

Notes

SEDOS Bulletin: We draw our readers' attention to the decision of the SEDOS Executive Committee that the Bulletin will be issued once instead of twice monthly as from September 15, 1985.

The Bulletin will be delivered by mail to all readers in Rome from September 15. We thank the Jesuits at Borgo S. Spirito and the Brothers of the Christian Schools on Via Aurelia very sincerely for their kind collaboration over the years during which these two houses were "pick-up" points where the SEDOS Bulletin was collected.

Comboni General Chapter: Congratulations to Francesco Pierli, MCCJ on his election as Superior General.

Gregorian University, Rome: The Faculty of Missiology presents two new special courses in English on Saturday mornings from October 26 till January 25: Christ and the Changing Cultures in South East Asia, and, Missionary Communication. There will also be an afternoon course on Missiology in Italian leading to a Diploma: Lectures at 16.30, week-days. Details from SEDOS or from the Gregorian.

Centre of Concern, Washington; Sabbatical Semester January 20 to May 16, 1986: lectures,

Seminars and research projects organised by the Center of Concern "to assist those involved in peace and justice to strengthen the foundations of their ministry".

Enquiries: 3,700, 13th Street NE., Washington DC, 20017, or SEDOS.

There is a "Job-opening" at the Center which is searching for an International Development Economist. Details from SEDOS or direct from the Center.

"Spiritus" Numero 100: A special edition: "Des Missionnaires S'Expriment sur leur Vocation." This September 1985 issue contains a synthesis of replies received from 200 missionaries, men and women from different institutes including "Fidei Donum" priests and 15 young people preparing to leave on Mission.

How do missionaries see their proper vocation to-day? How are they evolving in relation to the changing demands of mission? What are their hopes, difficulties, joys? It should be of considerable interest to SEDOS members. Address: Spiritus, 40 Rue ha Fontaine, 75781 Cedex 16, Paris.

U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) is again trying to recruit academic/research institutions with emphasis on Africa. The Jesuit Refugee Service in Rome alerts us to this initiative particularly in light of recent events in Ghana and revelations of CIA involvement there. Representatives of African Studies Centers at 14 major U.S. Colleges and Universities joined with other academicians in Area Studies to reject these latest initiatives of the DIA seeking the cooperation of scholars in preparing papers for the Agency.

BIBLE STUDY IN THE CARIBBEAN TODAY

Fr. Michael de Verteuil

(La Bible est une histoire. En la lisant nous sommes comme des spectateurs en train de regarder quelqu'un qui dit ou fait quelque chose à un autre. Mais nous ne sommes pas des spectateurs neutres. L'histoire de la Bible nous concerne. Elle nous enseigne à la manière d'une histoire. Nous nous rappelons notre propre histoire et nous constatons qu'elle suit le même cheminement que la Bible. Reconnaître l'histoire de la Bible est toujours une invitation pressante à une croissance spirituelle. Découvrir notre propre histoire peut avoir des conséquences allant bien au-delà de ce qui arrive si nous nous limitons à une lecture apologétique, simplement pieuse ou purement historique.)

Caribbean people must be among the most bible-loving people in the world, at least to judge from the quantity of bible teaching that goes on in the region. Every territory has its radio and TV bible programmes, its bible correspondence courses (usually over-subscribed), its full time and part-time schools, not to mention its bookshops well stocked with bibles (in all translations), commentaries and teaching aids. Caribbean people not only read the bible, they study it.

We need however to evaluate all this bible reading. Long hours of study never guaranteed anybody a pass in the GCE; you have to have a good study method. So too you must have a good method if you are to profit from bible reading.

St John at the end of his Gospel, expressed his purpose in writing it and his words can be applied to the whole bible:

"Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."

The bible was written then, that believing we might have life in the name of Jesus. The question is, 'Does their bible reading help Caribbean people develop the qualities of people who are truly alive, aware of who they are and creative?'

For over two years now I have been involved in a programme of theological education for the laity of the Roman Catholic Church and I have been struck by the need to develop a life-giving method of bible reading that can be made available to all. The search for such a method must be carried out in the open, not within the confines of any one denomination nor even of the Christian churches. Bible reading is always based on pre-suppositions many of which are consciously or unconsciously hidden. Our goals must be brought out into the open and our experiments subjected to the critique of anyone interested in the development of Caribbean people.

In this perspective I would like to share some thoughts on bible reading in the Caribbean. I will start by examining briefly three methods that are prevalent in the region but which I would consider inadequate.

3 INADEQUATE METHODS

1. Apologetic reading of the bible occurs when people use the bible to prove that some position they hold is right. It usually turns out in practice that they are more interested in proving that others are wrong. It is a very common method of bible reading practiced by all the Churches and sects. The form of baptism, the cult of the saints, the timing of the end of the world, are examined in the light of the Bible. Parents and teachers quote it to exhort their children to punctuality; adults to settle an argument about the economy or old age; Caribbean politicians to make their programmes more acceptable to voters.

Any Christian community that is serious about its commitment will spend time in the apologetic reading of the bible but this apologetic reading has limitations. When we do it we are on the defensive, anxious to prove that we are right and that by implication (to say the least) those opposed to us are wrong. We are then in imminent danger of thanking God that we are not like "the publicans". Our whole attitude prevents us from hearing a call to repentance, to lose in order to find, to leave where we are now in search of another land, all the signs given in the bible itself of an authentic encounter with God. While accepting the need for this kind of study, there must come a time when we consciously and deliberately put aside all apologetic purpose and be fully open to the word.

2. Inspirational Reading is also very common in the region. People open their bibles, more or less at random, and find a story, a saying or even a turn of phrase which fills them with inner peace and consolation. It has given solace to many for whom other avenues to security such as wealth, education, material comforts or power were closed. Like the revivalist meetings, like the novenas, bible reading was like a running stream in a parched land. And it continues today.

We must judge this form of bible reading with reverence. But it too has its limitations. Experience shows that as a general rule, inspirational reading bears only one fruit - consolation. It is a holding exercise, a call to be patient in the sense of "be patient for a little while longer and you will be safe", not in the sense of, "you have it in you to be the light of the world".

The basic problem is that inspirational reading is uncritical. We come before God passively. Whereas in apologetic reading we manipulate God's word to serve conclusions that we have already arrived at, in inspirational reading we give up the attempt to arrive at any conclusions at all. We cast God in the role of colonial master who tells us that we are not fit to make decisions for ourselves and must therefore leave them all to him.

3. Historical Reading: The latest arrival on the bible scene is the historico-critical method, so called because it studies the history of the texts, who wrote them and in what

circumstances - all questions that modern science has enabled us to answer more accurately than ever before. Today this method holds sway in practically all established churches here in the Caribbean as elsewhere in the world. It is compulsory learning for all ministerial students in the four seminaries of the churches in this region. Let us now examine its limitations.

In the first place, we must be clear that knowing all about the background of a text does not mean that you have understood it, far less, that you have met God in it. Knowing all about a text may lead to dissecting a text so thoroughly that it lies dead in your hands. I remember once hearing a parishioner comment that the only message he got from a sermon was that the preacher was a learned man, hardly a message of salvation for him or indeed for the preacher himself. I am not saying that the historico-critical method always remains academic, merely that it can and often does.

The more serious limitation of this method however is that it remains foreign to the vast majority of people in the Caribbean. Scholars like William Barclay may have popularized it, it still does not belong to the people. To master it you not only need to have sufficient leisure and sufficient money, you must have developed a way of reasoning that is proper to those who have completed secondary school and perhaps university. So we take the easy way out. We allot uncritical or inspirational reading to the uneducated, the gospel of Jesus being turned upside down, God hiding the secrets of his word from the little ones and revealing them to the learned.

It all sounds suspiciously like a mechanism of domination, not very different from doctors, economists or lawyers telling us that we cannot understand the secrets of their professions and must therefore leave ourselves passively in their hands. In inspirational reading we experience ourselves as powerless in God's hands. In historico-critical reading we are powerless in the hands of bible scholars. The great French statesman, Talleyrand, once said that war was much too serious a thing to be left to military men; bible study too is much too serious a thing to be left to scholars, especially when they as a group belong to a social elite. Our study method must echo the invitation of Isaiah:

"though you have no money, come, buy corn without money and eat, and at no cost, wine and milk".

Let us now examine such a method.

THE BIBLE AS A STORY

The bible is a story. We often say that Jesus taught us this or St. Paul taught us that and it will do as a way of speaking. But strictly speaking it is not true. At least this is not what the bible says. What the bible says is that Jesus taught something to his disciples or to the Pharisees, that St. Paul wrote something to the Romans or Corinthians, that Moses spoke to the Israelites. When we read the bible we are reading a story. We are spectators looking at someone saying or doing something to someone else, just as when we look at people on the television screen and see them relating with one another.

The bible story is for us. We are not disinterested spectators. But it teaches us in the way of a story. In the modern world we are so accustomed to text-book teaching that we have forgotten the story way. Text books teach us through facts; your science book teaches you that the body is made up of cells, your geography book that Kingston is the capital of Jamaica, your history book that Columbus came to the West Indies in 1492, your catechism book that there are ten commandments of God and four of the Church. You learn these facts exactly as you find them in the book. In a story the facts themselves are not important, what is important is how they affect you. The story teaches you by getting you to feel for the people in it, to share their emotions, to recognize yourself in one or other of them. It teaches you by making you part of the story, so that you gradually begin sharing the values of the people (or things) you identify with.

It is a very effective way of teaching, which explains why governments spend plenty of time making films and editing books about national heroes and why businessmen invest thousands of dollars composing little stories about some product they want to sell. Stories are not an inferior way of teaching, suitable only for uneducated people. In fact there are certain things that can only be taught through stories, things like courage, love, faith or wisdom. You cannot teach such things through a text-book. Try and define love and you kill it; you must tell a story. God knew what he was doing when he taught us through stories.

Unfortunately we have made the bible into a text book: This is the great evil of doing only apologetic study of the bible. The important thing is the lesson to be learnt from the text, whether a lesson of history (Jesus rose on the third day) or a lesson of morality (divorce is always wrong), a lesson about the Church, or a lesson about science (God made man from the slime of the earth). Reading the bible has become a way of getting facts. That however is to change its whole nature; it is like going to a play to see how the story ends, or to a music festival primarily to see who will win. Bible reading is first and foremost getting into a story and the way to study it is to let it become a story for us, to get to know the characters as people, to feel for them and recognize them, in a word to enjoy the story. That is what it was written for.

Discovering "our story": "To recognize"; that is a crucial point. We are continually reading (or reviewing) stories of people that we do not recognize. The stories of television and of the cinema, of Mills and Boon and Elton John are not our stories. It is true that we identify with them and get into their stories, that we laugh and lament with them, but we do this by leaving our own Caribbean region and once we have switched off the set or closed the book we end up foreigners in our country or in our own skin. That we should then feel our real home is in Brooklyn or Toronto is bad enough; far worse is that we cannot make sense of our selves, our history and our culture because we have no stories to interpret these things for us.

For the bible then to be a life-giving story for us, written "for us men and for our salvation", it must be a story that we can recognize. For many the bible too is a story of "far away places and strange sounding names", to quote from a song that was popular

long before Elton John. In fact many love the bible because it is so "other-worldly", its language so high-sounding, its names so beautiful.

It is interesting that the biblical authors themselves had to struggle with this problem. We see this in chapter 43 of Isaiah for example. When this passage was written the people were in exile. They were humiliated, with no sense of themselves as a people who had a great history and a great destiny. We can imagine them listening to the story of the Exodus with nostalgia or even cynicism. All good and well for their ancestors, but no chance of it happening to them; no Moses or Joshua to lead them now. The prophet will have nothing of that. He tells them the old story of the passage of the red sea but adds immediately:

"No need to recall the past, no need to think about
what was done before.
See I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light;
Can you not see it?"

Then he explains: "Yes, I am making a road in the wilderness, paths in the wilds."

The technique is important; he tells the old story but only to show them that it is being repeated in their own situation. In fact he describes what is happening to them in terms of the exodus story, "road in the wilderness:", "paths in the wilds".

We see the same pattern in the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24). The disciples are going for a walk on the Sunday after Good Friday. "Their faces are downcast" and understandably so since their experiences of the past few days make no sense at all. Then Jesus comes along and "explains the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself". Now they are full of confidence, "their hearts are burning within them" and "immediately they set out for Jerusalem". What has made the difference? Their exterior situation has not changed at all. Neither have they learned any new bible passages; being good Jews they probably knew them all by heart. The difference is that they now knew these passages as their story; that was the "full message of the prophets" which they had missed.

For us too the "full message" of the bible is that it is our story and good bible study is discovering that it is so. Whereas our lives appeared to us chaotic, we are now able to situate ourselves (including our sins) in the history of salvation; we discover that we are "no longer aliens or foreign visitors, but citizens like all the saints and part of God's household".

Bible reading is therefore an exercise in two stages. We first understand the bible story. At this stage we may require the help of a commentary (or of a teacher who has studied one) in order to understand the story better, who were the Pharisees, the publicans or the Herodians, why paying taxes was a problem for the Jews of the time, what was involved in being a fisherman in Galilee. But we must not exaggerate the amount of background information necessary, nor must it distract us from the main task of observing the movement of the story and how the characters are relating with one another. Then there is the second stage, just as important as the first and requiring as much seriousness,

by which we remember our own story and see that it follows the same movement as the bible story. It is a slow process in which we move to and fro, from the bible story to our own story and back again, until we discover them as really one.

Recognizing a bible story in this way is always a challenge to grow spiritually. We experience this especially when we read a story of Jesus, but also when we see how God relates with his people, and when we read the stories of the biblical heroes, Moses, Jeremiah, the apostles, St. Paul. We see from them what love, forgiveness, faith and courage really are, and it reveals us to ourselves. It is like coming suddenly into the light and realizing how untidy we are. Having entered into a bible story we become aware of how we have narrowed our horizons and settled for what is less than our potential, how our wisdom is really foolishness and our strength really weakness.

It is not however a destructive experience: Jesus, (or the God of the Old Testament) is an ideal but one that we recognize in the sense that it answers an aspiration that we have had all along. He is an impossible dream but one that paradoxically we experience as possible.

As a result our desire to grow spiritually comes from our own free choice. That is the difference between moralizing and story telling. When you moralize you draw the conclusion that the passage imposes an obligation on you (or others), "Jesus did this and therefore we should do this". In story reading we perceive for ourselves how we should grow. The seed is sown, it grows of its own accord, and then when the time is ripe we reap the harvest. St. Paul explains it as the difference between God giving us commandments written on a stone tablet that we must carry, and the Spirit taking possession of our hearts so that we freely choose what is right.

(Part II, of this article will appear in the next Bulletin of 15 October 1985).

Ref. SEDOS Documentation Centre No.1/1128.

LIFE IS THE WORD
BRAZILIAN POOR INTERPRET LIFE

Carlos Mesters

(Dans l'interprétation populaire de la Bible nous trouvons trois éléments: la Bible elle-même, la communauté et la réalité (c'est-à-dire la vie réelle des gens et du monde qui les entoure) A l'aide de ces trois éléments, les gens cherchent à saisir ce que veut leur dire la Parole de Dieu. Et pour eux la Parole de Dieu n'est pas seulement la Bible. La Parole de Dieu se trouve dans la réalité et elle peut être découverte avec l'aide de la Bible. Mais si l'un de ces trois éléments fait défaut, l'interprétation de la Bible ne fait pas de progrès et entre en crise. La Bible perd alors finalité.)

INTRODUCING THE ISSUE:
THREE BASIC SITUATIONS

First Situation: In Brazil there are many groups meeting to focus on the Bible. In this case the motivating occasion for the group is some pious exercise or special event: a feast day, a novena, a brotherhood week, or what have you. The people meet on the parish level. There is no real community context involved. The Word of God is the only thing that brings them together. They want to reflect on God's Word and put it into practice.

Second Situation: In Brazil some groups are meeting within a broader context. They are meeting on the level of the community and its life. I once went to give a course to the people in such a community. In the evening the people got together to organize the course and establish basic guidelines. In such groups you generally get questions such as these: "How do you explain the Apocalypse? What does the serpent stand for? What about the fight between David and Goliath?"

The questions, you see, are limited to the Bible as such. No hint of their own concerns, no hint of real-life problems, no hint of reality, no hint of problems dealing with economic, social, and political life. Even though they are meeting as a community, the real-life problems of the people are not brought up.

Third Situation: To introduce the third situation, I am going to tell you a typical story about my experience in this area. I was invited to give a course in Ceará, in northeast Brazil. The group was made up of about ninety farmers from the backlands and the riverbanks. Most of them couldn't read. In the evening we met to get things organized. They asked me about a dozen questions, but these are the ones I remember:

1. What about these community activities we are engaged in? Are they communism? Or do they come from the Word of God?
2. What about our fight for land? (Most of them had no land. But they had plenty of problems and fights on their hands). What about our labour struggles and our attempts to learn something about politics? What does the Word of God have to say about all that?

3. What about the gospel message? Does it have to do just with prayer, or is it something more than that?

4. The other day, in a place where there was a big fight going on between the landlord and his tenants, this priest came, said Mass, and explained the gospel in a way that made the landlord right. Then the local priest of the parish read the same gospel and explained it in a way that made the tenant farmers right. So who really is right?

5. The landlord gives catechism lessons that teach subservience and bondage. In our community we have a catechetics of liberation, and the landlord persecutes us for it. So how do we settle the matter and figure it all out? We want to know whether the Bible is on our side or not!

Here we have three basic situations. In the first situation the group involved comes together solely for the sake of discussing the Bible; the Bible is the only thing that unites them and they stick to it. In the second situation the people focus on the Bible, too, but they come together as a community. In the third situation we have a community of people meeting around the Bible who inject concrete reality and their own situation into the discussion. Their struggle as a people enters the picture. So we can formulate the following basic picture:

We find three elements in the common people's interpretation of the Bible: the Bible itself, the community, and reality (i.e., the real-life situation of people and the surrounding world). With these three elements they seek to hear what the Word of God is saying. And for them the Word of God is not just the Bible. The word of God is within reality and it can be discovered there with the help of the Bible. When one of the three elements is missing, however, interpretation of the Bible makes no progress and enters into crisis. The Bible loses its function.

When the three elements are present and enter the process of interpretation, then you get the situation that I encountered when I gave a course in Ceará. The people asked me to tell them the stories of Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah, and Jesus. That is what I did. But in their group discussions and full meetings they hardly ever talked about the Bible. Instead they talked about real life and their concrete struggles. So at the nightly review the local priest asked them what they had learned that day. They quickly got to talking about real life. No one said anything about the Bible. Ye gods, I thought to myself, where did I go wrong? This is supposed to be a course on the Bible and all they talk about is real life. Should I feel upset and frustrated, or should I be satisfied? Well, I decided to take it easy and feel satisfied because the Bible had achieved its purpose. Like salt, it had disappeared into the pot and spiced the whole meal.

Conclusions

1. When the community takes shape on the basis of the real-life problems of the people, then the discovery of the Bible is an enormous reinforcement.

2. When the community takes shape only around the reading of the Bible, then it faces a crisis as soon as it must move on to social and political issues.
3. When the group closes itself up in the letter of the biblical text and does not bring in the life of the community or the reality of the people's struggles, then it has no future and will eventually die.
4. These three factors or situations characterize the use of the Bible by the common people and reveal the complexity involved. The three situations can be successive stages in a single ongoing process, or they can be antagonistic situations that obstruct and exclude each other. It all depends on how the process is conducted.
5. It doesn't matter much where you start. You can start with the Bible, or with the given community, or with the real-life situation of the people and their problems. The important thing is to do all you can to include all three factors.

SOME OBSTACLES AND HOW THE PEOPLE ARE SURMOUNTING THEM

It is not always easy to integrate all three factors in the interpretation of the Bible. There are many obstacles along the way that the people are trying to surmount in various ways.

Many Don't Know How to Read: Many people today still don't know how to read, and the Bible is a book! Sometimes no one in the group knows how to read. They invent ways to get around this problem. They use song and story, pictures and little plays, making up their own version of the "Bible of the Poor". Thanks to songs, for example, many people who have never read the Bible know almost every story in it.

Slavish Literalism: Another obstacle is slavery to the letter or fundamentalism. This usually occurs when the Bible is read dissociated from a real-life community and concrete situation. The circle closes and the letter becomes a source of further oppression rather than of liberation.

Three things can help to overcome this obstacle:

The first is the good sense of the people. In one community composed of blacks and other farmers the people were reading the Old Testament text that forbade the eating of pork. The people raised the question: "What is God telling us today through this text?" Their conclusion was: "Through this text God today is ordering us to eat the flesh of pork". How did they arrive at such a contrary conclusion? They explained: "God is concerned first and foremost with life and health. In those times eating the flesh of pork was very dangerous to people's health. It was prohibited in God's name because people's lives had to be protected. Today we know how to take care of pork meat, and the only thing we have to feed our children are the piglets in our yards. So in this text God is bidding us to eat the flesh of pork".

A second element of great importance in breaking through enslavement to the letter is the ongoing action of a local church that takes sides with the poor. The ongoing movement of the Church in this direction is helping to ensure that questions focused exclusively on the letter of the biblical text gradually give way to others. Literalist questions fall from the tree like dry leaves to make room for new buds. The larger complex of a local church that sides with the poor for justice is very important in correctly channelling the people's interpretation of the Bible.

The third has to do with various devices of a fairly simple kind. For example, we can show people that many of the things we talk about in words cannot be taken literally. Symbolism is an integral part of human language. In many instances the first step towards liberation comes for people when they realize that they need not always take the biblical text literally. They discover that "the letter kills, the Spirit gives life". This realization unlocks the lid and lets new creativity out.

Ref. WORD-EVENT XIV-3-84

- end -

"WHEN I GIVE FOOD TO THE POOR, THEY CALL ME A SAINT.
WHEN I ASK WHY THE POOR HAVE NO FOOD,
- THEY CALL ME A COMMUNIST."

Dom Helder Camara

INCULTURATION: STS. CYRIL AND METHODIUS

John Paul II

The Pope lauds the respect of the two Saints for cultures and languages. He recalls how "in Venice, before the representatives of the ecclesiastical world, who held a rather narrow idea of the Church and were opposed to this vision, St. Cyril defended it with courage. He showed that many peoples had already in the past introduced and now possessed a liturgy written and celebrated in their own language . . . Reminding them that God causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on all people without exception, he said: 'Do not all breathe the air in the same way? And you are not ashamed to decree only three languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin), deciding that all other peoples and races should remain blind and deaf? Tell me: do you hold this because you consider God is so weak that he cannot grant it, or so envious that he does not wish it?'"

This, he says, recalls to him the way the second Vatican Council, 20 years ago, "had as one of its principal tasks that of reawakening the self-awareness of the Church and, through her interior renewal, of impressing upon her a fresh missionary impulse for the proclamation of the eternal message of salvation, peace and mutual concord among peoples and nations, beyond all the frontiers that yet divide our planet".

The Pope goes on to draw out the lesson of the brothers' work for "what today is called 'inculturation' - the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures - and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church". He pays tribute to the invention by St. Cyril of the Cyrillic alphabet: "By their original and ingenious creation of an alphabet for the Slavonic language the brothers made a fundamental contribution to the culture and literature of all the Slav nations."

Ref. Tablet, London 6 July 1985.

"THE INCARNATION OF THE GOSPEL IN CULTURES"

Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

The Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples has always recalled this doctrine in its instruction to missionaries. Very well known is its Instruction of 10 Nov., 1659, to the missionaries who were going to China and Indochina: "Put no obstacles in their way, and for no reason whatever should you persuade these people to change their rites, customs, and ways of life, unless these are obviously opposed to religion and good morals. For what is more absurd than to bring France or Spain or Italy or any other part of Europe into China? It is not these that you should bring but the faith which does not spurn or reject any peoples' rites and customs, unless they are depraved, but on the contrary tries to keep them ..

Admire and praise what deserves to be respected" (Collectanea
S.C.P.F. Vol. 1, No..135, p.42).

This directive is really up-to-date! In fact, the problem is not a lack of teaching or instruction of the Church on the incarnation of the Gospel in every culture, but rather all the difficulty of putting them into practice.

(From an address given by Cardinal Arinze at the CRIS (Roman Centre for Priests' Meetings).

Ref. Fides - May 4, 1985 - No.3349.

RECONCILIATION AND AFRICAN CULTURE

Ma Meinrad Hebga.

First of all, we need to beware of a tendency that is too frequent in some ecclesiastical circles, that of equating "African culture" and "folklore". Some western theologians, philosophers and anthropologists - and also certain African writers - categorise as folk-lore whatever concerns the specific cultures of the African continent: languages, religions, arts, customs, dress, musical instruments. . . In these circles, the traditional headgear worn occasionally by Mgr. Milingo, the famous healer from Zambia, would be considered as "pagan", as also his fly-whisk and his stick with colourful bead decorations.

On the other hand, things like the mitre, tiara, dalmatic, lustral water, pastoral staff, and other objects borrowed from assyrian-babylonian, chaldean, greco-roman and germanic paganism are considered "Christian"! Moreover, these same writers can, in all seriousness, link with an unintelligible concept of "pure Christianity" the touched up forms of processions from the pan-athenian feasts or from the *saturnalia*, or the vocabulary of the eleusinian or mithraic mystery religions: *sacramentum*, *mysterium*, *ablutio*, *summus pontifex*, *pontifex maximus*, and all the rest.

Did not the *relator* for the 4th Synod of Bishops declare in 1974: "Let us give to African the pure elements of Christianity which they will then clothe with their own culture"? However, he was careful not to reveal where this "pure Christianity", untouched by greek, latin, anglosaxon or slav expression, is lying hidden! This is in fact only one of the aspects of the ideological and cultural monopoly over the religion of Jesus Christ that has been held by the west, through greco-scholastic or germanic theology, roman law and european liturgies.

The enforced judaizing of the first converts from paganism was halted by the authority of the Holy Spirit and of the apostles at the start of the Christian era. But since then, philosophical, juridical, liturgical and cultural domination by the west has been assumed to be the obligatory way to salvation in Jesus Christ determined by divine providence. This monopoly is exercised not only in the area of the philosophical expression of the faith, but also,

and even more painfully, in the moral order; here each people has its own insights and its own specific contribution to make. But Church leaders have tended to ignore the values of traditions other than their own, and to impose, in the name of God, the ethical understanding that is proper to their own culture.

Ref. Extract from an article in AFER. Vol.25, No.6 Dec. 1983.
P.O.Box 908, Eldoret, Kenya.

- end -

'EDUCATION FOR LIFE'

A way of faith in Zaire

Betsy Brock ICM.

("To be fully happy in Zaire, among the people, to serve as a nurse in the pediatric ward of the local hospital, to get suddenly sick and be obliged to travel immediately back to the homeland" - this occurred to me some twenty years ago.

It has cost me many tears but, with hindsight, I see it as a turning point in my life, the beginning of more possibilities and of a new start. Since I had to stay for some years I registered for studies in Louvain. Five years later, I was more than thrilled to make my second departure for Zaire.)

The traditional form of sex instruction: Years ago life in the village was regulated by tradition. No one would deviate from the imposed norms. Growing youngsters were initiated to puberty by the elders of the village.

Unfortunately there was now hardly any initiation to adulthood. The parents felt estranged by the new morality, hence they were afraid to touch the delicate problems of life.

What are the actions and reactions of young men and women in modern society? Many admit that they got their information from cheap magazines and novels, from pornographic films or actual experiences with their peers.

Could something be done to initiate our young people? Did the traditional initiation give us some hints? The situation and the possibilities were thoroughly examined. We saw the urgent need to develop solid courses and sessions for groups of young people and we saw that these must offer more honest insights into all aspects of sexuality. They must also give young people the help needed to build their own lives on a set of lasting values. It meant an all-encompassing program aimed at "Education for Life". And all its aspects must be passed on through persons who are not only skilled teachers but also wise educators who exemplify in their own life the values they wish to pass on to others.

Authentic traditional values in contemporary "Education for Life"

To educate young people according to ancestral values, to enable young persons to fully fulfill their role in family life and to prepare them to contribute to the development of society we needed to build our program on the global education of the individual. It was clear that the christian vision of life was the fundamental value of this program. The program was gradually developed by the people themselves; it was based on african culture and assessed with various groups: youths, engaged couples, married people, workers and intellectuals.

Which ancestral values fit into the framework of contemporary life? The following were important:

- solidarity within the family constellation;
- respect of children for their parents;
- education of youth;
- in general, acceptance of all that is good and rejection of all that is evil.

And so in our program for life-education, we discuss the following:

- human personality, which goes further than organic functions and in which we also discuss emotional aspects and creativity of the spirit;
- man-woman relations, balanced love relationship;
- respect for the woman and for unborn life;
- education of the expectant mother;
- education of children.

There are 95 slides to illustrate the lessons. All shots were taken in the african context so that they would be relevant and easily understood. From the outset of the program, we were asked to give our course in the schools. We were very happy that it gradually spread in the capital and subsequently in the interior. Just as only the wise elders were permitted to initiate the young, so do we expect a serious preparation from our future educators. They understand quite well that their words are meaningless if their life is not beyond reproach.

We now have a central office in Kinshasa. Ten local educators are working there full-time with me. Their principal task is to give training sessions in the city and in the interior - to train the teachers. After a period of study, these are given model lessons to enable them to teach in their own milieu, young boys and girls in the schools, adults and school leavers in the parishes. We do not want to rush this formation for the educators need to have a solid base. We also notice that our program "Education for Life" benefits all levels of society.

Is our program well accepted? The lessons are given and received with enthusiasm. Young people are pleased that attention is given to their specific problems. The feedback we get is encouraging:

- "I have discovered my own personality".
- "Thanks to the lessons in "Education for Life", I live at peace with my wife and children".
- "I wish to live better ... Who can advise me in personal matters"?
-

Respect for Women: In an area in which the great majority of ~~people~~ **people** earn less than the minimum wage, prostitution and exploitation of women are rampant. To ascertain facts, our educators have gone to the harbor towns. They have gone far into the interior where a slavetrade still exists. Some facts point to results obtained so far:

- In the vicinity of Wamba, after our sessions, the women could sit at table with their husband for the first time. The local custom still prevailing before the sessions was that, when the husband had finished his meal, the wife would eat the left-overs outside. What is even more encouraging is that the couples are keeping to this new life style.

- One mother had engaged her student daughter to a man practising polygamy. Part of the dowry had already been paid and the mother was pushing her daughter to accept the proposal. The daughter flatly refused: "The lessons in life-education have taught me that I do not have to say yes." The girl continues her studies and will subsequently make a responsible choice.

Our education in Kinshasa: I wish to tell you more about this group. They are fine young men! Some have been committed to this work for more than eight years. They are elite workers whose exemplary life is contagious. The formation sessions are quite successful not only because they know the subject matter but also because their attitude commands respect. We are receiving full support from all officials who have followed our sessions. One example only -- the regional administrator of Kikwit wrote: "Your educators have visited us. These prophets have brought to the surface things deeply hidden in our hearts. They have challenged us to make a conscientious choice. We cannot escape it". One of the team members said: "Sister, the success of our work is due to our responsible life style. Should we no longer live what we preach, it would mean the end of our program".

I could tell you a lot about the seemingly insurmountable hindrances that thwarted our program and about the unexpected solutions coming just in time, thus strengthening our trust in divine Providence and renewing our enthusiasm. We were able to persevere on account of the small and big signs of His presence. We realize that we are but the instruments of a God who acts through the weakness of His people.

To pass on the message of salvation in our times, we need:

- Sufficient knowledge of the cultural background of the society and a lot of appreciation of this background.
- Capacity for dialogue, not only to facilitate the communication of ideas but to arrive at the sharing of gifts in unity of action.
- Faith that God completes His work in His Incarnate Word and that the person of Jesus communicates His grace to all Christians. Christ enables people of our time to pass on the Good News of **Salvation today.**

Ref. I.C.M. FOCUS. August - September 1985.
Via di Villa Troili, 30
00163 Roma, Italia.

**DECADE FOR WOMEN CONFERENCE
CATHOLIC NUNS IN KENYA PARTICIPATE IN NGO FORUM**

Compiled from reports of Sr. M. Felix, A.O.S.K. Secretary

The Catholic nuns in Kenya joined their fellow women from all over the world at the international Decade for Women conferences. Through their organisation-Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya (A.O.S.K.) - the nuns sent 11 representatives to the non-governmental organisations (NGO) Forum'85 in the Kenya capital, Nairobi July 10-19. The Association invited each member-congregation to reflect on four points in preparation for the Conference:

1. the role of religious women in the church and society today.
2. how the religious women can cooperate with other women in Kenya for the good of the church and society.
3. how the religious women can contribute to the promotion of women.
4. the participation of the religious women in Kenya in the Decade for Women conferences.

A.O.S.K. sent to the organisers of the NGO Forum'85 a report incorporating answers to the questionnaire and reflections of the nuns in Kenya concerning their role in society and the church. Also some nuns were chosen to represent A.O.S.K. on various Forum'85 committees.

WHY PARTICIPATE IN WOMENS' CONFERENCE?

A.O.S.K. decided to participate fully in the activities of the women's decade for seven reasons:

1. to witness to the role of consecrated women in the mission of the church.
2. to form solidarity with other women for the betterment of life and to contribute a spiritual value to the world.
3. to seek solutions to the problems of today's women. The nuns in Kenya work closely with the elderly, mothers, rural women, unmarried mothers, teenage girls and women in Catholic organisations. Thus, they are well acquainted with the problems of infertility, family planning, lack of amenities, overwork and drunken husbands.
4. to affirm the commitment of the nuns to helping women under various circumstances. This demands an open mentality from the nuns so as to situate their problems in context of the overall women problems. The nuns would, thus, include the overall women problems in their prayers.
5. to witness to the Christian Churches that consecrated celibate life is a legitimate expression of womanhood and motherhood.
6. to instil into a world dominated by self-seeking, power-seeking and pleasure-seeking the positive Christian elements of love (agape) and life-giving.
7. to show the "light" of religious women in Kenya.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE REPORT

The following is a summary of the answers to the questionnaire sent by A.O.S.K. to the religious communities in Kenya concerning the role of women in society and the church. A summary report was sent to the NGO Forum'85 organising committee by A.O.S.K.

Active participation in society and church: Respondents to the questionnaire perceived the role of religious women in the church and society as proclaiming the gospel, building community and serving.

When asked: "WHAT IS OUR ROLE AS RELIGIOUS WOMEN IN SOCIETY AND THE CHURCH TODAY?" the nuns in Kenya answered that they must actively participate in the functions of the church. This participation involves witnessing to Jesus through proclamation of his message.

Building community was also seen as an important role of religious women in church and society. The religious women while building community must enhance the quality of personal relationships and foster wholesome family life. They must help in spelling out the role of women in a male-dominated society and church. As such, they must respect themselves and animate other women to do the same. For example, in Kenya there are close to 2,000 women religious. These nuns are among the most educated women in society. They would play a decisive role in raising the consciousness of men as to the dignity of women. They would also animate their fellow women toward personal responsibility for their lives and development.

Service was mentioned by all respondents as an important role of religious women in church and society. This service must especially be expressed in concern for the poor and the suffering. The nuns must strive to eliminate ignorance, poverty and disease as an expression of their concern for the poor and suffering. Another dimension of service, according to the respondents, is the nuns' analysis of the patriarchal influence on political, social and church structures and insisting on legislation to safeguard women's rights and dignity.

In short, the role of nuns in society and the church today, as outlined above, is to witness to the kingdom of God; to bring about the unity, peace and justice of God's kingdom in today's world and to lead others to personal dignity, loving relationships and fulfilment.

Cooperation with other Kenyan women

The nuns saw it as crucial to work closely with other women in Kenya when they play their role of religious women in church and society. Asked: "IN WHAT WAY CAN WE WORK HAND IN HAND WITH OTHER WOMEN IN KENYA FOR THE GOOD OF THE CHURCH?", the nuns answered that they must be interested in promoting human rights and consequently support or even join the women-groups engaged in such work. Collaborating with women-groups committed to justice and peace was one suggested way of implementing this.

The nuns, it was emphasised, must cooperate with other women in Kenya to carry out various forms of education on issues affecting

women. These issues include family life, self-reliance, acquaintance with other women, women's needs and potentials. The women should also be urged to promote personal and social appreciation of womanhood and motherhood.

It is necessary to reach out to various groups of women. In this process, the uneducated women should be respected and their gifts appreciated and used. At the same time awareness must be raised among the women-elite that their leadership is needed to promote human and economic development. The appointment of diocesan coordinators for women activities was also suggested as another way of cooperation between the nuns and other women in Kenya.

Advancement of women: Suggestions about the promotion of today's women appeared in the answers to the question: "IS THERE SOMETHING SPECIAL THAT WE CAN DO TO BRING ABOUT THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN IN TODAY'S WORLD?"

It was suggested that the nuns participate in a family apostolate so as to reach out to all dimensions of family life. Establishing dialogue among women and between women and men was also suggested. Topics to be included: family life, natural family planning, one-parent families, teenage and school-girl pregnancies, unwanted children, abortion and alternative parenting such as adoption and fosterhomes.

Special attention to a sound Christian formation for the youth is necessary in promoting today's women. At the same time there must be loving support for unmarried mothers while helping them find means to rear their children. The nuns must evolve a pastoral care programme.

Sensitisation of church leaders on discrimination against women within the church was also suggested by some respondents. Additionally, church leaders must be led to see the following needs which affect Catholic women in Kenya: full-time and well-trained women catechists, participation of lay women in the church's pastoral planning, fostering pro-life groups and having more and better prepared nuns in higher education and higher institutes of religious studies. The nuns also suggested that they should exert leadership in meetings with men. In oppressive situations with clerics, the nuns should speak out. Finally, it was suggested that the religious women should raise the consciousness of women as regards their human rights, the negative influence on children of viewing men as superior and women as subservient, the many alternatives available to them and the importance of bonding with other women.

Participation in the Decade for Women: Most respondents expressed the urgent need for the nuns in Kenya to participate in the Decade for Women conferences. They were answering the fourth question: "HOW DO YOU SEE THE A.O.S.K. PARTICIPATING IN THE DECADE FOR WOMEN CONFERENCE MEETING?" Most nuns suggested A.O.S.K. should attend the entire conference while some representatives should be involved in the preparatory committees.

Some respondents saw A.O.S.K.'s participation in the Decade for Women conferences as a chance to inform other women about the religious women in Kenya. An exhibition and interviews during the conferences were suggested as means of giving this information.

There should be communication among the nuns in Kenya about the conferences. This would require circulation information about the conferences, a discussion on women issues A.O.S.K. meetings and contact with organisers of the Women's Decade conferences. The nuns also expected from A.O.S.K. reports from the conferences.

Ref. AMECEA Documentation Service, P.O.Box 21400, Nairobi Kenya.

- end -

LETTER WRITTEN BY THE FAMILY OF FR. EZECHIELE RAMIN
TO "THE COMMUNITY OF CACOAL, THE LOCAL BISHOP,
THE COMBONI MISSIONARY SISTERS AND PRIESTS,
THE INDIANS, THE FARM WORKERS."

- - -Gesú poteva non morire, ma é morto perché fossimo liberi. Non ha fuggito il dolore umano, é stato inchiodato sulla croce. Morto crocifisso é già risorto e il suo corpo glorioso come "primizia" aspetta ognuno di noi. Sul calvario é andato Lui, non ha mandato altri; cosí come Lui, anche noi.

E'noi che ama, non le nostre cose. Se questo ci spaventa, Ezechiele cantava spesso "non abbiate paura, il vostro nome é scritto nei cieli".

A sua Eccellenza Mons. Vescovo, grazie per essergli stato di guida a averlo fortificato nel sacerdozio di Cristo. Ai sacerdoti e suore, grazie per l'esempio che gli avete dato, per la fede che lo ha fatto crescere; grazie perché gli siete stati genitori, fratelli, sorelle al nostro posto.

Ai campesionos, agli Indios, ai poseiros, agli ammalati, a tutte le familie, in particolare quelle piú povere e bisognose, grazie perché l'avete accolto, amato, ospitato, aiutato e sfamato.

Ai fazendeiros e ai jaguncos: che la morte di Ezechiele vi possa riconciliare con Dio Padre e farvi comprendere che anche in Rondonia la terra é di Dio, cioè di tutti. Evitate egoismi e malvagità, perché attirano la sventura di Dio sulle vostre case. Agli assassini le parole dell'evangelista Matteo: "Fui in prigione a veniste a trovarmi". Vi auguriamo d'incotrare Dio. Noi vi perdoniamo....

A tutta la comunità di Cacoal.....

Non sappiamo come, ma siamo certi che il sangue di Ezechiele versato per il Signore vi porterá molti frutti buoni. Li meritate, perché avete sofferto e soffrite molto. Dio ci ha dato Ezechiele, Dio ci ha tolto Ezechiele. Rendiamo grazie a Dio.

Il saluto di nostro figlio e fratello era: Vi salutiamo nel Signore che vi vuole bene sempre e poi sempre ancora".

E' anche il nostro -

---- Il papà Mario, la mamma Amabile, i fratelli Paolo, Antonio, Filippo e Fabiano Ramin."

Ref. Missionari Comboniani: Capitolo XIII No.7. (Ezechiele was murdered recently in Rondonia, Brazil by agents of the local 'fazendeiros').

- end -

SEDOS SEMINARS 1985/1986 - DATES TO NOTE

1.

BIBLE AND MISSION

October 2, 1985

at

Jesuit Generalate: 5 Borgo S. Spirito

2.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
SEMINAR: EXTRAORDINARY SYNOD OF BISHOPS

December 10, 1985

at

Brothers of the Christian Schools
Via Aurelia 496

3.

THIRD WORLD THEOLOGIES

May 6 - 10 1986

at

VILLA CAVALLETTI, GROTTAFERRATA
