

### CONTENTS

#### EDITORIAL

318

#### SUFFERING IN SOUTHERN SUDAN - CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

Renato Kizito Sesana, MCCJ

319

#### REFLEXION - L'ACTION DE L'ESPRIT EN ASIE

Lucien Legrand

323

#### THE BEIJING EXPERIENCE

Helen McLaughlin, RSCJ

326

#### MOVING BEYOND BEIJING - TOWARDS EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT, PEACE

Rose Fernando, FMM

333

#### ANNUAL REPORT

339

#### SUBJECT AND AUTHOR INDEX

344

#### COMING EVENTS

348

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## EDITORIAL

Dear Readers of our SEDOS Bulletin,  
This Christmas season we are glad to present you with the last number of our 1995 SEDOS Bulletin. We would like to take this opportunity to wish you a Very Happy Christmas and many Blessings in the coming year.

We are opening our December edition with a very interesting article on the Church in Southern Sudan. In spite of many dangers, Fr **KIZITO SESANA, MCCJ.**, succeeded, with the help of many friends, to visit some very isolated Christian Communities. As he shows us, Christ is strongly alive and will be reborn at Christmas in the many communities of Southern Sudan.

Fr **LUCIEN LEGRAND, MEP.**, is very hopeful for the development of mission in Asia, he sees the Spirit present and working everywhere, making the present *epoque* for our witness and proclamation really 'dramatique et fascinante'.

The following two articles are conferences of the SEDOS Seminar on the Beijing Conference in October. Sr **HELEN McLAUGHLIN, RSCJ.**, former President of SEDOS, gave us a very concrete and interesting report on how she experienced the rich event of "Beijing 1995" as a religious. — Sr **ROSE FERNANDO, FMM.**, reflected in her Conference on the different aspects of Justice and Peace in the context of the Beijing Conference. She stressed that a motivating Spirituality will be necessary to put the many nice concepts into practice.

As always in December, we include in the Bulletin the Annual Report, of the Executive Director, Fr **WALTER VON HOLZEN, SVD.**, to the General Assembly 1995. It summarises the variety of missionary issues taken up during the year.

We thank Philippa Wooldridge for having prepared once again the Author and Subject Index for the entire 1995 edition of SEDOS Bulletin.



### NEW SUPERIOR GENERAL:

*Order of Carmelites*

FATHER JOSEPH CHALMERS, O-CARM

### BOOKS:

Priest, Doug (Jr):  
*The Gospel Unhindered:  
Modern Missions and the Book of Acts.*  
Pasadena, 1994.

Bosch, J. David:  
*Dynamique de la mission chrétienne.*  
Karthala, 1995.

Mommaers, P./Van Bragt, J.:  
*Mysticism Buddhist and Christian.*  
Crossroads, 1995.

Dulles, Avery:  
*The Craft of Theology, From Symbol To System.*  
Crossroads, 1995.

**SEDOS  
SECRETARIAT  
WISHES  
OUR READERS  
IN THE WHOLE  
WORLD A  
HAPPY  
CHRISTMAS  
AND BLESSINGS  
FOR THE  
NEW YEAR**

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# SUFFERING IN SOUTHERN SUDAN — CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

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Renato Kizito Sesana, MCCJ

*(Father Renato Sesana is teaching Communications at Tangaza College in Nairobi. He follows closely the events in Southern Sudan).*

Ler lies on the banks of the great White Nile, in the vast and swampy land of the Nuer, in the centre of Southern Sudan. In 1993 a Sudanese catechist, Joseph Pal Mut, came from Ler to Nairobi, Kenya. Mut knocked at the door of each religious missionary group housed in the city. He asked one question: "Could you please send a priest to Ler?"

Working as a missionary at the service of the African Church has been challenging and unpredictable. When Mut knocked at my door I met one of these sudden challenges. I would like to share some of them, with the questions they have raised for me. They may be of use to some other people.

Mut stood outside my door straight-backed, slightly taller than average, rock hard, with a pleasant face. Mut was asking for a priest, nothing more. According to Mut, thousands of Catholics were in need of the ministry of a priest. It was difficult to credit Mut's request. The percentage of Nuer people that had accepted Christian evangelisation before the Sudanese civil war was low, and the majority of those were Presbyterians. There had never been a Catholic mission in Ler. The Diocese of Malakal into whose geographical boundary Ler would fall, had, in the last official statistics, an approximate total of 37,100 Catholics out of a population of 2.7 million, spread over an area of 238,000 square kilometers. The Bishop of Malakal and his few priests were restricted to a small area around Malakal due to the civil war. Mut, a recent convert, learned about Catholicism during the period he was a refugee in Ethiopia. When Mut took out wrinkled note books with thousands upon thousands of names of baptised people, few could believe it. Mut did not desist.

## A Church of the Laity

Eventually, my *confère* Fr Paul Donohue and I decided to take the risk of going to Ler. We wanted

to see with our own eyes what was happening. We spent a week in the area around Ler, and witnessed the incredible work done by a handful of young catechists under the leadership of Mut. We visited chapels deep in the bush where people from the nearby villages would congregate. We were able to talk to them, and ascertained that they knew the essentials of the Faith. We celebrated the Eucharist everywhere, with adult Catholics who had never seen a priest in their life before.

There, in the absence of every Church structure, in utter destitution, in the midst of a bitter civil war were these people who were converting to the Catholic Church. For almost a century they had been indifferent to the faith. Now through the work of a semi-literate young man, they were embracing it. These Christians were not there when a Comboni Missionary, a Catholic priest from Bentiu — some 80 kms away — had passed through the area on a motorcycle during the dry season of 1982.

They called their catechists "abuna" (father). We had the feeling, difficult to verify, that some of them were celebrating a rite in imitation of the Eucharist. Their faith and love for Jesus were utterly serious and unquestionable. Indeed, they were deeply concerned to keep their community in communion with the Church. The proof of this came later. Early in 1993, under the skilful leadership of the Bishop provisionally assigned to minister to that area, it was possible to visit the area of Ler regularly and to send some priests: the whole community accepted the transition without any trauma or breakaway.

## The Eucharistic Hunger

More recently, in August 1995, I had the opportunity to visit the Nuba Mountains, the heart of Sudan. Again the visit had serious logistical obstacles and carried a dimension of danger. For

example, the visit began with a three-hour flight over the theater of war in a small plane from Kenya deep into Sudan. Once back on the ground, we walked several days through the bush to reach the area of Heiban.

In the Nuba Mountains the civil war has caused the total economic and social dislocation of the civilian population. Currently, about 300,000 Nuba civilians live in the area controlled by the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The rest are experiencing a policy practiced by the Khartoum Government similar to ethnic cleansing. Thousands of Nuba have been forced into Northern Sudan and thousands more are displaced, seeking to escape from forced labour camps. Euphemistically called "peace camps", there the civilian population is kept in conditions similar to concentration camps. Women are forced to become temporary "wives" of the Muslim soldiers. Men are kept far from their families and compelled to work in the fields or as servants of the soldiers.

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***The hunger for the Eucharist, the hunger for peace are different aspects of the same basic starvation. People long for the healing power of Jesus, the power to restore love and community where there is hatred and division. It is a longing which can promote positive changes in the Church.***

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The Nuba people are completely isolated from the international community. Despite the graphic account of their plight by the few journalists who — at the risk of their lives — visited the area as independent observers, no one has supported them. There has been no international humanitarian assistance. The people have experienced only the rage of the Khartoum Government's prejudice from the outbreak of the civil war up to this day.

The tragedy of the Nuba people has been documented by a team from African Rights, a London-based organisation dedicated to issues of grave human rights abuses, conflict, famine and civil reconstruction in Africa. In July 1995 African Rights published a 344-page report entitled "*Facing Genocide: the Nuba of Sudan*". In it ample and detailed evidence is given to prove that an authentic genocide is going on against the Nuba.

Three Catholic Permanent Deacons live and work in the SPLA controlled area of the Nuba

Mountains. The permanent diaconate in the African Catholic Church is practically nonexistent. The Bishop of El Obeid, who saw the storm coming and wanted to prepare the young Nuba Church to stand on its own had the foresight to ordain these men. For almost ten years the three deacons and the Catholic community have been completely cut off from their Bishop in El Obeid. The life of the Church goes on in the midst of problems.

The biggest problem is the lack of the Eucharist. The faithful feel the need of it. "If a priest cannot stay with us, could you have the Eucharist sent to us by plane?" catechists asked me during our first meeting. Catechists walked three or four days in order to meet me. Christian communities have grown in number, in spite of their isolation. The catechists showed record books with many hundreds of names of newly baptised adults, names of new communities in far-away villages, where ten years ago only Islam and the traditional religions were practiced.

#### **A Sign of the Eucharist**

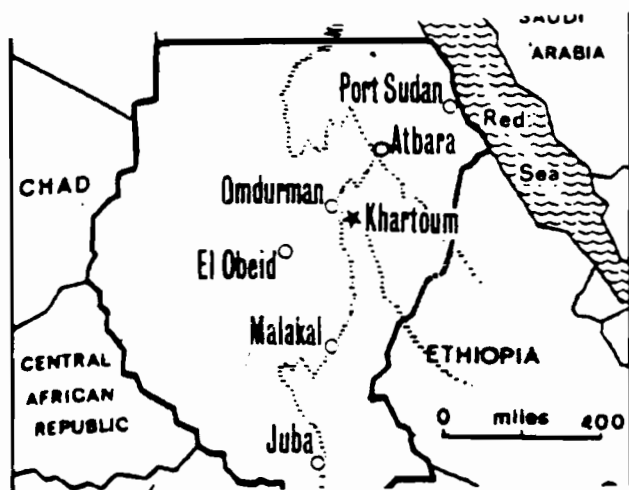
The catechists travel on foot from village to village. In each village they give instruction in a centrally located place. In this situation of isolation and persecution, clearly the Spirit has worked through the three unassuming deacons, the scores of catechists and dedicated lay leaders.

*What do these new Catholic communities ask for?* I asked what I could do for them. In the light of a full moon, during a late evening celebration of the Eucharist, with a community of people undernourished and wearing rags, (some of those present had actually sneaked out of a not too distant "peace camp" in order to come to the celebration), their overwhelming choral response was: "We want the Eucharist, we want a priest, we want to feel part of the Catholic Church". It was difficult not to be moved by the faith of these simple, dignified people who endure persecution in the name of their faith, and who do not ask for any help, other than that of the Eucharist.

The continual request for the Eucharist from the community was so insistent that two of the deacons thought of a substitute. Once they realised that I had not come all the way to the Nuba Mountains in order to judge them, they opened up and told me how they had thought of something to satisfy the Eucharistic hunger of their people. Knowing that they had no mandate to celebrate the Eucharist, they devised a substitute for the Eucharist, a sign of a sign. "Pre-adolescent girls go and harvest *dura* (a local grain similar to sorghum). The *dura* is ground into flour which is used to prepare some *kisra* (a

flat unleavened bread). The elders and the rest of us gather outside the chapel, and pray over the *kisra*. We ask God to make it a sign of his love and his presence among us. Then we distribute and eat the *kisra* during the prayer service. We know, and the faithful know, that this is not the Eucharist, but it helps us to go on until we will have a priest with the power to nourish us with the Body of Christ".

During those days that I shared my life and my power to celebrate the Eucharist with the Catholic communities of Ler and of Nuba Mountains, my heart inevitably brought to mind some questions. Why is it that when circumstances beyond the control of the Church empower lay people, they show initiative, energy, and commitment which is rarely seen in more structured communities? Is it proper



and just, given these special situations (but similar situations, if not so dramatic, exist or existed in many other parts of Africa), to leave communities for long periods, even many years without the help of the Sacraments, in particular, without the Eucharist? Are not the words of Jesus, "do this in memory of me", an order also for those who have no priest? Are not people like the Nuer catechists and the Nuba deacons the natural, tested leader and elders of their communities? What would prevent the Bishops from ordaining them? Would they be less priests than the products of seminaries, so aseptic, untouched by real life, distant from the anxieties of the people?

### The Peace Hunger

Other questions have come from another aspect of my ministry in Africa that started in connection with the war in Sudan, and spread because it answered a real need. It could be called community

reconciliation. As part of a group of persons who gathered in Nairobi in 1989 under the name: "People for Peace in Africa", I have been involved in reconciliation talks and workshops. Again this development originated from the grassroots. The first request came from SPLA factions, asking us to help them broker an agreement. Then the Somali journalists wanted a reconciliation workshop, then the Sudanese women, and the Rwandan refugees, and the victims of the so-called tribal clashes in Kenya. The list is constantly growing.

The first feeling, at least my personal feeling, was one of bewilderment. I was totally unprepared for this ministry. What do you do with fifty people in a room who are deeply divided, and yet — at least on a personal level — want to find a way out of the circle of hatred and violence? How can their wounds be healed, how can an understanding of the different viewpoints be achieved? What meaningful, and durable reconciliation can be reached? Nothing in my training had prepared me for this. Together, with my friends, we had to imagine, to create, to pray, to be deeply wounded ourselves before finding some possible path forward. Today, we are a little less ill-prepared than a few years ago. Unfortunately, the training I, and the other priests

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in the group, received as ministers of the Sacrament of Reconciliation focused almost exclusively on the sacrament's spiritual and individualistic aspect. The community aspect — the reconciliation of the penitent with the whole Church — was left to the spirituality, feelings, sensitivity of the penitent. Rarely, if ever, was the formal rite celebrated in community.

The members of People for Peace feel an enormous demand for the ministry of peace-keeping, peace-making, and reconciliation which goes beyond the interpersonal level to the level of communities. Explosive situations, potential Rwandas, exist throughout Africa. At a very local level there are tensions between rich and poor, tradition and modernity, pastoralists and agriculturalists (the juxtapositions are endless). These tensions are tearing apart the social fabric of

the continent. Can the Church be caught unawares another time? How will the Church bring the healing power of Jesus to these divisions? Is it possible to imagine a Rite of Reconciliation which involves two communities?

### The Inadequacies of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

In a document entitled "*Cast Away Fear*", published in preparation for the 1994 African Synod, the authors observed that the Church is growing in its appreciation of the African tradition of peace-making and reconciliation. To be called sons and daughters of God, they wrote, we need to be peace promoters. God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, gave us the ministry of reconciling peoples and communities. In a series of recommendations connected with this peace ministry the document asked that power be given to lay people to become more active participants in peace-making and reconciliation at all levels. Concretely, the laity could be trained both in the theoretical and practical methods of creative and evangelical resistance to injustice and in the promotion of a more human and participatory society.

The document says that, "The social and peace-making dimension of the Eucharist and of the Sacrament of Reconciliation should be stressed. In particular an inculturated Sacrament of Reconciliation should be celebrated on public occasions to confirm the achievement of peace after a conflict has been resolved".

It is clear that the present canonical form of the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is highly inadequate, in particular for the communitarian context of African society.

*Is the Church answering this hunger for peace and reconciliation coming from the people? When conflicts erupt, are we content with the formal expressions of distress and sorrow?*

### A Call for New Ministries

The hunger for the Eucharist, the hunger for peace are different aspects of the same basic starvation. People long for the healing power of Jesus, the power to restore love and community where there is hatred and division. It is a longing which can promote positive changes in the Church.

I have put forward more questions than answers. That is normal, since I am no theologian, I am not a social scientist. I am a priest who, like many other priests, listens to the anguish and the cry of the people. I have looked for answers to my questions in the most recent documents, and I have found

none. Only general principles. Does the African Church have the will to face the challenges of the time? Is the Church ready to be converted by the Faith of its members?

The Pastoral Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* is not different from other Church documents. In it I have found no answers to my questions. I concur with Mgr. Jean Zoa, Archbishop of Yaoundé, who reportedly said: "After the Second Vatican Council we have seen that the Churches which moved on with *aggiornamento* were those who asked themselves questions, those who felt they had pastoral problems and were eager to solve them. The same will happen for the African Synod". Those Churches who think that they now can relax because the Synod has been celebrated and because there are some general guidelines in the Pastoral Exhortation, run the risk of being left behind by life and of becoming anemic Churches.

My pastoral instinct tells me that we will begin to find answers to the above questions once we will trust lay people, empower them, and take seriously what they have to say about their participation in the priesthood of Jesus. It is important that we do not give up our search.



# REFLEXION

## L'ACTION DE L'ESPRIT EN ASIE

Lucien Legrand

### I. LA MISSION A LA RENCONTRE DES RELIGIONS

Du 12 au 16 septembre 1994, un Colloque réunissait une centaine de participants, la plupart missionnaires de terrain, venant d'Afrique, d'Amérique latine, d'Asie, du Moyen-Orient et aussi d'Europe. Le sujet de la consultation était «La Mission à la Rencontre des Religions». Ce Colloque préparait «Planète-Mission», une rencontre plus large qui rassembla à Lourdes, du 11 au 13 novembre, 6300 délégués de tous les diocèses de France, dont 1600 jeunes de moins de 18 ans et 550 de 19 à 24 ans. Une enquête préalable faite à travers les paroisses (catholiques et protestantes) reçut 100,000 réponses, répondant à la question: «Pour vous qu'est-ce que la Mission? Parmi les formulations suivantes, quelles sont celles qui correspondent mieux à votre opinion?»

L'annonce de Jésus-Christ à tous les hommes	88%
Le service d'une société plus humaine au nom de l'Évangile	80%
Un dialogue avec les croyants d'autres religions	59%
Le soutien aux Églises d'Afrique, Asie, Océanie, Amérique	50%
L'envoi de missionnaires en pays étrangers	43%
La conversion des non-chrétiens	32%

Ces réponses et pourcentages sont intéressants. L'annonce de Jésus-Christ reste la formulation de base; le motif humanitaire, dans son sens le plus large, suit immédiatement. Mais ce qui paraît étonnant, c'est que le dialogue avec les autres religions soit vu comme tellement important et qu'il soit donné comme objectif de la mission par presque deux fois plus de répondants que la conversion des non-chrétiens. Cette donnée converge avec le sujet qui avait été choisi par les missionnaires de «terrain» pour leurs échanges. Les statistiques ne font pas un dogme. Mais elles expriment un état de choses qui invite à la réflexion. Comment se fait-il que le dialogue avec les autres religions apparaisse si important de nos jours?

La réponse est peut-être donnée par la réflexion — l'oracle? — de Malraux, il y a une vingtaine d'années: «Le XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle sera un siècle religieux». A la même époque, le théologien allemand, K. Rahner, disait: «Le christianisme du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle sera mystique ou ne sera pas». Nous ne sommes pas encore au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, mais nous voyons déjà s'ébaucher la réalisation de ces prédictions. La religion est en train de redevenir, pour le meilleur comme pour le pire, un facteur important de la vie

des hommes. Sans approuver la vigueur prosélyte de l'Islam, on ne peut pas ne pas être impressionné. L'hindouisme a repris conscience de sa valeur depuis le discours de Vivekananda au Parlement des Religions de Chicago, en 1904, et surtout depuis qu'il a produit des figures du calibre de Gandhi et mené l'Inde à l'Indépendance. Le bouddhisme suit un mouvement parallèle et même le confucianisme, pourtant bien malmené par la Révolution chinoise, reprend du souffle à travers les succès économiques du monde asiatique, en proposant un modèle de démocratie confucéen qui serait plus efficace et mieux adapté au monde moderne que le modèle occidental. Chez les chrétiens aussi, on voit un retour au dynamisme évangélique dans les mouvements de prière et de solidarité, les formes nouvelles de vie religieuse et d'engagement, les pèlerinages: l'identité chrétienne recherche des formes d'expression plus vivantes qu'une pratique dominicale routinière.

Ne soyons pas naïfs. Ce renouveau des religions n'est pas que pain bénit. Il connaît des formes arrogantes, voire agressives, dans tous les fondamentalismes: musulman, en Algérie et ailleurs, hindou, avec la destruction de la mosquée de Bhabar à Ayodhya, bouddhiste comme élément de la guerre civile au Sri Lanka et aussi chrétien avec l'intolérance de certaines sectes et, chez les catholiques, des attitudes et des organisations se situant dans la mouvance lefévrisme. Il est donc important d'exercer le discernement. Ce mouvement de regain des religions demande à ce que nous lui donnions réponse au nom de l'Évangile. Il mérite notre respect, notre réflexion: c'est pour cela qu'il avait attiré l'attention des missionnaires rassemblés au Colloque de Chevilly.

### II. L'ESPRIT A L'OEUVRE DANS LES CULTURES ET LES RELIGIONS

On trouvera la base de notre réflexion dans un récent document pontifical, l'encyclique *Redemptoris Missio*, sur la Mission du Christ rédempteur, du 7 décembre 1990, principalement au chapitre 3, *L'Esprit Saint, Protagoniste de la Mission*. L'encyclique commence par évoquer les textes qui fondent la Mission à la fin de chacun des quatre évangiles (§§ 22-23). Le rôle de l'Esprit est particulièrement souligné en Jean et en Luc:

Comme mon Père m'a envoyé, moi aussi, je vous envoie...Recevez l'Esprit Saint (Jn 20:21-22).

On prêchera en son nom la conversion et le pardon des péchés à toutes les nations... C'est vous qui en

êtes les témoins... Et moi, je vais envoyer sur vous ce que mon Père a promis (Lc 24:47-49):

Texte dont on a l'équivalent au début des Actes des Apôtres: «Vous allez recevoir une puissance, celle du Saint-Esprit qui viendra sur vous; vous serez alors mes témoins à Jérusalem, dans toute la Judée et la Samarie et jusqu'aux extrémités de la terre» (Ac 1:8).

L'encyclique montre ensuite comment, dans les Actes des Apôtres, c'est l'Esprit Saint qui inspire et guide la Mission (§§ 25-28). Il le fait «d'une manière particulière dans l'Église et dans ses membres», mais aussi, comme le rappelait Vatican II (AG nn. 3.11.15) «dans le coeur de tout homme par les "semences du Verbe", dans les actions *mêmes religieuses*, dans les efforts de l'activité humaine qui tendent vers la vérité, vers le bien, vers Dieu». «Nous devons tenir, disait aussi Vatican II (GS nn.10.15.22),, que l'Esprit Saint offre à tous, d'une façon connue de Dieu, la possibilité d'être associés au mystère pascal». S'il n'y a rien de beau et de bon dans le coeur humain sans la puissance de l'Esprit,

cette «présence et activité de l'Esprit ne concernent pas seulement les individus, mais la société et l'histoire, *les peuples, les cultures, les religions*. En effet, l'Esprit se trouve à l'origine des idéaux nobles et des initiatives bonnes de l'humanité en marche... C'est encore l'Esprit qui répand les "semences du Verbe" présentes dans *les rites et les cultures*, et les prépare à leur maturation dans le Christ» (§ 28).

Et le Pape d'évoquer son activité œcuménique personnelle dans ses «rencontres avec les peuples les plus divers», surtout lors de la rencontre d'Assise qui fut l'occasion d'exprimer sa conviction «que toute prière authentique est suscitée par l'Esprit Saint, qui est mystérieusement présent dans le coeur de tout homme». Il conclut:

Ainsi l'Esprit, qui «souffle où il veut» (Jn 3:8) et qui «était déjà à l'oeuvre avant la glorification du Christ», qui «remplit le monde et qui, tenant unies toutes choses, a connaissance de chaque mot» (Sg 1:7), nous invite à élargir notre regard pour contempler son action présente en tout temps et en tout lieu (§ 29).

En langage biblique, notons que, dans les évangiles, outre les paraboles du semeur évoquant les travaux et les peines de l'ouvrier du Royaume, on a les paraboles de la moisson: la semence qui croît toute seule (Mc 4:26-29), le sénevé (Mc 4:30ss), l'ivraie et le bon grain (Mt 13,24-30), la moisson abondante (Mt 9:37s). Le message de ces paraboles est repris en conclusion de l'épisode de la Samaritaine en Jn 4:35-38:

«Ne dites-vous pas vous-mêmes: "Encore quatre mois et viendra la moisson"? Mais moi je vous dis: levez les yeux et regardez; déjà les champs sont blancs pour la moisson! Déjà le moissonneur reçoit son salaire et amasse du fruit pour la vie éternelle, si bien que celui

qui sème et celui qui moissonne se réjouissent ensemble. Car en ceci le proverbe est vrai, qui dit: "L'un sème et l'autre moissonne". Je vous ai envoyé moissonner ce qui ne vous a coûté aucune peine; d'autres ont peiné et vous avez pénétré dans ce qui leur a coûté tant de peine».

C'est l'Esprit qui a semé et qui a fait croître: notre tâche, dans une grande mesure, est de prendre connaissance de cette riche moisson qu'il a préparée, d'ouvrir les yeux sur les champs «déjà tout blancs», à travers le monde, pour la moisson.

### III. L'ESPRIT EN ASIE

Il serait téméraire de faire un bilan de ce que l'Esprit a fait en Asie: l'Esprit n'a pas fini de nous surprendre: il est aussi difficile de cerner son action que de photographier un ouragan. On ne peut que donner quelques repères en suivant les grandes lignes de l'encyclique.

#### 1. DANS L'EGLISE D'ASIE

A l'intérieur des Églises, on ne peut que mentionner la croissance continue des communautés chrétiennes, malgré des circonstances défavorables. On avait fait du christianisme un épiphénomène du mouvement colonial pour conclure qu'il disparaîtrait avec le colonialisme. Il est sorti reforcé et purifié de cette libération des peuples. Les Églises se sont «indigénisées»: elles se sont situées sans complexe en «Églises locales». Elles ont pris des orientations nouvelles et spécifiques: dialogue et inculturation des cadres, de la pensée, de la prière, engagement au service des pauvres et des opprimés, participation au combat des peuples pour la justice et la paix. Une prise de conscience chrétienne spécifiquement asiatique se développe encouragée par la Fédération asiatique des Conférences épiscopales (FABC). Les vocations aux ministères et à la vie religieuse se sont multipliées, avec une efflorescence d'options missionnaires.

Le souffle de l'Esprit s'est fait sentir dans un ensemble de développements imprévisibles:

- développement du christianisme en Chine: il est impossible de donner des statistiques: il est certain qu'un mouvement d'intérêt se manifeste pour le message de Jésus-Christ;
- ouverture de zones nouvelles à l'évangélisation: Sibérie, Uzbekistan, Mongolie;
- réouverture du Cambodge;
- diaspora chrétienne (coréenne, indienne, philippine) dans les pays arabes et en Sibérie;
- courage des petites minorités chrétiennes persécutées ou au moins isolées en milieu hostile.

#### 2. EN DEHORS DES EGLISES

a) *Chez les individus*: les valeurs «traditionnelles» de l'Asie restent encore bien vivantes: courage face aux épreuves comme on l'a vu lors des récents tremblements



de terre au Mahârastra et à Kobé, sens de la famille, fortement unie dans les coups durs, la maladie, la pauvreté; solidarité de voisinage (même la caste indienne n'est pas sans valeur face à la désagrégation sociale causée par le libéralisme sauvage et la société de consommation), honnêteté en affaires, fidélité en amitié. Ces «valeurs», comme toute réalité humaine, ne vont sans doute pas sans ambiguïté. Elles sont aussi contrecarrées par des attitudes opposées: l'Asie aussi est aux prises avec une «modernité», elle aussi chargée d'ambiguïté. Mais il reste que l'Asie continue à présenter un tissu social solide.

b) *Dans la société et l'histoire:* l'Asie a une longue histoire: à part l'Égypte, c'est en Asie que l'histoire a commencé. Histoire pas toujours édifiante qui a connu bien des tyrans, des invasions et des guerres avec leur cortège de cruauté, des oppressions et des injustices. Mais il y a aussi l'autre aspect: l'histoire de l'Asie a aussi été une histoire de merveilles artistiques et poétiques, de découvertes scientifiques et techniques, de progrès civilisateur par les lois et les réformes sociales, depuis Hammurabi jusque Gandhi, Ambedkar et Vinobha, en passant par le Bouddha et Confucius, de mûrissement de sagesse. De nouvelles sources de dynamisme spirituel apparaissent dans la lutte pour une liberté humaine intégrale, la prise de conscience et le combat pour la dignité chez les *dalits*, les larges populations tribales et opprimés de tout genre. Dans le monde et de plus en plus, l'Asie n'est pas seulement le continent le plus grand, le plus peuplé et le plus vigoureux économiquement. C'est aussi le continent qui a le plus de fond et de solidarité humaines, malgré les révolutions qui l'ont secoué et le secouent encore. Et, à travers ces révolutions, c'est peut-être aussi lui qui fait face avec le plus de dynamisme aux défis de l'avenir.

c) *Dans les religions:* c'est le fondement du dialogue interreligieux. Il n'est pas nouveau puisque, saint Paul déjà, à Athènes, faisait fond sur la religiosité des Athéniens pour leur annoncer l'Évangile du Dieu unique et de Jésus-Christ (Ac 17,22-29). Le Pape évoque l'apport spirituel qu'il a lui-même reçu dans le dialogue:

Le contact avec les représentants des traditions spirituelles non chrétiennes, en particulier celles de l'Asie, m'a confirmé que l'avenir de la mission dépend en grande partie de la contemplation. Le missionnaire, s'il n'est pas contemplatif, ne peut annoncer le Christ d'une manière crédible (§ 91).

Il est impossible de résumer la richesse spirituelle des religions d'Asie: sens de l'immanence dans l'*hindouisme* et de la transcendance dans l'*islam*; métaphysique et technique de libération dans le *bouddhisme*; recherche de l'harmonie cosmique, politique et sociale dans le *confucianisme*: on regrette de ne pouvoir formuler que de vagues généralités pour exprimer ce que vivent intensément ceux qui partagent la vie de ce monde asiatique. En général, l'âme asiatique est marquée par une quête de concorde issue d'une conscience profonde de l'unité fondamentale du tout, non seulement dans l'espace mais aussi dans le

temps, dans le lien continu des générations exprimé dans le culte des ancêtres. Faisons droit aussi aux *religions traditionnelles*. Elles vivent profondément le lien de l'humanité avec la nature que le mouvement écologique redécouvre. La *religion populaire* des pauvres, même très différente des grandes religions, a aussi sa grandeur dans la simplicité, la confiance et la générosité dont elle témoigne à l'égard du divin.

#### IV. «IL EN FERA MEME DE PLUS GRANDES» (Jn 14:12)

La puissance créatrice de l'Esprit ne se cantonne pas au passé: elle domine l'avenir. C'est par l'Esprit que nous sommes appelés, selon la promesse de Jésus, à «de plus grandes choses». Ces «plus grandes choses» commencèrent à se réaliser, dans les Actes et par l'apostolat de Paul, quand l'Évangile sortit du cadre galiléen où était resté Jésus pour aborder le monde gréco-romain. L'immense monde asiatique offre maintenant des perspectives beaucoup plus vastes au souffle créateur de l'Esprit: nouvelles profondeurs mystiques à pénétrer, nouveaux modèles socio-politiques et ecclésiologiques, nouvelles attitudes éthiques. La rencontre de l'Évangile et de l'Asie fera apparaître bien des traits insoupçonnés de cet «homme nouveau» dont parlait saint Paul (Ép 2:15;4:24). S'inspirant de l'épisode de la prédication de Paul à Athènes, Jean-Paul II parlait des «nouveaux aréopages de la Mission»: l'Asie est certainement l'un des plus grands, sinon le plus grand aréopage de l'avenir. Les progrès techniques et économiques des nouveaux «tigres» asiatiques ne doivent pas rester confinés au plan matériel; ils demandent un supplément d'âme que l'Esprit a déjà préparé dans leur culture et que l'Évangile peut catalyser.

Notre époque est tout à la fois dramatique et fascinante. Tandis que, d'un côté, les hommes semblent rechercher ardemment la prospérité matérielle et se plonger toujours davantage dans le matérialisme de la consommation, d'un autre côté, on voit surgir une angoissante quête du sens, un besoin d'intériorité, un désir d'apprendre des formes et des méthodes nouvelles de concentration et de prière. Dans les cultures imprégnées de religiosité, mais aussi dans les sociétés sécularisées, on recherche la dimension spirituelle de la vie comme antidote à la déshumanisation. Le phénomène que l'on nomme «retour du religieux» n'est pas sans ambiguïté, mais il contient un appel... Voilà encore un aréopage à évangéliser (§ 38).

Et on peut conclure avec la prière de saint Paul en Ép 3:20-21.

A Celui qui peut, par sa puissance qui agit en nous, faire au-delà, infiniment au-delà de ce que nous demandons et concevons, à Lui la gloire dans l'Église et en Jésus-Christ, pour toutes les générations, au siècle des siècles. Amen.

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# THE BEIJING EXPERIENCE

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Helen McLaughlin, RSCJ

*(Helen McLaughlin, RSCJ, was Superior General of the Religious of the Sacred Heart until 1994. This Conference was given on Friday, 13 October 1995, at the SEDOS Seminar on Beijing: World Conference on Women).*

## 1. Introduction

At 8.30 a.m. on 30 August 1995, the Qantas plane touched down at Beijing Airport. Finally we had arrived. I had travelled with over 300 women from all parts of Australia and we had already begun to tell our stories. There was a nervous excitement among us, a feeling of uncertainty about what awaited us: the end of a very long process and journey to get here and the beginning of a very important event that would bring together more women than ever before in the history of the planet.

The airport is small by international standards but the service went beyond international standards: our papers were dealt with efficiently, the luggage arrived without delay, and we met the first of the so courteous, patient and delightful university students who had volunteered to be at strategic points — the airport, the Identity Card distribution centre, the NGO Form, the Conference Centre and the shuttle bus stops. They seemed to be there at your side whenever you needed them. Most spoke English but others were fluent in French, Spanish or Russian — 50,000 of them, recognisable by their brightly coloured T-shirts. Throughout the day and throughout the meetings we were to experience their helpfulness, patience and understanding. This was one of the efforts China made to welcome us.

At the Workers' Stadium I was issued with the official Identity Card, given the programme and a cotton bag with, on one side, the words "**Look at the World through Women's Eyes**" and on the other the attractive red and white logo, which depicts eight women dancing. Each has her own energy and dynamism. Each one is linked with the other through a common centre. Together they generate more energy and power than each one could generate singly. The logo celebrates women as risk-takers, doers and active shapers of their own destinies.

Once in Beijing I was struck by the silence — so many people, so little noise; so many bicycles, no motor bikes; rarely did a driver use the horn, or screech the brakes or rev up the engine. It must be one of the quietest capitals in the world. Though there is little noise, there is a great deal of pollution, coming to a large extent from the old, rickety buses that gave off such dirty fumes. Like most cities Beijing has many large apartment blocks; there are also small houses separated by very narrow passageways and some old Beijing houses of gray stone with a courtyard behind. Modern hotels are mushrooming; some have been constructed especially for this Conference.

The Opening Ceremony for the NGO Forum on Women was "beautiful, brilliant, breathtaking". Can you imagine 80,000 participants from 189 countries and over 5,000 performers gathered together for this historic occasion? An all-women's orchestra, each one dressed in white, opened the event with Western classical and Chinese music. Then followed a magnificent, colourful display of dancing, rhythmic movement, Chinese opera, all beautifully choreographed and perfectly executed. A moving moment occurred when 20,000 doves and balloons ascended into the air bringing the message of peace and unity. Simultaneously on the large screen appeared the words, in Chinese and English, "The globe our homeland. Let peace doves soar forever over this planet of ours". Another moving moment for me was the presentation the Peace Torch by The Kampala Committee of Women for Peace in Africa to the NGO Convenor Supatra Masdit of Thailand. The Torch had been lit in Natal by President Nelson Mandela on 31st July and had travelled through Africa before being brought to Beijing. Throughout the Forum it was given pride of place in the Peace Tent. The sun was setting over Beijing as we sang the theme song "Keep on moving forward", and the ceremony concluded with each one singing in her own language "Auld Lang Syne".

The next day began what was to be our routine for the following days — the hour and a half jour-

ney in shuttle busses from our hotel in Beijing to the NGO Forum site in Huarou. All the way, this road was decorated with flowers and bright red banners with welcome signs in Chinese and sometimes picturesque English. "Hail and Convocation of the NGO Forum in Beijing"; "Be a Worthy Host to the UN Conference"; "Welcome to Huarou where you will get what you have come for". "May the Beijing Meeting bring back FRIENDSHIP to all corners of our world", etc.

## 2. Non-Governmental (NGO) Forum

### A. Organisation

**This ten-day event had as its overall vision:**

"To bring together women and men to challenge, create and transform global structures and processes at all levels through the empowerment and celebration of women. We are committed to equality, peace, justice, inclusiveness and full participation of all".

More than 5,000 events were organised, including plenary sessions, workshops, panels, training seminars, exhibits, videos, cultural evenings, spontaneous meetings in the five Regional Tents, the Youth Tent, the Peace Tent, the Healing Tent, the Global Tent and, for the times when you needed your own space, the Quiet Place. There was also an area for Religious Activities where there was a room for Catholics in which Mass was celebrated twice a day. There was another room for other Christian denominations, a third for the Buddhists and a fourth for the Muslims.

It is mind-boggling even to think of all these activities as well as the number of people from all over the world, of all ages, women working at the grassroots, others at national and international level and representing every shade of opinion. To walk the Forum grounds was to be part of a moving sea of colour and diversity — all shades of skin and hair colour, all shapes and sizes of women, many wearing dazzling national costumes; every imaginable kind of poster, banner, button and T-shirt emblazoned with slogans and images. There were some Catholic and Buddhist nuns in habits and robes as well as Islamic women dressed in black from head to toe. A veritable sea of diversity!

Over 200 disabled women were there, reminding us of their reality; they had made such sacrifices to be present and often experienced difficulties as few of the areas had easy access. On the days when the rain came down in torrents on the unpaved grounds, the mud became thicker and thicker so that the disabled had even more obstacles to overcome. It was beautiful to see how other women were ready to be

of assistance, carrying them over the muddy patches, up some flights of stairs, etc. That shows the atmosphere of the Forum — much respect, acceptance of the inevitable difficulties of this organisational nightmare, seriousness regarding the importance of this gathering, friendship, good humour, smiling faces. Some women were disturbed by the security checks at each of the main entrances; others preferred the security of the security checks. I used to wonder to myself if men would have accepted the conditions at Huarou!

The Press Centre was a hive of activity. 5,000 journalists, reporters, photographers, had come to cover both the Forum and the UN Conference. They gleefully fed the public with stories of controversies and conflicts, misunderstandings and mistreatment, and did not give coverage to the good and the positive, the efforts made, the struggles won

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*Whatever difficulties there may have been, this large and sometimes controversial gathering did provide, as its theme promised, a fascinating look at the world through women's eyes. It provided a sense of the possibilities of international cooperation and community. It provided a tremendous opportunity for cultural exchange and exposure to different ways of thinking.*

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and the obstacles overcome. At the Press Centre we could find telephones, FAX machines, have access to computers and use the e-mail. The e-mail allowed the Forum participants to maintain a dialogue with women in other parts of the world unable to be present and, during the UN Conference, to give input to the NGO caucuses. It was also a wonderful way to contact women in Huarou or Beijing whom you wanted to meet and could not find! There were also Seminars offered to any who wished to learn more about the technology. People were able to work in 44 languages — an expression of sensitivity for this multi-cultural gathering. The official languages of the Forum were English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic and Russian. Actually English was the dominant language in the small groups and workshops — and this caused tension.

### B. History of the NGO Forums

This NGO Forum on Women was built on three previous Women's Forums and UN Conferences:

the first in Mexico (1975), the second in Copenhagen (1980) and the third in Nairobi (1985). This particular Forum, unlike the others, was built also on the major issue-based world conferences that took place: the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio, 1992), the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna 1993), the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, March 1995). It is interesting to compare the number of participants at these forums: Mexico 6,000; Copenhagen, 10,000; Nairobi, 15,000, and now Huarhou, Beijing, 30,000. The increase shows the interest women have in these meetings, the importance they give to them, the responsibility they feel, as well as the determination they have to work for Equality, Development and Peace for all.

**C. The Aims: What are the aims of the NGO Forum? There are three:**

- a) agenda setting
  - b) networking
  - c) influencing the **Platform for Action** (the latter is the document prepared for and to be discussed at the UN Conference).
- a) The means used to study the agenda setting was mainly the Programme of Plenaries which presented critical analyses of the current global forces, examined responses and provided the impetus for NGO action plans for the 21st Century. The global forces affecting the quality of life of the human community were identified as:
- 1) the approaches to governance, including questions of citizenship and political participation;
  - 2) obstacles to peace and human security, including the effects of militarisation, violence and poverty;
  - 3) challenges posed by the globalisation of the economy including the impact of the technological revolution on work;
  - 4) rise of conservatism in its various forms: religious, nationalist, racial/ethnic and homophobic;
  - 5) media, culture and communication: challenges and opportunities.
- b) The networking was done throughout the whole of the meeting, at official gatherings and in spontaneous conversations. The Regional Tents were favourite gathering places of women from the same geographic area, and these became like a home-away-from-home for some, a place to relax, to have a good conversation. Religious women,

representing 62 Congregations, met three times and drew up a Statement addressed to the Delegates to the UN Fourth World Conference on Women. The Statement says:

As Catholic women religious from Asia, Pacific, Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America, participating in the NGO Forum 1995 and the Fourth World Conference on Women, we stand in solidarity with all women participants. Our commitment to live out the Gospel impels us to raise our voices with theirs to insist that the Delegates to this UN Conference ratify and implement a platform for action which effectively addresses the militarisation, racism, Structural Adjustment Programmes, narrow fundamentalist interpretations and patriarchal structures which contribute to the feminisation of poverty and do violence to women and girl children everywhere.

Compelled by the Gospel imperative to "act justly", we call upon the United Nations and our respective Governments to commit themselves to work for peace, equality and sustainable development. Furthermore, we challenge the United Nations, all Governments, NGO's, Churches, and other institutions working for human rights, to develop mechanisms of accountability to convert these commitments into concrete, measurable actions.

The development of this Statement is an example of networking as well as an expression of an effort to carry out the third aim of the Forum.

- c) The third aim was influencing the document, the Platform for Action, which would be discussed at the UN Conference. This Document was drafted and re-drafted by the UN over a two-year period. Much of the Document had already been accepted, but the points to be negotiated were those placed in square brackets. Much study and analysis of the material within the square brackets was done by the NGO's, and propositions were drawn up by different groups that homed in on their particular issue.

The workshops and seminar all centred on what the Draft Platform for Action listed as the 12 "critical areas of concern". These areas, identified as obstacles to the advancement of women, are the following:

- The persistent and growing burden of **poverty** among women;
- Unequal access to and inadequate **educational** opportunities;

- Inequalities in **health** status and unequal access to and inadequate health care services;
- **Violence** against women;
- Effects of **armed** and other kinds of **conflict** on women;
- Inequality in women's access and participation in the definition of **economic structures** and policies and the productive process itself;
- Inequality between men and women in the **sharing of power** and **decision-making** at all levels;
- **Insufficient mechanisms** at all levels to promote the advancement of women;
- Lack of awareness of, and commitment to, internationally and nationally recognised **women's rights**;
- Insufficient mobilisation of **mass media** to promote women's positive contributions to society;
- Lack of adequate recognition and support for women's contributions to managing natural resources and safeguarding the **environment**;
- The **girl child**.

#### D. Activities

Being at Huarion was like sitting down to a generous banquet, full plate after full plate: some dishes were spicy, others, yes, sour, even bitter at times, others completely unfamiliar, but so satisfying with new tastes lingering on the tongue. To give you an idea of the variety of workshops and seminars being given on any one theme, I take the theme of education. This covered "I want to go to school" (China Youth Foundation), "Women and Human Promotion" (*Mamans Catholiques du Zaïre*), "Educational Problems" (Azerbaijan Women Society), "Learning from Women's Struggles in the International Workplace" (City University of New York), "Educating the Girl Child in Bangladesh", "Women's Role in the Development of Countries" (UNIFEM, Sweden), "Rural Tunisian Mothers' Initiatives — Multi-discipline Caravans" (Tunisian Mothers' Association), "Popular Education: Empowering and Working in Nicaragua and Latin America" (*Capacitar*. Women Empowering Women), "Alternative Education for Street Girls and Women Workers" (Indonesian Child Workers), etc.

Such a super-abundance of activities was wonderful but made choosing very difficult. While the larger plenary meetings explored several subjects in depth, the hundreds of workshops offered, confronted participants with a bewildering array of

choices. Voices spoke on behalf of women whose children did not have enough to eat or water to drink. Voices spoke on behalf of girls who are forced to leave school at an early age, to marry or to work. Voices spoke on behalf of young women and children being bought and sold for sexual exploitation. Voices spoke out against religious oppression. Voices spoke out about the freedom that comes through their faith. So much to hear...So much pain to feel...So much work to do...So much reason to hope.

The first day I opted to go to the plenary where Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese Nobel Peace Prize Winner, 'spoke' by video to the fully packed Convention Centre. The word that stayed with me is "tolerance". She said that while women and children have inevitably paid a greater price in terms of war, there has been no known instance in history when women have started a war. Tolerance is the key to peace. In practicing tolerance it is not enough to live and let live. In societies where men are truly confident, women are not merely tolerated; they are

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***Our commitment to live out the Gospel impels us to raise our voices with theirs to insist that the Delegates to this UN Conference ratify and implement a platform for action which effectively addresses the militarisation, racism, Structural Adjustment Programmes, narrow fundamentalist interpretations and patriarchal structures which contribute to the feminisation of poverty and do violence to women and girl children everywhere.***

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highly valued. Intolerance breeds insecurity and without security there can be no lasting peace. Another phrase of hers, "An intelligent rooster knows that he crows because the dawn comes, not the other way round. It is not the prerogative of men to bring light to the day".

Winona LaDuke of the Indigenous Women's Network, Minnesota, USA, then spoke of the destruction of the earth and the disregard by industrial society for the rights of the indigenous peoples who number 500 million throughout the world. Decisions at the UN are made, not by thousand-year old nations of indigenous peoples, but by 189 member States, some of whom have been in existence for only 200 years. In truth, she said, most of those decisions are made by the 47 transnational corpo-

rations whose annual income often exceeds the Gross National Product of many countries. The right to make those decisions — decisions being made at the cost of millions of lives, of species of plants and animals, forests and entire ecosystems — is not a human right but a right based on wealth and power. The problem is not one of the North dominating the South but of the Middle consuming both North and South. She ended by calling for support in the struggle of indigenous peoples for recognition, self determination, control over their own lives and destinies.

On the following days I chose to follow workshops on Women and Armed Conflict. It became ever so much clearer to me how women are affected in many ways during war and armed conflicts. Though they may have no role in the decisions leading to such conflicts and are seldom combatants themselves, women are often left to maintain families when social and economic life is disrupted. Women are also victims of arbitrary arrests and torture. Systematic rape has been used as an instrument of war. Facts were given, such as: women and their dependants constitute 75 per cent of the world's 23 million refugees; more than 20,000 women were reported to have been raped in the first months of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina; women and children are more likely than ever before to be killed or wounded in wartime. While only 5 per cent of casualties in World War I were civilians, in conflicts currently underway the figure is almost 80 per cent; women are also more likely to become the victims of trafficking and involuntary prostitution in times of war and upheaval, often with the complicity of Government and Military authorities. In response, actions were proposed, such as, strengthening the role of women in peace and security activities; hastening the conversion of military resources and related industries to development and peaceful purposes; taking steps to ensure the safety and physical integrity of refugee women and promoting peaceful resolutions to conflict through education and training.

I listened to three women speak of their experiences and efforts to work for peace. The first, a Russian from Moscow, President of the Committee of the Mothers of Soldiers of Russia, spoke of the situation in her country today and of the war in Chechnia, a war of which 80 per cent of the population of Russia disapprove. Their protests in Moscow being of no avail, she with a few other mothers went to Grozny to express non-violently their condemnation of the war and to show solidarity with the Chechen mothers of soldiers. The second speaker Cairiona Ruane from Northern Ireland, gave the background to the conflict there and proposed as a strategy to expose any unjust activities of Britain to the International Court. Then Susanna

Ounei-Small from New Caledonia put before us their struggle for independence from France and their call for no nuclear testing in the Pacific. I was struck by the commitment of these women. This meeting aimed at being a Conference of Commitments, but I realised that if we want them to be effective, we must match the commitments with determination to make them work. These women showed me they were prepared to do that. Much reason to hope....

Whatever difficulties there may have been, this large and sometimes controversial gathering did provide, as its theme promised, a fascinating look at the world through women's eyes. It provided a sense of the possibilities of international cooperation and community. It provided a safe place for small supportive exchanges and large international networking. It provided a tremendous opportunity for cultural exchange and exposure to different ways of thinking. In a world seeking wholeness within diversity, in a world of people yearning to learn how to live peaceably together, it felt right to be there. This was the global village where we are entwined in each other's lives.

### 3. The UN Conference

On the 4th September the UN Fourth World Conference On Women began, thus overlapping by four days with the NGO Forum. This was the first Conference of its kind since the end of the Cold War, and so some countries were present for the first time — a record 189 countries in all. Most of the heads of the national delegations were women and, though there were more men present at this than at the NGO Forum, they were very much in the minority. The Vatican Delegation was headed by a women, Mary Ann Glendon, and was composed of 14 women and 8 men. There was one religious sister, a Superior General from Vietnam.

The aim of this Conference was to agree upon a general Statement of principles which would be known as the **Beijing Declaration**; to come to consensus on the issues under negotiation in the document, **The Platform for Action**, so that it could be finalised, ready for presentation to the UN Assembly to be held in New York in the third week of September.

The world of a UN Conference was so new to me, so different, so overwhelming. Gradually, I found out how to situate myself: that as a member of a NGO with observer status, I could sit in on the Plenary Sessions, attend the Special Activities, (organised by one of the UN bodies such as UNICEF, FAO, etc.), attend and contribute to one of the caucuses (groupings working on the square bracketed texts, either in geographical regions or by

specialising on a particular issue), be present at certain Press Conferences and go to national briefings.

Each morning, for the NGO's only, there was a briefing, organised by a team who assured that we were informed about the previous day's work, alerted to what would be happening that day, which areas were requiring delicate negotiation and what we might be able to do to help. At the first daily briefing we were given two very helpful documents, one with the paragraphs from the Platform for Action which contained the square brackets, and the second an analysis of these paragraphs — a help to understand the intricacies of the point in question and the UN language which has to be learned. I admired the dedication of the women who reported each morning. They were so well informed, had worked hard at the preparation for this Conference and did not spare themselves during it, working until late at night, patiently rewording a proposition which could be given to the official negotiators, ready to answer our questions and give us explanations. This opportunity to work for the rights of women throughout the world was not going to be missed. It was an opportunity but it was also a serious responsibility. As Gertrude Mongella, Secretary General of the Fourth UN Conference, said, "Millions have placed their trust in us. We must not fail them". Gertrude comes from Tanzania. The daughter of a carpenter, she has served as a parliamentarian in her own country, as a government minister and as ambassador to India. She claims that her success in leadership was nurtured by the high school education she received from the Maryknoll Sisters. When she was studying in the late 1950's, there were only two secondary schools in the country; and only 150 girls in a country of 7 million had completed secondary education.

This Conference was to be a "**conference on commitments**" to assure that the Platform for Action would be implemented at national, regional and international levels. One group from among the NGO's made a very large banner which was put up in one of the main corridors. It was entitled "Conference on Commitments" and underneath, whenever a country made a commitment in the Plenary, the country and the commitments made were posted. As of 11 September, 136 Governments had presented plenary speeches and 65 had made commitments in those speeches. Other Governments are already carrying out actions supportive of the Platform for Action, and those Governments were encouraged to publicise their activities. The first commitment to be publicised was that of the Holy See, which has committed 300,000 social welfare institutions of the Catholic Church to focus on literacy and education, health and nutrition.

Most of the points that required skilful negotiation were in the section on Health: these included sexual rights, reproduction, abortion, sexual orientation, family/families, parental responsibility. The multilateral debt was a question that the NGO's followed closely, some women would just stand outside the door where the negotiations were taking place as a reminder that women were watching. Unwaged work (housework and work outside the home, such as cultivating food, which has not been measured and valued in financial terms) was another delicate point. The organisation to which I was attached — WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations) — worked, together with other Christian groups, long and hard on the paragraph dealing with the place of religion in our lives. In the Draft Document religion appeared as a contributing factor to discrimination and oppression; then there was a move to remove the Word "religion" altogether. In the Final Draft the paragraph reads as follows:

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*To walk the Forum grounds was to be part of a moving sea of colour and diversity — all shades of skin and hair colour, all shapes and sizes of women, many wearing dazzling national costumes; every imaginable kind of poster, banner, button and T-shirt emblazoned with slogans and images.*

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Religion, spirituality and belief play a central role in the lives of millions of women and men, in the way they live and in the aspirations they have for the future. The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is inalienable and must be universally enjoyed. This right includes the freedom to have or to adopt the religion or belief of one's choice, either individually or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. In order to realise equality, development and peace, there is a need to fully respect these rights and freedoms. Religion, thought, conscience and belief may and can contribute to fulfilling women's and men's moral, ethical and spiritual needs and to realising their full potential in society. However, it is acknowledged that any form of extremism may have a negative impact on women and can lead to violence and discrimination.

SUSTAINABILITY is one of the words that

stood out for me — sustainable development, sustainable communities, sustainable livelihoods, sustainable work, even sustainable faith. The core struggle facing the world today is how to sustain and enhance the human community's well-being on every continent while at the same sustaining and enhancing the total community of all life, the Earth itself. For the rich North, sustainability raises questions about a lifestyle that is out of all proportion with what the Earth can sustain and peoples of the South can survive. In every category — food and fuel, medical care and housing, capital and technology, transportation and communications — our "way of life" is eating away at the very fabric of life for the rest of the world, for now and for future generations. As Jane Blewett of the Center for Concern said: "On every score, it is not sustainable, it is not replicable. It must change". This raises many questions and can provide us with practical ways to live Equality, Development, and Peace. It is up to each one of us to search for these ways and to commit herself/himself to putting them into practice.

In the same vein, but at the level of Governments, the 20-20 initiative, adopted on a voluntary basis at the Social Summit in Copenhagen in March, is a concrete step by which countries can guarantee basic social services for all. What it proposes is that developing countries earmark 20 per cent of their national budget, and donors 20 per cent of their aid, for high-priority human concerns, including basic education, primary health care, safe drinking water, family planning and nutrition. Pressure was put on Governments by the NGO's to make this one of their commitments at Beijing.

#### 4. Call — Responsibility

Each one of the 12 "Critical Areas of Concern" could be the subject of one talk. What is very important is that we study the Platform for Action; that, at our appropriate level, we try to assure its implementation; that we monitor how it is being carried out and that we communicate with different organisations regarding the follow-up. The UN itself has scheduled three times — in 1996, 1998 and 2000 — when the Platform for Action will be reviewed and assessed. The NGO's will be watching closely the responses of Governments.

Throughout the two weeks our response as women to a world in profound transition was both a challenge and a motivating factor for me. We are called to rekindle our hope and keep it alive, to keep trying to go to the roots of our problems and to be there with the poorest and the marginalised and be evangelised by them. Beijing made these words come alive for me in so many different ways as I experienced solidarity, as I became aware of the steps taken by women to improve the situation of

women, as I heard women prepare to lobby their Governments to assure that important statements be included and the means for implementation be expressed, as I realised that disciplined searching to understand the root causes of injustice, inequality and the denial of freedom is the on-going formation the world requires of us if we are to carry out our mission as an international apostolic community. My time in Beijing taught me that it is important for religious women to participate in these forums and conferences, to be well-informed about the issues, to speak out of experience and to contribute to assuring that Gospel values are present in the discussions and in the documents.

When Dr Margaret Mead, the great anthropologist, was asked, "What are the most important periods of human development in all history?" She replied without hesitation, "There are four periods in human history after which nothing was ever the same again: the period of evolution, the period of the ice age, the age of industrialisation and the period of the women's movement". My experience in Beijing confirmed in me the truth of that response.





# MOVING BEYOND BEIJING.....

## TOWARDS EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT, PEACE

*(Rose Fernando, FMM., is Coordinator for Justice and Peace. This Conference was given on Friday, 13 October 1995, at the SEDOS Seminar on Beijing: World Conference on Women).*

Rose Fernando, FMM

Why did the world need a **Fourth** World Conference on Women (FWCW) (4-15 September)? In 1945 the UN Charter was the first international instrument to establish the principle of equality for men and women. Since 1945, eighteen world events and documents have dealt with the cause of women. Where does the problem lie? With women or with men? With society or with religion? With tradition or with progress? With politicians or the masses?

Let us take a few moments to look at the reality of women today: I would like to share with you some facts and figures: (transparencies)

- 60 per cent of 1 billion rural poor are women.
- Of 960 million illiterate adults, 70 per cent are women.
- One third of women are physically abused.
- 500,000 women die each year because of complications from pregnancy.
- 500 women die each day due to unsafe abortion.
- Women are paid 30 - 40 per cent less than men for doing the same work.
- Women do two thirds of the world's work but get only 10 per cent of the world's income, and own 1 per cent of the world's land.
- If women's unpaid work in the household was given economic value, it would be worth US \$ 11 trillion, and add 70 per cent to global output.
- Women make up 80 per cent of the 100 million displaced and 29 million refugees in the world.
- Women's share of seats in the parliaments in 1995 is 11 per cent.
- Out of 130 million children not attending Primary School, 70 per cent are girls.
- 110 million mutilated (genital organs) women and children: 2 million continue to be mutilated

each year.

- US \$ 800 billion a year on weapons: and the international community does not have US \$ 6 billion needed to provide every girl child with education.

(published by the Committee for the 1995 World Conference on Women)

This list can go on and on. The above is just to give you an idea WHY a Fourth World Conference on Women was urgently necessary. An analysis of the present situation of women in the world clearly points to the following underlying cause: the present patriarchal system intertwined with: (i) religion, culture, tradition; (ii) the present world economic and political order. A status of inferiority, discrimination, exclusion and violence are some of the ingredients of the "daily bread" of women in several parts of the world. They are routinely deprived of education and health care; they are taken across national borders and sold into domestic service, bonded labour, prostitution, and marital slavery. The unwanted girl-child is sold to swell the commerce of female organs for medical and other services. (Girls are discriminated against throughout the world, also before birth in cultures where more value is placed on boys. Over 100 million girls are aborted or killed every year: this is usually due to poverty, family-planning laws, dowry). Rape as a war crime continues unabated: a woman is a spoil of war, a victim in the hands of the masculine enemy.

*"We are still only objects, not subjects"* Helvi Sipila of Finland, convener of the First World Conference on Women, told delegates in Beijing.

### The Beijing Event

It is in such a world context that over 32,000 women from all over the globe assembled in China for the NGO Forum, entitled: *"Looking at the World through Women's eyes"*. Through talks,

debates, workshops, art, dance and drama, women of every nation and race, of every religion and creed, of all spiritualities and ideologies, shared in poignant terms their sufferings and realities, their hopes and dreams for a different world. During each day of the NGO Forum (30 August to 8 September), voices of women filled the air in workshops and at plenaries. The following is a sample of the various workshops which were organised each day:

59	on peace and human security
58	on human and legal rights
48	on education
43	on health
41	on Government and politics
39	on economics
17	on environment
17	on mass media
15	on arts and culture
15	on race and ethnicity
12	on spirituality and religion
11	on science and technology.

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***"The NGO Forum on Women will be remembered as the turning point not only of women's determined efforts toward equality but also for the rest of the humankind's vigorous resolve to work toward a truly just and peaceful world".***

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The proceedings at the forum helped to create awareness, and served as an immediate preparation for the Conference itself.

Government delegations from 183 countries participated at the *Fourth World Conference on Women*, whose theme was: *"Action for Equality, Peace, Development"*, which began on the 4th September, and continued till the 15th. The FWCW produced two official documents:

#### **i) The Platform for Action (PFA):**

A 362-paragraph document, (which was approved by the *UN Commission on the Status of Women* in April 1995 for presentation in Beijing): on the 14th September, the Government delegations arrived at a consensus to adopt and implement most, if not all, of the document **which calls for action to achieve equality, development and peace.** (63 countries expressed reservations on one or more of the sections).

#### **The PFA Contains Six Chapters:**

**Ch.I** Mission Statement which notes that the PFA is an agenda for women's empowerment. It reaffirms the rights of women and the girl child, and calls for strong commitments.

**Ch.II** Global Framework describes the international condition. It includes references to past UN Conferences and changes since the end of the Cold War, the movement towards democratisation, the growing strength of NGOs, women and family, women and religion, and barriers facing women.

**Ch.III** Develops the 12 critical areas of concern which are identified as obstacles to the advancement of women.

#### **The 12 Critical Areas of Concern:**

1. Poverty
2. Education
3. Health
4. Violence
5. Armed and other Conflicts
6. Economic Participation
7. Power-sharing and Decision-making
8. National and International Mechanisms
9. Human Rights
10. Mass Media
11. Environment and Development
12. The Girl-child

**Ch.IV** Strategic Objectives and Actions based on the 12 areas of concern.

**Ch.V** Institutional Arrangements: this chapter notes that, while the primary responsibility remains with the State, implementation is dependent on a wide range of institutions at all levels. At the international level, actions by the UN system and other international institutions are specified.

**Ch.VI** Financial Arrangements: this chapter notes that financial and human resources have generally been insufficient for the advancement of women, and notes the necessity of political commitment to make available the human and financial resources. Actions at the national, regional and international levels are specified.

The document, *Platform for Action* is not binding on any country although its drafters hope it carries a social force that will influence national and international behaviour. It is intended as a "ready reference" that women's activists can use when local practices do not conform with these newly affirmed international standards. Its main objective is the empowerment of women. The full realisation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all

women is essential for the empowerment of women.

## ii) A Declaration:

A 38-paragraph document which includes 4 sections: i) an introduction; ii) a series of commitments; iii) a series of convictions; iv) a series of determinations.

### Role of the Government Delegations in Beijing:

Prior to the Conference, at the inter-governmental consultation on PFA, certain passages were bracketed as there was no consensus on these texts. About 20-25 per cent of the Draft Document was bracketed. In Beijing, the Government delegations had four possibilities:

- a) remove brackets
- b) amend the bracketed parts
- c) propose new alternatives for the section in brackets
- d) delete bracketed text.

(N.B. Only the bracketed texts were negotiable at the Conference).

### The WHAT and WHY of the Bracketed Texts could be Summarised as Follows:

**Economy:** it was clear at the FWCW that there still exists only one model of development, seen as economic growth. Certain countries refused to acknowledge that the "feminisation of poverty" was linked to the economic policies of the highly industrialised countries. Economic justice was not on their agenda.

**Fundamental Freedoms:** there were very different opinions on all that touched the fundamental freedoms of women. Equality between men and women, between the boy-child and the girl-child was not easily negotiable for certain countries, in the name of religion and culture.

**Peace:** some of the delegations refused to analyse the root causes of the different forms of violence endured by women. They refused to recognise the inter-connectedness between the structural violence inherent in the present World Political and Economic Order, where 10-20 per cent are in total control, and the women's realities. They refused to negotiate on disarmament and a stop to nuclear testing. No shift was made from military to social spending.

The above three major issues are clearly indicative of: i) the lack of equality, development and peace in our world; ii) the prevailing tensions between the North and South.

## **BEYOND BEIJING - WOMEN'S EXPECTATIONS** (As expressed by an OXFAM Spokeswoman)

### Women's Economic Rights:

- Structural Adjustment Reforms to be formulated in consultation with Governments, relevant UN Agencies, and women's organisations.
- to ensure that women's social and economic rights are not neglected.
- International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to be made accountable to the Economic and Social Council at the UN. IFIs to have their policies brought into line with international human rights standards to ensure their actions do not conflict with the human rights of women.
- The development of mechanisms to ensure the greater participation of women's organisations in formulating IFI policy.
- The promotion of greater accountability to ensure informed participation by women's groups and organisations.

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***Spirituality of Partnership: to work in partnership calls for a new way of being women and a new way of being men. It is an invitation to deepen our capacity to work in co-responsibility, to participate, to discern, and to make decisions.***

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### The Flexibilisation of Labour Markets:

- Implementation of International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions protecting women's employment rights, including equal pay, maternity rights, rights of association, and rights of part-time workers.
- Governments, financial institutions and the UN to measure and value women's unwaged work, and its inclusion in measurements of economic activity such as satellite accounts of GDP.

### Violence against Women:

- Ensure that violence is taken seriously and dealt with appropriately by local police forces and judiciaries. Legislation should be established which

specifically recognises, names, opposes, and establishes sanctions against all forms of violence against women. This should be done as part of the fundamental obligation of States to comply with established human rights instruments.

- Ensure that the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women has all necessary assistance from national Governments and UN Agencies in fulfilling her task, and to promote the renewal and strengthening of her task.

#### **Women's Rights in Conflict:**

- Recognition of women's rights in conflict. All relevant bodies must address the specific needs of women in these situations, and comply with all human rights standards.
- Rape to be recognised by all national and international fora as a war crime.
- Resources to guarantee refugee and displaced women's rights to protection and relief.

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***It was clear at the FWCW that there still exists only one model of development, seen as economic growth. Certain countries refused to acknowledge that the "feminisation of poverty" was linked to the economic policies of the highly industrialised countries. Economic justice was not on their agenda.***

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#### **Women's Right to Health:**

- A comprehensive approach to reproductive and sexual health and rights, strengthening provision for women's reproductive and sexual health care.
- Full implementation of the commitments made at the UN Conference on Population and Development, on women's sexual and reproductive health.

#### **Democratisation and Participation:**

- Women's rights could be delivered only with the support of the UN. The UN needs to be reformed so that it delivers its commitments to women and can be accountable for its success or failure in doing so.
- Governments and the UN must put money and staff into conference follow-up for Beijing to be a success.

#### **Some of the "Beijing Conflicts" and the Decisions Arrived At:**

**Economy:** "Analyse from a gender perspective, policies and programmes - including those related to macroeconomic stability, structural adjustment, external debt problems... with respect to their impact on poverty, on equality, and particularly on women...".

- "ensure that Structural Adjustment Programmes are designed to minimise their negative effects on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and communities...".

**Health:** "Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services".

**Sex:** "Women have the right to decide freely all matters related to their sexuality and child-bearing.... Forced sterilization and forced abortion are condemned".

**Sexual Rights:** "Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences".

**Rape in War:** "The systematic rape of women in wartime is a crime and must be immediately stopped. Perpetrators are war criminals and must be punished".

**Violence:** "Domestic violence is a world-wide problem, and Governments should intervene. Marital rape, genital mutilation of girls, attacks on women because their dowries are too small, domestic battering and sexual harassment at work are all forms of violence against women and violations of their human rights".

**Children's Rights:** "Children have the right to privacy when receiving health information and services, but their rights must be balanced against their parents' rights and duties. Whose rights dominate will vary according to the child's maturity".

**Female Inheritance:** Governments should guarantee women equal rights to inherit, although they may not necessarily inherit the same amount as sons in every instance.

**The Family:** "It is the basic unit of society and should be strengthened, protected and supported. Various forms of the family exist in different cultural, political, and social systems. Women must not suffer discrimination because they are mothers".

## CONCLUSION:

### Seeds of Hope at Beijing:

- Women moved beyond social and religious frontiers, beyond racial and economic barriers, united in heart and mind, working together for equality, development and peace.
- Some of the Government delegations were open and willing to negotiate, also with NGOs, in view of a better future for women.
- Some of the Governments made concrete commitments in view of empowerment and equality of women for their respective nations.
- The determination of the UN Secretariat to ensure a follow-up of the Beijing Document and of the Declaration, at the international level.

### Disappointments experienced at Beijing:

- In addition to the three main issues mentioned above, i.e. with regard to Economy, Fundamental Freedoms and Peace, there are also the following:
- Certain women's groups (for example, rural women, Indigenous women, domestic workers, the disabled, etc.) remained frustrated. Their voices were heard but their cries were not taken into consideration in the final text.
- The misrepresentation of women, and of the events at the NGO forum by the Mass-media did great harm to the cause. The news coverage focused more on the negative aspects and on logistics rather than on the issues of the Conference.
- There was little or no mention of the spirituality needed for a new value system for the transformation of our world as we enter the third millennium.

Any World Conference has four players: the Governments, the UN Secretariat, the NGOs and the Mass Media. Each has to play its role — with integrity. This is why we have failed in the past. The past decade has seen Seven World Conferences where much has been said, discussed and promised. But, glaring injustices continue, violence abounds, only 20 per cent of the world's population benefit from the present model of development, and peace remains fragile. Have each of the four "players" played their role with integrity?

Often, what the world fails to acknowledge is the **religious** element needed for the success of any event, at the national or international level. Here I would like to make my own the World Council of

Churches' intervention in Beijing: "We draw to the attention of the world community **the liberating power of religions**, and we affirm the positive and supportive role that the Churches and other religious institutions play in standing in solidarity with women....

In the light of all that we have heard today, below I share with you some aspects of a spirituality which I consider as being essential in order to experience the **liberating power of Christianity**. The spirituality proposed is inspired by women in the Bible.

1. **Spirituality of Relationality:** it is a spirituality for a new way of relating: with a re-imagined **God** (seen as male and female); with **people**, of all cultures and faiths; with the rest of **creation**.

Biblical inspiration: Ruth and Naomi, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, of two different cultures and religions. Their relationship is based on a relational value system.

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*The document, Platform for Action is not binding on any country although its drafters hope it carries a social force that will influence national and international behaviour. It is intended as a "ready reference" that women's activists can use when local practices do not conform with these newly affirmed international standards.*

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2. **Spirituality of Resistance:** as human beings and as women, it is only **resistance** that can keep us whole and integrated. We are called to resist all forms of injustice, oppression and violence.

Biblical inspiration: Shiphrah and Puah, the two Hebrew midwives who resisted the decree of the King of Egypt ordering to kill all the male children. In their own way, they resisted, at the risk of their lives, injustice, oppression and violence. Thanks to them Moses survived.

3. **Spirituality of Partnership:** to work in partnership calls for a new way of being women and a new way of being men. It is an invitation to deepen our capacity to work in co-responsibility, to participate, to discern, and to make decisions.

Biblical inspiration: Mary together with Joseph, were called upon to make important decisions. They were able to do so because of their humility and attitude of powerlessness.

4. **Spirituality for Empowerment:** it is a call to consider our own self-worth as women, so that in the process we can consider the worth of all others. In order to empower others, men and women, people of all races, castes and religions, we need to let go of our own need to dominate.

Biblical inspiration: Elizabeth empowered Mary by acknowledging her for who she was. Mary, being empowered was able to sing the *Magnificat*.

5. **Spirituality of Non-Violence:** It is only when a woman takes her rightful place at the policy and decision-making level (in politics, economics, etc.) that she can bring her qualities of compassion, non-violence and non-aggressivity, with a view to adopting non-violent strategies as response to all that is violent in our world, to bear. The woman has much to contribute towards conflict resolutions. The woman has a great responsibility in building a non-violent future.

Biblical inspiration: Esther, when she heard about the decree of extermination against the Jews, (they were her own people), she did not incite them to violence: she took the initiative to intercede with the king for their salvation. She succeeded in her approach.

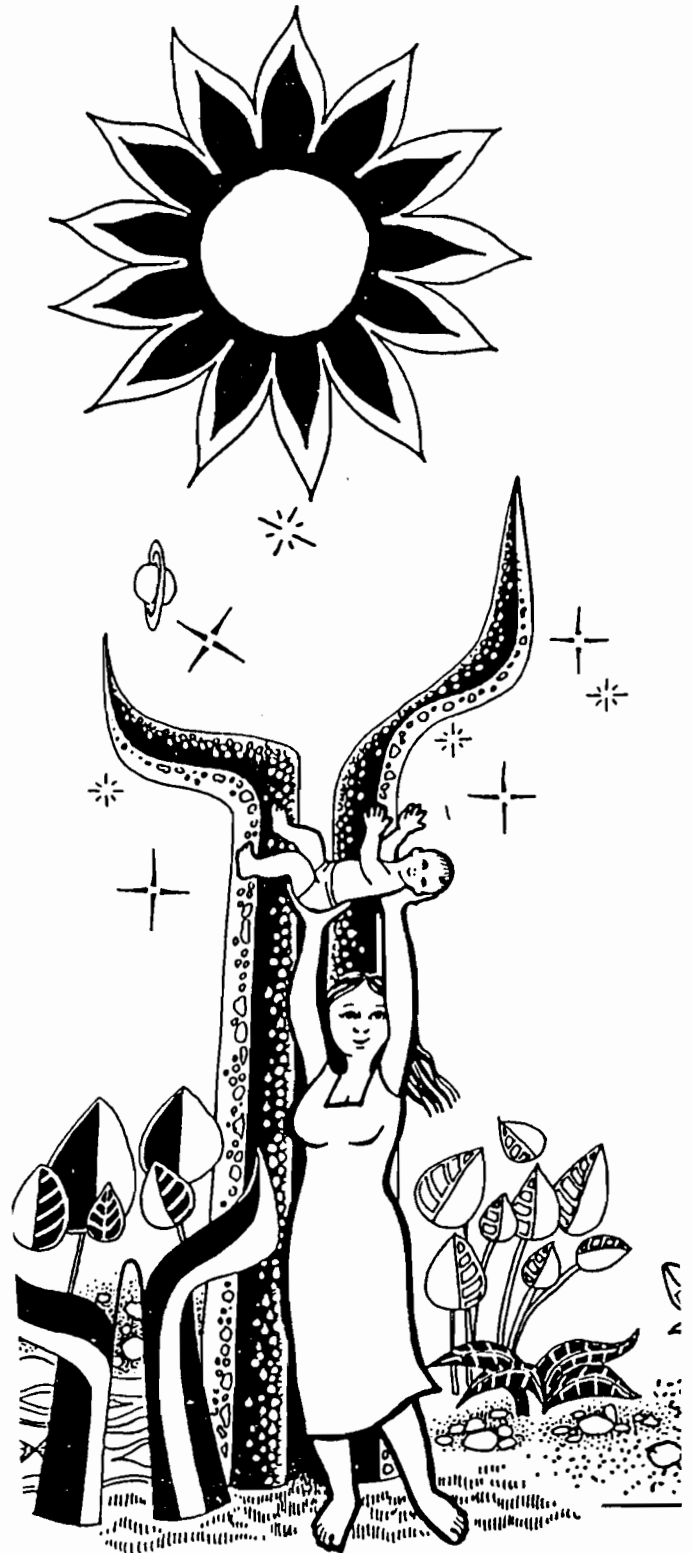
Gertrude Mongela, Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference on Women, in her opening statement, pleaded with the following words: "Millions have placed their trust in us. We must not fail them".

Khunying Supatra Masdit, Convenor of the NGO Forum on Women in Beijing, in her opening address forcefully declared: "The NGO Forum on Women will be remembered as the turning point not only of women's determined efforts toward equality but also for the rest of the humankind's vigorous resolve to work toward a truly just and peaceful world".

At the Forum and at the Conference, the cry for Peace through equality and development rent the air. These voices will not stop crying out. They continue to be echoed by thousands of women in every country as a follow-up of Beijing. They cannot and will not stop crying out till justice reigns in our world.

Justice will become a reality in the measure that:

- Women are transformed from being victims of inequality to become promoters of equality;
- Women are transformed from being victims of the current model of development to become promoters of sustainable development;
- Women are transformed from being victims of violence to become instruments of peace.



## ANNUAL REPORT TO THE 1995 GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF SEDOS

Once again a "SEDOS year" is coming to an end and the Secretariat is able to present to you here — and to those who in the whole world read the Bulletin — our Annual Report. After the concentrated effort of SEDOS in 1994 to accompany the African Synod with a symposium, the year 1995 has been more regular and the Report is therefore shorter. Our usual May Residential Seminar meant a new beginning; we held our first Residential Seminar in Ariccia, in the house of the 'Divino Maestro', and we were all happy to have found such a suitable place for our key activity. By the regular publication of the SEDOS Bulletin, containing English and French articles, we circulate materials of creative and stimulating reflection on the different aspects of mission today. The Conferences and Seminars here in Rome — we shall review them later — have again met with a generous response from our audience. (Remember last year's Conference in December on the Synod on 'Religious Life' and our mission). Through the new material coming from Women's and Human Rights organisations into our e-mail linked Secretariat, we were able to offer up to date information in our Documentation Centre. In this Annual Report, we are presenting only the main activities SEDOS has undertaken during 1995.

### I. STRUCTURE

#### 1. NEW SEDOS MEMBER (1995)

In November 1995, a new Congregation joined SEDOS.

*Sisters of the Charity of Saint Louis,*  
Superior General: Sister Geraldine Hagel,  
via Pecori Giraldi, 67,  
00135 Roma. Tel: 32 94 297 — Fax: 36 30 20 03

#### 2. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The members of the Executive Committee for the year 1995 were:

*President:* Yves La Fontaine, CMM., Superior General of the Marianhill Missionaries.  
Member of the Executive Committee since 1991.  
*Vice-President:* Joan Roddy, DMJ., Superior General of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. Elected in 1994.  
*Treasurer:* Seán Fagan, SM., Secretary General of the Society of Mary. Two terms and one year of extraordinary service.

Cecily Paul, FMM	Franciscan Missionaries of Mary	since 1991
Franziska Rehbein, SSpS	Servants of the Holy Spirit	since 1992
Giuseppe Filippi, MCCJ	Comboni Missionaries	since 1992
Jean-Claude Ceillier, M.Afr	Missionaries of Africa	since 1993
Dominique Samne, FSC	Brothers of the Christian Schools	since 1994
<i>Executive Director</i>	Walter von Holzen, SVD	
	Society of the Divine Word	since 1992
<i>Assistant Executive Director</i>	Victoria González de Castejón, RSCJ	
	Religious Sisters of the Sacred Heart	since 1994

#### 3. CHANGES IN THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Three members of the Executive Committee have completed one term of office: Franziska Rehbein, SSpS, Giuseppe Filippi, MCCJ, and Walter von Holzen, SVD. They were elected to the Executive Committee at the General Assembly of 1992. The three are available for another term. (See point: election).

**Father Seán Fagan, SM.**, who has given his generous services to SEDOS already for six years, helped us out for another year, because we could not find a treasurer. This is the moment to thank Father Seán for his generous service to SEDOS during these years. It is difficult to appreciate sufficiently all the time he dedicated to the many needs of SEDOS. I have to express a special thanks on behalf of the staff, who were

grateful for his great interest in organising constantly the official papers and payments of insurances and taxes. We lose an important collaborator.

I am glad to be able to inform you that we have high hopes of getting a Sister with experience to take on the task of treasurer next September. In the meantime, the SEDOS Secretariat, especially our Secretariat bursar, will bridge the gap, until Sister can start.

#### 4. SEDOS SECRETARIAT STAFF

Ms Patricia Cosgrave continues as Secretary. Her main responsibility is to type our SEDOS Bulletin into the computer. Besides she finds time to print out incoming e-mail documentation. On 15 November, Ms Miriam Yohini Francis finished her work at SEDOS after three years. She had started as a junior Secretary to Father Jenkinson and grew to become an important pillar of the Secretariat. We thank Ms Yohini with all our heart in the name of all who could — coming to SEDOS — enjoy her amiability and service. Ms Philippa Wooldridge continues with great dedication the proof-reading of the Bulletin. Also during this year, Sister Christel Daun, SSpS, was regularly helping in our Documentation room.

We are glad to employ in the place of Ms Yohini Francis, her younger sister Innocenta Sulogini Francis. She had already worked for SEDOS during Father Jenkinson's time (typing the book "Trends in Mission").

## II. ACTIVITIES OF SEDOS

### A. SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES

#### 1. *THE SYNOD ON RELIGIOUS LIFE AND OUR MISSION*

The morning session of our Annual General Assembly on 6 December 1994, was dedicated to the Synod on Religious Life which had finished a few weeks before in Rome. SEDOS was privileged, because the two Secretaries of the Synod accepted to speak for us. Father **Marcello Zago**, the Superior General of the Oblates, spoke on the dynamics and nature of the Synod and stressed the many convergences found during the four weeks. Brother **John Johnston**, the Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, where we usually hold our conferences, spoke on the Prophetic Role of Religious in a 'Changing Church and in a Changing World'. Besides the essential points of a prophetic vision of religious life in our times, he was able to present interesting considerations, especially valid for the Brother's vocation in the Church. This meeting on the Synod was rewarded with an attendance of over 300 people. The topics of Religious Life and Mission met the vital interests of many.

#### 2. *MEXICO AND CHIAPAS — THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS FACING MSGR. SAMUEL RUIZ*

On the afternoon of 28 February, SEDOS was able to reflect on a conflict in Mexico which continues to hold our attention. Father **Manuel Casillas**, a Comboni General Councillor and native of Mexico, was able to put the Chiapas situation into a wider context of the socio-political moment of Mexico. Father **Tom Ascherman, SVD.**, who had been working for many years as a missionary and professor in Mexico city, was able to show how the financial collapse of Mexico at the beginning of 1994, did not really come as a surprise, but definitely means more suffering for the poor population. No peaceful arrangement between the Government and the Zapatistas has been found. It is sad to mention, during the last few months, the Government has expelled several priests from the Dioceses of Msgr. Ruiz.

#### 3. *THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA AND HER MISSIONARY VOCATION*

Two theologians and missionaries from South America enriched our Eastertide. In preparation for the Fifth Missionary Congress to be held in Belo Horizonte in July, SEDOS wanted to recapitulate the actual problems of this continent, which after the Conference of Santo Domingo fell into a certain silence. Father **Clodovis Boff, OSM.**, brought us up-to-date with a survey of all the main challenges faced by the Brazilian Church, (and the whole continent). The new evangelisation, option for the poor, the sects, ecumenism, inculturation, communion and participation, were a few of his extensive considerations. Father **Carlos Pape, SVD.**, a Chilean missiologist and former member of our Executive Committee, spoke of the missionary



challenge the Latin American Church — with almost half of the world's Catholics — has to meet as a local Church in dialogue with other Churches.

#### 4. *THE SUMMIT ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE CHURCH*

In an afternoon Seminar on 2 May, two participants at the Social Summit of Copenhagen shared with us their experiences of the International Meeting organised by the UN. Both, Sister **Matilda Handl, OSB.**, and Father **Bob Vizillo**, the Director of Programmes of *Caritas Internationalis*, agreed that these meetings do have an influence and are opportunities for lobbying. Social development touches the centre of peoples' lives and therefore stays at the very heart of a missionary Church which is in dialogue with the sufferings of humankind.

#### 5. *SEDOS RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR — PHILIPPINES, INDONESIA AND THE PACIFIC*

From 30 May - 3 June over one hundred missionaries from 50 Congregations met for the Annual Study Week on Mission. For SEDOS the Meeting in Ariccia, in the retreat house of the "Divino Maestro", meant a change of site and new adaptations. The Conferences presented were the conclusion of a cycle of several years, in which we had studied missionary challenges in all the continents. All found that Ariccia is a nice place and we are looking forward to the 1996 meeting there. Sister **Mary John Mananzan**, a missionary Benedictine Sister, known for her books and conferences on women's issues, presented to us the 'New Pastoral Options' the Philippine Church wants to face. As a missionary Church, she was asking for openness and humble dialogue with her neighbours in Asia. Father **Michael Sastrapredja, SJ.**, explained to us why the Catholic Church is an influential minority in Indonesia and has reasons for hope. In his afternoon Conference, he explained the different currents present in Islam in Indonesia and how dialogue is taking place. Father **Ennio Mantovani, SVD.**, spoke of the important role the Church had in the recent history of New Guinea. In his afternoon Conference, he proved with practical examples, how vital inculturation has become for the future of the Church in the Pacific. We were fascinated by the unknown seas of the Pacific and felt that the day was far too short. The 3 working days were enriched by panels and much group-sharing.

#### 6. *UN FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN BEIJING*

On 13 October a big audience gathered to listen to three participants at the UN World Conference on Women. Sister **Helen McLaughlin, RSCJ.**, the former Superior General of her Congregation who had been President of SEDOS, gave us a lively report of her experience in Beijing. Ms **Eleonora Barbiera Masini**, a lay woman and sociologist working with women NGO's in the whole world, presented us with hard facts and showed how difficult the situation for women is in many parts of the world. Hopes for the third millenium come from the movement at the base. Sister **Rose Fernando, FMM.**, evaluated the Conference from the point of view of Justice and Peace for women. She insisted on the need for a new spirituality that will make change possible. — In the afternoon, Sister **Victoria González de Castejón, RSCJ.**, joined the three speakers of the morning in a very interesting panel. Sister Victoria represented SEDOS in Beijing.

#### 7. *MODERN RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM*

On Tuesday, 7 November, we had the opportunity to study in an afternoon seminar the phenomenon of modern fundamentalism in religion. Msgr. **Michael Fitzgerald, M.Afr.**, reviewed the different religions and explained the various forms fundamentalism takes in religion, be it: Christianity, Islam or Hinduism. Like most other Conferences mentioned in this report, this Conference will also be made available to our readers in one of the next editions of the Bulletin.

### B. SEDOS WORKING GROUPS

#### 1. *THE PHILIPPINES:*

The Philippine Working Group is already in the third year and continues to thrive. During this working year, the group had sent out a questionnaire to Philippine missionaries on all the continents. Very interesting responses were received and are still coming in. The group was very flexible in finding speakers — theologians and Bishops — passing through Rome. At the end of the Synod on Religious Life they held an open meeting with three Bishops. For these meetings they got a very big audience. The group was able to

elect a team of dynamic and convinced animators to keep the group going.

## 2. *HAITI*

The Haiti group — the most senior of the SEDOS working groups — was meeting until summer 1995. Since the return of President Aristide, there have been no new, violent developments in the country. We continue to gather some very interesting material coming in. In these weeks the coordinator will have to call a meeting and decide the future of the group which shows signs of weariness.

## 3. *WORLD DEBT*

Our day on 'World Debt', held last October with Conferences by Mr. Sergio Schlesinger and Mr. Dominick Coyle, brought into existence our Working Group on World Debt. Immediately a French and English sub-group were organised to facilitate the work. — Both groups continue to meet regularly. They study the different aspects of the highly complex problem of Debt. Both groups are convinced that — with the help of good articles and books — they are understanding better the complicated issue. They want to continue into next summer, and maybe offer the results of their studies to a wider audience in a SEDOS afternoon Seminar around Easter time.

## 4. *CHINA*

The 1994 Villa Cavalletti Meeting demanded a reflection on our missionary presence in China. The meetings resulted in very interesting exchanges on the different ways Congregations try to be, or become, present in China. The group is sharing experiences of how Congregations try to keep in contact with their very old members in China, and what can be done to provide formation for the young people interested in our institutes. It is a promising group.

## 5. *THE PACIFIC*

This year's Arricia Seminar with Father Mantovani's lively input on inculturation in the Pacific called for the foundation of a Pacific Working Group. The group will not be very large, but the participants are strongly convinced that the Church in the Pacific must become more present in the Universal Church. They are looking for a good animator who is based in Rome, in order to facilitate the work.

### C. PUBLICATIONS — TRANSLATIONS

#### 1. *AFRICA SYMPOSIUM PUBLICATION — THE KAIROS OF A SYNOD*

Our book "Africa — the Kairos of a Synod" went into a second edition with 300 exemplars (first 700). At the moment there are only 10 books left. The book was published shortly after the Synod, while the Papal Document was in preparation. Earlier books by SEDOS, like: *Trends in Mission*, edited a few years ago by Father Jenkinson, are still being sold by Orbis Books.

#### 2. *SEDOS BULLETIN*

Much of our time was spent in preparing, editing and posting our SEDOS Bulletin. We published again 10 issues with 32 pages and one double issue with the Conferences of the Ariccia Seminar. We maintained our practice of reserving more or less one third of the Bulletin to French articles. We can say that we have received many positive reactions to the Bulletin. We discontinued some of the very old complimentary (gratis) subscriptions. At the moment we print 1100 copies (about 300 go to the Generalates and 800 to different subscribers).

#### 3. *TRANSLATIONS*

We continued to prepare written translations in Italian, Spanish and French of the Conferences of the Ariccia Seminar. Because of the French articles in the Bulletin and the very limited demand for Italian, the high expenditure for these written translations should be re-considered.

#### 4. *SEDOS DOCUMENTATION CENTRE*

We continued the key-wording and computing of about 70 missionary magazines during the year. We are gradually increasing the number of good French reviews (*Études*, *Églises d'Asie*, *Select*, *Service d'Information des Églises d'Afrique*), in order to have a wider spectrum for possible publication. Our library is continuously enriched by the on-going collaboration of three editorials especially dedicated to SEDOS: for English books: *Orbis Books*, *MaryKnoll*, for Italian Missionary Publications: *L'Editrice Missionaria Italiana* (Bologna), and for Spanish: the *Editorial del Verbo Divino* from Estella. *Orbis Books* annually supplies about 30 books for our Ariccia Meeting.

Since August 1994, SEDOS is frequently using the Electronic Mail services. We are members of two local providers. *Agora* and *Peace Net* (the newly founded Catholic consortium with over 50 Congregations and the Vatican. Through the timely subscription to some Human Rights and women organisations, we were able to receive and print out abundant documentation on Beijing, also with articles in Spanish and French. At very little cost, we receive daily, since August, from the Third World Agency: **Peace World News** - interesting features on African and Asian countries. It seems important that SEDOS open a "Home Page" on the World Wide Web (WWW) where all the member Congregations can gradually introduce themselves with a missionary vocational page and where more missionary material (beyond the 32 pages of the Bulletin) can be offered. It seems especially important to reserve the signature SEDOS, on the net.

The fact that more and more Generalates have e-mail and net access, gives a new dimension to our missionary Documentation Centre. It will allow very quick distribution of interesting material to the Generalates, once their specific preferences are known (Africa, Asia, Human Rights, economics, culture). For example: through e-mail we received very early the 'Platform for Action', the final paper of Beijing, and we were able to distribute it into the mail boxes of religious throughout the world.

### III. LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

#### 1. *SEDOS ARICCIA SEMINAR 1996*

Our next Residential Seminar will be held at the same place as 1995, the "Divino Maestro" in Ariccia. Please reserve the following dates in your General Council's schedule to ensure participation. It will start on Tuesday, 14 May and end on Saturday, 18 May. As part of the wider preparations for the new millenium, the Executive Committee has chosen a general topic: *"The Bible and Our Mission Today"*. We are very glad to communicate that Father **Carlos Mesters, Ocarm.**, one of the outstanding biblists of our times, has accepted our invitation. — Sister **Maura Cho, SOLPH.**, from Korea, and Sister **Philippa Castronovo, FSP.**, will give insights from the Asian and European perspective.

#### 2. *WCC — AND MISSIONARY THEOLOGIANS OF SEDOS*

A group of theologians of UNIT II (Mission) of the World Council of Churches in Geneva has expressed interest in coming to Rome next summer, in order to discuss with Catholic theologians and missiologists, a position paper they are preparing for their own World Mission Conference. SEDOS will respond to the request and try to organise a team to dialogue with the World Council of Churches on mission.

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SEDOS Secretariat and the Executive Committee would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have helped us, in one way or another, in the realisation of the many projects over the past year.

Victoria González de Castejón, RSCJ  
Assistant Executive Director

Walter von Holzen, SVD  
Executive Director

## SUBJECT AND AUTHOR INDEX

### SUBJECT INDEX

#### AFRICA

- Algeria* Algérie — Quelle Croisade?, pp. 3-4; Algérie: un lieu pour vivre les Béatitudes, pp. 5-7; Two Sisters killed in Algeria, p. 222;
- Church* Evangile et Eglise en Afrique, face à la maladie et à la souffrance, pp. 263-268;
- Culture* Christianity and African Culture, pp. 243-249;
- Demography* Le Magistère Catholique face à l'explosion démographique, pp. 85-90;
- Development* La Démocratie Moderne en Afrique: facteur de développement integral, pp. 154-159; What For? The Structural Adjustment Programme in Africa, pp. 255-262;
- Dialogue* Evangelisation as Dialogue with African Traditional Religions, pp. 99-105;
- Ghana* Health and Medicine in African Traditional Religion, pp. 80-84;
- Islam* L'Islam en Afrique, pp. 142-147;
- Rwanda* Rwanda — Quelle Suite?, pp. 24-26; The Marginalisation of Africa by the International Media, pp. 49-52;
- Sudan* The Nuba of Sudan Face Genocide, p. 315; Suffering in Southern Sudan — Challenge to the Church, pp. 319-322;
- Synod* A Note on the Future of the African Synod — The End of the Assembly, 8-14;
- Tanzania* Catholic Women Organisation of Tanzania Joining Hands with the Other Women All Over the World on the Road to Beijing, pp. 232-233;
- Zaire* On se débrouille, en dépit du fouillis politique, p. 283;
- Zambia* Aids and Orphans, pp. 15-18;

#### ASIA — FAR EAST

- Asia* Reflexion — l'action de l'esprit en Asie, pp. 323-325;
- East Timor* East Timor, pp. 124-125;
- Indonesia* L'Islam lutte pour la suprématie, pp. 59-61; The Indonesian Missionary Church — Hopes and Problems, pp. 182-185; The Indonesian Church — The Challenge of Islam, pp. 186-192;
- Laos* Le répression s'intensifie contre les Chrétiens des minorités ethniques, p. 125;
- Pacific* Winds of Change and the Mission of the Church in the Pacific, pp. 205-215;
- Papue New Guinea* The Transforming Role of the Church, pp. 193-204;

- Philippines* L'Eglise et l'Etat à la réalité nationale des Philippines, pp. 106-111;
- Research Seminar* Philippines — Indonesia — Pacific Islands — The Philippine Church — Pastoral Options for the Year Two Thousand, pp. 164-176; Asia: A Missionary Challenge to the Philippine Church, pp. 177-181;
- Tibet* De plus en plus de réfugiés Tibétains arrivent à Katmandou (Nepal), p. 125;
- Vietnam* Le nouveau Cardinal Vietnamien exprime ses vues sur les tâches de l'Eglise au Vietnam, p. 63;
- CHINA** A Small Boat on the Boundless ocean, pp. 112-116; The Chinese Woman in Church and Society, pp. 234-236; Political — Religious Issue in China Today, pp. 311-313;
- Hong Kong* Children Without Childhood, p. 31;
- CHURCH** Our Prophetic Role in a Changing Church and Changing World, pp. 35-41; Le nouveau Cardinal Vietnamien exprime ses vues sur les tâches de l'Eglise au Vietnam, pp. 63; Le Magistère Catholique face à l'explosion démographique, pp. 85-90; L'Eglise et l'Etat face à la réalité nationale des Philippines, pp. 106-111; A Small Boat on the Boundless Ocean, pp. 112-116; The Church in Latin America: Between Perplexity and creativity, pp. 131-141; The Philippine Church — Pastoral Options for the year Two Thousand, pp. 164-176; Asia: A Missionary Challenge to the Philippine Church, pp. 177-181; The Indonesian Missionary Church — Hopes and Problems, pp. 182-185; The Indonesian Church — The Challenge of Islam, pp. 186-192; The Transforming Role of the Church, pp. 193-204; Perspectives Missionnaires dans la Hongrie actuelle, pp. 240-242; The Hispanic presence in the Church in the United States, pp. 302-306;
- CULTURE** Gospel and Cultures, pp. 19-23; The Hispanic Presence in the Church in the United States, pp. 302-306;
- DEVELOPMENT** World Summit for Social Development — Copenhagen, pp. 67-73; Cairo Conference — Le Magistère Catholique face à l'explosion démographique, pp. 85-90; The Copenhagen Alternative Declaration, pp. 280-282; L'Amérique Latine sous l'emprise de la volonté intégrationniste Nord-Américaine; pp. 292-298;
- DIALOGUE** Evangelisation as Dialogue with African Traditional Religions, pp. 99-105; The Indonesian Church — The Challenge of Islam, pp. 186-192; Christianity and African Culture, pp. 243-249;
- ECONOMICS** Le Libéralisme contre la Liberté, pp. 117-122; What for? The Structural Adjustment Programme in Africa, pp. 255-262;
- EVANGELISATION** Gospel and Cultures, pp. 19-23; Les nouveaux visages de la mission, pp. 42-48; Evangelisation as Dialogue with African Traditional Religions, pp. 99-105; Building Blocks of an Incarnational Evangelisation, pp. 148-153; Evangile et Eglise en Afrique, face à la maladie et à la souffrance, pp. 263-268; Les Pauvres et le regne de Dieu; pp. 307-310;
- HAITI** La géoculture comme clé d'interprétation d'Haiti?, pp. 74-79; What's the Matter with President Aristide?, p. 126;

- HEALTH** Aids and Orphans, pp. 15-18; Health and Medicine in African Traditional Religion, pp. 80-84; Evangile et Eglise en Afrique, face à la maladie et à la souffrance, pp. 263-268;
- HUNGARY** Perspectives Missionnaires dans la Hongrie Actuelle, pp. 240-242;
- LAITY** Suffering in Southern Sudan — Challenge to the Church, pp. 319-322;
- LATIN AMERICA** What Remains of the Option For The Poor?, pp.91-95; The Church in Latin America: Between Perplexity and Creativity, pp. 131-141; New Horizons for Liberation Theology, pp. 250-251; Message du 5<sup>e</sup> Congres Missionnaire Latino-Americain, pp. 286-287; Solidarity in Crisis: A Reflection on the Spiritual Reality of Solidarity in Latin America, pp. 288-291; L'Amérique Latine sous l'emprise de la volonté integrationniste Nord-Américaine: L'ALENA étendue au continent, pp. 292-298;
- Brazil* Women Working with Waste, pp. 314-315;
- MISSION** Les nouveaux visages de la mission, pp. 42-48; The Mission of the Religious after the Synod on Consecrated Life, pp. 53-58; Diversity and Truth: A Mis-siological Perspective, pp. 237-439; Perspectives Missionnaires dans la Hongrie actuelle, pp. 240-242; Comment Etre Missionnaire aujourd'hui?, pp. 273-279; Message du 5<sup>e</sup> Congress Missionnaire Latino Americain, pp. 286-287;
- POVERTY** What remains of the Option For The Poor?, pp. 91-95; An Interview with Mgr. Jacques Gaillot, pp. 123; The Copenhagen Alternative Declaration, pp. 280-282; Did Liberation Theology Collapse with the Berlin Wall?, pp. 299-301; Les Pauvres et le Regne de Dieu, pp. 307-310;
- REFUGEES** De plus en plus de refugies Tibétains arrivent à Katmandu (Nepal), p. 125;
- RELIGIOUS** The Mission of the Religious after the Synod on Consecrated Life, pp. 53-58; Political — Religious Issue in China Today, pp. 311-313;
- SEDOS Research Seminar, May 1995** Philippines — Indonesia — Pacific Islands, pp. 164-221;
- SYNOD** A note on the Future of the African Synod — The end of the Assembly, pp. 8-14; The Mission of the Religious after the Synod on Consecrated Life, pp. 53-58; Cardinal Lorscheider: Questions on the Synod Procedure, pp. 62;
- THEOLOGY** Theology, an Ecclesial Function, pp. 269-272;
- Liberation** New Horizons for Liberation Theology, pp. 250-251; Did Liberation Theology Collapse with the Berlin Wall?, pp. 299-301;
- VOCATIONS** Our Prophetic Role in a Changing Church and Changing World, pp. 35-41;
- WOMEN** De Mexico à Pékin, le long chemin des femmes — La IV<sup>e</sup> conférence des Nations Unies sur les femmes, pp. 223-229; UN Fourth World Conference on Women: Whose Conference is it?, pp. 230-231; Catholic Women Organisation of Tanzania — Joining Hands with the Other Women All Over The World on the Road to Beijing, pp. 232-233; The Chinese Woman in Church and Society, pp. 234-236, The Beijing Experience, pp. 326-332; Moving Beyond Beijing — Towards Equality, Development, Peace, pp. 333-338; Women Working with Waste (Brazil), pp. 314-315;

## AUTHOR INDEX

ALBACETE, Lorenzo, Mgr.	302-306	PIERIS, Aloysius	307-310
AMALADOSS, Michael, SJ	42-48	RAISER, Konrad	19-23
BELLEMARE, Gisèle, MSOLA	24-26	RILEY, Maria, OP	230-231
BETTO, Frei	299-301	RUDEL, Christian	292-298
BOFF, Clodovis, OSM	131-141	SARPONG, Peter K. Mgr.	80-84
CAREY, Frank, M.Afr.	15-18	SASTRAPRATEDJA, M. SJ	182-185; 186-192
CASALDALIGA, Pedro	288-291	SESANA, Renato Kizito, MCCJ	319-322
Catholic University of Eastern Africa,	99-105	STAMER, P.J.	142-147
COULÉE, André	273-279	TABARD, Père René, CSSJ	263-268
DAVIES, Fr	124-125	TAMAZ, Elsa	250-251
De MESA, José M.	106-111	TEISSIER, Henri, Mgr.	5-7
DURRER, Maryse	223-229	TICOZZI, Sergio, P.I.M.E.	311-313
FERNANDO, Rose, FMM	333-338	TRABER, Michael, WACC	49-52
GOROSTIAGA, Xabier, SJ	74-79	VIGIL, José Marfa	91-95; 288-291
GUAZZELLI, Mgr.	124-125	WALIGGO, J.M.	154-159
GUTIÉRREZ, Gustavo	269-272	WARK, André	59-61
HENRIOT, Pete	255-262	ZAGO, Marcello, OMI	53-58
Latin-American Missionary Congress	286-287		
HUG, James E. SJ	67-73		
JOHNSTON, John, FSC	35-41		
JUGUET, Eugène, MEP	117-122		
KAROKARAN, Anto, CMI	148-153		
LAZLO, Edith and Tamas	240-242		
LEGRAND, Lucien	323-325		
LORSCHIEDER, A. Cardinal	62		
LUENA, Olive D.	232-233		
LUXIAN, Aloysius Jin, Bishop	112-116		
MAGESA, Laurenti	8-14		
MAHEU, Betty Ann, MM	234-236		
MANANZAN, Mary John, OSB	164-176; 177-181		
MANTOVANI, Ennio, SVD	193-204; 205-215		
MARC, Gabriel	85-90		
McLAUGHLIN, Helen, RSCJ	326-332		
MICHEL, F. SM	3-4		
MODEHN, Christian	123		
MOTTE, Mary, FMM	237-239		
Non-Governmental Organisations — (Copenhgen Summit)	280-282		
ODUYOYE, Mercy Amba	243-249		



## COMING EVENTS

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### WORKING GROUPS

- 19 December** World Debt (French group) (Brs. of the Christian Schools)  
**23 December** Pacific 15.30 hrs. at SEDOS  
**26 January** World Debt (English) 15.30 hrs. at SEDOS
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