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SEMINAR
ON
LAITY IN MISSION
MARCH, 1987

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AIM OF THE SEMINAR

Francesco Pierli, MCCJ

On behalf of our President and of the staff of SEDOS I welcome all of you to this seminar on "Laity in Mission". As you may know, the theme was proposed by many of you. And rightly so, since the laity, men and women, are becoming evermore aware, both in theory and in praxis, that they are part and parcel of the missionary people of God and of the mystery of the Church as a sign of the times in today's world.

Moreover, the Synod on the Laity in the Church is in sight. You will recall that we, as the SEDOS family, spent a considerable time during the General Assembly on December 9, 1986, studying the Synod Lineamenta, spearheaded by the stimulating talks of Mrs. Margaret Hebblethwaite, Mrs. Emma Cavallaro and Fr. Séan Fagan.

But more than documents and talks, it is our own missionary experience that witnesses and alerts us all to the direct and multiple involvement of the laity in the process of evangelization and liberation which is the aim of our missionary endeavour. Where the Church is less structured and formal, there, the Holy Spirit urges the laity to become evermore creative ministers within and without the Christian Communities.

The resource persons, the sharing in small groups, the two optional workshops at this seminar will all add a great deal to our own experience, theological understanding and common attitudes. It is our hope that the seminar will achieve the following three objectives:

- 1) To broaden our information and awareness of what the laity are already doing for the vitality of the Christian communities and for the animation and transformation of human society in bringing about the reign of God;
- 2) To deepen our theological vision of the laity as Church and in the mission of the Church in the world;
- 3) To bring about a conversion of mind and heart and an upsurge of new attitudes which will allow us to look forward to and enjoy an ever greater sharing with the laity in practical orientations, government, life-style and discernment and hence to go beyond a mere repetition of the past statements of the Council or other documents.

I wish all of you a happy experience at this seminar. With the assistance of the Holy Spirit, may it match your expectations.

 RESOURCE PERSONS

DEIRDRE McLoughlin was born in Zimbabwe and raised in Dublin; Qualified as a physiotherapist in 1958; Practised as a physiotherapist in Ireland, Nigeria and Canada; Married Dermot in Nigeria in 1960; Trained in spiritual-direction at Toronto school of Theology and Ignatius College, Guelph 1977 - 1981; Associate staff St. Josephs Retreat House Hamilton; Executive Director Institute of Concern for Public Health, Toronto), 1985 - 1986; Lay-spiritual 1975; Permanent commitment to the Spiritan Congregation in 1984.

DERMOT McLoughlin was born in Dublin where he qualified as a physician; in charge of Leprosy unit at Abakaliki, Nigeria; Presently chief of service at Chedoke Hospital, Hamilton, Ontario; Assistant professor, Faculty of Radiology at McMaster University; Former National Executive Physician (Canada) for the Prevention of Nuclear War; Lay Spiritan 1975; Permanent commitment to the Spiritan Congregation in 1984.

The McLoughlin's have four sons ages 25 to 17. They are co-founders of the ASHLING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

DONALD NICHOLL was born in England in 1923; Oxford 1941-42; British Army, mainly in the Far East, 1942-46. Returned to Oxford 1946-47; Teaching at Edinburgh University 1948-52; Professor of History and Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz 1966, 1969-70, 1974-80; Rector of the Ecumenical Institute for Theological Research, Tantur, Jerusalem, 1981-85; Visiting Professor, Santa Cruz and Senior Research Fellow, Multi-Faith Resource Unit, Selly Oak, Birmingham 1985-86. 1987-Free lance.

ANNA MARIA TEPEDINO was born in Brazil; Educated at Notre Dame de Sion School; Graduated in philosophy; Member of Cursillos de Cristiandad and Movimento Familiar Cristiano M.Th. dissertation on "Women Disciples in the Gospels"; Presently lecturer and Co-ordinator of theology faculty courses, Pontifical University, Rio de Janeiro; Pastoral ministry in Baizade Fuiminese in Rio de Janeiro periphery; Married to Renato, they have four children.

AMIN FAHIM: Amin Fahim a fait dix ans de journalisme, puis dix ans de barreau avant de se trouver plongé à plein temps dans "l'Association Chrétienne de la Haute-Egypte pour les écoles et la promotion sociale". Pour cela, il a abandonné sa carrière d'avocat. S'il a le titre de président-directeur général, c'est en fait un groupe, plutôt une communauté de laïcs qui dirige l'Association, avec Amin au centre. Ce groupe comprend des hommes et des femmes, des catholiques et des orthodoxes. Amin assume plusieurs autres responsabilités dans

l'Eglise, parmi lesquelles: secrétaire général adjoint du Conseil de la pastorale d'ensemble de son pays; membre laïc de la Commission Pontificale Mixte de Dialogue entre les Eglises Catholique et Copte-Orthodoxe; premier vice-président d'une O.I.C., - le B.I.C.E. (Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance). Amin a 65 ans; il est marié et père de trois jeunes gens âgés de 27 à 34 ans.

AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Ninety participants, seventeen of whom were Superiors General, attended this SEDOS Seminar at Villa Cavalletti near Frascati from March 24 - 28, 1987. They represented 45 mission Societies and Congregations and came from 5 continents and 25 countries. Virtually all the participants were General Councillors or mission co-ordinators.

All the speakers were married lay people with families, in one case with grand-children. The witness of their commitment to mission in their varied situations in Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America was a remarkable inspiration to us all. The total absence of polemics was a feature of the Seminar. Wrote one of the lay participants afterwards: "I found it very important symbolically, that men and women, clergy and lay, had a deep affectionate relationship, sharing their experiences, trying to work together in order to build the Kingdom.

As usual the Seminar developed its own dynamic. It was based on an experiential model and blended the personal stories of the resource persons with serious theological-missiological reflection. Sharing in the concluding general assemblies was particularly rich and personal.

This report contains the full texts of the resource persons presentations, a synthesis of the group discussions and suggestions which emerged at the Seminar for the Executive Committee of SEDOS and the SEDOS member Institutes.

One question we will all ask ourselves following the Seminar "Are there blockages which the Holy Spirit is placing in our way as we spread the gospel message. What are they? And what do they say to us about where the Spirit is leading us?"

THE STORY OF DEIRDRE AND DERMOT
TWO LAY PEOPLE IN MISSION

Dermot and Deirdre McLoughlin

Deirdre: Once before, I made a short visit, not a particularly joyful one to Rome. It was spent at the Rome airport twenty six years ago when I was returning from Nigeria with my sick infant wondering if he were going to die. This is a happier visit!

Dermot: We thought of beginning by telling you something of the story of our lives. My childhood was unusual. My father was 40 years older than my mother - as a result of which he found it difficult bringing up three sons. We were all sent to boarding school and thus at nine years of age I had my first contact with the Spiritan Congregation. At twelve I had no doubt that I would be a missionary priest and I would go to Africa.

Then in my early teens I was troubled with scruples to a very extreme degree. They took over my life. I was quite a good football player and the only time I was free of these scruples was when I was playing football! This made me intensely interested in the game. I played for the school team and for the representative provincial side and everyone thought I was having a wonderful childhood. Scruples can be hell. I wondered if I could even be free of sin between confession and receiving Holy Communion and this continued for five or six years. During that time I met a beautiful priest whose death I am sure I speeded up with all the stress I caused him. He was extraordinarily patient with me and directed me to a psychological counsellor. I still wanted to become a priest but it became clear that it was not the way I was destined to go. The counsellor pointed out to me I could serve God just as well being a lay person. A weight was lifted from my mind.

I went on to medical school where I was still interested in religion and came in contact with Opus Dei. They were then opening a house in Dublin and were very active on the university campus. I became quite involved with Opus Dei but never moved into their residence. Many things disturbed me about them and I eventually moved away from them. At boarding school we felt we knew Africa through our contact with missionary priests and so it was not unusual that I left for Africa when I had qualified as a doctor.

At medical school I had seen this beautiful physiotherapist in the corridors of the hospital. In fact I think a lot of medical students got treatment during those days for doubtful ailments! Deirdre and I got engaged a year after meeting. After qualifying we went to Nigeria with the Medical Missionaries of Mary and the St. Patrick's Society in the then Diocese of Ogoja. We planned that I should go out for 6 months to see if we could work together there. Deirdre would then follow.

Deirdre: I was born in Zimbabwe, went to school with the Loreto Sisters, attended university and graduated as a physiotherapist. If I were ever asked, while growing up, what I would like to be my answer was always - "Not a sister and not a teacher!" Sisters were very remote during my schooldays. I constantly wondered what they did at the end of school day when they disappeared behind the little door at the end of the corridor. Later, in Nigeria I came to realise they were extremely human and just like me.

We were married in the small convent chapel in the leper village where we had gone to work. Our 'bestman' was an Italian. Dermot was very ill the day of our wedding so the bishop, "all things having been prepared" decided to marry me by proxy to the best man who would stand in for Dermot whereupon Dermot managed to stagger to the chapel - so all was well. The wedding cake which I had made and iced collapsed just after we cut it. Dermot took to his bed, which incidentally was the Mother Superior's! That was an exception. Later as we moved around the missions I would be housed with the sisters in the convent, while Dermot would stay with the priests in the rectory although we were married.

Our home was not ready when we returned from our honeymoon - so I ate with the sisters that evening. It was the only time I did so. I always had to eat apart from them if Dermot happened to be away. I was quite lonely. Then I would go to the womens' area of Leperville and although I could not speak their languages (there were many) and they couldn't speak mine they were the people who welcomed me. They were the people who seemed to understand. It was there that I learned the meaning of the word "presence". My memory of Nigeria is the women and their joy despite the fact the many had bad deformities and had spent years in the leper settlement.

We first came in contact with primary health care in Nigeria through my work as a physiotherapist. There were many leper villages and many children at school in these villages. Deformities were widespread. It was impossible for me to be everywhere so I brought one or two children from the different villages to the central village and held classes for them there for three weeks during which time they could also attend normal school. They learned about the care of hands and feet, the exercises to do, how to warn other children about not walking

on sharp objects, hot coals etc. and encouraging them to wear sandals. As sensation was often dead in their feet the leper children compounded their illness by not taking these precautions. Then I called to the villages to supervise them when they had returned. Dermot was also involved with "leper-attendants" - people who had 6 months training and were in charge of leper villages, dispensing medication etc.

Our eldest son John almost died during this time. I remember travelling with him between Abakalaki and Anawa. He was a baby of 12 months and had malaria. Half way to Anawa he seemed to have stopped breathing. We stood with him on the side of the road and cried. It was an isolated place. He began breathing again and we carried on to Anawa. It was while taking him home to Dublin eventually, still a very very sick baby, that I spent an hour at Rome Airport.

We didn't go back to Nigeria. We wanted to, but because of John's health we were advised not to. We went to Glasgow in Scotland instead where Dermot specialised in radiology. Financially we were poor. Dermot earned less than \$2000 a year from which he had to buy books, travel to London for his examinations and get accommodation which was very difficult.

We were lucky to get a ground floor apartment in a tenement. We knew we would only be there for a couple of years but the woman who lived across the hall from us with her husband and seven children was there for many years after we had left although it was a condemned tenement. She taught me something in life. We went to Ireland for Christmas one year. It was freezing on our return. There was no central heating in the apartment and I dreaded returning there. The morning we arrived back was foggy and cold and we were miserable when we got to the house. There was a light on, a fire lighting, the place was warm, the table was set and breakfast was half prepared. With all her problems our neighbours had stayed up for a good part of the night to make sure things would be comfortable for us when we got back.

When Dermot finished his radiology he was told by the head of his Department in the Royal Infirmary in Glasgow "You've got to leave Scotland; we have our full complement of staff; there are no prospects here." It was then we decided to go to Canada.

Dermot: We were there only a couple of years when I got a very good medical appointment with four other radiologists in a small city. I was soon able to set up a very successful medical group. It was a far step from the condemned tenement in Glasgow. We were now, in North American terms, "leading the good life". We were members of the country club and patrons of the arts in the city. Deirdre was on the guild for the local theatre. I was Chairperson of the Catholic

High School Board and a member of the Knights of Columbus. Deirdre was president of the Catholic Womens League. We had a very beautiful home and, as Deidre used to say, half of our religion was filling this home with antiques. We "had it made", were living in "the fast lane", working hard, playing hard, having a good life. We were good decent rich people. And had five healthy sons. But I did not find I had achieved happiness. When we stopped to think, which wasn't often, we thought maybe we were happier in the Glasgow tenement where we had more time together ourselves.

We had a beautiful house on 1 1/4 acres of land overlooking a lake. There was a window trimmed with stained glass on the stairs. Sometimes at night I would go there to pray. I thanked God for the beauty of the place we were in. If I prayed for a considerable time feelings of guilt came to me. I kept getting the same message - I showed you the slums of Glasgow and rural conditions in Nigeria. What are you doing with your life here? I would feel uncomfortable and raise this with Deirdre.

Deirdre: But I didn't agree at all! I thought we had done our bit.

I was enjoying life. I was involved with the community, doing good things and so I'm afraid I left Dermot to his guilt feelings!

Dermot: About that time Deirdre's teenage sister who was very attached to her, came to visit. She had a fatal blood disorder and was with us for the last months of her life. Deirdre took her body back to Ireland for the funeral. While she was away I did something which was not really fair considering how upset she was. There was a lay institute in Canada founded by a Russian Baroness, Catherine Doherty. About 75 lay members lived in a very simple fashion and about 14 priests had joined them. They organised weeks for families in the summertime when they would go and live in simple log cabins. During the day there were some conferences with one of the priests from Madonna House. I booked us in there for about six weeks after Deirdre's return.

Deirdre: I wasn't happy about this. I felt he should have asked me.

I was going through a very bad period, feeling very empty. I had to work through Maureen's death, but there was something more than that. The idea of going with the family to a family retreat week was the last thing in the world I wanted. When I got there, Fr. Bob Wilde saw how upset I was and did everything in his power just to get me to talk - even putting his chaise-longue outside the door of the cabin where we lived so that I would have to practically step over it to get out. That's what I did! I literally stepped over it, said 'Good Morning Father' and took off. I had no contact with anybody except being very upset that I had to cook with seven other families in the communal cook-house and think that everybody was looking at me for some reason. That week was one of the most difficult weeks of my life.

Dermot: On the other hand I felt that this was just what we needed, but obviously there was a lot of friction between us. The group of families was middle-class. Baby sitters took care of the children and we spent most of the day with the priest who helped us examine our material life style. This had never happened before. I thought of our local parish and realised we were honoured by the priests for our helping them. We were taken out to dinner and entertained profusely. Now it was quite the reverse. We were being challenged on how we were living. Even though this is what we had come together to consider it was interesting that when we were in fact challenged, we defended our life style. It developed into a debate between the ten families and the priest. Ten against one! - so we left feeling we had won the debate. Six months later we were all obviously troubled and...

Deirdre:I was the one who suggested we would go back! I had been thinking things over and recognised how empty was my life. I felt Dermot was right - there had to be some change. I suggested we talk again to Bob Wilde. I thought he would give us some blue-print to follow. The first thing he said was "Are you praying?". "Well, I go to mass on Sunday", I said. But he asked again "Are you really praying?" And I thought - probably not. When I was a child I used to chat constantly with God. But that seemed to have gone and apart from routine things like Sunday mass or church devotions I really hadn't been praying or giving time to prayer. "Well", he said, "become a little less active and spend some time just sitting in the presence of Jesus".

I started and liked it and became very inactive, gave up most of my activities and spent most of my spare time praying. Dermot pointed out that he felt this was not really the way things were supposed to be. We might have been on a thread-mill before but spending all my spare time praying was not the solution either. I began to realise that contemplation without action was just as wrong for me as action without contemplation. Both of us had come to realise we needed to change our lives and so we set out on a search.

Dermot: Just about that time we were asked to give a talk on World Leprosy Day. I was particularly qualified to do this. My audience was made up of 75 young people, 15 from the city where we lived, the remainder from other towns. I gave my usual talk and was winding up with the observation that people of North America should share with peoples of the other half of the world to help specially the 15 million people suffering from leprosy, only one-third of whom were getting medical treatment. We should be generous, gift-giving etc. I looked into the audience. There were two teenagers who knew me and our life style. They said nothing but I could see in their eyes "you are a total hypocrite!" Their challenge was the challenge of the priest on the retreat. I still remember the look in their eyes. When I got home I realised I could never talk about leprosy again.

We talked to many lay people, sisters and priests. I remember specially talking with one of Cesar Chavez' workers, from the migrant worker's organisations in California. The boycott on buying grapes and lettuce from California was in force. She spoke about non-violence. I told her what I intended to do. At the supermarket I would fill my handcart with groceries, put some of the Californian grapes and lettuce on top, ask at the check-out whether these came from California and then leave the handcart there declaring I would buy nothing from that store.

"But" she said, "that is being violent! Some worker in the store now has to go to the trouble of putting everything from that cart back on the racks". "I thought that was non-violent action", I expostulated and asked her what she saw as non-violent action? In California she said she had stood outside Supermarkets handing out leaflets and asking people not to buy Californian grapes. A woman came up to her and spat in her face. She said "Thank you". Again the next day the same woman came by. She handed her the little leaflet again and asked her again politely not to buy the grapes. Again the woman spat in her face and went into the store. Three or four days later the same scene was re-enacted - except this time the woman looked into her face and burst into tears. "That is non-violence" she said.

In our search we met two young nurses who had started a house of prayer. We met a member of young men and women who worked for a salary for half the year and worked as volunteers for the other half. We met many interesting people one of them being Jean Vannier. A comment of his was: "Whatever you do, do it with priests. They need laypeople to work with them in teams" We would say now - and I think he would too - "with Sisters and priests in teams". He said also he thought our role was to walk between the two worlds of the rich and the poor and be fully a part of neither. This in fact has become true in our lives. The poor we work with regard us as rich - which we are, and our well-to-do friends now regard us as eccentric and uncomfortable to be with. Our way of life challenges them. We have lost a lot of our close friends. We seldom get any invitations even from those with whom we work and they virtually always decline invitations to our home.

Deirdre: In our continuing search we were asked repeatedly whether both of us wanted to change our life style. Yes we both did - but if Dermot had pushed a few years previously there would have been a problem in our marriage. He was patient and waited for me to change. We became involved with a group in the diocese called "Youth Corps", - a group working with youth, prisoners and other outreaches and it looked as if we were going to move from where we live to Toronto where we would be part of the team in a community situation.

About that time we received an invitation from the Spiritans to their Pentecost celebration. Dermot had been to their school in Ireland

but had very little contact with them since that time. After Mass we were having tea on the school lawn and I was going over to greet a priest whom I knew vaguely when I bumped into the then Spiritan provincial-superior and knocked his cup of tea out of his hand. So - we had to stop and talk. Maybe it was the Holy Spirit acting or just my nervous embarrassment but I began to tell him about our search. A group of us had arranged to go to the Cathedral that evening to make a kind of general commitment to Jesus in 'Youth Corps'. The Superior showed interest and recalled that I had some missionary experience. He told me that the recent General Chapter of the Spiritans had discussed the question of new forms of membership in their Congregation. "Would you be interested in exploring this with us?" he asked. I said "No", as I presumed we were going another way. I then called Dermot over. We talked some more about considering the possibility and he invited us to phone him if we were indeed interested. Later in that week Dermot did phone and told him we really were not interested. We were going to stay with 'Youth Corps'. Besides, Dermot had also become involved in a project called ISAID in Niger with the Basilian Fathers.

The community project with Youth Corps did not work out. Neither did ISAID. After two years, the Niger Government decided to abandon the medical component of the project as it did not fit in with their government's plans.

Dermot: Looking back on events of those days my feelings were of extreme anger. We had given up good jobs. We had left home I had gone back to a job in tropical medicine which involved a phenomenal drop in salary. I took up this job with a view to the medical work in Niger. The agricultural part of the project prospered. The medical part was abandoned after dialogue and in the circumstances the government's decision was the right one. But for me - two avenues had failed since I left my home for Toronto. Two of our teenage sons were telling us - "Obviously nobody wants you: We don't know why you made this silly move; get the message! let's go back and be as we were before".

I went into a Church one-day to pray. I liked to envisage the face of Christ when I prayed but this day I was so down that I could not see his face. I sat therefore with eyes closed. I was incredibly angry. After, about thirty minutes I looked up and saw the usual churchy things. And there were stained-glass windows of the 'agony in the garden' the 'crowning with the thorns', the 'crucifixion'. Some kind of a message began to form - if we decide to follow Jesus things are not going to go too well! I took this to my Jesuit spiritual-director and over a period of a few weeks he came up with a simple explanation which meant something to me then - much more now, "Maybe you have been following Dermot's plan; are you prepared to start all over again and be open to follow God's plan?"

Deirdre: A few months later we were making the Ignatian Exercises in our home (the 'daily' 19th annotation method) and it became very clear that we were to go back and talk with the Superior of the Spiritans. We talked about his invitation and decided to present the idea of membership to his Council. If they approved then we would explore becoming Lay-spiritans. The Council approved. With Gamaliel we felt that if this were of God it would last, if not it would fail. That was in 1974.

When we bought a house in Toronto and moved there with our family, I sold my mink coat, antiques, Waterford glass and other trappings, and moved into a 'house' that was supposed to be for lay missionaries before they left for the "third world" and at their disposal for a period of re-entry on their return. This didn't work out at all. It was a disaster. The first year as Lay-spiritans was phenomenally difficult. "I think our dream is turning into a nightmare" was how Mike Doyle the provincial superior described it. In a lot of ways it was.

One of the problems, I think, was that lay and religious have different perceptions of different areas. I also found that as a woman I was a threat to some of the people. We have moved through that. It has changed. Fr. Pat Fitzpatrick, the Spiritan deputed to work with us, felt that too much psychic energy was going into the whole project. He saw that we had little involvement with VICS - the lay-mission wing of the Spiritans (whose house we had moved into) and so he advised: "Drop it for the moment". This we did. There are friendly relations between us and VICS and good collaboration. I think the hope was that VICS and Lay-spiritans would merge. Perhaps someday they will - but that does not seem to be the way to go for now.

We did actually remain Lay-spiritans. We remained as a family, opened our house and left it open to needs as they arose. The "needs" started to appear. People stayed for a while, some just for a meal, some just to talk. Others asked to join us in the community and "Aisling Community" was born. Some of those in the community became Lay-spiritans, others remained as committed Christians but did not become Spiritans.

In the following session we will highlight some of our involvements or outreaches in response to needs, specially with native Canadians and the Peace movement.

II

 THE AISLING COMMUNITY - FAMILIES IN MISSION

In this second part of our presentation we will describe just two projects which our Community undertook in response to perceived needs and we will explain a little more about our life as lay-members of a missionary society.

WORKING FOR PEACE

Deirdre: Three or four years ago a number of us were involved in working for peace in different organizations but we were feeling the need for more contemplation, more prayer. We seemed to be always going to meetings which were very busy and action-oriented. So thirty three of us got together to decide upon a time when we could meet to pray, as well as to talk, about peace. We were all busy people and the only time we could decide upon was 6.30 a.m. on Thursday mornings.

The group included some who were unemployed, our carpenter, the Moderator of the United Church, the Provincial of the Sisters of Sion in Toronto, one or two priests, a Mennonite minister and others, quite a number of whom were professionals. We came together to pray for an hour and then to discuss and discern for an hour as to what action or initiatives we should take.

We were called "CHRISTIAN INITIATIVE FOR PEACE". After some months we decided to ask LITTON Industries in Toronto, - the company making guidance systems for the Cruise missile which Canada was testing, - to co-host a conference with us. We would ask LUCAS Industries of Engalnd to come and tell us how they had moved from making machines of war to socially productive and useful merchandise. Litton Industries refused our invitation. Some time later we decided to send groups from our membership to Moscow, Washington and Ottawa to promote peace. Six of us would take letters and messages from the people of Canada to present in Moscow. Two other groups would go, one to Ottawa the other to Washington. We thought we would get a few hundred letters when we put the notice of our intention to go to Moscow in the newspapers. We ended up with between ten and fifteen thousand.

Meanwhile Litton Industries wrote to us saying they would be interested to see how a group like us would be treated in Moscow, - "like

dissidents as you are dissidents here". We accepted their challenge. We got in touch with Helsinki-Watch and they gave us the names and addresses of some of the people in Moscow involved in trying to develop trust between the USSR and the U.S. We arrived in Moscow the week after the downing of the Korean airline plane and were not really welcomed with open arms because Canada had just closed its airports to Aeroflot. We visited the Religious Affairs Department, quite a funny visit really because it was a Department staffed entirely by atheists one of whom said: "You know I was baptised, my Grandmother insisted"! We had a good meeting with the people of this Department. They suggested we go to the service in the Baptist Church which we did. Our group was made up of the Provincial of the Sion Sisters, a Catholic diocesan priest, a Redemptorist, a Mennonite minister, two United Church ministers and myself. The two United Church ministers preached at the service.

One of the highlights of our visit was trying to find the Group to Develop Trust, particularly the couple who were directing it. When we eventually found them we were a little concerned they might get into trouble because we went to visit them. But they welcomed us with open arms because they said: "You have come at the right time. Moscow is totally isolated now and by your coming you are going to save us being harassed and persecuted in a lot of ways by the K G B. When they feel no attention is being given, they move in". We visited them twice and then the K G B did move in on us and told us we were not being good tourists and that we had to behave. Olga and Uri her husband, had told us: "Don't be afraid, stand up to them. Half the problem is that people get scared; just don't be afraid; they are not going to do anything to you", and so we had decided it was more important to go and visit than to pay too much attention to the K G B. We got in again but then the next time three of us were stopped as we entered the building. We had quite a confrontation and eventually had to give up our attempt to continue visiting.

But one of our group, Mary Jo Leddy, the Sion Provincial, did succeed in getting to visit our friends again. She got from them a transcript of a tape of a peace-seminar they were holding actually on the conversion of arms factories to useful productivity. So, when we got back to Canada we phoned Litton and told them we had something we would like to share with them. They did not answer. We wrote; they did not answer. We telexed and said that on Ash Wednesday we would come to their gate, we would be praying from seven until eight and we would stay until such time as they decided to make an appointment - for a meeting with the President of Litton to discuss our original proposal and our Moscow transcript.

It was 40 degrees below zero when we arrived. We prayed for an hour and then a personnel officer from the factory met us with the police. He told us he was very sorry but the President was out of the country. We said that was alright, we would wait until he came back.

He said, "but he is in Europe"! and we said we would wait. He said: "Well wait for a little while" and he sent us out coffee on silver trays. So we waited. For the first few nights we stayed in cars and after that we set up a tent. Somebody was there all the time. As most of the people had jobs, those who needed to work during the day took a watch at night and those who were too busy during the week came at the week ends. We stayed outside Litton for forty days and forty nights and it was extremely cold, but it was a wonderful experience. The temperature hovered between 30 and 40 degrees below zero for most of the forty days.

We changed shift usually every four or five hours. We had philosophy seminars and we had prayer every four or five hours. We had discussion groups too. The police, who monitored our conversation by remote radio, were very concerned and used to check on us at night to make sure everyone was alright. People we didn't know would come in their cars to bring us coffee. We continued like this until we were told we were a health hazard which we were not, and we said we would not move the tent until we were officially told to do so. We had to appear before the Mayor and the city council and argue our case - we were waiting to have a meeting with the President of Litton, that was all we wanted and we would wait until such time as we got it. The Mayor could not get over this so he got in touch with Litton, and insisted we have a meeting but insisted also that our tent be removed. We did not resist his decision. We did have our meeting, the date being Holy Saturday. So for the whole of Lent, from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday we had kept vigil. Very little came of the meeting with the President in fact, but the whole process was deeply religious and ecumenical for all those involved. It also gave all of us time to reflect, pray and fast.

OUTREACH TO NATIVE CANADIANS

Dermot: I had felt for a long time that I should go to Niger to do medical work. We made this decision first of all within our family. I had talked about it with Deirdre and the boys on many occasions. ISAID needed a physician to go to Niger for three months of each year. The family had agreed that I could go but then the programme fell through and some people pointed out to me that maybe there was a more appropriate work for a family person, with Canada's Native People. I use "Canada's Native People" because "native people" covers a complex of different peoples in Canada. There are many large groupings of Indians who are complete and distinct tribes. There are also the Meti of mixed parentage who have certain rights separate from the Indians. There are the Inuit, whom you may know as Eskimos. I have worked with three of the native tribes, the Ojibway, the Cree and the

Inuit, but most of our work is with the Ojibway. When Helder Camara was on one of his visits to Canada he was asked what should Canada be doing for Brazil? His comment was, "One of the first things you should do is clear up the awful scandal of the way the native people are living within your own country". Here are a very few statistics:

- Indians are only 1.9% of the population but they are seven times more likely to be imprisoned than the general population. In two provinces, Manitoba and Saskatchewan native people are 40% of the jail population.
- Indian suicides are three times the national average. As a medical person I know that suicide amongst Indians is often unreported and so in reality is much higher. In the 15 to 24 year age group it is six times the national average of reported cases alone;
- Indian children are two and a half times more likely to die before the age of twelve months;
- Canada is supposed to have one of the best medical services in the world yet the figures for native health compare with many "Third World" countries.

I proposed to the Spiritan Congregation that we should look at the possibility of becoming involved with the native people and in 1978 a priest and I went on a tour in the north. We visited several communities, spent some time with native chiefs and went to a Medical Health Community Conference. On our return, the priest reported to the Provincial Council that it was not an appropriate mission at that time and I reported back that I thought it was a very appropriate mission. So the lay people decided to investigate further and to see if it were possible to develop a lay mission programme there. I had offered to do some work in one of the University of Toronto hospitals in the north while I was there as I am a radiologist and a general medical practitioner. There was one Reserve, New Osneburg which was not yet under the medical care of any hospital and so about 1979 I went there as a general practitioner.

I was rather shocked at what I found. There was a lot of violence. Many houses had boarded-up windows. I thought these were not lived in, but I found that there were up to twenty people living in some of those two-bedroomed houses. I did not realize, as most Canadians do not, the amount of squalour and poverty amongst the native people. Being mindful of the charism of the Spiritan Congregation to go to places where others are unwilling to go I felt this was just the place for me. I offered my services as a part-time general practitioner and the following summer our family came up and we stayed there. One of the difficult things about staying on a Reserve like this is that the people live in very poor housing.

In that particular Reserve there were no water or sewage facilities for any of the native homes, yet on the same Reserve the Federal buildings had not only running water but showers and tubs, washers and dryers in the white staff houses.

As we began to get to know the people it became extremely embarrassing to live in these privileged conditions and to be friends with the people on the Reserve in the other homes. We asked the Chief of the Reserve if we could have a place where we could live on the Reserve in a house like everybody else. He was a little suspicious at the beginning. After we got to know one another he said: "why don't you come and live with us? Stay with us as often as you can. We know you cannot be here all the time but get to know us and let us get to know you and learn to trust you. When we trust you, if we want you to do something we will ask you; if we don't have anything we want you to do, don't do anything. Just be here and get to know us". That was how we started to move out of the Nursing Station into the community.

The first summer the Bishop had given the community the old church which had become too large as a community centre. There was a small apartment at the back of the church and we used that as living quarters. That summer our own family and one or two other people came up with us and gradually we got to know the people on the Reserve. During the winter the church burned down and when we went up during that time as individuals we stayed in people's homes. In the summer of the following year we were asked to supervise a programme for the children. We agreed willingly but insisted that it would have to be run by the older teenagers. And so things developed.

Four or five times a year now I am on the Reserve and I frequently end up sleeping on the floor in a home. The native people are phenomenally generous and sharing. The home that we stay at has two bedrooms and often there are two families staying there, but whenever you go there they will find a place for you. Nobody would ever say that because the house was too full there was no room but they would apologise that there was no bed to sleep on.

Deirdre: Pecking order is important too. I remember once when I was the last to arrive I got the spot beside the stove. It is the worst spot because you melt and then you freeze and you are also responsible for putting wood on the stove in the middle of the night. I was sharing the living room with a number of other people, - somebody had the sofa and I think three of us had the floor, but being last in, I got the worst spot and that is the accepted approach.

Dermot: As well as doing medical work we were asked to teach catechism in the summer. I felt very uncomfortable about this and so I

talked to one of the chief negotiators of the native people about it. He had once been a United Church Minister and then gone back to Native Religion. There is a great religious and cultural revival going on among the native people at the present time. I asked the Chief about the proposal and he said that he would tell me what he told another community that wanted to come in and preach. "Go to the nearby town and if you convert the so-called Christians there to treat Indians as normal human beings by overcoming racism, then you will be welcome to come into our community and open a Christian Church". Because of this and other comments I was hearing from Indian people we went to the local Bishop, Msgr. Liguria and told him we would be happy to do development work and respond to requests from the people on the Reserve but we did not feel comfortable at that time about doing primary evangelisation. He agreed to this and in successive years has continued to support us in our endeavours in development work.

Even though not directly catechising something has happened. One of the senior women, a councillor, has come to us and asked us if we could find training for her as a lay person so that she could run a small christian community on the Reserve. Arrangements are being made for her to go to a Jesuit training centre for native deacons and native people who wish to do ministry. The Spiritan Congregation asked us if we would facilitate their students' field experience there. We were happy to do this and arrangements were made with the Toronto School of Theology so that Deirdre and I could be the field supervisors for the students. Things have worked out well.

Three seminarians spend summer there under supervision. One result, I believe, is that the people of the Reserve have selected one young Seminarian whom they want to come back as their priest. This is an interesting development because on Sundays when a priest comes, which is about once in six weeks, only about ten people attend Church - yet about 40% of the Reserve are probably born Catholic. The people move from Church to Church on Sunday as we do ourselves when we are there with them. We go to the Anglican Church in the morning and to the Catholic one if there is a Mass and then to the Pentecostals. "We will come back", say the Catholics, "if we are well serviced." So, - the significance of their interest in a Seminarian.

I also spend a lot of time with the Elders and hear of reactions to the white people, including the Catholic Church. We have taken away their lands from the Native people and what has been left to them is polluted by acid rain. There are two Reserves near us where so much mercury has been put into the river system that the Indian people will not be able to fish there for another 75 years. A Finnish Scientist first discovered this mercury was coming from a paper-mill in Dryden. Despite protests the Government took no action for six years and

now it is too late to do anything about it. I was called into another Reserve in northern Saskatchewan to look at the uranium mining in the area, (Canada is the biggest uranium supplier in the world), and already there are three lakes near the mines where the fish are inedible because they are radioactive.

We did harm also in the area of religion. One of the most beautiful customs in native religion was the "vision-quest", what Fr. John Haskell an Ojibway priest calls "confirmation". At the age of 12 or 13 the parent, usually the father, organised the "vision quest" for his son, sometimes too, for his daughter. The young persons were taken to meet the medicine-man.

They fasted for some time and then went to the sweat-lodge, a small log building with a fire in it. There they were subjected to extreme heat and then, when the fire went out at night, to extreme cold. After this they usually went high up into the hills where there was a smooth, flat rock much worn from all the people who, over hundreds of years, had lain on it. The youngsters lay on this rock but before they went up, the native medicine man had explained to them that while they were there they would dream and their dreams would help them in choosing their career in life. He would visit them maybe every four or five hours, day and night, to see they were not totally terrified and unable to continue with the experience which usually went on for about three days.

I have spoken to Carl Brandt who is a Mowhawk Indian psychiatrist, about what was actually happening. He explained that their blood sugar count dropped in this situation and they began to get controled hallucinations. So they dreamt and since they had been prepared to look for a career in those dreams, something significant happens. At the end of the three days they come down and share their dreams with the native medicine man and are helped to choose their career.

This is only one of the many experiences within Native Religion which I might call almost sacramental. When the missionaries came they looked upon these as the work of the devil, the native medicine-men were condemned and there are very few of them left today.

We are now at the start of a cultural revival. One Canadian Bishop I spoke to recently told me that he had gone to the sweat-lodge himself and taken part in the ceremony. He lit the fire and blessed the lodge because he saw the importance of moulding Christianity with the good things that were in native religion. But there was turmoil when he emerged. A lot of the people in the community were scandalized. "Bishop, you told us thirty years ago", they said "that this was devil worship and now you go in there yourself!". It is a very difficult stage in working with native people. We need to be sensitive in

whatever we do.

We negotiated our little mission project with the Bishop, an Oblate, who gave it his approval. We also went as lay people for funding to Catholic Church Extension. They helped us. In 1978, the Provincial Council approved the project unanimously as a Spiritan work to be co-ordinated by the ASHLING Community and it was handed over entirely to the lay people. We have had Seminarians with us and now we are looking for Sisters and Priests to come to Osneburg. The laity can take initiatives and organize but at a certain stage we realize we cannot do it on our own.

Deirdre:- I think what has happened is this. We have been there now for a number of years. People knew that we prayed. Sometimes they joined us in the morning. There has never been any pressure of any description and yet, lately, particularly in the last year, people seem to be asking, wanting, hungry for spirituality and for a more organized sacramental life. The time now seems to be right to develop further. We have had contact with a number of Sisters and the Bishop has encouraged us to search for some people who would live there permanently. This desire for a permanent presence seems to be coming from the Chief, from the Council, and from the people.

Dermot: I find that one of the most important times for contemplation is when I lie on the floor in a home there. I do not sleep too well and so I am awake a lot of the night. I can go over what is happening in my life, the way I live and the way the people there live, the simplicity of their life and what it is calling us to do. I find it a real time for examination of conscience.

In return for their receiving us we started welcoming Native people into our home. They have told us often that many people want to visit them to "have a look at the Indians" as they say, but few invite them back to their own homes. So we began the reverse process. Deirdre and I were counting the other day and realised we have had over 50 people from the Reserve in our home during the past twelve months. We have only two guest rooms, so we have begun to follow the Indian way - when the beds are full there is plenty of floor space and plenty of sleeping bags and pillows. In fact we always have some Indian people living with us now. At the moment we have two, one young lady who is having very complicated hip surgery and another young lady who had to leave the Reserve and go for schooling elsewhere.

Deirdre: About five years ago the first boy, Fabian, came to live with us for three years to go to school in Toronto. He has since returned to the Reserve. It was then that Liz asked if she could come down and finish her schooling with us. We do this only at the specific

request of the family or people concerned.

LAY MEMBERSHIP IN A MISSIONARY CONGREGATION

Dermot - We will move on now to the involvement of Lay-people within the Spiritan Congregation. By way of clarification, there are two Lay groupings in the Trans-Canadian Province of the Congregation.

Deirdre: VICS - The Volunteer International Christian Service was started around 1970 in response to requests from different areas in the world. VICS tries to match these requests with qualified volunteers from Canada. They make a two year commitment overseas, quite a number renewing their commitment for a second and sometimes a third period. Originally, as Lay-spiritans, we were supposed to be a base for the VICS volunteers as they waited to leave and again when they returned to Canada. VICS sends 20 people to different parts of the world every year. The group is ecumenical.

Dermot: There are three VICS people now in training in the pre-Novitiate or Seminary of the Spiritans. There are eight Lay-spiritans in our little group which is now in existence for twelve years so it has not been a massive group process...

Deirdre: ... I would like to qualify that. I think it could have been. A lot of people showed interest but a lot of people wanted to feel safe and to be looked after by a Congregation but that is not the goal of Lay-spiritans. Over the years lots of people came, lots of people talked and some explored with us and found our way of living not the right place for them.

Dermot: Becoming a Lay-Spiritans is directed towards permanent membership of the Congregation. There is a one year probation period for enquirers. They join us every Thursday night of the year for a community meeting at which there is a lot of sharing. At the end of the year they can make an application for a three year commitment and at the end of that they can apply for a further three-year commitment. After these six years they can apply for permanent membership.

Co-operation with priests and brothers occurs at many levels. A Lay-spiritans can be requested to work on any of the Congregational Committees. Deirdre, because of her training, is on the Formation Committee for the Province and I was the social-justice representative for three years. We attend Provincial Council Meetings and Chapters and submit an Annual Report to the Council to be critiqued - two separate reports in fact, one as Lay-spiritans and one about our work in the Canadian north. We have freedom to speak on all issues at Council Meetings or at Chapters. At the first Chapter we attended we made a

statement that the lay people did not want a vote at Chapters until all the priests and brothers were satisfied and happy for them to have it. At the second Chapter we attended this was not discussed. We will leave it in Limbo unless it comes up because having the vote or not is not a big issue with us.

Deirdre: We have quite a consensus as a community. It was necessary to be gentle at the beginning because the concept was new to everybody - exciting to some, threatening to others. I did not have a problem as the first woman because having worked in Africa, I had spent a lot of time in the company of priests. There have been moments of tension even disagreeableness specially with one or two of the older priests. These, we have worked through patiently and we are totally accepted now.

Last year there was a check with all the members of the Trans-Canada Province to see what they felt about the Lay-spiritans and the answer was very very affirmative.

Dermot: There are two important points we would like to emphasize now. First, - one of the things we really appreciated was that the Province allowed us, and there was considerable discussion amongst the priests about this - to evolve our own spirituality. If you are going to have Lay-people enter your Congregations or societies you must not make religious of them because then they will cease to be lay and will have nothing to offer. So, they must be allowed to evolve their own spirituality.

Deirdre: Our spirituality is very much that of Libermann the Spiritans' Founder. It is really very good for today. We read and study his works and we try, as far as possible, to be faithful to the charisma of the Congregation. We pray every evening as a community. Our community consists of our own house, in which there are three others living in addition to Dermot, myself and our children and often extra people. There is another house just around the corner where Judy and Joe Webster and their four children live and a third house about ten minutes away with Anne and Frank O'Neil and their three children. As many of us as possible get together for evening prayer. At times we are joined by seminarians from the House of Theology which is also about ten minutes away or by the pre-novitiate group about the same distance away in another direction.

This prayer time is the most important time. Our community is Christ-centered and if we let this slip we find things get really dissipated, but if we can get together in the evening for prayers often something will come out at spontaneous prayer which we can pick up later on over a cup of tea or coffee.

Dermot: There are a lot of things people would be reluctant to share in the kitchen which they can share when we pray together...

Deirdre:...and vice versa, we can pick up in prayer from a lead-off over a cup of coffee in the evening. The next statement was one that caused the most dissension when we wrote our little rule. It took two weeks to sort out these few sentences which concerned the role of the priest within the community. There is always a designated priest member of our community but it was not from the priests the opposition was coming. The dissension was amongst the lay people who were squabbling over the way it should be written. The few sentences with which we are all very comfortable now, finally came out like this: "Each grouping, that is, each Community shall have a designated priest member. He will be appointed by mutual agreement between the laity and the Provincial. The priest member will be careful not to assume a formal leadership role in the group. His role will be as a friend, a councillor and a guide. He will provide sacramental ministry when his priestly services are called for by the community. In extreme situations his presence will safeguard the Spiritan integrity of the group". We have never had any problem in its implementation.

Each of the Lay-spiritans must have a personal spiritual director who of course, should not be a member of the local community or group, but come from outside.

You might be interested in the occupations of the Lay Spiritans as of now. There are two home-makers, one spiritual director, two health professionals, one vocational councillor, one parish team worker and one school teacher. Two in the community have Masters of Divinity degrees. The priest member and one lay person are both at the Toronto School of Theology taking a doctorate of Ministry.

Dermot: The second point we want to emphasize is in the area of finances.

Apart from the initial cost of setting up the first house the Lay-spiritans are not a financial burden to the Congregation. I already mentioned that they gave some money (US \$7,000) for the native work in the north. That was a once only outlay. Now that work is funded through Church Extension and other donations and through Bishop Liguria. All Lay-spiritans are expected to earn their own living. However, within the community there is a philosophy - there shall be no poor among you so that no person in the community could be without finances due to unemployment or sickness. Indeed this has been tested on two occasions. The community looked after a woman member who did not have any income for two and a half years. On another occasion a couple in the community had considerable difficulty in paying their rent until their circumstances improved - which took over a year. The lay community looks after that. We do not turn to the Congregation for help.

We feel like any other Spiritan if a request comes from the Provincial and Council that we do something. Deirdre and I are getting to an age where in another five or six years all our boys will have finished University and we shall have a sense of freedom. One of the priests asked at a recent Council Meeting whether we would both be ready to go, for example to Papua New Guinea to get involved in a medical clinic if asked by the Provincial. We said we should feel like any other Spiritan: take that proposal, think about it, discern it, and if it seemed right, go like anyone else.

Deirdre: People often stay at the house temporarily. The usual rule is that they may stay for a month as guests and then, we discuss finances - whether they are in a position if possible to pay something towards their keep. People rarely stay more than a month unless they are members of the community or unless there is some definite living arrangement.

Dermot: Every Lay-member is supposed to have an outreach. First of all we suggest they look at the existing outreaches of the Congregation to see if they can fit in there; alternately if they are already discerning an outreach they should examine it in the light of the charisma of the Founder, - ministries into which others are reluctant to go and ministries which show a preferential option for the marginalized. We do not always live up to our guidelines, - but they are guides and we try to follow them. And now we would be happy to answer questions.

"THE SPIRIT STOPPED US FROM GOING INTO ASIA"

Donald Nicholl

Some years ago I asked Archbishop Anthony Bloom, a Russian Orthodox friend of mine how did he decide whether he should go to the many places where he was invited to speak. "Oh! well", he said, "every call I regard as a call from the Holy Spirit. I go unless I have some previous engagement even though I may know nothing of what they want me to speak about, because perhaps, the Lord wishes me to make a fool of myself"! Well, I can't manage that degree of irrationality so what I do is that when I am asked to go somewhere to speak I refer the question to the Holy Spirit.

About a year ago I was invited to go to Lomé in Togo to take part in a Conference there on the role of the laity. I referred this matter to the Holy Spirit and didn't get any answer at all! So I decided I wouldn't go to Lomé. I felt, at the same time, I had to work out some kind of rationale about why I was not being encouraged to go there by the Holy Spirit. I think that when I got the invitation I was immediately very unhappy about the title of the Conference - 'The Role of Laity'.

Metaphors are very revealing about the way our minds work and it seemed to me that this title was a sort of ecclesiastical jargon. The word 'role' is used of plays. You are cast in a role and are expected to say the words that the play wright and the producer have fixed for you. So it seemed to me that going to Lomé to hear what the ecclesiastics had said about my role as a member of what is called "the laity" was not something I particularly wanted to do.

Apart from anything else I find the very expression 'the laity' is a curious one. It reminds me of the time people would talk about the unemployed as though they were a kind of tribe on Mars. There is no such body as the laity of which one could be an organic member. The opposition of clerics and lay people reminds me of the foolish bull "Clericis" of Pope Boniface VIII in 1300 which began by saying that the whole of history taught that lay people had always been opposed to clerics. That seems to me to be an historically unfounded statement, a half truth.

More important, perhaps is the fact that as soon as you begin to use the dichotomy lay-cleric you introduce a dualism into your thought which means you can never bring them together again.

Once you get 'lay' on one side and 'cleric' on the other its a bit like Humpty Dumpty - all the King's horses and all the King's men couldn't get Humpty together again.

Soon after I received the request to go to Lomé I called into Oxford where there was a meeting on the role of the laity in preparation for the Synod. I was there for about an hour at the end of the meeting. What so saddened me was that my expectations arising from the title were realised. Commissions were reporting just at the time we arrived and what did I hear but constant complaints of the lay people about the clergy which is such a boring and useless kind of activity. I also heard the report of the Commission on the Spirituality of the Laity and was much comforted by the remark of Bonino who was there at the time. He said that to talk of spirituality of the laity as far as Latin America was concerned was a really strange and a funny thing to do, - as though you should talk about the spirituality of the goal-keeper as opposed to the spirituality of the centre-back! And I agree with him. It's not just Church people who make these kinds of misleading dicothomies. You notice that political philosophers, Locke and Rousseau, Hobbs and all those people with their various forms of social contract, - talk about the individual on one side and society on the other and they can never get them together again. They never really manage it because they have made it impossible for themselves from the beginning.

We do the same sort of thing when we talk about the Church and the world as though they were completely separate. In fact the whole discussion, as far as I have followed it, makes me grateful for the discipline that I received in my younger days when I studied St. Thomas and used to read the writings of Etienne Gilson. One of the things that always impressed me so much about Gilson was that when he came to a question such as we are addressing to-day, he would write an article of maybe 95 pages, and he would bring into it this consideration and that consideration, this and that quotation, this and that example. You would read page after page and ask yourself when is Gilson going to get to the point. What was happening was that he was steadily working through numerous options and cutting out various possibilities until eventually by the time you got to page 90, he had posed the question so precisely that the answer emerged in about 3 or 4 pages, almost by magic. All the work had been done really in posing the question exactly.

It seems to me that what people are getting at, if they are not misled by using this ecclesiastical jargon, is that our task to-day is ministry which the Church is called upon to exercise towards the whole of creation, particularly of course towards suffering beings. Eventually we shall all have collaborated in that condition to which St. Peter in the Acts of the Apostles refers, - 'the restoration of

all things', where all beings will be illuminated at the end of time and there will be no more suffering.

I think that once one puts it that way one's horizon becomes completely different and horizon is crucial in this. In a way what determines one's attitude towards most issues is one's horizon. If one's horizon is simply one's family, or the Church, then this is rather narcissistic. Horizon has to be the whole of creation - what our Buddhist friends call all sentient beings. So now you know why it was that I believe the Holy Spirit stopped me from going to Africa. It blocked that route for me and as a result I find myself here because I was invited by SEDOS. They knew I had refused to go to Lomé.

Thinking of the leading of the Spirit I ask you to reflect how unlikely it would have been some years ago if lay-folk such as those of us who are here, would have been asked to address such a group as I see before me now. In order to illustrate this let me tell you of an incident that occurred to a very good friend of mine. He came from a very devout presbyterian family from the North of Scotland, one for whom the things of God were constantly in their hearts. He became a Catholic. About a year later when he was in practice in Nottingham he went to his parish priest and said "Father I have been a Catholic now for a year and feel at home but I do feel that I need some help in deepening my spiritual life!" To which he got the reply: "Now don't you start worrying your head about that kind of thing. What you need to do for us is to get yourself onto the local Council and make sure we get a Catholic school!"

He was much older than I was and he told me of this incident many years later when he and I had become friends. I listened to this and I thought about it and one day I took him a copy of the 14th century mystical treatise 'A Cloud of Unknowing'. He never looked back after that. For the last ten years or so of his life he was constantly reading the 'Cloud of Unknowing'. "Oh", he would say to me "I have been reading your Cloud, chappie Donald!" and he would tell me something he had found. So the last ten years of his life were enriched by this mystical teaching from the 14th Century.

How different things are now! No one would think it altogether strange that lay folk should be addressing you as I am doing this morning. Throughout the world there is a whole way of mysticism not only in the Christian Churches but also in other faiths. For example take our Jewish brothers, - whereas mysticism was regarded by them almost as a swear word even 30 years ago, nowadays young Jews are not discouraged by any means from studying their mystical treatises. The same is true to a lesser extent in Islam and it is also true of Hindus. Amongst the American Indians the elders who know their mystical teachings are now saying they are so afraid for the human race that their teachings, - once confined to the small body of elders - must now be made available to everyone because the earth requires a mystical

teaching for all members of the human family.

It is very striking that perhaps the most successful series of books being published at this moment in England by Darton, Longman and Todd is a series which contains selections from the great mystical teachers such as Lady Julian of Norwich, St. Francis de Sales, the Methodist John Wesley the Anglican William Law. It is interesting also that there is no distinction into different denominations because this is a genuine ecumenical way. We find the same in the school of prayer which George Bibway, a Coptic priest and myself have initiated at Selly Oak. It is easily the most successful course we have put on there. At the end of each meeting, without any difficulty, we meditate for half an hour in silence. In the same way for example the religious experience research unit at Oxford has discovered that with many so-called ordinary people, (I have never met an ordinary person!) although they may be ordinary people like butchers and firemen and tailors - their mystical experience is much more common than what people have thought in the past. People who have had these experiences are always reluctant to speak about them because they fear that others will think they are a bit odd. And again, we don't know to what Christian traditions the different people belong.

So there is this tremendous search for interesting mystical things throughout the world. Nevertheless old habits do persist and give the impression that this teaching is not for everyone. If you look at the 1984 Bulletin for Non-Christians when the Secretariat was celebrating 20 years of its existence you will find in many of the documents, and specially in the Pope's speech, a pattern of how dialogue should proceed. There are the ordinary daily encounters between theologians, and then, as the Pope says, at a deeper level there is a meeting between the monks of other faiths and the contemplatives within the Christian community. I find this very strange - that this "deeper level" should be confined to monks! In a sense of course, this specialisation, this role, so to speak, for this special group of people is actually a danger to them also. Many of the people who are engaged in this east-west encounter are friends of mine and I sometimes ask them: "Is your identity first of all to be a monk and then a Christian because it seems to me sometimes that you behave as if being a monk is more important than being a Christian?"

In fact it is not I who am saying this. It is the scriptures which say that the deep things of God are meant for all. Consider for example what is said in the second letter of St. Peter where he speaks about the promises God has made to each of us - that we are called to be sharers in the divine nature. Friends have everything in common. Sometimes when I have been giving a retreat or a conference I quote this phrase. I say to people so that the full weight of these words of St. Peter will go into our heads - "And after you have become sharers in the divine nature what do you want next?. Do you want a biretta? Do you want a good career? Do you want to do a more advanced spirituality course? - with

the Carmelites?" What is there beyond sharing in the divine nature? And this sharing is for all. I don't really see how you can speak of the deep things of God not being for all. We are told in the first letter to the Corinthians that the Spirit investigates, researches, penetrates into all things, even the deep things of God. We are tempted to believe that we know more than the Spirit. Notice that in the next verse it says the Spirit alone is able to search into the depths of God.

Here I am reminded of an incident in the life of the great Russian Saint, Seraphin of Sarov. He was a great counsellor and one day he was busy seeing people for many hours. The local priest who was sitting in the corner said to Seraphin after all the people had gone away: "Father Seraphin, the human heart is open to you. You know what is in the hearts of all these people who come here". Seraphin said to him: "Not a word, my joy! The human heart is open to God alone. When people come to me I instantly refer them to the Holy Spirit and if I do so, and the Holy Spirit tells me what words to use to them, then those are the words that they need. If I do that I get it right. If I start trusting in my thinking, my own ratiocination, I always get it wrong".

That story of S. Seraphin ought be a warning to us not simply to invoke the Holy Spirit as a kind of trick for injecting enthusiasm into our own desires, specially in our missions. Here I think its very sad to read the story of what happened at Edinburgh, at the great Protestant missionary meeting in 1910 and more recently what happened at Nottingham in 1964. Take Nottingham first. The Protestants, Anglicans and Free Church People at Nottingham made a kind of contract - they would be united by 1980 or 1984. I remember at the time, when I heard this declaration I thought, - My goodness, who are they, who think they can preempt the work of the Holy Spirit? None of us can tell the Holy Spirit what has got to happen. Unity is of course, the work of the Holy Spirit.

But it is perhaps the Edinburgh 1910 meeting - such an historic occasion - which makes me wonder. The assembly there sent forth a cry that 'they were going to win the world for Christ in one generation!' Now I understand the enthusiasm but at the same time, isn't it terrible arrogance to talk about "winning the world for Christ" and "in one generation" as if you could direct the Holy Spirit yourself? I have recently been reading a good deal of the literature from about that time. Some of the things people were saying about other cultures and other religions at that time is absolutely breath-taking. The arrogance with which they spoke about others! I don't blame them. Maybe we do the same in our own way, but it is salutary to notice it.

I think at that time, they had a special hope that China was going to become Christian in one generation. On the whole the missions were going well in China, at least considering the numbers who were

coming into the Christian Church. But we all know what happened in the revolution of 1949 when the Christian missionaries were driven out. Although at the time I was very distressed like all other Catholics at what was happening to the missionaries, nevertheless, I began soon afterwards to ask myself whether we shouldn't interpret those events in the light of what is said in the Acts of the Apostles, "They were prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the Word in Asia".

I began to think of the position before and after 1949 in China. I thought to myself that before 1949 in China the Church was free to preach the gospel but the ordinary people of China were hungry, they had virtually no health services, they were subject to local war-lords, they were illiterate. The ordinary Chinese people were in a terrible situation. After 1949 there seemed to be a better situation than before. And I wondered whether, in the long run, those events might not have been good also for the Church. Suppose the Church had triumphed - and it was a triumphalist Church, - what kind of Christianity would we have had in China? Would it have been a very perverse form? Perhaps also it might have infected the rest of the Church. It might have become a model of what the Church was supposed to be.

It began to seem to me that it was perhaps comparable to what happened to Paul when he was prevented from going to Asia and was called to Macedonia, after which, of course, he began the evangelization of Europe. I ask myself also whether maybe the work of the Maryknoll missionaries in Latin America which resulted from the fact they could not work in China was not comparable to the evangelization of Europe by Paul. In other words the Holy Spirit blocked one way and that meant that people had to search for another way.

I am trying here, to raise this question in general of what it means when the Holy Spirit prevents us from doing something. The Holy Spirit does not direct us because that would turn us into puppets but the Spirit prevents or blocks us from doing certain things and that gives us the scope to find, in freedom, what way we are supposed to go. Another instance of this: as a result of my work in Tantur I became specially interested in the work of ARCIC the Ecumenical Commission of Anglicans and Roman Catholics, and the others, - Catholic and Lutherans, Lutherans and Methodists and so on. They produced various statements about agreements between the Churches and theologians coming together. It does seem however that the work of theologians is not going to lead to any direct movement towards reunion. Generally speaking, one feels it has been a failure. I think there is a different way of interpreting these efforts.

It is formulated in the golden words attributed to Thérèse Vannier, who has worked for many years among the mentally handicapped and for whom it is very difficult to understand the whole business of inter-communion. She said not long ago, "I do not believe that the different churches will ever drink from the same chalice until all of them learn to drink from the chalice of suffering of the poor and the oppressed".

What is happening through the blockage and frustration of ARCIC is that we are being told - "No! if you were to unite at this level it would be a superficial union for middle class intellectual people. If there is to be real full union in the Church you have to go deeper and deeper and we are pointing you in a different direction."

Many of you will have read Vincent Donovan's "Christianity Re-discovered: A letter from the Masai". You may remember that for Donovan the most important moment in his life as a missionary was when the group of Masai whom he had been instructing for a year said to him "Father, we are grateful for your having come here but we do not believe in your Jesus. Thank you and now we will go away". Donovan said it was the most isolated moment of his life, and also the most important moment. He learned more from that than from anything else. So he owes a great deal to those Masai, - a blockage led to some kind of revelation.

As I was thinking of Donovan a week or two ago I recalled what I heard from an engineer on the radio. Speaking of engineers he said, "We learn more from one failure than from a thousand successes." We theologians should try to do the same. We, all of us, are reluctant to learn this lesson. The reason, I think, is that every failure represents a threat to the identity which we have set up for ourselves in our own minds.

That is why I was so fascinated to-day when Deirdre and Dermot told us of how their son John said to them one-day when they were discussing their future lives: "Let's go back to where we were before". I found that very moving on the part of this young boy. It was like the Israelites who wanted to go back to Egypt. It is very understandable. We are afraid of what is coming in the future because we are losing some part of our identity which we have established for ourselves.

We come then to the question which I wish to pose to you. It is this: "Can we through the blockages we are experiencing, for example with regard to the coming Synod on the Laity, discern those deep things of God towards which the Holy Spirit is drawing our attention?"

Here is my own attempt at an answer. I hear from all ranks of the faithful about 'the crisis of identity'. Only a few weeks ago the Pope himself used this phrase, when he said that the laity were experiencing a crisis of identity since the Second Vatican Council. Similarly for missionaries, specially through encounter with the other faiths. It seems that people are capable of achieving salvation through their own faiths so what is specific about being a missionary? Likewise with priests. Many of their traditional tasks are taken over by lay people and so they ask - "What is left for us? What is it that constitutes our specific identity?"

I first began to experience how crucial this issue is about six years ago at Strawberry Hill College, when I was giving a three day conference to University Chaplains. What seemed to be troubling them was - "How can we define anything specifically Catholic? We seem to have lost all the things that differentiate us from Protestants, from others: we don't have the Mass in Latin; we don't have fasting on Fridays; we don't go to confession so often; we don't seem to believe in the infallibility of the Pope; birth control and contraceptives are not "out". What is left that is specifically Catholic? What identity do we have left?" My answer to them was - first, if what you are looking for is an identity based on inflexible difference from others then perhaps you should better go and imitate Ian Paisley and Ayatollah Khomeini! They have that kind of identity more surely than anyone I can think of. In this respect at least they are like the worst of the pharisees who keep on congratulating themselves that they were not as other men.

That reminds me of an incident in the life of Thomas Merton which is so illuminating. You may remember that Merton as a young man wrote "The Seven Storied Mountain" which is a kind of hymn of praise to himself for not being as other men. Then one-day he goes into Louisville and sees all the people around and he realises they are good and beautiful and he is glad now that he is as other men. Does it not strike you that in many respects during the last days of his life Jesus seems to have had his identity called in question by the events of those days. In Buddhist terms we would say that during those days Jesus passed through the great doubt in order to set the seal on his final identity.

Why do we instinctively seek to establish our identity through marking our difference from others? There are probably two main reasons for this: First of all as humans we have inherited a tribal or national way of establishing our identity. The tribe occupied a particular territory. You were who you were through not being the other people, through being different from the other people and

often of course at enmity with them. That way of defining oneself leads inevitably to tribal or national warfare. Here I would call your attention to a recently published book by Wilkinson an Anglican priest in which he shows that the present weakness of the Christian Church in Britain, and its progressive weakening over the last 70 years can be traced almost entirely to the failure of the Church to get beyond this tribal identity. The Church's attitude, when it came to the first world war of 1914 - 18, was a kind of sanctification of this tribal identity. I would suggest to you we are more or less wasting our time on evangelism as long as we are not working against this form of identity which is renewed in tribal warfare.

Yesterday I was interested to hear what Deirdre and Dermot reported about the Indians who said you can come and evangelize only after you have persuaded the white people in the nearby town to stop being so violent. It seems to me the Holy Spirit was saying a very salutary truth to Dermot, Deirdre and to us through those Indians.

The second cause of our establishing our identity through difference from others is through scarcity. We believe we can only be distinguished from others if we have more than others in some way, or have some form of distinction which others do not share. In the days when I used to teach Celtic history for example, I would tell the students about the wonderful Welsh legend which reveals that every person is a secret prince or princess. It was interesting to see the reaction of students. Some rather grumpy ones would say - "if everybody is a prince or princess no one is!". The more generous-minded students delighted to discover that at the end of the day it would be revealed that everyone is a prince or princess, - just as we are able to believe that at the end of the day we will see all beings as illuminated beings. Just as tribal definition in an historical way leads to tribal warfare so the definition of one's identity by scarcity inevitably leads to class warfare. And so I would again ask the question whether we are not wasting our time on evangelism so long as we do not work against the scarcity in the world which leads to this hostile form of defining oneself.

What I want to say now is what I believe to be the true identity for all. There is ultimately only one identity. It is to be seen through the text in Galatians where Paul says: "God forbid that I should boast in anything but the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ". And that, I think, is the true identity. Its an identity which transcends all other claimed forms of identity because those other forms of identity belong to a different order. So long as those

other forms are kept at a certain level, say, like being an Englishman, or a Maryknoller or whatever, so long as they are kept in proportion and are not claimed to be identity in the strict sense of the word but simply stages on the way to identity, then they are alright. If they take over and we think of them as our true identity then they become idolatrous.

How crucial this is, was illustrated lately in an article by the Irish theologian Enda McDonagh who put the question whether we ought not to stop baptising in certain parts of the world, as for example in Northern Ireland, because existentially we do not baptise into the body of Christ. We baptise into a tribe or a sect and if that is treated as a final identity it is a form of idolatry.

I want now to put two questions to you. The first is a personal one: I think that, in trying to determine whether we have a true identity or not all of us ought to say to ourselves - In what do I glory? Do I glory in anything other than the cross of Christ Jesus our Lord? The second is: Do I think of myself as God's favourite against others? Most nations seem to do this and are therefore idolatrous. Is it not true that our Lord revealed this was not his way because he says that God treats everyone the same and his rain falls on the just and the unjust?

Finally I would like you to consider this text from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians: "When they measure themselves with one another they are without understanding". In other words to establish one's identity or boast of it by comparing oneself with other people is to be without understanding.

And the last word I will give to you is a word from the great patriarch Athenagoras who said: "*Je renonce aux comparatifs*"; I renounce the category of comparison. To which I myself add a gloss - "*Comparison is death to the spiritual life*".

- end -

THE LAYWOMAN'S MISSION IN LATIN AMERICA TODAY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The role of the laywoman in Latin America today is quite similar to the one she must have played in the primitive Catholic Church. Small groups formed where women together with men, toiled side by side with faith in the Lord and witnessed even to martyrdom.

With the advent of Vatican II, the Church once again paid special attention to the poor (L.G.8) an option confirmed by the conferences held at Medellin (2.22; 5.15; 14.7 - 10) and Puebla (20, 1159). Since the 1960's, many movements in Latin America sought social change. They failed and military governments took over power in many countries.

This occurred in Brazil in 1964 when the military government closed down all the normal institutions of civil society or put an army general in charge of them. The only institution that could not be directed by the military was the church, which became a privileged space where people could still meet to discuss their problems. It was during this time that faith came to be understood as having social implications (1). God was seen as a God of life who could not bear to see any of his children having less life than the others (2).

The religious experience which then began was based on solidarity since the pain of one's suffering brother or sister was a challenge to the Christian conscience. Some priests and university students became involved in social problems and some actually went to live in the urban slums or in poor rural communities. Living close to the poor they came to understand that religious salvation was to be obtained through their commitment to the here and now of the other who suffered.

Biblical Circles arose where, reflecting on the Word of God and comparing it with their own lives, the members gradually discovered ways to aid them on their journey along the road of faith towards the building of God's Kingdom. These biblical circles were also the germinating seeds of the CEBs (Ecclesiastical Grass-roots Communities), a new way of being for the Church on our continent.

It was precisely in the CEBs that women began to exercise a new and important role, taking on leadership positions, aiding in organizing, stimulating and promoting many services such as works of charity, teaching catechism, organising liturgy, spreading the word of God. The predominant male face of the Church began to change. Women are generally more religious than men. For them, God is experienced in their-day-to-day lives and in their hope for a better future.

The traditional catechism taught that a person who suffers now will have a better life eternally. But with Vatican II we began to understand that we have to struggle to transform this present life into a better and more dignified one according to the loving plans of God. We appreciated the Council's view that "earthly progress is highly important for the Kingdom of God, in the sense that it can contribute towards organizing human society" (G.S. 39).

2. A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE KINGDOM

The Spirit that "breathes anywhere and does not say where it came from or where it is going" (John 3.8) calls for constantly renewed forms of service to the gospel, according to the times and the needs of different communities. With the biblical renewal inspired by Vatican II, a re-reading of the Sacred Scriptures was undertaken in the concrete reality of each region. In this manner, the Kingdom of God came to be understood not as something after death, but something that begins here and now to the extent that we seek to live in more sisterly, brotherly and egalitarian relationships among ourselves (1 - John 3.28).

The Kingdom of God is something dynamic. It is the intervention of God in the reality of the world in order to transform it. It is a free gift, but seeking it is a task that depends on each one of us. This change of axis in understanding reality is based on a more biblical, less dualist, less Greco-Roman understanding of faith, understood in a more integrated and integrating way. We saw that we have to demonstrate our faith in God by trying to transform unjust reality (Puebla 20, 1159), struggling to provide more dignified living conditions for all God's children. God's maternal instincts (Is. 49.15; Jr. 31.20) cannot bear the idea that his most unfortunate children, who are also his most beloved children, suffer so much.

Thus, the Church in Latin America - a continent which is so rich and yet so exploited and so full of misery - in its desire to maintain solidarity (G.S. 1), has made a preferential choice towards the poor. This is the fruit not just of ideological considerations but also of the need and desire to suffer along with, to feel with, to have compassion for those who suffer infra-human situations. Considering the reality of the misery and death which surrounds us in Latin America, theological discourse wishes to serve life. The God of Life, of Mercy who is Love, challenges each one of us to take up a position in the face of the reality of suffering, death, naked exploitation and structural violence.

Those who suffer most from violence and exploitation are women. Hence the clamour of women emerges from within the cry of the oppressed imploring the heavens (Puebla 88) for a place, for a space. The difficult task of building the Kingdom of God involves the concrete struggles of women, blacks, Indians, urban and rural workers, in short, of all kinds of persons marginalized from society.

3. THE CONCRETE STRUGGLE TO BELONG TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Gospels tell us of the egalitarian relationship Jesus had with women: he gives them refuge. (Mark 5.25-34), converses with them (Mark 7. 24-30; John 4. 4-44), gets to know their sufferings (Matthew 13. 19-27), becomes involved with their problems (Mark 5. 21-24, 36-43), values them (Luke 10-42), restores their dignity as the beloved daughters of God; in short, they are persons just as important as men for the mission of building the Kingdom.

This experience of equality is fundamental for women who are traditionally oppressed. It enables them to participate in the process of becoming fully-fledged human beings and together with men, to transmit the image and likeness of God which indeed they are (Gen. 1.27). This important discovery is taking place in the grass-roots movements. Many women, oppressed just for being women, for being poor, and many times for being black, discover themselves as people who

can think for themselves and express their own opinions.

The grass-roots movements began in the community centers of the Churches. The organizational form that became the most important were the Mothers Clubs (3). It is in these experience-sharing relationships that women discover that they share the same problems and can mutually aid each other.

A strong bond of solidarity arises among them. It is as if a new world is opened before their eyes, enriching their lives beyond the household environment. This awakening of consciousness is a truly liberating process which makes women lose their timidity and expand the horizons of their little family world.

Some of the most dynamic movements that have arisen since the 1970's had their starting point in those Mothers Clubs. This was the case, for instance, in the struggle for community day-care centers in São Paulo, the fight against high prices and the battles for health centers (4).

There has been a highly successful experience also with community ovens, where the mothers get together to make bread and slice it up according to the needs of each one of them. A new type of working relationship is created based on "to each according to their needs." While the dough rises, they reflect on the word of God, which gives them strength and inspiration and Good News on which the whole community can feed. In other parts of Brazil, similar experiences are lived out in the preparation of community soap (Caxias - RJ), where poor women wash clothes to earn their living.

From these communitarian experiences women discover the strength of unity and begin participating in people's movements (5). After having discovered themselves as people, they begin struggling for a better life for all, in this manner following Jesus Christ who came to bring "life and life plentiful" (John 10.10).

At this point, when they open themselves more up to the world, they feel the crunching weight of male chauvinism. Going to Church and community meetings is one thing, but getting involved in social movements is another. After all, home is the proper place for women - the men claim. Thus, the women have to struggle not only against their husbands at home, but also against other men at the union hall, in the associations at political meetings. This struggle is undertaken together with other struggles for better living conditions. The first demands are for better health conditions, then for schools, transportation, land where they can plant and live, in short, the basic elements in order to be able to live a proper human existence.

Their struggles have not always led to victories: Many have been taken prisoner, tortured, killed. But female resistance is a hidden force that they have. Their lives which have been marked by oppression and marginalization, has given them fiber, "guts" and the will to struggle, anchored in faith and in hope. This strength emerges especially at moments of crisis, such as widowhood (Ruth, Gen. 38) or war (Judith). So they continue to struggle courageously to build a better world for their children and grandchildren.

Movements of women from among the working classes of Brazil today ~~continue to emerge~~. They are sustained by faith and by the churches and make their presence felt particularly with respect to social questions. Their struggle has profound consequences since it questions deeply embedded structures and types of relationships with respect to the family, the ecclesiastical hierarchy and working traditions (6).

4. SCULPTING FEMININE FEATURES ON THE FACE OF THE CHURCH

One practice that has given enormous courage to women in the churches is Bible study specially of what their sisters accomplished in the history of the people of Israel and in the primitive church. There, in spite of the patriarchal context, they made their presence felt through their struggle on behalf of the people. Women in Brazil today want to recover and revalue this experience. This redemption of the past provides energy to face the present and to struggle for a better future.

They discover the presence of and the role of women. They find for example that even before the world knew of the existence of Jesus of Nazareth certain women had already had intimate contact with him - Mary his mother and her cousin Elizabeth. The meeting between them made their hearts leap with joy and hope (Luke 1. 39-55) (7).

In much the same manner, before the CEBs became well-known in the Latin American church, some women had already been involved in them. It was not only the bible circles but also the grass-roots educational movement (MEB) which valued the role of the Catechist-laywomen of Barra do Pirai (RJ), or the vicar-sisters of Nisia Floresta (PE). In order to deal with the situation arising from a shortage of priests, these women became involved with the people in a way that contributed enormously to their unity and organization. They called reflective groups together, prayed, and moved by their faith in God and their confidence in life and in love, they did not give up in the face of any difficulty.

These pioneers were followed by many others so that one can affirm today that women are actually a majority in the CEBs. They participate as simple members or are involved in coordination, inspiration, catechism, liturgy, bible circles, helping the needy (cf. AT 2.42).

Little by little these women came out into the open and are now a vast contingent sculpting feminine features on the face of the Church. They are assuming once again the activities that were habitual in the primitive church, as we are told in the New Testament: announcing the Good News (John 4.42 and 20.18), serving the community's table (Luke 10.38; John 12.2), spreading the Redeeming Word of Jesus (John 11.26), teaching the faith and inspiring the communities (Acts. 18.26). The Acts of the Apostles, furthermore, tell us that they met on the outskirts of the cities (Acts. 16. 13-15) in order to reflect, listen to the word of God and pray, inviting others to join them as well.

Their idea of mission, of spilling over the riches they had experienced, is constant. It is the same experience related in 1 John 1. 1-4: one cannot possibly keep to oneself such a great joy and discovery. It has to be communicated so that others can likewise participate.

Many have discovered that failure to read the Holy Scriptures produces a hollowness in a person, yet reflecting on them produces a critical spirit regarding one's own rights which frequently brings about persecution and the threat of death (8). This is why we already have our women martyrs - Margarida Alves, Sister Adelaid, Sister Cleuza and others. The participation of women, whose previous role was to nurture and educate in the faith, leads them to expose their very lives in the struggle for better living conditions for all. In the communities the women draw on the Bible, the book that belongs to the people of God, and find that they too have citizenship in the church due to the rights conferred upon them by the sacrament of Baptism (cf. L.G. 9, 12, 31) (9).

It is through these experiences that they discover their space, in the church as beloved daughters of God. In the CEBs they are no longer just a passive presence; they also discover ecclesiological values and bring up new questions for theology.

Religious Women: Another feminine feature that has appeared is the experience of the religious women who, "migrate" to the poor peoples' regions, where they rethink their vocations and their mission (10). They set up their communities, for example on the outskirts of town, sharing the challenges of other migrants. They take on a triple workday - domestic, religious and professional, like the

majority of women in the poor areas. Some of them take responsibility for parishes assuming the functions previously reserved to the clergy. This new practice, besides questioning the mode of their consecration brings them closer to the people. Such living experiences involve them in problems previously known only theoretically, - problems of marriage, abortion, sexual relationships, violence against women, motherhood, educating and raising children, the drama of the unwed mother, etc. All of this leads the religious woman to a new discovery of herself as woman.

The presence of these religious women has brought about a re-reading of the Bible as the history of a people linked to us by religious tradition and from whom we can learn faith in life. There is a rediscovery of the image of a God committed to the liberation of the oppressed (Ex. 3.7), of a more approachable Jesus who chose his friends and followers from among those on the fringes of society, and a new image of Mary, closer to the problems of women, not as a passive and subordinate woman but as active and participating (John 2.3-5 and 19.25; Acts 1.14), with a prophetic dimension (Luke 2.46-55), as an inspiration for those who, throughout the Latin American continent, participate in the struggles and aspirations of the poorest members of society, in the people's movements, in the CEBs, on the streets and in the churches (11).

Another feminine feature is sculpted by the women catechists who are responsible for the most systematic initiation to the Christian faith, mainly of children and adolescents. Eighty percent of those dedicated to teaching catechism are women. The fact of being involved in the self-same realities experienced by those who are being taught catechism is highly important. They participate in the same problems and the same solutions. They share joyfully in the progress of the group, build bonds of friendship which never become untied and which may be most helpful at some future point when problems in the life of the child or adolescent arise.

We have said that the evangelical strength of the catechists is tremendous, not in the sense of memorizing, but in developing an impressive dimension of creativity. Today in Latin America we can speak of many catechism teachers having "revolutionary tasks". They are open, in an effective and shared manner, to the problems of their people. They are capable of not just militant activity in the people's movements but also in transmitting to children a Christianity marked by the struggle for justice, by the valuing of life, by the importance of sharing goods, in short, by an alternative to this consumer and hedonistic society (12).

As a result of these diverse pastoral activities, whether as a religious woman in the midst of the people, as a Catechism teacher or as a lay person engaged in some movement or religious activity, a woman begins to feel the need to reflect on her faith. Reality raises so many questions for the Christian faith. And, in trying to respond to these challenges, she begins to study theology in order to have an improved pastoral participation.

5. SEEKING INSPIRATION IN MARTHA OF BETHANY

A very inspiring figure for women is Martha of Bethany. According to the reports of the gospels she managed to combine domestic chores (Luke 10. 38; John 12.1) with religious commitment and also theological reflection. (Luke and John present her as 'diaconos', a technical term used to designate service to the community). Jesus makes his supreme revelation to Martha. "I am the Resurrection and the Life". He explains precisely what type of Messiah he is. And he asks: "Do you believe in this?" Martha responds with a magnificent declaration of faith: "Yes, Lord, Thou are the Christ, the Son of God who came into this world" (John 11.25-26). She is thus the spokeswoman of the Community's faith of the fourth gospel, just as Peter is the spokesman of the Matthean community (MT 16, 16). She adds to the Christology of the synoptics, represented by the titles Kurios and Christos, the heightened Christology of the "messenger" which characterizes the gospel according to John.

Theology exclusively male: Until now theology has been the exclusive sphere of men. Today women are perceiving their own way of creating theology, where the elements of daily life are intimately mixed in with talk of God. A new awareness is arising of the liberating fecundity of reading the Bible, taking into account the female experience of oppression, of poverty, of resistance and hope. One begins to hear the echo and resonance of texts of Scripture in the hearts of those who are on the side most diametrically opposed to power and domination. A woman who intimately knows the fragility of life, the need to shelter and protect it, has also an original point of view regarding the Creator of life, that same God who through the Bible speaks to us of the fullness of life of human beings.

Still another characteristic of a feminine approach to theology is the integration between scientific strictness and sensitivity, between experience and seriousness of research, helping to overcome the gap that arises between a spirituality which involves devotional practices and a theology frequently reduced to cold and spiritless speculation. This is because a woman's way of being, thinking and living, has never learned how to be compartmentalized.

It is vitally important in this process that women doing theology in academic centers should be in close contact with their sisters from the poor classes. A woman's theological thoughts and deeds should be in solidarity with, should be the fruit of compassion, of identification with the situation of others. Her theologising should involve work so that life may be dignified and experienced alike by all of God's daughters and sons.

6. CONCLUSION: COLLABORATION IN THE BUILDING OF NEW CHURCH AND A NEW SOCIETY

The world today is witnessing the phenomenon of women beginning to speak up. Moving away from being the oppressed, the complainer, the forgotten, the little remembered, women today are starting to be heard. In all areas of society, in all segments of the labour market, in all fields of knowledge, she is constantly making her presence felt, taking on more and more jobs and functions, carrying out tasks of responsibility and explaining in a new discourse her new ways of being and doing (14).

After having rejected the place assigned to her by men, of being passive, inferior, emotional, irrational and sinner par excellence, she has discovered the new face of her identity, becoming increasingly visible and speaking up in society and in the Church. This is her new historical moment, a time fecund with future promise, a propitious time for announcing the "good news" that is here and is still to come (15).

Like Mary Magdelene (John 20. 11-18) women today are being called upon to bear witness to the resurrection and to deny the final triumph of death over life. They must be the witness of LIFE in the midst of despair and defeat, proclaiming the opening up of new roads of hope.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) This is the moment of greatest strength for Catholic Action in Brazil.
- (2) Cf. J. SOBRINO, "A manifestação do Deus da vida em Jesus de Nazaré" (The manifestation of the God of life in Jesus of Nazareth), in VVAA "A luta dos deuses" (The battle of the gods), São Paulo, Paulinas, 1984, pp. 96-103.
- (3) These are meetings of women in a church hall once a week to learn how to sew, join scraps of cloth together to make clothes and quilts, where they also reflect on the Word of God. They work together and begin to trust in each other and see their lives from a common perspective.

- (4) I. FIOROTTI - "A irrupção do novo Clubes de Mães" (The erruptoin of the new in the Mothers Clubs), mimeographed text. PUC/RJ (Rio de Janeiro Pontifical Catholic University) - Institute of Theology and Religious Sciences, 1985.
 - (5) The struggles for land, unions, slum-dweller associations, community home construction crews, community clean-up and garden projects, pro-black and pro-Indian movements, etc.
 - (6) Cf. Editorial, Tempo e Presença, Nov. 1986, CEDI (Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information), RJ - p. 3.
 - (7) Cf. T. CAVALCANTI, "sobre a participação das mulheres no VI Encontro Intereclesial das CEBs" (on the participation of women at the VI Interecclesiastical Meeting of the Grass-roots Communities), an article which will appear shortly in the REV (Brazilian Ecclesiastical Review).
 - (8) Cf. *ibid.*
 - (9) Cf. *ibid.*
 - (10) Cf. M.J. ROSADO NUNES, "Vida religiosa nos meios populares" (Religious life in the midst of the people), São Paulo, Paulinas, 1985.
 - (11) CF. C. MESTERS, "Maria mãe de Jesus" (Mary, Mother of Jesus), Petrópolis (RJ-BRAZIL), Vozes, 1981.
 - (12) Cf. Y. GEBARA, "A mulher faz teologia" (Women make theology), in REB 46, Petrópolis, Vozes, 1986.
 - (13) Cf. M.C. BINGEMER, "Mulher e teologia" (Women and theology), in Tempo e Presença 214, (Nov. 86), p.19.
 - (14) Cf. M.C. BINGEMER, "E a mulher rompeu o silêncio" (And woman broke her silence), in Perspectiva Teológica (Theological Perspectives magazine) 46, Sep/Dec 1986.
 - (15) Y. GEBARA, *op.cit.* (12).
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MODESTES RECHERCHES D'UNE COMMUNAUTE DE LAICS DU TIERS-MONDE
ET DES CONGREGATIONS RELIGIEUSES

AMIN FAHIM

INTRODUCTION

Mes Chers Amis,

Comme je l'ai déjà dit à certains participants, j'étais venu avec un texte qui s'est démantibulé au fur et à mesure que j'entendais parler les gens en carrefour, en public ou à table.

Le résultat est que je m'apprête à développer les deux points que je m'étais promis de ne pas traiter; à savoir, parler de l'expérience de l'Association Chrétienne de la Haute-Egypte - et en particulier celle de son équipe responsable - et puis exposer aux congrégations religieuses quelques réflexions personnelles.

Cela sera d'autant plus facile que, dans notre activité en Haute-Egypte, les religieuses et religieux sont des partenaires de choix, vu que nous sommes sur la même longueur d'onde et que nous nous trouvons liés par une véritable amitié.

Nos évêques, et surtout notre clergé, nous accusent de les préférer aux autres. Et j'irai même plus loin en affirmant que l'Association et certaines congrégations dites puissantes, sont accusées de faire et de défaire patriarches et évêques; ce qui n'est évidemment pas vrai.

Je remercie beaucoup les organisateurs de m'avoir invité à cette importante rencontre. Je ne sais si, à la suite de mon exposé, ils seront toujours heureux de l'avoir fait.

Prendre la parole après les exposés des quatre illustres intervenants, est pour moi une gageure. Cela sans compter que je me sens tout aussi impressionné par la prestance de Donald Nicholl. Je vais néanmoins prendre mon courage à deux mains et vous ouvrir tout grand mon coeur immédiatement en :

- 1) vous faisant une description de la situation égyptienne;
- 2) vous parlant de l'Association avec laquelle je travaille;
- 3) vous faisant part des découvertes et des choix effectués par son équipe responsable;
- 4) vous présentant quelques réflexions adressées aux religieux et religieuses;
- 5) et enfin, en vous proposant deux questions à étudier en séances de travail.

1. DESCRIPTION DE LA SITUATION EGYPTIENNE

L'Egypte : 3% de terres cultivées (la vallée du Nil); explosion démographique galopante : 14 millions en 1944, 50 millions en 1986, de 65 à 70 millions en l'an 2000. Taux d'inflation annuel : de 30 à 40% . Sept millions de chrétiens environ à grande majorité copte-orthodoxe (copte = chrétien égyptien autochtone; provient de AEGYPTOS, COPTOS) 150.000 catholiques; autant de coptes protestants (évangéliques); parmi les catholiques il existe une grande majorité de coptes-catholiques, pour le reste, d'autres rites catholiques. Mais d'autres minorités chrétiennes existent aussi.

Les musulmans et les chrétiens sont tous croyants : "Dieu est présent dans chaque acte", a dit hier Anna Maria Tepedino, parlant des latino-américains.

Les mouvements islamiques croissent (1 1/2 million d'adeptes) et s'activent à la confessionalisation du pays.

La Haute Egypte: la partie la plus défavorisée de l'Egypte; environ 1.000 kms du Caire à Assouan (au Sud). L'Association chrétienne de la Haute-Egypte (ACHE) travaille le long de 800 kms dans des villages parsemés; 20 à 25% de chrétiens, tous coptes (les trois dénominations). Cette plus grande concentration de chrétiens est due aux persécutions passées quand, à partir du onzième siècle, les chrétiens allaient se réfugier le long du Nil en Haute-Egypte. Face aux nombreux diocèses coptes-orthodoxes qui se multiplient, il y a :

- quatre diocèses coptes-catholiques avec une centaine de prêtres diocésains;
- dix-huit congrégations religieuses catholiques dont 4 masculines;
- quarante-sept communautés composées de religieuses (95%) et de religieux (5%) d'une vingtaine de nationalités diverses.

Quelques réactions sociales : les chrétiens, en général, ont maintenant peur; réaction grandissante: se réfugier, se sécuriser dans son clocher avec une mentalité de ghetto, ou émigrer (une autre manière de se réfugier).

Alors que les coptes-orthodoxes se sentent des citoyens de seconde catégorie, les catholiques et les protestants se sentent de troisième catégorie.

La communauté chrétienne d'aujourd'hui, mal à l'aise et obéissant à une règle historique se divise elle-même. On assiste alors aux absurdités que voici : les orthodoxes prennent leur revanche sur les catholiques qui, hier, les traitaient d'hérétiques et de schismatiques; les catholiques et les protestants cherchent à s'affirmer en contre-attaquant et à cultiver une identité propre; sans compter les luttes intestines existant à l'intérieur de chaque église. Finalement ce sont les laïcs qui paient les pots cassés.

Le "Dialogue", commencé en mai 1973, avec la visite historique de Schenouda III à Paul VI, a suscité une euphorie "officielle" de courte durée. Sur le terrain, les relations ont même empiré.

2. L'ASSOCIATION CHRETIENNE DE LA HAUTE-EGYPTE

- a) Origine: les Jésuites : fin du 19ème-début 20ème : écoles de villages.
 1941 : guerre, Ayrout, "Le Fellah" - Ouvertures.
 1964 : crise - laïques.
 1965 : 40 ans, président. Chance : JE NE SAVAIS RIEN, sauf la définition du mot "pédagogie" et pas très bien celle de "développement" qui n'était pas encore à la mode. Rien de la Haute-Egypte.
 1966 : j'abandonne la profession, me consacre à plein temps, sans salaire, avec deux enfants sur les bras et une épouse qui, avec raison, me trouvait un peu fou.
 Le siège comprenait 5 personnes dont le Père Directeur.
 Aujourd'hui il compte 50 dont 2 postes de relais en Haute-Egypte.
POURQUOI ? parce-que, notamment, j'étais dans l'attitude forcément humble de celui qui ne savait rien et qui avait tout à apprendre.
 "J'ai fait mes études à l'Université des villages de la Haute-Egypte".
 Je ne fus pas le seul à apprendre. Nous avons appris ensemble, en voyageant en minibus, des jeunes et moi, de village en village, de situation en situation. Une équipe naissait, une communauté LAIQUE à type particulier naissait aussi.

- b) Définition: Un mouvement
 chrétien
 égyptien
 laïc
 autonome
 qui vise le développement de l'être humain en Haute-Egypte.

un mouvement : une pensée qui évolue avec la vie et ses mutations
 - chacun y apporte sa part - un dialogue continu avec nos partenaires locaux et autant que possible avec la population desservie.

chrétien : d'appartenance catholique mais dans la perspective de l'Eglise Universelle; donc l'Eglise d'Egypte dans l'Eglise Universelle.

Certains évêques affirment : "Vous n'êtes pas catholiques parce que vous n'êtes pas d'obédience catholique mais d'appartenance égyptienne par choix. Nous rentrons là dans les problèmes politiques de l'Egypte : faire de la politique? non, mais DU politique.

"Je dois, en parlant de ma foi, adhérer aux problèmes des hommes et cela ne peut se faire sans faire de la politique " (Ghandi).

laïc : dans le sens d'assumer notre responsabilité dans l'Eglise, avec cette spécificité qui nous est propre; donner de l'espoir aux laïcs afin qu'ils puissent se consacrer au service de leur pays en partant de leur foi de baptisés; les deux appartenances se renforçant l'une l'autre.

autonome : obéissance à l'enseignement dogmatique de l'Eglise catholique, mais non à une hiérarchie ou à un évêque; obéissance à la vision, aux structures propres de l'ACHE; autonome dans son financement.

visant au développement de l'être humain en Haute-Egypte :

développement = bien-être pour un futur meilleur. Donner la chance à quelqu'un de se mettre debout et marcher seul. Choix du plus déshérité ; mais qui est le plus déshérité ? Qui a le plus besoin de quoi ? et comment le lui donner ? Recherche permanente d'autant plus que l'Eglise institutionnelle n'atteint pas les plus démunis. Ce sont souvent les congrégations religieuses qui le font.

Développement socio-humain avant le développement économique.

POUR TOUT CELA, il faut une COMMUNAUTE, c'est l'EQUIPE de l'ASSOCIATION.

- sa composition : elle comprend 10 membres (7 hommes et 3 femmes) dont 7 catholiques et 3 orthodoxes.
Parmi eux, 4 membres sont de la Haute-Egypte;
- son fonctionnement : collégialité; élection annuelle d'un président; partage des responsabilités entre les membres, par consensus;
- ses exigences : appartenance à l'Eglise, adhésion à la perspective d'un engagement à vie ainsi que l'acceptation de toute charge, en tout lieu, à condition que celle-ci ne mette pas en péril ni la vie du membre ni celle de sa famille. Les qualités requises pour cet engagement sont : intégrité, vérité, capacité d'évoluer et d'aimer.
Au cours de ces 16 années de vie, l'équipe a découvert et constaté une multitude de choses dont voici les principales.

3. DECOUVERTES ET CHOIX DE L'EQUIPE

- a) L'Amour universel de Dieu pour toutes ses créatures est aussi en nous; c'est la source de l'Amour que nous devons porter à nos semblables, la source inspiratrice de nos réflexions, choix et actions.
- b) Chacun de nous a sa propre vocation dans un corps qui est l'Association ces vocations sont exigeantes et doivent être constamment approfondies pour

répondre aux interpellations de Dieu dans la vie de tous les jours.

- c) En répondant à l'appel de Dieu, l'Association assume sa responsabilité sans attendre que lui soit reconnu ce devoir ni ce droit. On ne l'empêchera pas de divulguer l'Evangile, tout comme elle ne devra pas mélanger "sens de la responsabilité" avec "soif d'autorité"; C'est en vivant bien cet appel, que l'Association donne de l'espoir aux laïcs afin qu'ils vivent à leur tour leur propre vocation.
- d) Travailler dans la joie et donner de l'espoir, même lorsque les problèmes semblent insurmontables, en contribuant modestement à leur solution. Le voyage de Deirdre et de Dermot en est un exemple frappant. L'Association vit l'oecuménisme en travaillant :
 - pour le Dialogue entre les Eglises, sans discrimination ni volonté de conversion;
 - contre le confessionalisme qui veut qu'à des élèves musulmans soient désignés des professeurs musulmans bien choisis et formés; mais encourager la dimension nationale;
 - contre le désintéressement politique des chrétiens, en promouvant des programmes de formation de "leaders" pour des groupes de jeunes, des élections de jeunes (Baradera).
- e) Les laïcs sont d'autant plus crédibles qu'ils ne sont pas les "professionnels de l'évangélisation"; leur responsabilité est, par conséquent, d'autant plus grande.
- f) Les laïcs transmettent, à travers leur vie de tous les jours, l'Evangile au monde tout comme ils transmettent à l'église institutionnelle les espoirs et les souffrances du monde. Ils aident donc l'église institutionnelle à pénétrer, dans le monde, un peu comme le Verbe s'est incarné dans la nature humaine.
- g) Par leur comportement, les laïcs atténuent les différences entre les confessions chrétiennes par les mariages mixtes (juxtaposition Paul VI / Athénagoras), entre chrétiens et musulmans, par le travail en commun, au niveau politique et social. Ensemble, les laïcs peuvent exercer de légères pressions sur leurs clergés respectifs afin de les amener au dialogue.
- h) Les laïcs, surtout ceux qui ont le sens politique, peuvent prévoir l'événement et aider ainsi l'église institutionnelle à agir avant plutôt qu'après.
- i) Les laïcs peuvent donc aider l'Eglise à s'actualiser en élaborant leurs propres projets pastoraux et sociaux. Ils ont le devoir de susciter mais doivent attendre que se cristallise la pensée des autres intéressés.

Exemples:

1) le Conseil de l'Apostolat des laïcs (1967) annulé en 1969

2) le Conseil de la Pastorale d'ensemble (1979)

(en parlant de hiérarchie, des évêques demandaient si le LAÏC A UNE VOCATION): actuellement, le secrétaire-général prépare la 3ème lettre pastorale sur les laïcs (après "famille" et "la vivante espérance"). Dans toutes ces tentatives, les religieuses et religieux ont toujours été partie prenante.

j) Travailler avec les autres et éviter le parallélisme, encourager des projets communs, une approche commune. Exemple l'organisation de 2 sessions pour 2 diocèses.

k) L'Association est terrain de rencontre inter-diocésain et pour les diverses composantes de l'Eglise.

l) La force du dialogue: le dialogue dans l'église est une mission. Il faut prendre son temps pour instaurer la confiance; accepter d'être incompris voire même persécuté, et par les siens aussi. Dans le dialogue, l'interlocuteur doit se sentir aimé, écouté et respecté; il faut aussi savoir lui parler.

Exemples vécus par l'Association:

- en 1969, le Conseil d'Administration n'a pas abandonné le diocèse de Minia malgré l'antagonisme de l'évêque mais il a continué le dialogue avec lui;

- en novembre 1969, le Patriarche et les évêques coptes-catholiques demandèrent ma démission "parce-que laïc", me traitant même, verbalement, de "mercenaire". J'ai tenu bon et en 1977, lorsque l'un de ces évêques, alors porte-parole du groupe, a été nommé Patriarche, il m'a avoué: "Vous rappelez-vous Amin, lorsque j'ai demandé votre démission? Et bien, je ne savais pas grand-chose alors!" Ce même Patriarche a ensuite avoué, au cours de notre Assemblée Générale en novembre 1986 que le secret de notre réussite est que nous nous aimons et aimons ceux que nous servons; il nous a demandé d'aller toujours de l'avant, même si parfois, on nous critique.

- en septembre 1986, à la suite d'une conférence sur l'oecuménisme adressé à de jeunes catéchistes, dans un diocèse de la Haute-Egypte, et ayant déplu à certains prêtres, je fus dénoncé par eux auprès du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, risquant la prison et mettant en danger l'Association. On organisa alors, en accord avec l'évêque, une rencontre entre l'équipe de l'Association et tous les prêtres du diocèse. Résultat: on tiendra une session en 1987 afin de découvrir ensemble, le rôle du curé de paroisse dans l'école et le nôtre comme collaborateurs;

- par le dialogue à l'intérieur de l'Eglise: l'Association base ses réflexions sur les forces vives qui travaillent avec elle

et ce,

pour revoir la position de l'école, pour les 20 ans à venir : session-rencontre avec tous les responsables laïcs (directeurs) curés et religieuses; présentation d'un document dans un livret-"évangile" accepté et appliqué par tous; pour établir les grandes lignes de programmes intégrés de développement relatifs à la santé, à la formation de "leaders" de jeunes, à la promotion de la femme et à l'alphabétisation.

L'Association rassemble, en 3 sessions, ses meilleurs partenaires (religieuses, religieux, prêtres, laïcs).

- m) La force de la communauté : les jeunes sont séduits par la cohésion qui existe au sein d'une communauté et par l'amour qui unit ses membres. On nous demande parfois si nous vivons ensemble; nous avons dû expliquer à notre société pharaonique que l'Association n'est pas un "one man's project". C'est cet esprit communautaire qui a attiré les vocations autant au Caire qu'en Haute-Egypte (10 vocations). Les jeunes sont sensibles à l'atmosphère d'une communauté religieuse et pour nous, la vie communautaire est un facteur multiplicateur des forces.

4. REFLEXIONS ADRESSEES AUX RELIGIEUSES ET RELIGIEUX

Je vous prie d'accepter avec esprit calme, ouvert et constructif, ces quelques réflexions qui me sont venues à l'esprit dès le début de ce séminaire.

- a) Vous êtes une "force de frappe" de l'Amour de Dieu ("What can I do against this army ?", s'était exclamé feu Samuel, évêque copte-orthodoxe, en frappant sur l'annuaire catholique égyptien, lors de la première réunion de la Commission Pontificale Mixte de Dialogue entre les deux Eglises). Cette force de frappe est intervenue en masse auprès de la hiérarchie catholique en 1973.
- b) Vous représentez un élément primordial et vivant dans le rapprochement entre religions (chrétienne-musulmane) et entre confessions chrétiennes :
- 1) par vos institutions scolaires (60% de musulmans)
 - 2) par vos services sociaux surtout dans les villages.
- Vous êtes donc des agents du dialogue.
- c) Vous êtes des catalyseurs dans les relations entre évêques et prêtres diocésains d'une part, et laïcs, de l'autre: vous pouvez faire beaucoup dans ce sens en produisant un rapprochement constant entre eux.
- d) Vos institutions scolaires sont des ponts naturels avec l'intelligence quel que soit le milieu ambiant (citadin, bourgeois ou autre).

Il faudrait étudier sur place les conditions de chaque pays afin que ne soit pas favorisée l'émigration.

D'autre part, la formation de bons citoyens / citoyennes devrait encourager une vie civique et même politique responsable: dans la constitution des lois, dans la façon de gouverner, dans la formation de l'opinion à travers les mass-media, etc.

Il faut recourir aux leaders locaux pour cette autre formation, très importante, et encourager l'engagement social vis-à-vis des groupes défavorisés.

- e) Débarassez-vous du "complexe de l'étranger". Auparavant, c'était d'un complexe de supériorité que vous souffriez et croyiez faire oeuvre pie et nationale en substituant votre culture à la nôtre, sans même regarder la nôtre. Aujourd'hui plusieurs d'entre vous ont un complexe d'infériorité surtout face à la revanche de certains clergés locaux, et continuent d'affirmer " je ne peux initier ceci, ni dire cela parce-que je suis étranger". Certains religieux et religieuses vont même jusqu'à "imiter" les autochtones et adoptent leur culture, croyant que c'est cela l'inculturation. NON! Ne vous privez pas de votre "background", de la richesse extraordinaire de votre internationalité. Nos églises, sans une ouverture internationale, surtout du fait qu'elles sont minoritaires, mourront d'asphyxie.
- f) Le style de pénétration dans les milieux défavorisés, surtout les villages, est très varié : de la maison spéciale des soeurs avec centre polyvalent, au petit appartement au coeur d'un centre habité. Chaque style a ses avantages et ses inconvénients; mais de grâce, n'imitiez pas notre pauvreté. Vivez la vôtre telle quelle en offrant, cependant, l'espoir d'une vie meilleure à ceux qui vous entourent et qui voudraient vous imiter. Les pauvres n'aiment pas qu'on les imite. Voici une petite histoire : 3 soeurs avaient voulu vivre pauvrement dans une institution riche du Caire, en partageant la même chambre. C'est ainsi que 2 d'entre elles ont dormi par terre sur une natte tandis que la 3ème a occupé le lit. En définitive, les deux premières ont attrapé des maux de reins et la 3ème a dû, tour-à-tour, leur céder sa place. Et cela, n'a évidemment pas résolu le problème de la pauvreté en Egypte.
- g) Parlons des "vocations" religieuses et laïques:
- alors que notre clergé diocésain copte-catholique connaît une crise de croissance, certaines congrégations religieuses connaissent une crise de vieillesse;
 - certaines congrégations nous avouent vouloir ouvrir une communauté en Haute-Egypte pour "chercher des vocations". Cette solution nous a choqué un peu car là, il s'agit de "prendre" et non de "donner".

En effet, nous avons fait découvrir à certains religieux/euses au cours d'un exercice psycho-social lors d'une session de recherches dans le domaine du développement que L'AGENT DU DEVELOPPEMENT, c'est-à-dire celui ou celle qui pourrait CHANGER quelque chose dans un village, ce n'est pas le religieux mais QUELQU'UN DU VILLAGE, qui ne le quittera pas; en fait, le milieu ne peut se développer que par lui-même d'autant plus que par hypothèse, les religieux deviendront un jour inutiles. Or si une communauté de religieux / euses trouve un élément valable, celui-ci doit être formé pour rester au village et y travailler.

Il s'agit donc de choisir entre le développement de la Congrégation et celui du milieu défavorisé:

- certaines congrégations ont le sentiment d'avoir échoué parce qu'elles n'ont pas réussi à attirer des vocations en Egypte. Ceci n'est pas vrai car en fait, elles échoueraient en s'empressant d'amener à la vie religieuse des personnes qui n'ont pas une vocation bien nette et qui auraient par contre fait de bons laïcs engagés. Ce serait donc un double échec;
- nous approuvons beaucoup les congrégations qui restent encore sévères dans le choix des novices, veillant à la qualité de l'Institut, de la congrégation ou de la société;
- nous pensons qu'il est du devoir des congrégations de susciter des vocations laïques à côté de vocations religieuses. C'est facile d'interpeller les jeunes sur le sens de la responsabilité; nous le faisons chaque année quand nous engageons les nouveaux instituteurs (80 chaque année) et cela réussit à chaque coup puisque l'on entend les réponses suivantes : " on ne nous a jamais dit que nous étions responsables de quoi que ce soit; on veut toujours nous enseigner et l'on veut que nous écoutions". Mais il y a des laïcs bolides, partout; il s'agit de leur faire découvrir que chacun de nous est appelé et qu'il doit reconnaître l'appel de Dieu; on doit l'aider à le découvrir.

h) La formation :

- il faut veiller, autant que possible, à ne pas former des laïcs subalternes mais des laïcs capables de prendre un jour la relève; ceci doit être vrai tant au niveau scolaire qu'à celui d'un petit dispensaire de village; en effet, le vrai problème consiste dans le fait que plus une religieuse est spécialisée plus le fossé qui la sépare de ses assistants est grand. A titre expérimental, nous avons voulu relever le nombre de laïcs à la disposition des religieuses-infirmières (environ 40), en organisant une session "pour les religieuses et leurs assistantes : nous n'avons compté que 3 laïcs;
- pour prendre la relève il ne suffit pas la technicité mais plutôt un certain "Esprit"; l'on estime souvent qu'il s'agit là d'un luxe pour un laïc mais d'une nécessité pour un novice. Nous insistons cependant sur la formation spirituelle et humaine avant (ou avec) la formation professionnelle.

- i) Les fréquents déplacements des religieuses, dans des espaces de temps assez rapprochés (entre 1 à 3 ans) ne favorise pas une action en profondeur. Il faut du temps pour lier amitié, découvrir des "leaders" et les former. Ce cheminement exige une relation interpersonnelle entre les religieux et les laïcs détectés.
- j) Cultiver le projet communautaire dans chaque communauté. Il ne suffit pas de vivre ensemble, il faut réfléchir ensemble avant, pendant et après l'action pour pouvoir l'évaluer. Ce partage à toutes les étapes permettra d'unir la communauté et de la faire travailler en profondeur; autrement on aura : une religieuse au dispensaire, une chargée de la promotion féminine, une autre encore dans le secteur scolaire sans avoir pour autant une vue d'ensemble du milieu. Il faut alors sacrifier à la réflexion communautaire une part de l'activité afin qu'elle puisse devenir action. Je puis vous assurer que ce genre de vie communautaire attire fortement les laïcs, et bien des communautés religieuses peuvent en témoigner.
- k) L'emploi de l'argent peut être une arme à double tranchant : l'argent aide mais peut aussi corrompre. Bien des erreurs ont été commises par le passé lorsque, par exemple, l'on allait jusqu'à distribuer de l'argent (en petites coupures de 5 ou 10 piastres) ou des denrées alimentaires, à la porte de la sacristie aux seules personnes qui avaient communie. C'est le Patriarche actuel qui me l'a affirmé. Il arrivait même de glisser quelques billets dans la main du curé pendant les fêtes. Ceci a fait que les communautés catholiques ont dû se faire aider par les congrégations religieuses tandis que celles orthodoxes et protestantes n'avaient pas ce problème. Actuellement, et par voie de conséquence, il y a en Haute-Egypte des congrégations riches et d'autres pauvres donc moins populaires. Il arrive même que notre travail éducatif soit sapé systématiquement par certaines congrégations: nous voulons aider les jeunes à la responsabilité et au sens de leur dignité, en leur demandant, par exemple, une participation personnelle, modique, même symbolique pour un camp. Parfois des religieuses s'empressent de la leur payer à notre insu. Heureusement qu'aujourd'hui, la plupart des congrégations veulent être pauvres et le prouver. De toute façon, il serait bon que les congrégations elles-mêmes revoient ensemble le thème de la pauvreté - avec la participation discrète de l'association - car ce serait là un dialogue fructueux.
- l) La pastorale d'ensemble : que ce soit au niveau de la paroisse, du diocèse ou du pays, les congrégations religieuses doivent avoir un rôle prépondérant. Je voudrais relever le fait que l'on n'a parlé, au cours de cet intéressant séminaire, que de prêtres diocésains, de religieux et de laïcs. Il n'a jamais été question d'évêques.

Or, ceux-ci sont l'âme de la pastorale d'ensemble et ils seraient bien contents de sortir de leur tour d'ivoire et participer aux problèmes de la pastorale. Et si certains pensent que les problèmes n'existent pas, nous serions heureux de les leur montrer.

CONCLUSION

Je pense que, dans tout ce qui précède il y a matière à réflexion. Je vous proposerais néanmoins deux sujets d'étude :

Premier sujet : comment aider les laïcs à être à l'écoute de l'Esprit pour découvrir leur vocation et la vivre pleinement.

Second sujet : comment oeuvrer tous ensemble (clercs, religieux, laïcs), sans oublier la Hiérarchie en vue d'une pastorale d'ensemble qui travaillerait harmonieusement à tous les niveaux et pour la même cause.

Et pour terminer, je vous demande de me pardonner si j'ai manqué d'humilité, de délicatesse ou encore de reconnaissance devant l'oeuvre accomplie par vous tous mais je ne pouvais manquer cette occasion pour vous parler librement.

Je vous remercie donc pour votre patience et votre générosité.

A SYNTHESIS OF THE SEMINAR

Margaret Loftus, SNDN

INTRODUCTION

The participants in the 1987 SEDOS Seminar on the theme: THE LAITY IN MISSION were asked to share the main insights and awarenesses that had developed in their small group discussions. What follows can well be termed "a synthesis of the syntheses". It is an attempt to present in a comparatively orderly fashion those points that each of the nine groups felt it was important to share with the others. There is no attempt to present the reflections in full; only "seeds" can be found here -- seeds that need the germination of further careful thought, prayer and possibly action.

COMMON IDENTITY AND VOCATION

Before we talk about mutuality, complementarity and collaboration in mission -- values which should mark the activities of all church members, be they lay, religious or cleric -- there is need for a renewed understanding of our common baptismal vocation. This common vocation is fundamental to our lives as christians; it is far more important than the different roles we play in church life, or the functions we perform in the christian community. We are all the disciples of Jesus - in this fact is found our basic and common identity. We admit, however, that all too often this vision of common baptismal vocation is found to be lacking in word, attitude and action.

Furthermore, as christians, we form one community. The christian community includes and embraces us all - lay, religious and cleric. It is this community which, if truly christian, has a shared commitment to ministry. Evangelization itself is the concern and responsibility of us all.

The need to develop processes/methods to enable the entire community to move to a corporate discernment regarding ministry is very real. Together we need to grow toward the truth; together we need to determine a proper response to the action of the Spirit in the Church and in the world.

We recognize our common christian vocation as a different dimension of the human vocation. It is as human beings that we relate to one another, listen to the Spirit together, and put our talents at the

service of the Good News which we are committed to spread. Relationships of friendship - deep, intimate and healthy, are of vital importance in the Christian community. Tensions are bound to arise in the community; they arise wherever human beings are in any movement together, but they can be worked out with love, trust and dialogue. The more we can talk to one another, the less these tensions will be worked out through our own inner violence, and the more we will be able to accept the reality of conflict as the expression of the Cross from which new life can develop.

One basic question for religious congregations and clerics is: How can we support, encourage, assist - indeed, allow - the lay person to come into his/her own in the church, to live fully his/her christian vocation of discipleship. What do we need to do (or, perhaps more appropriately, to stop doing) to ensure that lay people are:

- fully accepted as lay with a spirituality and ministry distinctively theirs?
- fully active as true and effective agents in the pastoral action of the local church?
- fully involved in interfaith contacts where collaboration in shared values contributes to the building up of the Kingdom of God?

We know for a fact that lay people would find themselves more free and more apt to consider a call to fuller ministerial service if:

- financial support and assistance were more readily available;
- adequate training was ensured;
- religious and clergy provided more moral support - helping to sustain them through the difficult times when they were trying to "get it together", tying in all the complicated ends of a life stretching into different spheres: family, profession, apostolate.

What can we do in these areas? How can we come to terms with the long-term questions involved, most especially those questions that are economic and canonical?

Another question to be asked is: How can we, clergy and religious, be helped to recognize the impositions we so often place on the lay woman/man with whom we are associated in ministry? These impositions hinder the full expression of the christian vocation which is properly theirs, and deny the church the power of the witness of one christian community, united through the expression of different ministries, in effecting the one mission of building up the Kingdom of God.

An absolute criterion of the missionary quality of an Institute is its ability to produce life, to become unnecessary, to become not indispensable, to give place to the new local community which, true to its own christian vocation, starts the mission process again.

VOCATION

We acknowledge that the vocation in the church which attracts the greatest number of people is the lay vocation to marriage. And yet how often vocation promotion teams, on both the diocesan and religious congregation levels, fail to mention it. There is great need to acknowledge the holiness of this state. There is also need to encourage young people to respond to a possible vocation as a lay person engaged in active ministry in the local churches both at home and overseas. Vocations are God-given, and vocation promoters do their work badly when they give the impression that the vocation to the religious or clerical state is more of God than any other. The inclusion of lay people on these vocation promotion teams would be a great help in restoring the balance in this area.

CHURCH STRUCTURES

What we have come to call the BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES is an experience of the church, renewed and full of hope. These communities have indeed become the seeds of an experience of the Spirit. We recognize the participation of the lowly, of the poor, as the principal source of this new experience of church; it is among the poor and oppressed that the transforming strength of the Good News is experienced both in individual personal lives and in the broader society.

The Basic Christian Communities have helped to introduce us to the need and possibility of new structures in the Church - new channels for dialogue and communication, by which we can experience the church as communion. It is imperative that the "ecclesiology of the people of God" develop. Despite the "slowing down" and "centralization" trends evidenced today in many areas of church life, the call for collegiality and for dialogue is strong. People want to sit down and to plan together, to develop life-giving structures for the church as one christian community. Priests and bishops, who hold the main power in the church today, must "let the laity in"; they must change their attitudes towards non-clerics and must change their understanding of their particular ministry from the exercise of power to that of service. If the vocation of the lay person in the church today is not clear, and we often hear that it is not, could it be because the function of the ministerial service, hierarchical and clerical, rather than the role of the laity, needs to be renewed?

Planning and decision-making affecting mission and ministry must involve all the members of the church, and such involvement comes more properly at the beginning of the planning. No one wants his/her opinion to be asked when all decisions have been made, and the planning is moving into the action stage.

LAY/CLERIC/RELIGIOUS COLLABORATION

If we are truly convinced that the Spirit is active in the church, calling all its members to respond to the call to live in a spirit of true gospel service, we will take collaboration seriously. We will become a "listening" people - listening for the movement of the Spirit, listening to each other, listening in such a way that we can hear the needs of the world. This listening will be followed by effective collaborative action as response to the signs of our times. And who can doubt that the laity have a distinctive facility for reading and interpreting these very signs. Their mission is tied in with life, family, marriage, economy, etc. in a much tighter fashion that is that of the non-lay.

A discernment engaged in together, followed by our actually working together, will compel us to struggle towards a deeper understanding of one another. A spirit of mutuality, respect, and true friendship will be born, and will lead us to a true communion with one another. We recognize that such communion/collaboration, one which cuts across a variety of groupings, is already occurring in many areas. The sharing which took place at this SEDOS seminar, one which has proved so fruitful for us, highlights the fact that such sharing has much more value than spending hours talking about the "role of the laity".

Periodic reflection and discernment together must become a way of life if we are continually to learn from one another and to collaborate in an ever more effective manner. In the world of today a multitude of forces are pushing humankind towards a greater realization of its unity, of the commonality of its problems, and our mission to humanity demands that we grow closer together.

Our unity is marked by complementarity rather than by equality. To speak of equality is to begin to measure, and measurement is a category that we should renounce. No two people or groups are ever really equal. We all have different and indispensable roles. Although we often give lip service to this truth, we rarely spell out what it is. We do not talk enough about, or show by practice, what the indispensable ministry of the lay person is - what the lay person must contribute so that the church may be complete. Would we even know what christianity was if we had only the clerical or religious state? Yet there are certain functions allowed the lay person today, not by right, but merely because there is a scarcity of priests. The laity have more than a

stop-gap role. What are the ministries properly his/hers?

Women in particular need to be assured of a proper and full ministry in the church. They must be involved in helping to define their role - a role which will vary according to the religious and cultural milieu in which they minister. The more active presence of women in the church will open up new vistas for the church - they will bring their own special qualities. Recent Latin American history has shown that women, when they have come together, have found new freedom to act; it has also shown that the Bible, read from a woman's perspective, helps to develop the "feminine features" of the church. Such a reading helps all to become aware of the power in the Magnificat. Women themselves are increasingly conscious of their responsibility to promote the dignity of women; to provide opportunities to develop their competencies in all fields, including theology, and to serve more actively in an ever wider range of ministries. We acknowledge, too, that the ordination question is more acute in some cultures than in others.

Language is an important factor, not only in regard to women (who feel excluded by the constant use of the masculine gender), but also in regard to the laity in general. How often we talk of doing things for the laity, rather the with the laity. There is a style of talking that smacks of arrogance, for example: "We must help the laity listen to the Spirit". Do we not ALL need help in listening and discerning the action of the Spirit? Our vision of the community of lay/cleric/religious in mission needs a new vocabulary and a new way of talking. Language reveals a mentality. Our theological expression lags behind what we feel, and how we want to be together in mission. It is a question of conversion - our use of language will change when our conversion has gotten down into our bones.

CONCLUSION

We have many impressive church documents regarding the role of the laity in the church, regarding the church as one communion, regarding the collaboration needed that the Kingdom may come more visibly among us. What is needed now is their implementation that includes us all from discernment through planning to action.

Finally, we must be people of hope. Christ is risen and lives in our midst!

- end -

"GOOD IDEAS" - SUGGESTIONS WHICH EMERGED AT THE
1987 SEMINAR AS A FOLLOW-UP TO THIS SEMINAR

Helene O'Sullivan, MM

I. SUGGESTIONS FOR SEDOS EXECUTIVE

1. - That SEDOS channel information about the different ways in which institutes are working in collaboration with the laity where this involves lay members of institutes. Provide more information on relationships within the institutes, financial arrangements, formation etc.
2. - that SEDOS provide information and assistance to members on working together in team-ministry (priests, lay persons and religious). This could include the aspect of how to make pastoral councils more effective.
3. - that SEDOS circulate information on formation programs for lay persons preparing for trans-cultural mission.
4. - that SEDOS encourage the funding of lay people studying theology.
5. - that SEDOS consider opening its membership to lay missionary groups.
6. - that the report of this seminar be communicated to the delegates attending the Synod on the Laity. (eg. Asian theologians are planning to share this report with the Asian Bishops meeting before the Synod; Major Superiors attending the Synod could share it with Synodal members.)
7. - since declining numbers in missionary institutes are leading them to re-examine how they are present in mission; since strategizing with laity about the future of mission is important; - that SEDOS be a vehicle or instrument for bringing the two together in dialogue.
8. - that SEDOS be an international networking and information agency reporting on the ministry and works of laity.
9. - that SEDOS look at supporting tertiary formation centers on a national level for religious and lay people to give them the opportunity to deepen their faith together and prepare for mission in collaboration with one another. Inculturation would be an important element of this.

10. - that SEDOS publish articles and reflections which:
 - analyze concepts of poverty for missionaries (option for the poor).
 - examine community life:
 - its deeper meaning,
 - causes of conflict,
 - how to handle conflict especially in an inter-cultural community,
 - bonding at local level and across provinces, regions etc.

II SUGGESTIONS FOR SEDOS MEMBER INSTITUTES

A. Collaboration with Lay People

- That Institutes seek ways to promote collaboration between lay people, religious priests, and missionaries. This collaboration to begin during their early formation in the institute and continue throughout their time of study.
- Convinced of the importance of the lived experience of theology that courses be opened to seminarians, lay persons and religious with both men and women teachers, lay and religious.
- that all religious institutes be encouraged to include lay persons as consultants in all official meetings and chapters, etc.
- that religious institutes be encouraged to open their houses to lay persons interested in participating in prayer, renewal exercises etc.
- that religious institutes share their educational and formation resources with lay people preparing for ministry/mission.
- vocation promoters within institutes and dioceses promote the development of lay vocations as well as vocations to the religious life and priesthood.
- that members of religious institutes promote an understanding and appreciation of the sacramental vocation of lay people in marriage.
- that religious institutes take concrete action to accompany candidates/seminarians/members who leave the institute as they live out their mission in a different way.

B. WOMAN

- That institutes conscientize themselves regarding the exploitation of women;

- Take affirmative action for women/lay women in academic theology;
- Look at ways of giving financial support to lay people studying theology.

C. Quality of our Relationships in Community

That institutes work towards a realization of the importance of:

- Formation in human dynamics to get in touch with their feelings and help them in relationships;
- Taking time to relax together at meals, to discuss the day together, to communicate with one another, to discover one another.

D. Reverse Mission

That Missionary institutes give more time to reverse mission/mission animation. This starts by sharing missionary experiences.

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LAITY IN MISSION - MARCH, 1987

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Michael Amaladoss, SJ
Carlos Pape, SVD
Margaret Loftus, SNDN
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Oswald Gill, OFM	-	Hospitality
Patricia Watson, NDS		
Margaret Loftus, SNDN	-	Synthesis of the Seminar
Helene O'Sullivan, MM	-	"Good Ideas" for SEDOS Emerging at the Seminar

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SEDOS SEMINARS 1986-87

(Dates for your Diary)

- I. FEEDBACK ON THE SYNOD: "VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH AND THE MODERN WORLD TWENTY YEARS AFTER THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL".

Date: October 27, 1987 (Subject to alteration depending on the Synod schedule.

Place: Fratelli Christiani Generalate, 476 Via Aurelia, Roma.

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- II. ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND SEMINAR: BUILDING INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNITIES IN MISSION SITUATIONS.

Date: December 9, 1987. (Note this date has been changed from December 8).

Place: Fratelli Christiani Generalate, 476 Via Aurelia, Roma.

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- III. EVANGELIZATION: THE CHALLENGE OF MODERNITY.

Date: March 15-19, 1988. (Residential)

Place: Villa Cavalletti, Grottaferrata/Frascati.
