

74 n. 17

Rome, 17 May 1974

This week:

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AFRICAN ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES

Now we turn to Africa and present a rather mixed bag of items. First of all we have an interview given by Cardinal Rugambwa and, though he is speaking of the Church in Tanzania, what he has to say about the work done by the Church in preparing African countries for independence and the attitude of the Church to social and political systems is valid for the whole continent. His warning about the danger of stressing one aspect of Christian teaching at the expense of others is one we could all keep in mind wherever we work.

Fr. Sullivan's article describes how a new concept of team mission - priests' team plus people's team - has brought new life to a Christian Community in Uganda.

Bishop Njenga of Eldoret takes a critical look at the church's policy with regard to African Customary marriage. What he has to say about the spiritual values inherent in the Extended Family System opens new perspectives especially as regards the family apostolate.

Finally, Fr. Smith gives a far from uncritical report on the Consultation on Evangelization in Africa held in Nairobi in December 1973.

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Coming Events:

Social Communications Working Group	16 May 1974	4 p.m	SEDOS Secretariat
Executive Committee Meeting	22 May 1974	4 p.m	" "
Development Working Group	29 May 1974	3.30 pm	" "
Assembly of Generals	3 June 1974		
Health Meeting	4 June 1974	3 p.m	S.J. Generalate

N.B. - If you wish to attend the Health Meeting of 4 June, please let the Secretariat know as soon as possible by post or phone.

Sincerely yours,  
Fr. Leonzio Bano, FSCJ.

CARDINAL RUGAMBWA speaks to the press 1974.

Under the headline THE CHURCH IS ALWAYS REVOLUTIONARY the Sunday News, March 24th Dar es Salaam, printed the following interview given to Costa Kumalija, one of the newspaper's staff writers by H.E. Laurean Cardinal Rugambwa. It concerns the principles and the role of the R.C. Church in Tanzania.

Q. Your Eminence, the Church in Tanzania has been criticised that at no time during Tanu's fight for independence did it stand up as an institution to support the struggle. What do you think contributed to this attitude of the Church in those days?

A. I agree with you that the Church has been criticised in some circles for not standing up as an institution to support the rightful struggle for independence, but I leave it to your readers to judge if this criticism is just, once they know the facts.

In 1953, before Tanu was born, the Bishops of Tanganyika wrote a Pastoral Letter when our people still lived in semi-autonomous tribes and Tanganyika was a territory administered by Great Britain. At that time there was no national unity as such. There was not even a nation-wide political party for our people to join. Yet in that letter we stated:

"The dawn of a new day has come and an era of change and development is ahead..."

There had never been a national election in those days. Some foreigners in this country presumed there never would be one for at least another twenty-five years, yet we wrote:

"Africans in Tanganyika will soon begin to take a greater share in the government of the country in all its forms... by delegates of their choice..."

Remember when we wrote this, Tanu had not yet even been born. At that time, outside the Church, there was little talk of independence, yet we stated:

"The goal desired by all is a self-governing country."

A short time after this Pastoral Letter was issued, Tanu was born. I do not imply that the Letter gave birth to Tanu, but it certainly helped to prepare the way for the acceptability of a national political party.

At that time, the Church was one of the only nation-wide non-colonialist institutions. It could have advocated the establishment of a political party on a religious basis, but it did not. As we wrote later:

"Only by living in the midst of our fellowmen and showing practical interest in their welfare, can we hope each of us to become in some small measure 'the salt of the earth and the light of the world!'" (Unity and Freedom)

In 1958 when our people were going to the polls for the first partial national election, we Bishops could not tell our people how to vote. To do so would have been a misuse of position. But we did issue another Pastoral Letter telling them that if the nation were to fail under bad rule, it was their fault if they did not vote or if they voted for unworthy candidates. In that Letter we instructed them in their new responsibility to choose the Party and the candidates who would best serve the real good of the nation, the natural rights of man and the laws of God. We added that such candidates should be honest intolligent and God-fearing men. And this, of course, still remains true today.

In 1961, just a few months before independence, we issued another Pastoral letter stressing the need for unity and freedom in our country. In this Letter we urged all our people to become an integral part of national unity and not to participate in religious divisions.

I think too, that we should remember that our Independence was not built on political slogans nor on bloodshed. We won our independence by demanding our human rights, but before demanding them we had to know them. One way we came to know them was through the Church teaching on human dignity, personal responsibility, the equality of all men, the natural rights of man, our duties towards our fellowmen and so on.

We should also remember that independence demanded trained personnel to run the country after independence. And I think this is where the Church made one of its greatest contributions towards the struggle for independence. As Mwl. Julius Nyerere said when addressing the Legislative Council in December 1960:

"Sixty-six per cent of our children, Sir, who are now at school are in schools run by voluntary agencies....I would have thought that most speeches here referring to those schools would be speeches of encouragement to those devoted missionaries and their colleagues, the lay teachers, and not speeches which are frightening."

Very many of our leaders to independence came from those schools.

There are many other constructive ways in which the Church contributed towards the struggle for Independence, but I think these few facts are sufficient to answer your question.

Q. Do you see Catholicism as incompatible with socialism in Tanzania? If not, what plans does the Church have for promoting socialism in Tanzania?

A. There are many different kinds of socialism so the answer depends on which kind you mean.

Catholicism stands for human dignity under God, human rights and the integral development of man.

If a socialism denies God exists, it denies man the dignity of being a child of God, so this kind of socialism is incompatible with Catholicism.

If a socialism preaches human rights but in practice denies those same human rights to its citizens, it is to be rejected.

Below these totalitarian forms of socialism there is a whole scale of degrees to which socialism is practised in various countries.

The Church as such does not have a "Catholic" form of socialism nor a "Catholic" form of any other kind of government. The Church teaches the true dignity of man, human rights, effective love, rightful justice and the need to develop the full personality of man, but it is up to her local members what practical form to give to these principles.

Here in Tanzania, for example, over 99 per cent of the Church is made up of local citizens. The Church does not tell us what form of government we should have. It is up to us local citizens to decide which form of government we should have. It is up to us local citizens to decide which form of government gives best expression to our Christian principles for life here and now in Tanzania, and then to promote it accordingly.

At present we have Ujamaa, which is not the same as socialism practised overseas. As we Bishops pointed out in our Pastoral Letter of September 1972, our Ujamaa tradition is "Our traditional way of communal government, in which as in a family, people share the joys and hardships of each, yet each member enjoys specific personal rights and responsibilities."

It is up to us local citizens to promote and practise our Ujamaa tradition and not let it become something else, which might continue to call itself Ujamaa, but in effect be a foreign import quite different from our real Ujamaa tradition.

Q. Do you envisage a time when Catholic priests will be members of Ujamaa villages? What do you see as the role of the priests in such villages? Do you see them for example being able to take part in manual production work?

A. The role of the priest is to serve the Christian community. If that community lives in an Ujamaa village, obviously the priest will serve them in that Ujamaa village. As a matter of fact in Dodoma diocese alone, priests are at present serving the Christian community in 260 Ujamaa villages. In many other parts of the country, priests are giving like service.

In Rulenge diocese, the Bishop actually lives in an Ujamaa village. In various parts of the country some priests and some sisters live in Ujamaa villages. As your readers will confirm, it has been the tradition of the Church in Tanzania for Church personnel to live where their people are.

Of course all priests cannot live in Ujamaa villages because many other people who must be served live elsewhere.

Then too, not every Ujamaa village can have a resident priest. The latest figures I've seen indicate there are 5,628 Ujamaa villages in Tanzania and only 568 local clergy.

It has been traditional in the Church here in Tanzania that where a Christian community cannot have a resident priest, it is served by a resident catechist. This is being done in many Ujamaa villages. Also in at least one diocese that has a good number of sisters, it is intended that these sisters will soon start a course to serve as nurses, domestic science teachers, adult education instructors and so on in Ujamaa villages where they will reside.

Priests living in an Ujamaa village will be able to take part in manual production work in the same way that doctors will be able to take part in such work, but like doctors, the priests will be more needed for their professional work for which they were trained. This will be especially true in view of the fact that the small number of priests in relation to the number of Ujamaa villages will demand that one priest serve ten or more Ujamaa villages.

Then too we should remember that not all our priests will be able to remain in Tanzania. Some will have to go as missionaries to other countries just as missionaries from other countries have come to Tanzania. This is the sharing element of Ujamaa on an international basis.

Q. The set-up of all parish missions is in the form of communities, some of them complete with schools, community centres, dispensaries and of course Church services. Do you see the Church converting those missions into Ujamaa villages? If so, when do you think this can take place, and if not, why can't it be done?

A. As I have mentioned, it has been traditional for priests in Tanzania to live in the general area where the people live. Over the years, dispensaries, schools, community centres and so on as you mentioned have sprung up around these missions. In many cases, people have moved into the general area of the Missions so that they could more easily benefit from all these services offered at the mission. In effect the missions have thus been centres of development.

In the earliest days these services were necessarily run by missionaries. In recent times they have come more and more under the Christians themselves through their Parish Council. Thus they have joined together to work together on a voluntary basis to provide for their common needs, and as I understand it, this is Ujamaa.

It is Ujamaa applied to the common needs of the villagers. According to our Tanzanian traditions, they plan and work together for their common needs.

It is not Ujamaa applied to earning their family food in a general farm. First of all, the land is already being used to provide the means for common services.

Secondly, as I understand it, an Ujamaa village has from two hundred to nine hundred families. Thirdly, it has been our Tanzanian tradition for the father or grandfather to have the personal responsibility to provide for the family or extended family with food.

If this could not be done, he was helped by his clan or neighbours, because it was our tradition that no one went hungry as long as any food remained. But the family food itself was generally obtained through personal responsibility for one's family.

This same system is being followed in many Ujamaa villages today in Tanzania. Many people still call them Ujamaa villages, but in fact they are Vijiji vya Maendeleo or Development Villages. Like the villages around the Missions, the villagers make a common effort for their common needs and personal efforts for personal needs of their family or extended family.

Whether or not this will change should depend on the voluntary wishes of the people since the Arusha Declaration states: "there cannot be true socialism without democracy."

If, for example, the vast majority of the people of Tanzania want common ownership over the means of production to extend down to the last cow, as it does in monasteries where monks are not married and do not have personal family responsibilities, they should voluntarily express their wishes. These wishes cannot be presumed, even when people vote for a man whom they like for other reasons.

Q. As a Prince of the Church what do you see as the future of the Church in Africa where there are all sorts of revolutionary processes going on including the rejection of old conservative ideas?

A. Almost every age is revolutionary as compared to the previous age which the new generation rejects as conservative. Many of your readers regard their parents as conservative and many of their children regard them as conservative. This has been going on for the past two thousand years and the Church is still here.

We should always remember that the Church is not just the Pope and the Bishops. The Church is people united with Christ and united together in a spiritual unity. In this way the Church exists in six continents and has come down through various ages under the spiritual leadership of the Pope and Bishops.

It is true that one age emphasises one aspect of Church teaching more than other ages, but the doctrine is always there to be understood and to be emphasised.

For instance, at the beginning of this Lent, Pope Paul issued a letter to the whole Church stating:

"The bread which you do not use is the bread of the hungry; the garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of him who is naked; the shoes that you do not wear are the shoes of one who is barefoot; the money that you keep locked away is the money of the poor..."

People reading this would say Pope Paul is revolutionary and so he is, but in this case he is actually quoting St Paul who wrote that passage centuries ago. Pope Paul himself then went on to state:

"Hatred and conflict caused by... those who put their tomorrow before their neighbour's today, and by those who through ignorance or selfishness refuse to give up what they do not need for the sake of those who lack the bare necessities of life."

Pope Paul himself has given this emphasis to this point of Church teaching, but it is also up to all of us Christians to understand and emphasise all the points of Church teaching in every age and every country. In this way the Church itself is always revolutionary.

However I said it is up to us to understand "all" the points of Church teaching because there is a tendency in some Christians to over-emphasise one single point of Church teaching without balancing it against the other points of Church teaching.

As for the future of the Church in Africa, I see a great future. In Tanzania alone the Church has just about doubled since Independence to nearly three million members. Our people are coming to a better understanding of their faith and their Christian response is good.

Africa as a whole is experiencing the greatest sustained expansion of Christianity in any continent in any period of history, with the combined growth of all Christian denominations at the phenomenal rate of seven and a half million a year. I think this answers your question.

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A CHURCH OF THE GRASS ROOTS by Desmond Sullivan

God loves the ordinary folk of this world, the poor of Yahweh. And the greatness of renewal is that it is coming about not so much "from the preaching of radical Christian leaders but from the faith of the little ones, and the fierce wind of the Spirit blowing among them. Somehow or another they are the little flock to whom it is Our Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom." (1)

Modern missionary technique is to try not only to serve but also to draw upwards into our conferences and synods something of that hidden wisdom and blessedness which is given to the little flock. Renewal, in the distinctively Christian sense, will come from down there. One can almost summarise the revolution in mission policy as being "never ignore the little people, nor patronise them, nor indoctrinate them. But let them become the Church."

This "upside down" view of the Church means that a missionary is with people and races who are standing "at the threshold of the genius of their races" facing the Gospel. What a man is, what makes a Japanese, or an Englishman, or an Arab, his values, his mental outlook, the inner forms of this expressions, all this is confronted with the Gospel. The threshold leads either to a real redemption of that genius or to a quiet death of that unique human value. The Gospel confrontation means not looking upwards at the "grosse kirche" but rather downwards at the village Eucharist and the small community. This is the first step where Church grows out of Eucharist and persons become a new community: the Church grows new again.

The Newness of a Rebirth

The French bishops, in their conference (2) at Lourdes last year, spoke of this as a journey. "This journey towards a Church based on the responsibility of all its members opens up immense perspectives. This journey is possible and urgent. To embark on it is to commit oneself to a road of hope". Observers at the meeting were struck by the way in which the bishops seemed to be liberated by this new approach. The tension which was apparent the year before, gave way to a sort of joyous confidence in the future.

In the past, problems of ministry have started by considering the changing mode of life of priests (especially celibacy) and the questioning by the faithful of parish structures and practices. The new approach is to concentrate on what is being born, to take note of the new experiences growing in the Church. Each sign of decline can be matched by a positive sign of progress. The very decline in the number of priests is producing a co-responsibility of the laity. The crumbling of parishes is giving birth to new ways of community. The sapping of the command of authority is bringing growth to a personal sense of authenticity and decision making.

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(1) See J. V. Taylor. International Review of Mission. "Small is beautiful", 1971. p.328.

(2) NC News, November 7th, 1973.

This chronic vigour appears in the missionary Church in a great variety of ways. At the institutional level is the "Convention" in West Cameroon. This is an elected body of laity, priests and religious who consult and decide diocesan pastoral policy - an "open meeting" of a bishop and his Church. At the other extreme in the heart of the tropical forest of Congo, some of the African villages are producing some of the finest African liturgical music - not for the media or the public - just for themselves and their village church. In Kenya, unfortunately, the "self consciousness" of the African Church has produced the massive schism of the Church of the Legio Mariae, a peoples church, African style with many elements of Catholic belief and practice. Each new nation has its own: the ujamaa Christian villages of Tanzania, the flourishing growth of catechetics in Uganda, the upsurge of life in the Church in Nigeria's states. In each case the tension is to want to be fully Catholic, and at the same time to want to be fully themselves.

### Missionary Practice

Missionary practice is being pushed by the facts of the pastoral situation into a thorough examination of ministry as it stems from Eucharist, and of church structure as it grows from the little flock.

Young men, especially those missionaries who have never known colonialism, grappling at the moment with these problems are in many parts of Africa creating from the fruits of past missionaries a way of ministry, a mode of parish life authentic to the big church, but authentic too, to the little people who become their own Church.

One such incident happened in the small town of Amuria in the huge diocese of Tororo, Uganda. Tororo is one of the largest dioceses in Africa which has suffered a rapid decline in number of priests with an increase in number of Christians. Large parishes of 20 or 30 parochial units are in the charge of one priest. At the same time as there is an increase of faithful, there has been a frightening drop in sacramental life. Baptisms go up but Church marriages drop: 1,000 Christian marriages in 1960 and only 500 in 1970.

### Amuria

Fr. Alphons was alone in Amuria when I first met him during a visitation of Mill Hill Fathers in Uganda. The report from Amuria best describes his position.

"From February 1971, Fr. Alphons found himself alone in Amuria, a situation which is now almost normal in the whole of Tororo Diocese. He was running about like a madman, "doing" five places per week at times, meeting a few individual Christians, to some of whom he could distribute the sacraments, often a very small number in each place, but he got very much into a rut rushing around villages and coming home rather depressed. He found himself in a corner; he could not see the main issues anymore. The work seemed too much, because of lack of purpose and the feeling of being inadequate." Here was a dedicated priest burning himself out to maintain a dying church. His position is quite common in Africa, from the Congo in the west to Kenya in the east. Discussions were held to find a way of giving back courage to such men and devising a pastoral strategy suited to the changed circumstances.



In October 1971, Fr. Alphons was given two priests but with also an increase in geographical boundaries. This impossibly large area was given to them by the bishop along with the freedom which remoteness from the bishop often gives. All seasoned missionaries, they pledged themselves to stay together for two years and to try out a completely new approach. Among themselves they agreed there would be no P.P., no curate but rather equality and co-responsibility. Surveying their parishes of 30 parochial units, they decided that all these units too must be treated as equals -no hierarchy of parish church and lesser outstations. Their census of the area showed them that things were in rather a bad shape.

So they began at the bottom. Their plan was a "Christian community approach via a liturgical catechumenate". In each village with each priest taking two or three villages as starting points, they decided to "concentrate on those and try to make them fully responsible for Christian living in their villages".

The hope was that neighbouring Christians would also group themselves together after the example of the ones started by the priests.

This hope was made all the more necessary because of the political situation in Uganda. The priests said, "This will prove a solid preparation of the people for times to come, when they may find themselves without a priest nearby. They will be accustomed to falling back on their own resources and when we have to go the work will not come to a stand still."

The essence of the community approach was to form community meetings of parents to start, organize and run the catechumenate and the Church. The three priests would go together to a village, to lead the eucharistic celebration in turn, to liven the liturgy, and singing, and the participation of the people. Meetings after church were regularly organised to explain the new approach. Eventually, the meeting decided to choose a committee from among themselves. They organised their own meetings among the people, and reported back to the priests. Committee members went out to other places to establish other committees and guide them. The people quite rapidly became aware that they are the Church; that they really had a say in things.

Finances too were given over to the people. One fifth of all Church support collected was retained by the Committee for use by them, for them. Catechumenate money was used totally by the Committee for the catechumenate. Bigger capital expenses could be applied for to a central committee that judged the special needs of each place, as the case arose.

A new openness to religion and an amazing interest in the work of the Church sprang up. With responsibility exercised by the committees grew an interest in participation. At one meeting, for example, 35 members sat through a general meeting for 5 solid hours. The whole village is brought in by election of officers every two years, the right to elect or be elected belonging to every active Christian who has contributed toward the support of the Church (five shillings per annum).

### Equal communities

The priests in Amuria followed the strict principle that each of these out-stations, including Amuria itself, are equal: every village is a parish with parochial rights, and the priests are at their service when called. This meant, over and above the Eucharist, there could also be village community celebrations of weddings, baptisms, confirmations etc., in the various localities, whereas, before, these had always been the "right" of the main parish church. It also meant that the old idea of "my parish", "my people", shifted completely round. The people in every station spoke of all three priests as the hierarchy of P.P. and curate vanished too into a partnership.

The team of priests found that by this method the three of them could cover a tremendous area, because "all the work was based on the fact that the communities themselves are running their church communities," that priests working as a team of equals can do more than as individuals dependent on one man's decisions. Most stimulating of all was the discovery that by giving responsibility to even illiterate people you can create a real sense of their own responsibility for the Church.

### Team Ministry

The priest teams in African are not the super organised projects we hear of in Holland and Germany: the kind of pastoral technocrats who divide the parish into sociological crosscuts of their own speciality, with one for youth, one for the aged, one for the parents etc. Rather, it is the effort of three average priests who were forced by the facts to hammer out a new system before the old one failed.

One missionary's comment after two years' work in such a team said it had done his priesthood and spiritual life a great deal of good. "I can improve on my work and on myself. The feeling of 'I cannot cope with it all anymore' has left me. We supplement each other, we enrich each other, and we can put up with each other's faults easier, as each one has something of value to offer to the other.

"Apart from the scriptural texts about Christ living and working in a group, the apostles and even St. Paul doing the same, the very nature of Christianity demands community or communities. The essence of the priesthood requires group work. The Church law of celibacy points to the same. When monks, the celibate clergy, started missionary work they did it in teams: the parish clergy were as a rule married and thereby were identified with the local community. And if priests are unable to live and work in a community, how can they expect their Christians to do so?"

In practice, there were two interlocking "teams": the team of the priests who worked as professional equals, sharing prayer, life, and all decision making, and a team between the priests and people, each village sharing prayer, life and decision making with the priests. A simple run down of the functions of the village committee will astonish a traditional parish priest by its radical devolution of decision making.

1. They are responsible for the Sunday Readings, Prayer.
2. They arrange the timing and regularity of the priest's visit and collect the money for his petrol etc.
3. They collect all church dues from the faithful either in money or kind.
4. They prepare lists of those who are too old or weak to come for celebration of the Eucharist and arrange Communion for the sick.
5. They collect children and prepare them for first Communion, infants for baptism.
6. They judge who is ready for baptism, assess the status liber of those wanting to marry, the suitability of pagans asking for baptism, and arrange community feasts for these sacramental occasions.

They employ and pay catechists, teachers etc.

### The Effect

The point is not the details but the effect and the conclusion. For these people with these priests in this place and time, this new approach has sparked into liveliness the people of the Church. With the suddenness of intuition the villagers have "twigged on" to the meaning of Church: it is theirs, because they want to rather than have to. The mood of obedience has changed to one of initiative: from imitation of a pattern to creating their own style of liturgy; from being odd they have become special; from being alien they have become involved.<sup>(3)</sup> This new life towards maturity in the Church is the ingathering of the real personality of these races into the fullness of their being Christian, and adds by its flourishing variety to the fullness of the Catholicity of the Church.

### Respect For People

For the priests themselves, two reflections from their team work in Amuria had a special relevance. For the younger priest in the team, it was personally a very maturing process. "It proved to me again that, where I thought I knew the answers, I often did not. But I could always presume the good intentions of others and whatever suggestion I might make I could be sure of a hearing. So I would speak the truth quietly and clearly and also listen to others more honestly".

A second comment referred to the Christians. In that area, the majority have little school education. The older people, though they rule the village, can rarely read or write. However necessity and courage made the priests give decision making into their hands. This respect for little people gave surprising results. "Starting Christian communities and involving more and more people also solves many thorny problems which they themselves judge so much

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(3) Cf. Religion of Authority and Religion of Appeal in M. Légaut's Introduction a l'intelligence du passé et de l'avenir du Christianisme. Aubier, 1970.

better. Even the so-called dull have their story and this applies even more to our Christians who know their own people so much better. If we are truly servants, so much more can be done by so few, if there is more involvement of the people we work for."

In past centuries, the great things of Christianity came from small centres of excellence - in times and places that had resources as small and poor as many an African village of today - and as rich in human resources and cultural contrasts. The making of an Augustine or a Hopkins is the work, under God, of a few influential persons. By striving to keep their high horizons open, the genius of race is set free in them flourishing to express inimitably the very genius of their home and place.

The missionary standing at the threshold of the future of his people has something of the humility and anxiety of a mother who sees her grown son go off into the world. As the young son must make his own mature way, so the young Church is starting on the new road of its own genius. One can only pray that it will be true to itself and that a kind Providence will direct it into ways we may never have dreamed of, redeeming its own genius through the Gospel.

#### Ideas Into Realities

The last generation of missionaries carry the burden of tomorrow. They must work today to ensure survival of the Church tomorrow. This double task on a slimmed staff cuts out the frills. Pared to the minimum, the essential liveliness of the Church comes to a vigorous eucharistic community.

The plan given by the Vatican Council is to translate into the idiom of an African village the renewal concepts of the Bishops. The radical change by the Council from hostility to respect for other cultures and religions means, for the missionary, a big psychological switch. He does not any longer crusade through the countryside destroying native shrines, or force his Christians to wear medals and scapulars in place of native charms and amulets. He has to start from a premise that the facts are friendly, the culture of the people is respectable, the religion is their old way of searching for God, and their social and moral norms enshrine some valid human and even religious values.

Pluriformity in theology and expression of the European Church when translated into terms of Africa means putting Christ into an African dress culture, translating the patterns of liturgy into the style of reverence, movement, music and thought patterns of the new people.

Collegiality spelled out for Church government means, in post-colonial African villages, a call for a people's share in running the Church. Linked with the role of the laity, this means a community of decision-making as well as a praying community.

The catchwords of clericalism, triumphalism and paternalism and the positive theology of liberation still being digested in Europe filter through to missionary people as a demand which they understand too well. The movement of renewal in Africa has uncanny echoes of the earlier political movement to end colonialism. A personal freedom, a feeling of maturity,

liberation from structures of the past, an urge to create their own style and structures, to be themselves, has implications in the Church as well as in the State.

Writing these things into the running of a multiple parish in the missions means examining the fundamental postulates of Christianity, of community, self-conviction, personal autonomy and cultural humility.

Renewal: Five ways

Five canons can be formulated on the basis of experience since renewal hit Africa.

1. Put your money, efforts, personnel into building up people not schools, churches, houses or hospitals.
2. Build them up into self-convinced self-supporting communities that can make their own way as soon as possible in Christianising themselves and others.
3. Centre that community on a living Eucharist.
4. Let them be creative of their own style of Church rather than imposing our own Western style.
5. Cultivate family as the unit of handing on the Faith.

This upside-down church built on a eucharist of ordinary folk with their own spark of liveliness, their own genius of race is the threshold at which the missionary now stands.

The huge structure of the modern international Church stands on the myriad of pin points of such communities all over the world. These mini-churches are the little communities throughout the world where the Christ-life is happening. They alone are the sole justification for all the elaborate organisation, learning and effort of structures above them. If these small units weaken, lose the sharpness of their uniqueness and personalities, then the whole structure up to the top becomes an empty and fragile monolith. The Church created from below having those marks of unity, holiness, a church apostolic and catholic with the other sign of collegiality or community is the leaven type of little people whose faith in Christ can (and did) topple the world.

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THE CHURCH AND AFRICAN CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE

by Bishop J. Njenga of Eldoret, Kenya.

THI

I shall endeavour to describe the problem under the following four headings.

I :

1. Marriage in the African Mentality

1.

"Marriage" is a general term that describes various kinds of conjugal relationship, these types of relationship have a common thread, namely, a covenant between two people whereby they declare their commitment to each other as husband and wife. This covenant according to African concept may be monogamous or polygamous. This covenant is seen much more clearly in the monogamous system of marriage than in the polygamous one. However, it should be pointed out that even in polygamous families this covenant is real.

Notion of Polygamy

Covenant in polygamous families is a bond between two people, the husband and each of his wives. This type of marital relationship is analogous to friendship, for in the latter form of relationship a person is free to have as many friends as he can, and yet his relationship to each of his friends is unique but not exclusive. Similarly in the traditional African marriages that were polygamous, the husband sincerely felt that each of his wives had a unique relationship with him, a relationship which was that of husband and wife. To the traditional African, conjugal relationship was, in a manner, analogous to friendship, viewed as capable of being realised among various persons (wives) and not exclusively tied up with only one person (wife) as we note in monogamous marriage. This concept of marriage was adhered to, religiously guarded and implemented. To the African there was no doubt about the validity of this form of marriage. It was not only accepted by the husband, but also by the wives who even promoted it - for example, for the purpose of spacing children. In some African societies the wife sometimes suggested to the husband the idea of getting another wife; this is analogous to a friend suggesting to another friend the idea of getting another friend. The foregoing removes a certain misconception pertaining to the nature of polygamous marriages as practised in Africa. Polygamy in Africa was not practised to give expression to lust. Rather polygamy had social and economic dimensions. In Africa the social status of a person was intimately tied up with the number of wives and children that he had. Those who had many wives and children earned a great respect in their respective communities. Such were destined to live for ever; they perpetuated themselves among their children even after their physical death. So the more wives and children a person had, the more he was in a position to be certain of his immortality. Furthermore, the bigger the household, the greater was the possibility of carrying out mutual assistance with regard to material and other needs, for the household was characterised by corporate existence. Father Shorter, in the article quoted above, put it this way: "A man's prestige and position within the lineage depends to a large extent on the number of children. The polygamist will have many more children than the monogamist. Polygamy also caters for widows within the patrilineage,

and ensures that women for whom bridewealth was paid will be retained as mothers of further children for the lineage. Polygamy has other advantages, of course. It ensures that all the women of the community are materially provided for, there being no means by which an unmarried woman could find support in traditional African society".

Hence, it should be clear that polygamy was not practised to prevent prostitution on the part of the husband, though this goal was implicitly attained. Rather the practice of polygamy was effected as a praise-worthy value in the community because it was a sign of a person's ability. A person who could have many wives and children, and maintain them, showed that he was not only the ideal family man, but also a person who could be a leader in the Community. This is evident from what we know of our former old chiefs. They had many wives. To gain the right to lead the Community it was necessary to display the ability to run a big family. This is a big lesson to us men of modern times when the concept of limiting families is in vogue. In the traditional African context those who limit families would hardly qualify to lead the Community.

It should be noted that in traditional African life, having a big family and keeping it stable were correlatives. Divorce was rare. Even when a wife was barren, which was often the cause of divorce, a person married another wife who bore him children and in this way the barren wife's predicament was relatively removed. Where the husband was sterile his "brother" bore children for him and so solved the sterile man's problem. In this way of patching up the quarrel, the Community was fully involved in working out the reconciliation. What was more common in many African Societies was temporary separation, rather than divorce.

The stability of family, mentioned above, was also enhanced by dowry because it played an important part in cementing a marriage relationship. The dowry was not a matter of "buying" another person. On the contrary, the more the dowry, the greater the love. Dowry was a sign of the appreciation of the value of a wife. If a man failed to pay dowry, his "wife" felt that she was not loved by him, and she felt ashamed in front of another married woman. Among the Kikuyu, for example, such a "wife" felt that the husband had no rights to give her orders. Among the Kikuyu the dowry played such an important part in cementing a marriage relationship, that where divorce became absolutely necessary it was not considered complete till the dowry was returned to the person who had paid it. Among a great many Bantu tribes in East Africa all the children borne by a wife who had left her husband belonged to her husband, even if they were not his in the biological sense, as long as dowry was not repaid. Many Africans still feel that the dowry should continue to be paid. It should not, however, be thought that the traditional African polygamous family had no problems. On the contrary, there were jealousies and quarrels among wives and children. Yet, despite these problems these polygamous families had a stability that has not been achieved by many modern monogamous marriages.

## II. The Church and Polygamy

The Church has upheld monogamy as the ideal of marriage, but where polygamous marriages exist, the Church has the challenge of judging whether such marriages should be "blessed" by her. Indeed, some polygamous marriages manifest stability and human values that are not found in some monogamous marriages which the Church has already 'blessed'. The question is raised regarding the possibility of the Church blessing polygamous marriages. The following reflections might throw light on this question.

It is to be noted that many polygamous marriages have produced leaders of the Church and virtuous men within her. The earliest formation of these leaders and virtuous men finds its foundation in the stability, discipline and human values that obtain in polygamous homes. Hence the polygamous family has been the soil in which the seeds of christian life find their primordial nourishment. This is one important consideration. Another important point is the fact that those who have undertaken polygamy as a way of life, have done so because their culture approves and praises such an enterprise. Therefore, to what extent should the Church, noting the goodwill of these polygamous men, consider them and their wives for Baptism without disrupting the character of the household? Should there be a revision of the conditions for Baptism to vindicate Baptism of a polygamist and his wives?

These questions have relevance to ecclesiastical legislation. The Church lays down the laws to help men become more human and therefore more godly. These laws are meant to help the faithful fulfil the greatest of the commandments - the love of God and neighbour. Does the present legislation as applied to African polygamous marriages, tend to produce men who are imbued by the love of God and neighbour? Is it not possible for a new spiritual dimension to be enjoyed by a polygamist and his wives if the entire household were baptised? The same problem was raised about 20 years ago by the Protestant Church in Liberia and it was decided that bona fide polygamists should be received into the Church.

It would be worthwhile to evaluate the outcome of such practice! The Kenya Episcopal Conference was concerned about this question and wrote to Rome seeking advice. It is to be noted here that we speak of polygamous people who are found in that state by the coming of the Gospel of Christ. There is no question about mala fide polygamists of the present day.

In order to answer these questions the Church may have to state the priorities. The first priority is that the Church has been given the mission to preach to every creature, to bring to every creature the knowledge of Christ, his saving power, his friendship, his love of all men (even the polygamists), the suffering he underwent for all men and his dominion over all men. To deny the polygamist families the knowledge of Christ and His Mother, appears to be a serious omission; it is denying them a spiritual dimension which would make their lives more meaningful and hopeful. Learning about and practising



personal friendship with Christ would add a new lustre to the lives of wives of polygamous families. From the psychological point of view the wife had a monogamous relationship with the husband in question. This spiritual benefit would also be enjoyed by the polygamist who, because of the present Church legislation that requires him to "give up" all his wives except one, has been denied the knowledge of his own Saviour.

The whole question with its biblical background is well treated by M. Boivin W.F. in CROMIA/15 (Churches' Research Project on Marriage in Africa).

Considering the baptism of a polygamist or his wives will raise practical problems. There is the question of scandal on the part of the faithful. Already baptised Catholics may take second wives, justifying themselves that it is lawful! The principle enunciated may not solve the de facto situation among the faithful. However, all these problems call for more study, research, education and even re-thinking and revaluation on the part of pastors, theologians and the faithful.

### III. Church Legislation and Customary Marriage

Does the present Church legislation on marriage cater for customary marriages? Since marriage is the only sacrament that those getting married 'confer' upon themselves, with the 'blessing' of the Church, it is proper to ask whether those who marry in accordance with custom fulfil this basic condition of receiving the sacrament of matrimony.

There is no convincing reason to argue that those who marry according to traditional customs do not duly fulfil the sacrament of matrimony. Since the sacrament of matrimony is given to those who declare their mutual allegiance there appears to be no convincing reason to consider as invalid the mutual self-giving that is found in customary marriages. If the Church is satisfied that there was mutual self-giving she can approach the members of the Church and others and ascertain whether those who have declared mutual allegiance, according to traditional custom, were previously married or had children or had done something which was not edifying in the community. Here the Church would attach importance to the arbitration of the Community with regard to the validity or nullity of a customary marriage. In doing so, the Church would be applying to the customary marriages, the principle she applies to strictly christian marriages, the principle whereby people are instructed to state whatever may prevent the execution of certain marriages.

Once these conditions of self-giving and popular approval are fulfilled the integrating of the Church blessing and the local customary rites into one marriage celebration should be considered. It seems to me that the Church's marriage regulations are more and more moving towards the recognition of customary marriages. Now the Ordinaries may give the dispensation of 'sanatio in radice' to christian and non-christian marriages performed without canonical form, provided of course, some form of marriage was followed - be it civil or customary.

#### V. African Extended Family

The African families are characterised by the notion of the extended family system. When an African says in Swahili "Ndugu" he could mean a brother, step-brother, cousin, etc. When it comes to the question of initiation, marriage or any other ceremony, the extended family is concerned, and fully involved.

A great deal of misunderstanding among the European missionaries stems from this question of extended family. It is not uncommon for a boy or a girl to introduce somebody as 'Baba' to a Missionary, who is not the true father. A girl may come to see a Priest about marriage and on being requested to bring her parents, actually brings an old uncle and aunt as the parents. Such a person is sincere but one has to get into the same wavelength to understand the position.

This type of mentality has a bearing in African customary marriages. The whole family or clan is concerned with the paying of dowry, the match between the boy and girl, the impediments of the marriage, etc. Very often the physical parents of the boy or girl do very little directly regarding the proposed marriage. Many African people have a final ceremony which makes a marriage to be a true marriage bond. For example, among the Matengo of Tanzania you have Kutwika, among the Luos Riso and among the Kikuyus Kuguraria ngoima. At such final rituals, the whole clan is expected to attend, and to witness - and in some cases the ritual may be considered invalid if a certain relative is absent. From the foregoing, it is evident that the stipulation of Canon Law on marriage oversimplifies what a traditional African expects of a marriage ceremony, which in many cases stretches over a long period characterised by distinct stages. So, in performing a traditional customary marriage, you have more than two witnesses? There is the whole family, the clan and the neighbours to witness the wedlock.

It is to be admitted that this idea of extended family is fraught with some difficulties, especially during our technological and industrial age. In urban areas, many people flock in looking for jobs and often they have to depend on a relative whose income is barely enough to support his own wife and children. In a given small room in Nairobi, for example, one finds a young couple living with brothers and sisters of husband and wife who have come to town to find their luck in employment. Such a situation is not healthy for growing young children.

Should the extended family system be discouraged? Some people think it should. Others, and I am among the latter, think that the extended family system has high spiritual values which should be upheld through the whole Continent. Of course, all abuses must be eradicated. Father Shorter again writes: "Must the Christian elementary family be independent of relatives? Authority within the Church would think not. Pope Paul VI in his letter to the Christians of Africa Africae Terrarum of 1967 goes out of his way to praise the African 'sense of family'. He sees the extended family as the natural environment or sphere of action for the African. It offers means of protection, security and mutual

assistance. It inculcates a sense of authority and creates a bond uniting the living members of the family with the ancestors and God. The Pope Paul also praises as valuable the traditional religious ritual organised on a "family basis". Like many other systems in the history of the Church, the African extended family system needs to be Christianised, purified and adapted to suit the modern man. Father Shorter continues: "Our family apostolate, it seems to me, should be directed towards fostering these positive values of mutual cooperation, while educating the extended family in a respect for the human person, so that personal values and the rights of the elementary family are safeguarded and not submerged in the identity of the lineage".

As I said above, divorce was an alien <sup>idea</sup> to Africans. There was always some stability in a given marriage. Over and above the bride price, the notion of the extended family helped a lot in stabilising the marriage-bond among the people. When there was a row, and this was inevitable, the whole clan was involved in settling it. The culprit was fined or punished in some way, and those who did not heed the Wazee (which was rare) were regarded as outcasts!

This whole question of extended family should be studied thoroughly in our times in the light of the Gospel, in order to make the African marriages more christian and more stable.

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CONSULTATION ON EVANGELISATION IN AFRICA

The All Africa Conference of Churches organised a four-day consultation on Evangelisation in Africa in Nairobi in mid-December. It was attended by some 40 delegates from all the countries down the Eastern side of this continent (from Egypt down to South Africa) including Madagascar but excepting Mozambique. A Catholic priest from each of the 5 AMECEA countries was invited. I myself represented Zambia, alone in fact because the Christian Council representative never arrived.

The consultation was really the culmination of a research which had been conducted between 1965 and 1972 through all the countries of Africa in order to determine which particular areas are still requiring evangelisation. These areas were referred to as "frontier situations". Although the purpose of the consultation was a study of the report of the research and recommendations for action based upon it, not a great deal of direct reference was made to it during the four days.

The focus of the report, - as also of the consultation - was not on what foreign missionary agencies are doing but on what response to Christianity African peoples have made and to what extent they are able and willing to accept the responsibility for the spread of Christianity to the remaining unevangelised areas.

The consultation itself suffered from a lack of precision in its terms of reference and its direction and from too great a range of expertise (or lack of it) in its composition. It was remarked upon that those who one would have expected to be the most concerned - the people responsible for the original research - only put in occasional appearances at the sessions. It was curious to notice that the Catholic Church is not alone in being male-dominated; there was not a single woman delegate!

The general tone was one of great optimism for Christianity's future in Africa. Evangelisation was measured by two norms: by numerical penetration and cultural penetration. Regarding the former we learned that we are witnessing on this continent the greatest expansion of Christianity ever recorded in history with seven and a half million new Christians per year. This does not however keep pace with the total population increase (some 10 million per year) so in fact the percentage is actually dropping each year. The picture looks like this:

Followers of traditional tribal religions		
Muslims		17.7%
Christians:		41.7%
Catholics	16.2%	
Protestants	12.3%	
Orthodox	4.5%	
African Independent Church members	4.1%	
Anglicans	3.5%	
	<hr/> 40.6%	<hr/> 40.6%
		100 %

Including the members of the (estimated) 5,400 African Independent Churches, 65% of Africa can be regarded as evangelised, with at least 50 of the continent's 860 tribes being virtually 100% professing Christians.

So much for statistics. There was a great deal of discussion on the other norm, cultural penetration, much less easily measured. What emerged from the consultation was real determination that the future evangelisation of the continent, in depth as well as extent, must be the responsibility of the African Churches themselves. Missionaries from overseas are still required but it is for the African Churches now to determine to what extent and in what direction this help is to be accepted as regards both manpower and financial aid.

There was great enthusiasm for the formation of teams of missionaries to be sent to the as yet unevangelised areas (mostly among presently nomadic peoples) and such teams (their form of operation was not well determined) should be ecumenical and include Catholics. One recommendation urged the All Africa Conference of Churches to investigate this possibility with SECAM (the Catholic Symposium of Episcopal Conferences). The historical place of the Orthodox Churches and their role in future missionary work was stressed time and time again. Dialogue with Islam was treated with great caution lest too much attention to this aspect results in more positive Muslim missionary work. Missions to Africa of some evangelical Western (chiefly American) Churches without reference to the needs felt by African Christians themselves were regarded with considerable disfavour. With regard to the maturation of already evangelised peoples, it was repeatedly stressed that a great deal of theological thinking was required (often in terms of a Black Theology which was identified as a Theology of liberation) in order that the Gospel message be incarnated in Africa.

The following recommendations were made by the meeting:

1. That, the Church be sensitive to the forms of social, cultural and religious life of the people to whom it goes. It should seek to respond positively to the work of the Holy Spirit among the African people, in order to enable a truly indigenous and authentic expression of the faith to develop in that area.
2. That, the Church should regard evangelisation as the total witness, in word and deed to the whole life of persons and communities leading to liberation and fullness of life.
3. That, the African church be stimulated to think of itself as a missionary sending church crossing the borders of countries and/or cultures both within Africa and beyond the shores of this continent.
4. That, the African church accept the challenge and responsibility of evangelising in Frontier Situations on this continent.

5. That, it be <sup>the</sup> African church that determines what external help it still requires.
6. That, a unit be created within the structure of the AACC to deal with Training, Information, Finance, Coordination and promotion of Evangelistic outreach.
  - a) That a Pilot Scheme be launched involving a team of laity and clergy from different communions with a mandate to a particular area for a limited period in which AACC and SECAM cooperate.
  - b) That special programmes for training and orientation of laity and clergy for evangelisation in cross-cultural situation be organised.
  - c) That this unit works with missionary sending agencies and churches in organizing and conducting orientation programmes within Africa for missionary personnel called to work in Africa.

Rev. Adrian B. Smith. (Secretary for Church Affairs)

AGENDA FOR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Executive Committee will be held at 4 p.m, 22 May at SEDOS SECRETARIAT.

AGENDA:

1. Preparations for General Assembly of 3 June.  
-Reports on Neighbourhood meetings.
2. Relations with Cor Unum.
3. Relations with Christian Medical Commission
  - a) Replacement for Sr. Gilmory Simmons
  - b) Funding of Consultancy.
4. Report on Social Communications Group.
5. Any other business.

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