



Bread of Life are worth sharing with SEDOS Bulletin readers who may not have access to the Tablet.

## COMING EVENTS

### (1) PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION: WOMEN AND MEN PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The SEDOS General Assembly, December '88, requested a follow-up to this theme. We are organising two afternoon sessions to study the practical implications of Partnership. It is not necessary to have been at the December Seminar on Partnership in order to avail of attendance at these sessions. They will be complete units and will concentrate on shared experiences and group work.

Facilitators Paul Van Parijs, CICM and Matilda Handl, OSB

Dates Tuesday February 21, 1989: Thursday March 9, 1989

Time/Place 16.00 - 18.30 hrs. SVD Generalate

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### (2) NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUP SESSIONS IN PREPARATION FOR THE SEMINAR

#### EVANGELIZATION AND POPULAR RELIGIOSITY

Neighbourhood groups will meet on Tuesday March 21, 16.00 - to 18.00 hrs. Details of the membership of your suggested group, the convenor, place of meeting and the objectives of these group sessions are being sent to members by separate mail. Please note the date now in your diary.

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### (3) EVANGELIZATION AND POPULAR RELIGIOSITY

#### A SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR

Place Villa Cavalletti

Date 11 - 15 April 1989

Registration forms have been mailed. Early registration is recommended as only 95 places are available. More information on page 75.

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## POPULAR RELIGION: SOME QUESTIONS

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Michael Amaladoss, SJ

In a developing country like India popular religion is an interesting theme for study. 'Popular' may point to something that is liked by a big majority of the population. We speak of a popular film, a popular TV programme, a popular sport. 'Popular' may also mean 'of the people' as different from an elite. The obvious implication is that the elite is a minority. In the second sense it is not a value-neutral term since it is the elite who use it to refer to phenomena that they look down upon in some way. Religion refers to a complex of beliefs, rituals and community structures that are expressive of the deeper meanings of life and reality. One distinguishes it from religiosity that indicates an attitude that might find expression even in non religious-ways.

The scientific elite look at popular religion as obscurantist, superstitious and an obstacle to progress. The religious elite may see it as primitive. The intellectual elite may look at it as ignorant, fundamentalist and fanatical. The political elite often misuse it as a power-base. For the people themselves it is the way they live their religion. It is of course open to use or abuse like any human and social institution.

My intention in this paper is not to offer you a phenomeno-logical analysis of popular religion. I only wish to raise a few questions to start a discussion. I do not wish to offer any answers, though the way in which a question is posed and clarified may already indicate a possible answer. I am taking for granted that religion as a dimension of life is to be considered seriously and positively: I am not going to make an apology for it. I shall focus my attention on three questions: What is popular religion? How seriously do we take it? Is it a help or a hindrance for human and social development?

### I. WHAT IS POPULAR RELIGION?

Even if we try to avoid a value-laden use of the term and use it only descriptively, 'popular' does correlate to a term like the 'elite', whether intellectual or spiritual. The approach of a theologian or a sanyasi to things religious will be different from that of a lay person. Symbols and rituals that seem to be spontaneous expressions of the experience of the people can be differentiated from what is official, determined as such by the group, guarded by its hierarchical officials and handed down in a tradition. In a stratified society 'popular' could refer to the experience/expression of the poor and the powerless as compared to what is controlled by those in power, whether this power is political or religious. These contrasts describe popular in a negative way by comparing it with what it is not. But this reference to the other pole seems almost constitutive of the description of the popular. This is clear if we compare it with a term like tribal.

TRIBAL AND POPULAR RELIGION: Tribal religions are religions of the people. But they are not popular in the sense described above because there is no elite group within tribal society that would stand apart from the people and consider their beliefs and rituals as different and popular. It is a unified, closed system that does not have the two poles. This does not mean that an outsider may not find analogies between popular and tribal religions with regard to their beliefs, symbols and rituals and their psychological and social rootedness. But popular religion seems to me to be an open system with fluid frontiers which it shares with 'great' or 'higher' religion.

POPULAR AND POPULARISED: One use of the word popular refers to something that is preferred by a great number - a majority - of the people. In contemporary society one speaks of the mass: mass culture or mass media. The characteristic of the popular in the age of the media is that it does not really emerge from the people but from a group, often of the elite, who produce it for and in the name of the people and diffuse it. They create popular taste. Such products are not so much popular as 'popularised'. Whereas in earlier ages the people had some say in what was happening, today they have no influence at all except the negative ability of rejecting what does not please them. The production of films is the best example of this in India. But the process can also be found in the sphere of religion. The media can make or unmake gurus, promote temples and pilgrim centres. Such popularisation is alienating for the people and manipulative on the part of the popularisers, because it is really not 'of the people'.

POLARITIES IN THE FIELD OF RELIGION: Keeping in mind the popular-elite polarity we can try to explore further the meaning of the popular by evoking other similar polarities in the field of religion. These polarities are in no way synonymous. They bring out complementary aspects and enrich our understanding of the popular.

a) Pragmatic and Transcendental : Mandelbaum speaks of the pragmatic and transcendental aspects of religion. The pragmatic deals with the needs of life in the world, with suffering and sickness. The transcendental concerns the mysteries of life and death and the after-life. The former brings the Gods down to earth through shamans and ecstatic rituals. The latter perceives the ultimate meanings of life in the world and establishes and renews a timeless order through ritual. While the one caters to the life-needs of individuals and society, the other leads to salvation.

b) Cosmic and Metacosmic: Pieris evokes a distinction between the cosmic and metacosmic dimensions of religion. The cosmic deals with this world and its cosmic forces as well as with the powers of the human psyche, with the cycles of the seasons and the adventures of agriculture and hunting, with rites of passage and kinship relations that structure the group. The metacosmic, while rooted in the cosmic, rises beyond it to point to salvation, with special myths of origins and ends. The metacosmic speaks about the Absolute that calls for gnosis or renunciation and transformation. Pieris borrows this distinction from the Buddhist tradition which speaks of lokiya and lokot-tara.

c) Little and Great Traditions: From a cultural point of view, Redfield proposes the dialectic between the Little and the Great Traditions. The Little Tradition is localised geographically and historically. The Great Tradition embraces many Little Traditions and in the process becomes more abstract, universal, reflective and refined. The Little Tradition is not simply an incipient or degenerate form of the Great one. The two strands interact mutually and dialectically through a process of universalization and parochialization that keeps the tradition dynamic, as Marriott has described it.

d) Oral and Written: From the point of view of expression and communication one could speak of the oral and the written. Orality is linked to spontaneity, variation, emotional expression and immediacy. But writing makes possible standardization and a wider spread both in time and space. Oral cultures can be very developed. On the other hand one must distinguish between writing and printing. Where writing may remain an elite activity, printing may help to democratize and popularise elite as well as popular culture.

e) Lived and Reflected on: From the point of view of praxis one could evoke the distinction between religion as lived and religion as reflected on. Religion as lived takes life for granted in the sense that it goes on with its appropriate rituals and symbols. Reflection is a second order of activity that seeks for meaning and articulation and gives rise to speculation and discussion.

f) "Sacred" - two Models: Stirrat speaks of two models of the sacred, that of Eliade and Durkheim respectively. The sacred of Eliade may seem socially irrelevant. It transcends space and time. It is an absolute that is the object of individual striving and offers salvation. It is not a model of social life, but is concerned with universals. The sacred of Durkheim is concerned with social life, with space and time, whether this is thought of as cyclical or progressive. It is the "sacralized social" of the here and now.

'POPULAR' AND 'ELITE' Considering these various polarities one may be tempted to equate the popular-elite polarity either with all or one of them. That would be a mistake. I take them all as heuristic classifications that refer to two aspects and levels of the same continuum, but looked at from different points of view. They are not mutually exclusive. The 'higher' or more developed forms are rooted in the 'lower' or less developed and the 'lower' ones are open to the 'higher'. One can very well see how they are two dimensions of the Great religions. The elite too, as long as they are human, and practice ritual, participate in popular religion, even if they are able to talk about its meaning. Those who are practicing popular religion, unlike those who are engaged in tribal religious practices, know that the symbols and rituals that they live in a matter-of-fact way can be explained by people who are more informed than they are. They may even have some vague awareness of such explanations. Obeyesekere points out that in southern Asia:

Intellectuals not only continue to believe in their higher religions, like Buddhism and Hinduism, with increased conviction,

but, more surprisingly, continue to adhere to those spirit cults which are decried and sometimes condemned by these higher doctrinal traditions.

This can very well be substantiated from India. Similarly Ursula Sharma shows how a person who is sick besides going to a doctor may also take steps to remedy other possible causes like sorcery, and unintentional or known offence against the deity, and finally have recourse to the explanation of the Karma theory. Similarly Gabriele Dietrich, speaking of peasants, says: "They may worship God in a certain form, but their understanding of God also transcends this form".

REFLECTION AND SYMBOL: Thus we see that already at the level that we would call popular there is a reflection, even if it is unsystematic and unarticulated. On the other hand, access to systematic reflection is not a hindrance to participation in popular religious forms. This could be understood if we distinguish between symbol and reflection. With symbols one is at the level of the human, of life, of community, of time and space. No one can escape this level, though the symbols may be more or less refined. With reflection, symbols are not denied but relativised with reference to the reality symbolized. Symbols (and Gods) are susceptible to reinterpretation. Correspondingly the meaning system of a Great religion cannot have an impact on life and society unless it finds new expression in the living, 'popular' symbols of a new culture.

Francis Jeyapathy, after an interesting analysis of the meaning of popular religion, concludes.

The unique configuration of the so called popular religion can then be seen to lie in the strong local colouring of the symbols and rituals, in the close correspondence these religions have with the social life of the people, in the way local histories and socio-political conditions are gathered up, expressed, enacted and sought to be changed in the symbolic realm, in the ambivalent relation they enjoy with the official religions.

I think that popular and elite religions should be seen as two symbolic forms of one religion, two moments of one continuum of expression. They cannot be understood one without the other, even if they have specific characteristics and can be looked at separately. But the separate focus should not assume a dichotomy. They are different expressions at different levels of the same meaning. We need not attach value connotations to them.

Living the faith in a human, social way in symbol and ritual, is to live it popularly and this is a part of every religion. There is a popular component in each one of us. Some of us may be capable of reflecting on what we live, rising to higher levels of abstraction and expression, relativising, not doing away with, they symbol, and adapting it to different circumstances. While life can continue without reflection, reflection cannot cut itself off from life without losing its significance.

## II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POPULAR RELIGION

How seriously do we take popular religion? With a view to answering this question, I would like to start with a sort of case study.

Rituals connected with sickness and healing are a common focus of popular religious practice. How do we look at them? Investigators take various attitudes. Some will deny everything as superstitious and advise the sick person to go and see a doctor. Others would take the spirits seriously, but substitute healing rituals of a new religion seen by them as true and superior. Some would see the rituals as symbolic ways of handling realities that are basically psychological and/or sociological. Among these latter I see three different approaches:

One group would prefer to do away with the mystery and substitute modern scientific methods, which in any case they resemble in their own way;

Another group, without believing in the spirits, will act 'as if' and keep the ritual since it is effective;

A third group will respect the symbolic world of the ritual in its own cultural context and appreciate its efficiency without pronouncing on its truth value.

A final approach tries to substitute a new elite reflection from a new faith perspective.

THE RITUALS OF HEALING: AN ANALYSIS The people who practice these rituals do not indulge in all these reflections. But on the other hand we should not think that they are naive and do not know how to articulate the various causes of sickness and remedies for them. Sickness may have physical, psychological, social, personal and supra-human dimensions. In a Tribal ritual the witchdoctor treats the sick person holistically in relation to all these dimensions, though he does it symbolically: he gives herbal medicine, involves family and friends in the ritual to promote reconciliation, builds up self confidence through suggestive ritual, dispels the guilt feeling, and propitiates the spirits.

At the level of popular and elite religion this unity is broken. At the elite level there is a differentiation of functions: in a hospital, the doctor handles the physical aspects, the counsellor looks after the psychological and social problems, the chaplain calms the guilt feelings and assures spiritual support.

At the popular religious level we see the same differentiation, but the functions are managed in a different way. Recourse to medicine will be a first step. Where there is no known medicine, a goddess will be invoked. Where medicine does not bring healing one will try to make propitiation for one's unknown faults or amends for known ones. Sometimes one may suspect sorcery and approach a shaman, because there seems to be no other convincing explanation. If nothing succeeds, one would blame one's Karma or fate. Sometimes two or more of these means of healing may be tried at the same time. One notices however a certain mobility of consciousness without detriment to the final goal which is healing.

THREE TYPES OF RITUALS However, popular religion has many more rituals than the rituals of healing. We can broadly distinguish three types of these: need-based, social and transcendent. Let us briefly look into each of these:

The Need-Based Rituals cater to all human and social needs. As long as one does not feel fully master of oneself and is aware that one is dependent on the divine these rituals will continue, though symbols and Gods may keep changing according to history and culture. Of course, some one who no longer feels such dependence does not need religion. Use of need-based ritual does not mean that the persons ignore other means of satisfying their needs. As the proverb goes: "God helps those who help themselves". God is not a substitute for other human and natural means. But God continues as the hidden presence in all that befalls human beings. Speaking of peasants who were organizing themselves for a liberative struggle with the help of Marxist ideology, Dietrich says: "There was a strong feeling of reliance on the Gods in the people despite their consciousness of their own power to organize."

The Social Rituals contribute to the construction and maintenance of the community. Such are principally the rites of passage. These rituals are normally symbolic representations of community structures. They seem to act on the community through a "structure - anti-structure - communitas" dynamic. While there is a liminal moment of confusion and catharsis, the community structure is strongly and clearly reaffirmed. The ritual is of course socially determined and controlled by the representatives (the clergy) of the group.

The Rituals of Transcendence refer to the world of God. It is oriented to salvation. They are rituals of thanksgiving and praise. They mediate symbolically, not only a world that is seen as future, but a world that is present, but transcendent. These symbols of what will be, and what ought to be, challenge what is.

- In the spectrum going from popular to elite religion,
- the social rituals are shared by all, at least in a minimal form: birth, marriage, death. Even if the religious element is secularized the social structure would remain and would be mediated symbolically.
  - the need-based rituals will be found more on the popular side of the spectrum.
  - the rituals of transcendence will characterize the elite pole.

All the three types will be present, though in varying proportions, throughout the spectrum.

AN ADVAITIC PERSPECTIVE ON SYMBOL: What is the significance of these different dimensions of symbol and ritual? If we take the phenomenon of symbol seriously then I would suggest that the relation between the symbol and the reality it symbolizes is an advaitic one. The symbol is not the reality; it has no meaning independently of the reality. But the reality cannot be reached except through the symbol.

The symbols of reality arise out of the dialectic between the reality on the one hand and the human person and society on the other. This is the emergence of culture. The psychological structures of the human person, the relationships of social structures and the cosmic manifestation of the reality in space and time - all of these in their own way determine the kinds of symbols that emerge.

Among many others, Eliade (for cosmos and history) Jung (for psychology), and Mary Douglas (for society structures) have tried to



show the intimate link between their respective fields of study and the kinds of symbols that emerge. But the symbols should always lead beyond these conditioning structures to the reality they symbolize. The reality of the symbolic world is then a relative one: it is relative to the reality it symbolizes; it is also relative to the human, socio-historic and cultural conditions of its own emergence. This double relativity is the principle of variety, change, transformation.

What, then, is the significance of popular religion? Its significance is that of the symbolic world. The symbolic world is not the simple reflection of the real one. But it is not an empty, imaginative creation either. In the light of ongoing experience, change of circumstances and fresh discoveries the symbols may and will change or will be re-interpreted. But the inadequacy and mobility of the symbol does not belie the reality even if the persons who live the symbol may not always be reflectively aware of it.

### III. POPULAR RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT Is Religion an Obstacle to Development?

In a well known quotation Marx speaks about religion being the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its conditions is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions.

Weber who was more positive about the role at least of a particular type of religion, namely Calvinist Protestantism, was critical of Asian religions.

For the various popular religions of Asia, in contrast to ascetic Protestantism, the world remained a great enchanted garden, in which the practical way to orient oneself, or to find security in this world or the next, was to revere or coerce the spirits and seek salvation through ritualistic, idolatrous, or sacramental procedures. No path led from the magical religiosity of the non-intellectual classes of Asia to a rational, methodical control of life.

Gunnar Myrdal thinks that religion usually acts as "a tremendous force for social inertia" and says that he "knows of no instance in present-day South Asia where religion has induced social change".

These criticisms will apply more particularly to popular religion because it seems superstitious and magical and non-rational.

RE-INTERPRETATION OF RELIGION One can suggest that precisely because popular religion is concerned with their present needs, the people will not be averse to use appropriate means, even if that leads to a reinterpretation of their religious symbols. Dietrich says:

People's organization does not necessarily have a very secularizing effect on people even though the ideology under

which they are organized may have an atheistic bias. Most people tended to feel that their trust in the Gods was either strengthened or not affected in the struggle; certainly it was not weakened... The presence of God is very much experienced as the presence of energy in nature, in things and in people... Since the presence of God is energy, it is only natural if most people feel their trust in God is not weakened through political organization.

Studying rural Hinduism and its evolution in the context of modernity Ayrookuzhiel says:

While in some cases new meanings are put into old symbols, there is also the process of dropping some old religious symbols and integrating new ones like humanity, scientific truth, reason, etc. into their symbol complex.

Both symbol systems may sometime co-exist because they are perceived to meet different needs and to point to different meanings. Vieda Skultans, studying a healing temple, points out how mentally ill persons are brought there often because they cannot go to a psychiatrist. But when they are in the temple, the ritual centres around the accompanying female care-taker who feels responsible for the health of the family. Some who are staying in the temple keep seeing the local psychiatrist too.

Obeyesekere shows how the popularity of the Gods and their identity and role in the life of the people change according to the developing circumstances and needs of the people. Similarly some of the new religious movements that are developing in India can be seen as attempts to modernise Hinduism, attempts which are supported by the middle class.

The experience of Latin America shows that when people acquire a new awareness then they either create new popular religious symbols or re-interpret traditional ones so that popular religion becomes a force for liberation.

Symbol System and Social Change: How do we understand these phenomena?

If, as I have argued above, the symbol system emerges from the dialectic of life-experience and faith, when experience changes and faith remains the same, the symbol system readjusts itself to suit the new situation. Because faith and symbols are at different levels, though related to each other, transformation at one level need not imply transformation at another. This means also that in an on-going process of change the symbolic world is dependent on the world of experience, which is primary. Hence the symbolic world need not be seen as an obstacle to social change. Or to put it in another way, social change is no threat to the symbolic world though it might involve adjustment and even transformation. The symbolic world may not bring about social change on its own. But it cannot continue unchanged in the face of experience. If there is stagnation the cause may be more human and political rather than religious.

Rituals of Social Structure and the Reality of Power I spoke in the previous section of three kinds of symbol and ritual. They do not react to social change in the same way. The rituals of transcendence are normally not affected.

The need-based symbols and rituals easily adapt themselves or are reinterpreted or even disappear in the context of changing experience. The symbols and rituals that do not easily change are the socio-structural ones.

Social roles continue even if they are played by different groups of people. The legitimation of the caste system through ritual is a good example. It is true that the Bhakti schools tried to rise beyond the caste structure. But beyond affirming the availability of salvation to all irrespective of caste, they did not affirm social equality. Similarly some of the need-based cults may serve as a counter-point to the official ritual structure of the priests. But they have no effect on social structure. Similarly the ritual process described by Victor Turner speaks about 'communitas' as resulting from the process. But while the 'communitas' may be a happy resolution of the threatening liminal state, it does not radically change the structure, but reaffirms it.

In rites of passage the individual may move to another level in relation to the group. In social rituals like pilgrimages the liminal state may recall to all the participants non-structural values. But these values are institutionalized in the social group as a consequence of the rite. It is more prophetic than transformative.

This means that a socio-structural ritual can only be changed with difficulty. Besides the creation of a new awareness among every one in the social hierarchy a two-fold strategy seems indicated.

- At the social level, development and mobility characteristic of industrialization and urbanization, can break up existing social structures and bring about new ones, even though slowly.

- At the ritual level a process of what has been called 'sanskritization' which leads the Harijans to 'abandon' their proper Gods in the celestial hierarchy and to worship higher Gods, destroys the ritual legitimation of the social hierarchy. That is why the movement to open the doors of all the temples to the Harijans may be significant not only socially, but also ritually.

#### CONCLUSION

The structuralist tradition in anthropology has shown us that our ancestors did not have less intelligence and wisdom though they may have had different world views and symbol systems. Such a point of view helps us to avoid value judgements. This does not mean that there are no differences or change or development.

I have tried to show that popular religion cannot be simply dismissed as magical or superstitious. It can be understood only in the context of a 'higher' form of the same religion. It presents a complex structure with the symbol systems mediating between experience and reality.

One can distinguish the symbolic ritual into three kinds: need-based, socio-structural and 'transcendant'. It is this complexity that makes change possible. Like everything human, religion also can be abused.

One can show that evils like fundamentalism and communalism have their roots, not in religion, but in psychological need or social rivalry for power. While it is necessary to reflect on religion, it is lived religion that ultimately makes life meaningful and leads it to fulfillment.

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## UNITY IN MISSION, MISSION IN UNITY

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THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, (WCC) THE COMMISSION ON MISSION AND  
EVANGELISM, (CWME) AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

A REFLECTION FOR THE SAN ANTONIO MEETING

Tom Stransky, Paulist

History. The ecumenical movement is a child of this century. It was born out of a missionary commitment among Protestants concerned with the scandal of duplicated, competitive and splintered efforts by dis-united churches and agencies to proclaim the One Gospel. The first worldwide ecumenical meeting was the World Missionary Conference in 1910. Out of the experience three major streams began to flow in concerns for:

- the common tackling of divisive doctrinal understandings about the faith and order of the Church;
- despite such differences, the unity of christian efforts in the face of society problems;
- the explicit proclamation of the Gospel to non-christian peoples through common study and coordinated activities.

Eventually the three streams and their organized forms entered into the basic purposes and structures of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The WCC. An international, interconfessional organization to facilitate unity in fellowship, service and mission. Its self-definition:

- "a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior according to the Scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."
- Founded in 1948, headquarters in Geneva. Over 300 member churches, based on national constituencies. General Assemblies every 7 years, e.g., Canberra, 1991.

CWME. The Committee for World Mission and Evangelism is a subunit of the Faith and Witness programme (other subunits: Faith and Order, Church and Society, and Dialogue with People of Living Faiths). Its aim:

- "to assist the Christian community in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, by word and deed, to the whole world to the end that all may believe in him and be saved."

Major conferences: Mexico City, '63; Bangkok, '73; Melbourne, '80; San Antonio, '89. Past WCC general secretary (P. Potter) and present (E. Castro) were former directors of CWME. Includes mission boards of churches and National Council of Churches (USA).

RCC/WCC. In 1929 Pius XI forbade RC participation in ecumenical forums. The RCC declined the invite to join the WCC. RCs could not attend the '48 and '54 Assemblies. John XXIII reversed the decisions: official RC observers at '61 Assembly, and WCC delegated observers at Vatican II.

In '65 the Holy See and WCC established a Joint Working Group (JWG); it meets regularly to coordinate RC cooperation in WCC studies and activities. Two of the JWG studies: Witness, Proselytism and Religious Freedom ('70) and Common Witness ('81). Delegated RCs and other experts attend major WCC meetings. At the WCC headquarters in '84, John Paul II insisted that "the engagement of the Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement is irreversible."

RCC/CWME. Since the first CWME conference, '63, RCs have participated, in various ways, in almost all major meetings and projects at world and local levels. The Vatican Unity Secretariat has seconded Sr. Joan Delaney, MM, to the CWME staff, the only full-time RC at the WCC; she helps coordinate many joint efforts. Four members of men and women RC missionary communities with headquarters in Rome, are permanent CWME consultants.

Conclusion The commitment to common witness highlights the reality of "the real but imperfect communion" between the Churches (Decree on Ecumenism) - Christian witness to "what already unites, even before full communion is achieved" (John Paul II).

Unity in mission, mission in unity - the way and the goal.

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## MISSION CHALLENGE IN THE NINETIES

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Gabriele Ferrari, SX

I wish to thank Don Senior and the Catholic Theological Union for the invitation to be here today. It caught me by surprise, since I am not a professor. I am only a superior general of a relatively young "exclusive" mission society. My past 17 years in a directive role have been a constant reflection on mission. "Mission ad gentes" is the specific reason for the existence within the church of the Xaverian Congregation of which I am the Superior General.

### INTRODUCTION

What Challenges Face Professional Missionaries Today? Challenges facing mission today are much the same as those facing the church everywhere. We may view these however, from the vantage point of missionaries who are sent to witness their faith in churches/cultures other than their own. Let us state from the very beginning that these challenges are not exclusive to the catholic church and that my remarks will be necessarily colored by my European catholic upbringing. My mission vision may not completely reflect that which is currently discussed by theologians in the U.S. even though the U.S. Bishops' Letter "To the Ends of the Earth" (1987), indicates that we do share common concerns on numerous issues and topics.

In the past twenty years a major evolution has taken place in mission theology:

- \* the colonial era is over, many former "mission" lands are nations;
- \* Vatican II gave a new definition of church, "world church" - as Rahner puts it. Local churches are the subject of mission, responsible agents for inculturating the gospel message...
- \* on February 24, 1969 the "jus commissionis" was abolished; specific world areas are no longer entrusted to given religious communities for evangelization...
- \* a theological and anthropological re-evaluation of culture and non christian religions has taken place...
- \* the secular and modern world influences on religion have enabled churches to return to essentials, rediscover their role in the world, to be more credible...
- \* rapid communications have made the world smaller, they foster global vision...
- \* greater sensitivity to justice and poverty issues today views

these as the consequences of sinful, political, economic choices of the influential...

\* missionary vocations have decreased in number, while the number of clerical and religious vocations in the local church has increased.

All these happenings affect the church and they have a strong influence on the mission "ad gentes" as well.

Unfortunately, mission - on both local and higher levels - is still understood in a pre-Vatican manner. Most missionaries have yet to understand and make the 180 degree "about face" required. The "jus commissionis" was abolished 20 years ago; the process, however, is not over yet. Personal conversion and reflection are imperative to enable adjustment to the change. That is why we must re-read the council mission document "Ad gentes" together with "Evangelii nuntiandi" which followed it.

World Centered Mission Among the aspects which characterize this historic, world evolution, some are universally experienced and have found their way into the U.S. Bishops' Mission document: world centered mission, mutuality, a global vision of church, mission and salvation.

"The unity of human history today is simply a fact", writes Rahner. "Humankind is one, not only in its origin and as an 'a posteriori' idea... but as an immediately graspable reality." (W. Bülhmann, The Church of the Future, Orbis, 1986, p. 189). This global centering is reflected in various components of our world, church, mission and salvation effort. Every one of us needs a change of heart. We must set our gaze on the whole world... (GS 82)

We must seek to discover the consequences of the conciliar principle of incarnation, the affirmation of the church as sacrament of unity and salvation (LG 1 and 9), and of its presence in the world amid today's problems as indicated in "Gaudium et Spes". We need to analyze the consequences of such statements and global vision because these are in fact the challenges for the years ahead, the tasks still unaccomplished. This world-centered aspect of mission presupposes a multi-directional approach, an all-inclusive circular movement. No longer does the previously accepted uni-directional thrust of the past suffice.

"Global outlook" and ecumenical "mutuality" in mission (terminology of the U.S. Bishops) must take account of culture, non-christian religions, atheism, the secular world...all that is touched by evangelization. The challenge of "global mission" and the "holistic/integral" nature of salvation proper to mission requires a commitment to promote kingdom values: peace, justice, freedom, liberation, the building up of a new world order according to God's plan (the kingdom).

Our reflection will touch three major points and draw a few conclusions...

1. "WORLD CENTERED" MISSION:  
A CHALLENGE TO "BECOMING" A WORLD CHURCH

"The church must plan itself and its future in a new, hitherto unrealizable way. There must be a global, active, strategic planning of the world church." (Rahner) This new global awareness demands a new ecclesial consciousness. The church is challenged to renew its mission, discover new thrusts, not in a single but in many directions. It will become like a church in the diaspora, a small minority community where christian structures are minimal, christian witness of maximum efficacy and importance.

Geographically the North can no longer be separated from the South; their destinies are inextricably intermingled. (NCCB #14) Even if the description is not 100% apt, the North signifies "christian nations", economically developed, countries wielding world leadership and power. The South is equated to the "less evangelized", economically impoverished, politically dependent nations. In this latter sector the non-christian majority today resides, here will the majority of christians be found at the end of the century; 20% will be in the Northern and 70% in the Southern hemesphere.

Some challenges follow from this first affirmation:

Inculturation Until Vatican II the church was mainly a western church; today it is fast becoming a world church, more free and authoritative, spokesman for individual cultures and the world at large, no longer conditioned by the colonial era. The right to inculturation acquired as an aftermath of the council is now a duty incumbent upon all the churches and not only in principle. Each church is to be truly incarnate, "situated within the social life and adequately measuring up to the local culture" (AG 19). Individual local churches can no longer be mere photocopies of their founding ecclesial communities. A new road lies open before us. Hardly a few initial steps have yet been taken in this direction.

In 1975 Paul VI, referring to the gospel message in local languages, said "such change should be also introduced in liturgical expression, catechetics, theological formulation, subsidiary ecclesial structures and ministries." Inculturation implies translating the essential core message and structure of the church into the local cultural idiom, it means pluralism in form, contextualization, courteous attentiveness to local expectations.

This is the real challenge. Oftentimes, however, the fear of endangering a somewhat confused unity in favour of uniformity stands in the way.

Local/Universal Church The new concilial description of local churches (LG 23.26; AG cap III) is to be put into practice daily. This task is simultaneously entrusted to missionaries, local christians, hierarchy, people of God. The goal sought is an authentic church "already rooted in social life and adapted to the local culture" (AG 19), capable of mirroring the story of its people, independent of foreign economic conditioning, able to subsist on its own resources in the spirit of discernment and ecclesial communion.



This challenge is both real and provocative, impeded as it is both by poverty and by western efficiency, and resisted by certain conservative elements operating at times under the false cloak of fostered ecclesial unity.

The delicate balance and tension between local and universal necessitates a particular concerned attention for more communion among churches, greater cooperation and a more accurate definition of the very nature of the church itself. This process challenges mission to guarantee the contextualization and "localization" of the church without permitting it to close in on itself; it allows for a certain harmony between unity and legitimate pluriformity within the church as it moves toward becoming "world church".

All Embracing Mission. This global mission dimension implies an all-embrasive and multi-directional movement. Mission is the same everywhere. The WCC in 1962 rightly spoke of "Mission on Six Continents". Every local church is both subject and object of mission. Even if mission "ad gentes" still has a place and the cultural identity of the local church is to be fostered, we can no longer speak of "sending" and "receiving", "giving" and "getting" as if the older churches were on one side and the younger on another. Mission is not mere "doling out." This circular all-embrasive mission thrust enables and calls all churches, even the young and poor, to "share", to "speak", to "listen", to "aid", to be "challenged", to "give" and to "receive".

Are we attentive to the voice of the new and poor churches? Do we permit the poor to be actors in evangelization or must they ever remain privileged objects of compassion in the kingdom? Do we allow the poor, destitute, powerless to help us see and understand the evils of society, inflicted by one nation on another? (NCCB # 49) Are we willing to welcome from other churches, personnel, theological challenge, pastoral expertise, economic questioning? Are we ready to learn from the young churches, the grassroots-basic christian communities, lay leadership, pastoral agent roles and their capacity to "choose freedom" and lay aside the crutches of power and privilege?

"South/North" Relations. Some observations stem also from the global vision of mission and from the new "North/South" socio-political division of the world. The "south" is more vibrant, growing more rapidly. It provides new and more apt methods exemplified in liberation theology, the third world theological ecumenical association, (EATWOT), basic christian communities. The Church and other religions are investing in the south. However, is the full impact of this new socio-political reality understood? The south houses the Christian majority, while the north minority retains the decision making. Is this not reason for contention? Can such tension not be avoided by greater shared responsibility, a more pluralistic accepted approach to pastoral need, a more developed ecclesiology of communion?

Missionaries to "The North". Missionaries are part of this cross cultural system. Attitudes of superiority are to be laid aside; mission formation is to instill respect for the other, the different, the diverse. The export/import operation of models is to be avoided. The very word "missionary" is to be purged of all colonial

connotations.

Missionaries are enriched with multiple international experiences and their return home should allow them to be eyewitnesses to what they have experienced regarding injustice and oppression, often imposed on the south by the north. They can seriously question their ecclesial communities on issues of injustice, wanting solidarity, greater authenticity through communion/sharing as opposed to power/privilege. This can promote renewed christian community living and foment better understanding of christian civic responsibility and service for the good of the whole planet. (Economic justice #322).

Are we missionaries courageous enough to stand up for our brothers and sisters and denounce the implications of economic policies, lifestyle, greed which often brings death and hunger to the many? Are we willing to be the "voice of the voiceless", the critical conscience of the world? Are we ready to suffer isolation, hatred, open hostility for our brothers and sisters? "Often the participation in the life of the local church" write the American Bishops, "can put missionaries in conflict with government proposals in their own countries and with the government of nations that welcome them." (NCCB #19)

#### THE SECOND CHALLENGE:

##### ECUMENICAL SHARING, MUTUALITY WITH REGARD TO THE NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS AND OTHER CHRISTIAN COMMUNIONS

A greater appreciation of the theological values of non-christian religions offers new avenues for mission and provides occasions for representatives of various religions to meet. In the past religions were often self contained and inward directed. Today we have a new type of relationship between religions and the churches which we may refer to as "ecumenical interdependence". Confronted by a world facing possible nuclear disaster, ecological environmental imbalance, inroads by atheism, situations of structural injustice, world religion leaders feel themselves called to task and interrogated. We have seen the historic Assisi meeting of October 17, 1986. Such events offer hope to the world and the church, a hope to be preserved and nourished.

Relations With Other Religions The great non-christian religions seem to be locked into their own culture and they appear resistant to the attraction of the gospel. Religion and culture are realities closely inter-related: This de facto practical impenetrability was taken for granted previously. However, after the Council documents on religious freedom and non-christian religions, this has become an issue demanding more and more attention on our part. Some authoritative voices declare that the "spirit of Assisi" can weaken the mission impetus. But the contrary is also true, the conversion process cannot be accelerated; it will take place through dialogue and hope, in ways almost independent of us. On the other hand do we actually believe that a confirmed and convinced Buddhist or Muslim will be touched to accept a salvation message from outside when this does not profoundly and intimately influence his life and cultural milieu? What can be done?

The Power of the Gospel Theologians reflect on non-christian religious values and their relationship with the revelation of Jesus Christ and this is indeed important. However, those engaged in the mission "ad gentes" ought not lose heart in the power of the gospel message nor lose hope in the good will of men and women everywhere. Perhaps it suffices to believe that God will reveal his own plans in his own time when he deems it opportune. This may happen when we cease to cling to the gospel and Kingdom as our own jealously held possession (cf Phil 2,5ff); when we are more humble; when we are less self interested servants working for the salvation of others.

Having said this, it remains for us to discover "cultural" ways of transmitting our message in an appealing, persuasive, understandable fashion (EN 3), not as a "veneer" but as something which deeply penetrates cultural and religious roots (EN 20) capable of evangelizing converting, "winning over" hearts, to use the words of Paul VI. Here lies the challenge. Can we honestly say that we are walking this road? Are we convinced that our message adequately responds to the profound aspirations of people? Again we are faced with the challenge to inculturation of EN #63. Are we aware of the risks involved in repeatedly falling into the old sins of "religious colonialism?"

The Work of Mission We have said that the venerable non-christian religions seem to be quite impenetrable. What about mission then? Is mission to content itself with merely contemplating its lack of success and trying to elaborate a theological mystique of acceptance of suffering and persecution? Or on the contrary are we not called to creatively pioneer new ways, new mission strategies along the lines of evangelizing dialogue, witnessing presence, sincere, unbiased cooperation with non-christians?

Many missionaries unconsciously hope that the influence of Islam or Buddhism will wane so that the followers of these religions will turn to Christianity. A more valid and efficacious short range program might well be to attempt to preserve the sense of God and moral values found in these world religions. Thus the "seeds of truth" will not be lost and they may one day blossom forth into a true evangelization upon their encounter with the Gospel when the "time" dawns. Hence the church, mindful of the "salt" image of Matthew's gospel (Mt 5,13) has a most important role to play, namely, to help preserve all forms of religious belief, and to encourage the followers of these in their fervor.

Dialogue of Life. Apart from the on-going dialogue of the experts, mission in future must necessarily engage Christian communities in dialogue on life, common work, and above all on religious experience. The document of the Vatican Secretariat for non-Christians, "Dialogue and Mission" (1984, #35) states: "People rooted in their own religious traditions (not the indifferent or the alienated...n.d.a) will be able to share experiences of prayer, contemplation, faith, commitment... and ways and methods to discover the "Absolute". The Document continues:

"Such dialogue proves mutually enriching and fruitful, it cooperates in fostering the highest ideals and spiritual values of humankind. It promotes mutual communication of the underlying values of one's faith, it offers others the possibility to

experience gospel values in an existential manner".

All of us have witnessed some of the fruits of this dialogue. However, these are still but sporadic experiences which have not been adopted by the local church as yet.

The fact that the Secretariat is preparing another document entitled "Proclamation and Dialogue" indicates that dialogue is still somewhat feared, considered as something to be kept at a proper distance lest Church growth be compromised.

Ecumenism: Inter Christian Dialogue In this age of pluralism mission should not refrain from respectful and at times dialectical confrontation with other christian communions. The division among christians is still an obstacle to mission. A minimal contact with mission realities suffices for one to understand that ecumenical difficulties at the grassroots level often increase in direct proportion to the tiny steps realized at a higher level. Whatever seems acceptable in Europe or North America is often viewed quite differently elsewhere. If important advances have been made in the field of biblical studies, social development, human rights, justice issues, we still have a long way to go in the pastoral area where we oftentimes slide backward.

The history of missions reminds us that often we have multiplied structures (schools, hospitals, cooperatives etc.) to gain prestige for our individual churches in the spirit of a not always admitted religious proselytism. Our presentation and self-definition often contained elements of opposition; we stressed diversity and ignored what we shared in common. Our differences were not valued as elements of reciprocal enrichment but as reasons for division. We confused the dangers of indifference (always in good faith?) with self-affirmation, convinced that we alone had a monopoly on truth. To preach the Risen Lord, to seek him together on the road of love and truth, without undue constraint and moral pressure, should be an objective of mission. St. Francis de Sales tells us: "uncharitable 'truth' flows from an untrue 'charity'".

Ecumenism applied to life and religious experiences remains therefore a missionary challenge. Our hope is sustained by the belief that unity is possible. Our concern should be a "solicitude for all the churches". Never should we walk alone, but ever should we offer our fellow christians the possibility to walk with us and for us to walk with them.

### THIRD CHALLENGE: "HOLISTIC" OR INTEGRAL SALVATION

The Conciliar reflection on church/mystery of communion, and universal sacrament of unity/salvation, helped us understand better the true meaning of "mission." The new approach provides a different set of goals for mission today. Mission activity cannot be equated with "gospel preaching" and church "building" alone (AG 6). Evangelization, church "building", promotion of the Kingdom and its values, are all equally important mission goals. They are not opposed one to the other, rather they are component parts of the single mission entrusted to the church in our secular, unjust world. (cf. Dialogue and Mission, Secretariat for

non-christians, Bologna 1984, # 11,25; Zago, M. in "The Mission ad gentes, Bologna 1985, p. 44)

THE INTEGRAL NATURE OF SALVATION, the re-discovery of the Kingdom as "determining elements" of mission theology are some of the first initial fruits of the Council's mission reflection. They are expressive of a new and greater openness and role for mission in world history. However, as we have seen above, we must be willing to accept the consequences of such an affirmation.

Evangelization in its global meaning ("grace and vocation, proper to the church, her deepest identity..." cf. Paul VI in EN 14) remains the crucial point of ecclesial mission and of the universal sacrament of salvation. The route to be followed by mission is: witnessing and preaching Christ and his mystery. This message results in a redeemed community, the sign and cause (sacrament) of salvation for the world. This constituted community, is both redeemed and redeeming, called and calling, begins the journey toward the Kingdom so that the rest of humankind may follow." (Dialogue and Mission, # 25).

Thus the church offers "the gift of God", holistic salvation, (cf. NCCB # 45-46) a salvation which is directed "to every single person, the whole person." This salvific gift is not soul-directed alone, but it is an answer to the needs and aspirations of the whole person (AG 8, GS 3); it touches the individual and the entire human community (LG 9, GS 32); it speaks of the world to come and to our everyday world as well; and it gradually unfolds before us as we travel along the road of our earthly pilgrimage. (GS 1, AG 3).

Such innovative council statements have been the subject of extended theological discussion regarding the nature of this integral redemption. The Synod of 1971 says that a "constitutive dimension of gospel preaching" is a commitment to justice; Puebla sees human liberation as "an integrating element of evangelization" (476.1254); *Evangelii nuntiandi* (29-33) and John Paul II focus on service to humankind as "essential" to the church's mission. (RH 15/1218)

The Service of Humankind An important place in the church's pastoral activity is reserved then to both evangelization and the service of humankind (liberation, human promotion, social development etc). However, the mere mention of this fact still raises numerous objections and many "reservations". It suffices to recall the recent declaration of the S.C. for Doctrine of the Faith regarding liberation theology. It may be useful to determine correctly and clarify the nature of the interrelationship between evangelization and liberation, but it seems more necessary to accept the fact that the two are inseparably linked.

Before finding fault with and investigating possible errors (how many errors are allowed to pass unnoticed so easily) would it not be better to discover ways to support those who are directly engaged in human development lest they become so absorbed by their efforts as to lose sight of the total picture or fall victim to political oppression? How can we prepare people adequately for commitments which are never devoid of such tension, between the pastoral and the political, the spiritual and the temporal, gospel and life?

THE KINGDOM OF GOD The church's mission goal is the realization of the Kingdom of God in the world. The Council clearly states: the church is "seed sown" of the Kingdom (LG 5), to which it is subordinate and directed (cf. LG 9, GS 45). This concept is everywhere present in Council teaching, even if we only now experience its influence, thanks particularly to the ecumenical dialogue initiated within the church.

The goal of church mission is the Kingdom of God but in no way should we be tempted to "absolutize" matters. New horizons ever lie open ahead. The church cannot claim to be the end-all of mission. The church is directed only to the coming of the Kingdom. (GS #45). The church cannot be excluded, however, from mission; on the contrary it is the servant of the Kingdom of God, which Kingdom is more extensive than the church because it reaches out to those who are not of its declared membership (cf. LG # 16). Thus are we invited to cooperate with all Christians and non-Christians alike to strive for Kingdom values. (GS #45).

Solidarity and Cooperation This Kingdom perspective, if logically understood, encourages many mission initiatives for dialogue and solidarity with people who are, for all practical purposes, structurally outside of the church. This Kingdom vision invites us to venture out of our "christian strongholds", to throw open the doors of our mission residences, to welcome all who are seekers of the truth, goodness, justice. It brings missionaries to live in the midst of the despised and the outcast, it challenges missionaries to step away from their western "lugar social" (social vantage point) to view the world through the eyes of the poor, the privileged ones of the Kingdom. This Kingdom vision demands solidarity with those deemed to be of little or no worth, and the promotion of their rights as God's children.

"This commitment implies struggle and victory over evil and sin, it starts from ourselves and leads us to embrace the mystery of the cross. Thus does the church direct us toward the Kingdom and that perfect communion of all people in God."  
(Dialogue and Mission # 25)

"False Paths"? These are the roads which evangelization will explore more and more in the future. Some still claim, however, that these are false paths and that they will lead missionaries astray. The north African Bishops disagree. They wrote in 1979:

"The Kingdom of God is not attained only through baptism; it exists wherever men and women seek the full attainment of their true vocation, wherever love is shown, whenever communities are created in which love is taught and instilled, wherever the poor are treated as persons, wherever justice is promoted, peace fostered, truth and goodness allowed to favor human growth."

Justice and Peace The missionary obligation to promote the Kingdom of God connotes a commitment to justice and peace and the rejection of all that constitutes the "opposition" (anti-kingdom) to this (injustice, oppression, war, death, poverty, destruction of the eco-system of the world). It is not enough for the church merely to applaud those who succeed in denouncing opponents of the Kingdom, the

Church must have the courage and strength to stand for ever greater social change, for peace and disarmament wherever and whenever peace, freedom, and human rights are threatened. The demands of solidarity and love "presupposes a political community which extends beyond national boundaries" (EJFA 258). The church must also courageously support those lay persons who oppose social and political injustice. K. Rahner says that it seems that whenever the laity begin to take a critical stance in the world, the church "becomes nervous, preoccupied and runs for the safety of the sacristy" (op.cit.p. 95).

The prophetic role of the church and its credibility are so closely entwined that, were the church to lose its prophetic stance, it would also lose its relevance in the world consciousness. A church closed-in on itself, more concerned about its own privileges than for the promotion of human development is unworthy of the name "church". Church in fact means "calling", "mission", "outreach", being sent as a response to world expectations of salvation.

Openness to the World. Since the church is the servant of the Kingdom it must be attentive to avoid the pitfalls of clericalism, idolatrous self-complacency, integralism, which impede its openness to the world. Like a poor, humble servant, following Mary's example, the church is to listen and respond to the needs of humankind. The world constantly reminds the church that many issues still demand and await attention:

- \* problems of the inner city, youth, women, the unchurched..
- \* world economics, the new economic/political order..
- \* nuclear threat to world peace.. warfare
- \* need to safeguard the rights of minorities (eg. indios)
- \* the preservation of our ecological environment...

We are not here this afternoon to find solutions but, we must recognize these as authentic mission concerns. Solutions may be sought within the context of the Kingdom: the Kingdom preaches justice and equality (cf. Rom 14, 17 and Mt 5,6), solidarity and sharing; it opposes "sinful structures" (SRS 36) which stand for the anti-kingdom, - non-truth, non-freedom, non-justice, non-peace, non-love. Well do the U.S. Bishops point out the underlying connection existing between their mission message and that of the two pastorals on "Peace" and "Economic Justice" (NCCB # 6-7)

The salvific power of the Kingdom alone, present in the risen Christ, confers strength and hope to resist that "regal consciousness" so as to follow the "prophetic imagination" spoken of by Bruggemann (cit. in Schneiders, *New Wineskins*, NY pp 270). The Kingdom will win out eventually, it will blossom forth fully, it will bring what has been initiated to completion and transform the world by perfecting our poor missionary initiatives. Only then will mission challenges cease; all will be gathered together under God, so that He might be "all in all". (1 Cor 15, 18)

#### FORMATION FOR MISSION IN THE NINETIES SOME OBSERVATIONS

These remarks are obviously directed primarily to those who are called and will work directly together with the local church in mission.

Cross Cultural. Preparation for this "world centered" mission apostolate requires a formation which is both open and sensitive to the world and all its problems. Formation in a cross cultural milieu, like that of Catholic Theological Union (CTU) is imperative and essential. Such experiences are privileged moments, particularly beneficial to those eager to learn. They provide a formation to intercultural dialogue, mutual cooperation, acceptance of the other without any overtones of superiority or inferiority. Mission today and moroso tomorrow, expects and requires such basic qualities and attitudes of its personnel. In times like ours when vocation numbers are reduced, we may be tempted to lower the standards of formation demands and take the well troden path. This would prove to be a grave error, it would reflect shortsightedness on our part in evaluating the motives and capabilities moving individuals to become truly persons with a "universal spirit" open to the world.

International/Inter-racial: Forward looking programs for mission should not be conditioned by contingent necessity, but freely choose to establish and foster international formative and mission communities. Such communities can offer the proof of what we preach: the new fraternity of the Kingdom of God, the new family, communities where people from north and south can live together despite diversity of national origins and socio-political differences.

Likewise we should explore courageously the possibilities of creating inter-racial communities, favor the establishment of religious and apostolic communities composed of religious, priests and laity, and examine possibilities of intercongregational communities. Mission today requires specialized and competent people, often exceeding the possibilities of each individual congregation. I believe that the history of CTU itself offers us a valid witness to such possible cooperation.

Clerical - Lay - Religious Formation must be open-ended and accessible to all: those preparing for priesthood, for religious life candidates, but also for laity called to share in church mission. Thus will mission, once it allots greater space to the laity and non-clerical religious, discover the awesome impact of witness testimony which is often obscured today by forms of ecclesiastical power.

Small Communities Formation to mission must address itself to community living, the quality of which demands greater attention also. Small communities located in the midst of over-populated crowded urban areas provide mission with an incisiveness, often not fully appreciated and more frequently opposed. This lived presence among the poor deserves support. Religious women have been the trailblazers in this initiative of establishing small communities in the midst of the poor. The path may not be easy, nor is it necessarily indicated for all, but it certainly seems to be a most valid road to follow. It also has the unconditioned support of the Conference of Latin American Religious. This experience and new way of living one's consecration to God has already produced ample fruit - a new mission spirituality of incarnational solidarity and preferential option for the poor. It may be asked why such communities have not yet been established in Asia and Africa. Perhaps it is because this process presupposes a different kind of church having greater freedom and openness, and a particular type of formation.



Continuing Formation Since we are living in a time of transition and of discovering new ways of being missionaries, ongoing formation is important so that personnel may be re-tooled for new challenges and revised apostolic methods.

It is well to focus attention on the specific charism of a missionary and set priorities which respond to church/world expectations more than to the internal needs of the mission congregation.

Ongoing formation for mission should allow for biblical and theological reflection and be attentive to the challenges of moral theology, human sciences, and the situation of our world.

Contemplative When we state that human promotion and liberation are integrating component parts of evangelization, we have to guarantee the spiritual and contemplative aspects of mission also. We do this to strike a balance in the socio-political field as well as for a "missionary" purpose. We are called to discover the "seeds of the Word", the hidden presence of God in history. This depends on our ability to read historic events in the light of faith. This contemplative dimension is all the more necessary in the formation and life of those called to live with people who follow other great religions. We need people detached from money and power; individuals capable of discovering the "seeds of the Word", the presence of God in history; those able to accompany others in their search for God; persons with a deep spirituality and attuned to inter-religious dialogue.

Corresponsibility In 1974 the African Collaboration Meeting Commission of the Union of Superiors General published a document: "Evangelization in Corresponsibility". This paper speaks about the new and changed mission situation in Africa today and it mentions some of the requisite qualities foreign missionaries should possess. Missionaries must believe in their mission vocation, recognize, appreciate and accept cultural/national diversity, adapt to less efficient work methods than in the past, promote the local adaptation of the African churches. It admonishes missionaries not to be disheartened when they are assigned to secondary and subordinate roles, not to distance themselves from the local church. Their cordial, at times critical, contribution is still needed. Missionaries should be convinced that they still have a role to play. The new situation makes providential change possible. They must be prepared to avoid the temptation of seeking the limelight.

Bishop James E. Walsh of Maryknoll wisely wrote: "To be a missionary is to go where you are not wanted but needed, and to stay there until you are wanted but not needed." These are indeed words of wisdom for missionaries everywhere and they ring true today as well. Thank you.

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## THE BREAD OF LIFE

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Sara Grant, RSCJ

I have belonged since 1972 to an ecumenical community, embracing different faiths as well as different Christian Churches. At the deepest level, not being allowed to have full intercommunion makes very little sense to us.

The Christians among us share not only the same basic faith, but the same Eucharistic faith - Catholic, Anglican and Methodist though our origins may be. At present, all of us communicate when the celebrant is a Roman Catholic priest, but at the weekly celebration according to the rite of the Church of North India the Catholic members communicate from the Reserve - this at the suggestion of our own bishop, who was deeply concerned to help us, but felt he could not give permission for full intercommunion. We therefore place the ciborium on the altar just before the "Our Father" and then say a prayer composed at the request of the bishop of the Church of North India who was our visitor at the time: "Father, we thank you for the union of mind and heart which you have created among us by the gift of your Spirit: with your Son we pray that full and visible union may soon be established among us and all Christians, as you will and by the means you will. Amen."

This is always said with deep feeling. We know that this is at best a penultimate solution, but at least we feel it is honest. It has several times had a very powerful impact on Christians who have never before fully realised what the division between our Churches really means.

The Wider Ecumenism This is not the whole of our saga, however. As I said, we are ecumenical in the widest sense, and, not infrequently, members of other faiths who share our life-style, and feel completely at home because it is fully Indian, want to share our worship also. If they are present at the Eucharist, they sometimes want to receive communion.

What does one do about this? And what do you make of the extremely intelligent and well-educated young Hindu couple who were deeply hurt when they came to Mass with us and were offered a flower at the time of communion (a practice well understood in India as a sign of the grace and friendship of God)? "We were about to receive the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ", they told us, "and cut!" (with a vigorous and disdainful gesture), "Someone offered us a flower!" No explanation based on the need for official Christian initiation (baptism) or anything else had the slightest effect. "There is one Mystery", they said, "beyond all name and form, which men call by many names. And in this place, access to the Mystery is through Jesus Christ. And we belong to this community!"

Baptism - Cultural alienation Paradoxically, for historical, sociological and psychological reasons, all connected, baptism is for many sincere devotees of Christ in India an almost insuperable obstacle to full membership of a christian community -

not through any fault of their own, but rather through the wellintentioned but misguided policies of our ancestors in the faith. The very word "baptism" suggests to most Hindus an intrinsic alienation from all that they rightly treasure in their spiritual and cultural traditions, including very often effective membership of their own family and community. Humanly speaking it seems almost impossible to change this situation. In many cases, however, these blocks do not seem to exist in relation to the sharing of the Eucharist. This is something the Church needs to ponder very seriously in these days, when we have become much more sensitive to the human realities of those to whom the Gospel is to be brought.

Participation in the Lord's Supper Could we envisage a revised form of pedagogy to Christ, in situations which seem to demand it, where participation in the Lord's Supper, the "showing forth of his death until he comes", would be the initial stage of incorporation into the community of his followers and baptism would be reserved for a later stage, as the expression of a definitive initiation into the mystery of his life, death and resurrection, into newness of life in God and a commitment to live by his Spirit as a core member of the Christian community which we call the Church? The Eucharist could then truly become an easily accessible sign, extremely intelligible to the men and women of our time, of the banquet at the end of all the ages when all the nations of the earth, in all their rich variety, will be transformed into one by the all-pervading power of the Spirit. In India especially, this symbolism of a meal which unites people of all communities, castes and religious backgrounds is increasingly understood and valued, and is a desperately needed sacramental sign - in the strict sense of effecting what it signifies - of the healing of this sadly divided nation and of humanity as a whole.

John 3 and John 6 If this seems a very outlandish suggestion, perhaps we should reflect that even in the Acts of the Apostles the Spirit did things that took the early Church by surprise; one thinks of Peter on his rooftop at noon, and the Spirit falling on the unbaptised (Acts 10, especially vv.44 ff.). It may be argued that this did not lead to any very widespread practice of confirmation before baptism, but I am not necessarily advocating any universal change. Perhaps we should simply read the New Testament with fresh eyes in the light of our own very different social and cultural situations, and ask ourselves, for example; whether we have not tended to absolutise John 3 on the necessity of baptism in water and the Spirit if a man is to enter into the Kingdom of God, at the expense of John 6, to the effect that if one does not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, one cannot have life in him. In fact of course the Church has absolutised neither, despite occasional appearances to the contrary, always knowing that "God is not bound by the sacraments", as the old adage has it; but maybe the Church has not always been aware of the full extent of its own freedom.

Groundswell of Desire What is the Spirit saying to us today through this desire for intercommunion? It seems almost impossible not to believe that it is the Spirit who is behind this great groundswell of desire and the growing recognition in most unexpected places of the "breaking of the bread" as an efficacious sign of human koinonia, communion.

Many people would probably be alarmed by the radical questions the Benedictine Henri Le Saux asked himself nearly two decades ago: "Is not the Eucharist an open sacrament? - open to every believer - that is, to anyone who is committed to the service of the human koinonia and recognises in the Eucharist the sign of this koinonia? Is it necessary for this 'believer' to give to this sign-symbol the name of Christ, at least in the theological formulation made explicit in the course of centuries in the Church?" He proposed these questions tentatively, in his private notes, and they should be read in that perspective, and not as an incentive to precipitate action, but they should surely be taken as a goad to deep and serious pondering on what we understand by unity of faith in the light of the Lord's own words: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father", not to mention the whole scenario of the judgment in Matthew 24.

We need to see this whole question of the Eucharist in the context of a world bent on destroying itself through nuclear war, famine, disease and crime, and yet here we are, engaged in our little fratricidal battle over organic unity or unity of belief as condition or consequence of shared participation in the Eucharist.

Union in Gospel Values Reminded by the paragraph from Vatican II's decree on ecumenism (1.2) perhaps we ordinary members of the Church, especially those of us who live, as it were, on the frontiers of Church and Kingdom, need to take more seriously our responsibility to feed in to "those who have received... the sure charism of truth... our own intimate sense of these spiritual realities", and especially of the deep union we experience with many of those who are not Catholics, or even Christians, who yet live by the values of the Gospel and are wholly committed to the love and service of their fellowmen and women, even to the risking of their own lives, and draw strength and courage from the Lord's example. Does intellectual agreement on a common formulation of what we believe about the Eucharist really constitute a more important or compelling justification for receiving it?

Again, I am not advocating wild or irresponsible innovation, still less disregard for legitimate authority in the Church; but I do not see how we can be faithful to that authority as it is expressed in Vatican II unless we allow the realities among which we live touch our minds and stir us into the profound and prayerful rethinking urged on us by the council itself. As the decree on ecumenism says (1.4), "let everyone in the Church, according to the office assigned to them, preserve a proper freedom in the various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in the variety of liturgical rites and even in theological elaborations of revealed truth. In all things let charity prevail. If they are true to this course, they will be giving an ever richer expression to the authentic catholicity and apostolicity of the Church." One might also surely add, "and a strong boost to her evangelical credibility", not least among the millions in India on whom so far the real message of the Gospel has had little or no impact.

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48 Great Peter Street, London SW1P 2HB.

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## EVANGELIZATION: POPULAR RELIGIOSITY

Villa Cavalletti: April 11 - 15, 1989

### FOCUS OF THE SEMINAR

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The Seminar could focus on three areas: a right understanding of popular religiosity, a socio-cultural and religious analysis of the same, and a reflection on its place in the project of evangelization as inculturation, dialogue and liberation. A good starting point may be Evangeli nuntiandi 48 and Puebla 444-469.

Everyone knows the phenomena we refer to when we speak of popular religiosity: pilgrimages, devotions, sacred times and places, ritual and ascetic practices, symbols, etc.

Customarily one tends to view them in a condescending manner either as opposed to the 'official' liturgy or as different from the religion of the cultural and religious elite. Recently one sees a more positive assessment of it as the religion of the poor and the oppressed as opposed to the religion of the rich and the powerful. How can we look at it and evaluate it in itself as the religion of the people? Do not more developed forms of religion have their roots in it? Is there not a popular dimension in each one of us?

How do we understand popular religiosity and its place in the life and culture of the people? The power of symbol and its roots in human natural and socio-cultural conditions of existence have to be explored. It can be alienating. It can also be prophetic and inspirational. It can be a means of exploitation. It can also be a force for liberation. What are the criteria for discernment and animation?

Does popular religion disappear with the onset of secularization in the modern world? Or does it take new forms like gnosis, spiritism? How do we understand the New Religious Movements? Can we say that there is no popular religion in Europe and America?

In the project of building up the Kingdom through evangelization, how can we assess the role of popular religiosity? How can we tap its potential? How can we enter into an authentic dialogue with it, without marginalising it? How can we enable the people to live their religious life meaningfully in view of the Kingdom? Are the people in the 'secularized' part of the world being starved of popular symbolic expressions of religion? How can we mediate between and integrate the popular and the elite, the popular and the official, the popular and the powerful?

### Resource Persons

Mgr. Samuel Ruiz is bishop of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico for over 25 years. He had a key role in the Medellin and Puebla Conferences.

He is fluent in all five Indian (Mayan) languages spoken in his diocese. Respectful of cultural diversities, he is very much involved in the diocesan process of empowering for lay ministry. He is known in the diocese as "Tatic Obispo" (Our father bishop) and is recognised as a prophetic figure in Latin America.

Sidbe Sempore, OP. is from Ouagadougou (Burkina, Faso) in West Africa. Theological studies in France, Austria and Switzerland; diploma of the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem; teaches and conducts theological and biblical research in Benin, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast, has published articles and studies on Afro-Christian Churches (see Popular Religion in Africa: Benin as a Typical Instance in Concilium, August, 1986).

Jyoti Sahi is an artist and theologian. Founder of an Indian School of Art for Peace (INSCAPE) at Vishram, Silvepura, Turbanahalli, Bangalore, where he lives with his family and a group of artists.

Christine Weizsäcker is a wife and mother of five children; a biologist, graduate of Freiburg and Edinburgh universities; a member of the State Scientific Council on consumer products. She is personally involved in environmental and peace movements; member of a group preparing a submission on Genetic Engineering for the State Government; on the organising Board of the Kirchentag and participant in the Katholikentag - the popular annual celebrations of the Protestant and Catholic Churches held on alternate years in Germany.

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**REMINDER**

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SEDOS BULLETIN

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