

SEDOS

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25 years in mission 1964-1989

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MISSION:
from Vatican II
into the coming decade

General Assembly 1989

SEDOS - Via dei Verbiti, 1 - 00154 ROMA - TEL.: 5471350
servizio di documentazione e studi - documentation and research centre
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NEWS

SEDOS NEW MEMBERS

MARIST SISTERS We welcome the Marist Sisters to membership of SEDOS. The Superior General is Sr. Bridget Burns. Their address is via Aurelia 292, 00165 Rome; (Tel. 633814).

DAUGHTERS OF MARY AND JOSEPH We welcome also the Daughters of Mary and Joseph (DMJ) to membership of SEDOS. The Superior General is Sr. Joan Roddy. Their address is via Rivarone 100, Int. 9; (Tel. 68.05.629).

COMING EVENTS

CHRISTIAN - MUSLIM DIALOGUE

AT SEDOS: DECEMBER 15, 16.00 hrs.

LOCAL CHURCH:
PRACTICES AND THEOLOGIES

SEDOS 1990 RESEARCH SEMINAR
VILLA CAVALLETTI, March 20 - 24

RESOURCE PERSONS

IVONE GEBARA	- BRAZIL	EFOE J. PENOUKOU	- BURKINA FASO
TERESITA WEIND	- USA	FELIX WILFRED	- INDIA

SEDOS SECRETARIAT WILL REOPEN on JAN. 8, 1990

WE WISH ALL OUR READERS A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND GOD'S BLESSING
IN THE NEW YEAR.

MISSION FROM VATICAN II INTO THE COMING DECADE

Michael Amaladoss, SJ

The Second Vatican Council inaugurated a paradigm shift in the theology of mission. One could schematize the change as a movement from 'the missions' to 'the mission' and then on to 'evangelization'. Before the Council one spoke of the missions as territories where the Church had not yet been firmly planted. So missionaries went out to do so. Mission was seen as Church extension.

The Council Searching for a theological foundation, the Council rooted mission in the Trinity. "The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary", it said, "since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Ad Gentes, 2). The whole Church is on mission everywhere, though the concrete tasks might vary according to circumstances of time, space and need. Other documents of the Council also contributed perspectives that led to a development of the theology of mission in the succeeding decade. The document on other religions spoke of God as the common origin and end of all peoples. The document on mission referred to the 'seeds of the Word' in other religions. The Constitution on the Church in the modern world said that the salvific action of God reaches out to all peoples in ways unknown to us. It also pointed to the autonomy of the secular world with which the Church is called to dialogue. The Decree on Religious Freedom upheld the primacy of conscience and the visibility and social nature of its pursuit of truth. The Constitution on the Church spoke of Church as the sacrament of unity of all peoples and the beginning of the Reign of God.

New Perspectives In the 25 years after the Council, experience in a post-colonial world, the awareness of being a world-Church and theological reflection have led to the emergence of new perspectives in mission theology and praxis. The SEDOS seminar on the Future of Mission saw inculturation, inter-religious dialogue and liberation as integral dimensions of mission. It also pointed to the growing importance of the local Churches in the process of mission. Inculturation is seen as the task not only of the younger Churches, but also of the older ones faced with secularization and modernity. One speaks of re-evangelization of a de-christianized society. A certain legitimacy is recognized in other religions in the plan of God, especially after the symbolic event of Assisi in October 1986, when the Pope came together with leaders of other religions to pray for peace. Inter-

religious dialogue focuses then not only on mutual understanding, but on a common experience of God and collaboration in the promotion and defence of common human and spiritual values. Liberation demands an option for the poor, a call to conversion of individuals and social groups and work for the change of unjust and oppressive structures. There has also been a growing awareness of mission in and to six continents. Every local Church is responsible for its own mission and co-responsible for the mission of all other local Churches. Mission ad gentes, called 'first proclamation' by Evangelii Nuntiandi, is now everywhere. Mission ad extra or 'foreign mission' is more and more seen as collaboration in mission.

A Paradigm Shift Reflecting on these new developments in the theory and praxis of mission, theologians have proposed a paradigm shift. The focus of mission is not the Church, but the Reign of God: the Church is indeed to be built up, but as the servant of God's Reign. The mystery of God's action, in Christ and the Spirit, reaches out to the whole world in ways unknown to us and the Church is called to serve this mystery in collaboration with all people of good will. The fulfillment of the plan of God is in the future and the Church, in company with others, is on pilgrimage. While the Reign of God will be fully realized only on the last day and will be God's gratuitous gift, it is also our task and we are called to contribute to its building up in history through creative development and through struggle for liberation from oppressive structures. The interplay of the freedoms of God and of the human person in the process of salvation is a factor for pluralism in history and in the world. Therefore the concrete task of mission in a particular situation has to be discerned carefully. Today, mission without mystery is oppressive.

A Different Point of View Looking back again at this history of the development of theology with regard to mission, in the context of contemporary experience, I am asking myself whether we do not need to take another step to meet the challenges of the next decade. Before the Council, the theology of mission was done by the missionary from his/her point of view. One needed to find meaning in what one was doing and this was done in the light of the vision of the world and of theology at that time. This was a view from the centre to the periphery. The Council and the post-conciliar period brought a welcome deepening and broadening of perspectives. But the approach was from above, from the Trinity, conceptual and abstract. Scholastic theologians delight in dealing with universal concepts. Mission is everywhere and every one is on mission. It is true that a greater attention is paid to the reality of the world: its cultures, religions and the poor. But when mission is everything, I think that it loses in focus what it gains in breath. This stage in the reflection has brought to us many new and rich elements. Perhaps it is now time to look at them from a different point of view.

I would like to specify this new point of view as looking from the periphery and from below. From the periphery: that is, as an observer from the Third World, the younger Churches, which in the eyes of many still represent objects of mission. I am also looking at the situation as an Indian. Someone from Africa, Latin America or elsewhere in Asia may look at it differently. From below: that is, approaching mission not conceptually, but questioning it from the experience of contemporary reality. In doing this I am only highlighting elements that are present

in the ongoing reflection on mission. For instance, when I consider mission as inculturation, inter-religious dialogue and liberation, I want to ask a lot of questions. Sharing them with you will be one way of evoking this new point of view.

Some Questions

Cultures Inculturation as an integral dimension of mission is described as the incarnation of the gospel in a particular culture. When a group encounters the gospel and changes its attitudes and manner of behaviour, this change finds expression in its way of life: its symbols and art, its spirituality and celebration, its social relationships. If the group is not prevented from doing so such cultural expression of the gospel is a natural, creative process. Conversion of this group of people is mission. But I do not see why their expression of the gospel in their own cultural forms should be considered mission. A local Church in trying to be itself is not doing mission. The many factors that prevent it from being itself are not mission problems. A missionary who comes from outside the culture may have difficulty in the necessary process of acculturation: learning the language, adapting to the living conditions, etc. These may be problems for the missionary. They are not problems for mission.

The gospel is on mission to a culture precisely when it is counter-cultural. When the gospel raises its prophetic voice against what is sinful and limited in a culture then it is doing mission. Such mission may suffer from over-inculturation. St. Paul was being a missionary when he proclaimed that in the risen Christ all were equal so that there were no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. But when he went on to exhort slaves to obey their masters or to forbid women to speak in the Church, he was being a practical man of his time, not a missionary.

Other Religions When we had a negative view of the other religions as a whole, though recognizing the presence of good and holy elements in them, then the other religions were objects of mission. They eventually had to be done away with. But the situation changes when we acknowledge a certain legitimacy in the other religions as elements in the plan of God. In a multi-religious society, people can live together in harmony only if they understand each other. But an inter-religious dialogue that is devoted to the mutual understanding and removal of prejudices, however necessary, does not seem to be mission. It should be the normal way of life. But religions do engage in mission when they challenge each other's limitations and lack of response to God. They are also doing mission when together they play a prophetic role in society in the promotion and defence of common human and spiritual values. Then they are acting as servants of God's own mission in the world.

The Poor To the poor the gospel comes as the good news of liberation.

The Church is called to struggle for justice in the world taking the side of the poor. But the focus of the struggle for justice with the poor is to struggle for the change of unjust socioeconomic, political, cultural and even religious structures. One cannot change these sinful structures without converting the sinners who are responsible for them, because these structures are not impersonal. One can of course witness to Christian love through catering to the needs of the people and offering them development assistance. But it seems to me that

the real objects of mission in such a situation are the people responsible for the structures of oppression.

WHAT IS MISSION ?

I feel, therefore, that in speaking of mission in a global way as inculturation, inter-religious dialogue and liberation we are losing its precise focus. It is true that everything we do can be relevant to the building up of the Reign of God. But what have we gained by making everything mission? I think that we have to rediscover mission as primarily prophecy. The Melbourne Mission Congress of the World Council of Churches said:

Proclamation is always linked to a specific situation and a specific moment in history. It is God's good news contrasted with the bad news of that specific situation.

I think that this is a good criterion for evaluation when we seek to determine what is mission in a particular situation. Mission is a call to conversion. When Jesus began his mission, he said: "The time is fulfilled, and the reign of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1,15) His teaching and his parables challenged his hearers to a decision. Even his miracles were not just acts of compassion, but symbolic acts that provoked reflection on his person and his message. He preached the gospel to the poor; but he also challenged the rich, the wise, the powerful. That is why he went to his death. Should we not recover this prophetic dynamism of mission?

Contemporary Challenges to Mission What are the sinful situations in the world today that demand the prophetic proclamation of the Gospel? For reasons of convenience, let me keep to the culture-religions-justice scheme, though we shall see how inter-twined they are. My aim is not to make an exhaustive list, but to point to a few highlights.

Cultural Sphere

From a cultural point of view, I have three concerns: inequality, consumerism and violence. Paul proclaimed the equality of all human beings in the risen Christ. But we are far from having realized it even within the Church community. In the world there is so much discrimination based on race, caste, sex, religion, nationality, colour, ethnicity, etc. Inequality is all the more painful and oppressive, because most human groups today proclaim the ideal of a democratic society based on the individual rights and dignity of every human person. Discrimination can take many subtle forms that are demeaning to the dignity of the person concerned.

One often hears about the secularization of modern culture. Secularization has a positive side to it in so far as it promotes a differentiation between the social institutions, like religion, politics, economics, culture, etc. In its negative aspects one speaks of the disappearance of religion and of the spread of unbelief. I think that the people have not become less religious, but they have no time and desire for the practice of religion. It is not an intellectual crisis of belief, but a moral crisis of desire. Science and technology can be used

or abused. People have chosen to abuse them in the pursuit of pleasure and plenty. There is always the desire for more. Selfishness leads to individualism and to competition. Collective selfishness oppresses the poor. A materialistic attitude to life and the world leads to the erosion of human and spiritual values and eventually to alienation and meaninglessness.

Unbridled competition and alienation lead to violence. One does violence to oneself in the form of drugs in an effort to escape boredom and failure in the contest of life. Selfish pursuit of pleasure leads very easily to violence against others to meet one's own needs. Collectively this takes the form of war. The flourishing arms industry is an evidence of this ongoing violence in human society. A violent person has no respect for the other. Violence is an indication of the breakdown of community structures. It is the manifestation of the loss of hope. It is the fruit of a life without love. Humanity today also violates nature. The unbridled exploitation and plunder of nature ultimately leads to the destruction of nature itself, and with it, of humanity.

Religious Sphere

In the sphere of religion we are faced with two kinds of challenges: fundamentalism and communalism. Fundamentalism is the reaction of a person whose (religious) securities are threatened. It is one way of fighting alienation and loss of meaning. One holds on fanatically to the truths one has. One does not want to question them for fear of losing them and with them one's bearings in the moral world. Fundamental groups are found in all religions today. They tend to be aggressive proselytisers and intolerant even of their own co-religionists.

Communalists think that because they share the same religious belief they have the same economic and political interests. Communalism uses religious sentiment and emotion for political and economic ends. It is often inspired by a small elite in pursuit of their own power, but sways a whole multitude. In one sense, fundamentalism and communalism are not really religious problems. They have to be tackled at the social and political levels. But we could also counter them by the promotion of authentic religion, open to the world and to history, in dialogue with other believers and aware of its prophetic role in society and by encouraging the autonomy of the secular in its own sphere.

Justice Sphere

The promotion of justice poses a particular type of challenge to the very identity and self-awareness of the Church. On the one hand, the Church has to be involved in the social and political life of the people. On the other, the Church should keep its distance in order to be able to challenge the world prophetically. I do not think that making the Church the preserve of the clergy and assigning the world to the Laity will solve the problem. The Church as an institution, unlike Hinduism or Buddhism for example, enjoys a public presence and voice. At the same time its very institutional character may lead it to become self-defensive or to compromise, thus losing its prophetic voice. A strong foreign presence in the local Church also seems to inhibit prophecy.

Our option for the poor may sometimes lead us to concentrate only on economic poverty. For many people living poorly, unless they are in absolute misery, poverty may seem less of a problem than living without human dignity and freedom. Freedom can be denied in many different ways. What strikes our eyes, of course, is the lack of political freedom in totalitarian regimes of the right and of the left. But people can be enslaved in so many ways, even in the so called democratic societies: to money, to the machine, to bureaucracy, to prejudice, to ideology, to media-promoted disinformation. Promotion of inner and outer freedom so that people can be agents of their own transformation and growth is a real challenge today.

The Church claims to be the sacrament of the Reign of God. In the early Church there was an attempt to construct ideal communities, though there were difficulties as, for example, in Corinth. When the Church began to conform to the world, the monks and later also the religious took up the challenge of building model communities. They cannot be an adequate model because eventually one has to quit the world in some way, especially through the vow of chastity. Today one speaks of basic ecclesial communities. But unless the Church seeks to provide a model and a vision of an alternate community, not only at the basic level, but also at national and international levels, its witness will be less credible. We are not just called to be prophets, but the sacrament and beginning of the Reign of God.

A Holistic and Global View A further step in our process of reflection is to see these and other challenges to mission holistically and globally. A holistic approach would see how much these challenges are interconnected. We cannot transform any culture unless we dialogue with other religions that also animate the culture and unless we can change the concrete socio-economic and political context that conditions people's lives and attitudes. Inter-religious dialogue should lead to a common prophetic voice in the growth of both culture and the world. A true liberation from oppressive socio-economic and political structures could hardly be achieved unless the people change their world-views and attitudes and draw inspiration and motivation from true religion. Therefore all these challenges have to be faced in an organic manner.

Both because of the communications revolution and because of increasing economic and political inter-dependance the challenges of mission have taken on a global character. Religious pluralism is a reality everywhere. Inter-cultural contacts and influences are increasing, promoted by pervasive and rapid media communication. Though different cultures may react to science and technology differently, the impact and some of the problems may be common. At the economic and political level the problems of the poor in the Third World have their roots in the First and the best way of helping them, besides making them self-dependent, is to influence the decision-makers in the First World.

Cross-cultural Mission Mission today has, therefore, international dimensions. This internationality is not merely geographic. It has deeper theological roots: the universality of the plan of God and the catholicity of the Church. Meditating on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, both Paul and John discover the universal extent of the mystery - the plan that God revealed in Jesus. While Paul speaks of the cosmic Christ who was at the beginning and in whom

all things will be united at the end, John speaks of the Word in whom all things were made and who unites all peoples in the very life of the Trinity. The role of the Spirit in this process of unification is also stressed by both. Since the Council the Church has spoken of itself as the sacrament and servant of unity. Recent documents of the Church end with appeals for collaboration among all peoples of good will.

The universal dimensions of the plan of God and of the service of the Church takes concrete form in the catholicity of the Church. Catholicity is not mere geographical universality. It is not merely called to become incarnate in each culture becoming authentic local Churches. All the local Churches are called to become a community in pluralism - a communion. As the Constitution on the Church says:

In virtue of this catholicity, the several parts bring their own gifts to one another and to the whole Church, so that the whole and its several parts grow by the mutual sharing of all and by a common effort towards the fullness of unity.

International mission is not therefore a tactic for the better placement of resources and personnel. It is the expression and demand of the catholicity of the Church.

In the context of each local Church being responsible for its own mission and co-responsible for the mission of all the Churches, internationality will take the form of mutuality in mission. This gives us a new perspective on mission ad extra. I think that we should speak today of cross-cultural mission. In practice this will be the responsibility of some people who hear a special call for it. One could rapidly list a number of conditions that seem essential for their success. They should not only be sent, but also asked for and accepted. They would probably go for specific jobs that require specific skills. They have to acculturate themselves - that is learn the language, adapt oneself to a new way of life, adjust to the climate, etc. - in order to be effective. They have a special role of mediation between the local Churches. To the local Church that receives them they bring the riches of the cultural expression of the gospel of their own local Church. In turn they carry back to the Church that sent them the riches that have experienced in the Church where they are working. If we understand this subtle interplay of the local and the foreign, one can wonder whether a community that is completely foreign in a place is really meaningful today, except in very special circumstances, to meet particular needs, for a particular time. Missionaries would go not only from the North to the South, but also from the South to the North.

Priorities If we look at mission in a global manner, there are needs and problems everywhere. Not only primary evangelization, but the ongoing challenge of the Gospel is needed everywhere. God may also inspire various people to different and particular tasks: work for human development, struggle for justice, cross-cultural mission, inter-religious dialogue, etc. But if we consider the various challenges of mission today and seek to prioritize them, I think that the most urgent problem is the moral one of consumerism and its consequent exploitative and oppressive structures. Commerce becomes supreme and everything else - religion, culture, politics, social relationships - becomes subservient to it. There is a loss of the sense of transcendence. People have no time for religion. They become slaves to machines. The discoveries of

science and the powers of technology are abused for selfish ends. The poor are becoming poorer. The facility of modern communications have made control and exploitation easier and faster. The concern for the common good and the attention to moral and spiritual values have broken down. An expanding individualism and competition undermine human relationships and community. Violence in all its forms is on the increase. Whole peoples are at the mercy of market forces.

The need of the time is for a spiritual humanism: humanism, so that people can become free and subjects of their own destiny; spiritual so that this destiny is inserted into the plan of God for the world.

Though this need for the gospel is everywhere, I think that it is particularly acute in the First World. As post-Christians their sensitivity to the challenges of the Gospel is blunted. From a global point of view the epi-centre and the key to the solution of most of the problems are in the First World. This is because of its economic and political and, in many places its cultural dominance due to the mass media. The elite of the First World also inspire and control, not to say corrupt, the economic and political elite of the Third. Therefore, if one can read the signs of the times and discern priorities, I wonder whether the privileged place and the most challenging for mission today is not the First World. Speaking to a group of Asians in April, 1947, Gandhi said:

If you want to give a message to the West, it must be the message of love and the message of truth... The West today is pining for wisdom. It is despairing of a multiplication of Atom bombs... It is up to you to tell the world of its wickedness and sin - that is the heritage your teachers and my teachers have taught Asia.

I should specify that Gandhi included Jesus among the Teachers of Asia. Gandhi's proposal is not less relevant today even though, not only Asia, but all people of good will are called to carry this message today.

Where there is growing indifference to religion, where there is a moral crisis of values, where one finds the roots of contemporary unjust and oppressive structures, there is a priority for mission today and tomorrow. I wonder whether, in a world that is becoming increasingly a global village, a re-evangelization of the Christian world may not be a more credible witness today to the rest of the world. Such an effort would also lead us to re-examine the cultural and historical structures in which we carry the challenge of the Gospel in our mission ad extra, especially if they have not had much success at home.

Conclusion Let me recall briefly the points I have made, by way of conclusion. I have proposed that we rediscover the specificity and relevance of mission as prophecy. With this as a criterion, we can discern the contemporary challenges of mission in the realm of culture, religion and justice. I have made my own list. I have pointed to the global nature of these challenges and evoked the need for mutuality in mission. Both the plan of God for the world and the catholicity of the Church as communion demand that mission today be mutual and cross-cultural. Briefly analysing the signs of the times, I have suggested a

double, but inter-linked, priority. From the point of view of global challenges, the consumerist and commercial culture, backed up by economic and political structures demand our attention. From a geographical point of view, the First World seems to be the place that needs a prophetic voice more urgently.

The Church today is called to commit itself to an international moral movement of peoples. It is in pilgrimage towards the Reign of God in the company of all peoples of good will. It has to be true to its own identity as the witness of the good news of Jesus, of his death on the Cross and of his resurrection. It has also to hear the call to be the servant of unity in the world. While being a community rooted in Jesus, it needs to have open frontiers, ready to dialogue with everyone. Opting for the poor, it must prophetically confront the unjust oppressor. In humility it has to be sensitive to mystery of the action of God in the world. It should be open to the creative newness of the Spirit. Its horizon is God's own mission of universal reconciliation, when God will be with God's people. Then God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." (Rev. 21,4)

N O T E S

1. Your Kingdom Come, 198.
2. Lutem Gentium, 13.
3. Communal Unity, pp. 579-580, quoted in Wm. Theodore de Bary (ed), Sources of Indian Tradition, Vol. II (New York, Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 273-274.
4. See T. K. John, "The Pope's 'Pastoral Visit' to India: a Further Reflection", Vidyajyoti 51 (1987) 58 - 66, especially p. 59.

25 YEARS IN MISSION, 1964-1989

HISTORICAL NOTES

SEDOS began in a humble and tentative way in 1964 with the coming together of nine societies who decided they needed a permanent secretariat to continue their Ad-hoc meetings. They were the following: African Mission Society, whose Superior General, Fr. Henri Monde, was the moving spirit, Assumptionsits, Capuchins, Divine Word Missionaries, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Marianists, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Scheutists and White Fathers. The first General Assembly of Superiors General was held at the White Fathers Generalate on 1.10.64. Fr. Volker, Superior General of the White Fathers was confirmed as the President of the group, Fr. Monde of the African Mission Society - as Vice President and Fr. Forree, as Treasurer. On the completion of his term as Superior General in May 1967 Fr. Volker was succeeded by Fr. Schutte, Superior General of the Society of the Divine Word Missionaries. He was responsible for commissioning an important Evaluation Report on the young organisation. This was carried out by Fr. Benjamin Tonna who later became the first Executive Secretary of SEDOS. It was Fr. Schutte who made available to SEDOS the spacious offices on the grounds of the Divine Word College which house the Secretariat to the present day. The generous gesture of the Divine Word missionaries has been of immense help to SEDOS down through the years.

Fr. Monde, Superior General of the African Missionary Society became President in January of 1969 when Fr. Schutte completed his term as Superior General. By that time there were 30 member Societies of Sisters, Brothers and priests.

The days following the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council were full of new hopes and questions. SEDOS grappled with these questions and organised a Theological Symposium to chart the path of mission in the post-Vatican period. Fr. Monde, in his address of welcome to the participants put the question bluntly:

It must be said, without equivocation, that the missionary institutes are preoccupied, worried and uncertain about the future of missions. This is not to indulge in pessimism. In a changing world which daily poses new problems, it is perfectly normal that the missionary world also should ask questions about its own function in this rapid and often radical evolution.

In effect the symposium's agenda became narrowed down to two central questions both of which were uppermost in the minds of missionaries: the precise value of non-christian religions as roads to salvation; the place of development work in missionary activity.

The 1970 Symposium dealt mainly with the "Why" of missions. Twelve years later another key event occurred in the history of SEDOS - the 1981 RESEARCH SEMINAR ON THE FUTURE OF MISSION. It dealt rather with the "How" of mission. The approximately one hundred participants were divided equally between resource persons and Superiors General of the SEDOS missionary Institutes. They agreed unanimously on an AGENDA FOR FUTURE PLANNING, STUDY AND RESEARCH IN MISSION. Fr. Gabriele Ferrari, Superior General of the Xaverian Missionaries and President of SEDOS at this Research Seminar, looking back to this Seminar writes:

"The ideas which emerged from it may now be found disseminated in the constitutions of many missionary and "non-missionary" institutes. SEDOS is and has been an extraordinary catalyst of the missionary energy of the Institutes and Orders engaged in Mission, a valid pointer which eight years after the seminar demonstrates the actuality of the intuitions of that event."

Looking back over the past 25 years there are certain aspects of SEDOS which seem to describe well its spirit. Gabriele Ferrari describes them as follows:

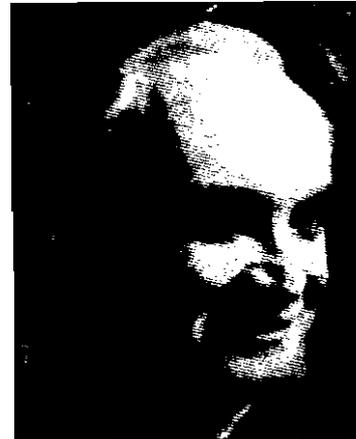
"If I had to synthesize briefly what the word SEDOS evokes in my spirit some years after the termination of my office I think I could summarize it in a few words:

The pleasure of common research, the freedom to express and communicate to others one's thoughts about the hopes and fears for our mission, the joy of being able to express these truths in which I believe with all my heart".

We share with you in the following pages reflections from some of the past Presidents, Vice Presidents and Executive Secretaries who were deeply involved in the work of SEDOS over the years. They comment on the "signs of the times" as they impacted on the work of SEDOS in its commitment to keep abreast of the changing aspects of mission.

THE EARLY YEARS

When I was called to serve in SEDOS in 1966, I understood the opportunity as an invitation to explore new ways in the evolving situations of the mid-sixties. I had just been through the powerful Vatican II experience as Director of the Centrum Coordinationis Communicationum de Concilio. I also belonged to a group of sociologists who were trying to apply their expertise to Church work. Now I would try to harness sociology to apply Vatican II to the Missions.



Benjamin Tonna
Executive Secretary 1966-75

1

By 1975, when I had finished my years with SEDOS I had become convinced of the hopeless gap between human resources and the saving enterprise. I had learnt that the world would not be saved by plans drafted by using sociology or some other social science to activate Vatican II theology and policy documents. I had experienced that this world was already being saved and was blessed by a very particular plan - a plan prepared by its own very special Saviour. I could help only if I joined His saving effort.

As I strove to do that I realized that sociology could help me locate and begin to read signs of the unfolding patterns of the Lord's plan of salvation. This happened to me when SEDOS became involved with China. Here was practically one-third of the human race apparently closed to missions. Mao Tse-tung was saving China, and here we were unable to do anything about it. At the same time we were becoming increasingly and painfully aware, thanks to the Council, that the Church was called to be existentially cross cultural. A crucial expression of this experience would be the China Missions. I remember that things came to a head, at least for me, when I was conducting a retreat for Maryknoll Missionaries in Hong Kong and I had to share with them my faith that God must have plans for China and that, already, He must be acting on them. We could expect to see some visible results of His work if we observed more closely what was happening around us. We could also seek to interpret what was happening assigns pointing to patterns of God's own way of saving China.

At that point the whole SEDOS documentation service took a turn which reflected a deeper view of reality. We began looking at the reports, statements and studies we had collected in light of the question: could the experiences and ideas they expressed be signs also of the way the Lord was activating His plans? Could patterns of these plans begin to emerge if we collected enough sign-laden facts? Here my sociology provided fresh help. It did not, of course, help me plan the salvation of the world but it did help me understand how the world was being saved. If I could share these findings with missionaries, I would be helping them work with the Lord in a creative response to the Lord's mandate in Mark: "Go...the Lord continued to work with them throughout

and confirm the message through the signs which accompanied them" Mk 16,20. Theology also became more helpful. Thanks to the Incarnation all aspects of the human condition could be considered as potential "loci theologici", arenas for God's saving power to act and, by implication, potential locations for signs of His action. Our problem was one of deciding where to start.

Major World Trends

We began by analyzing major world trends from this particular perspective. We soon became involved with United Nations agencies and N.G.O.'s. And when we decided that a specific trend was of special interest to missionaries, we would try to discern what was really taking place there. This happened for example, when we zeroed in on "Third World" urbanization and mission to the Cities. We tried to disentangle the patterns of salvation from what we saw developing there.

There were other world trends which we began to consider as particularly sign-prone. One was the exponential growth of the population in the mission countries, its concentration in a few megalopolises, and its increasing pressure on resources. Another sign of the times, was the independence movements in the southern hemisphere and the concomitant State nationalization of education, health and social services. Missionaries were heavily involved in this latter development and the crucial question became: "shall we adjust our own institutions or shall we serve in the public sector?"

In the sixties socio-economic development was still considered the key to the future of the emerging independent States. Analyzing this trend we discovered that, between us, we, the members of SEDOS could count on the largest single group of workers serving in the developing countries. We were asked to document the fact - and to read it as a sign - when we hosted an international conference on the contribution of Christians to the development of the newly emerging nations.

While the development trend did not produce the expected results, nation-building in the mission countries, however, began to gather momentum. We saw this again as a sign, inviting us to take a catholic view of Christ's Church seriously. We went back frequently to Ricci and to De Nobili in an effort to find out how to inculturate the gospel message in different situations.

But we did not restrict our search for signs to the area of the actual content and implications of these trends. We began to ask grass-root missionaries about their reactions to them. We patiently collected their experiences and their ideas, assuming that the Lord would also be acting on the same trends through them.

Our favourite hunting ground for signs soon became the missionary condition itself. How were missionaries at the grass-roots level reacting to the rapidly evolving situations generated by the population explosion, by rapid urbanization, socio-economic development, nation building and nationalization? What were they striving for and hoping to achieve? We became very curious not only about how they were interpreting their traditional roles but also about what they were inventing as a response to the realities they were facing.

I can recall my excitement when we began to realize that the experiences and ideas which we had patiently gathered from them tended to converge on certain patterns. One of these was the building of small Christian communities in Africa and South America. We were receiving reports of independent but analogous experiences of the phenomenon from all kinds of places. Once we caught the signal, we strove to follow it up by searching for similar patterns elsewhere.

It did not take us long to realize that the Church as *Communio*, proclaimed in *Lumen Gentium*, was emerging - right in the missions - through the phenomenon of small ecclesial communities. We began to encourage missionaries to steer in that direction. On the way, we read and followed the signs of the coming of the local churches and of the emergence of local theologies - often the result of a faith response to local situations, as happened with liberation theology.

Another pattern which we began to read as a sign was that of a comprehensive lay involvement. When we discovered missionaries desperately saving on their meagre allowances in order to finance training and full-time work for catechists we realized we had to move in this direction. We asked missionaries to consider building up lay catechist corps and to promote catechesis in its adult form - training for full Christian discipleship. Here it was the "implantatio" of *Ad Gentes* which, we learned, was coming to life. Lay involvement could not stop here. It had to grapple with justice and liberation issues. This was how the contemporary Church was coming to be, *defacto*, Light to the World, *Lumen Gentium*, by coming to terms existentially with the values of the Kingdom.

By the time I left SEDOS, in 1975, the Church had already focused on evangelization through its 1974 Synod. When *Evangelii Nuntiandi* was published, in 1975, we could take it as a confirmation that we had read the signs well: inculturation was the way the Incarnate Lord was saving our world.

Benjamin Tonna is at present parish priest of his native town of Rabat in the Republic of Malta. He is co-director with Brian P. Hall of the Omega Institute of the University of Santa Clara and author of Gospel for the Cities.

EXPANDING CONTACTS



2
Joan Delaney, MM
Executive Secretary 1976-80

One of the earliest SEDOS seminars I recall was on "The Ecumenical Aspects of Mission". This brought me into contact with the Secretariat for Christian Unity. Later the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC approached SEDOS and requested Roman Catholic involvement in the preparation for the CWME Melbourne Conference (1980). The theme was "Your Will Be Done". There were SEDOS sponsored seminars, and meetings and a prayer service undertaken by members of SEDOS both before and after the Conference. My appointment in 1984 as the Roman Catholic consultant on Mission to CWME by the Secretariat for Christian Unity was related to and grew out of this involvement with ecumenism in SEDOS.

Inculturation was one of the more popular topics in the 1976-80 period. Mission in Europe and the place of returning missionaries also preoccupied many of the members. A SEDOS Medical Sub-Committee ran a series of three lectures each year on topics such as natural family planning and primary health care. Sr. Francis Webster wrote a fascinating account of her attendance at the WHO meeting on primary health care held in the USSR. A series of meetings on South Africa helped to overcome the prejudice against those outside South Africa discussing South Africa, an attitude which seems incredible from the present point in time. At a joint EDUC-SEDOS meeting we had a discussion with some of the staff of the World Bank. They informed us that it was their first meeting with a religious group.

The role of women was only a minor topic of consideration in those days, yet it was taken for granted that the SEDOS Executive Committee would be made up of 50% men and 50% women. Considering that two thirds of the membership at the time came from men's Societies, I always regarded this as a very positive step.

China, Vietnam and the Middle East stand out in my mind as areas about which it was difficult to obtain information. They were topics on which Bulletin articles occasioned negative reactions. At least it proved the Bulletins were read!

The end of my term co-incided with the first steps in the planning of the SEDOS Research Seminar of 1981. "Mission in Dialogue" the account of the Seminar published by Orbis Books, was edited by two members of the Executive Committee - Father Joe Lang, MM and Sr. Mary Motte, FMM. This remains a valuable addition to missiological literature and did much to make SEDOS better known.

My time at SEDOS was an invaluable learning experience not just in knowledge gained but in witnessing what can be achieved by dedication and cooperation. This was evident in the faithful work of the staff, the unfailing support of Fr. Timmermans and Fr. Ferrari the two SEDOS Presidents with whom I collaborated and the members of the Executive Committee as well as the outstanding generosity of the SEDOS members.

Joan Delaney went to work at the Ishvani Kendra Documentation Centre in Poona, India. She is presently working in Geneva as Vatican Representative to the Commission for World Mission and Evangelization of the World Council.

TOWARD THE SEDOS RESEARCH SEMINAR 1981

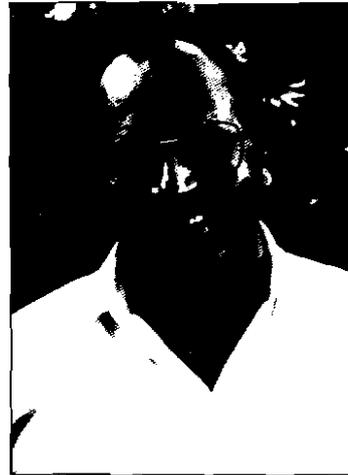
My three years as President of SEDOS were among the richest and most interesting in my missionary experience. Not only do I believe I took no time away from my Institute but I gained definite advantages both for myself and my work as Superior General.

The three-years of my presidency were marked by the preparation and celebration of an event which was to direct the future course of SEDOS and its Member Institutes for a long time to come. I refer to the ten-day Seminar which was held near Rome, at Villa Cavalletti, in March 1981. Much time was given to its preparation, to the choice of participants, to the study and development of the texts. I still remember with pleasure the Executive Committee meetings and those of the Steering Committee; the way we studied the Seminar themes in-depth and the hope and enthusiasm with which we worked. The time for these meetings was always taken from other engagements and from the little free time we had but it was given with joy to the cause of mission. The support of the Member Institutes was unfailingly whole-hearted.

We all felt that a new step in the history of mission was about to be set in motion. The questions that had preoccupied us since the 1971 SEDOS Seminar were changing and we were ready to explore new ones. It was now, the "how" rather than the "why" of mission to which we had to find an answer.

The 1981 Seminar was, in itself, an extraordinary experience of universality and missionary ecumenism. I have attended two Bishops' Synods and other ecclesiastical meetings, but none had the strength of that Seminar. The ideas which emerged from it may now be found disseminated in the constitutions of many missionary and non-missionary Institutes. I, in my capacity as President of SEDOS, often presented the themes resulting from the Seminar to missionary institutes in connection with their planning efforts.

SEDOS is and has been an extraordinary catalyst for missionary energy of the Institutes and Orders engaged in mission and a sign of their collaboration which could be increased. Eight years after the



Gabriele Ferrari, SX
President 1980-82

Seminar, the intuitions that emerged there still prove valid. Inculturation, liberation, dialogue and communion are ways open to everyone but which have not yet been fully explored. They are raised at every meeting on mission, but SEDOS in contrast with other organizations has taken, them seriously.

If I had to synthesize briefly what the word SEDOS evokes in my spirit some years after the termination of my office, I think I could summarize it in a few words: the pleasure of common research, the freedom to express and communicate one's hopes and fears for mission and the joy of being able to express those truths in which I believe with all my might.

Gabriele Ferrari completed twelve years as Superior General of the Xaverian Missionaries early in 1989. He is now spending a sabbatical year at the Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, USA.

IMPLEMENTING THE SEMINAR



4

Henry Heekeren, SVD
President 1983-85

The "signs of the times", as seen by the members of SEDOS and by the Executive Committee during the years of my presidency (1983-85), are best reflected in the Seminars on Mission which were held at Villa Cavalletti. The three Seminars which I describe here were only links in a chain of many relevant topics treated by SEDOS over the 25 years of its service to the universal mission of the Church.

In March 1983 our theme was "Dialogue in Mission". With the help of experts, and using a pastoral and experiential approach, the numerous participants began to see more clearly some basic criteria for authentic dialogue with other religions and traditions and to appreciate their importance in contemporary missionary enterprise. We realized that in proclaiming the good news of God's love in Christ, we must search for God's presence among all peoples, in a spirit of real dialogue at all levels of life. We became aware that this demands more humility and readiness to listen and to learn. This is imperative not only for us as missionaries but for all members of the Church.

In 1984, three years prior to the Synod on the Laity, our Seminar was on "Ministries in a Dynamic Local Church". We felt the urgency of listening to those who are leading us into the reality of new ministries, especially in the young Churches of the South and East, through their discovery of a new role and identity in the Church today. We became more acutely aware that a new definition of ministry is needed and that the relationship of new ministries to the traditional ones has to be clarified further. We felt that in this field Religious and Missionary Institutes should make their contribution daringly since they were

