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## EDITORIAL

What is the role of religious leaders in peacemaking and social change in Africa? The first article reports the efforts of an ECUMENICAL GROUP to explore the implications of this question and to forge a pro-active agenda for the continent.

JOSEPH PUTHENPURAKAL, SDB presents the specific missionary challenges to be faced as we move towards the 21st century - the century of Asia. He focuses on the obstacles which block the Gospel message as it encounters the Asian psyche, its traditions and values.

JON SOBRINO, SJ probes the meaning of Leonardo Boff's decision to leave the priesthood and the Franciscans. He analyses it in terms of a series of crises in the current Church. Central to his reflections, is the credibility of the Church with the victims of history and those we call, 'the Left'.

During their 1992 General Assembly, the PARIS MISSION SOCIETY, founded in 1663, considered the fundamental purpose of their society and the shape of mission in the future. Their collegial statement is rooted in a rich history which draws on almost 400 years of mission experience.

MAGDA VAN HOYWEGHEN, MMS presents both a summary of the 9th International Conference on AIDS and a sobering commentary on the spread of the disease. "By the year 2000, 40 to 40 million people will be infected; 90 percent of all HIV infections in the developing countries"!



## CONGRATULATIONS

### New Superior Generals

SR. ANNUTIATA PAK, IBMV

FR. BENITO ARBUES RUBIOL, FMS

## GENERALATE MOVES

Order of The Holy Cross  
(Crosiers)  
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Wollegestraat, 19  
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Belgium

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## RELIGIOUS LEADERS: PEACEMAKING AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN AFRICA

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*(What follows is a statement from the symposium, held in Kenya from July 18-23, 1993. Co-sponsors included, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), the Association of Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA) and the Nairobi Peace Initiative (NPI).*

Participants came from 16 countries in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa and from two European countries to consider the multiple changes underway on the African continent and the neighbouring island countries. They came from Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Ethiopia, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Switzerland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Africa is under the influence of a "second wind of change", characterised by a restructuring of the political order. It is clear that changes such as the shift from one-party to multi-party political systems, the revision of constitutions, legal reform highlighting various aspects of social concern are benefiting Africa. These are welcome changes. These changes come at a time when there is renewed interest in the history of the carving up of Africa by the colonial powers. The implications of that interest for current developments in Africa remain to be seen.

During the early 1960s when most African countries became independent, Africa's leaders collectively accepted the boundaries drawn by the colonial powers. That acceptance constituted one of the basic provisions of the OAU. One of its main objectives was to facilitate the liberation of those portions of Africa still under colonial or minority rule. Thus was post-independent Africa committed to a largely reactive agenda, premised in great measure on the structures imposed by or inherited from the colonial period. But as the African proverb notes: "The log can be in water for a long time without becoming a crocodile" - Africans will not become Europeans, even if we continue to work within European categories and structures.

It was against such a background that this symposium was called to consider the role of religious leaders in peacemaking and social change in Africa. We have been called together to forge a pro-active agenda for this continent.

## DEMOCRACY

Democracy is a political, economic social and cultural choice made by society, allowing for the implementation of a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Additionally, democracy is understood to encompass the broad range of social institutions and movements which have their origins in initiatives taken by the people. In our discussions, it comes

clear that "democracy" makes its appearance in Africa as a response to the excesses of one-party, and in many cases, one-man rule. Additionally, the unsatisfactory political order has been exacerbated by economic decline with commensurate human suffering because of declining standards of living. People in Africa want change, with the expectation that a shift to

more participatory governance will provide answers to the ills of their respective countries.

Africa is undergoing a second liberation. One of the elements of this process is identified as democracy. In this symposium we have been at pains to understand the concept as it comes from outside the continent and to define for our own purposes what it might mean for the Church's engagement.

### International Order

Additionally there is an understanding that some portions of the current democratisation process is lodged in the shifting dynamics of the international order. In as much as the process of democratisation is perceived to be imposed from outside the continent, it is manifest most explicitly as a new configuration of conditionalities with regard to both bi-lateral and multilateral aid.

In some African states, the democratisation process has come to be associated with what is now referred to as multi-partyism. Multi-partyism, in turn has been identified with pressure and agitation for national elections with the

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attendant possibility of the respective political candidate to 'win' or 'lose'. Although the democratic process is associated with multi-partyism, there is decision underway to expand and enrich the meaning of democracy.

### Winners and Losers

There was strong discussion regarding the demands of the 'win/lose' matrix. It was noted that within traditional African leadership patterns there is an acceptance of and a provision for losing and for the surrender of power to a person identified through an accepted consensual process. Relinquishing power in many traditional contexts is compensated with face-saving devices. Patterns of power management

together with the various manifestations of shared power and compensation are situated within the context of a community consensus process.

In contrast, post-colonial political regimes, whether based on single or multi-party configurations, have yet to find their roots in widespread popular consent. Thus when a political figure loses (rather than relinquishes) office, the loss is total and, on occasion, devastating. Obviously, in such situations leaders are reluctant to leave office. They are tempted and often prepared to abuse power in order to retain it.

### Popular Consent

If the current political process is to be carried out with some degree of legitimacy, it will be necessary to revise the national constitutions of African countries, which were drafted without full participation from the people. Any such revision will require full consultation with and consent of the people. Meaningful political change can only be achieved on the basis of *consensus*. How is this achieved in Africa today?

It was emphasised that Africans need not be taught about the 'win/lose' matrix; which has been present in Africa since time immemorial. In the African heritage, this matrix did not yield unmanageable tensions owing to the in-built values and norms. This insight has not been acknowledged or sufficiently appreciated by political leaders in the post-colonial period. In the African tradition there is an understanding of unity in diversity; an affirmation of a certain kind of pluralism and a balance between the several components. A re-appraisal of this traditional understanding of political process will greatly enhance the social transformation taking place in Africa today.

### Government

The concept of government in Africa is still in formation. Existing models of government are informed by aspects of the colonial heritage while the current democratisation process makes additional contributions to the understanding of government. Good government, according to symposium contributions, is characterised by community, compassion, and continuity.

The Church does well to identify and incorporate into the consensus-building process,

value concepts which provide for stable but responsive exercise of power.

### Economics

The economies of some countries in Africa have for all practical purposes collapsed. Many others are not viable. If the current democratic reordering of the political scene in Africa is to be sustainable, it will need to be undergirded by stable economies. Participants noted that the

economic issues need to be addressed on two levels: those which impinge on Africa from outside the continent and those over which Africans have control within the continent.

Economic issues within the continent can be further divided between those over which governments have control and those over which people have control. There were repeated calls for careful analysis and action by the Church on all levels of economic concern.

## CHURCH

Who is the Church? When we speak of 'the Church' addressing or interacting with the political changes in today's Africa, who is being referred to? Just as in the case of the word 'government', it is useful to reflect on the word 'Church' in the variety of African languages and in the variety of our representative ecclesial traditions. In the public arena the Church tended to be portrayed as the voices of senior Church leaders and officers of national and regional ecumenical organisations.

this regard, it is incumbent on the Church to participate in an affirmation of common and inclusive elements of ethnicity which in turn render the African identity renewed and strengthened. In one form or other, the Church is present in nearly all the ethnic communities across

The participants urged that public advocacy by Church leaders at all levels be premised on the **consensus** and the **unity** of the entire Church community. Collectively and individually, the leadership role of the Church is called to be exercised in the **servant posture** in its relation to the people.

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***Meaningful political change can only be achieved on the basis of consensus. How is this achieved in Africa today?***

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### Identity

It was pointed out that African identity comprises a number of elements including: **politics** (the distribution and management of social influence); **economy** (the distribution and management of resources); **ethics** (the system of values); **aesthetics** (beauty) and **metaphysics** (world view), the most recognised instrument of which is religion. Obviously the Church in Africa, has been preoccupied with metaphysics and religion. During this time of rapid and far-reaching changes, it is called, additionally, to engage itself with the renewal of all aspects of the African identity.

### Ethnicity

Participants expressed the need to examine critically the African ethnic reality as one of the potential building blocks of the new society. In

the continent, the Church is well placed to exercise a unifying influence over African peoples. Most critically, the Christian Church is challenged to address the question of authentic African identity and the related issue of African culture.

### Religious Plurality

Participants emphasised that Africa has always been culturally and religiously pluralist. In the traditional African setting, this plurality has not generated tension and conflicts, largely because of the in-built values and norms of tolerance and reciprocity.

The symposium urged that these values and norms be taken seriously not only in building bridges of cooperation between Churches, Church organisations, but also in interaction with individuals, organisations and institutions of other religious communities, including Islam. Participants recognised that the unity of Africa will greatly be enhanced by the development of

positive and constructive relationships at all levels.

### Church and Economics

Cultural and spiritual identity remain truncated in the absence of economic self-determination. As a colonised continent, Africa was by definition not economically self-determining. During the post-colonial era African countries have not been able to assert their economic self-determination. Instead, continued economic dependency has served to undermine the self-confidence of African countries and communities including the African Church.

In our discussion groups, participants articulated the need for Africa's full and deliberate participation in the determination of its own economic future, in all aspects of life. For economic self-determination is seen to be an important component of a healthy self-identity.

The necessity of belt-tightening and sacrifice in the current economic crisis is understandable but not an attractive one. Every possible means must be identified to affirm and strengthen

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***Most critically, the Christian Church is challenged to address the question of authentic African identity and the related issue of African culture.***

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those viable sectors of the existing economic base in Africa. Already examples can be cited of the Churches in Africa which have taken the call for more deliberate action towards their own economic self-determination and towards greater participation in their respective economies.

### Participation

In this symposium, the Churches have been praised for challenging, on occasion, all oppressive powers and structures. At the same time they have been accused of unwitting collaboration. In particular, the Church is admonished to address the manner in which political power is claimed and exercised on the African continent. In the very first instance, within its own struc-

tures, among its own leaders and between leaders and laity, the Church must be seen to be modelling a unified witness in terms of equitable participation, transparency and accountability.

This symposium affirms the Church as an instrument of change in anticipation of the new society. In particular, the Symposium urged the Churches to recognise the essential role of women in the life of the Church, and also in the process of reconciliation, peace-making and social change. This recognition should be supported by strengthening the participation of women at all levels.

Likewise, the Symposium also urged the Churches to further encourage the youth to participate in their programmes at all levels. To this end, the Churches were urged to review their strategies in order to provide opportunities and resources for a good and active participation.

### Consensus Building

Additionally, the Church is called to affirm and strengthen the unity of all peoples; it must help to create an atmosphere of mutual caring and listening, enabling people to participate knowledgeably in the current change process. Specifically, the Church should encourage the selection, education and preparation of qualified candidates to run for public office and should, to this end, educate the electorate on their rights, their duties and their expectations of the holders of public office. Among other things, such expectations include the consent of the people for whom an elected representative speaks.

In the period prior to elections, the Church should facilitate consultation and the formulation of common goals among political candidates, educating them to the norms of transparency and accountability vis-a-vis their own electorate. For those who lose in the contest for public office, the Church is called to offer its pastoral ministry, ensuring that such loss is neither total nor detrimental to the individual or community involved. In this regard, continental Church organisations such as the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and Symposium of Episcopal Conferences in Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) are urged to take seriously their allocated observer status at the OAU.

## Reliable Information/Expertise

If the Church is to play its role in the public affairs of the continent effectively and efficiently, it must do so on the basis of reliable information and with the support of qualified personnel. In this regard the Churches are urged to utilise the lay experts in various disciplines for collection, analysis and synthesis of relevant data.

To this end it will also be necessary for the national, regional and continental ecumenical organisations to collaborate in the dissemination of relevant information and insights, which facilitate the process of change in various parts of Africa. Such collaboration should also include the strengthening of existing theological facilities and curricula, ensuring that the training of young Church leaders will be attuned to

the needs of the times.

## Church as Healing Community

There is great promise of a more participatory society in Africa. There is also the dire need to heal the wounds of the past. In numerous countries across the continent, civil wars are raging. The Church is called to minister to all conflicting parties, and, of course, to the victims of conflict, working for the restoration of broken people and broken societies. In Mozambique, in Liberia, in the Sudan, in Ethiopia, in Kenya and in other countries, the Church has demonstrated compassion and articulated vision for a reconciled future. In limited fashion and at times on larger scale, the Church has been able to beat swords into plowshares.

# RECONCILIATION AND PEACEMAKING

The Church is mandated to be involved in peacemaking and reconciliation. The gospel presents this mandate as an essential element of Christian witness. Biblical reconciliation has everything to do with wholesome self-identity, with integrated relationships to God, neighbour, community and also to nature. The whole world is God's world.

Ultimately, mature reconciliation is the product of inter-dependent relationships at all levels of society and with all people. In the quest for 'right relationships', the Church is called to exercise the role of bridge-building between hostile communities, of healing within and between hurting communities, of dialogue instead of confrontation, of an understanding of real needs rather than superficial political positions staked out by power brokers.

## Reconciliation Politics

It is in governance and political life that the noble mandate of reconciliation politics is put to the test; in the discussion there was strong debate on the practicalities of the win/win aspect of reconciliation politics. As a beginning point, it was emphasised that multi-party politics as presently practised in Africa takes a variety of forms. The definition of democracy is open to contributions from all quarters, including the African tradition. If the goal of political

change is a harmonious community, it does not necessarily follow that the politics of competition provide the means. Churches were urged to become actively involved in the search for alternative democratic models appropriate to the respective countries, taking into account the African heritage, and post-colonial pressures.

The Church in Africa is challenged to affirm the well-being of all political contestants. On a

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continent in which the exercise of power is often equated with "eating", the politics of reconciliation is a daunting challenge and opportunity for the Churches to serve Africa. Reconciliatory entry points are provided precisely by the strongest tension points; the Church is called to keep pressure on political or military contestants, where apparently unresolvable differences surface. As the 'servant of all',

the Church has no option but to be available wherever there is hurt.

Even more urgent for the Church is the call to anticipate tension spots by engaging in consensus building, ensuring that constitutional reform, elections and other public processes at

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***The Church ought never be oblivious to political process. But neither is the Church bound to make its contributions solely within the confines of the publicly accepted political arena.***

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all levels be carried out in the spirit of "win/win". Clearly "win/win" possibilities are greatly enhanced when a basic consensus exist and when such consensus eventually takes the form of equitable laws for the benefit of all.

The Church ought never be oblivious to political process. But neither is the Church

bound to make its contributions solely within the confines of the publicly accepted political arena. Indeed, the Church has the option and the mandate to work outside political structures, appealing to basic values and norms, building consensus on a broad range of issues. Indeed, consensus building involves much more than political relations.

Consensus building and education for participation in the political process is not carried out in a void. Participants affirmed that the African electorate knows what it wants. In this regard, consensus building is carried out as a process which liberates people to fulfill their own felt needs. To this end, the Church is mandated to foster reconciliation as dialogue with the community; with protagonists, with antagonists, with all contestants in conflict, strengthening meanwhile all who have the gift of healing and reconciliation.

Ref. AMECEA Documentation Service  
September 15, 1993  
P.O. Box 21400  
Nairobi, Kenya



**Gerald A. Arbuckle, SM., Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership**  
(Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 1993) pp. 226.

*What is the role of dissent in the Church and in religious congregations? Gerald Arbuckle defines dissent as "the proposing of alternatives" and proceeds to explore the role of loyal dissent in mission. The book is divided into two sections - Dissent, Leadership and Refounding in the Church and The Church in Miniature: The Refounding of Religious Congregations. Although some of the material in the second part has been covered in Out of Chaos: Refounding Religious Congregations, the new emphasis makes this book well worth a careful look!*



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# ASIA - MISSIONARY CHALLENGES

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Joseph Puthenpurakal, SDB

*(Joseph Puthenpurakal has been working in Nagaland for the past 20 years. At present he teaches in Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong, India).*

## AN OVERVIEW

To speak of Asia is to speak about many countries at the same time. More than a continent, Asia is a conglomerate of "continents" and giant archipelagoes. It is that part of the globe where more than anywhere else one meets countless human masses. It is the home of more than 3000 million people, that is, 60% of the world's population - the greater majority of whom never heard the Gospel. Its ancient history goes back more than 5 thousand years. It has a rich mosaic of cultures and sub-cultures. It has a rich heritage of spiritualities.

In fact, Asia is the cradle of all great religions of the world: Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Christianity, born in Asia, accounts for hardly 4% of Asia's teeming millions. Catholics number about 70 million. If we exclude the Philippines where the majority of Catholics are found (50 million), then the rest of the Christian population would appear as a drop in the ocean of Asia's immense multitudes. It may be mentioned that 60% of Asia's population is made up of youth, and about 50% of the people live below the poverty line!

Asian countries, with the exception of Japan and Thailand, have undergone, in one way or other, the traumatic experience of foreign domination. In the wake of the new-found political freedom there has been a dynamic economic development in most of the countries. As a result, new economic centres like Japan, Taiwan, Korea and Thailand have emerged. It

has also given birth to a middle class society which is highly consumeristic and competitive. Often this new middle class is indifferent and insensitive to the overwhelming majority of the poor and marginalised for whom life is a struggle against privation and exploitation. Unfortunately, the benefits of science and technology are yet to reach the masses. "Many Asian countries", we read in a recent report, "are still governed by dictatorial, military or

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theocratic regimes marked by a denial of human and civic rights, political murder, the curtailing of freedom of expression and of the press".

Therefore, whether it is from the socio-cultural, socio-religious or socio-political point of view, the realities of Asia are so challenging and so complex and the contrasts, from Calcutta in India to Shanghai in China, from Jakarta in Indonesia to Dhaka in Bangladesh are so diverse and the living conditions of people so different that it is extremely difficult to make accurate observations which are applicable everywhere. At the same time, it would not be possible to understand the missionary and missiological challenges of Asian

Churches apart from the sociological, economical, cultural and religious challenges of the people.

Among the Churches in Asia four are emerging as centres of powerful witness to Christ and his Kingdom. They are: South Korea in the Far East (North), the Philippines in the Far East (South), Indonesia in South East Asia and India in South Asia. In countries like China, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan the Churches are not that free to carry out their service of evangelisation. The same is also true of Arunachal Pradesh in North East India.

In Sri Lanka, Christians form about 7.5% (Catholics = 6.7%). Still, the position of Christians is weak, because of the strong link between the government and the Buddhist monks. In Japan, Pakistan, Thailand, Bangladesh and in the rest of Asia Christians are a very small minority. The case of India deserves a special mention, namely, Christians in India number 21 million, that is, 2.7% of the total population. Of these the Catholic Church which forms only 2% of the population carries out about 20% of the social services of the country through its educational institutions, hospitals, rural clinics and socio-economic programmes.

## MISSIONARY CHALLENGES

### A Clarification

First of all, by **challenge** we do not mean **danger**. What we understand by it here is a God-given opportunity, however difficult it may be, which, if utilised in faith and with the resources available, will lead to the spread of

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*The Churches in Asia are called upon to give a prophetic voice to millions who suffer.*

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the Gospel and the glory of God. A challenge, in other words, is a difficulty turned into an opportunity.

Secondly, a **missionary challenge** refers to a challenge in a concrete and definite form of mission work. For example, multiplicity of languages in a given area, difficulties of communication, poverty of the people, illiteracy, lack of personnel, religious persecution, are some of the missionary challenges which the missionary has to face and overcome in his/her concrete day-to-day mission work. Instead by **missiological challenge** we mean problems arising from theological reflection when the evangelising mission of the Church is confronted with a given context. For example, how do we understand the centrality of Jesus Christ in a context of religious pluralism, the role of the Church vis-a-vis world religions, the **why** of the urgency of proclamation, if non-Christians

too may be saved in their religious traditions, the link between conversion and baptism, etc.

### Injustice and Exploitation

It is true that years of freedom from colonial rule have helped the Asian countries to formulate their own economic policies and priorities. Many nations have become richer. But it is also true that the poor have not been given their just share of the benefits of scientific and technological progress.

In many Asian countries their everyday life is a continuous struggle for existence. Often they lack the bare minimum needed to live: the 360 million who live below the poverty line in India, the many other million in Bangladesh, Pakistan, China, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Laos and other countries, and those living in the outskirts of many urban centres are just a few examples.

Along with poverty, there flourish new forms of slavery, injustice, violence, corruption, inhuman working conditions, exploitation of various types, the use of drugs and other social evils.

The Churches in Asia are called upon to give a prophetic voice to these millions who suffer. The voice of the Churches may appear to be feeble in comparison with the magnitude of the problems. Still their voices can be the best witnesses in the Asian context.

## Secularisation and Materialism

The desire for a better life with the comforts which modern life can offer is a big attraction for many. But often the temptation is to measure happiness and success by material possessions. The ensuing danger is a growing disregard for the religious and transcendent dimensions of life. The powerful effects of modern mass media communications with their consumeristic and hedonistic appeal are a tremendous challenge to the values of the Gospel. At times, the Churches are at a loss. This challenge is felt especially in urban centres. If the Churches are not to lose the cities, a renewed form of evangelisation and catechesis is a must.

A rediscovery of the spiritual riches of Asian cultures and values is a must. In this the role of the Churches is crucial.

## Credibility

Though Christianity consists of a small minority in Asia, the image non-Christians have of the Churches is that of a powerful social institution effective and disciplined. The Churches are respected for their services. But in many cases, they are not wanted. Though born in Asia, Christianity is considered as foreign to Asia. Its link with colonial origins, its lifestyle, its forms of worship, its training of personnel, and above all, its exterior super-structure and dependence on the West even for day-to-day expenses increase the suspicion of non-Christians, and confirm them in their belief that the Christian Churches are a threat to national integration and cultural unity.

## Inter-Religious Dialogue

By and large the Christian Churches have had some success among the tribal peoples of Asia, and among people who are marginalised and who belong to minority groups. However, the great religions of Asia have remained for the most part impenetrable to Christian missionary work. The tendency to identify nationality, religion and culture as well as the politicisation of religion by vested interests further complicate the religious scenario of Asia. The rise of fundamentalist groups and the proliferation of religious sects make the situation still more complex. For the Churches the question of inter-religious dialogue is no more an option. So while affirming the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the definitive self-revelation of God, it

is necessary to explore the action of the Spirit of Jesus in the great religious traditions of Asia.

In this context it may be noted that in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* there is one quotation which occurs more than once, as Fr. H.J. Kroeger, a Maryknoll missionary and missiologist observes. It is found in Articles 6, 10 and 28: **We must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal Mystery.** Missionaries and missiologists are invited to explore the richness of this quote and to realise ever more the workings of the Spirit in non-Christian religious traditions. Inter-religious dialogue will open the way to this renewed understanding and enrichment of each other.

## Inculturation

Inculturation, an all-embracing reality in evangelisation, is a slow process. It is the only meaningful mode of proclamation, and proclamation becomes meaningful in the measure in which the Good News is inculturation among a given people.

In the context of Asia it would mean allowing the Gospel message to come in touch with the Asian psyche, to meet the Asian soul and to

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transform its values with the power of the Gospel. The Good News, then will express itself in the lifestyle, worship services, religious art and architecture, formation programmes and organisational structures of Asian Churches. It will then speak a language intelligible to Asia's millions.

## Redimensioning

The institutional build-up and the investment pattern of Asian Churches stand in direct con-

trast to the stark poverty of the millions of Asia who live in conditions which are distressing. There is the ever present danger of proclamation losing its force, and spending becoming more and more internal and outreach programmes becoming proportionately scanty. Are the Churches willing to reallocate their resources in favour of the poor? In favour of a more convincing witness value?

### Difficult Areas and Oppressive Regimes

Totalitarian regimes and Communist governments and fundamentalist ideologies prevalent in some countries cannot last long as history teaches us and as the recent events in Eastern Europe demonstrate. In all these situations the Churches have to have great patience and endurance. And that is the tough challenge several Churches are facing in different parts of Asia.

### Responsive Areas

Pope John Paul II speaks in prophetic tone when he writes: "I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelisation and to the mission *Ad Gentes*" (RM 3). There are several responsive areas in Asia where the gospel is welcome, for example, the tribals of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar and others. Every effort must be made to reach them with

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*Jesus Christ appears to be the real challenge of Asia. In a continent of religious pluralism and relativism how should we proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus Christ when similar claims are made by the followers of other religions...?*

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the Good News. Just as the Apostle Paul changed his plans and went over to Macedonia, Asian Churches may have to change some of their plans and priorities to announce the Good News for those who are open to Jesus Christ. Statistics reveal that the Churches spent 98% of personnel and means on themselves, while hardly 2% of it is used for outreach programmes. Missionary evangelisation is **contact**, contact with the un-reached.

### Fundamentalism and Sects

This is one of the most challenging forces facing the Churches in Asia today. The transition from colonialism to independence and the sudden impact of modernisation and of technological advance have shattered many of the age-old cultural patterns and values and world-views of people without replacing them with new and more meaningful ones. The resulting confusion and chaos have given birth to fundamentalist groups which find in their new attitudes a sense of stability and security. The renewal of Churches, the creation of supportive groups through Base-level Ecclesial Communities and the projection of a more "gospel" image of the Church are the tasks that await the Churches.

### Youth

Young people form more than half of Asia's population. Day by day they are becoming victims of political parties and dangerous ideologies. If guided properly, they can become the key to a prosperous and more peaceful Asia of tomorrow. Unfortunately very few Churches in Asia are prepared to deal with the problems and needs of modern youth. Even religious congregations with a specific gift for working among youth are finding the task very difficult.

### Christian Unity

A divided Christianity can never enter into effective dialogue with world religions. So far, the Churches in Asia have not been able to take seriously the task of Christian unity. Some attempts have been made here and there, but a decisive step towards Christian unity is yet to be taken. It is risky, because the Churches are unwilling to be vulnerable.

### Mass Media Communication

In the context of Asia where millions are illiterate, mass media have an important role in the spread of the Good News. The subtle ways in which modern media are used to propagate anti-social values and pernicious pornography remain as a constant bombardment of the Good News. No individual Church may be able to stand up to it. Asian Churches must meet the challenge unitedly, not only for counteracting the evil effects of negative media, but, above all, to use them to reach out to the people who have no other chance to come in contact with the Gospel message.

## MISSIOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

### The Centrality of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ appears to be the real challenge of Asia. In a continent of religious pluralism and relativism how should we proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus Christ when similar claims are made by the followers of other religions with regard to their own founders? What does Jesus Christ mean to the 96% of Asia's population? These are not new questions. But, the answers to these questions have become urgent, because we are living in a world that is fast becoming a global village. Hindus and Muslims, Jains and Parsees live side by side with Christians, and in the so-called Christian West there are Chinese and Japanese, people from India and Indonesia, Singapore and Sri Lanka. Moreover, the aggressiveness of Islam and the fundamentalist attitude of Hinduism in some areas force Christians to take seriously their belief in the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ. But unfortunately the vast majority of Christians are unprepared to find answers to the questions that are asked of them.

### A Renewed Mission Theology

Perhaps no concept in theological discussions has undergone so much change in the last few decades as the concept of MISSION. Vatican I (1869-1870) spoke of mission as one of the many tasks of the Church. Vatican II (1962-1965) placed mission in the heart of the Church, thus ushering in a Copernican Revolution in theological thinking. The short sentence in *Ad Gentes 2*: "**The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature**" is theologically a revolutionary insight. It gives all theology a new orientation. It makes mission theology pervade all theology and all theology missionary. The revolution has just begun.

In fact, the concept of mission from being an appendix to ecclesiology has become a key concept in understanding what the Church is for. Earlier Western theology busy with atheism, secularism, liberation, had very little time to look at the nature of the Church. With Vatican II and with the post-Conciliar documents, especially *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio*, all theological disciplines and related subjects have started focusing on mission of the Church in the world, namely, to offer Jesus in his manifold expressions as the Saviour of

humankind. Without mission the Churches cannot be called "Catholic". The great challenge, therefore, is to understand theology missiologically, and to help missiology, which is an interdisciplinary science, with the findings of theological reflections.

### An Integrated Evangelisation

The post-synodal Exhortation of Pope Paul VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi* - one of the richest post-conciliar documents - describes evangelisation as a rich, complex and dynamic reality. It contains elements like witness, dialogue, proclamation, catechesis, conversion, baptism and the other sacraments, insertion into the ecclesial community, implantation of the Church, the formation of local clergy and religious, inculturation, integral human promotion, liberation, etc. The Pope also emphasises that: "There is no true evangelisation if the name, the

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*Vatican II calls for a Church that is prepared to consider "dialogue" as the mode of "being a Church", and inculturation as its mode of proclamation and communication.*

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teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Song of God, are not proclaimed" (EN 22). Forgetting this complex, but rich understanding of evangelisation, can lead to wrong missionary practices.

The challenge which the Asian Churches have is not to lose sight of all these different aspects, while being busy with one or the other dimension of evangelisation.

### A Hermeneutic for Asia

The task of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in relation to Asian realities and in the light of the Gospel is to make the Good News really "good news" for Asia. The crucial nature and role of "context", without making it the sole authority in interpretation, is another big challenge facing the Asian Churches.

### Missio-Oriented Formation

There was a time when all theology was one. Now it is divided into several disciplines. And each discipline has its own conclusions. But all of them serve the mission of the Church. The unifying aspect is evangelisation, which in the words of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, is the reason for which the Church exists. It gives identity at the deepest level. Hence, all formation in the Church has evangelisation and mission as its fundamental reason. This challenge is all the greater in Asia where the horizon of missionary proclamation is immense, but where the labourers are few.

### Creating Authentic Local Churches

One of the major discoveries of Vatican II is the importance and the role of local Churches. In the past, missionary activity was understood as a movement from older Churches to younger Churches, from the Churches in the West to the Churches of the third World countries of Asia and Africa.

Vatican II gave a jolt to this age-old concept of mission, when it affirmed that every local Church is sent by Christ and is responsible for the evangelisation of its own members, and of the whole world. This calls for an authentically dynamic and creative local Church, resourceful and at the same time united with the universal Church. It calls for a Church that is prepared to consider "dialogue" as the mode of "being a Church", and inculturation as its mode of proclamation and communication, a Church that is ready to live in solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised and the exploited

millions of Asians, a Church that will seek to be firmly established on its own indigenous personnel which will be the fruit of communities strong in faith, hope and brotherly love.

### A Missionary Spirituality

If the whole Church by nature is missionary, then, the vocation of a Christian and the vocation of a missionary are identical. In other words, all Christian spirituality must, in one way or other, be missionary. *Lumen Gentium* puts it succinctly when it says: "Every member of the faithful is called to holiness and to mission".

### CONCLUSION

In spite of the diverse and challenging situations we meet with, the Churches in Asia are full of hope. Asia's spiritual and ethical values, its cultural heritage, its youth potential and, above all, its respect for the person of Jesus Christ are, indeed, very hopeful signs for the Churches of Asia. Pope John Paul II sees the dawn of a new springtime for the mission of the Church in the world and, especially for the Churches of Asia. He has four references to Asia in his encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*. The signs are such that the 21st century will be the century of Asia!

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# LEONARDO BOFF

## AN APOSTOLIC AND PASTORAL CRISIS

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Jon Sobrino, SJ

*(Jon Sobrino, a Spanish Jesuit and liberation theologian who has worked for many years in El Salvador reflects on Leonardo Boff's decision to leave the priesthood. This reflection was published in the Spanish magazine, Sal Terrae, in October 1992).*

"I feel as though I have hit a wall. I cannot go one step further", stated Leonardo Boff at the end of June 1992 when he announced that he was leaving the priesthood and the Franciscan order, although he reiterated that he will remain in the Church, that he maintains the Franciscan spirit, and will continue working as an ecumenically open Catholic theologian, and will continue to defend the poor.

His decision was met with a variety of reactions, as would be expected. Some could not hide their secret glee ("We told you so") and Cardinal Sodano let slip that it was not a surprise, after all, Christ also had his Judas. Others lamented the fact that the decision would weaken Leonardo's position, and that it would have been better to hang in. Others, although saddened on the one hand, rejoiced in his prophetic gesture, because in the long run, this integrity, dramatically maintained, humanises the Church and the world far more than a docile, routine obedience. Others, in the midst of this difficult personal situation, have taken the opportunity to thank Leonardo for his long life of vigour and tenderness, his creativity and service to the poor. All together, we believe that, at least publicly, Leonardo has received more support than condemnation. Perhaps rightist sectors fear generating the same turbulent reactions that surged when they sentenced him - and he accepted - to a year of silence.

However, Leonardo Boff's decision must be analysed beyond these reactions. In our opinion the most important thing that it demonstrates is a series of crises in the current Church. In other words, his resignation has uncovered several serious problems in our Church.

### Increased Authoritarianism

In the first place, it demonstrates the increased authoritarianism within the Church. Neither Leonardo, nor liberation theologians, nor bishops such as Pedro Casaldáliga question the authority of the Church, not for theological reasons, nor for sociological reasons. However, what is currently taking place is quite different. Vatican centralism, with its counterpart in Latin America's CELAM, has generated coercion, paralysis, fear ... the hierarchical and clerical verticalism keeps those below dependent - to say nothing of the situation of women within the Church. What is worse is that it is done with a belief that the salvation of people, of the

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***In our opinion, the most important thing that (Leonardo Boff's) decision demonstrates is a series of crises in the current Church.***

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Church, of the world depends on those above, as if salvation is not sown patiently by mortals, through the faith, hope and charity of each day, and with compassion, justice, truth and the surrender and martyrdom of many, many Christians in critical moments.

And this authoritarianism is also very specifically present in the world of theology. What has Leonardo written that, even remotely, could be seriously considered a threat to faith? He has written a critical analysis of Church institutionality and this is what seems to be unforgivable. While his statements do not go

against dogma, while history and daily experience confirm that they are true, there are things that can not be said, or published. In this sense, his book, *Church, Charisma and Power* did not bode well for him. The book contains harsh things, things that even could be debated. However, why not do so with peace, fraternity, and freedom. Is Leonardo, the Franciscan, tender and vigorous, unreachable, inaccessible to dialogue, blind and incapable of changing his opinion if he is shown to be mistaken?

It is sad, but the accumulated experience of theologians shows that it is possible to speak more freely about the mystery of God than of Christ. If one speaks about the Church, real freedom is even further curtailed. And if organisation and ecclesial power is tackled with

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***Why not think of faith as the continuous manifestation of God, who constantly introduces more truth (creative faith at least) and not think of faith as solely or even substantially under the "deposit" model?***

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freedom, sincerity, responsibility and integrity, problems increase. There seems to be something untouchable about this power, even though it is in the last place in terms of Christian reality according to the hierarchy of truths established at Vatican II.

In our opinion, it is important and decisive that there be truth in the Church and that the truth of faith is maintained. It is reasonable, therefore, to expect that this is also true institutionally. However, this does not have to be the only decisive instance and there is no reason why it should generate the impression that only the papal curia has the right to decide. Why not pay attention to the community of the faithful - above all those who are truly faithful - the poor and the martyrs? Their sense of faith as well as that of the community of theologians: Latin Americans, Asians, Africans, Europeans, could be a mutual corrective. Why not pay attention to the fact that the Spirit of God has favoured good and avoided evil throughout history. According to Gamaliel in the Sanhedrin, "If this is the work of men, it will perish. If it is the work of God, nothing will keep it from prospering". Why not think of faith as the continuous manifestation of God, who constantly intro-

duces more truth (creative faith at least) and not think of faith as solely or even substantially under the "deposit" model? In the parable of the talents isn't the best model the one that puts the talent to use rather than the one that deposits it in the bank, hidden away, closed and inaccessible? Why, above all, take away the joy of thinking of faith as a means to serve, open to correction of course, but to fraternal correction - horizontal and not a vertical imposition.

### **Fraternal Crises**

There are also crises related to fraternity in the Church. The same day on which Leonardo made his decision public, Cardinal Angelo Sodano was in Spain. When asked by journalists to comment, he stated, as we have already mentioned, that it was not surprising since Judas also betrayed Christ. The first reaction to these words was one of incredulity, "impossible", "typical manipulation", "invention", "a journalistic twist", but the next day the incident hit the headlines in the Spanish press. It could be said the words were hastily spoken, (He did try to rectify them at the earliest possible opportunity, without much success). However, hasty or not, they are objectively "intolerable", and lacking in "quality and charity", according to theologians in Madrid.

It is intolerable to compare Leonardo's decision with that of Judas. Judas has taken his place in history as the most vile of human beings; he sold Jesus for money and turned him over to be killed. Has Leonardo done anything remotely similar? For years he has worked until exhausted, and not for money. He has given his best and he has been attacked, persecuted and even threatened with death by worldly powers. And all of this to defend and maintain the hope of the poor, to show the face of God and the Church. He carried out his work in order that Christ might live, and not to turn him over to be killed. The fact that he has committed mistakes is one thing, he himself signs his works *theologus et peccator*, but to call him a Judas is intolerable.

And this is more than one, isolated, sad anecdote. Cardinal López Trujillo, who in Puebla ironically defended the idea of communion and participation, has not facilitated either communion or participation, neither of lay people and priest, nor bishops. And in a telling, but sad anecdote, Cardinal Archbishop of Santo Domingo López Rodríguez recently stated that progressive priests, "are frustrated bitter men, filled with defects. The sooner they



leave the better. And I believe, in my personal opinion, that as soon as we marry them off to women who will mistreat them they will be tamed".

It might be said that these are sad anecdotes, isolated cases that should not be generalised, human limitations that should not be aired so as not to scandalise the sensitive. However, Cardinal Sodano is the current Secretary of State and first president of the Santo Domingo Assembly and Cardinal López Rodríguez is the current president of CELAM, and the second president of the previously mentioned assembly. The problem goes much further. To call Leonardo 'Judas' is a measure of current institutional fraternity. And not only fraternity, but the dignity of the baptised. To call someone Judas who is not a heretic or an apostate, but rather a declared member of the Church, denigrates a baptised lay person, as if to be a lay person is not important. And in order to tame rebellious priests, women are mentioned, as if their natural bent is to mistreat men and not draw them nearer to God and encourage them in terms of serving the poor.

### A Crisis of Joy

Within the Church there is also what might be termed a crisis of joy and thanksgiving. Not to cry with someone crying is sad, but worse is not to feel joy with someone who is rejoicing. In Latin America there have been and continue to be countless tragedies that produce cries of grief, but there have also been people and acts that produce joy. The people, the poor above all, know how to cry and how to laugh with joy. They feel joy, for example, in El Salvador when Rutilio Grande, a dedicated priest, who decided to visit them house to house, asked for their participation in pastoral work, giving them back dignity, defending them, denouncing their oppressors, accompanying them to the end. They feel joy when they find themselves among North American religious, hidden and now buried in Chalatenango and La Libertad, who served and loved with constancy and simplicity. They rejoice when they find an intellectual such as Ignacio Ellacuría, or a popular leader such as Polín, or a catechist such as Jesus, the "man of the Gospel", as they call him, or a human rights defender such as Marianela or a bishop such as Oscar Romero.

This capacity for joy is very important in the Church. It is because its mission is to proclaim a good news that produces or should produce joy. Joy moreover, generates thankfulness and

it is proverbial that the poor give thanks for the cited martyrs and all those who live for and with them.

But this thankfulness and joy, so essentially human and Christian is not very prevalent in ecclesial institutions. Have they given thanks, as they should for Rutilio and Romero, among the dead, or Pedro Casaldáliga or Gustavo Gutiérrez among the living? Have they given thanks, and it is asked without irony - even when hypothetically it has to be corrected - for the effort, the work, the strength that Leonardo Boff has demonstrated. Have they given thanks that God is now a little closer to the victims of

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*After Medellín, the Church surprisingly and joyfully began to take the poor seriously, as victims, as impoverished, and began to direct its pastoral work from this perspective.*

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this world, that the so called 'Leftists', the agnostics, revolutionaries and atheists at least respect or draw near to the Church?

It is understandable that the Church has branches that keep watch over custom and doctrine and that should, therefore exercise criticism and correction when it is necessary. But is it an environment based on suspicion and not a fraternal, human and evangelical environment. Does the Church only criticise, although this might be necessary, but does not give thanks for the efforts of theologians and bishops, does it always express itself harshly, without the joy of the Gospel and the poor.

### Option for the Poor

The problems that have been mentioned refer more to the interecclesial reality, but we want to add another problem, that is at the heart more important. Leonardo's case demonstrated that the Church is in the midst of an apostolic and pastoral crisis. Even accepting the limitations, and even with Boff's errors, one thing is undebatable. Two groups of people have heard and have given thanks for priests and theologians like him, the victims of this world and the 'Leftists' intellectuals and revolutionaries. It is highly important to remember this.

The Church has always focused on the middle class; sometimes to a scandalous degree on the upper oppressive classes. It has also always had a pastoral mission to the majority (for the poor) a pastoral mission that is normally paternalistic. After Medellín, the Church surprisingly and joyfully began to take the poor seriously, as victims, as impoverished, and began to direct its pastoral work from this perspective. This pastoral option for victims, not simply the poor, is difficult to maintain and in many cases a type of regression has begun. To state it briefly and symbolically, charismatic communities have fewer difficulties than Base Christian Communities; and it is more frequent to return to a ministry based on the sacraments than a ministry of accompaniment.

In this difficult option for the poor, or in stronger words, in this pastoral work for the victims, Leonardo, although he was not a pioneer, nor was he alone, has been and we hope will continue to be important. His specific

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***The Church lacks the double conviction that the Gospel is also for those of the 'Left', that it will be light, encouragement, strength and Good News. And that they also might bring the Gospel to us.***

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theological talent involves developing different themes about the poor and from their perspective. In not supporting, and in fact making his work more difficult, the Church is depriving itself of an important force in terms of maintaining and strengthening its pastoral work toward victims, it is indirectly weakening it.

However, more noteworthy is the second point. The Church does not have, nor does it seem to be concerned about a creative pastoral ministry to the 'Left'. And this is serious. One might think that atheism is a distant reality, although in recent Church documents, the Church is very concerned with the growing secular culture. One could think that revolutionary 'Leftism' has no power, or one might think that it is over, with a feeling of relief, although in documents the Church has spoken of "revolutions of desperation" that could repeat themselves if the situation once again becomes desperate.

The question remains as to the real and efficient pastoral mission of the institutional, Latin American and world Church to the 'Left'? We believe, little if any. Who therefore, is telling them about God and Jesus, and who has credibility? Who at least keeps the name of God and Christ from being blasphemed - a tragedy that scripture warns about?

The truth is that not many people think about this type of pastoral work. Bishop Romero did, Ignacio Ellacuría did as a committed theologian and intellectual, Sister Silvia did as a religious who accompanied her people to the end, even in the midst of bombings. But these Christians are few, and at an institutional level they are even fewer. One hopes that the 'Left' will come to us. The Church does not seem to take seriously its commitment to go to them, with maturity but also with audacity. The Church lacks the double conviction that the Gospel is also for those of the 'Left', that it will be light, encouragement, strength and Good News. And that they also might bring the Gospel to us. This 'going to the other' rather than simply waiting for them to arrive has always been a fundamental part of the Church. For example, the Assembly of Jerusalem decided to 'go to the Gentiles'; in Vatican II the Church decided to go 'out into the world', and in Medellín the decision was made 'to go to the poor'. To go to the 'Left' is an essentially ecclesial and a very necessary action.

And what would this 'Left' say which does not understand ecclesial subtleties when it sees that the institution tends to silence Romero, to hound liberation theologians and base communities, and has treated Leonardo with such a degree of hostility that he has been forced to leave the priesthood, a primary sociological symbol of the Church.

### **Crisis of Credibility**

Finally, the Church is going through a credibility crisis, critical in a world that for many reasons is abandoning the Church.

We all know, but it must be restated, that since the beginning of the modern era the Church has won major battles, but it has lost many wars due to a lack of credibility when its victories turned sour. Years ago, it persecuted Galileo, eliminated Savonarola and Servet, more recently it attacked Marx and Freud, and defended the monarchy against revolutionary democracies, and democracy against socialist

revolutionaries. On a theological level, and in this century, it has persecuted modernists and evolutionists, the *nouvelle theologie*, practically all theologians who made Vatican II possible, the new ecclesiology, Rahner and Chenu, Lubac and Congar. It appeared to be successful, moreover, as it was able to condemn them. However, the cost has been high. It lost credibility.

We are not advocating a call to anachronism or to masochism, but a call to clarity. The battles won by the Church were provisional; the victory declarations hasty. Years, decades or centuries later the battle became a lost war and the victory of the enemies of that time had to be accepted as good. Today the Church appears to be winning battles against liberation theology, against the clear and decisive option for victims, against the clamor of lay people and women within the Church.

We do not know whether it will win or lose these battles but it seems important to remember the following. First of all, history, the Latin American Church at Medellín did not condemn those who were changing history, nor was it just towed behind, but it became a powerful force in order that the continent's majorities could move toward justice and life, the Kingdom of God. It would be sad, very sad, if the Church regressed and was left behind by history and people were deprived of its humanising force.

Secondly, we must learn from the past, to be more cautious about whether winning the battle means winning the war. In this sense the reflection that appears in one of the preparatory documents for Santo Domingo is very important. According to the document, the rejection of the illustration of religion is tied to scandalous experiences. 'Christianity appeared as a divisive factor in society, intolerable and exclusive'.

The Boff case, of its nature, does not help the Church ensure its credibility before the vic-

tims of history or before those we have called 'the Left', where in fact the Church needs credibility. The nature of the issue demands credibility, as credibility is the result of a true proclamation and realisation of the Gospel as good news for the poor. However, the Church also needs credibility in order to be heard, in order that ordinary, average people, workers or intellectuals do not draw further away, as has occurred in Europe in recent generations.

In our perception, this is the worst that could happen with cases like Boff's, and for that reason, and not just for a friend's suffering, the resulting sadness is understandable. For this reason we have also spoken with freedom and integrity about the problems that are currently part of the institutional Church. The reflections that we have offered must be seen from a perspective of concern, interest, and caring for the

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***The reflections offered must be seen from a perspective of concern, interest and caring for the Church.***

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Church. It is not aimed at attacking people, who could be extremely well intentioned, as Leonardo himself recognises, but rather to touch on serious institutional problems.

Undoubtedly, to speak of Boff, we could have spoken of many other positive things. Although less enjoyable, what we have done is to us, more urgent. And in terms of our brother Leonardo, we are left only to wish him, in Franciscan fashion, peace and goodwill.

Ref. Jon Sobrino, SJ  
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 Lima 18  
 Peru

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# MISSION: AN UNENDING JOURNEY

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*(At their General Assembly in July 1992, the Paris Foreign Missions Society drafted a statement on the fundamental purpose of the Society and its future directions).*

## THE SITUATION

### Before God

It was first of all our relation to God that we wanted to consider. The Gospel is "God's power to save" (Rom 1:16). Mission is not our enterprise. It is the plan of God at work in the world since its beginnings with all the power of his creative Spirit. It is God's reign of truth,

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***At the sight of these teeming masses of young Asians, we cannot doubt that this is the melting pot where the future of the world is being molded.***

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justice and love which triumphs over falsehood, oppressions and hatred. It is the glory of God which radiates over the universe in spite of the distortions which debase humankind and defile the world.

Because it is God's work, Mission is beyond us. Its horizons reach "infinitely far beyond all that we can ask or think" (Eph 3:20). Its power will always surprise our human weakness. In this power of God we place our faith and hope. It is an indestructible hope whatever may be the obstacles and difficulties: "If God is for us who can be against us?" (Rom 8:35).

### Before the Nations

Sent as servants of the Gospel to the Nations, we consider our relation to the people to whom we have been sent, in Asia and in its extension in the Indian Ocean, gigantic human masses that make up 60 percent of the world's population.

In our contact with these peoples, we had the privilege of admiring refined cultures, which are often the fruits of thousands of years of philosophical, religious, artistic and scientific development, and we let ourselves be impregnated by the depths of their religious sense, their wisdom, their respect for others and for nature. Our encounter with the great religions of Asia as well as with the cult of spirits and ancestors impressed us and helped us to understand new dimension of our own faith.

The wisdom of Asian culture goes hand in hand with a bold modernity, particularly evident in the scientific and economic dynamism of old and new eastern 'dragons'.

However, perhaps more than in its economic progress, the riches of Asia lie in its youth. According to the statistics, 34 percent of the population of Asia is below 15 years of age, and 50 percent below 20. Moreover, we do not need statistics to feel challenged by these thousands of young people flocking into schools and villages or in the streets of the big cities of Asia. At the sight of these teeming masses of young Asians, we cannot doubt that this is the melting pot where the future of the world is being molded.

It is an exhilarating experience to find ourselves immersed in this upsurge of life. In this age-old history, these cultures, these religions, this dynamism and this youth, we recognise "the image and likeness" of the Creator. We marvel at the hand of God in it all: we recognise in their prayer and their rites the universal liturgy of peoples who praise the Lord (Ps 117:1), of the whole earth acclaiming him with shouts of joy (Ps 100:2;98:4). We perceive in this vitality the footstep of God who comes and establishes his reign in the world, the work of the Spirit who gives life.

However, the sight of these marvels does not blind us to the other face of the Asian world. These teeming masses are largely victims of poverty. This youth is often bewildered, crushed by a savage economic development which debases both man and nature. Illiteracy; destitution; sickness; exploited children and oppressed women; dehumanised life in the slums and in the huge housing schemes of the big cities; marginalised outcasts whether they be *dalits* or *burakumin*; strife and bloodshed in the name of religion, language or race; suppression of freedoms and human rights; lack of respect for human life; declared or undeclared wars bringing in their wake refugees and homeless; and in the background, the great international economic imbalances; "the situations of economic and cultural neocolonialism" already condemned by Paul VI in his letter on evangelisation (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 30). All that is also part of the landscape of the regions where we work.

It would be easy to go on with this list of problems. For us it is not a question of inflammatory speeches but of an experience which wears us down from day to day. For we feel at one with these people whose joys and moments of pride we share as well as their anguish and pain.

Among them and with them in faith, we meet Christ in agony until the end of time and we hear there his cry of apparent despair on the cross. The resurrection was the answer to this cry and, as one of us said at the funeral of a victim of the riots in New Caledonia, ever since the death of Jesus on the cross there has not been an anguished cry which God has not heard and to which he has not responded by making us share in "the power of the resurrection" of his Son (Phil 3:10).

So, if we feel really powerless before this sea of distress "though we see no answer to our problems, we never despair" (2 Cor 4:8). We know that the groaning of the world is the labour of childbirth and that "creation still retains the hope of being freed, like us, from its slavery to decadence, to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God" (Rom 8: 20-22). This confidence in divine power, victorious over all forms of slavery, despair and death, is indeed the Good News that Jesus, by his ministry and above all by his death and resurrection, has brought to the poor and which he has bequeathed to us in order to transmit it.

## MOVING ONWARD

Sent as the servants of this Good News, we have set out on our path. Gone are the days when our predecessors would take months, even years, to reach Asia. Yet even today the route to Asia still remains an adventure and makes of our lives an on-going journey.

### Paths and Travelings

For some the adventure was very real and took them to the prisons of China, Vietnam and Brazil: expulsion after expulsion, it brought them to repeated exoduses.

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*Called to let ourselves be completely transformed, we are shaped and molded from within by those whose lives we share.*

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At any rate, our missionary life is a continual exodus, an interior voyage made up of:

- rupture: every departure demands linguistic, cultural and religious uprooting;
- immersing of ourselves in a new people, its language and culture, its rhythms of life and ways of understanding and behaving. Called to let ourselves be completely transformed, we are shaped and molded from within by those whose lives we share.

One of the characteristics of missionary life is that one is always moving onward, continually setting out, following the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1) and the Exodus of Israel in the desert, in the steps of Jesus who invited his disciples "to go elsewhere" (Mk 1:38), who himself "had nowhere to lay his head" (Mt 9:20). Thus our missionary life is itself a voyage in company with "the God who comes" (Apoc 1:4,8), in order to advance toward the meeting with the people of Asia and the Indian Ocean and to walk with them, to find again the ways of the Spirit in their cultures and their religions and make their ways converge toward that of him who is the Way, Jesus Christ.

## Poverty Which Enriches Us

This route is that of poverty:

- material poverty of a life-style which is simple and sometimes hard;
- priestly poverty whereby we are totally available for others through a life of total commitment;
- poverty in solidarity with the poor, their sorrows and struggles, a solidarity which makes the missionary a person of the Beatitudes;
- poverty specific to the foreign missionary, which implies a radical dispossession in our ways of looking at things, in our customs and even in our certitudes. There is a great poverty in the insecure life of the foreigner, in having to

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*Inter-religious dialogue is not a tactical move to win the sympathies of others. It is an act of faith in the priority of divine action.*

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express oneself continually in languages which are too rich and complex to be perfectly mastered, in entering new worlds where one feels clumsy and ignorant.

To use the words of Saint Paul, this dispossession is the way for the missionary to experience fully the *kenosis* of Christ the Servant, "his emptying of self...which is permeated by love and expresses love" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 88).

But the *kenosis* of Christ leads to the resurrection, to newness of life. In the missionary adventure, we experience this in a real way. Having left home, family, native land and cultural milieu for the sake of the Gospel, we receive the hundredfold now (Mk 10:30).

Learning other languages, being initiated into a foreign culture and wisdom, is a real discovery. It is an exhilarating experience to speak of God and to adore him in new languages. Life in the midst of other peoples frees us from our narrowmindedness, prejudices and false absolutes. It enlarges our spirit and our heart. We are enriched by the spiritual wealth of the

Nations. We receive a great deal from the original way in which the Churches of the continents live their faith; in sharing this life, we are privileged to experience truly the communion among the Churches which makes for true catholicity. Thus day by day our missionary life helps us to understand "the incomparable riches of his grace" (Eph 2:7) and opens us to this fullness.

In this perspective, it was as a sign of "resurrection" that we received, during the Assembly, the news of the nomination of Bishop Ramousse as Vicar Apostolic of Phnom Penh. We touch "the power of his resurrection" when we see this Church, which seemed to have been annihilated, being reborn.

## ORIENTATIONS

Having returned to the deep sources of Mission, we can now redefine our orientations.

### Welcoming God's Action

Jesus invited his disciples to lift up their eyes and see "the fields white for the harvest....I have sent you to harvest what you have not sown" (Jn 4:35ff). If Mission is first of all God's action before being a human undertaking, before establishing priorities for our action we have to welcome that preliminary action of God to gather in the beautiful harvest which God himself through his Spirit has sown and made to grow and which is already there before our eyes waiting for us. "Working for the Kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity which is present in human history and transforms it" (*RM* 15). It is in this spirit that we have to understand the double dialogue with culture and with the poor.

### Dialogue

Inter-religious dialogue is not therefore a tactical move to win the sympathies of others. It is an act of faith in the priority of divine action. As *Redemptoris Missio* reminds us, the Spirit, the chief agent of Mission, precedes us in Mission: there would be no listening to the Gospel if the Spirit had not first been at work in hearts. That "does not affect only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions" (*RM* 28). "So inter-religious dialogue is required by the deep respect we must have toward everything which the Spirit 'who breathes where he wills' has brought about in

man" (RM 56). In fact, how can we fail to perceive the breath of the Spirit in the sense of the divine in India and in the absoluteness of God in Islam, in Confucian wisdom, in Buddhist detachment, in the desire for harmony in Japanese Shintoism, or in the rootedness in life transmitted through ancestors in Madagascar?

### Commitment to the Poor

The divine dynamism is particularly active among the poor. God, who already in the Old Testament, identified himself with the cause of the poor (Ex 22:20-26), was made one with them in Jesus Christ (2 Cor 8:9).

The cry of the poor is a call of God. Commitment in solidarity with the masses of Asia, the dialogue of life and of action, with the efforts this implies, is also a way of meeting God, of receiving his presence and his gifts: "Whatever you did to the least of my brothers, you did it to me" (Mt 25: 41). "We must therefore stress the importance of dialogue for integral development, social justice and human liberation. Local Churches, as witnesses of Jesus Christ, are called to enter this field.... They must muster all their energies in favour of human rights, proclaim the demands of justice and denounce injustice" (*Dialogue and Proclamation*). These efforts for justice carry the mark of the "Risen Christ who is already at work in human hearts through the energy of his Spirit. He arouses not only a desire for the age to come but by that very fact, he also animates, purifies and strengthens those noble longings by which the human family strives to make life more human (*Gaudium et Spes*, 38).

### Proclamation of the Gospel

The harvest demands workers (Mt 9:38). The power of the resurrection must be announced to the poor, who have a right to hear the Good News. This was the mission of Jesus (Lk 4: 18f); it is also the mission of his disciples, it is ours (Lk 9:1-6).

This evangelisation has to be carried out according to the multiple "Paths of Mission" described in Chapter Five of *Redemptoris Missio*:

- Direct proclamation is the "permanent priority of mission" (RM 44). We could therefore have as epigraph to our missionary

programme the prayer of Saint Paul in Ephesians: "Pray for me to be given an opportunity to open my mouth and speak without fear and give out the mystery of the Gospel" (Eph 6:19f).

But, the other complementary "paths" are no less important:

- The witness of life because "people today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers" (RM 42).

- Formation of the Churches so that they in their turn may become missionary communities, because it is the local Church which has responsibility for Mission (RM 48).

- The work of development and conscientisation, as much with the poor to support their efforts (RM 59) as with the rich to remind them that what counts is not to "have more" but to "be more" and that the fight against hunger is

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*We have only one desire, that is to serve Mission in and with the Local Churches.*

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brought about by a conversion of life style on the part of the affluent (RM 59).

### The Horizons of Mission

Whatever form missionary commitment takes will depend especially on the Spirit working in particular situations and through personal charisms. When we assess the activities of the members of the Foreign Missions we cannot but wonder at the variety of gifts and ways: from our presence in the field of scientific research to monastic and hermetical life; from ministry in refugee camps in Thailand to involvement with refugees in France and America; from big industrial cities of Japan to the tribes of India or of the Burmese border; from participation in theological research of the Churches of Asia to animation of youth movements; from Madagascar to Korea; from France to the United States. All of this presents a range of very different tasks: uniformity and conformity find no place in the MEP profile!

All of this illustrates in a concrete way the range of the horizons of Mission analysed in

Chapter Four of *Redemptoris Missio*: a variety of geographic horizons throughout the world, but also new sociological horizons in the "new worlds" of our age - big cities, migrants and refugees, camps and slums, not to speak of the "new forms of the *areopagus*" which are the world of communication, commitment to the cause of peace and human rights, culture, scientific research: "Our times are both momentous and fascinating" (RM 38) concludes this analysis. Momentous, certainly, and we have a continual concern especially for the Churches where our presence has been interrupted; China, North Korea, Laos, Vietnam and Burma (Myanmar). "Fascinating", because when we look at Asia, we realise, as the encyclical says, that "missionary activity is only beginning" (RM 30).

### In Communion with Local Churches

The Christian communities of Asia, which a short time ago were considered "mission countries", have become local Churches. Evangelisation is no longer entrusted to missionary societies; these Churches have taken charge of it. Far from regretting the "loss of

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*If we are tempted to ask: "What is the purpose of our presence if we can no longer serve for anything?", the answer is simple: "To serve".*

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our territories", we rejoice to have seen the Churches of Asia and of the Indian Ocean grow and come of age. We are not nostalgic for the former relationship of "mother to daughter" and "master to disciple". We want to respect the fact that the Asian Churches have taken on responsibility for themselves. We have only one desire, that is to serve Mission in and with the local Churches.

This total integration is in keeping with the basic inspiration which prompted the sending of Apostolic Vicars to Asia to ordain priests and other bishops and so establish Churches. This reference to the local Church has remained the great tradition handed down by our predecessors, and this tradition has come to fruition in our present situation where so often we are a

very small minority among the priests of the dioceses where we work. If we are tempted to ask ourselves: "What is the purpose of our presence if we can no longer serve for anything?" the answer is simple: "To serve".

It was in this spirit that in 1986 we decided to support the missionary institutions founded in local Churches. It is in the same spirit that we now accept priests coming from these Churches into our Society. It is not a question of "recruiting", of serving ourselves from the "recruiting", of serving ourselves from the "reservoirs" of abundant vocations in certain countries. It is a question rather of offering the service of our Society for the missionary development of the local Churches if they so desire, only where they desire it and when they ask for it.

Being inserted into the local Church in this way helps us to surmount the dilemma which at times arises between missionary and pastoral activities. It seems to us that this is a false dilemma. As the FABC reminds us, "the active subject of Mission is the local Church living and acting in communion with the universal Church" (Bandung 1990, Final Declaration, 3.3.1). Our missionary project is carried out in collaboration with the local communities, their priests and their laity. Even if certain new and more or less secret insertions in some countries may isolate those who are called to them, they do not act on their own; they count on the support of the prayer, friendship, solidarity and communion of Christian communities and like to come to them to have their strength restored.

### In Dialogue

Inserted as we are in the local Church, we can neither erase our character as foreigners nor forget our missionary vocation. Besides, both are to the benefit of the Churches. Our different sensitivities can become a means of enrichment. The concern for the "elsewhere" remains with us and makes us aware of places not yet evangelised, even where Churches are already well established and have a well developed network.

Our service is not intended merely to fill gaps. Neither is it a pretext for isolating ourselves in our "pastoral projects". In dialogue with the Churches, we help the Churches to open up to others and to those outside.



## CALLS

In conclusion, we would like to address ourselves to all those who would like to share in the joy of our adventure.

### Vocations

The missionary vocation, for life, in a foreign country and to the Nations, is still meaningful. We believe in it for the simple reason that it has made us happy. Therefore we remind the Foreign Mission Society and its members of the pressing obligation to communicate this joy and to be concerned for the awakening and development of such vocations.

We address this call more especially to young people. To be a missionary in Asia is an adventure which gives new meaning to life and satisfies the heart. Those who commit themselves to it will not be disappointed, for God does not deceive.

### To the Church of France and Europe

We extend our call to the Church in France and those in other European countries. May they not yield to the temptation of closing themselves in on their problems and on narrow European perspectives, but let them remain faithful to their universal vocation. Let our presence in their name in Asia help them to become more aware of the immense reality of Asia and of what is at stake there for the future of the world and the coming of the Kingdom of God.

### To the Churches in Asia and the Indian Ocean

We thank them for welcoming us and enriching our lives with their new riches. We rejoice to see them carry on the task of Mission and we pray that they may be faithful to this grace which gives them their full stature.

We ask them to see in us, not the survivors of a glorious past, but the witnesses of "else-

where", signs of communion with other Churches, and for accepting our "foreign-ness", even and especially if it challenges them.

### To Our Own Missionary Society

We can only take up again the call of the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*:

- continue to believe in the validity of our vocation
- remain faithful to the charism of the founders which is, in our particular case, service to Mission in and with the local Churches
- but entrust this faithfulness to the creativity of the Holy Spirit, "who makes all things new" and gives boldness and courage.
- in an attitude of more active awareness of the realities of Asia and the "rapid and profound transformations with characterise today's world" (RM 37b)
- at the price of a continual conversion though greater detachment, greater transparency and more availability to the action of the Holy Spirit.

### Conclusion

Realising the immensity of what is at stake as we face this challenge before which we feel so impoverished, knowing that we are only unprofitable servants and that Mission is in the hands of God to whom alone belongs the power and the glory, we can only address our prayer to him who comes through his Son Jesus Christ.

Come Lord Jesus!  
Paris, 29 July 1992.

Ref. *The Japan Mission Journal*  
Summer 1993  
Oriens Institute for Religious Research  
28-5 Matsubara 2 Chôme  
Tokyo 156  
Japan

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# AIDS:

## 9TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**Berlin, Germany, June 6-11, 1993**

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Magda Van Hoyweghen, MMS

*(Magda van Hoyweghen, MMS., is a surgeon who has worked in Tanzania, Sudan, Sierra Leone and Malawi. She is at present Africa Sector Coordinator of the Medical Mission Sisters and lives in Nairobi, Kenya.)*

14,000 people from 166 different nations were in attendance at the conference. The German government financed the participation of 300 delegates from developing countries, Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, 600 HIV positive persons were allowed free entrance to the conference. The presence of a large group of HIV positive persons, a lobbying group of homosexuals and lesbians and a very remarkable group of prostitutes walking around with placards, gave a special "colour" to this meeting.

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***By the year 2000, 30 to 40 million people will be infected; 90 percent of all new HIV infections in the developing world.***

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I went to the conference in Berlin carrying with me all my experience of AIDS in Africa. The history and the reality of AIDS in the West, Western Europe and North America featured highly in the programme. Latin America was seldom mentioned while Asia and East Asia were discussed mainly to give a warning of a possible serious epidemic in that part of the world if no immediate measures were taken to prevent HIV from taking a massive hold. In the late 70s and early 80s, when the HIV infection became evident in Africa, not much was known about this virus and the way it spread. There is no reason why Asia and East Asia

should be overtaken by the disease as happened in Africa.

While waiting for President Richard von Weizsäcker to officially open the conference, we were sitting in a huge amphitheater-like room with thousands of participants, surrounded by cameras, TV equipment, lights flashing at all sides, in glass compartments high up where the German, French and Spanish translators were sitting with all kinds of gadgets and technology. All of a sudden I was overwhelmed by the extravagance, the pomp and the immensity of everything. Putting all this in the context of AIDS, a disease which we know is causing so much suffering, pain, isolation, social and economic hardships was too much for me. Several times during the meeting, that feeling of "immensity" came back; but at the same time, I became very much aware of all the efforts that were being made in the fight against this disease.

### **Main Points and Impressions**

The prediction about the number of HIV and AIDS patients has been greatly underestimated. There are now about 14 million HIV infected people in the world, half of them in sub-Saharan Africa. By the year 2000, 30 to 40 million people will be infected; 90 percent of all new HIV infections in the developing world!

The AIDS Conference was organised in affiliation with the 4th STD World Congress as AIDS is more and more seen as a sexually

transmitted disease (STD). With only symptomatic treatment available and no cure yet in sight, the bulk of the input and discussion was centered around prevention. As infection with HIV often follows the contraction of a conventional STD, prevention of these conventional STDs is being seen as a preventive measure for HIV infection itself.

HIV infection is mainly, but not only, a disease of the poor; the materially poor and those made poor by circumstances, like drug abusers. Women, HIV patients, Black Americans and people from the developing world were very often lumped together as "marginalised and less privileged" persons. It is this group which has the highest incidence of HIV infection. (In the United States, 50 percent of the women with AIDS are African-Americans).

Besides the connection between HIV and STD, there is another clear connection between TB and HIV. While STD often precedes HIV infection, TB develops more often after the infection is established. The number of TB cases all over the world has jumped tremendously while treatment has become more complex. Blood transfusion is a hidden factor in the spread of HIV infection, and we were told by a doctor from India that checking blood transfusions for the AIDS virus is still uncommon in India!!!

In a session on "the risk of HIV infection in the health care setting", it was said that only 36 such cases have been documented. From these, 33 were derived from hollow bore needles, with phlebotomy as the most common cause. In 16 of these, trauma occurred through a glove.

Breast-feeding has now proven to be a way of vertical transmission of the virus from mother to child. Up to 30 percent involve cases in which the mother contracts the disease at the end of her pregnancy or soon after the delivery. In developing countries, breast-feeding continues to be advised even when the mother is HIV positive because of the dire consequences for a child that is not breast-fed.

The vulnerability of women was often mentioned as an important factor in spreading the disease. Women are more often victims than transmitters of the disease. Prevention could start by improving their health, education, economic prospects, legal and social status. The fight against poverty is another important factor in curbing the disease. Many women and men

alike have to work in the sex business simply to survive.

Avoiding risky sexual behaviour and practicing sexual abstinence are both very effective methods of prevention. But, these methods ask time, commitment and a broad backing from individuals and society. While working on these aspects of change, other methods are needed, advised and encouraged. As one of the speakers said: we have to look at "how" the world is today, not "how we would like it to be"! Young people have sex, why deny this or pretend it does not exist. In developing countries, 3/4 of the AIDS patients contract the infection via sexual intercourse. In Europe, 1/3 contract HIV infection by sharing needles. Studies have shown that in the developing world as well as in

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***Women are more often victims than transmitters of the disease.***

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"marginalised" first world countries, women have their first sexual encounter at an average age of 15 years. Sex education is as important as family planning, but both are a luxury in many countries.

### **Methods of Prevention**

One new development stirred quite a few reactions - the production of a female condom. The number of women who have used it is still too small to draw any conclusions. The condom was applauded by the almost all female audience in that session as a great achievement. At least, those women felt that now they too have a method to protect themselves. When they were told that it cost \$2 compared to about 40 cents for the male condom, enthusiasm diminished.

To summarise the sessions, these were the methods mentioned:

1. Treatment of STD (use of condoms is one way of prevention).
2. Use of condoms (very poor use in Africa), while emphasising chastity and fidelity.
3. Sex education needs to start at an early age and must be placed within a developmental context and be gender-specific.

4. Mass education to assist with behaviour changes. Education of the public must take into account religious and cultural beliefs but at the same time be realistic and practical.
5. Care and treatment of prostitutes and their clients.
6. Safety of blood and blood products (7 to 14 blood transfusions in one million can still be positive due to the window period of HIV infection).
7. Proper needle use or exchange for drug addicts.
8. Avoidance of risky sexual behaviour.

### Treatment and Testing

Many researchers are working on developing therapeutic, rather than preventive, vaccines. By the turn of the century, maybe a vaccine could be available. The possible use of this vaccine in developing countries has already been questioned because the studies undertaken are mainly on the virus strain that is predominant in

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*...even "if" a vaccine is found, it would not be of much value if all factors - economic, relational, social and personal - are not worked at now.*

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the West. The vaccine will have to be cheap (which is unlikely), will have to be easily transported and stored, will have to be heat resistant and should give the desired effect with only one dose. But still, even "if" a vaccine is found, it would not be of much value if all factors - economic, relational, social and personal - are not worked at now.

Regarding testing, it was said that testing must always be combined with pre and post-test counseling even for those who turn out to be

negative. Testing has developed in such a way that most tests do not belong to the first or the second category but cover an "in-between" area e.g. it seems to become quite common to ask for testing before a person is appointed for certain jobs. This is not voluntary testing and not mandatory testing. In the discussions it also became clear that we have placed AIDS in a separate category. By doing this, we have provided a disservice to the public and consequences for dealing with the public.

### CONCLUSION

During this meeting it again became very clear to me that there are great differences between HIV infection in Africa and in Western countries. There are clear differences in modes of transmission in the proportion of women and men affected, in the means of symptomatic treatment that is possible and can be given, in survival time. There are also differences in the social, economic and cultural implications for the persons involved. Sometimes it was frustrating to hear what was being done in terms of medicine, research possibilities and different options for treatment that AIDS patients in the Western countries have at their disposal while in Africa there very often is not even a bare minimum for a simple symptomatic treatment. Sometimes I felt as if Africa were a "lost case" reaffirmed by statistics and predictions about the spread of the disease. One of the speakers said, "The HIV epidemic is well advanced; the AIDS epidemic is just beginning"! A sober thought at the end of this week-long conference.

We have a long road ahead of us. I hope and pray that we will be joining the many who walk on that road in search of support, companionship, understanding, treatment and healing.

Ref. *Intercontinent*  
September, 1993 No. 206  
8400 Pine Road  
Philadelphia, PA 19111  
U.S.A.



## mission moments

### A SILENT PRESENCE

(YEMEN)

In the desert country of Yemen, bordering the Red Sea, the population is 100% Muslim. There are two small communities of White Sisters there, one at Hodeida the other at Durayhimi. The Sisters had been invited by the Yemenite Government, first all to train nursing staff at Sanaa and later for dispensary and midwifery work. That is what the Government was seeking.

What were we seeking in accepting the invitation? Was it to teach Jesus Christ openly, to baptise, to inaugurate local churches? No, not at all. Such activities would have been labelled proselytism, a criminal offence in Islamic countries.

Dialogue is our form of evangelisation among Muslims. They are taught that the Gospels have been falsified: so our life must be to them a kind of fifth Gospel, obviously genuine and revealing Jesus Christ.

In Durayhimi, a large village of 6,000 people, with no less than 15 mosques, we are cut off, to a great extent, from contacts by mail, visits even with our Sisters in Hodeida and above all from any parish celebration of the Eucharist. How are we, the only two European and Christian women in the village, how are we to be missionaries of Jesus Christ? It must be by "the dialogue of daily life". This means closeness, closeness to the people around us and closeness to God.

It is by our medical service and by our simply being women that we can approach the women of Durayhimi, for the world of Muslim women is a closed world that only women may penetrate.

Our work as midwives brings us close to the people. Once at one o'clock in the morning we returned from a delivery. A neighbour had noticed our absence and from over the wall she enquired where we had been and whether the new-born child was a boy or a girl. Then she could go to sleep in peace.

When our neighbours heard of the death of the mother of one of us, a whole procession of women came to offer their heartfelt sympathy. One exclaimed, "And you weren't able to be there, even for your mother's funeral! That will be counted for her in Heaven".

We are certainly accepted and loved. What a welcome we received on our return to Durayhimi after an absence of two months for our holidays! There they were, all our women neighbours, with iced water to refresh us and hot tea to invigourate us. They took hold of the broom to sweep our house and courtyard clean of all the sand that had accumulated during our absence... while they chatted away giving us all the local news.

Five times a day the call from the mosque invites our neighbours to pray. When, well before dawn, we hear the old people murmuring their prayers to the "One God, Master of all", how can we not ponder the richness given to us in Jesus Christ?

Ref. Mary Lampard, WS  
White Sisters - White Fathers  
No.312 Oct./November 1993  
Sutton Coldfield  
West Midlands  
England

### HOUSE VISITS

(INDIA)

One day during tea I invited Geroge Rodrigues (a student of theology) to accompany me for one hour. He willingly agreed and we decided to visit 10 families in the neighbourhood. Well, we met 5 families. We said a prayer with each of the families. We said a kind word to their suffering. In one family, a mother (belonging to the Presbyterian denomination, but living with a Catholic) expressed her eagerness to have two of her children baptised in the Catholic faith and to have her marriage regularised.

We moved on to the next house. There we found a dying man, his wife, his children and two of the neighbours. The dying man, a Protestant, was about 70 years old. His name was "Slow". The wife and the children belonged to the same Protestant denomination, but for a very long time all of them had abandoned their religious practices.

In the course of the conversation we had with the dying man, we asked him whether he would like to be received into the Catholic faith. Since he could not talk, with signs he made us understand that he did want to

embrace the Catholic faith. Thereupon, we asked the wife and the three children whether they were happy about the decision of their father. They said they were indeed very happy to respect it. Interestingly, one of the neighbours had been visiting them regularly and instructing them in the Catholic faith.

The parish priest went to see the dying man. The catechist, who accompanied the parish priest was of the same tribe as the dying man. He revealed to us that he had been instructing him over the years, and that he had expressed his desire to be received into the Catholic faith at least before he died. So the parish priest administered the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Anointing of the Sick.

Hardily an hour after we had returned to the parish house, someone came running to tell us that "Mr. Stephen" (no more "Slow") had gone to his eternal reward.

This and many such incidents have convinced me, that visits to families, praying with family members and also "inviting" them to embrace the Catholic faith are ways through which the Lord continues his evangelising mission. I am also convinced that zealous lay persons (as the ones I have mentioned above) are the Lord's excellent instruments to spread the Good News.

Ref. Jose Varickasseril, SDB  
*Indian Missiological Review*  
 June 1993  
 P.B. No.507  
 Bhanwarkua Chowraha  
 Indore - 452 001  
 M.P., India

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## GOD HAS NOT ABANDONED ME

### (CHAD)

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Semera has five children. The leprosy that is consuming her hands and feet makes her difficult job as

mother even more difficult. In reality, being a mother in Chad, as in all of Africa, means sacrificing your life totally for the survival of the family.

Semera gets up at dawn in order to go to the fields to cultivate whatever can grow in a climate of nine months of drought and 40 degrees centigrade. She works until 11:00 a.m. when the sun becomes unbearable. Then she goes to cut firewood and to look for herbs to prepare a little sauce for the *funa*, a kind of millet bread that is used as every day food.

When she returns home, she has to prepare the *funa* which requires a lot of time and effort. She must first grind the millet by hand, then she must go to the well to draw water. In the late afternoon the children will be able to have the only meal of the day.

Semera is one of the few Christians of Berem and she finds the necessary strength in her faith to carry, with serenity, the cross of her infirmity. "In my poverty God has not abandoned me", she has told me more than once.

Frequently, Semera comes to talk to me. One day, while seated on the straw mat, her facial expression reminded me of La Pietà of Michelangelo that I had on my wall. While I was absorbed in my thoughts, she asked me: "Is Mary the mother of Jesus"? Then she added: "This woman also suffered a lot during her life, but she always trusted in God. In her suffering, I see my suffering".

Semera, like Mary, understands and shares in the suffering of others because she knows very well what it is to suffer.

I had spoken to her about a missionary nurse in Italy, she took the story to heart, praying and asking about her assuring me that "whatever we ask God with faith, He will grant us".

Her strong and vibrant faith makes me understand why God prefers the poor and calls them blessed. Every fiber of Semera's being communicates

a profound peace that almost makes you feel the presence of God in your heart.

It is a grace for me to find myself living in a town where God has sown abundantly in the hearts of his children.

I meet people like Semera every day in the outskirts of my new town, people who have a strong faith in God and a generous heart. I'm here to tell them, like John the Baptist, "among you there is one you do not know", because God has already come, among these my brothers and sisters and has set up his store among them.

Ref. Nicole Nshombo, SX  
*Xaverian Missions Newsletter*  
 Sept./October 1993  
 101 Summer Street  
 Holliston, MA 01746-5857  
 U.S.A.

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## RAGPICKERS AND PROSTITUTES

### (INDONESIA)

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"Poor soul! Why become a rag-picker?! This was the comment of some people who saw me when I picked up empty boxes and bottles from a trash bin. In that comment there was a tone of sympathy and of pity. Such comments came from people who are outsiders, who do not belong to the ragpickers. On the contrary, in living among them I felt proud when I discovered something that was still useful or could be sold from among the thrown-away contents of a trash bin. It enhanced my self-respect as with hard work I could produce something as they did.

The opportunity for living and sharing with prostitutes was not less revealing. Staying with them for some days made me come into their "world" to even listen to their complaints. In general their main problem is an economic one. It is not astonishing,

therefore, that some of them have become prostitutes with the permission of their husbands. It is not unusual that some of these husbands spend the money earned by their wives rendering services to other men, to gamble or even to go with other prostitutes.

From our conversations I understood that they realised that their way of life was looked down upon by religion and public opinion, but they themselves felt powerless to return to a more accepted way of life. One of them expressed her desire to leave prostitution. She put her hope in a man who had said that he was willing to accept her as she was and marry her. From this sharing it seemed to me that her hope to start a new life was dependent on men and on money.

This experience has meant a lot for me as a Medical Mission Sisters' candidate. I am grateful to the Society for this opportunity to live with rag-pickers and prostitutes so that I could share their joys and sorrows especially of those women who are treated unjustly.

Ref. Pelagia Tee  
*Inter Continent*  
 September 1993, No. 206  
 8400 Pine Road  
 Philadelphia, PA 19111  
 U.S.A.

## CAMPAIGN FOR LIFE

### (BRAZIL)

"Nine million Brazilian families hardly earn what they need for their daily subsistence. They lack the means to pay for shelter, clothing or transportation to their place of work. Rather, they dwell in huts that we would not even consider good enough to house animals. They live beside fetid sewage or garbage heaps. They are lacking jobs, schools and health".

These words by Dom Mauro Morelli, Bishop of Duque de Caxias (RJ), appeal to Brazilians to unite in

order to counter the steadily increasing pauperisation of the population. His crusade is receiving federal aid. President Itamar Franco has made Bishop Mauro the president of a "National Council against Hunger and Poverty and for Life". The recently founded council has eight ministers and 21 renowned citizens as members. It will present the government with an action plan on a national level, initiated by the Brazilian "Movement for Ethics in Politics".

Citing statistics at his disposal, Bishop Mauro underlines that 32 million Brazilians are starving. 70 percent of Brazilians do not have the means to get sufficient food.

In detail, the campaign plans to establish its committees in every municipal district. The committees are supposed to examine:

- Where are the slums and squalid quarters in our town?
- How many people live under miserable circumstances?
- How much income do those receive who have a job and how many are unemployed?
- What about their alimentation?
- How many schools are there?
- In what condition are sanitary installations?
- What kind of food is being produced in our town?
- What kind of initiative would be needed to mitigate the hardship?

A second step foresees a conscientisation campaign by mass-media, the formation of self-help troops, the distribution of food in special emergencies, and the foundation of soup kitchens, in order to combat misery. The campaign is to be promoted among the middle-class which up to now has tried to keep aloof from problems caused by the impoverishment of the many.

In Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Barra do Pirai, where such committees are already established and in working order, some encouraging results have been achieved.

Employees of the Electric Power-Supply company of Rio collected ten thousand coupons entitling to get meals. A company producing food put two thousand food-baskets of basic foodstuff at the disposal of the campaigners. A university is ready to donate one percent of the income of its collaborators. The employees of Banco do Brasil have established a Solidarity Fund. The Banco do Nordeste signed a contract of cooperation with the Movement of Landless Rural Workers. Some entrepreneurs in Brasilia deal out 20 thousand plates of soup to the poor on a daily basis and arrange material for social house-building.

In Rome, the first foreign committee to Fight Hunger and Poverty in Brazil has been founded.

#### Ref. Information

Missionszentrale der  
 Franziskaner E.V.  
 5300 Bonn 2  
 Albertus / Magnus Str. 39  
 Germania

## CORRECTION:

We regret a significant omission in the article by Aloysius Pieris, SJ "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions" which appeared in the September SEDOS Bulletin. What follows is the complete text; cursive print indicates the omitted portion of the text....

Most Asian Churches, consequently, find it difficult to exercise their two-fold evangelising: to experience solidarity with non-Christians by witnessing to the spirituality common to all religions (*by practising the beatitudes*) and to reveal their Christian uniqueness to proclaim Jesus as the new covenant (by joining the poor against mammon's principalities and powers that create poverty and oppression. (see p. 231, The Credibility Gap, paragraph 2).

## **COMING EVENTS**

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### **WORKING GROUPS**

**November 4     AFRICA - Follow-up**

**November 11    HAITI**

**November 30    PHILIPPINE: Theological Reflection (3:30 p.m.)**

**December 16    SUDAN**

Place: SEDOS Secretariate; via dei Verbiti, 1

Time: 16:00 p.m.

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**December 7**

### **SEDOS ANNUAL ASSEMBLY**

#### **THE CHALLENGE OF AN INCULTURATED FORMATION OF OUR AFRICAN VOCATIONS**

Speakers:

**Jeanne Amina, FMM**

**Dominic Samne, FSC**

**Alexander Motanyane, OMI**

also

#### **GENERAL MEETING AND FUTURE PLANNING**

Place: Brothers of the Christian Schools; via Aurelia 476

Time: 9:00 - 18:00

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**1994**

**May 17 - 21**

### **ASIA: CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH**

#### **SEDOS RESEARCH SEMINAR**

Speakers:

**Fr. John Tong (China)**

**George Soares-Prabhu, SJ (India)**

**Ms. Michiko Ota (Japan)**

Place: Villa Cavalletti

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