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EDITORIAL

The first two articles of this issue are two conferences given at a SEDOS seminar on the eve of the Synod on Religious Life.

Father HERMANN SCHALÜCK, OFM., Superior General, offers us a challenging reflection on our common identity as religious men and women. After an overview of Religious Life and mission in history, Father Schalück shares with us how he sees the renewal of religious life in relation to our mission "Ad Gentes" and the demands that this renewal will have in our lives.

In her conference FRANCE DELCOURT, S.A., reflects on the changes and transformation that Europe is experiencing and the impact that these changes have on the Church. Economic transformation, a changing society, a multi-cultural and multi-religious world in evolution are some of the challenges that European religious men and women experience today.

CYPRIEN MBUKA, CICM., reviews in short the results of the African Synod and offers us his own personal impressions. In his conclusion he calls the Synod a Synod of hope for the local churches if its orientations are carried out in practice.

DORIS GOTTEMOELLER, RSM., addresses in her conferences two important questions, the question of our ecclesial identity and of our mission in the post-modern world. She characterises apostolic women religious as "laywomen who have embraced and publicly committed themselves to a distinctive way of following Christ". She also addresses some key points such as the value of membership in the Church for apostolic religious women and the meaning and importance of corporate mission.

Symposium Publication

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The book of 190 pages is ready. - All the major conferences and some of the panels given at the Symposium on the African Synod (April/May 1994) are published in their original languages, French and English.

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NEW BOOKS

Perli, F. / Albanese, G.:
Scrivo a voi giovani
Provocazioni missionarie
EMI, Bologna, 1994

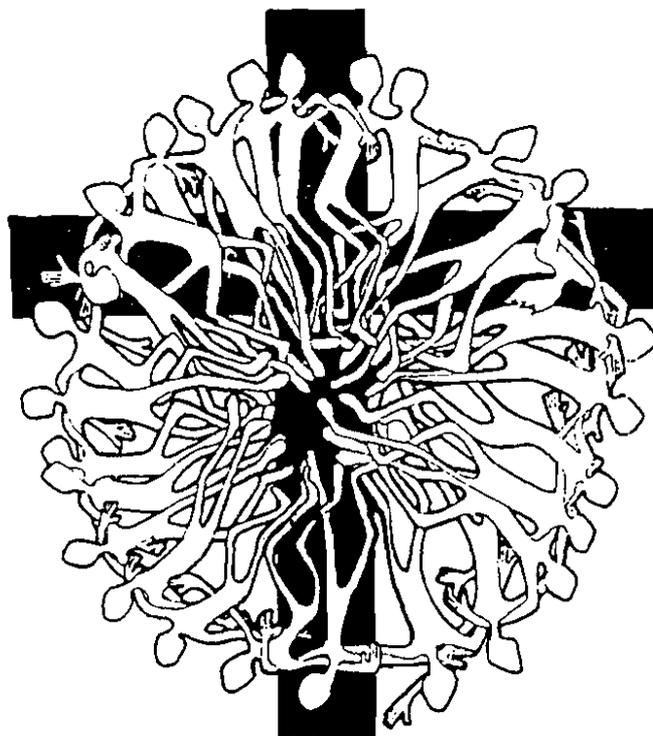
Sanon, A. / Monsignore Pasinya:
L'Africa dopo il Sinodo
EMI, Bologna, 1994

Tong, E. / Wiest, J.P.:
The Catholic Church in Modern China
Orbis Books, 1993

Goudzwaard, B. / de Lange, H.:
Beyond Poverty and Affluence
Toward an Economy of Care
WCC, Geneva, 1994

Brown, Stuart E.:
The Nearest in Affection
Towards a Christian
Understanding of Islam
WCC, Geneva, 1994

Van Straelen, Henry:
L'Église et les religions
non Chrétiennes
Beauchesne, 1994



OUR IDENTITY IS MISSION

Brother Hermann Schalück, O.F.M.

(Brother Hermann Schalück, O.F.M., is Minister General, of the Order of Friars Minor. This conference was given on 30 September, 1994, at the SEDOS Seminar on The Renewal of Religious Life and Our Mission "Ad Gentes").

INTRODUCTION

My brothers and sisters, it is good to be here together on the eve of the synod on religious life and to reflect on some of the important common issues related to our identities as religious men and women in a rapidly changing world.

Our discussion is at a opportune moment. Some of the challenges that we discuss within our individual communities we can now share together with other brothers and sisters who are dealing with similar concerns. In my presentation it is not my intention to give a privileged place to one or the other tradition in Religious Life. I rather think that there are some common elements which prompt us to rethink, redefine and possibly "re-invent" the dimension of missions and especially of mission "*Ad Gentes*" as a constitutive part of Religious Life in general. With the ever increasing insight of missiology, anthropology, ecclesiology, and other social sciences there is additional clarity and confusion about our "mission" as religious.

PREMISES

I want to share with you some of my premises.

First, it is obvious that there is a tremendous diversity in the expressions of Religious Life within the Church. Each community has its own particular mission growing out of belief in Jesus Christ the Incarnation of God's love. The diversity of religious Life is shaped by the personality, charism and spirituality of the community's founder and the community's response to the Church's and social needs throughout the community's history. In a homely image it is

fair to say that each community is like a particular plant or type of flower in a vast garden. Some plants are medicinal, some plants are savory, some plants produce food, some plants seem to be serene in their quite reflective beauty. All are planted or missioned by God, each for a particular purpose.

My second premise is that not all religious communities are intended to live forever. To continue the image of flowers in a garden, some communities have a perennial life, many are annuals. The death of a community is probably a sign that this particular community has fulfilled its purpose. The death of a community is not a negative sign of failure.

A third premise is that it is especially during periods of historic transition that new religious communities are born while others are forced to adapt and still others die. An indicator of a historic transition is the major change in a society's assumptions and interpretation of its experience of life.

A fourth premise. I believe that we are now living in a period of major global transition, that we are in an "in-between-time". (Sean Sammons) The changes are evident in the migrations of so many peoples, the access to global communications, the different popular revolutions and movements: political, sexual, biological, genetic research, religious fanaticism, and interdependent global economies. The changes are happening not only in individual societies at the local level but they are simultaneously influencing life and society at the global level. This global shift has ramifications for future Religious Life and our "*mission Ad Gentes*".

OVERVIEW OF RELIGIOUS LIFE AND MISSION IN HISTORY

From its very beginning Religious Life appears as the Incarnation of God's radical love for his world, as a sign of the radicalness of the Gospel and as a liberating force transforming the world. It is worth remarking that, from its first appearances, Religious Life was not defined as an expression of the pastoral or charitable activity of the Church, but rather as a visible and legible sign of what it means to be Church-at-the service of the world. Evangelisation "*Ad Gentes*", often with its dark and bright sides, has been the work mainly of the Religious, both men and women, lay and clerics.

Early Church

In terms of participation or mission there were distinct group among the followers of Jesus: the large crowds to whom he preached and fed, the people whom he healed, the 70 disciples, the 12 apostles, and the 3 closest friends, Peter, James and John. After Jesus' death and resurrection the Community's mission was among the Jewish people and grew "*Ad Gentes*" to include the Gentiles. Eventually, there were groups within the community identified by certain gifts, ministries, or common concerns. There were administrators, prophets, widows, deacons, teachers, and apostles. The Christian community for the next two centuries was preoccupied with celebration of its mysteries, its quiet growth and its survival among intermittent periods of persecution.

Hermetical Life

In the fourth century the Emperor Constantine and his family converted to Christianity and they brought the Roman Empire itself into the Church. The Church had the mission of implementing the petition of the Lord's Prayer that God's Reign "come on earth as it is in heaven". The whole empire was becoming Christian. There were still areas to be converted. The demons had been forced from the cities, from civilisation and into the wilderness. Holy men and women left villages, farms, families and friends to go into the desert to live as hermits. There they were lightbearers of the gospel in the desert combatting the forces of darkness. The glorious return of Jesus seemed to be contingent on the ability of the Church to clear a path for him. The Christian community had the mission inward, to the peoples of the cities of the empire and "*Ad Extra*" out into the wilderness.

Monastic Life

Over the next two centuries as the Roman Empire was collapsing groups of these desert hermits gathered together in associations with certain of these holy men/women who became their mentors and teachers. In time these associations became more structured and served as the base for monastic life which flowered in the Rules of Saint Basil in the East and of Saint Benedict in the West. It was a time of uncertainty and the monastic communities became islands of security and culture within the changing maps of western and central Europe. The monasteries kept the record of western civilisation alive while spreading Christianity among the new settlers on the European continent. The Religious Life of the monastic communities provided a stability for the continent in a period of transition. The mission "*Ad Gentes*" could be described as bringing the civility, the law and order of the Reign of God to illiterate, impoverished and often violent people.

Mendicant Life

By the end of the first millennium of the Christian Era, European society was organised with a strong feudal base. Pockets of merchants and other entrepreneurs began to live independently of the feudal lords in communes and towns. These new businessmen gave birth to a new style of life of distributed wealth in a stable European society. From within this new culture grew mendicant Orders of friars, religious men who were not associated with monasteries but who travelled from village to village preaching messages to convert and comfort the people. The friars' mission was to live the penitential life and to preach the message of God for the conversion of heretics and the encouragement of the faithful.

The wealth of the communes and the middle class grew, universities were established to teach the young. The feudal system collapsed and was replaced by nation states that vied with each other for power and wealth. With the new security and independence a Renaissance opened the way to the education and glorification of the individual person. People learned that the world was not flat, that men could travel across the ocean to new lands. Gold, spices and wealth rewarded the adventurous. The mission "*Ad Gentes*" became a project to Christianise the natives of the New World.

Apostolic Life

The Church grew wealthier by its association with Catholic colonial powers. There was a strong reaction to the wealth and conduct of the Church. In Northern Europe the Protestant Reformation caught fire and changed the history of western Christianity. Within the Roman Church the Counter Reformation gave rise to many new apostolic communities of men and women who wanted to live a simple evangelical lifestyle while caring for the poor and disadvantaged in their societies as teachers, nurses, preachers and missionaries. Also, it has been a tumultuous period of revolutions (American, French, Russian, Latin American, Colonial; Scientific, Rationalism, Industrial, to name a few), hundreds of wars and the migration of millions of peoples. In academic circles there was a divorce and mutual mistrust between the natural and the spiritual sciences, between religion and psychology. Yet even with persecutions, the periodic ban and dissolution of some religious communities, Religious Life did flourish. There was a strong self-confidence that grew from our defense. We knew who the enemies were and we believed that we were right. Our mission "*Ad Gentes*" was to bring as many people worldwide to the truth, which for us at that time meant, into the Roman Catholic Church.

TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the first half of this century there were various movements, such as the biblical, ecumenical, catechetical, liturgical and lay apostolates. By the 1950's many communities were sending missionaries abroad, bishops and superiors read the signs of the time and responded by building large novitiates, schools of philosophy and theology to accommodate the many applicants to seminaries and to Religious Life. Then the Church gathered for the Second Vatican Council.

Perhaps the Second Vatican Council was not so much an opening to the future but a summary, an end of a rich period of the Church's history? What if it was the full blossom of a plant that is now entering into autumn and winter?

Today: The In-Between-Time

Not only have our lifestyles, clothing and prayer life changed over the past thirty years but our civil societies have changed with

incredible speed. Within the Church there have been strong developments in scripture scholarship and theological reflections, as well as an incorporation of the natural and social sciences into our theologies. Our understandings of God, Church and Mission are being affected by these changes.

For centuries the observation of the sun rising and setting daily on the horizon gave people reason to think that we were the center of the universe and that the sun rotated around us. What began as a casual observation grew into a cosmology, that is, an interpretation of the perception. From this cosmology the Christian Church and western civilisation constructed a complete worldview encompassing God's design for the human race, the need for salvation, worship, law, ethics, iconography, etc. The new perceptions of Galilei were not harmless or mere curious observations. Using a simple new lens Galilei introduced a tremendous shift in the perception of the way humanity understood its place and our solar system within the universe. The experience of the new perception forced the previous cosmology and many of its corollaries to crumble and new ones to take their place. This crisis was not without serious problems. This new information was a tremendous threat to the way Christians had understood God, their world and their place in it. The threat to the cosmological underpinnings of society was so strong that it was not only difficult, but even dangerous, to talk to bishops and to try to convince them to see reality in the new way.

Today we are in a similar time of crisis where our cosmological assumptions are changing. Perhaps the new lens that introduced the beginnings of a new cosmology is the lens of the camera through which we saw the earth from the moon. People all through the world have had the common experience of watching other people break the law of gravity, move into space and from the moon watch our planet rotate like a glowing Christmas ornament suspended against a black sky. Together we watched ourselves and our planet, a globe without borders, fragile, alone and brilliant, from a camera that sat on the moon 280,000 miles away.

Today one half of the human race, the women, are defining themselves and their rights vis-a-vis the other half, the men. This is probably one of the most important discussions in the history of the human family. The world is becoming a global village where more people are

interested in spirituality but do not identify with a religion. As we learn more about creation and electronically meet new brothers and sisters throughout the world our perceptions change. We not only see nature and one another differently but our understanding of God changes. Fewer people are frightened by the concept of God. All religions are seen as good and helpful for people's journey. More spiritualities are creation-centered and identified with the struggles of the poor and human rights. Physicists who were previously considered the enemies of religion are now giving us lectures on how matter and spirit are aspects of the same reality and that the base of all matter is spirit.

For the first time in history the whole global family can now be simultaneously affected by the same experience at the same time. Television has united us around a new village fire. We watch the Russian White House in Moscow being attacked; together hundreds of millions of people from every country in the world gasp at the same instant as we watch the winning goal of the World Cup being scored in Los Angeles. We can Tele-fax across closed borders, over the heads of despots, giving people hope as well as updated data about human rights violations. Access to information shifted power from factory production output to information. Information gives people the possibility to make choices for their lives.

Over the last ten years or so we have witnessing a shift in focus: from an ecclesiocentric and/or exclusively Christocentric model of mission (and also of Religious Life) towards a model which, though thoroughly ecclesial and grounded in true discipleship, is open the horizon of the world to come, of the "new heaven and the new earth", that is of God's Reign. In this way, it is the Reign of God which defines the identity of the Church and which is also bound to re-define Religious Life within the Church. If the identity of the Church is mission, then the Reign of God and its values (peace, justice, divine filiation and human fellowship, unconditional respect for all life, brotherhood/sisterhood of all the nations under one God) become the goal of the mission of the Church.

It seems that contemporary theology has reached a fairly strong consensus about the base for the self-understanding of the Church (also of Religious Life): The center of Jesus' life and ministry was the proclamation of the breaking-in of the Reign of God by words, gestures ("deeds") and especially through his death and

resurrection. Biblical scholars tell us that Jesus' self-understanding consisted in his being the prophet of that new reality which is called the Reign of God. He speaks about a God who relates to every single human being, to the whole of creation, to history in and through which his love will unfold and grow until the end of the times. "The Kingdom of God... is the utopian vision of a society of love, justice, equality, based on the inner transformation or empowerment of human beings. A vision in which people will 'act' and 'live together' differently because they will 'be' and 'feel' themselves differently" (P. Knitter).

Vatican II has placed mission at the very center of the Church's self-understanding: The Church is missionary by its very nature. Mission belongs to the very essence of the Church. One could easily say: The Church's identity is mission. In this perspective mission does not proceed from a special mandate received from some ecclesial authority, but from baptism itself by which every Christian is initiated into that "communio". A "communio" which is not a closed circle, but rather a living body whose nature consists in the act of sharing and self-giving, much the same as Jesus has given himself away for the sake of the "many". In a very clear sense the Church does not exist for itself. It is rather, as *Lumen Gentium* puts it, the "sacrament" of the communion of humankind and of the whole creation with God, the sacrament of God's salvic and liberating plan for his creation.

MISSION AND REVERSE MISSION

When we speak about "mission", it is easy to look for a project, a book to publish, a tract to write, a film to produce in order to communicate the "content of the message" in order to change others' lives for the better. But "mission" is not the same as a certain amount of measurable information to be communicated, taught or handed over. It is an attitude of being sent to announce by presence and/maybe by word the Reign of God.

Seven hundred eighty years ago at the time of the Crusades our brother, Francis of Assisi, travelled to the east with the intention of preaching to the Sultan, the enemy of his people. If the Sultan would convert then there would be peace. Francis was fortunate because the Sultan was a wise and open man. Rather than be angered by Francis' preaching the Sultan invited him to live in his camp and to

continue their discussions over a period of time. Francis experienced another conversion in his life. He did not become Muslim but he returned to Assisi with a great respect for the "Saracens". He was more deeply evangelised himself than was the Sultan. In the First Rule for our life Francis wrote that the brothers who go among the "Saracens or other unbelievers" should live among these people being "subject to all", quarreling with no one and by their lives give witness to their faith as Christians. If and only when it pleases God should they preach and baptise.

Francis gave us a wonderful model of evangelisation and mission. We go into a situation that is foreign to us and we live respectfully with people as we come to understand their ways. We do not argue with them and we do not attempt to preach until God makes it clear that we should do so.

Mission is thus an attitude, a viewpoint, an enlightenment (Buddha) which allows us to see what is really here: to see, to experience the humble and simple God living among us or better put: we living within God. Mission is choosing to have your eyes opened and to be a witness to the Reign of God where spirit and matter are in harmony. It is to believe and to hope in the Reign of God that is around us, that is beneath the surface of life, that is within each person. It is a chosen attitude, a disposition toward peace and toward justice, desiring to see all as it is intended to be by God. It has the ability to bring out what is hidden, like "the steward who brings treasures from the storeroom". It is a way of seeing and understanding the world and its people with faith in the Incarnation of God's Love. There is a marvelous story about St Ignatius Loyola that describes this attitude of faith. When St Ignatius was an old man living in retirement, often he was seen in the garden walking among the flowers. Every so often he would wobble up to a plant that was in full bloom. He would push his cane up against the flowers and gently shake them saying, "I know, I know, do not shout about it so loudly"!

DISCIPLESHIP A BASIC ATTITUDE FOR ALL TIMES

It was not only the content of Jesus' teaching that captured the apostles' attention. It was also his personal interest in them and his calling power. Calling them to see, to be awake to the Reign of God that was within and around them,

so that they could be free to be their true selves. In Simon, Jesus saw the hidden strength of a great leader underneath the vacillation of a coward who loudly denied knowing him before a servant girl in Herod's courtyard; it was the hidden gentleness of James and John who both wanted to call down the fire and brimstone of Sodom and Gomorhea upon the Samaritan town which would not give them night shelter; it was the hidden loyalty and passionate dedication of Mary Magdalene who was prostituting herself for money; it was the hidden fairness of Zaccheus who promised retribution to all whom he had cheated; it was the hidden integrity within Matthew the apostle and martyr who had been willing to work for the enemy and to collect tax money from his own people. Our mission is to help those who are blind, deaf or indifferent to experience and respond to the Reign of God that is within and around them.

Questions

Dedication to Reign of God will open up many questions about the way we do things when we go about our mission: For example, what would it mean for us as religious to be in China and go to China in the future? What would be the intent of such a mission? The Chinese have the world's oldest continuous civilisation. We believe that God has been loving the Chinese people, living and working among them for thousands of years. So why would we feel called to go live among them? What would we need to tell them? or to ask of them?

What lessons are we learning from our recent experience of evangelisation in Rwanda? In other parts of Africa? What about the feasibility of religious communities becoming active NGO's associated with the United Nations? How could we preach or witness our faith that Christ has died, Christ has risen and that Christ will come again to the United Nations community?

When we implant the Church or our institute in other countries how mobile, flexible and poor are we? How respectful is our attitude towards the culture and ways of our hosts? Do we retain the ownership of structures and of the young local Churches? Is now the time when the "young" Churches developed by our Institutes should now become themselves active in "sending" missionaries? Why are there not more missionaries from Africa, Asia, Latin America? Do we evangelise by our witness to evangelical dignity and equality among our-

selves - lay and clerics, men and women - as we all are bound together by the same fundamental task of evangelisation? Do we export our old problems and divisions to the young Churches?

Challenges

What about the renewal of Religious Life and our mission "*Ad Gentes*"? Lest we fool ourselves, we need to remember that in nature most renewal is through death. Unless the seed fall to the ground and die it will not produce a grain of wheat. Death opens up the possibility of progress and development, a rebirth to a life that is very different from a prior stage. Maybe we are being prepared for the next planting and like the seed can only believe and hope that the unknown future is within us. Perhaps we are now being pulled into the next period, across the threshold. Often there is resistance whenever creation comes to an evolutionary boundary crossing. New energy is created by the friction caused by the resistance to evolutionary draw forward. This new energy helps to propel creation into its next stage.

Religious Life refuses boundaries. More often than not Religious Life defies strict definitions, the naming of structural elements and geographical limitations. Its very nature is dynamic and not static.

All of our institutes need to adapt, both those at home and those abroad, to the issues surrounding us: the challenge to form smaller groups of Christians living a gospel inspired life among people who are indifferent, blind or hostile to the Reign of God; learning how to live in international and intercultural communities, not just because of necessity but as a public witness to the solidarity of the human race; working and collaborating together, men with women, women with men; praying and working, on a regular basis, with people of other religions; sharing with the scientific community the message the God has become part of creation; speaking on behalf of those who do not have voice at public meetings such as the World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen), the World Conference on Women (Beijing), the World Conference on Habitat (Turkey).

Lessons about the renewal of Religious Life and our mission "*Ad Gentes*" can be learned from our smaller brothers and sisters, hydrogen and oxygen molecules, which even though they are so well defined and useful, often merge and find new life when they lose themselves and become our Sister Water, who St. Francis reminds us is precious, useful, chaste and pure. In water, hydrogen and oxygen have a temporary and useful fulfillment that was undreamt. However, each must change, convert, lose itself in order to unite, to become something new. Earlier in history the message of the Incarnation passed from its Jewish home to the west, in Greece and Rome where there was a fusion between the message from the Orient and the culture of the West. In many ways this exchange or union is similar to the fusion of hydrogen and oxygen to make our gentle Sister Water. A question for us: Are we prepared personally or institutionally to bring the molecule of our world and let it merge completely with another's world so that there will be a new understanding of the Incarnation and its ramifications? For example, what if the West were to bring its world of theology and reflection and let it be transformed and inculturated into the teachings of Confucius so that there would be a Chinese Catholic Church?

Much of Religious Life as we knew it is dying and changing into a new life that is yet unknown, undreamt. For the next century, I believe that there will be various experiences of Religious Life in the Church. Not only will they be diverse but they may be functioning out of different ecclesiologies and in very different social situations. In some countries religious communities will prosper as they did fifty, sixty years ago in the north. In other places even with our best of intentions and efforts, the answer to our prayers will be fewer numbers and even the disappearance of some communities that served the Church very well in the past. It will also draw out the new forms of Religious Life from the Church for the global society, forms which will be consistent with predecessors in the past but different, perhaps as different as a seed compared to a sapling.

Just as the prospering commune of Assisi was the catalyst for the innovation of Francis and Clare, we can expect that our new world will be the catalyst for the new spiritual leaders, the new forms of life publicly dedicated to God. These new forms of "religious" life will respond in fresh and in bold different ways to the challenges that come from evolving global village. They will probably be concerned with

opening the eyes of those who cannot see the obvious parts of the Reign of God.

Attention has to be drawn to the danger of an incorrect reading of the Religious Life, a danger which exists both in the local Churches of the South as in those of the Northern hemisphere: Some consider only the utilitarian aspect and thus relegate to the background the "raison d'être", the fundamental charism of Religious Life, which consists in being a humble, but nevertheless prophetic sign of God's loving presence in the world and in the whole of creation, in being a sign of the living Spirit which gives birth to an ever new incarnation of the Gospel and witnesses to the coming of the Reign of God within the different cultures of the world. I would like to emphasise the fact that in its deepest dimension, Religious Life is not a resource at the service of pastoral ministry. It is rather essentially important in itself, in and through giving witness to God and the transforming power of the Gospel in the Church and in society. "The apostolate of all religious consists primarily in the witness of their consecrated life, which they are bound to foster through prayer and penance" (CIC 673).

The history and the present situation of our Province in the Netherlands and frequent conversations with my brothers there, convince me more and more, that we have to read our history as an Institute with the eyes of faith, in a true and hope-filled perspective of death and resurrection. I think that this is one of the relevant perspectives of "mission and gentes". What I am going to say now will make you perhaps think of similar situations in your own institute and history: Our province in the Netherlands was once the largest province in the Order, with 1.500 members. Now it is down to some 400 friars, and it is easy to imagine that it will become even smaller. But this province has a unique and recent history of sending out many brothers into different countries and cultures. The Dutch friars have been decisively and very generously instrumental in setting up local Churches and new independent and vibrant international provinces of our Order in Brazil, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Korea and Japan. Hundreds of our Dutch friars evangelised and died in these areas. Does the growth that we are proud of today in those countries have the cost of the self-emptying, of dying within the sending province? Yes. Together with my brothers in the Netherlands, I try to look at this evolution, filled with hope that also in Holland religious, Franciscan, life will by no means come to an end. But that it will continue - maybe

with small numbers - but with new energies also received from the young Churches and provinces they have been ministering to.

My question is: Are we open and ready to learn these difficult lessons which history teaches us? My impression is that what prevents us often from being courageous in "reaching out" and "going beyond" is the fear to give away, an understandable, but dangerous reluctance to give up, a sometimes disastrous strategy of "maintenance and "crisis-management" which does not allow for creativity, for visioning, for sending and sharing our resources. I'd also like to add here that in our experience it will be crucial for the missionary character of the whole Church and of our international institutes that the young Churches and the religious Orders serving in them take over the task of "sending" and of reaching out themselves. There should and there could be more missionaries from Africa in Africa; from Latin America in Africa and Asia; from Asia in Asia; and from Asia in Africa. Why does this not happen more visibly and more frequently?

CONCLUSION:

SOME SPECIAL CHALLENGES

1. The call to new frontiers

Religious Life refuses boundaries. (Saint Francis: The story of Lady Poverty asking the friars to show her their cells, "Our cloister is the world"). More often than not Religious Life defies strict definitions, the naming of structural elements and geographical limitations. Its very nature is dynamic and not static. Religious Life has often been the primary agent of change within the Church and in society. By its very nature it is a constant pursuit of the "ultimate" in life and history, the continuous search for the fullness of life and of history. It has to do with the urgency for authentic witnessing to the truth that, despite of the many arguing to the contrary, God's love is the agent in history and that Jesus is the Lord: He will return again to inaugurate the fullness of the Reign of God. Religious Life breathes and celebrates that end-time already now. It is thus proclamation, anticipation, and prophecy. Religious Life with its mission "*Ad Gentes*" is a sign of the Reign of God which is part of the dialectic of the 'already' and the 'not yet'.

I would like to propose some simple questions for your reflection and perhaps your discussion:

- Are we the presence of the Risen Lord in the world?
- Are we the voice of the poor seeking to be heard in a world which is structurally unjust?
- Are we a cry for justice that is not easily silenced?
- Are we the signs and "sacraments" of a compassionate God?
- Are we the alternative to greed, nationalism, consumerism, racism, upward mobility?
- Are we peacemakers, with peace reigning first of all in our own hearts and in our own Institutes?
- Are we a word of hope, a song of encouragement and hope for those who need courage?
- Are we caretakers of our Mother the Earth?
- Are we the gatherers of the alien, the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the migrant, the asylum-seeker, the unemployed, the forgotten?
- Are we a sign of a reconciled Church (the question of being an international Institute..)?
- Are we that special gift to the Church which calls it back to its initial love and discipleship?

2. "Passing over"

Jesus' mission was a personal Passover (Kenosis) from what is familiar and secure into a world of sinners, outcasts, the indifferent, the corrupt and the impure. Today, a creative following of Jesus has to contemplate and implement our community's Passover into the lives of the poor, by making our option for the poor a self-emptying into other contexts and other cultures, and inculturation.

3. We speak about the necessity of acting with integrity to **implant a Church which is inculturated** but also one which is international ("Catholic"). It is so important in these days, having the advantage of history and the studies of modern social sciences that we do not act impetuously and blindly. We need to be careful to avoid the danger of incommunicability through a superficial and erroneous concept of inculturation. We also need to be cautious of the danger of a new nationalisms which can hide within the language of inculturation and "respect for cultures". An essential part of our mission "*Ad Gentes*" is to help people avoid being trapped by the destructive elements of tribalism. But before we go to other places to give advice to other brothers and sisters we need to be certain that we have the practice of addressing these same human problems within our institutes.

4. This last point brings me to the challenge that **we evangelise by our witness to the evangelical dignity and equality that we practice among ourselves (Ca 588,1)**. We have continuing historical problems concerning the relationship between lay and clergy, between men and women, and yet all are bound together by the same fundamental task of evangelisation. It is important for us as religious institutes to examine ourselves and to ask if we export our old problems and divisions to the young Churches? Reconciliation must take place among ourselves on a daily basis if we hope to be witnesses of the Reign of God among other nations, tribes, and cultures. The message that we preach by word and deed must be incarnational, that is, it must demonstrate our firm conviction that God takes creation and our societies seriously. Mission "*Ad Gentes*" must include the wisdom and commitment to the struggle of the poor that is contained within the social teachings of the Church. Our work for justice and peace is an integral part of evangelisation. Dialogue is an essential element to our mission "*Ad Gentes*". Dialogue as evidenced in a public manner by the famous encounter of world religions in Assisi eight years ago.

Conclusion

Sunday morning, on the eve of the Feast of our Brother Francis, the Synod on Religious Life will open and we shall then begin a public discussion of our reflections, or hopes and our fears about the future of Religious Life. Jesus asks that we go out into the whole world and "make disciples of all nations. Baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". To submerge ourselves with the whole world into the conscious awareness of the love and life of the Trinity

My prayerful hope is the Synod may be able to clearly focus on the vital questions that are arising from around the world. Also, I hope that all of the different forms and expressions of Religious Life, and not only the Missionary Societies or Missionary Orders, may regain strength, vitality and meaning by recruiting, forming in a missionary spirituality, sending men and women, who are men and women of vision and hope, rooted in contemplation to live and proclaim God's love, brothers and sisters who incarnate the *raison d'être* of the Church of Christ in view of the Reign of God: to be symbols, signs and agents of God's love towards his creation: "Religious are the radicalisation of the Church as mission or movement towards the Reign of God" (M. Amaladoss).

L'EUROPE DANS L'AN 2000, NOUVEAU DÉFI MISSIONNAIRE POUR LA VIE RELIGIEUSE

France Delcourt

(France Delcourt, S.A., Présidente de l'U.C.E.S.M. (Union des Conférences Européennes de Supérieurs/res majeurs/res). Conférence donnée le 30 septembre 1994 au séminaire du SEDOS sur la mission et la vie religieuse).

L'Europe qui apparaissait comme un vieux continent, divisé depuis 1945 en 2 blocs EST/OUEST, est soudain remis sur le devant de la scène mondiale depuis 1989-90 avec la chute spectaculaire du bloc soviétique.

"Ainsi cette Europe congelée en deux blocs opposés, avec chacun son système de défense et son marché interne, qui se construisaient toujours en contre-rapport avec l'autre, était en apparence une Europe stable, l'Europe des accords tacites, de partages de pouvoir, de zones d'influence, que les deux antagonistes s'étaient engagés à respecter. C'était la paix froide pour éviter la guerre chaude" (Card. Poupard 21-23 Mai 1994 Congrès à Villa Cagola-Gazzada).

L'effondrement du système communiste laisse émerger en Europe centrale et orientale tous les problèmes et antagonismes ataviques entre peuples et minorités ethniques mis sous le couvercle de régimes dictatoriaux.

Par contre-coup, la situation bouleverse aussi les rapports entre pays occidentaux.

Ainsi "dans une certaine mesure, l'Europe se trouve désormais devant son image réelle. Et c'est à partir de cette situation de fait, qu'il faut envisager concrètement sa construction" (Card. Poupard-id).

Dans ce continent en pleine mutation, comment se situent l'Église et la vie religieuse? Même si ce fut de manière différente, dans

l'ensemble, la FOI a été partout mise à l'épreuve, à l'EST comme à l'OUEST..

Continent le premier évangélisé, il est devenu celui des vieilles Églises, face aux nouveaux pôles de développement dans l'hémisphère SUD..

Devant les difficultés de l'annonce de la BONNE NOUVELLE à un continent qui semble ne pas avoir soif de Dieu, la tentation est grande de rejoindre les jeunes Églises qui manquent tellement d'ouvriers.

Et pourtant, il serait irresponsable de désertir ces lieux désormais arides, mais où se jouent des enjeux de dimension planétaire, et où s'affrontent la FOI et une MODERNITÉ qui, progressivement, va envahir le monde entier.

Ainsi, au moment même où la vie religieuse apostolique européenne traverse une phase de fragilité (peu de recrutement, vieillissement des membres) elle est spécialement invitée à un nouvel élan face aux enjeux que soulève la construction de la nouvelle Europe. [Remarque: si 50% sont âgés de plus de 65 ans, les religieux/ses européens représentent près de la moitié de l'effectif mondial ce qui avec leur capital de formation signifie de réelles potentialités à ré-investir sans doute d'une autre manière que par le passé]

Sans vouloir tout traiter, nous allons parcourir quelques unes des situations qui interpellent particulièrement les religieux/ses qui vivent en Europe.

I LES TRANSFORMATIONS ÉCONOMIQUES

L'Europe occidentale est en majeure partie engagée dans l'UNION EUROPÉENNE qui vient de prendre naissance en 1993 grâce à l'adoption des accords de Maastricht. C'est un ensemble qui représente la 1^è puissance commerciale du monde, rival dangereux pour les USA et le Japon.

Mais la grande question est: Quel usage l'U.E. va-t-elle faire de son pouvoir. Nous sommes devant un très grand défi: celui de la JUSTICE SOCIALE.

Devant un système économique qui tend à rendre l'homme uni-dimensionnel, les religieux/ses doivent être vigilants pour faire émerger les autres dimensions culturelles et spirituelles de l'homme.

Or, les religieux dont les Instituts de vie apostolique ont été presque tous fondés avec une option préférentielle pour les pauvres, sont particulièrement interpellés pour veiller - avec d'autres partenaires portant le même souci - à une répartition plus équitable des richesses.

On peut considérer plusieurs niveaux:

A Tout d'abord au sein même de l'Union Européenne (U.E.)

Même s'il y a croissance globale de la richesse de l'U.E., il s'en faut de loin que les économiquement pauvres aient disparu; on voit même surgir de "nouveaux pauvres", ceux que leur niveau de précarité rend particulièrement vulnérables aux variations de la situation économique et du marché de l'emploi (l'Europe occidentale souffre d'une situation de chômage quasi-structurelle..)

Et dans cette Europe économique qui marche à plusieurs vitesses, les religieux/ses se rendent solidaires de tous ceux qui sont marginalisés.

B Ensuite il y a la justice sociale au sein de la nouvelle GRANDE EUROPE

L'Europe centrale et orientale tente de passer à l'économie de marché depuis la chute du bloc soviétique..mais la situation se détériore de plus

en plus depuis 3 ans, et le chômage fait son apparition..C'est une énorme mutation difficile à gérer.

Devant les multiples attentes de l'Europe centrale et occidentale, l'Europe occidentale risque de les considérer comme un nouveau marché qui s'ouvre pour écouler les produits de notre société de production et de consommation, pas tellement prête à ouvrir ses marchés aux exportations venant de l'Est.

En Europe centrale et orientale on craint fort que le vide spirituel laissé après la chute des régimes marxistes ne soit comblé par un afflux de biens matériels.

Devant un système économique qui tend à rendre l'homme uni-dimensionnel, les religieux/ses doivent être vigilants pour faire émerger les autres dimensions culturelles et spirituelles de l'homme.

C Enfin, dans le champ des relations de l'Europe avec les pays en voie de DÉVELOPPEMENT

Il existe la convention de LOMÉ entre l'U.E. et des pays de l'APC (Afrique, Pacifique et Caraïbes) qui essaye de mettre au point les termes de l'échange. Mais cela ne recouvre pas les besoins de tous les pays du Tiers-Monde, alors que le nombre des PMA (pays les moins avancés) a augmenté au cours de la dernière décennie.

Nous savons, en particulier le poids énorme que fait peser le remboursement de la dette internationale qui paraît sans terme prévisible. Il y aurait aussi à reconsidérer le modèle culturel de développement que le NORD impose au SUD.

Mais l'Europe a aussi des relations particulières avec l'AFRIQUE.

De récentes études montrent que l'économie mondiale peut se passer entièrement des importations et exportations de l'Afrique; de là à l'oublier le pas est vite franchi..Aussi, environ 24 Instituts missionnaires ont créé un RÉSEAU FOI-JUSTICE EUROPE-AFRIQUE, pour rendre les décideurs de l'U.E. plus conscients de ce grave problème.

Comme Instituts religieux ayant des membres dans beaucoup de pays en voie de développement, comme religieux soucieux de la justice dans le monde, nous avons une particulière

responsabilité pour tenir les populations européennes éveillées à ces importants enjeux. Se situant comme partenaires de laïcs, chrétiens ou non, plusieurs d'entre nous s'associent à des organismes ayant les mêmes préoccupations de promotion de ces pays, de défense des droits des peuples à un niveau de vie plus humain, dans le respect de leurs aspirations culturelles et spirituelles.

II UNE SOCIÉTÉ EN MUTATION

L'Europe fait face à une véritable révolution technologique qui touche tous les secteurs de la vie urbaine, mais surtout du monde rural qui subit une mutation sans précédent. Mais d'autres secteurs sont aussi en changement.

A Mondialisation et démocratie

Du fait des progrès des techniques de communication, nous sommes à une époque de mondialisation étonnante. Nous avons une concentration du savoir, et donc du pouvoir qui se joignent à l'avoir entre les mains de quelques uns qui se trouvent spécialement dans l'hémisphère Nord (et notamment de l'Europe occidentale).

La grande question qui se pose alors est celle des CONTRE-POUVOIRS à exercer pour contrôler et limiter ces nouveaux pouvoirs. Dans un système démocratique nous disposons de beaucoup de possibilités, mais nous n'en faisons pas suffisamment l'usage.

Cela suppose une éducation à une vraie liberté conduisant à des choix personnels avec d'autres, en vue du bien commun. Nous avons là aussi un champ privilégié pour aider à développer le sens d'une participation pleine d'initiatives.

Il est de notre responsabilité d'exercer avec d'autres, le pouvoir qui est remis entre nos mains pour faire respecter les droits de l'homme et des peuples, le bien commun de l'ensemble - en Europe et dans le monde - à la lumière de la doctrine sociale de l'Église.

C'est ce dur apprentissage que font les pays d'Europe central et orientale qui, de même qu'ils se sont engagés sur la voie de l'économie de marché, ont opté pour la démocratie pluraliste et l'État de droit. Ici, nous devons souligner le rôle important joué par le Conseil de l'Europe dans la mesure où c'est lui qui discerne le label démocratique.

B Un avenir démographique en interrogation

La population d'origine européenne (à l'Est comme à l'Ouest) stagne dans l'ensemble. Cette situation est en partie masquée encore par l'augmentation de la longévité de la vie. Mais une telle population dispose de moins d'esprit de créativité et d'adaptation pour faire face aux nouvelles mutations de la situation mondiale avec ses situations inédites.

Ce vide - encore relatif mais pour peu de temps - de population, joint à de grandes richesses économiques joue déjà - un rôle d'appel de personnes venant de pays pauvres et en expansion démographique. (Depuis 1945, l'Europe occidentale aurait accueilli environ 20 millions d'immigrés intra ou extra-européens).

Une question de fond interpelle les européens, surtout de l'Ouest:

- comment vivons-nous cet accueil des immigrés: comme une chance? comme une menace?
- comment préparer les enfants européens à vivre une situation pluri-culturelle?

Comme religieux, nous voyons là un enjeu important de l'accueil de l'AUTRE dans sa différence culturelle, religieuse. auquel notre formation communautaire nous prépare, surtout lorsque nous faisons partie d'un Institut international.

En cela il peut être une contribution à réconcilier les peuples entre eux base de l'édification de la paix en Europe. Et en voie de conséquence dans le monde aussi.

III UN MONDE PLURI - CULTUREL ET MULTI - RELIGIEUX EN ÉVOLUTION

Du fait de cette immigration (surtout d'origine extra-européenne) l'Europe (surtout occidentale) est de plus en plus une réalité pluriculturelle avec une multitude d'options religieuses et philosophiques. L'Islam devient la 2^e religion du continent après le catholicisme.

Les médias diffusent une culture trans-atlantique commune tendant à créer une uniformité de comportements.

Dans un contexte de matérialisme pratique plus que d'athéisme militant, nous entrons dans l'étape dite de post-chrétienté... Et surgissent

maintenant sectes, mouvements religieux type Nouvel Age qui envahissent en force l'Europe centrale.

Une foi sociologique disparaît: elle devient de plus en plus une option personnelle. Les chrétiens sont moins nombreux mais plus convaincus. La question est bien de leur soutien, formation accompagnement. Et là, les Instituts religieux ont quelque chose à offrir, y compris le partage de leur spiritualité.

On peut considérer plusieurs enjeux:

A La Rencontre des cultures

Le rencontre des cultures dans l'espace européen est un vaste chantier où les chrétiens ont une contribution spécifique à apporter aux côtés des autres, sans chercher à exercer une hégémonie.

Il est de notre responsabilité d'exercer avec d'autres, le pouvoir qui est remis entre nos mains pour faire respecter les droits de l'homme et des peuples, le bien commun de l'ensemble - en Europe et dans le monde - à la lumière de la doctrine sociale de l'Eglise.

Comme le disait le Card. MARTINI (ancien président de la CCEE): "Nous nous trouvons face à une occasion providentielle et historique qui nous est donnée de faire de l'Europe une société multiraciale et multiculturelle, où chacun apporte sa richesse et s'ouvre aux richesses des autres".

Trois vecteurs de la culture interpellent particulièrement les chrétiens: le domaine de l'éducation, la famille et le champ de l'audio visuel. Autant l'éducation et la famille sont des terrains traditionnellement fréquentés par les Instituts religieux, (encore qu'il faut en renouveler l'approche) autant le secteur audio-visuel d'apparition plus récente leur est bien souvent peu familier.

B L'oecuménisme

Les grands changements dont nous sommes témoins en Europe, créent selon l'expression du Card. WILLEBRAND: "une nouvelle urgence

oecuménique entre chrétiens de l'Europe du Nord et du Sud, de l'Occident et de l'Orient". Et nous savons les tensions actuelles entre orthodoxes et catholiques dans plusieurs pays de l'Est ayant recouvré la liberté religieuse..

Les chrétiens d'Europe ont une responsabilité historique pour oeuvrer en faveur de l'unité des chrétiens; cela redonnerait plus de crédibilité à la parole de l'Eglise dans le monde, surtout lorsqu'il s'agit de défendre les droits fondamentaux des personnes et des peuples.

Nous nous souvenons du succès remporté par l'Assemblée oecuménique européenne de Bâle en Mai 1989 sur le thème PAIX et JUSTICE pour la CREATION ENTIERE. Nous avons là des délégués de tous les pays d'Europe (sauf l'Albanie) et de toutes les confessions chrétiennes. Cette rencontre a joué un rôle de soutien et d'encouragement aux participants de l'Est pour poursuivre leur mouvement non violent en vue d'obtenir la liberté.

C Le dialogue entre foi et modernité

Dans la crise que traverse la foi et l'Eglise en Europe, nous sommes sans doute particulièrement sensibles aux retombées négatives. En fait dans l'énorme mutation que nous vivons, la foi se purifie de tout ce qui ne la concernait pas directement. Dans le processus de sécularisation, où prend consistance l'autonomie des réalités terrestres, c'est notre image de Dieu qui change pour accéder à la pure gratuité d'un Amour qui se propose.

Dans la nouvelle conjoncture, se perdent les repères traditionnels qui balisaient les rapports au mode, à Dieu, aux autres, à soi-même.

La tentation est multiple, allant de l'abandon de l'Eglise et/ou de la foi, au désir de retour à la situation anté-conciliaire. Mais de toutes façons, aucun lien n'essaierait de se nouer entre la foi et la nouvelle culture, marquée par un développement technique considérable, les manipulations génétiques, l'omni-présence des médias, une mondialisation de l'information et de l'action etc..

Avec leur capital de foi et de formation, les religieux/ses sont appelés à être aux avant-postes de cette situation missionnaire par excellence qu'est l'évangélisation de la société moderne.

Cela suppose plusieurs conditions: une foi suffisamment fondée en J.C., sachant

reconnaitre l'essentiel de ce qui ne l'est pas. Nous devons avoir une claire conviction du sens de l'Incarnation: J.C. n'est pas moins présent à notre société moderne qu'à celle des siècles précédents; cela s'enracine dans une vie forte dans l'Esprit.

Enfin, nous devons apprendre à porter sur notre monde d'aujourd'hui le regard de Dieu qui l'aime et veut le sauver. Il s'agit moins de condamner que d'annoncer la Bonne Nouvelle.

La science et la technique n'ont pas le dernier mot de toutes les situations; ils laissent ouvert l'horizon du sens à donner à nos vies, nos souffrances, notre mort..

Finalement nous sommes renvoyés aux questions existentielles que porte toute culture en son sein, aux questions éthiques que posent aux hommes de l'art les nouveaux pouvoirs sur la vie et la mort.

La vie religieuse est renvoyée au sens fondamental de son existence dans l'Église: être témoin de l'absolu de l'amour de Dieu dans une existence humaine fondée sur sa foi en J.C. capable de combler le coeur dès maintenant.

La vie religieuse offre une autre manière de vivre le rapport au pouvoir, à l'avoir, à la séduction qui est celle proposée par l'Évangile; elle le manifeste dans un style de vie publique communautaire qui est une alternative, parmi bien d'autres, d'être en relation avec soi-même, les autres, le monde, Dieu..

Nous montrant davantage attentifs à l'inculturation de notre foi dans notre contexte européen, nous serons aussi plus aptes à accueillir les apports venant de l'univers culturel des jeunes Églises; nous aiderons l'Église à sortir de son euro-centrisme; il y va de la catholicité effective de notre Église.



SYNODE POUR L'AFRIQUE OU SYNODE AFRICAIN?

Cyprien Mbuka, CICM

La phase de la célébration romaine a pris fin. La célébration conclusive du Synode aura lieu dans le continent africain à travers des célébrations eucharistiques présidées par le pape et au cours desquelles il présentera les conclusions auxquelles le Synode est parvenu.

Le thème principal du Synode était: *L'Église en Afrique et sa mission évangélisatrice vers l'an 2000. Vous serez mes témoins*. De ce thème on avait retenu cinq axes à travers lesquels l'évangélisation se concrétise: l'annonce de la Bonne Nouvelle du salut, l'inculturation, le dialogue, la justice et la paix, les moyens de communication sociale. Le Synode a travaillé dans ce même cadre, sans y avoir été obligé. Deux grands ensembles de défis ont émergé: la 'pauvreté anthropologique' et la pauvreté matérielle. C'est ainsi que les questions d'inculturation et de Justice et Paix ont été les plus abordées. Des réflexions du Synode se dégagent quelques prises de position importantes; elles peuvent, à juste titre, être considérées comme les affirmations fondamentales du Synode. Dans cette modeste contribution à chaud, je me limiterai à évoquer ces affirmations, à vous présenter mes impressions personnelles et à relever quelques signes d'espérance.

AFFIRMATIONS FONDAMENTALES

Sur le plan théologique, l'ecclésiologie fondée sur l'*Église-Famille de Dieu* est le fil conducteur des analyses doctrinales et des orientations d'action du Synode. L'image de la famille comme désignation de l'Église est présente à Vatican II (cf. LG, n°28). Le Synode en a fait la colonne vertébrale de ses affirmations. L'Église est au coeur du mystère de la famille trinitaire (cf. *Message du Synode pour l'Afrique au Peuple de Dieu*, n°20 et 24); elle

s'enracine dans le mystère de la communion des trois Personnes réellement distinctes l'une de l'autre: la spécificité de chacune est aussi essentielle que leur unité. Par l'Incarnation, Dieu assume la condition de l'homme, écoutant ses cris d'angoisse, partageant ses joies et ses misères, et toujours prêt à le délivrer (cf. Ex 3,7-12). C'est de ce Dieu, *unité dans la diversité, libérateur de l'homme*, que l'Église est signe et instrument, et que chaque homme et chaque femme est l'image (cf. Gn 1,26).

Dans le contexte africain, l'image de la famille peut bien s'appliquer à l'Église, à condition qu'elle soit complétée par celle du Peuple de Dieu et éclairée par le théologie trinitaire. On peut ainsi relever comme valeurs: l'égalité fondamentale dans la diversité selon les rapports de générations ou de rôles; l'autorité considérée comme un service rendu à la communauté au nom des ancêtres; la palabre comme espace régulateur des mécanismes du traitement des problèmes. On dénoncera, par contre, comme antivaleurs l'exploitation de la femme par l'homme, le paternalisme, l'infantilisme, le parasitisme.

A la lumière de cette ecclésiologie les Pères synodaux jettent un regard sur l'Afrique pour y déceler les défis majeurs et tracer des orientations d'action qui peuvent être synthétisées en sept points: renforcer la pastorale des Communautés ecclésiales vivantes (CEV) comme lieu d'une évangélisation en profondeur, donner la voix aux sans-voix et libérer les libertés; libérer les gens de la pauvreté matérielle; libérer les cultures du terroir; promouvoir le sens de responsabilité, de coresponsabilité et de solidarité; intensifier les liens de collaboration et de dialogue; assurer une formation à la hauteur des défis du continent. Nous ne nous attardons pas sur le bilan; nous privilégions les éléments pour l'action.

**PASTORALE DES CEY COMME LIEU
D'UNE EVANGELISATION
EN PROFONDEUR**

L'ecclésiologie de l'Eglise-Famille se con-
crétise à travers les communautés chrétiennes à
taille humaine: les Communautés ecclésiales
vivantes. Recommandées déjà par les évêques
d'Afrique au Synode de 1974, elles se réalisent
déjà dans plusieurs endroits et portent des
fruits. Le Synode demande que la pastorale de
ces communautés soit renforcée.

Enracinées dans le terroir, ces communautés
ont une ouverture sur le monde, une attention
vive à ses défis et une motivation pour les
affronter. La conversion, en effet, est une
exigence de témoignage et d'engagement à la
fois personnels et communautaires. La famille
chrétienne, justement appelée *Eglise domestique*
sera témoin du Christ au cœur de la grande
famille africaine (cf. *Message*, n°27). Les
mouvements d'apostolat des familles seront
promus; la famille sera protégée contre les idées
individualistes et permissives (cf. *Message*,
n°29).

**DONNER LA VOIX AUX SANS-VOIX
ET LIBERER LES LIBERTES**

En Afrique, les régimes totalitaires bafouent
impunément les droits et la dignité de l'homme.
Des populations sont brimées et réduites au
silence. L'Eglise-Famille porte en elle le souci
de tous, car tous sont appelés à former une
même famille dans le Christ; elle a un rôle
prophétique et elle est la voix des sans-voix.
Les Eglises d'Afrique n'ont pas manqué de
dénoncer ceux et celles (et les structures) qui
réduisent leurs frères et soeurs au silence, ceux
et celles (et les structures) qui enchaînent les
libertés de leurs frères et soeurs. Mais la situa-
tion n'a guère changé. Le Synode réitère ces
dénonciations: "les agresseurs, affirme-t-il,
auront à répondre devant Dieu de tout acte de
violence contre des vies innocentes" (cf. *Mes-
sage*, n°35).

L'Etat de droit est une urgence; il est le seul
à garantir les droits des citoyens (cf. *Message*,
n°34 et 36). L'Eglise contribuera au processus
de démocratisation des pays dans la mesure où
elle favorise la participation des citoyens à la
chose publique. "La démocratie doit devenir
l'une des routes principales sur lesquelles
l'Eglise chemine avec le peuple" (cf. *Message*,
n°34). Les Commissions *Justice et Paix* veille-
ront les communautés chrétiennes à leur

responsabilité en faveur de la justice et de la
paix, et pour la défense des droits humains. Les
médias ont un rôle très important dans la con-
scientisation des gens sur les questions de jus-
tice et paix. C'est un devoir pour les Eglises de
développer les médias au niveau diocésain,
régional et continental, de soutenir et de
promouvoir la créativité de ceux qui y sont
engagés. Pour répondre à leur objectif, qui est
d'être au service du peuple, les médias officiels
doivent être accessibles à toutes les composantes
du peuple sans exclusive.

Parmi les sans-voix et les sans-liberté en
Afrique il faut certainement compter les
réfugiés et les déplacés. "Le Synode dénonce et
condamne énergiquement toutes les volontés de
puissance et toutes sortes d'intérêts ainsi que
l'idolâtrie de l'ethnie qui conduisent aux guerres
tribucides: elles valent à l'Afrique la honte
d'être le continent où se trouve le plus grand
nombre de réfugiés et de déplacés" (cf. *Mes-
sage*, n°36). Le Synode demande aux chrétiens
du Nord d'interpeller ceux qui vendent les
armes aux Africains afin de faire cesser ce com-
merce de la mort (cf. *Message*, n°40). Les
Eglises d'Afrique intensifieront leur sollicitude
à l'égard des réfugiés et des déplacés; elles
s'adonneront à de sérieuses analyses des causes
de ce fléau et auront le courage de démasquer
les vrais coupables. Les Conférences épis-
copales n'hésiteront pas à se prononcer publi-
quement et à agir ensemble pour défendre la
cause des faibles. Les *Africains émigrés dans
les pays du Nord* constituent aussi une préoc-
cupation: le Synode souhaite qu'ils soient
respectés (cf. *Message*, n°41). La *déforestation
et la pollution industrielles* dont l'Afrique est de
plus en plus victime est dénoncée. L'action
pastorale et scolaire de l'Eglise devra inculquer
le souci pour l'environnement et le respect de la
création.

Les femmes jouent un rôle important dans
l'Eglise et dans la société. Les discriminations
dont elles sont victimes aussi bien dans l'Eglise
que dans la société doivent être dénoncées. Il
est temps qu'elles accèdent aux instances où se
prennent les décisions. On établira des mini-
stères ecclésiastiques pour elles. *Les jeunes*
représentent plus de la moitié du continent
africain; ils sont la source de dynamisme et de
renouvellement de ce continent (cf. *Message*,
n°62). Les Eglises et les dirigeants des pays
intensifieront le dialogue avec eux (cf. *Mes-
sage*, n°63); ils inventeront des modèles de
développement devant intégrer le potentiel
énorme que la jeunesse représente (cf. *Message*,
n°63 et 64). Des pastorales pour les jeunes

seront promues, au sein desquelles ils assumeront leurs responsabilités. *Les laïcs* n'assument guère le rôle qui leur revient dans l'Église; ils n'ont pas suffisamment accès aux responsabilités. "Une certaine conception de l'Église, affirme le Synode, a eu pour résultat un type de laïc trop passif". Dans la ligne de l'ecclésiologie de l'Église-Famille, "tous les pasteurs sont invités à développer une pastorale où le laïc retrouve toute sa place et son importance" (cf. *Message*, n°57); des ministères devraient leur être confiés. Le Synode apprécie les efforts déployés par les *théologiens africains*, non seulement dans le cadre du Synode mais dans l'approfondissement de la foi et son intériorisation en Afrique.

LIBÉRER LES GENS DE LA PAUVRETÉ MATÉRIELLE

En Afrique, le tissu économique est délabré, la majorité des gens vivent dans la misère et une infime minorité jouit seule des richesses du continent. C'est avec raison que ce continent est considéré de plus en plus comme un *hors-monde*. Le Synode s'est penché sur cette situation. Depuis sa présence en Afrique, l'Église ne cesse de combattre la pauvreté matérielle, ses oeuvres caritatives en sont la preuve. Mais hélas, ces semences ne semblent pas être tombées dans de la bonne terre.

Le Synode condamne le comportement irresponsable de plusieurs Africains dans la gestion des biens de leur pays, ceux qui ont détourné les fonds publics sont tenus à réparer le tort qu'ils ont causé (cf. *Message*, n°32). Le Synode dénonce aussi le Nord qui entretient un système économique fondé sur des inégalités structurelles: "imposition à partir de l'extérieur, à nos sociétés, de mesures économiques et sociales, des styles de vie contraires à la dignité de l'homme" (cf. *Message*, n°41). Il demande que la dette qui écrase l'économie africaine soit remise, sinon en totalité au moins en grande partie. L'avènement d'un nouvel ordre économique international plus juste est l'unique solution à cette situation (cf. *Message*, n°41).

Le Synode se tourne avec sollicitude vers les pauvres, les malades, et en particulier vers *ceux qui souffrent du SIDA*. Il leur adresse une parole de soutien et les assure de sa prière (cf. *Message*, n°38). Les Églises d'Afrique soutiendront les associations pour la défense et la protection de la vie, et organiseront une éducation et un service des malades au sein des communautés chrétiennes. Chaque Conférence épiscopale apportera non seulement le soutien spirituel nécessaire aux individus et aux familles concernés par le SIDA, mais aussi une contribution aux recherches qui s'attaquent à ce fléau et à tout ce qui s'y rattache.

LIBÉRER LES CULTURES DU TERROIR

Des recherches et des essais d'inculturation existent en plusieurs endroits en Afrique. On constate néanmoins l'existence d'une grave dichotomie entre la foi et la vie concrète. La foi semble superficielle, non vécue dans son identité culturelle. Le Synode reconnaît que l'inculturation est une entreprise *urgente et prioritaire*. Elle s'inscrit dans la logique de l'Église-Famille, qui plonge ses racines dans le terroir et se réalise dans l'histoire concrète avec ses traditions et ses valeurs. Les Églises d'Afrique seront des *lieux où le chrétien accueille et témoigne de Jésus-Christ dans l'intégralité de son être personnel, communautaire, religieux, culturel, économique, politique et social*. C'est l'Incarnation du Fils de Dieu, révélateur du Dieu-Trinité, qui est le principe, le modèle et la finalité de l'inculturation du message chrétien. L'inculturation doit donc être compatible avec le message du Christ et se faire en communion avec tout l'Église: elle doit respecter la logique propre de la culture comme un tout, culture comprise dans son sens dynamique, évolutif et historique. Ainsi l'inculturation ne conduit pas à un christianisme facile, mais à une évangélisation en profondeur, à une découverte de la personne vivante en Jésus-Christ à partir de ses propres traditions historiques.

L'inculturation concerne toute la vie de l'Église: théologie, liturgie, catéchèse, pastorale, droit, communication, vie consacrée, etc; elle touche l'homme en société sous ses multiples aspects. Certains points ont eu une attention spéciale: la vénération des ancêtres, la maladie et la guérison dans le contexte de la tradition africaine, le mariage, la 'sorcellerie', les mauvais esprits (cf. *Message*, n°18). L'inculturation est un processus de longue haleine; elle concerne toute la communauté chrétienne, chaque membre apporte sa contribution spécifique, tous étant ouverts à l'Esprit. Les théologiens, en particulier, approfondiront la *théologie africaine* sous ses divers aspects.

SENS DE RESPONSABILITÉ, DE CORESPONSABILITÉ ET DE SOLIDARITÉ

Une communauté chrétienne, inspirée par l'ecclésiologie de l'Église-Famille aura le souci d'assumer ses *responsabilités* y compris celles qui concernent les besoins matériels et

financiers. En Afrique, les expériences qui vont dans ce sens sont plutôt rares (cf. *Message*, n°44). Les communautés chrétiennes sont invitées à mettre tout en oeuvre pour leur propre auto-suffisance financière (cf. *Message*, n°44). "*Le premier pas dans cette direction, déclare le Synode, est une gestion transparente et une vie simple qui ne jure pas avec la pauvreté, voire la misère des populations*" (cf. *Message*, n°44).

Dans l'Église-Famille, chacun doit assumer sa part de responsabilité: ainsi tous sont coresponsables de l'oeuvre commune. Il est important qu'entre diverses instances de l'Église jusqu'aux fidèles laïcs soit cultivé le sens de la coresponsabilité et de la subsidiarité. La coresponsabilité permet le respect des compétences et du charisme de chacun; elle garantit l'application du principe de subsidiarité. Le Synode rappelle que la vie religieuse est d'abord un signe visible de ce que cela signifie d'être Église-au-service-du-monde. Si on ne s'intéresse aux religieux et religieuses que pour des fins utilitaristes, on risque de négliger le charisme de l'Institut. Tous les religieux, qu'ils soient prêtres, frères ou soeurs doivent être valorisés. L'on comprend dès lors la valeur de la vie contemplative, dont le témoignage est d'une grande importance surtout en milieu musulman. Le charisme missionnaire sera désormais considéré comme un don parmi d'autres.

Les congrégations missionnaires ont encore leur place en Afrique. Leurs membres sont des témoins chrétiens qui rencontrent la valeur africaine de la solidarité; ils manifestent l'unité et l'universalité de l'Église. La phrase prophétique de Paul VI à Kampala: "Africains, soyez vos propres missionnaires", demeure vraie, mais l'Afrique n'a nullement l'intention de se replier sur elle-même; elle souhaite être en lien de solidarité avec toutes les Églises-soeurs. On constate avec joie la multiplication des vocations missionnaires en Afrique. Plusieurs de ces missionnaires partent aussi en dehors du continent. Ils témoignent ainsi de la vitalité des Églises d'Afrique. On se réjouit également de l'émergence en terre africaine d'Instituts missionnaires pour hommes et femmes. Des prêtres diocésains travaillent comme *fidei donum* en dehors de leur diocèse, de leur pays ou du continent. Le Synode encourage cet esprit missionnaire: il est l'expression de la solidarité entre des Églises-soeurs. Enfin, la solidarité *ad intra* concerne aussi les besoins concrets de la vie. Les évêques veilleront à assurer la sécurité sociale (maladie et vieillesse) de leurs prêtres,

ainsi qu'un soutien moral et un accompagnement spirituel.

INTENSIFIER LA COLLABORATION ET LE DIALOGUE

Le collaboration et le dialogue sont des valeurs de l'Église-Famille. Des efforts sont déployés pour valoriser les Religions Traditionnelles Africaines. Il faut les continuer. *Il faudra même engager un dialogue structuré autour de l'héritage religieux et culturel africain avec leurs garants* (cf. *Message*, n°21). Des collaborations oecuméniques avec les frères et soeurs des autres *confessions chrétiennes* sont à intensifier. "Ensemble nous voulons rendre témoignage au Christ et proclamer l'Évangile dans toutes les langues d'Afrique et de Madagascar" (cf. *Message*, n°22). Tout en condamnant de la manière la plus ferme la violence qui prétend s'exercer au nom de Dieu et les injustices qui peuvent être commises, les Conférences épiscopales auront à favoriser le dialogue avec tous les *musulmans* de bonne volonté et à chercher à promouvoir la liberté

Le collaboration et le dialogue sont des valeurs de l'Église-Famille. Des efforts sont déployés pour valoriser les Religions Traditionnelles Africaines. Il faut les continuer. Il faudra même engager un dialogue structuré autour de l'héritage religieux et culturel africain avec leurs garants

religieuse des personnes et des communautés. Le Synode assure aux frères et soeurs musulmans que les Églises en Afrique entendent développer avec eux la collaboration dans le domaine de *Justice et Paix*.

ASSURER A TOUS UNE FORMATION A LA HAUTEUR DES DÉFIS

La complexité de la situation actuelle ne souffre pas d'actions improvisées. *Une formation solide et continue s'avère nécessaire pour tous: évêques, prêtres, religieux et laïcs*. La formation du clergé, des religieux, des religieuses et des laïcs, sera assurée dans leurs propres milieux. La doctrine sociale de l'Église et l'analyse sociale des situations seront

inscrites dans les programmes de cette formation. Il est indispensable que tous apprennent à discerner leurs droits et leurs devoirs. On insistera surtout sur l'usage du bien commun et la gestion responsable. Le Synode invite tout le monde sans exception à se former à la démocratie (cf. *Message*, n°33) et à s'initier aux moyens de communication sociale.

Il est sans doute opportun d'offrir des possibilités de ressourcement aux *évêques*, premiers responsables de l'évangélisation. Les prêtres seront formés aux vraies valeurs culturelles du terroir, au sens de l'honnêteté, de la responsabilité et de la parole d'honneur. Le *recrutement* des candidats sera fait avec soin et discernement, en y impliquant les communautés chrétiennes dont les candidats sont issus.

On offrira aux *laïcs* une formation biblique et chrétienne solide. Aux décideurs économiques et politiques, on proposera une formation soignée en matière de doctrine sociale de l'Église. Aux femmes, en particulier, on offrira une formation qui puisse les préparer à leurs responsabilités futures au foyer, dans la société et dans l'Église. On assurera aux *Catéchistes*, non seulement une formation initiale, mais aussi une formation continue ainsi qu'un support moral et spirituel. La formation de la jeunesse fait l'objet d'une sollicitude particulière. Le Synode encourage les écoles catholiques et souhaite que les Églises locales contribuent au programme de 'l'École pour tous'. Projetés vers la modernité, les jeunes sont déracinés; une attention particulière leur sera réservée dans le programme de l'inculturation.

IMPRESSIONS PERSONNELLES

J'ai personnellement eu la joie de prendre part au Synode comme expert. Il est clair que devant un tel événement les impressions et les avis divergent selon les personnes et compte tenu de plusieurs facteurs. Pour ma part, mes impressions personnelles peuvent être résumées en six points.

Expérience de Pentecôte ou de "Babel" inversée

Pour les Pères synodaux, et tous ceux et celles qui ont travaillé avec eux, le Synode a été un temps de grâce, une occasion de vivre l'unité et la communion dans la diversité, une expérience de Pentecôte inversant la tour de Babel. Nous étions plus de 300 membres, hommes et femmes à vocations et fonctions

différentes; nous étions venus de l'Europe, des Amériques, de l'Asie et de l'Afrique; nous appartenions à diverses races, langues, peuples et nations.

A ne considérer que l'Afrique, nous avons pris conscience de sa diversité sociale, économique, politique, religieuse, culturelle, linguistique. Nous avons davantage pris conscience du fait que la présence coloniale a marqué chaque peuple d'Afrique; elle a renforcé les différences. L'Afrique de l'islam n'est pas celle du christianisme; les zones à forte majorité catholique réagissent autrement que celles à forte densité protestante; les pays où la Religion Traditionnelle Africaine est encore très vivante ont une autre perception des problèmes que les pays où cette Religion a quasi disparu. L'Islam lui-même est vécu différemment selon qu'on est au nord ou au sud du Sahara. Mais, grâce à l'écoute des uns et des autres, au partage des expériences et à la convivence nous sommes arrivés à nous apprécier au-delà de toutes ces diversités, à mieux nous connaître et à apprécier ceux et celles que chacun représente et le monde d'où il vient. Nous, Africains, avons vécu d'une manière affective la présence des Afro-américains. Un consensus s'est dégagé sur de grandes orientations. Il s'est dégagé une forte volonté d'intensifier les liens de solidarité internationale Nord-Sud et Sud-Sud en vue de dénoncer les injustices criantes.

Attention englobante à l'Afrique

Le thème central du Synode - l'évangélisation - a été abordé d'une manière ouverte et intégrale. Le Synode s'est livré à une certaine autopsie de l'Afrique. Il a pensé à chaque Africain, homme et femme, jeune et adulte avec ses valeurs humaines, spirituelles, culturelles, économiques, politiques et religieuses. Il a insisté sur la conversion et le témoignage de la part de tous: évêques, prêtres, religieux, religieuses catéchistes, laïcs, jeunes, adultes. Des sujets tels que la famille, le mariage, les ancêtres, les mauvais esprits, la sorcellerie, etc, n'ont pas été oubliés. Les malades (sidéens), les pauvres, les opprimés, les réfugiés, les déplacés et les chômeurs ont fait l'objet de la sollicitude du Synode. Les théologiens, les chercheurs, les hommes de culture, les travailleurs sociaux et les volontaires au service de la protection de la vie et du développement, les chefs d'État et les politiciens africains, les frères et sœurs de l'hémisphère Nord ont tous été pris en considération. Le Synode n'a exclu personne; il a lancé un appel au dialogue avec les musulmans,

Synode ont été des moments significatifs dans le processus synodal. Certains n'y ont vu qu'un mélange de folklore africain avec le rite romain. Quelqu'un aurait plaisanté en disant qu'en voyant des cardinaux participer à ces cérémonies, il avait eu l'impression de se trouver dans un jardin zoologique! Il y a eu des compromis culturels dans ces célébrations. Cela est dû à la diversité de la richesse culturelle en Afrique, à l'endroit où ces célébrations ont eu lieu et à la composition très variée de l'ensemble des participants. Mais il n'en demeure pas moins vrai qu'à travers ces célébrations eucharistiques, les Africains ont aidé leurs frères et sœurs non Africains à louer le Seigneur, ils ont pu montrer leur manière de célébrer et d'exprimer la foi chrétienne commune. L'Afrique et ses îles ont envahi la basilique Saint-Pierre; elles ont fait entendre leurs voix et exhibé leurs rythmes de danse.

Afrique hospitalière et reconnaissante

La reconnaissance est une marque de la culture africaine. Le Synode a exprimé ses sentiments de reconnaissance à tous ceux et celles qui, chacun à son niveau et selon son engagement, apportent une contribution à l'affermissement de la foi chrétienne en Afrique et à la maturation des Eglises africaines dans le processus d'autonomie au plan matériel et financier. Le Synode a particulièrement mentionné: les missionnaires, les religieux et les religieuses, les prêtres, les théologiens africains, les catéchistes, les femmes, les Eglises-sœurs du Nord, les formateurs éducateurs dans les séminaires, les scolasticats et les noviciats, les familles chrétiennes, les laïcs engagés, les mouvements d'action catholique, les travailleurs sociaux et les agents du développement, les organisations non gouvernementales.

Des "oubliés" qui interpellent

Le Synode était essentiellement composé de pasteurs. Il est normal qu'il se soit surtout préoccupé de résoudre des questions conjonctuelles. Du coup, on négligeait quelque peu les perspectives structurelles et le regard visant l'évangélisation au troisième millénaire. Certes, le dossier auquel le Synode devait faire face était complexe. On doit admirer l'effort du Synode pour cerner les divers problèmes du continent africain. Il est néanmoins légitime de se demander si les femmes, les jeunes, les laïcs et les théologiens ont occupé la place qui leur revient dans les réflexions synodales. Le poids de ces catégories de chrétiens dans la balance

avec les Religions Traditionnelles Africaines, avec les chrétiens d'autres confessions, avec les nouveaux mouvements religieux.

Souffle de liberté

L'ambiance générale du Synode respirait la détente. Chaque Père synodal a eu la possibilité et l'occasion de faire un exposé en son propre nom ou au nom d'un groupe. Les contributions pouvaient également être faites par écrit; elles ne devaient pas nécessairement se limiter au cadre tracé par l'*Instrumentum laboris*. Tant en assemblée plénière qu'en petits groupes, chacun se sentait à l'aise; la participation était active et souvent constructive. L'usage des langues vernaculaires a sans doute favorisé cette ambiance. L'apport des experts était bienvenu. Plusieurs fois le pape a encouragé les Pères synodaux à s'exprimer et utiliser les méthodes de *la palabre africaine*. Effectivement, chacun s'est exprimé librement en disant ce qu'il croyait devoir dire, même si cela s'écartait de l'enseignement habituel de l'Eglise.

Synode vraiment africain

Le Synode a eu lieu à Rome, au Vatican. Mais la présence imposante des Africains et Africaines à cet événement, l'ambiance et les questions abordées nous autorisent à dire que l'Afrique était présente au Vatican. Le Synode pour l'Afrique a été aussi un Synode africain. Chaque matin, dans la prière introductive, un message significatif évoquait les diverses situations vécues en Afrique. Les foyers de guerre et de tensions ont été présents à l'esprit de tous. Le Rwanda, l'Angola, la Somalie, le Soudan et le Liberia n'ont cessé de résonner dans nos oreilles. Les événements heureux de l'Afrique du Sud avec ses premières élections démocratiques ne sont pas passés inaperçus. *La béatification d'un martyr zaïrois, Isidore Bakanja, durant le Synode a été une occasion de plus pour amener l'Afrique au Vatican et intensifier l'atmosphère africaine au Synode*. Le Centre SEDOS qu'on a trop vite, à mon avis, soupçonné de 'synode parallèle', de 'synode alternatif', voire même 'd'anti-synode', a joué un rôle positif: il a constitué une sorte de forum d'informations et de documentation. Il a rassemble plusieurs personnes, en particulier des Africains et des Africaines non membres du Synode qui ont apporté à leur façon une contribution à la réflexion synodale grâce aux multiples conférences et débats organisés par SEDOS.

Les messes d'ouverture et de clôture du

des problèmes des Églises d'Afrique n'aurait-il pas imposé un agenda leur réservant un temps plus important? Est-il évident que ce qui a été dit à leur propre soit un droit et non une concession? Les femmes étaient présentes au Synode, mais elles n'ont pas été suffisamment entendues, puisqu'elles ne pouvaient prendre la parole que dans les petits groupes.

Il faut reconnaître au Secrétariat général, en particulier à notre confrère Mgr Jan Schotte, le mérite d'avoir bien préparé le fonctionnement du Synode. Techniquement, tout s'est déroulé à merveille. La méthode utilisait la dynamique voir-juger-agir. Cependant, un élément très important dans cette catégorie 'd'oubliés', c'est le facteur temps. Manifestement, le temps imparti aux échanges et au discernement était trop bref pour permettre une réflexion de fond. En outre, *pour les programmes d'action et les structures proposées rien n'a été prévu quant à la méthode et la mise en pratique. Le risque de ne rien entreprendre n'est pas illusoire.* Les affirmations, les confirmations, les dénonciations et les condamnations du Synode sont très belles et pertinentes. Dans quelle mesure, néanmoins, le langage et la conceptualité utilisés toucheront-ils les personnes concernées, pour qui ce langage risque d'être 'ésotérique', car trop ecclésiastique? Il ne faut pas sous-estimer le risque que tout cela n'ait guère de force de conviction.

APRES LE SYNODE: QUELLES ESPÉRANCES?

Après le Synode, beaucoup se demandent quelle contribution cet événement apporte à l'Église et au monde. Il est trop tôt pour répondre à cette question. Je voudrais me limiter ici à quelques éléments que je crois pouvoir considérer comme des espérances pour l'Église d'Afrique et pour nous, les missionnaires.

Église d'Afrique: un nouvel élan

Avant le Synode, plusieurs frustrations ont été enregistrées auprès des Africains: de l'idée d'un *Concile africain en Afrique* on est arrivé à un *Synode pour l'Afrique* et au Vatican. Durant le Synode, la revue anglaise, *The Tablet*, a publié une caricature qui mettait en scène trois Africains: un laïque, un musulman et un théologien catholique. La laïque se présente devant la porte de la salle du Synode, on lui ouvre la porte et on la fait entrer, le musulman se présente: on le traite de la même manière; le

théologien se pointe à son tour, on lui demande qui il est, il répond: "Je suis un théologien"; on lui répond sèchement: "Pas de théologien ici!" Cette caricature illustre bien les sentiments nourris par plusieurs d'entre nous.

Avec le recul dans le temps, on *peut se demander si l'heure était venue pour l'Église d'Afrique de pouvoir célébrer un Concile continental avec le poids dogmatique, juridique et pastoral qu'il implique, sans penser aux exigences matérielles.* Le Synode a été une occasion pour plusieurs pasteurs africains de se connaître mutuellement et de mieux saisir les problèmes du continent dans leur complexité et leur diversité. Cette étape ne peut-elle pas être considérée comme un élément d'un processus à poursuivre? Qui pourrait arrêter le souffle de l'Esprit si un jour il nous conduit vers la célébration d'un Concile africain? A vrai dire, la question qui vaut actuellement la peine d'être posée est celle de savoir si le Synode a répondu aux questions africaines de l'heure.

Par sa nature, un Synode peut difficilement aborder des questions brûlantes ou encore débattues par les théologiens. Une certaine autocensure s'impose dans le fonctionnement même d'une telle assemblée. N'oublions pas qu'elle était composée de plus de 300 personnes, venues de milieux culturels différents et de contextes divers, s'exprimant en diverses langues et se trouvant devant un dossier à la mesure de l'immensité du continent. Encore une fois, est-il raisonnable d'attendre de cette assemblée des réponses inédites à des questions de fond, après un mois?

S'il fallait parler d'espérance pour l'Afrique, j'évoquerais trois aspects. Tout d'abord le Synode a exploité assez bien les possibilités ouvertes par ce qui pourrait être appelé le consensus catholique actuel. Cela n'est pas à négliger, car il n'est pas évident que ce qui est permis officiellement soit effectivement vécu dans nos Églises particulières ou dans nos communautés religieuses. Ensuite, le Synode a révélé un consensus des pasteurs autour de grandes orientations face aux défis de l'Afrique. Enfin, le Synode a été un espace de ressourcement théologique et pastoral pour les participants; un espace invitant à plus d'engagement et de dynamisme. Dès lors les Pères synodaux sont appelés à partager leurs acquis avec leurs frères et sœurs pour susciter dans l'Église d'Afrique un nouvel élan. Sur le plan du contenu du discours donc on peut dire que rien n'est nouveau. Cependant, une vigueur nouvelle s'est imposée, elle porte l'espoir

devoir se réaliser quelque chose de neuf.

Missionnaires: esprit pluraliste et pluridimensionnel

Plusieurs orientations d'action du Synode viennent encourager les orientations missionnaires de nos Instituts dont CICM. L'Afrique continue à apprécier la présence des missionnaires. Nombreuses sont encore les tâches qu'on peut leur confier: non-chrétiens, formation des communautés chrétiennes qui se prennent en charge, animation des Églises locales en vue d'un esprit missionnaire tant *ad intra* qu'*ad extra*, témoignage du don total de soi-même, témoignage de la fraternité universelle, témoignage de vie fraternelle et de solidarité entre membres de différentes tribus et nations au sein d'un même Institut, communautés internationales et interculturelles, fraternité et partage de responsabilités entre Nord et Sud, solidarité et coresponsabilité Sud-Sud.

Le Synode invite également les missionnaires à s'engager dans la nouvelle évangélisation: formation des animateurs locaux, hommes et femmes; nouvel élan missionnaire, marqué d'un esprit pluraliste et pluridimensionnel; attention aux divers défis: moraux, culturels, socio-politiques, économiques, religieux et ecclésiaux de l'heure; accent à mettre sur une évangélisation non seulement des personnes, mais aussi des structures, des situations concrètes; conversion qui touche non seulement des individus isolés, mais des personnes en société avec tout leur contexte de vie; priorité à donner aux zones les plus difficiles et les plus inaccessibles; en milieu musulman: nécessité d'une mission de présence priante et amicale; dans les activités, une plus grande importance à accorder aux relations humaines et les contacts avec les gens à la base, plutôt que de mettre sur pied des structures imposantes. Le Synode invite aussi les missionnaires à renouveler leurs attitudes: collaboration franche et ouverte, esprit d'interdépendance et de solidarité au nom de la commune mission; concertation dans la gestion du personnel et dans les stratégies pastorales; formation missionnaire initiale et permanente répondant à ce nouvel esprit. Nous, missionnaires, devons plus que jamais être partie prenante de ce qui se passe actuellement en Afrique: partager les joies et les peines de ses peuples, apporter notre contribution à leurs efforts de survie, travailler à la solidarité entre divers Instituts et agir de plus en plus auprès des instances du Nord.

Conclusion: Synode de l'espérance

Dans nos Églises particulières, les orientations d'action mentionnées dans la première partie de cet article constituent un acquis valable pour un avenir d'espérance. Mais à condition qu'elles soient mises effectivement en pratique. *Aussi notre grande préoccupation doit être de nous concentrer sur le suivi du Synode.*

Une Commission post-synodale a été érigée d'une manière collégiale: les évêques d'Afrique eux-mêmes et le pape ont établi la liste des membres de cette Commission. Cette présence africaine aux côtés du pape pour la mise en forme définitive des acquis du Synode est d'une grande importance. Nous souhaitons que cette Commission pourra stimuler les Églises d'Afrique, selon une modalité à définir, à se retrouver assez rapidement et régulièrement pour faire l'évaluation de l'application des propositions synodales. Nous espérons que les Conférences épiscopales ainsi que chaque Père du Synode dans son rayon d'action respectif partageront avec les autres, dès leur retour, les convictions communes de cette rencontre synodale. Ce partage devra prendre un nouvel élan au moment de la publication de l'Exhortation apostolique post-synodale. Nous croyons que ce Synode est porteur d'espérance pour l'Église et les peuples d'Afrique. Il revient aux participants de partager leur joie dans le Seigneur avec leurs frères et soeurs de l'Afrique et d'ailleurs.

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APOSTOLIC RELIGIOUS LIFE: ECCLESIAL IDENTITY AND MISSION

Doris Gottemoeller, RSM

*Who has seen the wind?
Neither I nor you:
But when the leaves hang trembling
The wind is passing through.*

*Who has seen the wind?
Neither you nor I:
But when the trees bow
down their heads
The wind is passing by.*

This whimsical lyric, by Christina Rossetti, reminds us how susceptible we are to the influence of unseen forces. The wind's traces may be gentle, as in the poet's vision, or fierce. At one moment wind soothes, shapes and guides; at another it rips and tears. It rustles leaves, lifts kites, powers sails and supports wings. It can also destroy homes, uproot trees and down power lines. Invisible but not silent, wind whispers and sings and sobs and roars. Wind can be fickle or frightening; it can also be life-giving and renewing.

Anyone who has lived apostolic women's religious life in the United States in the last 30 years knows what it is to be buffeted and shaped by powerful but sometimes unseen forces from every side. Continuing the analogy, we could liken the pressures on us to winds from the four compass points. From the East came the expectations of the institutional Church, whether Roman or American: conciliar documents, "Essential Elements", canonical requirements, diocesan policies and procedures. These influences helped to launch and validate our renewal, but also created tensions between our own insights and official mandates and interpretations.

From the South came the winds of liberation theology. The bishops at Medellín and Puebla and our sisters missioned in Latin America sent messages of a new way of being with the poor, of doing theology, of being Church.

Our West winds were the forces of our own society and culture. Enjoined by the Second Vatican Council to make our own "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age", we adapted our lifestyles and ministries to new needs. At the same time we experienced and adapted to the revolutions in science, technology, communication, transportation, the political and social orders, popular culture and the media which characterised all of Western society.

To the northern point on the compass we can assign the steadying influence of our own founding charisms and sound traditions, newly researched and interpreted for contemporary life.

From North, South, East and West, then the winds of change have carried us to this place and shaped our present reality. How can we describe that reality?

In the decades after the Second Vatican Council the winds of change propelled us through some incredibly difficult terrain: misunderstandings without; polarisations within; loss of membership; lack of resources; pastoral disappointments. Along the way we have acquired an unprecedented level of academic and professional preparation for ministry (but we sometimes confuse professional achievement with ministerial effectiveness). We have a spirituality cultivated through individual faith journeys (but we are less sure how to integrate it into a communal experience). We have highly developed skills in group participation (but less skill in calling forth and affirming individual leadership). Overall, compared to 20 years ago, American women religious today are more grounded in charism, more self-aware as women, more appreciative of diversity, more aware of the interdependent causes of social ills and as committed as ever to alleviating the suffering of the poor, needy and the vulnerable.

Moreover, the processes of renewal have freed and empowered us. We have eliminated irrelevant and outmoded symbols and practices. We have grown into new theological, spiritual, educational, psychological insights. So the moment has come to ask: What kind of future can we look forward to? The answer - our future - depends, as it always has, on the mysterious work of God's providence in our regard. But the future also depends, as it always has, on how we answer the depth questions. These are perennial questions which have to be answered in every time and place. The prospect that the upcoming synod may ask and answer these questions strikes fear in some. But there is no reason to fear. These are not questions that can be answered by a synod, or by assemblies or chapters or planning teams, no matter how motivated or sophisticated. The answers to these questions can only be born out of and lived within the hearts and lives of our members.

There are only a small number of such depth questions, but in light of the theme of these days together, charism and mission, I would like to focus on two of them: the question of our ecclesial identity and of our mission in the post-modern world. The two questions are interrelated as being and action: Identity is expressed in mission. Moreover, the four winds of change - messages from the institutional Church, for liberation theologies, from our U.S. culture and from our traditions - have given each question its distinctive form today.

(Before going on, I want to note that I am using the phrase *apostolic religious life* throughout these remarks in an inclusive and non-technical sense to distinguish our topic from contemplative religious life rather than from its monastic or evangelical forms).

Ecclesial Identity

The question of ecclesial identity can be asked from two perspectives: First, does women's apostolic religious life occupy an essential or unique place in the Church? And second, is visible membership and participation in the Church critical to the identity of women's apostolic religious life? How important are we to the Church, and how important is membership in the Church to us?

The question of ecclesial identity seen from either perspective would have sounded absurd a few decades ago when the signs of our identification with the Church were so distinctive - our dress, dwellings, lifestyles and ministries

signaled that we were a special and esteemed group in the Church. The question of identify had been answered along the same lines ever since the founding of most of our congregations. But one of the effects of renewal has been to lay open the question in our new context. First, let's examine it from the perspective of our place in the Church.

History shows us that religious life began in the third century when disciples began to gather around the early desert solitaries. But most of our modern apostolic congregations arose after the Reformation, with the greatest number founded in the 18th and 19th centuries. Clearly, what has not always existed in the Church need not always exist. Neither religious life in general nor apostolic religious life in the form in

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which we know it today is essential to the constitution of the Church.

However, the Second Vatican Council affirmed that religious life is inseparable from the life and holiness of the Church, an encomium which suggests a distinct identity. What is that identity? Generally, the Dogmatic constitution on the Church defines us as lay persons in a specific canonical state. I say generally because in one passage it says that laity are "all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the religious state" (No. 31), thus, signaling a fundamental ambiguity: Are we laity or not? As we know, a key achievement of the Council was to transform our understanding of Church from that of a hierarchical institution, a perfect society in which religious occupy a special "state of perfection", into a people of God in which all members are equally called to a life of holiness. That ecclesial vision highlights baptismal consecration and the significance of the lay vocation; is less clear in affirming any distinct contribution of religious life to the Church.

As the years have passed, this theoretical ambiguity has grown in the practical order. How many people really believe that religious life is a gift to the whole Christian community, not just to the men and women who embrace it? What are the consequences of that gift in the lives of the hierarchy, the clergy, other laity, the poor and the marginated, and those in need? What difference does the presence of apostolic women religious, as a specific group rather than as single individuals, make to the life of a parish, a diocese or an institution?

It seems to me that the answer to the question of ecclesial identity is that, fundamentally, apostolic women religious are laywomen who have embraced and publicly committed themselves to a distinctive way of following Jesus Christ. Apostolic religious life is a *way of life*, a phrase which connotes a depth and breadth and intensity of commitment far beyond a lifestyle. Lifestyles can be taken up and abandoned by simply changing one's economic status, leisure activities, or diet.

By contrast, a way of life consists of a constellation of fundamental life choices having an internal coherence and consistency. One has a way of life, defined by the choices one has made about relationship to God, to the Christian community, to sexuality, to possessions, to companions, to those in need. The way of life known as religious life is a radical response to the call of Jesus, who says, "I am the way". By analogy, the early Church described itself as "the way", a commitment to following Christ to which every other choice is subordinated (Acts 9:2). Author Judith Merkle describes religious life as a categorical choice, that is, a choice that eliminates other choices. She notes: "Religious life involves more than social action, professional excellence or holistic living. Rather, it is a life project built on a relationship". Religious life is a continual call to conversion. It is dynamic, as the fundamental choices deepen and mature, and the consequences of those choices are played out in different circumstances. The totality of these choices, lived with visible and passionate commitment, clearly distinguishes us from other laity in the Church and offers a unique witness.

I suggest that in the processes of renewal our identity has been weakened because we have not tended enough to the internal consistency, the congruence, among the depth choices which define our way of life. Celibacy, prayer, community, mission should all interact and contribute to the fundamental unity as its core. For

example, the witness of celibate community is a powerful expression of ministry; ministry engenders passion in prayer; prayer purifies the heart of attachment to material things; renunciation of material things brings us closer to the poor and the needy, etc.

It is accurate or helpful to describe our way of life as charismatic? yes and no. On the positive side, this designation highlights the spontaneity, the diversity, the creativity, the gratuity of religious life. The Pauline passages on charism are eloquent and well-known. However, it must be noted that they apply to all Christians. All - bishops, clerics, laity, religious - are called and gifted in a variety of ways. Since the Council, however, the term has been appropriated by religious to refer to the grace of founding a congregation, to its characteristic spirituality, to its mission, to the gifts and graces of individual members and to religious life as a way of life. I suggest that the imprecision of the term has greatly diminished its usefulness. The distinctiveness of each congregation might better be identified with its tradition or its deep story. Furthermore, the description of religious life as charismatic sometimes heightens the tension between institutional/hierarchical elements of the Church and the charismatic in a way which is not helpful. The reality of the Church is much more profound and complex than this simple dichotomy.

Let me more on to the second aspect of the ecclesial identity issue: How significant is public membership and participation in the Church to our identity as apostolic women religious? Any of you who have processed a dispensation for a sister who says that she is comfortable being a community member but no longer feels at home in the Roman Catholic Church knows what this issue is. Any of you who experience the tension among congregational members over including or not including - a eucharistic liturgy within a congregational celebration recognise another aspect of the issue.

If we go back into our congregational histories we recognise that our foremothers sought and prized public identification with the Church. Some congregations experienced painful struggles when church officials threatened to withhold recognition that founders regarded as rightfully theirs. More recently, our perseverance through the process of approval of constitutions, despite requirements that were sometimes arbitrary, insensitive or oppressive, testified that basically we know ourselves to be,

and want recognition as, congregations within the Roman Catholic Church.

This desire persists despite the growing pain caused by the transformation of our consciousness as women and our realisation that the Church itself institutionalises sexism within and fails to denounce it without. How can we justify this continued commitment to public identification with the Church and what does it call us to?

Our commitment rests on our knowledge that at baptism we were each born again into life in Christ and into that extension of Christ's presence and work throughout space and time known as the Church. Within the Church we are taught, nourished, forgiven, reconciled. The Church is not just a spiritual concept or an individual personal experience. It is a collection of human beings from every race and nation and condition, united by the one Spirit in a visible and public community of disciples.

At religious profession we renewed our baptismal commitment and thus signaled that membership in the Church is intrinsic to the way of life we were choosing. The choice for a life in union with Christ is a choice for a life within Christ's Church.

Sometimes this is not an easy place to be. We share membership with those who are flawed, confused, limited in many ways. In our more honest moments we recognise flaws and limitations in ourselves. Furthermore, within the Church there is a differentiation of roles, responsibilities and gifts. To paraphrase St. Paul, "Not all are apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of mighty deeds" (cf. 1 Cor. 12-13). But the greatest gift, the one that is the hallmark of a Christian and the criterion by which all else is judged, is love. It is our love for Christ and for the community united in Christ which impels and sustains our commitment to membership. To allow ourselves to be alienated from the Church is to surrender our birthright; it is to deprive ourselves of life-giving nourishment; it is to be exiled from our true home. Furthermore, public estrangement from the Church deprives its other members of the witness of our love, our truth and our fidelity.

To summarise this first part of these reflections then, apostolic religious life is a distinct way of life within the Christian community characterised by a complex of fundamental choices. Among these choices is the choice for explicit membership in the Catholic Church.

Religious congregations, because they exist to facilitate and promote the way of life of their members, also have a public identity within the Church.

The Mission of Apostolic Religious Life

Our second depth question is: What should be the mission of apostolic women's religious life today and in the future? Our world today is very different from that in which our missions were first articulated. The immigrant poor of the 19th century have moved up the economic ladder; many of our traditional works have become public responsibilities; the rest of the laity have expanded their role in ministry. Still the way of life we have espoused is radically for others. We have made a lifelong commitment to mission within the context of our individual congregations. Therefore we need to re-examine and, if necessary, restate our mission for this new time and place. This is a work for

We have made a lifelong commitment to mission within the context of our individual congregations. Therefore we need to re-examine and, if necessary, restate our mission for this new time and place.

each congregation, but I suggest that the mission apostolic women religious are called to today should be integral to our way of life, prophetic, global and corporate.

Mission as integral to a way of life. Each of our religious congregations was founded to express some facet of the Church's mission. Mission is at the heart of our self-understanding, an expression of our identity. The choice to be "in mission" is part of that constellation of fundamental life choices which constitute our way of life. As self-evident as this seems, the identification of mission with our way of life has been eroded from several sides. For example, David Nygren and Miriam Ukeritis in the "Future of Religious Life" study describe the "parochial assimilation" of religious life: Religious are regarded as interchangeable parish workers, without any significance attached to their identity as religious. The sense of mission as integral to the way of life has also been weakened as a result of financial pressures: Sometimes a "job" - anything that pays an adequate salary - seems like the

only possible choice of work. The sense of mission is weakened from still another side when, in the absence of a strong commitment to prayer or community, an individual allows her world to be wholly defined by work. Professional ambition and workaholicism can replace zeal for mission.

As apostolic women religious, our mission expresses our identity as laity, as women and as religious. I use laity here in contrast to the clerical vocation. It is true that many of our members are performing ministries which used to be the responsibility of priests. However, the fact that we are doing them demonstrates that they are expressions of the baptismal vocation, not the priestly vocation. Our congregations do not have two classes of members, lay and clerical; we do not have hierarchy built into our way of life. Our radical equality as baptised Catholics is part of who we are within community, and it makes us one with the overwhelming majority of the Church's membership.

Our identification with women and as women animates and shapes our mission. *With* women because we have made ourselves present to other women in their hopes, fears, achievements and struggles. We understand the needs of people for health care, housing, education, economic justice, political representation, moral guidance, spiritual inspiration from a woman's perspective. *As* women because we bring to ministry our personal gifts of courage, compassion, sensitivity, honed through our own life experience.

Finally, our identity as religious shapes our mission. Individual ministries are expressions of a congregational mission; they are shaped and focused by the congregation's tradition. But beyond that our public identification with a distinctive way of life is itself a witness, a prophetic statement.

Mission as prophetic. To describe religious life as prophetic does not necessarily connote dramatic speeches and gestures, although some occasions do call for them. Rather, it connotes a transparency to the divine which is the fruit of a life focused on Jesus and which is the real meaning of prophecy - speaking of God. It is not a matter of individually prophetic persons, but of a way of life which because it involves the deliberate, daily and publicly identifiable following of Jesus, is prophetic by its nature.

The notion of being publicly identifiable is a

challenging one, given the absence of the former markers of public identity such as habit and proximity to a church and employment in a particular setting. It does not mean adopting these outward symbols again. Nor does it necessarily imply being recognised as a religious by every casual observer. On the other hand, it doesn't mean fading into anonymity. It means being recognisable to all who would see, who are interested or who inquire. It requires a facility in drawing the gaze of the inquirer from ourselves to the Gospel which we proclaim and which animates us.

Prophecy demands inculturation lest the word spoken fall on deaf ears. It leads to diverse expressions of religious life as the word is adapted to differing circumstances. Prophecy requires engagement in the public issues of the day if the Gospel is to speak to contemporary human needs. Prophecy requires that we hold our sponsored institutions accountable for the clarity of their Gospel witness.

Mission as global. A prophetic mission today will also be global in its perspective and outreach. We know from personal experience and observation how the poverty and suffering in one part of the world have their causes in decisions made in another part, and how the elites of the world conspire to enhance their own positions at the expense of the poor and marginalised. We know that greed, lust for power, racial and ethnic animosity, and rape of the Earth and its resources know no boundaries. Women and men religious constitute a worldwide network of communication and potential response to human suffering and exploitation. Many of our congregations transcend national orders. Others have members missioned in some of the remotest corners of the globe. Furthermore, we have organizational ties with religious throughout the world through our own conference and through the International Union of Superiors General.

What is sometimes lacking is an appreciation of the valuable resource we have in our information about realities around and creativity in making effective use of the information. As individual congregations and as a conference we have responded to new needs and specific crises in Eastern Europe, Liberia, Somalia, Central America, Haiti, Rwanda and many other places. Can we enlarge our commitment to information sharing, analysis and coordinated action on behalf of a truly world Church?

Even if the mission of one's congregation is

focused on a particular local Church or geographic region, this potential and imperative for global outreach exists through the leadership conference as well as through relationships with other congregations.

Mission as corporate. Perhaps the most challenging dimension of future mission will be its corporate character. In the FORUS study Nygren and Ukeritis claim that many individual religious and groups have relinquished the power of corporate witness for a variety of individual commitments in effective but unconnected ministerial positions. "The emphasis on individual ministry, or, at times, simply procuring a position, has eclipsed the symbolism of, and statement previously made by, corporate commitments". The situation of individual ministries is not easily reversed, even if it should be. There are only two ways to do so: Either everyone is employed within the same institutional ministry or everyone is committed to the same type of service such as ministry to persons with AIDS or to street children. The first solution is only possible where the congregation controls the institution. The latter solution assumes that the type of social problem being addressed will always exist to the same degree of need. Neither solution takes into account the differing talents, energies, professional expertise of the members.

A new way to think about corporate mission is needed, one which recognises the changing social realities, engages and focuses the energies of the members, and expresses the public identity of the congregation. It is a corporate mission that is needed, not necessarily corporate ministries. The twofold test of whether a congregational mission is more than rhetoric is how effectively it shapes each member's choices and how much it contributes to the public perception of the congregation.

Concluding Reflections

The characteristics of mission outlined here - integral to the way of life of apostolic women religious, prophetic, global and corporate - will be nuanced by the tradition and fresh inspiration of each congregation. Who are we? What is our hearts desire? How will we spend our talents and energies? Our ability to answer these depth questions about identity and mission with clarity and conviction has implications for new members, for associates, for affiliates. They deserve to know what we are asking them to invest in and to help shape for the future.

The questions are our questions. They belong to us before they belong to church officials or synod participants. It is time to speak and live our truth without compromise.

There is growing temptation among religious today to believe that our choices are limited. We feel constrained by age, by diminishing numbers, by finances, by professional education, by ecclesial expectations to carry on as we are, without really encountering the depth issues. Let us take a lesson from the successful sailor who makes a friend of the wind: Buffeted by contrary breezes, he chooses a tack and sets the sails. With one eye on the compass, the sailor strains forward toward the distant shore.

Despite the winds buffeting us we too can set our direction. Our compasses Christ, our sails are woven of faith and hope, courage and love. We can only face forward. Renewal has often invited us to look backward toward the great persons and events of our past. Now it is time to look forward to the new leaders and creative deeds in our future. There was no golden ago of religious life. There were only women and men, human as we are, who loved God, cared for persons in need and dared to dream. We are as human, as flawed and gifted as they were, and still in touch with the dream.

We began this hour by reflecting on the four winds of change which have brought us to this place. Let us end by invoking the wind that comes from another direction, the breath of the Spirit which blows where it wills. Sometimes a zephyr, sometimes a mighty gale - God's Spirit can nudge our timed choices, strengthen our frail resolve, reverse any misdirected course. Before he left us, Jesus promised the apostles that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit would come upon them, and they would be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Later, when their time was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. "And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were...and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak... The Spirit enabled them to proclaim" (Acts 2:2-4). Now it is our time Spirit of God, fill us and send us forth with the power and passion of your Word!

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mission moments

HOW DO I REEL AS A REFUGEE

(ZAMBIA)

Though I was born in Zambia, I am a pure Angolan girl, aged nineteen and doing Grade Twelve at Meheba Secondary School. I have included 'pure' in the sentence above because the country where my parents were born, and my grandparents too, is Angola.

Because of that, there is no way I myself can escape being called a 'refugee', a word laden with sorrow.

As far as I am concerned it is easy to define 'refugee': this is someone who has to remain in any country other than his or her homeland mainly because of political events continuing there. For example, there is the endless war taking place in Angola due to the differences between the leaders in that country. In short, a refugee is a sufferer.

I feel offended if anyone calls me a refugee. It makes me feel dirty in some way compared to the person who uses it. I would cherish to be in my native country and be free of such a demeaning word.

As a refugee, I have no country I can feel proud of. The country I live in is somebody else's. Certainly, I am kept safe here, but I cannot even speak the official language of Angola, which is Portuguese.

Instead I have been adopted into the official language of Zambia. I study eight school subjects in English and feel overworked.

Away from my country I feel resentment from the citizens here, even though I lack some of the rights they enjoy. Being cared for by Catholic agencies and the UNHCR, this is no substitute for being able to vote. This, too, makes me think of Angola. It would be wonderful to vote for a person I hope and trust would rule that country at his or her best level.

In Angola I could enjoy the right of freedom of movement, allowing me to move freely to any part of the country without having to ask for a pass, as I must do here. There, too, I would hope to enjoy the country's wealth and be allowed to buy durable commodities, such as a van.

Here in Zambia many kinds of employment are not open to me, nor to my parents, because we are foreigners. When I finish school I would love to be a driver or a nurse.

But the jobs open to refugees are mostly in teaching and agriculture, and very few other areas. It is of great importance to me to decide what type of job I would take.

Certainly, God is with me, and has been since I was born, day and night, knowing all my worries, needs, secrets and many other things. God kept both my parents and grandparents safe during the time they were escaping from the war in Angola, and through all the

years since.

God has promised to be with me in future, and I believe will answer my daily prayers to create peace in Angola. Then all the Angolan refugees will be free to return to their homeland.

Nothing is impossible to God.

Ref. Grenia Idalina Kuchimbwa
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WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN 1997

(HONG KONG)

What will happen in 1997? How should we prepare? Many people ask about 1997. Will Hong Kong be the same? There seems to be four opinions on this.

The first is very optimistic. They think that communism is no longer in the world. It has disappeared in places, one by one, especially in the regions of Eastern Europe. So, we will no longer have to face a Communist Government. Communism would have collapsed.

The second would be a little bit related to the optimistic opinion. It sees Hong Kong more or less remaining as it is now. To change the present system of Hong Kong

would disturb the development of China mainland and would also affect the unification with Taiwan. To change Hong Kong would frighten Taiwan and make unification more difficult.

The third is a less optimistic opinion. Hong Kong would have lost its special position. It would become only one of the good cities in South China.

The fourth position is pessimistic. The corruption, nepotism, party control over legal matters and lack of a legal system in China would also have an influence on Hong Kong and could cause Hong Kong not to function well.

I personally do not think the first opinion will happen because most of the Chinese have a low degree of education and that they are easily satisfied in their basic material needs.

Neither would the last position emerge because the reasons given for the second opinion would also hold here. It would not be good for China and it would frighten Taiwan. Also Hong Kong already has a legal tradition and definite experience in this area.

Personally, I would favour the second or third opinion - hope for the best but prepare for the worst. Hope for the second but prepare for the third. From the 14th Party Congress held this year, we can see the market system was strengthened. This should bring prosperity to China. Some outsiders think that China is reforming only in the economic area without having any political reform. For China to work out its economic development without some political reform would not be successful.

However, I think this observation is not correct. In fact, China has already promoted some political reforms even though not to the degree expected by outsiders. Deng Xiaoping, already had set an age

limit for government officials and had tried to clear out some cadres who are not capable of holding their posts. There are now university entrance examinations set up and government officials also need to have academic qualifications in order to earn promotion. He also tried to promote a separation between the party organisation and government administration.

There are problems remaining because of the first generation, founding members of the Government, are still alive. These people definitely trust guns and they believe and trust in the leadership of strong charismatic personalities. They also hold strongly to their ideology. It takes time for these elements to die away. These elements can influence the future of Hong Kong - 1997.

I think that after 1997, the Chinese Government would not trust the Christian Churches like the British Government does. They are likely to pay heed to the request of other religions for equal privileges and trust that the Christian Churches receive from the British Government. The Chinese Government considers all religions as means to balance problems arising in the system. I read in a book published recently by the Communists that Hong Kong is a capitalist system. Many people are rich and many people are still very poor so the different religions should inculcate concern for the poor among their believers. Religions serve as useful means for this.

In my meetings with the Chinese officials, the Hong Kong Catholic Church has assured that she could maintain her contact with Rome, continue her religious activities and social services, including schools and Caritas services. However, freedom would definitely be under pressure. Any criticisms of the Government or party would cause pressure. I think the Church can continue or hold her place in society and carry on her mission. If this

mission does not make for confrontation with the Government, the Church can still do a lot of direct evangelisation as well as indirect teaching through her social services.

To prepare ourselves to face the challenges of 1997, I would like to propose the following concrete suggestions for our consideration:

1. Create public opinion about love for the Chinese people, their culture and their language.
2. Promote consensus and, unity between the Diocese and religious Institutes/Missionary Societies and within these respective groups through frank dialogue.
3. Study and affirm the texts concerning religious beliefs, organisations and activities in the Basic Law.
4. Plan some kinds of evangelisation or witness which are not only in accordance with Catholic principles but also which will be in harmony with the future social situation; implement these plans in a positive way but with caution.

Ref. Fr. John Tong
Chronica
 No. 4, May 1994
 Congregatio Immaculati
 Cordis Mariæ
 via San Giovanni Eudes, 95
 Roma

94/310

COMING EVENTS

November 24

Afternoon: 16.00 hrs

SEMINAR RWANDA - QUELLE SUITE?

Soeur Giselle Bellemare, MSOLA
Père Pedro Sala, M.Afr

Place: Brothers of the Christian Schools; via Aurelia, 476
(simultaneous translations: Engl. Fr. Span.)

December 6

Morning: 9.30 - 13.00 hrs. (For everybody)

2 PARTICIPANTS OF THE SYNOD ON RELIGIOUS LIFE:

NEW PROPHETIC ROLES IN A MODERN WORLD

Br John Johnston, Superior General, FSC
(Assistant Secretary of the Synod)

ESSERE "RELIGIOSI E MISSIONARI" DOPO IL SINODO

Fr Marcello Zago, OMI., Superior General
(Special Secretary of the Synod)

Afternoon: 14.15 hrs. (for Delegates of Member Congregations)

SEDOS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Place: Brothers of the Christian Schools; via Aurelia, 476

SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR 1995

PHILIPPINES - INDONESIA - PACIFIC ISLANDS

May 30 - June 3, 1995 - Divino Maestro (Ariccia)
