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**SEDOS**

**BULLETIN**

# LOCAL CHURCH: Practices and Theologies

SEDOS SEMINAR  
March 20 - 24, 1990



15th April, 1990

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**SEDOS RESEARCH SEMINAR**  
**LOCAL CHURCH: PRACTICES AND THEOLOGIES**

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## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME OF THE SEMINAR

After the Second Vatican Council the Church has become aware of being, not only a world Church, but also a communion of local Churches. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences with their periodic meetings and statements, the Federation of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America in Medellin and Puebla, the Pastorals of the United States Conference of Bishops, the coming African Synod, the Council of European Bishops - not to speak of the various national Conference of Bishops - these are only a few indications of the Local Churches, at various levels, seeking to discover their identity and mission. This emerging awareness is also seen in the work of theologians, liturgists, and of the peoples themselves who are becoming assertive of their identities.

This emerging awareness and the experience and practices of the local Churches will be our starting point. What is the context in the world and in the Church of these new experiences? What are the elements of this new development? What are the situations and conditions that favour it? What are the difficulties and

even obstacles that it is encountering?

Such an analysis of this experience will lead us to reflect theologically on our understanding of the local Church and of the universal Church as a communion of Churches. Inculturation will be seen as a process that builds up the local Church. What are the conditions that promote an authentic inculturation? We can also explore the meaning and implications of catholicity.

Since the Church is mission, every local Church is on mission in its own situation. Only by becoming fully local can it play its prophetic role adequately. As the focus of mission is moving from the 'planting of the Church' to the 'building of the Reign of God', the mission of the local Church becomes wider not only with regard to the local situation and culture, but also with regard to the world and to other local Churches. We can speak of co-responsibility and mutuality in mission.

What are the implications for Mission Institutes of these new developments in the practices and reflections of the local Churches?

## A LOOK BACK TO THE SEMINAR

This seminar was a profound witness to the vitality of local Churches. The speakers from different continents reminded us forcefully that our understanding of the place of the holy has been irrevocably changed by the Second Vatican Council. It is re-located in the believing community.

### **Believing Communities**

We had glimpses of these believing communities during the seminar. They are found among the masses of the poor in Brazil whose over-riding

concern in life is to survive; among the Jesus-communities of varying degrees and levels in the cultural pluralism of India; among the communities of the Ivory Coast asking to be recognized as people of God in their authentic cultural roots and wishing to be liberated from seemingly eternal assistance from outside; and among the communities of North America "doing Eucharist" with a growing conscious and active participation, determined to carry the meaning of the Eucharist into the work and play of everyday.

## Participants

The Seminar was as stimulating as we had anticipated and even went beyond our expectations. Groups quickly formed their own believing communities where the holy was celebrated. In the wide variety of their cultural, national and racial differences participants shared a unique richness of mission experience. They came from all continents, from 24 different countries and 57 different mission societies and were almost equal in numbers of women and men.

## Return to the Theme of Local Church

This was the best attended SEDOS Research Seminar on Mission since the 1981 Seminar which drew up the Agenda for Future Planning and Research on Mission. Almost a decade later SEDOS has returned to the theme of the Local Church which was the context within which the 1981 Seminar was placed. Translations of the Seminar papers, in Spanish, French and Italian, are being sent to all SEDOS Members.

## Commitment to Action

The SEDOS President, Francesco Pierli, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries opened the Seminar with a short address on the significance of the theme. SEDOS Vice-President, Mary Slaven, Superior General of the Sisters of the Holy Family (Bordeaux) presided at the closing session. A highlight of this closing session was the Assembly debate on a proposed COMMITMENT TO ACTION by SEDOS Members which originated at the Annual General Assembly in December, 1989. A committee of five superiors general, mandated at the opening session, drew up proposals for action which emerged during the Seminar. The Assembly

endorsed unanimously the committee's proposals for action.

The Executive Committee is circulating these proposals to all SEDOS Members.

## A Farewell

This was the 5th SEDOS Research Seminar on Mission which Sister Helene O'Sullivan, Co-Director of SEDOS has helped to organize. It is also her last as she will be leaving SEDOS in July this year to return to Hong Kong where she worked for many years.

Fr. Jenkinson paid a special tribute to Helene. They have worked as a team in the Secretariat for the past nearly five years. Helene brought to SEDOS a fresh creative spirit which was manifested in new ideas and new ways of treating old ones. Her vision of mission, enriched by her experience in Hong Kong and in the Office of Social Concerns of the Maryknoll Sisters in New York was a major contribution to SEDOS. She has taken part wholeheartedly in a team-work approach to the work of all the departments of the Secretariat to which she was completely committed. The SEDOS Bulletin has been notably improved; the Documentation Center has been transformed with her help; her gracious good humored and welcoming presence has made the Secretariat a pleasant place to visit and a valuable source of information and guidance on mission to all those who called.

Fr. Jenkinson thanked the Maryknoll Sisters for having seconded Helene to SEDOS. SEDOS has been enriched by her being with us. We will miss her very much. He proposed a sincere vote of thanks and appreciation to Helene in his own name, in the name of the Secretariat and in the name of SEDOS Members.

The Assembly manifested its enthusiastic approval by giving Helene a long standing ovation.

## RESOURCE PERSONS ON LOCAL CHURCH

### IVONE GEBARA

Ivone Gebara has a degree in Theology from the Catholic University of Louvain and a doctorate in Philosophy from the Catholic University of Sao Paulo. She has been teaching Philosophy and Theology in the Institute of Theology of Recife for 16 years and for 12 years has been a member of a Team which forms young people for pastoral work in the Church of North-East Brazil. Each year Ivone gives a course in Christology at the Ecumenical Centre for Service in Popular Education in Sao Paulo. Every 2 years, she teaches a course at Lumen Vitae in Brussels. Ivone helps to run women's groups, and has published articles and books on women in the Church in Latin America. Orbis Books has published her most recent book *With Passion and Compassion*. Though living in Brazil she is a member of the Generalate Team of the Canonesses of St. Augustine.

### EFOÉ-JULIEN PENOUKOU

Efoé-Julien Penoukou was born in Benin (then Dahomey) in 1945; Doctorate in Theology and Anthropology and Masters in Political Sociology; professor at the Catholic Institute of West Africa (ICAO) at Abidjan in the Ivory Coast since 1979; dean of the faculty of theology there since 1985; consultant to the Pontifical Commission on Inter-religious Dialogue; Secretary of the Episcopal Theological Commission of the West African Region (CERAO); member of the editorial board of SPIRITUS; author of "Eglises d'Afrique" and contributor of articles to many reviews including SPIRITUS, CONCILIUM, LUMIERE ET VIE, AFRIQUE NOUVELLE etc.

### TERESITA WEIND

Teresita Weind, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, has been Liturgical Coordinator for the African American parishes in the diocese of Chicago. She studied at Mundelein College in Chicago and received her Masters of Theology degree in 1972. While studying she ministered with the community in St. Joseph Parish and San Marcello Mission on the north side of Chicago, in the Cabrini-Green Housing Project. Teresita is Pastoral Associate at St. Catherine's Parish near Chicago. Her natural gifts of voice and leadership in prayer have been called out in service toward groups gathering for retreats, reflection days, and prayer meetings. Her love for ministry with small groups challenges her in her parish and local church.

### FELIX WILFRED

Felix Wilfred was born in India in 1948 and ordained a priest in 1972. For the past fourteen years he has been teaching systematic theology in St. Paul's Seminary, Tiruchirapalli. He is a member of the Vatican's International Theological Commission and acting executive secretary of the Theological Advisory Committee to the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. He was president of the Indian Theological Association and has taught as visiting professor at the Universities of Münster, West Germany and Nijmegen, Holland. He addressed the IV General Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences, held in Tokyo in 1986.

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**LOCAL CHURCH: PRACTICES AND THEOLOGIES**  
**REFLECTIONS FROM ASIA**

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Felix Wilfred

Let me express, at the outset, my satisfaction over the formulation of the theme of this SEDOS seminar "Local Church: Practices and Theologies". The organisers have rightly placed practices before theology, and thereby have set the proper methodological orientation for the seminar. Following this approach in the first part of my paper I will present a few reflections on the

present-day trends and socio-cultural processes which call for an appropriate praxis on the part of local churches. Though these trends and processes are not exclusive to Asia, they are nevertheless reflected upon from an Asian perspective and on the basis of Asian experiences. The second part of the paper is devoted to the study of a suitable ecclesiology for the Asian context.

**PART I**

**EMERGING TRENDS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL PROCESSES  
AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY:  
CHALLENGES TO ECCLESIAL PRAXIS**

The last stage of the journey of the human family in this century has been marked by many momentous events and new turns. The ominous prospect of a nuclear holocaust which not long ago seemed to hang over the human family as Damocle's sword, now seems to have vanished as a bad dream while fresh signs of hope are emerging both at the global and local level.

Among the significant developments are the changes in the relationship between the First and the Second World and the victory of peoples' movements in many parts of the world. The political and military confrontation that characterized the post-war period between the First and the Second World and which determined global politics has now undergone a sea-change. As for peoples' movements, they suffered heavily in the hands of the vested interests. The repression of these movements (which has not abated and leaves no room for

naive and premature optimism) made many sceptical about their capability to bring about any effective change in the prevailing order of things. Such apprehensions are today laid to rest as the future of peoples' movements has brightened up with events like the Edsa revolution in the Philippines and the uprising of the people of Eastern Europe against self-serving rulers, party-chiefs and bureaucrats. The most dramatic of all was the dethronement and execution of Ceausescu and his wife Elena.

We who have witnessed such significant developments at the end of the 80's cannot but pose certain questions concerning the future. What is the shape of things to come? In which direction might the human family be moving in the next few decades? Is the domination and oppression of the poor and the weak going to intensify or diminish? These are, obviously, very difficult

questions to answer. Some indications of future directions can be found if we examine some of the trends and socio-cultural processes, that are beginning to emerge.

A study of the emerging trends at the turn of the century is indispensable and crucial for the local Churches in Asia and for that matter anywhere in the world. It is necessary for their self-understanding, insertion and relevant praxis in the new century that is about to dawn.

### **1. CONFLICT BETWEEN THE MACRO AND THE MICRO**

One of the phenomena which we observe all over the world today is the conflict between the macro and micro - the big trying to dominate the small and the latter refusing to be dominated and reduced. This can be seen in almost all areas of societal life.

At the political level for example, we have the macro in the form of the nation-state, a political entity of the modern world which was brought into existence by setting aside the diverse ethnic, linguistic and regional groups at the micro level. In most cases, the overarching structure of the nation - state does not acknowledge the experiences and self-perceptions of the various groups and peoples subsumed, nor respect their legitimate autonomy and differing identities. Resistance, therefore, to the macro political reality on the part of the micro is something quite pervasive. In Asia, we have such a situation for example, in Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines etc.

#### **Political Fundamentalism**

In this context I must add a word about political fundamentalism which is emerging everywhere. It is a phenomenon which has appeared with the collapse of macro level

realities. It has come to fill in the ideological vacuum that exists today. Fundamentalism is an attempt on the part of one of the constituents in a society to assume the role of the macro and in this process suppress other groups and identities.

What is happening at the political level in terms of macro and micro is but a modern reproduction of the contrast between the 'great tradition' of the dominant groups, classes and religious agents and the 'little tradition' of the marginalized groups in society. The macro, the great, often declares its respect for the micro. But history and experience show that the macro, in reality, develops its own world, its own interests, and in this process seeks to absorb the micro.

#### **Culture**

At the level of culture we note a dangerous trend to transform the whole world into a mono-cultural zone. The politically and economically powerful First World tries to impose subtly on the rest of the world a culture, or rather a sub-cultural way of life, based on standardized forms of production and the same patterns of marketing and consumption of goods. It passes for macro culture and, indeed, culture. The struggle against this cultural imperialism is visible in the societies of the Third World.

#### **Social Sciences**

If we take the social sciences such as anthropology, the same trend is discernible. Grand social and anthropological theories are construed in relation to the situations and experiences of those at the micro level. These grand theories are applied to micro level realities only for verification and confirmation. This approach and orientation is today being challenged. Many concrete experiences at the micro level simply break pre-conceived schemes and theories. The reality at the micro

level presents such differences and variety that they defy classification into one general frame; they call for totally new explanations and interpretations.

### **Natural Sciences and Technology**

The conflict between the macro and the micro is also evident in the field of natural sciences and technology. One of the principal reasons for the gross disparity in economic growth in the world is the dissociation of science and technology from the social and economic base of the people at the micro level, those at the bottom. Grippled by a megalomaniac vision, science and technology proceed with giant strides to accomplish the political and economic designs of the powerful.

It is this macro science which is unfortunately imported into the Third World, into Asia. Therefore, there is a cleavage between the needs of a society at the micro level and the grand designs of imported science and technology. While the gap may continue with serious consequences for the poor and the marginalized, there will develop also a strong trend towards taming macro science. The demand for a science and technology with social concern and a human face will get strengthened further in the years to come. This trend will share the objectives of the ecclgical movement which is putting pressure on macro science to develop itself in relationship with environmental concerns. The conflict between the macro and the micro is likely to continue at the turn of the century and even beyond, leading finally to a clear choice in favour of the micro in science and technology.

### **Religious Institutions**

At the religious level, the second part of the twentieth century has brought fresh awareness about the great religious traditions of humanity, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the powerful trend towards

secularization. The great religions are in fact macro institutions or 'great traditions'. But at the turn of the century we are witnessing the trend of not letting oneself be impressed by the macro religiosity which is identified with huge institutions, power, wealth etc. There is a search for salvation in the small, in the neglected and despised. It is a trend in which the mustard seed assumes importance, a trend in which what happens to people at the micro level in terms of religious experience becomes more significant and crucial than the mighty religious institutions, their interests and concerns.

This orientation reflects the attitude of Jesus in his time. He was not impressed by the grandiose temple to which the disciples drew his attention (Mk. 13:1, Mt. 24:1). On his part, he pointed rather to an insignificant widow in the same temple, highlighting the worth of her small mite (Mk. 12:41-44m Lk 21:1-4). The prominent place popular religiosity is acquiring points towards the future. So too, the small, micro, basic communities are clear expressions of the religious orientation and praxis of the years to come. The multiplication of sects in the past years, which is likely to continue, represents a protest against macro religious institutions, traditions which are becoming sterile and a spent-force. The turn of the century may witness in the religious field, as in other fields, an intensification of the conflict between the macro and the micro.

## **2. FROM FRAGMENTATION TO INTEGRATION**

In today's world we note forces of division and marginalization operative in various areas of societal life. In spite of these many tendencies toward fragmentation in today's world, we also note, on the other hand, how the process of globalization is taking place at a very fast pace. Thanks to the modern

powerful communications media, the problem of one people or group does not remain isolated but is brought to international attention. This, emerging global consciousness is a great sign of hope. The human family is moving today towards a unity which was never before achieved in history. There is a deep aspiration to get out of situations of marginalization and division and reach integration. If fragmentation is the self-destruction of humanity, the movement towards unity is the sign of its redemption.

Nobody can deny that in spite of many hurdles, international cooperation is getting stronger today. There are many initiatives at the international level to take up jointly issues affecting humanity such as apartheid and violation of human rights. We have, further, bodies of regional cooperation as, for example, SAARC and ASEAN in Asia.

#### **North - South Relations**

The effectiveness of the movement towards the unity of the human family will depend on the development of the relationship between the three blocks into which our world has been divided in the past decades. Significant and dramatic changes have occurred in the relationship between the First and the Second World. The concrete shape of this new inter-relationship has yet to be seen. If ideology was the bone of contention between the First and Second World, economic difference and imbalance continue to divide the First World from the Third world. The prospect, therefore, of the First and Third World, the North and the South meeting will be real to the extent that economic, and consequently political issues are faced.

In this regard, we envisage in the coming decades the possibility of two parallel processes developing. On the one hand, the capitalist nations, which depend on finding new markets for their continued growth, will try to be generous towards poor nations

by offering credit so that these Third World countries will in turn be able to buy their products - machinery, arms etc. Even countries now relatively safe from debt will be trapped into a serious debt-crisis.

On the other hand, the already existing solidarity among Third World nations on the political level will begin to express itself more and more also on the economic front. This economic cooperation may initially take the form of trade relationships among Third World nations in particular regions. The general movement toward the unity of the human family may have to pass through these stages of conflict and tension on the one hand, and phases of partial cooperation and solidarity on the other.

#### **A Holistic Perspective**

At a more basic level, the trend to view reality from a holistic and integral perspective, despite the pervasive tendency to atomize and dichotomize, is slowly gaining momentum. This orientation is supported by modern empirical sciences like physics, biology, psychology, etc. Modern science has passed from the mechanistic paradigm of Newton to a new paradigm of quantum physics in which the whole universe is seen as inter-connected within one and the same movement and dynamism. In the face of the unity of all reality, sciences like sociology, anthropology and psychology are becoming more and more aware of their limitations. Each one of them can deal only with a fragment of reality which cannot be explained without being linked to the other dimensions. Today, interdisciplinary approaches are becoming common and even indispensable. The myth that reality can be known by atomizing it, is giving way to a holistic and integral approach which can unfold the web of relationships connecting all the parts of reality.

#### **Ecological and Feminist Movements**

Today's trend towards unity and

integration includes two important movements: the ecological movement and the feminist movement. They are powerful affirmations of unity and at the same time a protest against fragmentation. The ecological movement challenges the one-sided emphasis on domination and control in the relationship between humankind and nature and underscores the necessity of harmony. The feminist movement which calls for the complementarity of woman and man, protests against a male-dominated society - a society marked by aggression, violence and war. The concerns voiced by these two movements will set the agenda for the century that is dawning. They will help to bring about a much needed balance in the growth of the human family.

#### **Positive Recognition of Pluralism**

The coming decades will be characterized by an ever greater recognition of pluralism in all areas of life. Centralization of every kind - political, economic, religious - will be forced to loosen its grip. Decentralization of power, wealth and ideology will begin, thus keeping alive the dream of the unity of humanity in diversity, despite signs of division and conflict. Pluralism is going to be the strongest antidote against all domination, control and regimentation. Its language is dialogue and its attitude and praxis is participation for pluralism is based on the recognition of the otherness of the other. The liberation of the oppressed and the quality of human life in the decades ahead will depend in great measure on our recognition and appreciation of pluralism.

I must add that the pluralism we envisage is not some kind of *eirenism* in which each group or people is simply let be in their diversity without regard to others. Such a pluralism is not desirable and could be even counter-productive to the true welfare of humankind whose various peoples, nations and groups

should mutually communicate, confront and correct each other so as to grow as one family. In true pluralism, the element of challenge is as important as dialogue and participation. Further, the pluralism we envisage is not without limits. The limit of pluralism means that there is no choice when:

- it is a question of justice;
- it is a question of being in solidarity with the poor and marginalized;
- it is a question of an unjust social, economic or political order.

### **3. THE PROCESS OF MODERNIZATION**

The process of modernization is a global question which affects every society. Whether East or West, North or South, in every society we find traditional elements in varying degrees alongside the forces of modernization. But in the Third World societies the impact of modernization is much more evident than elsewhere. Science, technology industrialization, modern means of communication, urbanization, modern educational and political systems have profoundly influenced traditional cultures, institutions and ways of life. Even more deeply, they have brought about a transformation in attitudes and values and in the consciousness of individuals and groups. These changes are immediately visible in the cities of Asia which are growing at an alarming rate through mass-migration and urbanization consequent upon modernization.

I do not want to enter into the various theories regarding the process of modernization as they may take us too far afield from the focus of this paper. Let me, however, make three observations which are important in understanding this process. First, modernization is not to be equated with 'westernization' which is the process by which a non-western individual or group adopts the forms of life, ways of thinking, values and

behavioural patterns of the West. Second, the expression 'modernization' is value-laden. It presupposes that the characteristics of the developed world also should one day be the traits of the underdeveloped societies of today. (And that is perhaps why there is the temptation to identify modernization with westernization). Third, the economic developments and modernization which have taken place in the West are not, as often assumed, independent of the underdevelopment of the Third World. Modernization cannot be understood without the colonial and neo-colonial history of exploitation.

### **Modernization and Tradition**

It is important that the question of the relationship between modernity and tradition be posed differently than it has been in the past few decades, specially since the 1960's. Most of the theories rested on two premises. Firstly, it was assumed that there was a dichotomy between tradition and modernity. No distinction was made between the various types of tradition. Tradition, as such, was viewed as a force restraining the process of modernization. It was not recognized that there are some traditions which can block the process of modernization and others which can be a valuable resource for it. Experience shows how certain traditional cultural and religious elements, known for their immobility, become in new circumstances, a strong force for change and transformation.

Secondly, it was assumed that the so-called 'theory of convergence of industrialized societies' is universally valid. According to this theory, traditional societies of different kinds become more and more similar as they become industrialized and urbanized. This is a somewhat simplistic approach. It does not reflect the complexity of social change in traditional societies. The people of a particular culture per-

ceive, approach and handle the same issues and problems of modernization differently than other peoples because their underlying core values and perceptions are culturally influenced. Therefore the responses to modernization will be different in different societies. A variety of responses in the same society is also possible. Evidently, core-perceptions do change but their pace and mode of change are different from the structural and institutional changes which may result from modernization.

In practice the encounter between traditional societies and modernity has produced a wide variety of situations. Modernization has produced dual systems in economic, political and cultural spheres. In Asian societies, for example, we find tradition juxtaposed to modernity. Asians, accustomed as they are to living with contradictions, live with one foot in modernity and the other in tradition. Another response has been to try to discard the traditional culture completely and replace it with modernity and its values coupled with a defense of traditional cultures, institutions and ways of life. In some other situations we have a transference of traditional attitudes and values on to modern systems or reversely, the superimposition of the modern onto tradition. As far as Asia is concerned it is undeniable that the response of the vast majority has been a profound desire to reap the benefits of modernity without losing the identity of one's traditional culture and its long cherished values, ideals and core-perceptions. This is a challenging task facing Asian societies at the turn of the century.

How should we go about this task? Modernization is an ambiguous process. If it contains great potential for humanization it also contains elements of dehumanization. Economic development based on limitless growth and backed by political power has caused wealth for some at the expense of the poverty and misery

of the masses. Therefore, ethical and humanistic perspectives from Asian cultural resources need to be brought into the modern process of development. This challenging task also calls for a prophetic critique of all forms of alienation and negation caused by the process of modernization. The following reflections on the centrality of culture indicate the responses to modernization for the future.

#### 4. PROGRESSIVE CENTRALITY OF CULTURE

As a consequence of modernization, the cultural dimension of life is relegated to the background. Economy becomes the all-embracing and dominant factor in human and social life. We can observe this in the model of development set forth by the First World for Third World countries. In the so-called development decades of 1950's and 60's, the progress of Asian countries as well as other underdeveloped parts of the world was thought of in terms of economic growth. But slowly the realization dawned that development was not being achieved by or for the poor because economic issues were tied up with political ones. In the 1970's and early 80's we tried to come to terms with the political question - the issue of power. Today, with poverty and misery still weighing heavily on the poor in our villages and slums, attention is progressively turning to the role of culture. Today, one begins to realize the key role of culture for both economic development and the acquisition of political power by the people. Even more basically than these, culture affects their selfhood as persons, as active subjects and agents of history.

The culture of a people expresses its spirit, its collective unconscious. Like the trees of the forest which preserve the soil from erosion, the cultural roots of a people give them strength and selfhood to withstand the oppression

and exploitation of the powerful. It is the living embodiment of their experiences transmitted from generation to generation; it is the unique, specific way of a people's knowing, feeling and perceiving reality and interacting with it. How an ancient culture cannot be simply got rid of is exemplified by the short-lived cultural revolution in China. Culture does change, but it cannot be forcibly cast off.

#### Economic Development and Culture

For future economic development serious attention will have to be paid to the culture of a people from which stem their values, motivations and attitudes. For example, Japan may exhibit the same traits as the industrially advanced countries of the West. And yet, Japanese capitalism has a different cultural matrix from that of the West. The thesis of Max Weber concerning the relationship between capitalism and protestantism is well-known. Japanese capitalist growth, however is based on the traditional cultural institution of *furusato* - old home village - where people were engaged collectively in rice cultivation through close bonds of relationships with each other and with nature. Chinese entrepreneurship and business traits derive from Confucian philosophy and ethics.

The centrality of culture is manifested differently in the West and in the East. In the West, it has begun to express itself as a quest for meaning and a search for new symbols. It expresses itself also as a virulent critique of the empirical rationality which characterizes the present model of development, which is often anti-human and devoid of humanizing culture. In Asia, which was dominated by colonial powers, the centrality of culture can be seen in the affirmation of the identity of a people as a group, a nation. It is also seen in the search for cultural roots to undergird the modern-day economic, social and political life. The cultural comes to the fore in our

Asian societies also in the aspiration of the people to determine for themselves, on the basis of their history, tradition and values, their own patterns of development and forms of self-government. People will no longer allow political and economic considerations to supplant their culture. They are becoming increasingly aware that both the political system and economic growth must bear the imprint of their culture.

Following the political independence of the Third World nations from colonial rule, it was thought that political unity would automatically bring about unity among the various ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups. This has been belied by experiences of ethnic conflict and civil war within various nation-states. Subsequently it was thought that the creation of a common economic system would unify peoples of different races and countries. This too is being contradicted by experience. European unity which rests primarily on an economy base and a common market is being eroded today with the prospect of the reunification of the two Germany's, which has caused serious concern among their neighbours. Ethnic and cultural elements are again coming to the fore and breaking open economic frames. The conflicts between the Armenians and the Azerbajdzans as well as the demands of Lithuanians, Estonians and Latvians are all indications of the central role that cultural identity is going to play in the years to come.

The assumption by the First World that it had resolved the ethnic question through a common economic system, and the assumption by the Second World that it had resolved the same problem through a common ideology, are both being proved false by these trends. The re-emergence in the First and Second World of the cultural and ethnic dimensions of life should lead to the realization of the limitation of the economic and the ideological dimensions. The First

World and Second World which thought that ethnic and cultural conflicts were simply a Third World phenomenon are learning now from their own experience the complex situations that the Third World societies are facing and the difficulties of finding solutions in merely economic and ideological terms.

## 5. CRISIS OF SURVIVAL

The teeming millions of Asia are today caught in a deep crisis of survival. The natural resources of land, sea and forests which were for them life supporting have been taken from them and are today controlled by oppressive forces from within Asia and from abroad. Industrialization which is both capital and resource - intensive is taking place in Asian societies. It has marginalized the masses for whom life has become unbearable in the rural areas. Impoverished and dispossessed they are fleeing in large numbers to cities and towns to eke out their existence around slums and shanty towns in abject poverty. They are deprived of the necessary power to decide their own destinies. The economic policies adopted by many Asian Governments have suppressed the rights of workers, peasants and marginalized sections of society including tribals, women, *dalits* (the untouchables) and oppressed youth. The gross imbalance in the relationship between production, distribution and consumption has widened the gap between the affluence of a few and the abject poverty of the dispossessed masses.

### Focus on the Village

The line of economic development followed in the past few decades has heavily favoured the cities to the detriment of rural villages where the bulk of the Third World people live. This trend is likely to intensify in the years to come, aggravating the crisis of survival for the marginalized and powerless groups. A

refocussing on the village is imperative to overcome this crisis.

### **Escalation of Violence and Terrorism**

Another development in the years ahead is the unfortunate escalation of violence and terrorism. It will be the result of economic conditions rather than politically motivated. Colonialism in the first half of the century and the economic policies of the development decades in the second half strengthened the already powerful and further marginalized the powerless. This situation will reach a breaking point in the years to come. It appears that recourse to violence and robbery in order to force the powerful and the rich to part with their wealth will become increasingly common in India. Escalation of unrest, revolts and violence on economic grounds can be expected among oppressed groups of people, especially the tribals, *dalits* and poor peasants. Such a development will force structural and institutional changes - a goal that has not been achieved by the present pattern of development.

The roots of future change can be found in the upsurge of consciousness about the present situation and the conviction that this situation is not to be taken by the marginalized as their inevitable fate but as something to be overcome. From the general ocean of misery voices of protest are being raised. There is a persistent demand from various quarters to transform the present oppressive order of things into one in which people can grow, flourish and blossom as human persons. It is a struggle, first and foremost, to obtain the basic necessities of life. Equally important is the struggle for equality by social outcasts and marginalized peoples like the *dalits*, tribals and other ethnic minorities.

The experience of past decades shows that the crisis of survival cannot be overcome by pinning one's hope on one single approach. No

single ideology, no single political system or economic arrangement can claim to be the panacea for the woes afflicting the oppressed. A plurality of approaches is called for, depending on the specific situation of oppression with its unique characteristics, history and cultural roots. In some cases, sharp confrontations will lead to the overcoming of long-standing oppression, whereas in other cases religion may furnish the rallying point for the people in their struggle against unjust economic and political situations. In still other cases, a fresh awareness of their ethnic and cultural identity will prove the most effective means for establishing justice and equality.

### **The Role of Ideologies**

What role will ideologies play in relation to the struggle of the people? All ideologies promise to get the poor and the marginalized out of their crisis of survival. But the type of ideology necessary for socio-political transformation cannot be dictated from above. It has to be shaped and formed from out of the experiences of the people in specific situations and contexts. People cannot simply surrender to any ideology that promises to liberate them because ideology can be made into a myth by vested interests, party chiefs and bureaucrats or into a totem which the people have only to prostrate and adore.

Recent events in Eastern Europe illustrate the consequence of turning any ideology into an idol. It would be wrong to interpret these developments in Eastern Europe as a victory for capitalism which has little to boast about. Capitalism too has undergone and is still undergoing even more serious crises, even though it may not be so evident and dramatic as what has happened in Eastern Europe. Concentration of wealth in the hands of a few with the subsequent impoverishment of the many, racism, new forms of poverty in the so-called developed countries, the production

and sale of armaments - these are the handiwork of industrial capitalism which cannot claim to help overcome the crisis of survival in which humanity is enveloped. Rather, it is the principal cause of the global crisis of survival.

It may not be easy for Asia and other Third World societies to get out of the strangle-hold of advanced industrial capitalism as its tentacles spread further and further. But the direction of future development is becoming clearer to us. If the greater part of the twentieth century has been under the sign of the two mega ideologies, the emphasis in the future is going to shift from ideologies to the people as the center. Codified and institutionalized responses in the form of ideologies are inadequate to meet the challenges of poverty and survival. We can expect the emergence of fresh and crea-

tive responses on the part of the people to the question of poverty, misery and human survival.

### **Response of the Local Church**

Responses at the local level to these global questions will shape the specificity of each Local Church. The praxis and agenda of the Local Church cannot be, therefore, something separate from or parallel to these socio-cultural processes. For the Churches to respond in terms of praxis to the questions and challenges is to respond to the living God who is in the midst of the people and in their history. In this perspective, the communion among Local Churches will be also a communion in praxis in which all respond to the same voice of God speaking today in a wide variety of situations - situations which more and more bear common traits and form part of convergent socio-cultural processes.

## **PART II**

### **ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF ECCLESIALITY**

In a recent public interview, the Deputy Prime Minister of India, Mr. Devi Lal, stated that "Christians have no business in the country and should take off to where they belonged, America, England or even Italy". There is nothing new about this view. He has given a sharp and renewed expression to a deeply embedded attitude among Asians that Christians in Asia are an alien body.

Many reasons may be adduced to explain this rootlessness of Christianity in Asia, - colonial past, spiritual and material dependence on foreign resources, lack of involvement in the national scene, failure to practice inculturation etc. These factors may, to some extent, account

for the situation. But they do not touch the heart of the question, namely, the lack of an anthropological and cultural foundation for the very being of the Church among the Asian peoples. None of the present-day ecclesiological orientation seems to meet this crucial concern of Asia.

In this second part of the paper I intend to highlight the necessity of developing an anthropologically and culturally based ecclesiology in Asia and to spell out some of its implications. The reflections made here - let me state it clearly - are tentative and provisional. None of them is to be understood as an independent model of the Church. They are rather four strands differently mixed to form concrete images of the Church.

## MAJOR ECCLESIOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS

### 1. Reformist

This ecclesiological current originated a few decades before the Council and made its mark on Conciliar deliberations and documents. It is a ferment of thought which, in contrast to the centralizing ultramontanist ecclesiology of 'the perfect society', called for an understanding of the Church as communion and highlighted its mystery aspect. It is characterized by its tendency to *ressourcement* - going back to the Fathers and the tradition of the early centuries to derive fresh insights for the understanding of the nature and mission of the Church. Promoting unity among all Christians through dialogue has been one of its chief concerns. It is this ecclesiology which brought the idea of local Church to the fore and underlined the place of Eucharist, Spirit, the Word of God and ministry as its constitutive elements. As a major ecclesiological orientation a large number of theologians are associated with it, among them Y. Congar, E. Lanne, H. Legrand, J.M.R. Tillard, A. Dulles, J.A. Komanchak.

### 2. Liberal

This orientation is characterized by its critical approach. It calls into question the way the church functions, its triumphalism, its mode of exercising authority, its strong centralization. Freedom of thought and expression, respect for human dignity and rights in the Church, openness and flexibility in its life - these are some of the concerns of this orientation. It views critically, doctrines like infallibility and primacy as they have been formulated and understood. The present is adjudged in the light of the Gospel to which this orientation repeatedly draws our attention. It is concerned with making the Church meaningful to people in a secularized and 'adult world'. H. Küng, L. Swindler, J.L. McKenzie and many

others represent this orientation.

Both these ecclesiological strands - reformist and liberal - are today locked in a controversy with forces in the Church that are trying to re-assert a centralist ecclesiology through a movement of restoration and integralism. The debate relates especially to Vatican II - its reception and the interpretation of its significance as well as its continuity or discontinuity with earlier tradition.

### 3. Liberational

Christian unity and openness to the world were concerns very much present in the thinking of the Council. But there was another important question which, although it did not receive the attention it deserved, nevertheless was part of the original spirit of the Council. It was the imperative need to be a Church of the poor. This question formed part of the vision of the initiator of the Council, Pope John XXIII and was expressed in the speeches of a few Council fathers like Cardinal Lercaro. That the Churches should be in solidarity with the poor and the suffering, in imitation of Jesus Christ, was expressed in passing, in, the documents of the Council, specially in Lumen Gentium, 8 and Ad Gentes, 5. These few indications, coupled with a sharp awareness of the poverty, misery and oppression of the poor in various parts of the Third World, specially in Latin America, led to an ecclesial praxis of liberation, and consequently to the development of an innovative and fresh ecclesiology of liberation. The focal point of this liberational praxis and reflection has been the basic ecclesial communities. As representatives of this trend we may cite Jon Sobrino, Leonardo Boff, Juan Luis Segundo.

### 4. Inculturational

The post-conciliar period has given a greater impetus to this orientation. The main task of the

Church in the Third World, particularly in Asia and Africa, is seen as inculturating the Church by assuming the cultural and spiritual heritage of their peoples. This process of inculturation is viewed as contributing to the realization of the catholicity of the Church. This ecclesiological orientation drew inspiration from the teachings of the Council as articulated in several documents, above all in *Ad Gentes*. Inculturational ecclesiology gained momentum through the works of theologians like K. Rahner and W. Bülmann, who saw the fundamental significance of Vatican II in its transition from an Euro-centric Church to a world-Church. This perspective points out that numerically, Christians in the Third World have overtaken those in the West; the Church is becoming in fact a Third World Church with its pre-history in Europe.

#### **ANTHROPOLOGY PRECEDES THEOLOGY**

The above four orientations embody significant issues and concerns which affect the Churches in Asia. Nevertheless, they are inadequate for Asia because, in varying ways and degrees, they let the theological precede the anthropological and the cultural. Instead, the approach to be taken is one in which ecclesiology rests on anthropological and cultural foundations in the spirit of the axiom *gratia presupponit naturam*. Rather than trying to make the Church local by relating it to indigenous cultural forms, we need to perceive, understand and re-appropriate the essence of the Church in terms of Asian culture, ways of life and human relationships.

Social and anthropological theories of the past which defined community as an objective social fact consisting of structures and institutions are no longer valid today. Community is seen more and more as a reality to be explained in symbolic terms. Community is basically a

*symbolic reality*, and symbols belong to the anthropological and cultural realm. Therefore, the very nature of the community of the disciples of Jesus among a people has to be re-interpreted and re-defined through their world and their symbols and re-constituted by the fibres drawn from their ways of being a people and a community. If the human person is "an animal suspended in the web of significance that he or she has spun", then the nature and identity of the ecclesial community can be understood only by starting from this human and cultural web. Let us examine some of the human and cultural values in Asia and their implications for the Church.

#### **JESUS-COMMUNITIES OF VARYING DEGREES AND LEVELS**

Inclusivism is a characteristic Asian cultural trait which is reflected in the way any community is conceived and lived. The boundaries are not rigidly marked, structures not rigorously fixed and conditions of belonging not strictly laid down. Community exists in the people, in their attitudes, their spirit, their values, their vision and experience. What matters to most people is not the external religious identity but the deeper religious experience and the path one follows to attain it. Among the Hindus, for example, the *margas* or paths like *bhakti* (way of devotion) *jnana* (way of knowledge) and *karma* (way of involvement and action) characterize a person's religious leanings rather than his or her institutional membership in a religion called Hinduism.

This explains the fact that there are millions of followers of Jesus in Asia who experience him deeply in their lives, who are enlightened by his teaching and drawn by his personality without, however, being members of any visible Church. It is also a fact that they follow him much more closely than many within the boundaries of the visible

Church. When we speak of the Church in Asia should we not direct our attention to this larger Jesus-community? Such a larger Jesus-community will have an Asian anthropological and cultural basis which is inclusive and open. In Asia, we must be ready today to accept various levels of ecclesial community.

### **Openness and Fluidity**

People can belong to the Jesus-community in varying degrees. This is in keeping with the Gospels in which discipleship of Jesus is presented as having a certain fluidity. Not all the followers belonged to his community in the same way. There was the larger crowd that followed him everywhere he went, fascinated by his teaching, his authority etc. (Mt. 4:23-25). There were the seventy-two disciples and the Twelve. And even among the Twelve some were closer to Jesus than others. The Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain were addressed not only to the disciples but to the whole crowd as well. The content and form of the missionary instructions given to the Twelve (Lk. 10:1-16) were the same as those given to the seventy-two (Lk. 10:1-16), but Luke highlights the mission of the seventy-two. Nicodemus (Jn. 19:39) and Joseph of Arimathea (Mt 27:57) were in the circle of the followers of Jesus. There were also people like Zachaeus who, listening to Jesus' words, declares himself ready to part with half of his riches (Lk 19:1-10) and Lazarus who was a friend of Jesus and whom Jesus visited often (Jn. 11:1-4; 12:1-2).

All these people and many others like the Centurion (Mt 8:5-13) and the people of Samaria (Jn. 4:41-43) came under the influence of Jesus and belonged to his community in varying degrees and ways. Jesus' community was not a closed group. The Reign of God was the heart of his community and therefore it was basically an open-ended community with no barriers and limits. We know that Jesus did

not want to create a group with rigid structures like that of the Essenes, nor were his Twelve disciples seen by him as an elitist group replacing the people of Israel. The values of fluidity and inclusiveness which Jesus espoused correspond to the Asian understanding of community.

### **DIVERSE FORMS OF ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY**

#### **Ashram**

An anthropologically and culturally-based ecclesiality in Asia will find embodiment in a wide variety of forms. In India, for example, *Ashram* could become an important expression of ecclesial community. *Ashram* is a community of God-seekers gathered around a spiritually experienced guru or master whose doors are open to peoples of all faiths and all strata of society without discrimination of any kind - male or female, higher or lower caste. It is something that embodies the spirit, culture and tradition of India and at the same time a form of community that is most congenial to the realization of Jesus' vision of humanity as a family under the Fatherhood of God. Contemplation, simplicity of life, interiority, hospitality, renunciation and the practice of poverty as a protest against selfishness and greed, are traditional Indian religio-cultural values practised in *Ashram* life. These values and practices make *Ashram* life a fruitful terrain for the blossoming of a Jesus-community according to the Gospel.

#### **Action Groups**

Another form of ecclesial community could be the so-called action groups and movements which are found in many parts of Asia. These are small grassroot groups involved with the people in their struggle for life, liberation and human dignity. They are often spontaneously formed to respond to the plight of the most lowly, oppressed and marginalized

sectors in the society. In these groups one finds people of different faiths, all gripped by the same vision of a world of justice, love, fellowship, freedom and solidarity - ideals which correspond so well to Jesus' vision of the Reign of God.

The praxis of these groups reflects the criterion of belonging to the Reign of God as given by Jesus in his discourse on the last judgment (Mt. 25:31-46). One can see in such groups and movements, the community of Jesus united in fellowship for the realization of the ideals of the Reign of God. Those who do God's will are the brothers, sisters and mother of Jesus (Mk. 3:33-35). And like Jesus of Arimathea they are in close contact with the suffering body of Jesus as they seek to remove the nails and take that body - the least and lowliest - from the cross where it is today crucified. The existence of such successors to Joseph of Arimathea, united so intimately with the wounded body of Jesus should lead us to understand that the community of Jesus is a reality with open frontiers. Here the Church becomes for us truly the mystery of God which we can comprehend only by touching his wounds, by mystical contemplation and by experience.

There could be many such forms of ecclesial communities in Asia reflecting the Reign of God in different ways, and at the same time expressive of the human and cultural background of the people. The communion of Churches could also be interpreted as communion among these various forms of communities - Ashrams, action groups etc. Each one may have a particular focus. For example, the Ashram community will emphasize the *bhakti marga* and *jnana marga*. They would thus enrich and complement each other. Obviously, this is a different type of communion of Churches.

### **The Role of Tradition**

The anthropological and cultural foundations and forms suggested here

may raise the question: How does all this fit into the centuries-old tradition of Christianity? Y. Congar states that Christianity does not begin everytime from zero. He is perfectly right. We cannot, obviously, deny the significance of Christian heritage for Asia. But the point to be examined is whether the Christian heritage and tradition need have the same importance and application in Asia as in their places of origin and growth. The present-day Asian cultural situation with its religious pluralism was certainly not foreseen as the environment of a Jesus community when certain institutional structures evolved in Christian tradition. The present Asian situation with its religious pluralism is quite unique and it may not be right to expect ready-made answers from the past. Nor may it be right to raise an historically - conditioned past situation or solution to the level of a norm to be applied to the churches of Asia today.

We know that in the New Testament, close to Jesus' times, there were a plurality of forms in which Jesus-communities developed. We must ask why only one of those forms among many should become the norm by divine right - *iuris divini*. Connecting divine right with the present shape of the Church has become a very delicate and difficult question, especially in areas like sacraments, the place of women in the Church etc. The question turns out to be all the more difficult and complex when we are faced with the possibilities of different forms and grades of ecclesial community in a continent of cultural and religious pluralisms such as Asia. Deeper study and reflection in this whole area may be required in the years to come.

### **CONCLUSION**

It appears that none of the current ecclesiologies respond to the situation of the Church in Asia which projects the image of an alien body.

The root cause of this situation is the way the Church exists as a theological and religious reality with no cultural foundation in the Asian soil. It is crucial to develop an understanding and praxis of ecclesial community that will have the anthropological and the cultural as its base, rather than as its consequence.

Being a community is first and foremost a cultural and symbolic reality, and not a matter of structures and institutions. Seen from the Asian cultural perspective, community exists primarily in the people. There is much flexibility and openness. This inclusiveness allows for various grades and levels of belonging to the Jesus-community. Inclusiveness, which has the support of the New Testament, leads us to see a much larger number of Asians belonging to the Jesus-community than those who are within its institutional boundaries. Similarly, there could be various forms of ecclesial communities in Asia such as Ashrams and action groups. There, communities with

people of different faiths reflect the love, fellowship, justice and freedom of Jesus' vision of the Reign of God, which is the ultimate unity of the human family. All this has implications for interpreting Christian tradition and relating it to the present.

Finally, the Churches in Asia should not simply try to sink their roots in Asia, but rather should have Asian cultures as their roots in as much as these roots are God's own grace and gifts to them. These are gifts through which they fashion themselves into unique and distinct communities. These are not expressions of much-feared nationalism or cultural chauvinism. To call for an Asian/Indian anthropological and cultural foundation for the local Church could be just the opposite of what is being feared: it is not a Church of power, ethnocentricity and exclusion, but a community of poverty and powerlessness, of interiority and selfless love for one's neighbour and open to all castes, cultures and faiths.

#### NOTES

1. Cf. Felix Wilfred, *Popular Religiosity and Asian Contextual Theologizing*, presented at a symposium held at the University of Nijmegen, Holland, 3-7 January, 1990 (to be published shortly).
2. Bede Griffiths has repeatedly drawn attention to this point. For example his article: "Nature, Technology and the New Society", in *Jeevadhara*, vol. XVIII (1988) pp. 23-31.
3. Two issues of *Jeevadhara* on human problems were dedicated to these two questions: January 1987, and January 1988.
4. Cf. James Davison Hunter - Stephen C. Ainlay (eds), *Making Sense of Modern Times*, Peter L. Berger and the *Vision of Interpretative Sociology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London-New York, 1986, pp.57-75.
5. Cf. M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1972, pp. 46 ff.
6. Cf. Anthony Giddens, *Sociology. A Brief but Critical Introduction*, Macmillan Education Ltd., London, 1988, pp. 136. ff.
7. Cf. S.N. Eisenstadt, "Modernization and Dynamics of Civilization" in *Solidarity* 102/103 (1985): 3-11.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Cf. M.N. Srinivas, *Op.cit.*: Cfr also Yogendra Singh, *Social Stratification and Change in India*, Manohar Delhi, 1989, pp.91 ff.
10. Cf. Brendan Lovett, *Life Before Death, Inculturating Hope*, Claretian Publication, Quezon City, 1986.
11. Cf. Masao Takenaka, *God is Rice*,

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12. Reported in *Indian Express* Madurai Edition, January 18, 1990.
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  16. Cf. G. Gutierrez, "I grandi mutamenti all interno della società e delle chiese di nuovo cristianità dopo il Vaticano II", in G. Alberigo, *L' Ecclesiologia del Vaticano II: Dinamismi ed prospettive* op. cit., pp-23-36; Id., "The Church and the Poor: A Latin American Perspective", in *The Reception of Vatican II*, op. cit. pp. 171 ff.
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## LOCAL CHURCH: PRACTICES AND THEOLOGIES REFLECTIONS FROM BRAZIL

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Ivone Gebara

### INTRODUCTION

I wish to give a general outline of the different practices and theologies which exist in Brazil today and in particular in the North-east region of Brazil where I have lived and worked for sixteen years.

The point of view I offer you and the interpretation of what I call the practices and theology of the Church is only one among many others. Even if I try to be "objective" in my description of the various trends, my interpretation inevitably reveals my involvement, my political "colour", as well as the fact that I am a woman. You will be aware of this throughout this short account which aims, on the one hand to reveal the richness and complexity of the Christian phenomenon in Brazil, and on the other to highlight what is at stake in the actual ecclesial situation especially in the most recent events in the northeast region of the country.

My reflection is divided into three parts. In the first, I shall describe the present situation of the country where the Church is being built; in the second, some of the practices and theologies in use there and in the third the significance of

the conflicts which are being experienced by the Church. A short conclusion will bring us back to our hopes and to the vision we may entertain for the years ahead.

### OUTLINE

- I. The economical, political, social and cultural context of the Church in North-east Brazil.
- II. Some Practices and Theologies:
  1. Popular religious practice and oral Theology of life.
  2. Traditional "conserving" practice and Theology.
  3. Traditional "modernising" practice and Theology.
  4. Practice and Theology of Liberation.
- III. Conflicts between the different practices and models of Church and their relationship to the models of society and the different anthropologies.

#### Conclusion:

Is there room for hope? A conclusion to stimulate reflection.

### 1. THE ECONOMICAL, POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH IN NORTH-EAST BRAZIL

Wherever the Church is present as a community of believers, heirs to the Faith and gospel values of Jesus, it is marked by the economical, political, social and cultural con-

text. It is this context and the practical options made by the faithful which determines the model of Church in each era of history.

Even if there are some isolated areas which are rich and modern North-East Brazil is still one of the poorest areas in the world. It has one of the world's highest infant mortality rates mainly attributable to hunger; 80% of the population is poor; 15% belongs to the middle class; 5% are rich landowners who control over 70% of the land and wealth of the area. During the last two years, the country has experienced enormous rates of inflation. Last year alone it reached almost 2.000% in twelve months.

The majority of the population survives thanks to a "hidden" economy which does not figure in Government estimates or official calculations. It consists in the exchange of petty services, in small businesses and artisan trades - in short - in an extraordinary inventiveness which seems to increase each year. This economy is actuated by the poor themselves; their humble "assets", their industry and their will to live constitute the dynamics of this subterranean economy which ensures them their daily bread.

This population of the poor is often considered to be Roman Catholic but in fact the majority belongs to the Pentecostal Churches, the Assembly of God, Candomblé (an Afro-Brazilian religion) .... What these people seek in religion is immediate help to survive, to live. Among them one often meets people who go on a pilgrimage with Catholics, and who then call on the "pai de santo" a sort of priest of the Afro-Brazilian cult. At the same time they have small sanctuaries with representatives of the "celestial" forces of the different cults in their homes. If one asks these people to which religion they belong it is not surprising to hear them say they are Catholics.

This reflects some of the complexity of Catholicism in Brazil, and the diversity of the questions which arise regarding the practice and theology of the local Church.

Although I am referring more specifically to the poor, the rich are no different - the ambiguity regarding a choice of religion is always present. One often finds that the rich favour tradition and negate everything that seems to open up a prophetic way in the Christian life. They believe in an almost immutable religion, a religion which sanctions the established order without asking whether the established order is not in fact ethical disorder. Catholicism has always played an important role in the lives of all social groups. The holders of religious power have also played a significant role in the different social classes.

It is well to distinguish the Church seen as a community of Faith, the heir to Jesus, and the "hierarchical" Church. There is a tendency to confuse the two in my country. Speaking of the Church, one wants at times to speak of the People of God, at times of the hierarchy. There is a certain looseness in the use of the term "Church" in our country, understandable if one recalls the many atrocities to which the poor were subjected and the lack of official condemnation of this situation by the Church. The term "Church" used in a general way can engender misunderstanding and so, in the second part of my reflection, I shall try to clarify the different ecclesiastical practices and the theology which underlies these practices.

Political power in Brazil has always been in the hands of those who held economical power. Until about seventy years ago the hierarchical Church, apart from some exceptions, blessed and legitimated to a certain degree the Government in power. This attitude began to change during the period of military dictatorship (1964-1985), when the hierarchy, pressured by the suffering of thousands of people, took a definite stand against the arbitrary exercise of power by the military government. Over the last five years, however, we

have witnessed a certain withdrawal of the Episcopate and of the hierarchy from this stand. Some Church groups indeed, have taken up clear positions opposing the irresponsibility of the Government in different sectors on the one hand, and on the other openly and effectively supporting people's movements, syndicates and political parties which are

trying to build an alternative plan for society.

There is thus a lack of homogeneity within the Church in its attitude towards the different political options. This is apparent not only at the pastoral level but at the level of its attitude towards civil society.

## II. SOME PRACTICES AND THEOLOGIES

I shall give an overall explanation of five types of practices and theologies. No none of them in isolation corresponds completely to the reality. What I propose is diagrammatical and somewhat static; actual experience is larger than any confining interpretation. The typology I am presenting here is a yardstick to try to understand what is happening in the Church of Brazil.

### 1. Popular Religious Practice and Oral Theology of Life

The religious practice of the poor is conditioned by the effort required to "survive", or to protect life itself which is threatened by many mortal enemies. Chief among these is hunger. This struggle seems to grow greater daily. The life of the poor is continually exposed to death much more so than the lives of those who live in stable economic conditions. Food is "for the day"; the house which shelters a large family again is for "the day"; a storm or even a decision of a big landowner or of the Government can destroy this roof which is just as fragile as life itself.

Religious practice is rooted in this basic historical precariousness. There are very few people to whom the poor can look for help or support and it is in this fragile existence that "allies" from above - the Saints who live with God, come to their assistance. When real and concrete expectations become more and more ephemeral celestial intervention

opens up the way to possible salvation in the short-term humdrum of daily life. Pilgrimages to "holy places", Saints' days, candles, offerings and promises are so many expressions of their deep need to be made welcome, to be heard and to have their sufferings eased.

Religious practices of the poor go beyond the limits of Catholicism and it is often outside those limits that remedies are sought for their many trials. Different doors are knocked at in the hope that at least a window will be opened somewhere! Thus their religious "syncretism" is an expression of the struggle to live another day.

This way of life which often makes appeal both to God and to the "celestial allies" is what I call the oral Theology of life. At one and the same time God is involved in human distress and yet is above all distress since everyone, men, women and children can make him hear their suffering pleas, their desires for love and their concrete expectations. This is no written Theology. To write about God is a luxury the poor cannot indulge. Quite simply one lives on God, one speaks of God, one hopes in God. This is the Theology of the majority of Brazil's population, but rarely is it considered to be such.

### 2. Traditional "conservative" Practice and Theology

What I term traditional "conservative" practice and theology

is to understand the Christian faith as a compendium of religious practices in the belief that they come from God and to be prepared to carry them out in the belief that they lead directly to God.

Obedience is a primordial concept in this manner of living Christianity. Obedience to God is equated with obedience to authority, whether religious, civil or family, etc. It is by obedience that order is maintained, tradition preserved, and that a certain morality, rooted in principles believed to be eternal, is protected. To disobey is to transgress an established order, it is to sow doubt and in the end it is to act contrary to God's will.

In this perspective, one acts with charity towards others because it is one's duty. Thus various charitable organizations have been founded in Brazil. The causes of the poverty of the poor are not questioned; the poor are helped to bear their poverty and God will reward us for our good deeds.

Sacramental practice, defending the catechism and guarding the traditional formulation of the Catholic faith are the bastions on which rest this practice of charity and help. Liturgies, traditional songs of a somewhat nostalgic timbre and at times an exaggerated stress on ecclesiastical laws and rubrics are also part of the fabric of the life of this Catholic group. It is present mainly in the middle classes, in those bordering on poverty or in the rich minority who are convinced of the value of a traditional religion which they see under threat of disappearing. In general, these groups are favoured by the majority of the bishops and priests of the most traditionalistic tendency. They have increased over the past decade. They advocate political neutrality, at least in public, but this "neutrality" often hides their real options regarding the structure of society. In fact, their 'practice',

what they do, reveals a rather limited social horizon, an analysis which does not go very deep and an attitude of fear when faced with change whether in society or the Church.

### 3. Traditional "Modernising" Practice and Theology

In Latin America in general and in Brazil in particular, religious movements began to emerge following the Second Vatican Council. They were organised on a national level and had programmes for action. This was not just a question of national groups adopting a modern use of language but also making use of modern technical methods and trendy expressions which, however, retained their traditional content. These movements seek to gain access to the more affluent sectors of society as well as to youth and to some extent to simple people involved in small trades and who struggle valiantly to keep the increasing threat of financial impoverishment at bay.

The model of Catholicism accepted by these religious movements shows a uniformity achieved by adhering to the same theological thought and ideological position strongly bound to the capitalist system prevalent in our societies. The reflections of these Christians show at times, some of the root causes of the peoples' misery. However the causes often identified have a functional origin - they believe that with a little effort these can be solved.

Their socio-political option is thus to maintain and better the status quo. They do not preach radical change and often they advocate a conservative policy disguised as modernity.

Their religious practice is traditional. They attend mass, prayers, organisational meetings, youth meetings, send their children to catechesis and go to discussions

on topical problems. They are always loyal to the teaching of the Roman Magisterium. Usually, these movements have sufficient funds to construct well-built centres with very well-appointed modern offices. They want to be recognized as Church institutions approved by the Pope. More and more they are introducing modern communication techniques. They favour a somewhat "sugary" tone when speaking of the wonders of the Christian life. Their reflection does not coincide either with reality or lived history but echos an ideal which can easily lead either to alienation or fanaticism.

#### **4. Practice of Liberation Theology**

The Theology of Liberation in Latin America has been a burning question in the international press for the last twenty years. It has firm supporters and violent adversaries who have not spared the representatives of this theology from ecclesiastical tribunals and public chastisement.

Liberation Theology is, so to speak, the theoretical expression of practical faith. Its point of departure is the call of God which comes to us from our neighbour - the poor and the margined who, by their suffering down through history, demand that we take a stand in restoring whole life to them. The exponents of the Theology of Liberation do not see this as a question of choosing or not choosing to defend the cause of the oppressed. It is not a choice but an ethical necessity if one is to be faithful to the christian faith, to the life-giving Spirit. It is this radical way of understanding the faith which requires actions of justice and caring and which demands a change in those international structures which are the cause of misery in different countries around the world. With this objective in view, a large number of Christians have joined popular organizations - trade unions, political parties and popular movements of all sorts which seek to

give everyone a more humane life. Christian life is primarily an "ortho-praxis" for them, acting or doing right, and only later, an "orthodoxy", that is to say well-regulated, correct, logical thought.

These groups of active Christians of different social origins - poor, middle class, ecclesiastical (Catholic Action for example), are not very numerous even though propaganda often leads one to think that they are multitudinous. They expound both a practice and an alternative theology which maintain that faith in the values of the Reign of God must be able to bring about personal conversion, community and social change, as well as more justice in the world and in the Church. Some of these groups meet in basic ecclesial communities, small church centres where they try to share responsibilities and services and, in as far as possible, wealth. The different communities often have a rather original liturgical life in which is not necessarily assisted by a priest.

This practice and theology provokes fear among traditionalists who see the Church being overrun by questions which are outside the religious sphere. It also provokes fear in political authorities lest faith really become a yeast that raises the dough of practice. Following Jesus Christ and being fired by the values of the Reign has serious historical consequences that must lead to definite changes in our behaviour. This practice and theology also raises the fears of religious authorities who see their power questioned by healthy criticism; the exercise of community sharing and the division of power.

#### **5. Practice and Feminist Theology of Liberation**

Participation of women in the different popular liberation movements as well as the daily struggle of thousands of women who bear almost

total responsibility for the home, has begun to stimulate theological reflection among some women. They take the reality of their own situation as their starting point. Some of them - myself included, - began to suspect a theology which presented the male as the model of the ideal human person. Even liberation theology was suspect. These women realized the potential problems contained in the androcentric anthropology which is at the basis of all the theologies that we have learned.

The theoretical formulations of this anthropology present "man" as the first of creation. The practical social and ethical implications of this anthropology profoundly affect the self-identity of women and their role in both Church and society. Women are outside the great decisions of history. They are either accessories, or those who are called upon to care for the wounded from the "wars" created by male reasoning. Woman's place in the Church is mainly that of a servant.

Significant changes are beginning to take place especially at the level of awareness and at the level

of calls for action even within institutions of the Catholic Church. Women are realising that the task of educating children and young people in the Church is in their hands, even if they have little say about the actual content of what they teach. Now, for the last three years, these women are beginning to feel a certain disquietude concerning certain theological formulae. Questioning these, they are beginning to demand a revision and a re-elaboration of theology based on a more equal anthropology, with greater deference for the difference between the sexes, in short an anthropology which takes history more seriously.

Liberation theology is only now beginning to propose a theological argument which is inclusive of sexual differences. The liberation of everyone must include not only the diversity of cultures but the difference between the sexes as well. This is what is lived. It is what some women in Brazil, aware of the historical responsibility which devolves on them, are trying to say and to write about, whether they are religious or lay.

### III. CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE VARIOUS PRACTICES AND MODELS OF CHURCH, AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH MODELS OF SOCIETY AND DIFFERENT ANTHROPOLOGIES

The word "conflict" does not necessarily mean open, conscious, clear conflict but it does imply conflict about interests to be defended, and about models of society and Church which are being built.

In a very schematic way we may say that the stakes in all ecclesiastical conflicts centre on the construction of two models of society and Church. The first, more democratic model, seeks consensus and is founded on a perspective of social justice with a socialist stamp. The second, more centralized and hierarchical, is founded on the perspective

of social justice according to the capitalist model, that is to say a reformist justice, which does not try to plumb the actual causes of the problems. Nor does it question the prevailing model of society.

I do not wish to enter here into the debate about the crisis of historical "socialism" but only to touch upon the orientation of a vision of society or of Church which is based on a certain scale of values.

During the last ten years the centralizing model of the Catholic Church has gained ground. This has

been sanctioned from above and is moulding a Church unity which appeared to have been shaken by the openness set in motion after Vatican Council II.

Doubtless one finds therein a return to certain types of uniformity prevalent prior to the Council where the role of authority was understood to mean obedience almost without dialogue. This manner of behaviour is characteristic of different Vatican structures especially regarding Local Churches which see their autonomy being gradually restricted. Opening up to the great social, political and scientific questions and the dialogue deriving therefrom, were considered to be a threat to this unifying vision of the Gospel which claimed the approval of authority.

In my view one must bear this vision in mind when trying to understand the Vatican's recent intervention in the Latin-American Confederation of Religious (CLAR) and in the closing of the Institute of Theology at Recife and the Regional Seminary of the North-East. This is very disturbing since these places which witnessed to the "alternative" vision of the Church permitted the poor, people professionally qualified in different sciences and women and men of different religious creeds to meet as partners and discuss together the building of a more humane world.

The work of these places questions the position of those who wield "religious" power. It calls for a serious revision of the manner of exercising that power and a revision of the institutions which depend on it. But such a revision is seen as insupportable by those in power who prefer to get rid of the signs of "being different" and to declare publicly that this different way which follows a new path, does not lead to truth. This different way must be eliminated.

Behaviour like this, without "dialogue" is the prerogative of all

authoritarian regimes and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church is not exempt from this sin.

In all Church conflicts there is something very deep which should be stressed. Both our traditional theology and the concept of power in the Church are based on an anthropology which does not take into account the present reality of the human person in our pluralist, secularist society in search of autonomy. Traditional anthropology is based on a bi-polar, dualistic and idealistic system which has a rather pessimistic concept of the human person.

This is not the place to elaborate on this anthropology. We know its general characteristics. We know how jealously it guards a logic which in the long run always favours one to the detriment of the other, even excluding one to the benefit of the other. We know the extent to which it has sacrificed the body, bodies, history, life itself, in favour of the soul, the ideal, principles, in the belief that truth was to be found in the "higher world" and that the "lower world" was too mixed, transitory and impure to be recognised and esteemed. In reality it did not take seriously the wonder of creation since its reasoning and its practice often consisted in seeing opposition within human nature itself and opposition between the human and the natural world. Eventually, it actually came to oppose the human to God, and went even further in its desire for domination by trying to eliminate both God and the human recognizing only the values of gain and profit.

Today different movements throughout the world as well as in North-East Brazil, are proclaiming a new understanding of the human person - a human being deeply related to all existence. We are still only beginning to understand the relationship between everything which exists. As this crystallizes and deepens, theology and Church Institutions will be

increasingly obliged to revise their concepts, their manner of understanding the human person and his or her relationship to the Transcendent One. No doubt some Good News is being announced quietly as the dawn of the second millennium approaches but it

is still far from being heard everywhere. This hope is like a beckoning star which will not set as long as men and women have not yet celebrated their happy relationship with the whole of Creation.

#### WHAT MAY ONE HOPE FOR? - A CONCLUSION TO STIMULATE THOUGHT

Hope differs in relation to things, events, people. The object of hope may have the same general formulation but in the context of real history it varies according to each one's expectations.

While each of the five practices and corresponding theologies which I have described lay claim to Christian hope each one formulates hope after its own fashion. Hope resembles the desire for happiness which accompanies us each day. We cannot lose it without the risk of losing our reality as humans. So it is true to say that even hope is encircled by our system of values and our vision of the world.

Must we then speak of a conflict of hopes within the Church? I am convinced we must. The conflict between the various groups, each building a different vision of the Church, leads necessarily to a conflict of hopes. The way one tends to favour one's vision regarding history, the image of man and woman, and life in God, always touches our hope. Even though the object of this hope is placed above everything else it is part of the daily struggle for survival.

Let me return to today's experience in the history of the Church in North-East Brazil. It would seem that in the years to come there will certainly be an increase in the practices of both traditional and modernist theology. This seems clear from the interplay of the forces actually

present in the country, above all at the ecclesiastical level. But this

does not mean that the hopes of the poor for liberation, the attainment of autonomy and self-determination, the need to democratize ecclesiastical structures, will not make progress. The way may perhaps be more difficult and may be lived differently but the hope which characterizes it will always be present. Christians have acquired some assets which cannot be made to disappear simply by decree. These acquisitions are historical signs. I single out four to illustrate my point of view:

- The presence of a basic Church made up of people who seek to understand and live by "Jesus' example" through their engagement with and towards the poor. These people are either poor themselves or have taken the cause of the poor to heart;
- The large numbers of lay people who have undertaken to proclaim the Reign of God and to confirm the faith of their brothers and sisters. Some of them have committed themselves to the ministry of the theological magisterium at different levels of ecclesiastical life;
- The feminist movement which is beginning to form within the Christian community itself despite encountering some reserve and misunderstanding. Some women are re-discovering the importance of their role in passing on the faith and are seeking a place as equals in the Church;
- The movement of small communities of religious women inserted among the poor, trying to live the daily life of the poor and working for

their liberation.

These four examples among many others show us the strength of the hope which wants to see a Church born out of the poor by the will of the Spirit and which could be instrumental in creating a new relationship between man, woman, nature and the world. This Church which is growing slowly, despite the difficulties inherent in the historical process, is an invitation to believe that the God of Life who is in our midst, who is our flesh, is urging us each day to "restore justice", to "set the prisoners free", to "proclaim a year of grace", to be open to the unpredictable which can change the course of our lives.

### **Communion**

If all this is true on the level of our faith lived in the limits of history, it is also true that this invitation to restructure life is situated in the midst of conflicts and difficulties. I would like to highlight a few in this conclusion.

- In the context of different practices of Church, can one speak of communion within the local Church? Should one not speak rather of communion between different Church groups who have a similar practice and in this sense, of communion that goes beyond the local level?
- The expression "local Church" is sometimes too limited to express the complex reality of christian communities living in a same geographical area. Today, to limit local Church only to a geographical aspect is to forget the complexity lived by the different groups.
- A great number of christians live a kind of communion which goes beyond diocesan boundaries. It is a communion which sometimes goes beyond even country boundaries, communion which is built upon the same interpretation of the faith and upon the common action of christians building a more just

and human society. Thus, one often sees that christians (catholics) have lived an ecclesial communion with groups of churches coming out of the Reform and even with groups who do not identify themselves with religious creeds.

In my opinion, we are in the process of building a new communion, one which will give a different face to christianity in the third millennium.

### **Religious Congregations**

To end this conclusion, I would like to say a word about the participation of different religious Congregations in Latin America in what we call "communion" of Church.

Religious Congregations, through their members, are identified with the different models of Church. There is not one Congregation in Latin America that is homogeneous even if officially it commits itself to one plan of action or type of Church. In reality, the options and actions are fairly mixed.

In the movement of small communities inserted in popular areas (inserted religious communities) there is often a communion that is created beyond the specificity of each religious Congregation. It is a communion built on the same way of living religious life - near to the poor, sharing with the poor. It is an attempt at communion with the life of the poor and at helping so that they will again rediscover their dignity. In this sense, these small communities although different in their congregational origins, come together in a "common charism" to put themselves at the service of and to listen to the poor. In theological terms, it is to be at the service of and attentive to the God of life.

This new way of living consecrated life demands, more and more, a new reflection on the structures of religious life and on the theology

and anthropology which support it. Religious who are very committed to the liberation of the poor often have the feeling of being "strangers" in their own Congregation, speaking another language because they are living another reality.

Can our old structures, modernized often from a "technical" point of view, welcome the "new wine" that is in the process of fermentation, or does one have to discover new casks so that the new wine will not be lost?

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**LOCAL CHURCH: PRACTICE AND THEOLOGY  
REFLECTIONS FROM THE U.S.A.**

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Teresita Weind, SND

On a very, very cold and wet Sunday afternoon into the evening of May in 1983 I was with a group of adults and children who marched in front of Palmer House in downtown Chicago. We were there to focus attention on and pray for the adoption of the Peace Pastoral, **THE CHALLENGE OF PEACE: GOD'S PROMISE AND OUR RESPONSE**. As you know, the Peace Pastoral was accepted. Since that Sunday afternoon there have been and continue to be many people walking for Peace, disseminating information about peace and encouraging others to turn their lives toward the Gift of God's Promise of Peace.

On a still colder day in late November in 1984 I was with another group of people who marched around the main building of the U.S. Post Office in downtown Chicago. We were protesting U.S. involvement in South America.

On yet another occasion, on a frigid Friday afternoon in Holy Week, and then again in the following year, on a beautiful, sunny April afternoon on Good Friday, I was with a very large number of Christians who were walking the living Way of the Cross throughout the northeast side of Chicago. The pilgrimage took us to 14 different places where we wanted to demonstrate against the way our local consulates, civic and state departments participate in the injustice, oppression and terrorism that destroys innocent people in our own and Third World countries.

I knew very few of these people with whom I marched, demonstrated and protested in the name of Jesus. As we moved together, we were a prophetic sign of the justice and freedom of

the Reign of God. As we moved together, we were an identifiable dimension of Local Church applying what we believed about the coming of Peace and Justice. I will probably never see many of these people again, but the identity I discovered and shared with them on those days helped to shape me into the Christian I am aspiring to be. These people called me to witness to my communion with the People of God.

Closer to home, I can recall that it was again a very cold evening in November of last year when a couple from one of our Base Communities came to take me with them to a scheduled meeting in the home of one of the members. I had been invited to be with them to listen to their concerns about our parish community. This same group invited me to return in January of this year so I could respond to what I had heard.

Most recently, on Tuesday evening, February 17, 1990, I was with a different Base Community for Mardi Gras - supper, socializing and evening-prayer. They had invited me to share the meal and then to preside for the communal prayer with their group.

#### **Gathered Around the Eucharist**

More frequently and more regularly than these spotted events just mentioned, I gather with our Christian community every weekend to **DO EUCHARIST**. This phrase, **DO EUCHARIST**, describes the shift from the practice of going to hear Mass to a growing conscious and active participation in the rites (liturgy of the Word and liturgy of Eucharist) and the determination to carry the

meaning of Eucharist into the work and play of everyday. The People of God, gathered around the Eucharist in a particular place, is the Local Church. I know many of these people with whom I DO EUCHARIST. I know all of the members of the Base Community units. Those whom I know and those whom I do not know share in that common bond in the mystery we name CHURCH. In this ecclesial reality, no one is a total stranger. In this mystery of CHURCH, I know I am intimately bound to many beautiful, justice-minded, peace-oriented people. These are people who made and keep making the commitment to live from the place of the Spirit and the energy of Sacrificial Love. Since that is more than any one person can ever do alone, these people keep coming together in many different ways to open each other to the Gift of God.

One of the solid and stable realities of Local Church is that we are drawn into and gifted with a community of people whose conscious identity is re-birth in the Risen Christ. We probably would not know these people, would not be privileged to serve and worship with these people were it not for Local Church.

#### **Bearing Witness to the Reign of God**

A primary function of the Local Church is the gathering of a diverse group of folks in a community of faith for the sake of bearing witness to the presence and coming of the Reign of God. Church actually structures that togetherness in mutual trust from a common origin. Church affords us the opportunity to work together on common interests toward a common direction arising from a purpose rooted in the Redeeming Christ.

#### **The Relocation of the Holy**

Local Church since 1965 has borne witness to the re-location of the holy in the midst of community in worship, example and service. (1) We are slowly moving away from attaching

the holy with the ordained or the special commissioned ministers. We are growing into an awareness of ourselves as "the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, God's own people who declare the wonderful deeds of God who called us out of darkness into that marvelous light of merciful love and peace." (1 Peter 2:9). Living into and out of this mystery is sometimes awkward, frustrating and even painful. It is not easy to share the responsibility of leadership after we have been led for such a long time. Experience bears out the other side: it is not easy to share the authority and power after having held it for such a long time. The passage into the new church is indeed a difficult one.

#### **CALL FOR REFORM**

The Pastoral Letter from Catholics Concerned about Fundamental Renewal of our Church takes this reality seriously. The Letter is a Call for Reform in the Catholic Church. The text of this letter, issued 25 years after Gaudium et Spes, was published in the New York Times as a full page advertisement on Ash Wednesday, February 28, 1990. The Ad included the full text and 4500 signatures. Those who wrote and those who signed the Call for Reform know very well that the re-location of the holy is alive and vibrant in the local ecclesial communities. We testify with the author of Revelations 21:3, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold the dwelling of God is with people. God will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God will be with them'" The Call to Reform is one response to this voice, spelling out some practical applications for realizing the re-location of God, the holy, in the midst of the People, the Laity, the Local Church.

Heaven and earth are full of the glory of God. But sometimes this glory becomes crusted over and concealed by institutional structures

that stand as a stumbling block to church members and society. To really experience the holy in the community, the Call for Reform reminds the Church that:

- we need to have women incorporated at all levels of ministry and decision-making;
- we need to discard the medieval discipline of mandatory priestly celibacy, and open the priesthood to women and married men, including resigned priests, so that the Eucharist may continue to be the center of the spiritual life of all Catholics;
- we need extensive consultation with the Catholic people in developing church teaching on human sexuality;
- we need to speed up the inculturation of diverse peoples through new forms of liturgy, language and leadership drawn from the native culture of the people; and,
- we need a process that allows all those affected to be heard from, and to take part in the decisions.

These and several more needs are included in the Call for the Reform of our Church. The letter concludes with this statement:

*To be a clearer sign and a better servant to God's global family, our church must reform its own structures. We call on all people within our church, in the spirit of co-discipleship, to use their imagination and creativity. For the world's sake, let us make the church more faithful to its mission." (2)*

### **EXPLOSION OF MINISTRIES**

The Call to Reform comes within this 25th anniversary year of the Council that renamed us the People of God, the Laity. Renamed and renewed, we are called to "full, active and conscious participation" in our local settings. There is no longer that certain someone who is going to come with hierarchical authority and do

church for us. This is the reality that is slowly sinking in and reshaping American Catholics. This is the reality that challenges us to be continuously formed and transformed for interaction for justice and world peace, for global community and ecological harmony.

Peter Neuner, theology professor at the University of Munich, writes:

*"In all theologically significant places in the Bible, the term LAOS does not refer to the common people in contrast to the spiritual and temporal leaders. LAOS circumscribes the believers and baptized in contrast to those who are not baptized and who do not believe.*

*LAOS designates people of God, church as a whole. If we have a correct theology of people of God, we do not need a special theology of the laity." (3)*

Local Church is in praxis wherever the Laity minister in the name of Jesus. With a global concern and local involvement we see ourselves as active participants in the great explosion of ministries. (4) In the arena of the local church, people reach out to people. Edward Sellner promotes mentoring as the authentic exercise of power that serves the needs of all the others in ministry. Mentoring leads people to new perspectives, facilitates personal and institutional growth, helps other name their talents, clarify their dreams and fulfill their potentials. Mentoring moves people from disorientation and despair to new life-giving experiences of creativity and hope. This degree and intensity of active involvement frees the lonely and alienated from the sphere of isolation, self-doubt, self-hatred and meaninglessness. Mentoring is a form of peer ministry. It is a way of getting the church involved in the world. The real issue today is about getting the church involved in the world.

Gregory Pierce, of the National Center of the Laity maintains that:

*"It's important to determine the rightness or wrongness of one's actions in the real world of work and family. We are not constantly called to take heroic stands. Church is not always heroic protest. Daily work inside our jobs is as important as the prophet in the desert."* (5)

### **Peer Ministry**

Peer ministry, self-help groups, and conscious witness to Christian values are a few of the ways that local church practices the gift of Faith in the Risen Christ. The challenge facing every form of Christian ministry is to be prophetic for the growth of the Reign of God here on earth. It is not enough for Christians to be fulfilled and self-satisfied. As Local Church, the people are to bear witness to the gospel values of freedom, equality, forgiveness and community. In North America this is a call to be counter-cultural and stand over and apart from the oppression, inequality, individualism, consumerism, materialism, violence and dehumanism that pervade this society. Strong ties, frequent prayer and commitment to the Way of Christ keep the Local Church alive and active in present day social trends. As more and more Christians grow in this conviction, more and more individuals form the connections that bring them in support of and with each other.

### **Ministry of Listening**

In 1981, Reverend J. Daryl Furlong and Sister Eileen, in the diocese of Madison, Wisconsin, began the Ministry of Listening. This is another form of peer ministry with a focused family perspective. It is an example of the explosion of ministries in North America. The Ministry of Listening draws the participants into a process of establishing support and healing for families at the parish level. The term that came out

in Fr. Furlong's work is "like-to-like ministry". More and more of us keep learning that the ones who are compassionate and sensitive are those who have experienced or presently share in a similar or LIKE hurt or pain. There are now many active groups for the separated and divorced, for those who are mourning the loss of a loved one, and those who are care-givers for the terminally ill.

Fr. Furlong and Sr. Eileen developed a structure for listening to families. They expressed it in a cyclic manner beginning with an awareness that understands, leading to a caring that enables, moving on toward a like-to-like ministry that serves, supported through structures that facilitate and free. The cyclical pattern of awareness, caring, ministry and structures continues to make clear at the level of Local Church that the parish is here to serve the needs of others. (6)

With the relocation of the holy in the believing community and its actions, more and more of the Laity come to see that Christian life is a way of achieving human fulfillment and implementing the work of the healing, redeeming Christ. Every Christian is called to share this mission and responsibility. Every Christian learns to serve as disciple and suffering servant. Every Christian discovers how to serve and share by listening.

Isaiah prophesized about this in one of the songs of the Suffering Servant:

*The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word those who are weary. Morning by morning God wakens, God wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught."* Isaiah 50:4

### **Notes:**

1. David Powers, "Evolution in the Priesthood", *Church*, Fall, 1988, p.18

2. Call to Action, 3900 North Lawndale, Chicago, Illinois 60618, U.S.A.

3. "The Laity," *Overview*, The Thomas More Association, 205 West Monroe Street, Chicago, Illinois 60606-5097, U.S.A.

4. Edward Sellner, *America*, September 16, 1989, p. 133.

5. Gregory Peer, *Overview*, March 1990.

6. Rev. J. Daryl Furlong, *The Ministry of Listening*, Buckley Publications, Inc., Chicago, Ill, 60640, 1987.

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**THE CHURCHES OF AFRICA:  
THEIR IDENTITY? THEIR MISSION?**

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Efoé-Julien Penoukou

Faith in Christ, in the Spirit of the Father is the greatest event that ever happened to me in my life and it remains my most precious possession. This faith I received, with so much else, was a personal gift from the Triune God who wished to act through many and generous missionaries in order to reveal himself also to us in Africa. I wish to make my conference more a testimony of this faith than an academic presentation, even if, because of my professional bias, I do propose certain theological considerations.

It is in the critical light of this historical and irreversible gift of the Triune God to men and women of all times, places and cultures, that I speak of Christian experiences and hopes in Africa in terms of the demands of both ecclesial identity and of fidelity to evangelical truth.

My testimony is grouped round the three following topics:

- I. Impact and dilemma of the African Churches.
- II. A 'specific Church' - a requirement both of ecclesial identity and of universality.
- III. Challenges to the Mission of the Church in Africa.

**I. IMPACT AND DILEMMA OF THE  
AFRICAN CHURCHES**

The coming of Christianity to black Africa had, and continues to have, a deep impact on the life and mentality of numerous peoples in their happy or unhappy opening up to the Western world. This is true even if they had been already strongly in-

fluenced by Islam. The Christian phenomenon appears as an incontestable fact of society in parts of Africa even while generating in spite of itself, nationalist messianisms, independent Churches or so-called syncretist tendencies.

Even an empirical look at the statistics on Catholics shows dearly that although they represent only 13% of the inhabitants of the continent today their annual growth rate of 3.5 million is greater than that of Catholics in Asia, Europe and Oceania together. The rate of increase in the number of priests places Africa in second place after Asia and before Europe, America and Oceania. It is also well-known that two-thirds of the world's 200,000 catechists are Africans. We could continue but we must not lose sight of the fact that although these statistics are encouraging, the motives for conversion are sometimes ambiguous. So also are some 'Christian' practices and even the content of faith. Nevertheless one can observe in general, a vitality and an undeniable aliveness in many ecclesial communities as well as in their social environment. Many dioceses have made worthwhile efforts in the fields of liturgy, catechetics, theology, socio-economic matters and politics. In Africa as elsewhere, under the inspiration of Vatican II, prayer groups, gospel-sharing, fraternal meetings are all developing; new ministries for the laity, both men and women, are making their appearance; indigenous religious institutes are being born and faculties of theology established; many regional, national and even continental associations of African theologians, biblical

scholars and moralists are appearing. Almost all local Churches are developing their social involvement, rightly concerned as they are, to link evangelisation and human development.

These ecclesial practices obviously differ, often widely, from one Church to another for various reasons such as the length and level of first evangelisation, the personality of the bishop, the presence or absence of Islam etc. They represent faith experiences which are most certainly sincere. They give birth to and nourish those men and women who today, build tomorrow's Church on African soil.

At the same time, the good faith of the African Churches places them in a kind of dramatic dilemma with regard to their inauthentic or non-prophetic relationship with a black continent ill at ease with itself. It is a continent subjected to a system of international aid, involved in conflicts - between tradition and modernisation, between authoritarian one-party systems and a desire for liberty, between a broken-down economy and the struggle to survive, between external aid and a system of exploitation etc. It is said that the African Churches constitute a kind of sounding-box of the different disunities and contradictions existing in their societies. More precisely, the Churches seem to be just as unable as are the African States themselves to break out of these contradictions in spite of the newness and the radical nature of the evangelical message. In fact, without denying the value of the experiences and the efforts of faith which the Spirit never ceases to uphold in the heart of the different ecclesial communities, the African Churches present a dilemma with three characteristics. They are:

1. Dependent Churches
2. "Wait-and-see" Churches
3. Outmoded Churches

## 1. Dependent Churches

Implanted from outside and founded on models of "church" which were developed by and for given societies, the African Churches are structured with a total dependence on alien plans - theological, pastoral, liturgical, financial etc. This is after more than a hundred years of evangelisation in some regions. The efforts at inculturation which can be seen here and there are, for the most part, superficially cosmetic without any real relationship to cultural symbolism. Ecclesial institutions are often imitations of those in Western Churches and are a heavy burden. As a result, and at the instigation of the African States, the African Churches are permanently beholden to others for financial support. Projects are undertaken according to the possibility of obtaining outside help. Even Mass offerings come from Churches elsewhere, their purchasing power and their 'intentions' penetrating even the Eucharistic celebrations of Africans. Numerous aid organisations are established, develop and then compete with each other. Without them there is no survival for our dioceses, our institutions, our pastoral methods, our seminaries, our theology faculties and our formation centres....

Along similar lines, the relationship between Missionary Institutes and some African Churches remains ambiguous in spite of the excellent work of missionaries in first evangelisation.

Such a situation gives rise to an ecclesiology of implantation which until now African Christians themselves have not been able to accept. This structural dependancy is anti-ecclesial in the long run. It strikes at the very identity of the Church and its end as sign and sacrament of salvation. It brings into question the credibility of the Church in Africa.

## 2. "Wait-and See" Church

Churches accustomed to receiving everything from outside tend to wait for everything. In this sense, many of the local Churches in Africa could be called "wait-and-see" Churches, often lacking in imagination and prophetic creativity. One waits for and applies certain exhortations from Rome as if they were divine decrees. The forthcoming special Synod for African bishops is, at the present moment, an astonishing illustration of this. The "wait-and-see" Church is one that is insufficiently helped by the Gospel to enlighten, take responsibility for or even create events. It rather waits for and submits to events instead of filling them with the leaven of the Gospel, anticipating them or determining their shape. This is to be seen in both ecclesial and social situations. The most striking example of this for me is the attitude of total indifference shown by the sub-Sahara Churches in the face of the racist system of apartheid.

## 3. Outmoded Churches

A "wait-and-see" Church naturally courts the risk of becoming outmoded - overtaken by events and by the evolution of mentalities and behavioral patterns. This is why in certain areas - doctrinal, moral and pastoral, a certain type of ecclesial language has no longer any effect. In fact, this language shows itself to be outmoded in relation to cultural traditions as well as to present-day changes. As a result, many groups do not feel that the gospel really touches their ancestral religious convictions, their actual life situation or their deepest aspirations. The phenomenon of syncretism is developing. Intellectuals and young people who seek companionship in centers of reflection and human solidarity are turning to the Rosicrucians or the Freemasons. Meanwhile, poor Christians faced with the aftermath of belief in witchcraft and the attendant need for healing

are joining the new religious movements of charismatic healing.

## THREE THEOLOGICAL CURRENTS

In the face of these three characteristics of African Churches, three theological currents have developed which attempt to react to the dilemma in which the Churches find themselves. They are complementary to each other. All want to establish an adequate relationship between the Good News of Salvation and African reality.

### 1. African Theology

This saw the light of day in the 50's on the eve of independence for African States. It is characterised by a demand for the overt recognition of African values. It is the theology of adaptation, of finding stepping-stones in cultural traditions in order to pass over them to a Christianity seen as a finished product. But this ongoing theology will become increasingly critical of the ecclesial practices of the Magisterium and will promote a growing awareness of the need to incarnate the object of belief in African reality.

### 2. The Theology of Inculturation

This follows the same lines as African theology but with three particular traits:

1. a concern to specify the precise the precise places for evangelical incarnation;
2. affirmation of the relative, partial and circumscribed character of the teaching of the Magisterium with regard to the unfathomable riches of the Word of God;
3. development of a dialectical relationship between Gospel and culture. If the culture has to accept the Word of God as a factor of conversion and anthropological and cosmic fulfillment, it can only do so by deepening, by itself and under the action of the

Spirit, the dimensions of meaning and hope which are inherent in this Word.

Especially in Burkina Faso, the theology of inculturation focuses on a Church/family praxis and on a theology of brotherhood and sisterhood.

### 3. The Theology of Liberation

During the 70's, this appeared because of the dehumanising situation in black Africa, the new awareness of the gospel as a promise for the whole person and for all persons, and the Latin-American Colloquium of Third World Theologians at Akkra in December 1977.

"All theology of liberation is born out of the attempt to understand the suffering of those who are victims of oppression and institutionised exploitation, of those who are rejected and treated like objects while they are human beings created in the image of God, redeemed by Christ and sanctified by the Spirit" (in "Libération ou Adaptation? La théologie africaine s'interroge". L'harmattan. 1979, p.195).

All these aspects which characterise practices and theologies in the African Churches today represent not only different faith experiences but also the limitations and demands of fidelity. In this second part of my testimony, I would like to put forward a few theological reflections along the lines of inculturation.

## II. A SPECIFIC CHURCH REQUIRES IDENTITY AND UNIVERSALITY

The question of the specific local Church has its foundations at one and the same time in the gift of the Triune God in Jesus Christ, and in the cultural gifts which also find their origin in this divine gift. The inculturation approach is a search for maturity in faith. Because of its

relevance and credibility in African societies it allows us to rediscover the Triune God, not as an abstract metaphysical problem, but as an interpersonal relationship which is a perfect communion of differences. The Triune God is at the same time difference and communion in relationship. The difference is not an obstacle to communion but a condition of communion. God is only God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All creation was made in the image of this Triune God before it was broken by the sin of division, of loss of identity. Nevertheless, all cultures are nostalgic for such an image of the Triune God and aspire to communion in the differences of their identity.

The mystery of the Church which St. Paul expresses in Ephesians as the plenitude of Christ, has no other identity than this Trinitarian structure of unity and diversity (Eph. 1:22-23). The Church actualises and realises in a sacramental way the communion which has been revealed and assumed by the person of Christ at the heart of history. The principle of the diversity and unity of Churches thus originates in the communion-in-diversity relationship proper to the Trinity.

These few reflections indicate how being a particular local Church is firstly a requirement of faith. The local Church draws its particular identity from the inexhaustible riches of the unique Mystery of the Holy Trinity, principle and model of the Church (Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism, No.2, par.6). It is the Spirit of such a Trinitarian mystery which enlightens the peoples and makes them fruitful, thus enabling them to build a Church through discerning and living certain specific aspects of their culture.

The local Church is neither a ghetto nor an anonymous society. It is one specific expression of the unique Church of Christ. In other words, the local Church fulfills

itself in communion with the totality of ecclesial Communities as the one and unique Church of Christ. There is then a sort of interiorisation, of mutual inclusion, which shows that it is only in agreement and in communion with other Churches that a local Church identifies itself with the Church of God. The particular local Church is both Church and specific in so far as it is a response to the gospel heard in a human situation, in communion with other local Churches. No one local Church can pretend to exhaust all the diverse meanings or the many historical forms assumed by the Church of Christ.

In Africa, the Church can actualise its specific identity, and show itself as sign and sacrament of salvation only by facing the major challenges with which it is presented.

### **III. THE CHALLENGES TO THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN AFRICA**

#### **1. Challenge of Identity**

The first challenge is that of the very identity of the local Church. This challenge is applicable not only to actual ecclesial experiences but above all to its environment and to its socio-cultural evolution. Many doctrinal and sacramental statements and practices still pose very basic problems and keep consciences in a state of perpetual turmoil. I am thinking here of the thorny question of marriage which prevents many Christians from receiving the other sacraments. In fact, the Christian family itself is threatened. The accommodation between Roman law and Germanic custom brought about in the ninth century by Archbishop Hinemas of Rheims still continues to weigh heavily on Catholic doctrine concerning marriage in Africa.

There remains also the delicate and complex problem of the eternal financing of projects and institu-

tions pertaining to the African-Church. Certainly, the disastrous economic environment prevailing on the continent makes it difficult to see other choices in the immediate future but this remains something paradoxical to a responsible acceptance of the gospel. If the Church in Africa remains so very dependent on outside help can we truly believe that the God of Jesus Christ has given what is needed to all peoples so that they might accept responsibly his message of salvation? How can it faithfully proclaim itself as Church, as sign and sacrament of Salvation for all? In Africa, we urgently need an ecclesiology of responsible participation. However difficult it may be, it is time that we ourselves increasingly undertake responsibility, area by area, for those projects which arise out of our essential needs and which are within our capabilities. Taking things in hand autonomously and responsibly, through a regional or even continental solidarity among the Churches, portrays a prophetic witness of liberation for the future. This would be a testimony to carry to the heart of an Africa eternally assisted from outside.

#### **2. Challenge of The Political Order**

It has been said in more than one African country, that the African States are not legal states. The majority of them are shackled by one-party authoritarian regimes. These systems which attack both liberty and human dignity are implemented, if not actually created by Christians. Acknowledging well-known principles, we must undertake a political commitment by both individual Christians and ecclesial Communities. It is where the destiny of human beings is being played out that the mission of salvation proper to the Church is to be found. This salvation is neither an abstract principle nor a theoretical debate but an event which involves Christ and his Church in the history of the human race.

### 3. Challenge of The Economic Order

The permanent economic drama of Africa is well-known, as are its causes. Firstly, there is the international economic system which contributes to African's underdevelopment - in spite of whatever is signed by way of loans or aid agreements. The international speculators who deal in our primary resources, the bottle-neck of debts and the accumulated interest on them and the present plans for structural adjustments, all spell ruin for Africa. The figures, the facts and the misdeeds are there. But the serious responsibility of Africans themselves for this stagnation is undeniable. Areas of real effort exist but they are isolated and sterile in the long run. The World Bank observed recently that the standard of life on the black continent is about the same as it was thirty years ago. The responsibility of Africans for this situation is enormous: lack of thought, laziness, a mendicant mentality, corruption, irrational interference by arbitrary political powers in the economic sphere, ill-conceived development plans... so many evils which crush people like a sordid and sinister fate. It is time to call all Africans to make a collective effort in the name of their dignity and intelligence as human beings to act to change the situation.

Faced with such a situation many local Churches have rightly undertaken micro and macro development projects. However, the often social, and therefore non-productive nature of these projects, their excessive dependence on external financial backing and the partial nature of involvement by the Church are all factors which make for self-questioning on the educative role of the Church in economic practice. In what ways and for what reasons does the Church's strategy of development differ from that of the State, and above all, how does it form the African for self-reliance? In a word, are the practices of social development un-

dertaken by the local Churches on the right road for the liberation of the poor, and thus for the coming of justice, - sign of the Reign of God?

### 4. Challenge of The Cultural Order

For us in Africa the question of culture is an all-embracing one. I am not entering into the false debate between those who wish that we would be no longer African in Africa and those who wish to reduce our cultures to fossilised traditions. Culture is not a static thing; it represents, both in tradition and evolution, a way of being together, transmitted and unceasingly interpreted as vehicle and creator of values capable of helping a human being to become fully human.

For us the cultural question belongs to the theological order as I have defined it earlier. It also leads to an understanding of how much the Redeemer of humanity, who wished to save the Jewish people in their particular culture, can only be truly accepted in the heart of specific cultures.

The liberation or human promotion of Africans as Africans does not exclude the urgent need for a judicious openness to the evolving realities of our present world. This is necessary in order to discover and develop the true values of their cultural patrimony.

### CONCLUSION

In Africa it is not the people who reject the Church but rather the Church which does not recognise itself in the people, a people in solidarity with history. We do not have religious crises but religions in crisis.

I end on a note of hope with regard to all the sufferings of the local Churches by quoting a celebrated 16th century theologian, Erasmus of Rotterdam, who was a

contemporary of Luther, and who was threatened and isolated in his struggle for the liberation and fidelity of the Church of his day. He wrote these words full of emotion, humility and faith: "I therefore support this Church until I see in it a

better one, and it is certainly obliged to support me until I become better." The Church is not yet perfect and neither are we! - We are called to become so in the perfection of the communion of the Triune God, our very reason for existence.

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SPEAKER: Justo Lacunza  
(Pontifical Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies)

DATE: Tuesday, 15th May, 1990

TIME: 16.00 - 18.30 hrs.

PLACE: SVD Generalate, via dei Verbiti, 1  
(via dei Verbiti and vialle Marco Polo, buses 95, 57,  
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## HEALTH IN A SEARCH FOR WHOLENESS SOME INITIAL EXPLORATIONS

RESOURCE SARAH SUMMERS, MMS  
PERSONS: Superior General of the Medical Missionary Sisters

MARY PAWATH, MMS  
Vicar General of the Medical Missionary Sisters

DATE: Wednesday, 13th June, 1990

PLACE: SVD Generalate, via dei Verbiti, 1

MORNING 9.00 - 13.00 Presentations and discussions  
SESSION

13.00 - 14.30 Lunch. You may bring lunch or take lunch at  
either of two nearby restaurants.

AFTERNOON 14.30 - 15.00 "The Global Brain" - a video about the inter-  
SESSION connectedness of our world.  
15.00 - 17.00 Case-study of Health Care for the Poor in  
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SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION IN ITALIAN, FRENCH, ENGLISH

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