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## Editorial

*Fr AQUILINE TARIMO, SJ, a professor of theology in Eastern Africa, in the first article examines one of the most intriguing questions of African Society, the influence of ethnicity on the nations, regions and social relationships in Africa. He observes at present a politicization of ethnic groups and the consequent abuse of ethnic consciousness. He proposes and elaborates a constructive approach to ethnicity and sees an important role for the Church in this process.*

*In our second article, Fr PHILIP GIBBS, SVD, a missionary and professor of theology in Papua New Guinea, studies attentively the cultural environment. He asks himself how modern missionaries can respond to a rapidly changing cultural situation. Are there ways to relate to Melanesian cultural values without falling into romanticism or negative cynism? –*

*In our third contribution, we are able to offer you one of the important documents the Asian Church produced at the beginning of the year. The Final Declaration of the January meeting of the FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES (FABC), witnesses to the vitality of the Asian Churches, appealing for creative renewal at all levels of pastoral services and redefining with hope the Asian Churches' role of love and service to the most needy. –*

*We conclude our September issue with a reflection by Sr SHARON EUART, RSM, on the roles of women in the Church of the new millennium. She maintains that, while this question is evoking great expectations in some people, it continues to evoke anger and alienation in others. She thinks that the many slow changes in different fields will allow us to enter the new century with optimism. –*

## Sierra Leone

### XAVERIAN MINISTRY IN REFUGEE CAMPS

*The rebel war in Sierra Leone, which has lasted since 1991, has been crucial to the Xaverian missionary engagement in that country of West Africa. Almost all mission stations had to be abandoned for they were attacked and looted by rebel soldiers. Many lives were lost — including that of priests and sisters, catechists and community leaders. Thousands of people became homeless and refugees. To our questioning dismay, many of the young men and women who carried guns and caused mayhem in Sierra Leone had studied in the mission's own schools.*

*Having worked there for over 50 years, we, Xaverians, do not feel we can abandon Sierra Leone now. Indeed, while the peace process, in which Bishop George Biguzzi, S.X., of Makeni, had a determining influence, meanders in tortuous ways there, the missionaries continue to return and to pick up the pieces of their torn and ransacked missions, and, most importantly, to be God's loving and reconciling presence for and with their people, Christian and Moslem.*

*Presence is the essence of the Xaverians' ministry particularly with the refugees from Sierra Leone still in Guinea. Xaverian Fathers Willy, Jim Tully, Pascal, Pucini, Victor Mosele, Angel Aguirre, Lazzarini, Franco, all veterans of the Sierra Leone mission, have followed their people to the refugee camps and intend to remain there until needed. Their presence, however, demands follow up. Many families have been separated from one another — husbands, wives, children, members of the extended family. They work to reunite at least some of them with their families who may be in other camps or in another country. This involves processing papers and sometimes bending the law in order to provide the needed assistance.*

*The refugees have been wounded, and may have lost hope. They urgently need reconciliation. What they need most is a heart to listen to their pain, to share the remembered vision of family members maimed or massacred before their eyes, to care about the little ones who have no way to go to school and the youth who have nothing to occupy their time, to find some little bit of clothing to replace the rags on their back that are all they have left, to be given some assurance that they are persons with worth and dignity that all the destructive forces against them cannot take away, and to be offered the consolation of celebrating the Eucharist and the other Sacraments.*

*The Xaverian missionaries see the deprivations, misery, confusion, and hopelessness, and they listen to the cries of distress. Even more devastating than the physical trauma is the emotional suffering and psychological anguish. Their shock is numbing...*

*In such an atmosphere the faith, prayer and fraternity of the people of the Catholic Communities are the secret which explains their great capacity to suffer and to overcome their tragedy. These attitudes evangelize, inspire and stimulate the very evangelizers. The richest resources of a nation, particularly a nation prostrated by injustice, violence and suffering, is its people. The word of God is heard in the very history of these people.*

## Ethnicity, Common Good, and the Church in Contemporary Africa

### Introduction

Many people consider the problem of ethnicity in Africa to be perennial. Most problems such as favouritism, sociopolitical disorder, manipulation of ethnic identity for selfish gains, ethnic hatred, civil wars, and so forth, are all attributed to ethnicity. Although ethnic hostilities are constantly revealed in politically motivated murders, torture, unjustified imprisonment, disappearances, and denial of human rights for the targeted ethnic groups, a critical evaluation of positive and negative aspects of ethnicity remains a taboo in public. Even in the Church ethnic tensions are strongly experienced. Yet, for unknown reasons, such a social problem has not adequately become a part of theological reflections. Perhaps, this is because the Church is an integral part of the problem.

Although many people, from the African perspective, speak about ethnicity in its degenerated form only a few scholars have really reflected seriously on its nature, development, and impact on social life. Some of the available literature on this subject, however, lack a critical examination of it in relation to the changing meaning of ethnic identity, ethnic loyalty, common good, political competition, and religion. Consequently, this situation, in a way, has accelerated the process of misinterpreting the whole phenomenon of ethnicity. From my viewpoint, the problem of ethnicity in Africa can thoroughly be understood if we take seriously the following questions. First, how is ethnicity and ethnic loyalty understood today? Second, how is ethnicity related to the conflict of loyalties? Third, how has the dynamism of ethnic loyalty fashioned the African understanding of common good and politics? Fourth, has the Church managed to stand above ethnic loyalty and the tension it generates? Fifth, how can we promote a constructive way of approaching the issue of ethnicity in contemporary Africa? Given the importance of these questions the subject of ethnicity deserves a critical analysis. The focus and presentation of this essay follows the framework of the aforementioned questions.

### The Meaning and Nature of Ethnicity

The term ethnicity,<sup>1</sup> as applied to Africa, refers to a group of people sharing a common name, language, symbols, sociopolitical organization, religious beliefs,

cultural heritage, sometimes territory, common ancestry (descent), and a group identity. Ethnicity, or a sense of peoplehood, has its foundation in combined remembrances of past and present experiences, common inspirations, value systems, norms, and expectations. Most of the indigenous peoples of Africa have lived and continue to lead their lives within the framework of an ethnic group. If a person is in difficulties, it is common for this person to call for help from his or her ethnic group. In urban areas ethnicity is appealed to when people are in need of financial support, political support, and solidarity. For many people, ethnicity stands as a symbol of communal identity, solidarity, security, familiarity, and cooperation. Be it in rural or urban areas, ethnicity remains a powerful force, although it “varies like temperature, from time to time, depending on prevailing circumstances”.<sup>2</sup>

The meaning and nature of ethnicity is difficult to grasp unless we relate it to the changing structures of local institutions and States.<sup>3</sup> Without that connection, we will continue using old answers for new questions. We have to consider cultural, socioeconomic, and political changes that have been taking place in African societies and how they have refashioned ethnic identities. From my point of view, ethnicity, as far as Africa is concerned, assumes a triple history: precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial. In the precolonial period, ethnic groups were more rural, regional, homogeneous, and there was less competition between ethnic groups for the scarce economic resources than is the case today. I am not saying that traditional communities had no economic difficulties. What I want to point out, as J. Lonsdale argues, is that in precolonial African societies, there was a recognized “art of living in a reasonably peaceful way” without a State in the way it is understood in the West.<sup>4</sup> During the colonial period, small ethnic groups, under the principle of divide-and-rule, were given new features because they were forced to merge.

Because of the ethnic competition for the scarce economic resources and political power, each ethnic group tends to fight to have a president coming from their group. For them, the president will loot the State for his ethnic group. In other words, the president is not for the State, but his ethnic group. This is the root cause of the struggle to control the State. Ethnic strategies are often connected with the resources of modern economy, for example in gaining employment, educa-

tion, securing loans, and seizing appointments for lucrative offices. Through this example, we can therefore conclude that the competition for the limited economic resources within the State, in the post-colonial era, to a certain extent, has changed the structure and the meaning of ethnicity in Africa. Let us now explore the source of the conflict of loyalties.

### **Ethnicity and Conflict of Loyalties**

The problem of ethnicity in Africa is also linked with the question of competing loyalties. In many parts of Africa, ethnic loyalties have risen above other loyalties. The reason is that during the colonial era there were a few economic or political incentives which ethnicity could offer. Today, ethnic loyalty may mean a quick promotion in one's status especially in places of work. Even the internal administration of churches has shown that their loyalty often lies more with their ethnic groupings rather than with Christianity. In difficult times religious leaders, as political leaders, take refuge in their ethnic groups. A good example here is the genocide that happened in Rwanda. In this event, Christians could not appeal to their Christian conscience to address the hatred that existed between Hutus and Tutsis.<sup>5</sup> Even those in positions of authority like Bishops could not raise their conscience above the criterion of ethnicity. Christianity, for many, is like a coat which can be put on only when it is needed; when it is not, it is forgotten in the wardrobe. This is the sign that Christianity is still on the periphery. We will return to this point in the later stage of our discussion.

How can we integrate ethnic loyalty within the structure of State? In carrying out this project, the question that we have to struggle with should be: How can we reconcile ethnic loyalty with nationalism? To begin with, we have to acknowledge that a leader has "commitments not simply to general values and ideals but also to concrete people".<sup>6</sup> The process of decision-making and the kind of common good that we are committed to are heavily dependent on the persons and groups which claim one's loyalty.<sup>7</sup> Loyalty can be influenced by interest group, cultural group, religious group, or self-interest desires which use others as a ladder to acquire popularity, power and wealth. Consequently, moral conflicts in public life can be fruitfully looked at as conflicts between these concrete commitments to various groups. As a way of demonstrating this point, the analysis of Abner Cohen on the relationship between African cultures and modern politics in urban areas reveals that [ethnic] organizations camouflage or deny [their] existence in public and its members will adopt a low profile and attempt to fade into the general social landscape. At the same time, however, its members must know about one another and should be able to recognize one another as co-members in order to coordinate their activities in the interests of the group and to avail themselves of the privi-

leges of membership. In other words, they have to be visible to one another, but invisible as a group in public.<sup>8</sup>

This concern brings us close to the question of the plurality of loyalties which is an important clue in exploring the relationship between ethnic loyalty and the common good in Africa.

A leader can only be just if he or she is able to find a balance between competing loyalties. This is possible by forming social structures that are founded upon the principle of overlapping loyalties. This is the only possibility that can keep leaders from becoming opportunists or persons who advocate the interests of a particular group. This project entails "weighing competing loyalties and competing goods and to act in a way which attends to their rightful claims".<sup>9</sup> The question of respecting loyalties of ethnic communities is an important part of forming a cohesive political society. As such, the process of harmonizing competing loyalties must be achieved by maintaining a balance between the State and ethnic communities. This demand therefore brings us to the point of examining the relationship between ethnic loyalties and the common good.

### **The Relationship Between Ethnic Loyalty and the Common Good**

Ethnicity affects, directly or indirectly, our understanding of common good. While ethnic sentiments may undercut the nationalistic approach, they may also be a force that enhances any sense of nationhood and common good.<sup>10</sup> Despite the rhetoric of national unity, the typical African's understanding of common good, solidarity, and community remains limited to the circles of particular ethnic groups. This situation shows that important issues such as how to form a nation based on traditional values and political consensus were not addressed sufficiently after independence. African leaders remained stuck in the political ideology of *uhuru* (freedom). They did not know that the political struggle of *uhuru* was a temporary ideology.

Involvement of an ethnic group in a bigger group like a State should be understood from the perspective that enables each ethnic group to develop deliberative powers and a sense of purpose in search for the common good. In this context, access to a multiplicity of groups promotes a diversity of experiences and interests, and enables each group to participate fully in the common structure laid down by consensus. The idea of political consensus can articulate new perspectives and preferences which will eventually enter into the balancing process, dissolving political conflicts, and creating local institutions that guarantee fairness. This approach gives priority to innovation and change that articulates new perspectives and preferences that eventually seep into the balancing process, affecting the shape of interest groups. Pluralism protects rights of individu-

als, groups, and promotes cohesion and consensus based on consent. A balance of interests achieved by the free bargaining of groups in society creates a comprehensive conception of the common good and is thus a more equitable way of dealing with competition among ethnic groups and ensuring equal opportunity for all. Such an understanding, in turn, will enhance cooperation between different groups within the society.

The task of African societies is therefore collectively to envision and formulate a new concept of the common good based on ethnic identities, political consensus, and people's consent. To develop such a vision does not mean that ethnic differences must be denied. Not at all. What is important is to orient such identities toward an overlapping consensus which fosters the common good. This task entails developing a more profound unity that underlines ethnic differences. It is not a unity that imposes the sameness, but a unity that demands equality, freedom, participation, and "creativity in the interest of moral good".<sup>11</sup> This way of proceeding, as I have mentioned earlier, is important because the African understanding of the common good is still frequently limited to the framework of the ethnic well-being. That is why most city-dwellers, as observed by Goran Hyden, are sensitive to the needs and interests centred on their village of origin and ethnic group.<sup>12</sup> Place of birth and ethnicity are seen as having influence over cities, despite the fact that cities are the seats of power and wealth. The understanding of the common good follows the same framework. Let me give two examples to illustrate this point. During his reign, Mobutu Seseseko, the former president of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formally Zaïre), used State funds to construct an airport in his village, Gbadolite. In the same way, Felix Houphouët-Boigny, the former president of Ivory Coast, built the State House and a basilica in his village, Yamoussoukro. These two examples show that ethnic identities often remain the point of departure and basic building-block for the concept of common good that an African nation intends to pursue.

### **Politicization of Ethnic Groups and the Abuse of Ethnic Consciousness**

Ethnicity acts as a pole around which group members are mobilized and compete effectively for State-controlled power, scarce economic resources, and constitutional protections. Ethnicity, as used in this context, refers to a subjective perception of common origins, historical memories, ties, and aspirations. Under the leadership of political opportunists, members of the ethnic group are urged to form an organized political action-group to maximize their corporate political, economic, and social interests.

Conflicts involving ethnicity could be summed up

as those advocating interests of "culturally distinct peoples, [ethnic groups], or clans in heterogeneous societies who are locked in rivalries about the distribution of or access to power",<sup>13</sup> and in which those concerned have certain regions as their stronghold and tend to follow the strategy of ethnonationalism. Most of the internal and political conflicts found in Africa involve ethnic groups struggling for control of their region (as it is the case in Angola, Kenya, Chad, Nigeria, Sudan, and Ethiopia), or even struggling to control the entire country (e.g., Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia and Sierra Leone).

What happens is that ethnic groups engage themselves in a struggle for power and privilege with other ethnic groups within the political frameworks. In this battle, each ethnic group will tend to advocate its distinctiveness in different ways. Bear in mind that this phenomenon does not happen simply because of conservatism. Rather, ethnic groups are also interest groups whose members share some common economic and political interests.<sup>14</sup> It is essential to note that people do not kill one another merely because of the cultural and ethnoregional differences. They kill each other when these differences are used to create divisions, unhealthy competition and hatred between ethnic groups. The situation does not become explosive until such a climate of social relationship is extended to the socioeconomic and political spheres.

In different ways, ethnicity is often used by *élite* groups in socioeconomic and political competition. The factor of ethnicity plays a significant role in informal relationships. Ethnicity is a live political and economic issue. It is not just a mere cultural identity limited to friendship, marriage, and rituals. Some politicians at regional and national levels allocate to their ethnic groups considerable State resources to extend their influence and control. Without scruples, such politicians intend to maximize their support and their access to resources in competition with rival politicians through ethnic groups. Consequently, this practice breeds corruption, rivalry, hatred, and conflict between ethnic groups.

The competition for political power and scarce economic resources has become a way of life in African societies. According to Solofo Randrianja, elites encourage the emergence of an ethno-nationalism in order to mobilize supporters. This type of politicized ethnicity makes its appearance when nationalism extends the field of action of the ethnic community from purely cultural and social spheres to that of economy and politics. The progressive transformation of Inkatha, which began as a cultural association, into a political organization used by *apartheid*, is a good example of this.<sup>15</sup>

When ethnic groups are politicized, ethnicity moves from the private sphere to the public domain. Those who mastermind this transition work for political par-

ties that serve the interests of the elite.

The practice of politicizing ethnic groups appeals to cultural identities for its effectiveness. Elite political leaders cooperate with cultural intermediaries such as chiefs and religious leaders in using cultural identity for political maneuvers. In this process, ethnic identities are reformulated to suit their political agenda. Political opportunists proclaim themselves as representatives of the ethnic group while always promoting their interests in the first instance. "They combine knowledge and power in a context where the colonial economy of predation, except in a few rare cases, has left the State as the principal source of wealth and social advancement".<sup>16</sup> Politicization of ethnic groups appeals to the ethnic solidarity based on ties of blood-relationships. This practice takes the form of a conservative return to the grassroots of ethnic identities. The appeal to group symbols is used to construct a sense of cohesion which makes it easier for them to mobilize people. Sometimes they use cultural slogans to arouse the emotions of the people and make them accept even what they do not understand.

Interest groups competing for scarce economic resources, "often invoke traditional sentiments to reinforce their appeal".<sup>17</sup> The success of political leaders in winning popular backing depends upon the trust which they inspire, and ultimately on their ability to obtain material benefits for their faction, in the form perhaps of a government job or loan, a school or clinic, a road or electric supply. In this case, "we are dealing with a kind of patronage politics, with economic resources used as political currency to enable the leadership to buy support for their policies".<sup>18</sup> Since political and bureaucratic leaders may also appeal to ethnic identity to fulfil their ambitions, the practice of politicizing ethnic groups becomes one cause among many causes of ethnic conflicts.

By appealing to ethnic loyalties and affinities political leaders urge people to keep allegiance to those who represent ethnic interests. The way of persuading people to support politicians appeals to the traditional methods of obeying and supporting a chief. Ordinary people feel that such politicians are about to restore the traditional political systems which ensured participation of all. But the truth is that political opportunists, under the cover of African cultures, apply principles of manipulation and predation to serve their own interests. The consequence of using these principles is that ethnic groups are trained to acquire an attitude of concentrating on winning favours and fighting for the limited national resources. Their participation in public affairs is reduced to a game of advocating ethnic interests rather than building structures that can guarantee equality, justice and development for all. As a result, people no longer see hard work as the source of economic success. As far as this practice is concerned,

one can argue that ethnicity, when misused, destroys local institutions and the sense of the common good. First, it tends to substitute values of human rights and equality among citizens in favour of particular groups. Second, it reduces equal and fair access to resources to rivalries between groups rather than treating it as a question of social justice.

As far as elections are concerned, "voters feel as though [they are] not electing representatives but ethnic mini-presidents".<sup>19</sup> Voters do not appeal to the criteria of economic performance, health services, education, human rights, and constitutional change. The important question for them is how to enable their interest-group to control the State. "The rationale used is basic: let us ensure that many of ours control government offices".<sup>20</sup> Political leaders convince ethnic groups to believe that they rule the country on their behalf. The president is seen as an ethnic ruler. People believe that if one of theirs holds a high post, it is held in trust for the benefit of their ethnic community alone.

Following the same framework, political parties become ethnic parties slated for ethnic bargaining to acquire political powers that would allow them to loot the State. Most political parties in Africa are handled like ethnic associations by elites who make a career in politics. It is from this perspective that parties promote ethnic nationalism and ethnic politics. Others see the introduction of multi-party democracy as a way of decentralizing the State in favour of ethno-nationalism. Consequently, this practice creates mutual mistrust between ethnic groups. Those who belong to the less dominant ethnic groups feel left out and discriminated against by the system. In turn, they feel obliged to act, legally or illegally, to ensure their survival. This is, in fact, the root cause of African conflicts. Let us now turn to the practice of ethnicity in the Church and its consequences.

### **Ethnicity and the Church**

The question of ethnic loyalty and ethnic tension exist also in the Church. This situation has robbed the Church of its ability to create a new community. According to D.W. Waruta, "most religious groups and denominations, closely scrutinized, are very [ethnic] in their composition and leadership. Those that happen to be multiethnic with a national outlook are plagued with internal [interethnic] conflicts".<sup>21</sup> Such a framework shows that the issue of ethnicity operates and creates tension in the Church as it does in the political arena. In view of trying to understand the operation of this phenomenon one has to find out the real causes of this situation. As far as the history of African Christianity is concerned, this situation is linked to the method applied by certain missionaries of concentrating their effort of evangelization within a given ethnic group, "thus producing a largely [one ethnic] denomination. [In the

process of maintaining their dominance, such ethnic groups tend to] conduct their worship services in their ethnic languages, thus keeping out all others".<sup>22</sup>

Concerning power distribution and administration, leaders such as Bishops from the mainstream Churches are often appointed and assigned duties basically on ethnic arrangements as more and more Dioceses are created along ethnic boundaries. These churches are threatened by the clamour for each ethnic group to have its own Bishop! Sometimes such arrangements are justified by language and cultural considerations.<sup>23</sup>

On the same point, Aylward Shorter argues: it would be surprising if the Church were not both a victim and an accomplice of ethnocentrism. Up till now, Catholics have been reticent about the ways in which they have been affected by the "ethnic disease". Church authorities approached the ethnic problem with extreme caution, creating ethnically encapsulated Dioceses, and aligning with ethnically oriented governments. Even so, it was always possible to avoid appointing Bishops who were ethnic outsiders, or who belonged to unpopular minority ethnic groups.<sup>24</sup>

Christians believe that the Church is called to promote a multiethnic community of faith, where there is no Jew and Gentile, but one family of God built on faith, love, and hope. This teaching, however, has not yet become a reality in Africa. The reason is that even the Church has not been untainted by [ethnicity] and therefore it too has lost the ability to create the new community.... The challenge for modern Africa and particularly for the guardians of public morality who include the Church is how to confront this problem and transform it from a negative to a positive reality.<sup>25</sup>

When Augustine Karekezi, a Rwandan Jesuit, was asked in an interview to link the role of the Church in Rwanda with what happened there in 1994 he said: My faith as a Christian has been affected seriously, in the sense that I cannot realize that such evil could happen in a country where so many people are Christians and where there are so many Catholics (over 65 percent) with such influence in education. What have we been doing as Christians and as priests? How can we preach the love of God, the compassion of God, in this situation? All these questions rise from an experience of the deep mystery of evil, evil that is so consistent and so strong that its power is prevailing.<sup>26</sup>

One may deceive oneself by saying that the conflict of Rwanda was a unique case and that such questions do not apply elsewhere in Africa. The fact is that such questions cannot be limited to the Christians of Rwanda. The experience of Rwanda should be taken as a typical example to all Christians of Africa. The experience of Rwanda reminds us that all Christians from Africa are called to ask themselves serious questions especially about the relevance of their Christian faith in the earthly life. This means we have to scruti-

nize the kind of evangelization found in Africa — our preaching and celebration of sacraments in relation to social relationships — all these must be scrutinized very carefully. In addition, the question that can guide us in this reflection should be: Does our Christian faith make any difference in our everyday life? There is no way we can avoid confronting this question. To do that would be the same as trying to run away from the challenges of earthly life.

The challenge of the African Church is how can it appeal to the Gospel values to construct a new community with new social relationships. This is a serious challenge because the Church is considered to be a part of the problem of ethnic hatred and as such it has failed to stand above this situation. An expression which reveals this attitude says: "the blood of ethnicity is thicker than the water of baptism". There are six points which support this attitude. First, for many years the Church has been using the structure of ethnicity for evangelization. Second, the Church has been reluctant to address the problem of ethnic hatred openly. Third, Bishops' Pastoral Letters have not yet succeeded in transforming people's consciences. This is because there is no cooperation and active participation of Christians from the grassroots communities as well as an integrated vision. Fourth, an ethnic bias is also held by some Church's leaders. Fifth, with regard to social problems, the Church has failed to assume its commitment and to be self-critical. Sixth, there is no ecumenical collaboration in dealing with social problems.

We can conclude that the example of the Rwandan holocaust underlines the foreignness, artificiality, and ambiguity of the kind of Christianity found in Africa. This is not a condemnation, but a matter of fair examination of conscience. There is no doubt that the Church has failed to be the conscience of society in Africa. I do not, however, intend to argue that Christianity is automatically able to overcome the sinful nature of a human being. My argument is that the Church has failed to create even a minimum awareness to defend basic human values and rights. This situation has been created by the fact that the Church has done very little to link its mission with social questions. Furthermore, the kind of religious knowledge emphasized in Africa remains focused and entangled in theological propositions which concern mostly the nature of God and the "salvation of the soul". This means the Church has done very little in promoting integral human development which includes awareness in social justice, human rights, common good, and social responsibility. In brief, the African Church lacks a "theology of life".

### **A Constructive Approach to Ethnicity**

The problems confronting African societies in the modern world are numerous. And some of the problems are cultural in the sense that they are related to

cherished practices and attitudes inherited from indigenous cultures. It can be said that such problems do not only result from the imposition of European colonial rule with its concomitant introduction of European cultural values and institutions. Some of the problems are related to the African capacity to grapple with, and adjust to, the aftermath of colonial rule and its institutions. Likewise, the problem of ethnicity is closely related with the capacity of African governments to integrate ethnic identities into political society.

According to David Lamb, ethnicity is one of the most difficult concepts to grasp, and one of the most essential in understanding Africa. Publicly, modern Africa deplors it. Kenya's President Daniel arap Moi calls it the cancer that threatens to eat out the very fabric of our nation. Yet almost every African politician, practices it — most African presidents are more [ethnic] chief than national statesman — and it remains perhaps the most potent force in day-to-day African life. It is a factor in wars and power struggles. It often determines who gets jobs, who gets promoted, who gets accepted to a university, because by its very definition [ethnicity] implies sharing among members of the extended family, making sure that your own are looked after first. To give a job to a fellow [ethnic member] is not nepotism, it is an obligation. For a politician or military leader to choose his closest advisers and bodyguards from the ranks of his own [ethnic group] is not patronage, it is good common sense. It ensures security, continuity, and authority.<sup>27</sup>

We have to acknowledge that the real question is not how to eradicate ethnicity, but how to integrate it into social relationships. We cannot afford to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Even the efforts of introducing democratic ideals in Africa will not succeed without taking into account the issue of ethnicity. Any project, be it political, economic, or religious, which involves the mobilization of people must first take into account the cultural contexts in which individuals *live* rather than those in which someone may think they *ought to be* living. The point is that the process of building democratic institutions will succeed if and only if we start with *what* people *are* and from *where* they are.

Many studies of ethnicity concentrate on justifying the idea that sociopolitical organization based on ethnicity is a primitive model. And in most cases such an approach suggests that if Africa wants to make progress it must first of all eradicate ethnicity. This approach has influenced many African leaders. Consequently, many leaders think that ethnicity will disappear as the process of urbanization gains momentum. They conceive the existence of ethnic loyalties and affinities as “some sort of a primordial carryover, a traditional, or atavistic residue, to be cured or erased with the march of modernity”.<sup>28</sup> In addition to that, ethnicity is seen as a barrier to political integration and impediment to at-

taining the essence of nationhood and progress. I do not agree with them. My argument is that when people of different origins come together in urban areas within a short period of time while maintaining ties with their home areas and constantly recreating in homogenous groups, their ethnic identity and loyalty remain substantially unchanged.<sup>29</sup> Although urbanization brings changes in cultural traditions, these changes cannot happen at once. The feeling of belonging to an ethnic group may, in fact, be stronger in towns than within a more homogeneous rural society. Ethnicity is reinforced in urban areas because of the opposition and diversity found in these places. Evidence of this supports my conclusion that urbanization, high levels of education, and high social status do not necessarily decrease ethnic awareness.

Ethnicity provides the content and the deeper explanation of the nation-State. Whatever point of view is adopted, the question of ethnicity must be approached in a positive way. Ethnic identities and loyalties cannot be suppressed by the State. They need not be destroyed. What should be destroyed, instead, should be the practice of manipulating them.

If we accept the importance of ethnicity, however, we must be ready to grapple with three questions. First, with regard to the issue of multi-ethnicity in Africa, what form should the State assume? Second, how can we reconcile the rights of minority and majority groups? Third, how can we order the conflict of interests among ethnic groups in the changing world? Third, what form should the concept of the common good assume due to the economic disparity that exists between ethnic groups? Fourth, how can we harmonize ethnic languages? These questions could be answered adequately if we acknowledge that each ethnic group has some voice in shaping socially binding decisions. However, the strength of ethnicity is a two-edged sword. Ethnicity, on one hand, when abused, can be the root of internal problems connected with human rights and social justice.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, when appropriated properly, ethnicity can be a positive ingredient that guarantees the realization of the idea of civil society by enhancing participation, integration of loyalties, and commitment to the public good.

In most cases, ethnicity is manifested as a form of resistance against the oppressive structure of the State. It could also be said that the problem of ethnicity is related to the crisis of citizenship, lack of political consensus, the struggle to survive, sociopolitical and economic insecurity, and the lack of an agreed-upon concept of common good.

While ethnicity cannot in itself form the basis of modern social organization, its reality and hold over African people cannot be denied. Acknowledging and providing this reality with a democratic form, however limited, that meets the demands of peace and collective



prosperity in our times seems more sensible than denying its reality in the face of the numerous problems, from civil wars to [ethnic] patronage today.<sup>31</sup>

We must perceive ethnicity as a process that involves negotiating identity within groups while maintaining ethnic differences. The failure to recognize the power of ethnic identity will continue to create political instability and lack of cohesion, and exacerbate the situation of civil unrest found in many African countries. The problem of ethnicity in Africa is not a problem of primordial communal sentiments, sentiments that impede the unification of the State. Rather, it is a problem of incomplete structural integration. African States have failed to modify strong ethnic identification in favour of more national ones while at the same time not undermining the rights of ethnic communities.

Whatever the case, ethnicity is not a negative reality or evil in itself as it has been portrayed by the forces of colonization and post-colonial politics. The fact is that ethnic consciousness becomes harmful when abused. Henry Okullu makes the same point. He argues:

Let it be known, however, that [ethnic] grouping is not hereby wholly condemned. [Ethnic] affiliation as an extended family system is a great asset in nation building especially when acting as a moral retaining influence upon, and a means of security for, its members. It can be argued that [an ethnic] as a larger family unit is an order of creation. A nation, some people will argue, is not an aggregate of individuals, but rather a unity of independent institutions, of which [ethnic] grouping is one. If such is true then [ethnic] groups are a very strong foundation upon which a strong nation can be built. To do this effectively it is necessary to know how to distinguish between that which belongs to the [ethnic group] and that which belongs to the nation.<sup>32</sup>

It is unrealistic to believe that a State can ignore the structure of ethnicity without negative consequences. On the other hand, it is a mistake to believe that State affairs should be dictated from the viewpoint of one ethnic group as is the case in Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, and so on.

It is often argued by political scientists that economic insecurity makes self-interest seekers recruit men and women of their own ethnic groups into authoritative positions for the interest of their ethnic groups and region. Ethnicity, taken from this perspective, creates a loss of national culture — a culture which would be enriched immensely by the absorption of the existing different cultural backgrounds. If ethnic identity is positively appropriated, it can become a national value, together with the weaknesses and strengths of that ethnic group. Ethnicity is a means of cultural support.

To sum up, the significance of ethnicity has not diminished with the formation of nation-States. There

are several reasons. First, family, clan and ethnic group are still the essential structures of social relationships in African societies.<sup>33</sup> Second, “one’s identity is ethnic, not national. [Third], African leaders have done very little to convince their people that nationhood offers more benefits than ethnicity”.<sup>34</sup> Fourth, African leaders have not defined the relationship between an ethnic group and the State with respect to the common good. Fifth, African States have not managed to appropriate inherited cultural traditions to help come to terms with the cultural realities of the times and emerge with new visions for the future. Sixth, the approach to nation-building has not tried to find a way of integrating and welding together several ethnic groups into a large cohesive political community called the nation-State to help eliminate internal confusion and transfer ethnic loyalties to new central governments. Seventh, “there have been no efforts made to formulate viable and contextualized ideologies for contemporary African nations. [Eighth], there have been no effective ways of dealing with traditional moral standards that seem to crumble in the wake of rapid social change”.<sup>35</sup> Ninth, most governments do not respect the freedom of the judiciary and the rule of law.<sup>36</sup> Tenth, the issue of political morality, as argued by Kwame Gyekye, has not been fully addressed.

## Conclusion

In this essay we saw that ethnicity can become a blessing as long as it enriches social life. On the contrary, it can become a curse when it becomes the source of division and hatred between ethnic groups. In search for a balanced way to deal with ethnicity we can say that what Africa needs is not to get rid of [ethnicity]; one cannot think such an effort would succeed; Africans, like all other peoples of the world, need to devise ways and means for all ... ethnic groups to live together harmoniously and in a complementary relationship to each other.<sup>37</sup>

In view of encountering this situation we can search for a way to implement practical ways of creating cohesion in African societies. First, there is a need to develop educational and cultural programmes at the grassroots level through which ethnic and cultural diversities can be appreciated and integrated into national unity. Non-Governmental Organizations, including the Church, can play a significant role in developing these programmes. Secondly, interethnic cooperation and dialogue, as proposed by Waruta, can be promoted as a national ideology. Third, the challenge of modern Africa should be how to promote complementarity between ethnic groups, mutual tolerance, accommodation of diversity of opinion, respect for pluralism, and cherish the sense of the common good. Fourth, the Church and other Non-Governmental Organizations are

called to propose new ways of integrating ethnic identity into the structure of the State.

With regard to the ethnic tensions and conflicts something urgent must be done. In some African countries the situation is so bad that certain forms of ethnic hostilities are more ferocious than the *apartheid* policies of John Vorster of the former South Africa, more inhuman than the European colonization of Africa, and more lethal than Adolf Hitler's Nazi movement.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> I prefer the term "ethnicity" rather than "tribalism". The reason is that the term "tribalism", in its common journalistic setting, is often understood to mean that Africans have a basic loyalty to tribe and that each tribe still retains a fundamental hostility towards its neighbouring tribes.

<sup>2</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1969), 102.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London: Longman, 1993), 50.

<sup>4</sup> J. Lonsdale, "States and Social Process in Africa: A Histogramical Survey", *African Studies Review* 3/2 (June-September, 1981): 139. I am not saying that modern African societies are to be organized in the same way. My point, following the argument of Lonsdale, is that the operative force and validity of a particular model of social organization depends very much on the culture and historical background of a particular society. As such, the way State structures have been introduced in Africa remain meaningless to most Africans.

<sup>5</sup> Hutus and Tutsis are the major ethnic groups in Rwanda and Burundi. The 1994 civil war in Rwanda was based on the ethnic hatred between these two groups.

<sup>6</sup> David Hollenbach, "Plural Loyalties and Moral Agency in Government", in John C. Haughey, ed., *Personal Values in Public Policy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 77.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Abner Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture: Explorations in the Dramaturgy of Power in a Modern African Society* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1981), 220.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>10</sup> See Henry Shue, *Subsistence, Affluence, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 144-52.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1974), 238.

<sup>12</sup> Goran Hyden, *No Shortcuts to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective* (London: Heinemann, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> Ted T. Gurr, "People Against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System", in *International Studies Quarterly* 38 (1994): 347-77, at 355.

<sup>14</sup> For a somewhat similar thought, see Robert H. Bates, "Modernization, Ethnic Competition and the Rationality of Politics in Contemporary Africa", in Donald Rothchild and V. A. Olorunsola, eds., *State Versus Ethnic Claims: African Policy Dilemmas* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983), 164-65.

<sup>15</sup> Solofo Randrianja, "Nationalism, Ethnicity and Democracy", in Stephen Ellis, ed., *Africa Now: People, Policies, and*

*Institutions* (London: James Currey and Heinemann, 1996), 31.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>17</sup> William Tordoff, *Government and Politics in Africa* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 86.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>19</sup> "Prospective Voters and Ethnic Mongers", *Mwananchi* (2 August, Nairobi, 1997): 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> D.W. Waruta, "Tribalism as a Moral Problem in Contemporary Africa", in J.N.K. Mugambi and A. Nasimiyu-Wasike, eds., *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Initiatives Publishers, 1992), 127.

<sup>22</sup> Waruta, "Tribalism as a Moral Problem in Contemporary Africa", 128.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Aylward Shorter, "The Curse of Ethnocentrism and the African Church", *Tangaza Occasional Papers No. 8, Ethnicity: Blessing or Curse* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1999), 28-29.

<sup>25</sup> Waruta, "Tribalism as a Moral Problem in Contemporary Africa", 134.

<sup>26</sup> David Hollenbach, S.J., "Report From Rwanda: An Interview With Augustine Karekezi", in *America* (7 December 1996): 13 - 17, at 16.

<sup>27</sup> David Lamb, *The Africans* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 9.

<sup>28</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 185.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, the analysis of ethnic interactions in the city of Nairobi, Kenya, by Anthony O'Connor, *The African City*, (London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1983), 99-120.

<sup>30</sup> Rodrigo Mejria, S.J., "Our Mission Today in the Context of the Eastern Africa Province", in Bishop Ndingi Mwana' nzeki et al., *Our Mission 450 Years Later* (Nairobi: St. Joseph The Worker Printing Press, 1991), 49-50.

<sup>31</sup> Kwesi Prah, "The Crisis of Neo-Colonialism in Africa and the Contemporary Democratic Challenge", in Hizkias Assefa and George Wachira, eds., *Peacemaking and Democratization in Africa: Theoretical Perspectives and Church Initiatives* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1996), 19.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Press Limited, 1987), 45-46.

<sup>33</sup> Lamb, *The Africans*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), vii-xii.

<sup>36</sup> This problem is exacerbated by the lack of modern national constitutions that can restore people's confidence. The existing national constitutions are constantly manipulated by the regime in power and serve only the interests of the elite group or certain ethnic groups.

<sup>37</sup> Waruta, "Tribalism as a Moral Problem in Contemporary Africa", 130.

Ref.: Text from the author

## Missionaries and Culture

**A**t one time I was living in the Paiela Valley in a far corner of the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. The valley had no road access, and usually I would arrive on a chartered aircraft. The church leaders knew that there was often space available on the aircraft and they would give me money to buy store goods for the church canteen. One day a leader came with a list of goods to purchase and bring next time I came. Of the items requested I turned down three: cartons of bottled Coca Cola, bubble gum and sweet biscuits. I was concerned for people's health. In my view Coca Cola, apart from being a symbol of multinational consumer values, is also a health hazard from broken glass in an area where everyone goes about bare-footed. Bubble gum is another "junk" food; besides, I get tired of hearing the children popping it while in church. Sweet biscuits will only help start a cycle of tooth decay in people who generally have strong healthy teeth. Upon my refusal, the leader yelled angrily, "You are a colonialist b.....". My arguments were unacceptable. People wanted to buy such things and therefore I should help by using the space available on the aircraft. In refusing I was branded as a colonialist. I, an outsider, was telling people what was good for them.

The incident occurred fifteen years ago. Now the people of Paiela have a road into their valley and they can bring in as much Coca Cola as they wish. In fact, shortly after the incident there was a "gold rush" in the area and some people gained so much money that not only could they charter their own aircraft, but they even took out a lease agreement for their own helicopter, pilot included!

The account above serves to illustrate how missionaries today live in situations in which cultures are undergoing rapid change. This paper will reflect on some issues arising from that situation. Though the examples given are limited to Papua New Guinea, the paper will surely provide lessons with a wider application. What is the appropriate attitude toward culture for missionaries in these changing times? I do not not pretend to have the last word on this question, however, if the paper serves to stimulate further reflection, it will have achieved its purpose.

### Changing Missionary Roles

Missionaries came to Papua New Guinea along with government officers, prospectors and traders. They came with matches, axes, knives, nails, salt, etc.

People saw the missionaries using such things and wanted them for themselves. Missionaries came with a spiritual message, and as part of the Good News, they helped introduce Western education and modern health services. These too had a big impact on the people. Faced with the invasion from outside, change was inevitable. Could the effects of the changes have been different?

When the first missionaries came, evolutionism was favoured in anthropological circles. People in the mission-sending countries believed in a slow ethical and religious development of humankind whose religion developed slowly from animism and pre-animistic magic, to polytheism and finally to monotheism, with Christianity as the crowning jewel of such evolutionary development. Thus the "natives" in Papua New Guinea were generally regarded as "primitive" both technologically and spiritually. Such attitudes did little to foster a dialogic approach to mission and frequently local customs were condemned without investigation as to their meaning and wider function in the society.<sup>1</sup> Western customs were introduced — for example, having European names at baptism, because that seemed "the Christian thing to do".<sup>2</sup>

Some missionaries like to refer to the "good old days" when people were less sophisticated and the youth would listen to them. But times have changed. Evolutionary theories have been discredited (though vestiges linger on). Missionary roles change too. In post-independence Papua New Guinea most of the major Churches have local leaders; only the Catholic Church continues with a high percentage of expatriate missionaries.<sup>3</sup> They too face the challenge of allowing the thrust of ongoing evangelisation to come more from leadership within the local communities.

In academic circles one gets the impression that missionary presence is barely tolerated, and one is often confronted by the refrain: "*You missionaries destroyed our culture*". What is the most fitting response to such accusations? One could simply ignore or oppose the statement and retreat to the relative security of the seminary or mission station. Alternatively one could endeavour to compensate for the alleged sins of the past by taking a lead in promoting inculturation. Neither response is particularly helpful for present-day missionaries, called to be companions on the journey and co-workers with national church workers.

### Culture and Cultural Change

All too often "culture" has been understood as a

collection of customs, or what people “do”, for example, as rituals or artistic expression. This approach can fall victim to a museum mentality which freezes culture in a particular time period and encourages romantic views of ways of living in the past.<sup>4</sup> A preferred alternative is to understand culture as a system of meanings that are expressed in the way people live. Thus culture is a process by which people shape their lives, helping them to know how to feel, think and behave. Most cultures consist of many sub-cultures, all of which are in rapid transition. There are traditional and modern technological subcultures, urban versus rural mind-sets, youth values and the values of the older generation.

At one point, while preparing a draft of this paper I was sitting next to a young Papua New Guinean engrossed in watching the “Muppet Show” on television — an educational programme produced in the USA. Many young people in urban areas know more about the lifestyle of characters on television than about the system of meanings that shaped the lives of their forebears. Children go to school and learn about a world quite different from that of their parents. In many parts of Papua New Guinea, boys no longer live in the “men’s” house and the initiation rites are abandoned or truncated. Traditional culture seems outdated, belonging to those who have died.

Currently in parts of Papua New Guinea, there is a debate on the value of “kastam” or “culture”. People wanting to introduce customary elements into education or prayer and worship encounter resistance from others who consider such attempts at “inculturation” to be wrong, or at best irrelevant.

A woman who is now a religious sister gives an account of her experience as a child. “The children in the nearby village used to sneer at the children from my village saying that our people were still practising the *tambaran pasin* (superstitious practices) especially referring to the traditional singing and the barter system of exchanging. There were times I felt ashamed for being in the village with such practices yet I couldn’t understand why those practices were seen as bad by the children from another village”.<sup>5</sup> This experience of shame is becoming increasingly common today.

The arguments mounted by those critical of “kastam” or culture, centre around three points:

1. *Culture is “sinful” and so must be rejected by Christians.* On this point, the argument often centres around whether one can wear traditional festive clothing (*bilas*). It is said that those who decorate their bodies with feathers and other finery are making a deliberate display of themselves and thus are guilty of the sin of pride. Some point to dress standards for modesty in other countries and regard those in PNG traditional attire as being too scantily dressed.

2. The second argument holds that *traditional culture is something to leave behind by those wanting to benefit from modernity.* Some people promote the idea that their grandparents were “primitive”, living in darkness, and that enlightened Christians should make every attempt to distance themselves from such barbarity. School dramas typically promote this mindset and it is no wonder that the prejudices involved are passed on from class to class. Often at school festivals one sees pupils acting out the “stupid” traditional person and everyone has a good laugh.

3. The third argument holds that, *we need to be liberated from certain customs since they are oppressive.* Today, many young people prefer to risk the freedom of Western ways to traditional values which they find burdensome. Mourning and funerary feasts provide an example of changing customs. Traditionally, in some parts of Papua New Guinea, during the time of mourning, which could last for months, friends and relatives would bring food, firewood and other items to sustain the mourners. But this must all be paid back, imposing a heavy burden on the family concerned. Now some Christians are arranging for their own “funerary” feast while they are alive so that their families will have to mourn only a few days after their death and thus not end up with a large burden of debt.

The missionary who fully supports the arguments above will easily play into the hands of those who regard missionaries as being anti-culture. On the other hand, the missionary who would passionately oppose those arguments might succumb to a form of cultural romanticism which sees everything in traditional culture as good and desirable. Some missionaries are convinced romanticists — for example, occupying themselves taking photos of girls in traditional attire dancing up the aisle in church, but showing little concern for the difficult life that many of these girls face in the village.

Some missionaries may decide to side-step the cultural issue, and leave it to “them”. However, perhaps the preferred alternative is to search together for cultural values appropriate for today’s world.

### Cultural Values for Today’s World

When the first missionaries arrived in Papua New Guinea they noticed the way people performed rituals to placate or seek the assistance from spirits and dead relatives. The missionaries condemned such practices as superstitious and “heathen”. Now some people are asking if blanket condemnations of these and other practices were necessary, and whether they stemmed from the missionaries’ (mis)interpretation of Melanesian religious experience.<sup>6</sup> Could it be that at the deeper level of religious experience there are values that could have served as a basis for dialogue?

Admittedly, interreligious “dialogue” is largely a post-Vatican II concern. Nevertheless, with hindsight we can ask why, for example, funeral rites were not given greater prominence in Christian worship and why puberty rites were either condemned or ignored. Dimensions of Melanesian culture such as these were manifestations of a deeper religious experience based on the search for, maintenance, and celebration of life.

There are many traditional Melanesian values that would serve as cultural foundations for the Good News. For example there is Melanesian spirituality with its sense of the sacred which it naturally integrates into the events of daily life: in sickness and healing, fortune and misfortune. There is the sense that rituals include human involvement, so one prays while working, not passively with one’s hands joined. There is a strong sense of justice based on reciprocity. There are communal values with their spirit of sharing and communal ownership. Underlying such values is the longing for the fullness of life. Admittedly, these noble values have been mixed up with human shortcomings and sinfulness — for example, there was and is sorcery, extortion, and the selfish dimension of the “wantok” system which can serve as an excuse for corruption.

The missionary today needs to be involved in cultural issues at the level of such positive values. How many are equipped theoretically and emotionally for such a task? The “inculturation” of rituals and devotional practices can too easily remain at a superficial level, not touching on the values and the issues that people are struggling with. Effective evangelisation requires a dialogue of listening to where the community is now, and then inviting them to make their own the way of life revealed in Jesus Christ. Acceptance of that invitation leads to a transformation in people’s values, attitudes and actions. This is the level of culture in a true sense, and it is here that the missionary must try to be in contact with where people are spiritually. Attempts to impose change from above may result in superficial forms of inculturation, whereas a genuine transformation grows from within.

At one time a group of parents told me how they were unhappy with videos being shown in the village by a local businessman. I too was concerned because many of the children were watching videos until late at night resulting in their sleeping in the classroom the following day. The parents seemed unconcerned about sleepy children. Rather, they were embarrassed at the sex scenes appearing in many of the videos. The ensuing discussion raised a number of cultural issues. They were curious to know if sex scenes such as those in X-rated movies are accepted as normal behaviour in the movie’s country of origin. They agreed that there was a need to reflect more on the norms for sexual relationships in their own society. Furthermore, they were relieved to learn that most videos include a cen-

sor’s rating on the cover so that they could anticipate shows which would hardly be suitable for general audiences. With input and encouragement from myself the parents were able to work together and arrive at a somewhat satisfactory solution.

### **Myths and Counter-Myths**

If it were simply a question of whether to watch television, or what to wear in a liturgical procession, then the answers would not be so difficult to find. However, the missionary venturing into the area of culture and cultural values will, before long, encounter the realm of the mythical. Having dealt with fundamentalist myths about humanity being inherently evil, and the romanticist notions of the “noble savage” and some of the equally fanciful ideas Papua New Guineans have about Western culture, one will discover that many of the changes occurring today are legitimated as the fulfilment of traditional myths and old prophecies.

For example, there are the myths of the poor ugly bachelor who encounters and marries a beautiful young woman who effects in him a dramatic change in appearance. Many young people sense a similar change when they join fundamentalist churches with their instant baptism, on condition that they renounce their past culture which was keeping them poor and unemployed.

In Porgera, where there is now a multi-billion dollar gold mine, people say that the infra-structural changes were predicted by prophetic figures long before outsiders, including missionaries, ever entered their area. There were prophetic tales of bridges being built, permanent houses, and a flurry of activity in the bush of Yatika, which is now part of the mining township. Technology and myth intertwine as people connect the mining developments with predictions of the end of the world. Could this be one of the reasons why missions linking Scriptural passages with a millenarian message appear to be far more popular in Porgera than the “Good News” of the Catholics?

Prophecies can be self-fulfilling, and myths can influence attitudes now and in the future. Today some people claim that their forebears were tricked into giving up their traditions. However, one of the first missionaries to Wabag, Fr Bernard Fisher, disagrees. He writes: “I have a problem with young people of a later generation claiming that their grandparents were stupid and easily outwitted. I refuse to join in that disparagement; the people I dealt with were as alert mentally as any of their descendants and I respect the judgements they made”. Fisher says, “I think they made the intelligent decision to get better things and I respect them for it”.<sup>7</sup>

### **National Response**

Village life is “hard”. One spends a lot of time

gathering firewood, fetching water, and preparing food. In urban areas, for those who have the means, gas cookers, running water, and electric appliances save a lot of time and trouble. Who wants to go through the effort of lighting a woodstove when gas is available? Do people choose to listen to the radio instead of watching television? However, usually, the gas stove and the television come in a package deal along with the many other trappings of modern Western culture. In gaining new insights and the knowledge of other realities, people's values and ideas will inevitably change.

The trend continues today, particularly with the tourist dollar. Culture, as promoted by the media these days, appears as a commodity to be sold to tourists. In this sense culture is understood in terms of performances, arts, and crafts. One reads in the newspapers how the annual shows in various parts of the country (Hagen, Goroka, Enga, Port Moresby, etc.) are instrumental in preserving PNG culture. From my personal experience of such events, I wonder how much culture is seen as an object with economic value, and if the ever-increasing amounts of prize money were not offered, I doubt if many people would participate at all.

The question arises, besides the economic and tourist potential, what interest is there among national people in cultural matters? Concerning material culture, generally, museums and cultural centres are suffering from neglect. Plans for introducing cultural themes into the school curricula seldom move from paper to reality. Books are written, but rarely read. Editions of the New Testament in local languages lie in boxes gathering dust. "Culture study" projects continue so long as they are supported by outside funding. The anthropologically trained missionary finds these trends hard to take.

In talking with educated people in Papua New Guinea, one will inevitably encounter negative attitudes to the village and its values. For people who have gained an education and job skills, it seems demeaning to go "back" to the village lifestyle. The presumption is that the next few generations will leave behind much of their traditional culture and values, so it is a waste of time worrying about it, especially if it does not help one prosper. For some, the argument helps save them from the awkwardness of dealing in traditional matters, where quite likely they will say or do the wrong thing and then feel ashamed. In such situations, my first reaction is to pity the children with second-hand cultural values governing their lives. Yet, if independence means that a nation "pays its own bills" then it also implies that Papua New Guineans themselves must take responsibility for their cultural identity both now and in the future.

### **Missionary Attitudes**

How can modern missionaries respond to the situation of rapid cultural change, alienation, and the ac-

cusation that "you missionaries destroyed our culture"? Is there a way to relate to Melanesian cultural values without falling into romanticism on the one hand or cynicism on the other? I propose the following ten points as a way towards finding a healthy solution.

1. Missionaries should not simply accept the stories about their predecessors going about destroying the whole of traditional culture.

If some early missionaries are still alive it might be good to ask them what happened and they will most probably shed new light on the issue. For example, in Enga, nowadays people say that "the missionaries" condemned the initiation rites, seemingly unaware that Fr Schwab took part in the rites between 1953 and 1962 (beginning within five years of the arrival of the first missionaries).

The first missionary in Enga, Fr Bus writes as follows,

"I myself, before I could start to 'preach' because I didn't know the language, began by asking the people in Pompobus about their world view, their beliefs. I started to learn their language. Later on in my instructions or sermons I could make comparisons between Bible beliefs, scenes, ceremonies and their own stories, laws and ceremonies.... In later years, when there were indigenous priests, I repeatedly asked some of them, encouraged them, to study their own culture in relation to the Bible Revelation. Especially I wanted them to discover the very human and Christian values in their own culture, and to show how much can be integrated and how well the traditional and Christian cultures could enrich each other. They seem to find it not important or interesting or valid, or too difficult".<sup>8</sup>

2. Missionaries must be honest in acknowledging that their work has had destructive consequences.

There were blanket condemnations of traditional rites and beliefs. In co-operation with the colonial powers, in some provinces, large areas of land were alienated from the local people. Paternalistic attitudes and over-protection has inhibited people's initiative. Denominationalism still destroys communal solidarity. These and other unfortunate trends should be admitted and deplored.

Some mistakes arose because interpreters either misunderstood what had been said, or generalised in a way that subtle details were overlooked. Seminar-ians from the Simbu Province like to tell the story of the early missionary, Fr Schaefer, announcing to the people that he was going away and would return with an SVD brother and some Holy Spirit Sisters. The

interpreter mistakenly said that the missionary was going to fetch his wife and her family and that the people should be prepared to contribute to his wife's brideprice!

### 3. Healthy cultures change in order to live.

A recent book on traditional Enga culture, *Historical Vines*, shows convincingly how between 250 and 450 years ago, the introduction of the sweet potato precipitated rapid changes among the Enga people.<sup>9</sup> The authors argue that cultural needs motivate men and women in altering social meanings and values. They show in great detail how in pre-colonial times Enga big men played a part in altering society with its economics and ideology. Warfare, ceremonial exchange and large ancestral cults were orchestrated by powerful big-men who were brilliant orators, flamboyant performers, and skilled economists. They may have lived in a "stone age" culture in that they used stone tools, but the culture was not stone-like in the sense of being static or inanimate. On the contrary, the pre-colonial culture was dynamic and it continues to be so today.

4. We need to reconsider the theological value of culture.

We would do well to remember the theological principle, "Grace builds on nature". God uses nature as a medium for saving grace, and the same holds true for culture. The Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22) refers to grace "secretly at work" in the hearts of all people of good will. People search for God with a sincere heart and "under the influence of grace" and try to put into effect the will of God. Others strive "not without divine grace" to lead an upright life (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 16). Are we convinced that Christian faith can really take root within today's cultural context? How often do we discover Christ in our Melanesian neighbour?

5. The missionary must arrive and remain with the attitude of wanting to learn.

Many come with university degrees and have years of theological and other studies behind them. However, when it comes to getting to know people, and understanding the situation, we have to begin as learners all over again. Papua New Guineans are good at saying "Yesa" to know-it-all, and then joking about them when they are gone. On a faith level missionaries should seriously ask how they themselves have been evangelised by the people.

6. Missionaries should be prepared to dialogue with nationals as companions on the journey of life.

The "they" word should be used sparingly, and hopefully replaced by "we". A national sister writes, "It is as if we are rolled back and forth in the waves between modernisation and culture/customs/traditions. There is a need for a third party, a tolerant, patient one, with an attitude of wanting to learn as well as an attitude of willingness to help us face our realities yet not solving our problems, someone who can guide people in choices related to the Christian faith".<sup>10</sup>

Rather than observe from the relative safety of the sideline, missionaries need to encourage debate about cultural issues. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the wantok system today? Is polygamy as life-giving as it might have been in former days? What helpful values do people gain from television? What language(s) will Papua New Guineans use in the coming millennium? Recently with a small group of young men and women sitting around a woodstove, I suggested we talk about why people were abandoning their traditional cultural values. The lively debate continued well past midnight.

7. We must learn to be discerning.

Unfortunately there are fundamentalist tendencies in both missionaries and the people in Papua New Guinea. Fundamentalists tend to see everything in either/or terms: black/white, good/bad, Christ/Satan. For the fundamentalist, if a culture is not "Christian" then it must belong to Satan. At this point it sometimes helps to remind people of a traditional Engan proverb about a man with a bag full of opossums. One of the animals was dead a long time and was beginning to smell. Instead of finding and discarding the offending possum, the foolish man threw away the whole bag, thus disposing of what would have made a good meal. The fundamentalist solution is to throw away the lot rather than face the task of being discerning and choosing what to discard and what to retain.

8. The starting point for inculturation is the community and the point of entry is the way of life of the community.

To evangelise a community in depth requires a dialogue of listening for the felt needs in the community and then inviting the members to discover a solution to those needs through faith in Jesus Christ. The resultant change will affect the way people feel, think and behave. The missionary may take the initiative in suggesting possible courses of action. However, the primary agent of inculturation must be the community. Attempts to impose change from outside or above will seldom result in a genuine link between faith and life.

9. People are the recipients of culture, but they

also “create” culture.

There is the important task of helping to conscientise people as to their power to guide the process of social change. Recently in a Highlands community I witnessed how people can create new cultural events. Because of the stories about moral laxity in the community, the leaders decided to conduct sessions on womanhood and what it means to be a Christian woman today. The women went into seclusion in the bush for four days. Mature women instructed younger ones in rituals and tribal lore which they felt had given them pride and dignity as women in the tribe. For many of the young women it was an experience of ceremonies that they had only heard about before. The days of seclusion ended with a procession with a statue of Our Lady (dressed in the ceremonial costume of a woman of the clan) and a special celebration of the Eucharist. A month later the men went through a similar experience. The sympathetic missionary can contribute a great deal by encouraging such efforts.

10. It is important that missionaries help people discover that the Christian faith we share can be life-giving in cultural terms.

Besides talk about “eternal” life, we need to address the real needs of people here and now: particularly the need for security. I am reminded of the account of a woman praying over the food that she was setting aside for her husband. He was planning to take part in a tribal fight and his wife, for her safety and his, was praying that he would stay out of trouble. He ate the food and then told her that he had decided it was not worth the risk getting involved in the fighting. Was his wife employing magic? Or was this the valid response of a faithful woman striving for life in its fullness?

### Conclusion

No doubt there are things that we regret in the history of mission work. However, surely we must focus more on what is happening now in this sea of change. It does not help to be a romanticist seeing the traditional culture as coming straight from the Garden of Eden. Nor does it help to take the fatalistic view that all traditional societies are doomed to transmute into some Western cultural form. We must be realistic, prepared to take responsibility for our part in the present changes.

As the Jubilee Year 2000 approaches, many Church leaders, including Pope John Paul II, are preparing to apologise for the harm caused by the Church in the past. They consider it important to seek reconciliation so as to open the way for renewed partnership in the new millennium. In the same spirit, missionary congregations might consider whether this is an appropriate time to apologise to the people they have evangelised for some of

the mistakes and misunderstandings of previous years.<sup>11</sup>

Through openness and with some spiritual enlightenment we can hope that missionaries will not be mere agents of or obstacles to change, but rather companions on a journey that is slowly but surely leading to transforming our world into the form of the reign of God.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See Ennio Mantovani, “Key issues of a dialogue between Christianity and culture in Melanesia”, *Sedos Bulletin* (1999) 35-41. Mantovani says, “It was not ill will that prevented dialogue. It was, in my opinion, also mainly ignorance on the part of the Western missionaries. The knowledge we have today about religions in general and about Christianity in particular was simply not available” (p. 35).

<sup>2</sup> See William Longgar, “The Missionary Situation in Papua New Guinea”, *Catalyst* 29.1 (1999) 91-109.

<sup>3</sup> In 1995 the ratio of national Catholic priests to all Catholic priests in active ministry was 175/473 = 37% (See T. Aerts, *Christianity in Melanesia*, UPNG Press, 1998, 164-165). As of 1 September 1999, the ratio of national Catholic Bishops to the total number of Catholic Bishops is 3/19 = 16%. The ratios for national sisters and brothers to the total number of sisters and brothers in 1997 is 447/900, and 119/198, respectively. (The figures do not include brothers in clerical religious congregations).

<sup>4</sup> See G. Arbuckle, *From Chaos to Mission*, Geoffrey Chapman, 1996, 38.

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication, March 1999. Name withheld.

<sup>6</sup> See, E. Mantovani, “Key Issues”, *Sedos Bulletin* (1999) 35-41.

<sup>7</sup> Fr Bernard Fisher, personal communication, 22 March, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Fr Gerard Bus, personal communication, 19 March 1999.

<sup>9</sup> P. Wiessner and A. Tumu, *Historical Vines: Enga networks of exchange, ritual, and warfare in Papua New Guinea*, Crawford House, Bathurst, Australia, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Sr Pia Sogon, Personal communication, 9 March 1999.

<sup>11</sup> In 1998 in the Simbu Province, people from the Denglagu parish gave pigs and money to the Bishop to help compensate for their part in killing one of the early missionaries, Fr Morschhauser, some 64 years before. However, as a result of Fr Morschhauser’s death (and also the death of Brother Eugene) 80 men (some most likely innocent) were taken away and gaoled, and some died without ever returning home. In the spirit of the Jubilee Year is there some way that the Church could offer a reconciliatory gesture for the Simbu men who died? This is merely one practical case. Surely there are many possibilities not only in other places in Papua New Guinea, but throughout the world.



## Une Eglise renouvelée en Asie: une mission d'amour et de service

[ NDLR – Le texte ci-dessous est la déclaration finale publiée à l'issue de la 7<sup>e</sup> assemblée plénière de la Fédération des Conférences épiscopales d'Asie (FABC), assemblée qui s'est tenue du 3 au 12 janvier 2000 à Samphan, en Thaïlande. La traduction est de la rédaction d' Eglises d'Asie ].

“ Je répandrai mon Esprit sur toute chair. Vos fils et vos filles prophétiseront, vos anciens auront des songes, vos jeunes gens des visions ” (Jl, 3,1)

**P**rophétiser, rêver ses rêves, voir des visions - en ce temps du grand Jubilé, les paroles du prophète Joël animent nos cœurs. Nous, évêques de l'assemblée plénière de la FABC, nous nous tenons au seuil d'un nouveau siècle et d'un nouveau millénaire, le troisième depuis la naissance de notre Seigneur Jésus Christ, né de Marie, une femme d'Asie. Les merveilles que nous voyons nous incitent à remercier notre Dieu d'amour, Père, Fils et Saint Esprit.

Nous remercions car le propre fils de Dieu a réalisé pour nous le rêve et la vision d'une vie en abondance (Jn 10,10). Nous remercions car “ *l'amour de Dieu a été répandu dans nos cœurs par le Saint Esprit qui nous fut donné* ” (Rm 5,5) pendant cette assemblée spéciale du synode des évêques pour l'Asie. Nous remercions pour ce grand événement de notre siècle, le Concile de Vatican II, et pour la communion et la créativité pastorale qui ont été engendrées par la réunion régulière des Eglises d'Asie. A cet instant nous sommes très reconnaissants pour l'événement ecclésial de cette assemblée spéciale pour l'Asie de ce synode des évêques, et pour l'exhortation apostolique *Ecclesia in Asia*, (EA).

L'assemblée plénière, avec ses 193 participants, incluait cinq cardinaux, 95 évêques (venant de 14 Conférences épiscopales et organes associés : deux évêques, un préfet apostolique et un supérieur de mission *sui juris*), des prêtres, des religieux et des laïcs.

Nous regardons ce siècle passé comme ayant connu le plus phénoménal progrès scientifique et technologique dans l'histoire de l'humanité. En ce siècle, les peuples d'Asie ont brisé le joug du colonialisme et ont pris leur place dans la dignité et la liberté, au centre de la scène humaine. Ces dix dernières années de développement sont riches de promesses, promesses d'un monde nouveau et merveilleux de solidarité humaine et de progrès. Les femmes sont en train de sortir de leurs rôles traditionnels et réclament maintenant leur légitime place dans la société et dans l'Eglise.

Cependant, pour les pauvres, et spécialement pour les femmes, liberté, progrès, mondialisation et les autres réalités qui affectent en ce moment les peuples d'Asie ne sont pas de purs bienfaits. Ils sont ambigus. De plus, en regardant ce siècle passé, nous nous souvenons qu'il fut un des plus meurtriers de l'histoire avec ses deux guerres mondiales et d'autres innombrables plus petites guerres. La mondialisation, non régie par des normes juridiques et éthiques, augmente les millions de ceux qui vivent sous le seuil de pauvreté. Elle accélère le processus de sécularisation. Elle apporte la consommation dans son sillage et menace les valeurs profondes des cultures d'Asie. A l'intérieur des sociétés asiatiques elles-mêmes, on trouve d'autres structures d'oppression, telles que le système des castes, les dictatures, l'exploitation des peuples indigènes et les dissensions internes. La corruption étendue à différents niveaux des gouvernements et des sociétés sont des réalités de la vie quotidienne.

Ainsi, dans l'année du Jubilé, nous nous sommes rassemblés ici à Samphan, en Thaïlande, pour réfléchir et percevoir. Comme Marie, nous gardons toutes ces choses dans nos cœurs. Et puis, venant des plus profonds espoirs et anxiétés de l'Asie, nous entendons l'appel de l'Esprit auprès des Eglises locales asiatiques. Un appel pour le renouveau, pour une mission d'amour et de service renouvelée. C'est un appel aux Eglises locales pour être fidèles à la culture asiatique, aux valeurs spirituelles et sociales et ainsi pour être vraiment des Eglises locales enracinées. L'appel de l'Esprit est intimidant. Mais n'est-ce pas le meilleur moment pour se souvenir des sacrifices de nos martyrs asiatiques qui tenaient compte de la mission donnée par le Christ à ses Apôtres pour aller et ne pas être effrayés, “ *Je suis avec vous pour toujours* ” (Mt 28,20) ? N'est-ce pas le meilleur moment pour rappeler ses paroles, “ *Sois sans crainte, petit troupeau, car il a plu à votre Père de vous donner le Royaume* ” (Lc 12,32)?

Nous tenons compte de l'appel de l'Esprit venant à nous à travers l'assemblée spéciale pour l'Asie du synode des évêques à Rome en 1998 et de l'exhortation apostolique *Ecclesia in Asia*. Nous rêvons de partager notre foi en Jésus. Nous rêvons d'une foi à Jésus par

qui Dieu nous sauve. Nous rêvons d'habiliter nos communautés à être hommes et femmes qui, bien sûr, donnent la vie en partageant avec leurs sœurs et frères en Asie l'abondante vie donnée par Jésus, qui, nous le croyons, est " la Vie ".

Nous rêvons de réconciliation entre les frères et sœurs d'Asie divisés par les guerres et les conflits ethniques. Nous exprimons notre solidarité avec tous nos frères et sœurs de Chine et des autres territoires où l'on n'a pas la liberté nécessaire pour vivre sa foi et remplir sa mission. Avec joie, nous accueillons les représentants des pays d'Asie centrale qui ont gagné récemment leur indépendance.

### **Première partie : Le renouveau de l'Eglise en Asie : vision et signification**

#### A - Une vision de renouveau

L'aube du nouveau millénaire est un temps de crise. Cependant un temps de crise, comme nous le montrent les Ecritures et toute l'histoire de l'Eglise, est un temps de recommencements, de nouveaux mouvements. L'histoire des trente dernières années de la FABC a été une série de mouvements axés vers une Eglise rénovée. Nous notons huit mouvements qui ensemble constituent une vision asiatique d'une Eglise rénovée :

1. Un mouvement vers une Eglise pour les pauvres et une Eglise pour les jeunes. Si nous nous plaçons au côté des foules dans notre continent, nous devons dans notre manière de vivre partager quelque chose de leur pauvreté, " être les porte-parole pour les droits des défavorisés et des plus démunis, contre toutes les formes d'injustice". Dans ce continent de jeunes, nous devons devenir, " en eux et pour eux, l'Eglise des jeunes" (Réunion des évêques d'Asie, Manille, Philippines, 1970).

2. Un mouvement vers une " véritable Eglise locale", vers une Eglise " incarnée dans le peuple, une Eglise indigène et enracinée" (FABC - 2<sup>e</sup> assemblée plénière, Calcutta, Inde, 1978).

3. Un mouvement vers une profonde intériorité pour que l'Eglise devienne une " communauté profondément priante dont la contemplation soit insérée dans le contexte de notre temps et dans les cultures de nos contemporains". Intégrée dans la vie quotidienne, " prière authentique qui doit engendrer dans les chrétiens un visible témoignage de service et d'amour" (FABC - 2<sup>e</sup> assemblée plénière, Calcutta, Inde, 1978).

4. Un mouvement vers une authentique communauté de foi. Totalelement enracinée dans la vie de la Trinité, l'Eglise en Asie doit être une communion de communautés de participation et de

coresponsabilité authentiques, une avec ses pasteurs, et reliée " aux autres communautés de foi et à l'unique et universelle communion" de la Sainte Eglise du Seigneur. Le mouvement en Asie vers des communautés ecclésiales fondamentales exprime le profond désir d'être une telle communauté de foi, d'amour et de service et d'être vraiment une " communauté des communautés" débouchant sur la construction de communautés fondamentalement humaines (FABC - 3<sup>e</sup> assemblée plénière, Bangkok, Thaïlande, 1982).

5. Un mouvement vers une évangélisation intégrale active, vers une nouvelle orientation de la mission (FABC - 5<sup>e</sup> assemblée plénière, Bandung, Indonésie, 1990). Nous évangélisons parce que nous croyons que Jésus est le Seigneur et le Sauveur, " le but de l'histoire humaine, ... la joie de tous les cœurs, et l'accomplissement de toutes les aspirations" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 45). Dans cette mission, l'Eglise doit être le compagnon et le partenaire compatissant de tous les gens d'Asie, le serviteur du Seigneur et de tous les peuples d'Asie dans le voyage qui mène à la vie accomplie dans le Royaume de Dieu.

6. Un mouvement vers l'habilitation d'agir pour les hommes et les femmes. Nous devons développer les structures d'une Eglise participante afin d'utiliser les talents personnels et les dons des laïcs, hommes et femmes. Habités par l'Esprit et grâce aux sacrements, les laïcs hommes et femmes doivent être participants dans la vie et la mission de l'Eglise en apportant la Bonne Nouvelle de Jésus dans les domaines concernant l'économie, la politique, l'éducation, la santé, les médias et le monde du travail. Ceci demande une spiritualité de disciple engageant clergé et laïcs à travailler ensemble dans leurs rôles respectifs pour la mission commune de l'Eglise (FABC - 4<sup>e</sup> assemblée plénière, Tokyo, Japon, 1986). L'Eglise ne peut pas être un signe du Royaume et de la communauté eschatologique si les fruits de l'Esprit ne sont pas reconnus légitimement pour les femmes et si les femmes ne partagent pas " la liberté des enfants de Dieu" (FABC - 4<sup>e</sup> assemblée plénière, Tokyo, Japon, 1986).

7. Un mouvement vers l'engagement actif pour générer et servir la vie. L'Eglise doit répondre aux forces ayant à faire avec la mort en Asie. En étant disciple authentique, elle doit partager sa vision de pleine vie promise par Jésus. C'est une vision de la vie fondée sur l'intégrité et la dignité, avec compassion et soin attentif pour la terre ; une vision de participation et de réciprocité, avec un sens respectueux du sacré, de la paix, de l'harmonie et de la solidarité (FABC - 6<sup>e</sup> assemblée plénière, Manille, Philippines, 1995).

8. Un mouvement vers un triple dialogue avec les autres croyances, avec les pauvres, avec les autres cultures, une Eglise " en dialogue avec les grandes

*traditions religieuses de nos peuples*”, en fait en dialogue avec tous, en particulier avec les pauvres.

Ceci est la vision d’une Eglise renouvelée telle que la FABC l’a développée au cours des trente dernières années. C’est toujours d’actualité. Cependant nous continuons de chercher les défis plus profonds pour un renouveau - sa signification et sa dimension dans notre vie et mission en Asie.

## B - La signification du renouveau

“ *Regardez, je fais toute chose nouvelle*” (Ap 21,5). En Asie, nous ne cessons de découvrir que ce renouveau est l’œuvre de l’Esprit de Dieu. C’est l’Esprit du Seigneur “ *qui a rempli le monde*” (Sg 1,7) et “ *renouvelle la face de la terre*”. Nous devons être attentifs et ouverts aux mystérieuses incitations de l’Esprit dans les réalités de l’Asie et de l’Eglise. Dans les Ecritures, le renouveau est l’image de ce qui est qualitativement nouveau, totalement nouveau. Le renouveau renvoie principalement au salut forgé par Jésus Christ dans le Saint Esprit. Il s’adresse à toute chose et en tout temps - jusqu’à ce que l’Esprit ait recréé des nouveaux cieux et une terre nouvelle (Ap 21,1 et Is 65,17).

Nous sommes pris dans le dynamisme et la tension de ce qui existe déjà et de ce qui attend encore sa complète réalisation. Le renouveau est un don de Dieu de même que notre propre tâche. Dieu l’a déjà accompli comme le fruit de la mission de Jésus et de l’Esprit. Il est maintenant influent dans notre monde. Cependant, le renouveau est un cadeau attendant de devenir notre chose, de s’incarner dans la vie du monde, dans la vie des hommes et des femmes d’Asie, dans la vie de l’Eglise. L’Eglise a toujours besoin d’un renouveau intense pour sa vie et sa mission. Nous sommes une sainte Eglise nécessitant purification. Nous avouons que, par bien des côtés, nous avons failli dans notre vocation pour la mission d’amour et de service.

En tant qu’Eglise d’Asie nous choisissons :

- un renouveau qui a pour auteur Dieu, qui nous recrée dans l’Esprit de son Fils. Car Dieu dans le Christ nous a fait le sacrement d’une nouvelle humanité, signe et serviteur du renouveau. Tenant compte des paroles de St Paul, nous embrassons l’exigence morale de renouveau en se séparant de l’ancien moi et en allant témoigner de la nouvelle vie en Jésus par un amour désintéressé ;

- un renouveau tourné vers une spiritualité profonde et holistique et une intériorité qui reflète notre régénération dans l’Esprit de Jésus, notre nouveau chemin pour être Eglise ;

- un renouveau qui est un engagement missionnaire, repris avec une vigueur renouvelée et

avec l’esprit de mission de l’Eglise, dans l’interaction créative avec les réalités de l’Asie ;

- un renouveau qui respecte la tradition mais suffisamment courageux pour englober un avenir qui grandit dans la fidélité à cette tradition ;

- un renouveau qui nous permet d’oser parler de Jésus et d’annoncer son don de vie nouvelle à notre monde asiatique fait de lumières et d’ombres ;

- un renouveau qui doit inclure, étant donné notre condition humaine, non seulement la conversion des esprits et des cœurs mais aussi la conversion des structures dans lesquelles ceux qui ont été marginalisés par la société se voient donner un plus grand rôle de participation ;

- un renouveau qui est le projet de deux pôles, du clergé et des hommes et femmes laïcs travaillant ensemble d’une façon créative - d’en haut comme d’en bas - montrant ainsi le renouveau comme un signe d’authentique communion ;

- un renouveau qui célèbre la communion dans la diversité, témoignant de l’étonnante catholicité de l’Eglise ;

- un renouveau qui ne tient pas uniquement compte du nombre et du remplissage des églises, ni du nombre de services rendus. Ce qui compte de plus inestimable est l’identité ecclésiale et la qualité de notre témoignage comme serviteurs et disciples de Jésus et du Royaume de Dieu pour les peuples d’Asie.

Pour nous en Asie, renouveler l’Eglise, c’est être ouvert au mystère de l’Esprit, c’est accueillir la venue d’un Dieu toujours surprenant qui captivera nos cœurs émerveillés. Nous avons besoin pour cela d’être plus que de simples travailleurs au renouveau. Nous devons avoir l’imagination créative des poètes et des artistes, des admirateurs et des rêveurs, convenant à ceux qui ont reçu ces dons de l’Esprit de Dieu. C’est en faisant le renouveau que l’Eglise expérimente les surprises de Dieu. Percevant et connaissant Dieu, communiant avec lui dans l’expérience contemplative, l’Eglise expérimente le mandat de l’Evangile toujours en cours, dans une interaction dynamique avec les réalités complexes d’Asie.

## Deuxième partie : Problèmes et défis dans la mission d’amour et de service

### A - Mondialisation

Nous regardons l’évolution économique de l’Asie avec un grand intérêt pastoral. Une conscience critique de notre part des diverses et complexes réalités socio-économiques de l’Asie est essentielle (EA 5). Alors que le processus d’une mondialisation économique a apporté certains effets positifs, nous sommes conscients qu’il s’est développé au détriment

des pauvres, tendant à pousser les pays les plus pauvres en marge des relations politiques et économiques. Nombre de pays asiatiques ne sont pas capables de se maintenir dans une économie de marché mondialisé (EA 39). Les phénomènes de marginalisation et d'exclusion en sont les conséquences directes. Il a produit de plus grandes inégalités parmi les peuples. Il a permis seulement à une petite portion de la population d'améliorer son niveau de vie, laissant beaucoup à leur pauvreté. Une autre conséquence est l'excessive urbanisation, menant à l'émergence d'agglomérations urbaines énormes et, comme résultat de la migration, crimes et exploitation des plus faibles.

Nous sommes conscients que "*la mondialisation culturelle*" passant par l'overdose des médias de masse "*conduit rapidement les sociétés asiatiques dans une culture de consommation mondialisée qui est à la fois profane et matérialiste*", minant ou causant l'érosion des valeurs sociales traditionnelles, culturelles et religieuses qui ont nourri l'Asie. Un tel processus est un grand danger pour les cultures asiatiques et les religions, aboutissant à un "*dommage incalculable*" (EA 7).

Ainsi, la mondialisation est un problème éthique et moral que nous, en tant qu'Eglise, aurions tort d'ignorer.

#### B - Fondamentalisme

Nous prenons douloureusement connaissance de la montée d'un fondamentalisme religieux, ou mieux, d'un extrémisme, qui continue de diviser les sociétés asiatiques et de faire souffrir notre peuple. Une Eglise renouvelée encouragera chrétiens et chrétiennes à participer pleinement aux activités sociales et culturelles, au niveau local aussi bien que national, pour établir un rapprochement entre les communautés et construire l'harmonie. En Asie, les chrétiens vivent dans des sociétés multi-confessionnelles ; et dans tous les pays d'Asie, excepté aux Philippines et à Timor-Oriental, ils forment une petite minorité. L'Eglise doit partager avec les autres responsables religieux la vision de Vatican II d'un retour aux sources, et les aider à tirer substance de leurs propres racines en ces temps de mondialisation qui amène partout chaos et confusion. Nous devons nous efforcer de promouvoir les droits de l'homme pour tous, sans tenir compte de caste, couleur, croyance ou religion, en élevant nos voix contre toutes ces violations.

#### C - La situation politique

Bien que l'Asie soit libre de toute colonisation extérieure, et que la plupart de ses pays ont une sorte de gouvernement démocratique, ils ne suivent pas le même modèle de démocratie. Les résultats des élections sont parfois questionnables. Fréquemment, après des élections, les gouvernés ont très peu à dire dans la manière de

gouverner. Certains vont même jusqu'à caractériser la situation comme un détournement de démocratie. Une situation courante veut que ceux qui sont élus recherchent leurs intérêts personnels. La plupart des gouvernements arrivent au pouvoir grâce à des alliances avec d'autres partis, souvent sans le clair mandat du peuple. De plus, il y a une tendance vers la centralisation du pouvoir et des prises de décision. La corruption envahissante est une réalité aux différents niveaux des gouvernements. Dans certains pays, la vie toute entière est politisée, touchant chaque secteur, rendant l'implémentation impossible. Les gouvernements sont obligés d'adopter des politiques et des pratiques telles que les politiques d'ajustement structurelles dictées par le FMI, la Banque mondiale et l'OMC. Ces politiques sont dénuées d'humanité et de préoccupations sociales. Le modèle de développement économique encouragé par les entreprises transnationales en Asie n'est pas acceptable.

#### D - L'écologie

Si nous regardons le développement encouragé en Asie et son impact sur l'environnement, nous voyons une constante permanente détérioration de notre environnement, résultat d'une pollution non contrôlée, d'une pauvreté avilissante, de la déforestation, etc. Le pire advient quand certains pays d'Asie deviennent des décharges de déchets toxiques, des lieux de production pour des industries dangereuses, utilisant des procédés industriels sans soucis de l'environnement. Même s'il y a des normes, les agences gouvernementales de contrôle de l'environnement ne sont pas à même de faire respecter de telles normes.

#### E - La militarisation

La militarisation croissante des sociétés, encouragée par les gouvernements et les "marchands de mort", est un autre défi. La construction de la paix, incluant le désarmement, devient impérative, appelant des réponses urgentes aux problèmes tels que l'interdiction des mines, le commerce des armes légères et la prolifération du nucléaire. Etant donné la nature des conflits armés dans de nombreux pays d'Asie, la prévention des conflits, ainsi que leur solution, constitue un défi crucial. Les religions asiatiques, incluant le christianisme, doivent contribuer à construire la paix. C'est un domaine privilégié pour dialoguer avec les religions et les cultures pour conduire à la réconciliation.

### **Troisième partie : Le défi du discernement de la voie asiatique**

L'Asie est une mosaïque culturelle étincelante par sa riche diversité. Cela vaut pour l'Eglise catholique.

Les Eglises locales présentent une splendide variété dans leur origine, histoire, situation culturelle et socio-politique, identité ecclésiale et croissance. Evidemment, les défis pastoraux qui se posent à l'Eglise en Asie sont également divers. Cependant, une mission commune les unit tous : proclamer *“ la Bonne Nouvelle de Jésus Christ par le témoignage chrétien, actions de charité et de solidarité humaine... Les nombreux éléments positifs trouvés dans les Eglises locales fortifient notre attente d'un 'nouveau printemps de vie chrétienne' ”* (EA 9).

Face à un tel défi, nous reconnaissons avec espoir *“ une prise de conscience grandissante de la capacité des peuples en Asie, pour changer les structures injustes ”*, une conscience qui ne fait que grandir et qui demande plus de justice sociale, plus de participation politique et économique, des chances égales et plus de détermination à sauver la dignité de l'homme et ses droits. Des groupes minoritaires recherchent dans la discrétion les moyens pour devenir les agents de leur propre avancement social. En eux, nous voyons l'Esprit de Dieu à l'œuvre dans les efforts et les conflits *“ pour transformer la société de telle sorte que l'aspiration humaine à une vie plus abondante puisse être satisfaite comme Dieu le veut ”* (EA 8).

Le renouveau pour une mission d'amour et de justice demande une nouvelle compréhension et un nouvel engagement. Après une écoute mutuelle, nous avons réalisé que quelque chose de nouveau se faisait jour. Pendant trente ans, nous avons essayé de reformuler notre identité chrétienne en Asie ; nous avons abordé divers problèmes, l'un après l'autre : évangélisation, enracinement, dialogue, “asianisation” de l'Eglise, justice, option pour les pauvres, etc. Aujourd'hui, après trois décennies, nous ne parlons plus en distinguant chaque problème. Nous abordons les besoins présents qui sont énormes et de plus en plus complexes. Ces problèmes ne sont pas des sujets à discuter séparément, mais ils sont les aspects d'une approche intégrée pour notre mission d'amour et de service. Nous avons besoin de sentir et d'agir “ en totalité ”. Faisant face aux besoins de ce 21<sup>e</sup> siècle, nous le faisons avec des cœurs asiatiques, en solidarité avec les pauvres et les marginalisés, en union avec tous les frères et sœurs chrétiens, et en joignant les mains avec tous les hommes et femmes d'Asie de croyances différentes. Acculturation, dialogue, justice et option pour les pauvres restent nos orientations quoique nous fassions.

Nous nous engageons pour la naissance de “l'asianisation” de l'Eglise qui doit être l'incarnation de la vision et des valeurs asiatiques, en particulier l'intériorité, l'harmonie, l'approche holistique et globale de chaque secteur de la vie. Nous sommes aussi convaincus que, seulement par “l'autorité

intérieure” de vies authentiques fondées sur une profonde spiritualité, nous deviendrons les instruments crédibles d'une transformation. Ceci est important car nos contacts avec les autres traditions religieuses doivent se situer à une certaine profondeur, et non pas juste à un niveau d'idées ou d'action. Nous sommes conscients que cette “asianisation”, fondée sur de solides valeurs, est un don particulier que le monde attend. Parce que le monde entier a besoin d'un paradigme holistique pour faire face aux défis de la vie. Pour cette tâche, ensemble avec tous les Asiatiques, l'Eglise, une petite minorité dans ce vaste continent, a une contribution spécifique à apporter, et cette contribution est la tâche de toute l'Eglise en Asie. Nous croyons en une pensée spirituelle innée et une sagesse morale de l'âme asiatique ; ceci est le noyau autour duquel la perception grandissante “d'être asiatique” se construit. Cet “être asiatique” se découvre et s'affirme d'autant mieux dans un esprit de complémentarité et d'harmonie, plutôt que dans la confrontation et l'opposition. Dans ce cadre de complémentarité et d'harmonie, l'Eglise peut communiquer l'Evangile tout en restant fidèle à sa propre tradition et à son âme asiatique (EA 6).

#### A - Les soucis pastoraux

Vu que les contextes de la vie des gens sont divers dans le continent asiatique, c'est à chaque communauté ecclésiale sous la conduite de sa Conférence épiscopale de discerner les priorités pastorales de sa région. Cependant, en cette assemblée plénière, nous avons identifié certains groupes de gens vers lesquels nous devons plus spécialement orienter notre mission d'amour et de justice, et qui sont, en même temps, également partenaires dans cette mission. Ce sont les jeunes, les femmes, la famille, les indigènes, les immigrés par voie de mer ou de terre, et les réfugiés.

##### 1. Les jeunes

L'Asie est généralement connue comme le continent des jeunes, étant donné que les jeunes forment la majorité de la population. Les jeunes sont la réalité d'aujourd'hui et non pas seulement l'espoir de demain. Ils sont une source d'énergie et de vitalité dans la société et dans l'Eglise. En même temps, ce sont les plus vulnérables et les victimes des structures d'exploitation dans notre monde. La situation des jeunes doit être comprise en tenant compte des réalités complexes dans lesquelles ils vivent. Les changements rapides et drastiques qui prennent place dans notre monde - mondialisation, changements politiques et explosion des médias - affectent radicalement la vie des jeunes partout en Asie. Jeunes de tous les milieux,

urbains et ruraux, pauvres et riches, éduqués et non éduqués, employés et sans emploi, les organisés et les non organisés, tous sont ballottés par les vagues de la culture contemporaine. Les problèmes de ces jeunes ont besoin d'être abordés collectivement, en accompagnant les responsables de mouvements de jeunes.

Le nouveau millénaire nous attend avec espoir, ouverture et optimisme à cause des vraies ressources de nos jeunes qui leur donnent la possibilité de s'occuper de l'évangélisation, du leadership, du chômage, du pouvoir des femmes et de l'harmonie communautaire afin de pouvoir établir le règne de Dieu fondé sur la justice et la paix. Si l'Eglise marche avec les jeunes, de nombreux nouveaux horizons d'amour et de service s'ouvriront et les objectifs propres à leur soin (camaraderie, formation et service, ...) se réaliseront. La nouvelle façon d'accompagner les jeunes est de voir en eux des ressources et non des problèmes ; de faciliter leur apprentissage en partant de leur expérience et non pas des réponses toutes faites ; d'impliquer davantage ces jeunes dans les prises de décisions, et non pas de s'en tenir à réaliser les décisions prises par d'autres. C'est seulement quand les jeunes sont reconnus comme agents et ouvriers de la mission d'évangélisation de l'Eglise que leur potentiel s'épanouira.

## 2. Les femmes

Nous reconnaissons que les cultures d'Asie valorisent la famille et les relations familiales. Cependant, on constate partout une discrimination contre les bébés de sexe féminin, la violence et les abus envers les femmes et les filles dans la famille, et un manque général de respect pour la vie. Certains préjugés culturels et les traditions ont une forte influence sur la façon dont la société et les communautés traitent les femmes. L'Eglise peut elle-même aborder ces problèmes en créant des structures efficaces de conscientisation, d'aide juridique, de défense des droits, en étant concernée par la violence exercée envers les femmes. Nous prenons Jésus comme exemple dans une nouvelle démarche pour et avec les femmes. S'opposant à la culture dominante de son temps, courageusement, Jésus accepta et reconnut l'égalité des femmes, leur dignité et leurs talents. Sa grande sensibilité et son respect pour les femmes sont une invitation à une profonde conversion pour l'Eglise et la société.

## 3. La famille

La famille incarne pour ses membres le mystère de la Trinité au cœur de notre monde. Elle peut être

appelée un "sacrement" de l'amour de Dieu et est en fait l'Eglise familiale. Elle est l'école et le sanctuaire d'amour où les êtres humains connaissent l'amour et apprennent l'art d'aimer et de prier. L'Asie a une tradition millénaire de grand respect pour le don de la famille ; elle est le support de l'héritage de l'humanité et son avenir. Elle est aussi le berceau de la formation de la foi et l'école des valeurs évangéliques, la première arène pour la socialisation et le développement de l'enfant. "*La famille n'est pas seulement l'objet du souci pastoral de l'Eglise ; elle est aussi pour l'Eglise l'un des agents d'évangélisation les plus efficaces*" (EA 46). Aussi le renouveau dans l'Eglise doit commencer avec la famille.

A ce moment de l'histoire, nous observons malheureusement les cassures de la famille dans beaucoup de régions dans notre continent, spécialement dans les centres urbains. Nombreuses sont les forces déployées contre la sainteté et la ténacité des valeurs de la vie familiale. Individualisme, hédonisme, matérialisme, consumérisme, intervention de l'Etat, mentalité contraceptive et style de vie technologique, affectent d'une façon hostile la stabilité du mariage et de la vie familiale, compromettant la stabilité de notre société et de ses valeurs.

## 4. Les indigènes

Les peuples indigènes forment une section significative de la société et de l'Eglise en Asie. Ces communautés anciennes et très soudées ont préservé de nombreuses importantes valeurs humaines et sociales. Aujourd'hui, dans de nombreux pays d'Asie, leur droit d'habiter est menacé et leurs champs sont abandonnés; eux-mêmes sont assujettis à l'exploitation économique, exclus de la participation politique et réduits au statut de citoyens de deuxième classe. La "dé-indigénéisation", un processus d'aliénation imposée vis-à-vis de leurs racines sociales et culturelles, est même une politique volontaire (mais gardée secrète) dans nombre d'endroits. Leurs cultures sont sous la pression des cultures dominantes et des "grandes traditions". Beaucoup de projets pour l'exploitation des minerais, des forêts et des réserves d'eau, souvent là où les populations tribales vivaient, se sont souvent faits au détriment des indigènes.

Dans notre société contemporaine, où il y a une érosion constante des valeurs traditionnelles asiatiques, les communautés indigènes d'Asie peuvent jouer un rôle important. Proches de la nature, ils gardent les valeurs d'une vision cosmique de la vie, une société démocratique sans la division en castes. Ils ont gardé simplicité et hospitalité. Leurs valeurs et leurs cultures peuvent offrir une vue correctrice pour les communautés dominantes et le génie consumériste et

matérialiste de nos sociétés modernes.

#### 5. Les migrants par voie de mer ou de terre et les réfugiés

Parmi les changements rapides qui ont pris place au sein des sociétés asiatiques, nous observons avec un grand intérêt le phénomène d'une migration sans précédent et des mouvements de réfugiés. C'est "*un phénomène social majeur, exposant des millions de personnes à des situations économiquement, culturellement et moralement difficiles. Les gens émigrent à l'intérieur de l'Asie et hors de l'Asie vers d'autres continents pour beaucoup de raisons, parmi lesquelles la pauvreté, la guerre et les conflits ethniques, la négation de leurs droits humains et de leurs libertés fondamentales*" (EA 7). D'autres raisons sont l'établissement de complexes industriels énormes dirigés selon la trilogie coût-rentabilité-profit, visant uniquement les intérêts économiques des entreprises nationales et internationales. Les immigrés connaissent les effets destructeurs de l'immigration dans leur vie personnelle et familiale, dans leurs valeurs sociales et culturelles.

Le nombre alarmant d'immigrés, de réfugiés, de personnes déplacées et les problèmes économiques, culturels, religieux et moraux qui émergent sont certainement un défi pastoral pour l'Eglise, réclamant une réponse pastorale adéquate et urgente. A la lumière de l'enseignement de l'Eglise, nous affirmons que l'immigration et les mouvements de réfugiés qui aboutissent à la dépersonnalisation, à la perte de la dignité humaine et à la séparation des familles, sont des problèmes moraux qui défient la conscience de l'Eglise et de nos nations asiatiques. En ce qui concerne l'Eglise en Asie, cela pose des défis urgents pour élaborer de vivifiants programmes d'action orientés vers le service au sein de sa mission pastorale. L'Eglise doit donner la main à tous ceux qui se sentent concernés par les droits des immigrants et de leur situation, se souvenant que les immigrés eux-mêmes doivent être les principaux agents du changement.

#### B - Les idées maîtresses de notre réponse

Quand nous en venons à considérer la réponse de l'Eglise à tous ces défis et aux autres problèmes, une approche crédible et intégrée s'impose. Si nous osions ajouter quelque chose aux paroles de St Paul au sujet des commencements de la foi, nous dirions, dans une perspective asiatique : "*La foi vient de l'écoute et du voir*". Nous pourrions facilement trouver la source de nombreuses conversions dans le témoignage vivant d'authentiques chrétiens, qu'ils soient clercs ou laïcs.

La recherche asiatique pour l'Ultime s'est fait

sentir et a été fréquemment exprimée dans nos méditations et discussions. Nous serons de crédibles témoins pour nos frères et sœurs d'Asie seulement s'ils sentent que nous avons fait l'expérience de cet Ultime.

Notre approche doit être intégrée. Nos Eglises en viennent à cette conviction nouvelle que ses agents de service et de ministère ne peuvent plus être isolés en groupes spécialisés. La communauté tout entière, chaque groupe, chaque personne avec qui nous avons un rapport dans le service, est un agent pour l'évangélisation. Nous réalisons que, précisément parce que c'est l'Esprit qui finalement invite, dirige et renforce chacun de nous pour la mission, cette mission ne peut pas prendre place en dehors de la réciprocité et de l'échange. De plus, les problèmes et les besoins qui nous font face ont atteint un tel volume et une telle complexité qu'ils dépassent les aptitudes, les capacités et les ressources des individus, des communautés et des Eglises. Œcuménisme et dialogue avec les autres religions sont devenus essentiels pour n'importe quel ministère que nous entreprenons. Cette compréhension partagée a également souligné le caractère d'échange mutuel de notre ministère et service. Il n'y a pas de véritable service s'il n'est pas accompli en collaboration, en engageant activement l'autre personne (ou communauté) s'il ne devient pas un véritable échange de dons selon le vrai sens de la théologie charismatique de St Paul.

Un des meilleurs moyens pour aider et autoriser l'"autre", quel qu'il soit, se basera sur notre habilité à reconnaître ses dons et sa sagesse, les profondes capacités humaines cachées qu'il porte en lui-même au cœur de sa recherche, de sa souffrance, pauvreté ou ségrégation.

Ainsi nous reconnaissons avec gratitude et admiration la contribution généreuse et disponible des femmes, des jeunes, et des personnes consacrées. De plus, dans ce continent de l'Asie où l'on aime et respecte les plus anciens, nous reconnaissons aussi les aînés comme des personnes de foi et d'humanité, pleins d'énergie, d'expérience et de maturité. Nous les invitons à mettre leurs capacités au service de la mission du Christ dans l'Eglise et la société.

#### C - Quelques orientations pratiques

1. Le meilleur moyen d'évangélisation et de service au nom du Christ a toujours été et continue d'être le témoignage de vie. L'expression de notre foi dans le partage et la compassion (sacrement) supporte la crédibilité de notre obéissance au Verbe (proclamation). Ce témoignage doit devenir le chemin évangélique pour les personnes, les institutions et toute la communauté ecclésiale. Les Asiatiques

reconnaîtront l'Évangile que nous annonçons quand ils verront dans nos vies la transparence du message de Jésus et l'image inspirante et apaisante d'hommes et de femmes immergés en Dieu.

2. Nous considérons la formation de ceux qui évangélisent - laïcs, prêtres et religieux - comme centrale et cruciale dans le processus "d'asianisation" et dans l'accomplissement de notre mission d'une façon asiatique. *" Dans le passé, la formation a souvent suivi le style, les méthodes et les programmes importés de l'Occident..."* (EA 22). Ce qui se fait et doit continuer de se faire sans tarder est *" d'adapter la formation aux contextes culturels de l'Asie"* et au milieu social, économique et religieux où le ministère doit s'exercer. La formation qui facilitera l'arrivée de ministres et d'évangélistes capables de construire une nouvelle façon d'être Église en Asie, doit prendre place dans l'Église locale, dans le contexte et à l'intérieur de la plus large communauté. Elle doit être entreprise avec l'adhésion et la participation des différentes sections de l'Église. La question de la formation permanente de tous les évangélistes (évêques, prêtres, religieux et laïcs) mérite une attention toute spéciale. Dans les programmes de formation s'adressant aux laïcs, il doit y avoir des laïcs hommes et femmes aux côtés des prêtres et religieux.

De même dans la formation des futurs prêtres et des religieux, et dans leur formation permanente, le partenariat de laïcs compétents doit être assuré pour qu'une telle formation s'adapte à la réalisation d'une Église participante. A moins que la communauté toute entière ne soit impliquée dans le processus de formation, nous ne pouvons atteindre le but que nous nous sommes fixé : une image asiatique de l'Église. (Une telle image de l'évangéliste asiatique est formulée par Jean Paul II dans *Ecclesia in Asia*).

De plus, les gens en Asie veulent voir leurs pasteurs non pas comme des administrateurs d'institutions et des pourvoyeurs de services, *" mais comme des personnes dont les pensées et les cœurs reposent sur les profondes choses de l'Esprit"* (Rm 8,5). L'Église doit répondre au respect que les Asiatiques ont pour ceux qui exercent l'autorité avec une claire droiture morale dans les responsabilités du ministère dans l'Église (EA 43). Les formateurs doivent promouvoir une *" compréhension en profondeur des éléments de spiritualité et de prière inhérents à l'âme asiatique, et à se laisser entraîner plus intensément dans la recherche à laquelle se livrent les peuples d'Asie en vue d'une vie plus pleine"* (EA 22).

La primauté de l'Esprit, qui caractérise l'Asie, a besoin de trouver une expression concrète dans tous les programmes de formation. *" En Asie, siège de grandes religions, où les personnes et des peuples entiers ont soif du divin, l'Église est appelée à être*

*une Église de prière, profondément spirituelle bien qu'elle soit engagée dans des préoccupations humaines et sociales immédiates. Tout chrétien a besoin d'une authentique spiritualité missionnaire de prière et de contemplation"* (EA 23).

3. La mission d'évangélisation de l'Église est profondément affectée par l'impact des mass media et des nouvelles technologies de communication. Néanmoins, les médias peuvent grandement aider dans la proclamation de l'Évangile jusqu'aux limites du continent, tel que cela se fait aujourd'hui par *Radio Veritas* à l'initiative de la FABC. Cependant, ce n'est pas suffisant d'utiliser les médias simplement pour répandre le message chrétien et l'enseignement authentique de l'Église. Il est nécessaire d'intégrer ce message dans la *" nouvelle culture"* créée par les communications modernes (EA 18).

4. L'engagement sérieux et inspiré par la foi des professionnels dans la vie publique est essentiel pour la construction de la société. Ainsi, les professionnels deviennent les témoins au sein de leur milieu social, de leurs collègues, clients et bénéficiaires. La tâche de l'Église de promouvoir justice, paix et développement humain, de sauvegarder aussi les droits de l'homme, sera plus efficace quand les hommes politiques, les planificateurs et les dirigeants seront correctement informés des aspects moraux et humains de leur carrière ou de leur service professionnel. C'est là que les hommes politiques, les hommes d'affaires, les fonctionnaires, les dirigeants et les autres actifs catholiques ont une mission spéciale. Qu'ils ouvrent les portes de leur cabinet ou de leurs chambres de commerce au Christ pour renouveler et sanctifier l'ordre temporel. Les pasteurs doivent aussi leur permettre d'enrichir l'Église par leur expertise, conseils et expérience. D'un autre côté, la spécialisation dans des domaines variés a laissé la plupart des professionnels catholiques avec une connaissance de la foi inadéquate comparée au niveau de leur éducation. Nombreux sont ceux qui sont à peine au courant de l'enseignement social de l'Église. Aussi, *" les responsables chrétiens dans l'Église et dans la société, spécialement les laïcs hommes et femmes ayant une responsabilité dans la vie publique, ont besoin d'être bien formés à cet enseignement, de sorte qu'ils puissent inspirer et animer la société civile et ses structures avec le levain de l'Évangile"* (EA 32).

5. L'assistance juridique est devenue une méthode et un puissant moyen pour répondre aux problèmes et défis mis à jour pendant cette 7<sup>e</sup> assemblée plénière. La société civile en Asie la pratique déjà. Les évêques ont un rôle important dans ce domaine et doivent le prendre en tant que priorité pastorale. Fondé sur les impératifs éthiques et moraux que l'on trouve dans l'enseignement social de l'Église, l'assistance juridi-



que doit s'exprimer clairement. En particulier, l'accent sur le bien commun peut être une base pour cette assistance vu que nous rejoignons les hommes et femmes d'autres croyances. Les Conférences des évêques qui constitue la FABC doivent adopter l'assistance juridique pour le bien commun, en fonction des circonstances actuelles.

6. L'éducation dans ses différentes formes - formelle, informelle, paroissiale, publique et privée - a beaucoup contribué à la maturité et à la formation de la personnalité. Dans chaque problème et défi que nous rencontrons, il y a les dimensions de l'humanisme chrétien, de la croissance mentale et spirituelle qu'une perspective chrétienne peut aider à se développer. Les éducateurs catholiques, dans le dialogue professionnel et créatif avec les membres des autres religions et des autres communautés chrétiennes, sont appelés à être compagnons et guides dans le processus en cours de cette croissance. Ceci s'étend à toutes les étapes de la croissance humaine, et est aussi une dimension du service pastoral de l'Eglise, qui doit exprimer dans les programmes adaptés de formation permanente pour ses propres membres et pour le public dans son ensemble. De plus, les éducateurs doivent se souvenir qu'un élément essentiel de n'importe quel programme éducatif est la formation des valeurs.

7. Pour notre mission d'amour et de service, les autres moyens effectifs continueront d'être les communautés ecclésiales de base (BEC), les petites communautés fondées sur l'Evangile et les mouvements d'Eglise. La vision de la "*nouvelle façon de devenir Eglise*", encouragée par la FABC, prouve être une très bonne aide à la croissance et au développement des BEC et mérite notre attention et notre aide. Les mouvements d'Eglise, dûment discernés par l'Eglise locale en accord avec sa hiérarchie, peuvent aussi offrir des contributions créatives et spécifiques à l'Eglise.

8. Dans ce ministère d'amour et de service varié, exigeant et global, la naissance et le développement de groupes spécifiques qui se dévouent au service de Dieu, de son Royaume et de l'Eglise continueront d'être une tâche importante de la hiérarchie. Ici, nous mentionnons les différents groupes des personnes consacrées, les sociétés missionnaires nées en Asie, et les nombreux laïcs qui offrent d'importantes années de leur vie pour un travail missionnaire ou pour d'autres volontariats.

9. Enfin, l'échange de personnel et d'autres ressources sous différentes formes, telles que les prêtres *Fidei Donum*, "le jumelage" des diocèses, le parrainage, les opportunités de formation-éducation et autres, sont des supports pour l'ensemble de la mission de l'Eglise.

## Conclusion

Alors que nous célébrons le grand Jubilé de la

naissance de Jésus Christ notre Sauveur, et que les Portes Saintes des églises sont ouvertes, nous portons notre attention sur l'image de la porte et redécouvrons avec plaisir notre appel à entrer dans la communauté des disciples du Christ et de partager sa mission et sa vie. C'est là de l'autre côté des portes que nous entendons sa parole rassurante et encourageante. Pendant, ces jours de réunion mutuelle il en fut ainsi pour nous : nous avons entendu son souffle dans tout ce que nous avons partagé. C'est à travers les mêmes portes que nous allons maintenant dans le monde des peuples de l'Asie, dans leurs joies et leurs combats, qui sont aussi les nôtres.

Ici à Samphran, nous avons partagé nos vies, nos espoirs et difficultés, et nous avons été fortifiés par l'Esprit, l'amour mutuel et l'amitié dans notre rencontre. Nous rassemblons tous nos souvenirs dans les Ecritures et dans l'Eucharistie en ouvrant nos cœurs au Christ et à l'autre.

Confiante dans le Seigneur qui n'abandonne pas ceux qu'il a appelés, l'Eglise en Asie prend joyeusement son chemin de pèlerin qui aborde le troisième millénaire. Sa seule joie est de partager avec la multitude des peuples d'Asie l'immense don qu'elle a reçu - l'amour de Jésus le Sauveur. Son unique ambition est de continuer sa mission de service et d'amour, afin que tous les Asiatiques aient la vie et l'aient en abondance (EA 50).

Dans cette mission nous tirons inspiration et force de Marie, la Mère de l'Eglise, qui en hâte vint à la maison d'Elizabeth pour proclamer la Bonne Nouvelle - Jésus Christ le Sauveur.

Ref.: *Eglises d'Asie*, Dossiers et documents n.5/2000, Supplément EDA n.309, Mai 2000.

## Women in the Church in the New Millennium

*Three areas in which “women can be influential in effecting further change for the lives of women in the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” were examined in an address by Mercy Sister Sharon Euart during a Jubilee Day for Women observance 25 March in the cathedral of the Diocese of Stockton, Calif. Euart, a canon lawyer, is an associate general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. She reviewed the history of women of faith, ranging from Mary, Jesus’ mother, and other early saints, to three modern women: Blessed Katharine Drexel, about to be canonized, St Edith Stein and Dorothy Day, whose sainthood cause recently was opened. “It is hard to pigeonhole the role for women in a Church which has come to revere three women who charted for themselves such different roles of service”, Euart said. And “it is hard to imagine any organization which could so comfortably embrace the rich diversity offered by the examples of these three”. Euart reviewed changes during the past 35 years in church and society related to women’s roles, and issues, challenges and opportunities faced “as we enter a new millennium”. In Vatican Council II’s vision, she stressed, the sacraments of initiation “are the starting point for any consideration of the Church’s ministry”. Also, “the council emphasized that there is one People of God but many forms of service”. In the past 35 years “many official Church voices have been raised on behalf of women’s increased participation in the church”, said Euart. “There is no doubt”, she added, “that today more women are involved in numerous and varied ministries ... than there were in 1965 or 1975”. “Yet”, she said, “progress has not kept pace with the call issued by the institutional church itself”. Euart said that “in an effort to eliminate obstacles to fair treatment in the Church, it seems to me that the first and foremost challenge we face is to be advocates for women in the society in which our church lives, especially for those who are economically disadvantaged. “Second she said, “we should encourage official Church leadership in their efforts to promote collaborative models of ministry in which clergy, lay and religious work together”. “Third she said, “women must take advantage of the opportunities to participate in those areas of church life that are legitimately open to them”. Euart’s text follows.*

In any consideration of the role of women in the Church we must start with Christ himself, the saviour

of all, and with his most perfect disciple, his mother, Mary.

The images of Jesus and Mary are like jewels which, lifted to the light, show a multitude of facets and colours. It is natural that at various periods in the history of the Church believers have chosen to emphasize some facets over others, which is one more example of how grace builds on nature.

Certainly in our times we recognize more clearly than ever before the high regard that Jesus had for his women disciples, beginning with this mother. At the Annunciation, which we celebrate today in this cathedral dedicated to it, her words to Gabriel, “Let it be done to me according to your word”, are not words of passive acceptance but of positive affirmation of God’s will and of her own decision to participate in it. Can we not hear an echo of the faith of the mother in the words of the Son, in that moment in the Garden of Gethsemani when the prospect of his self-sacrifice causes his sweat to be like drops of blood, “Father not my will but yours be done”?

It is Mary who prods Jesus to his first sign at the wedding feast of Cana. She stands beside the cross in his death agony, enduring what no mother should have to endure, the death of her child. At that time she also hears his words of consolation, by which he makes her the mother not only of St John but of all the faithful, “Mother, behold your son”. Mary remains with the Disciples in “constant prayer” in the Upper Room after the Ascension while they await the Holy Spirit. We can imagine how, with the example of her discipleship, she helped sustain their faith until the day when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they were transformed from a small frightened band into the heroic missionaries who are a model for us all.

Mary is not only the new Eve, helping to repair the breach opened up by the sin of our first parents, but she is also the heir to the faith of all the great women of the Hebrew Testament with their longing for God’s will to be done. She affirms this in her mighty prayer, the Magnificat, which made kings tremble as they prayed about God’s “deposing the mighty from their thrones and raising the lowly to high places”. It continues as a challenge to us today in our relatively affluent circumstances with its image of God giving the hungry “every good thing” while the rich are sent away empty.

But it is not with his mother alone that Jesus showed a respect unmatched in his own time for the

role of women. Mary Magdalene is a trusted disciple and, contrary to the popular image of her, a close reading of the New Testament does not confirm her as a woman “with a past”. Whatever her background, she is given singular honours by God. It is she who discovers the empty tomb and runs to tell the Disciples of it. She first sees the risen Lord, whom she does not recognize immediately, in the garden. In that tender moment in St John’s Gospel, she recognizes him not by sight but by the way he says her name, “Mary”. It is to her that Jesus announces his ascension and tells her to go to the Disciples and tell them: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”.

There are other examples as well, such as the Samaritan woman whom Jesus engages in the dialogue about living water. When the disciples come upon this discussion, they are “surprised that Jesus is speaking with a woman”— which is very revealing for their ordinary attitude toward women. We all remember from this passage that Jesus tells the woman about her past, with her five husbands; but he also reveals more of himself to her than he usually did during his lifetime.

When she remarks, “I know there is a Messiah coming”, he replies unambiguously, “I who speak to you am he”. Even more significantly, her town comes to believe in Jesus, first through her word about him and then through their own experience of him: “No longer does our faith depend on your story. We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this really is the saviour of the world”. Can there be a better description of the mission of every Christian: to announce the Gospel and to help people to their own lived faith in Christ?

Two other examples will show the Lord’s concern for women, which goes well beyond the conventional attitudes of his time.

The first is the story of the woman caught in adultery who the Pharisees callously use to trap him into contradicting the law of Moses, asking whether the woman should be punished by stoning to death or not. At first Jesus puts them “on hold”, tracing his finger in the dust. When he does deign to speak to them, he tells them that the one without sin should cast the first stone. After the group has left humbled, he asks the woman, “Has no one condemned you?”. She replies, “No one, sir”. He answers that neither does he, but cautions, “From now on avoid this sin”. There can be no greater contrast between the attitude of Jesus and that of his contemporaries. The latter use the woman as a pawn. Jesus treats her as someone worthy of respect.

Perhaps the most touching story is the passage in St Luke’s Gospel in which a penitent woman interrupts what today we might call a dinner party to reach

Jesus. Hear how Luke describes it: “Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with ointment”. It must have been an extraordinary scene and for many of the guests an embarrassing one.

The attitude of Jesus’ Pharisee host is judgmental. Luke describes him as thinking to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner”. However, Jesus’ attitude couldn’t be more different. He says to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Lk 7:50). In Matthew, Mark and John there is a similar scene, except here the woman is criticized not for her sinfulness but for not using the money spent on the ointment on the poor. Again Jesus is accepting of the woman’s gesture, taking it as preparation for his burial; and he places her actions high among the important moments of his life on earth, saying that “wherever this Gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be spoken of in memory of her” (Mt 26:13).

In the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, numerous other women’s names appear, indicating a continuing influential participation in spreading the Gospel by women; and the centuries since have recorded many women who founded communities, started movements and even, like St Catherine of Siena, changed the history of the Church. However, I would like to move into our own times to find other examples of how women lived the Gospel and thus profoundly made a difference in the Church. In a few minutes I will offer a more systematic overview of the Church’s law and teaching as it relates to women’s role, but my point here is that no discussion of law or theology fully conveys what it means to serve a Lord who “came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as ransom for the many” and who told his Disciples that whoever would be first among them must serve the rest. It is hard to inscribe such an attitude in an organizational chart.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the Church’s true leaders are those determined to become saints. They may not have put it quite like that, but these persons, in their pursuit of love of God and love of neighbour, allowed no obstacle to stand in their way, including Church authority. It is sobering to remember the saints who were not only *not* encouraged by their church superiors but actually found them hostile — at least at first. Teresa of Avila or Ignatius of Loyola never got into trouble with the Church until they became zealous for the Gospel.

And it is the saints whose influence remains well after they are dead. While we still name churches after St Catherine of Siena, it is only Church historians

who know the names of the Popes who lived during her lifetime.

And so in addition to Mary and other women of the Gospel of whom I have spoken, I ask you to consider also the lives of three modern women: Mother Katharine Drexel, Sister Benedicta, born Edith Stein, and Dorothy Day. Edith Stein has been canonized, Mother Drexel is about to be and the cause for sainthood for Dorothy Day has only recently been accepted by the Holy See.

How different they all are: Mother Drexel, the daughter of a wealthy and prominent family; Edith Stein, brilliant philosopher, born Jewish; Dorothy Day, a natural community organizer and agitator. Yet it came about that all three would have in common belief in Christ and a commitment to his Church.

And all would travel far in their lives on account of that belief and commitment. Mother Drexel would move from the drawing rooms of Philadelphia to the service of our Black and Native American populations, founding a religious community to take care of a need she rightly saw as pressing. Edith Stein, who worked in some of the most important circles of contemporary philosophy, would move into the world of Catholic philosophy and education until, deprived of her teaching post by Nazi anti-Semitic legislation, she followed a call which she had long considered and entered a Carmelite convent as Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Dorothy Day would move, after her Catholic conversion, from the most liberal, not to say libertine, circles of socially conscious New York to found the Catholic Worker Movement, which has influenced generations of Catholic young people throughout the country. Two of these women would die in revered old age, and Edith Stein would die in the horrors of Auschwitz.

It is hard to pigeonhole the role for women in a Church which has come to revere three women who charted for themselves such different roles of service. It is hard to imagine any organization which could so comfortably embrace the rich diversity offered by the examples of these three.

However, the Church does have a tradition of theology and law which deals with the role of women, and I would now like to turn to that for the balance of my reflections today.

The topic of the role of women in the Church often evokes a variety of responses: great expectations from some persons; conflict, anger and even alienation from others. In the rest of my presentation I hope to identify *some* of the changes that have occurred during the past 35 years in this regard and *some* of the issues, challenges and opportunities that face us as we enter a new millennium.

In order to appreciate the changing role of women in the Church as the positive contribution that it has been and continues to be to the mission and ministry

of the Church, I think it is important first to reflect briefly on the changes we have witnessed over these years and the Church's teaching on mission and ministry that has been renewed on account of them.

### Context for Change

The context for such changes is the Second Vatican Council, that major event in the history of the modern Church, and how it has been implemented. The council gave impetus and direction to our understanding of what it means to be Church. While some people have exaggerated the break with the past represented by the council, especially in terms of doctrine, which remained intact, it would be hard to exaggerate the break which the council made with the past attitude toward the world which existed, if not since the 16<sup>th</sup> century Council of Trent, certainly since Vatican I in 1870.

It was an attitude which considered the Church under siege by forces of the modern world which were trying to bring it down and which had even infiltrated within its walls. Modern historical studies, the scientific method, and freedom of thought and expression seemed all to be attacks on the Church's foundations — whether the Bible itself or on tradition. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries there was probably good evidence for at least some of this hostility on the part of the modern world. But if the Church had preserved itself from real threats, it had also closed itself off to many of the good things offered by the world and from fully understanding the needs of the world to which it might hold the key. The council recognized, in a more balanced way, the deficiencies, the benefits and the needs of our day.

The council also decided to look at the Church itself, first of all, in its totality. Many expected the council fathers to treat the Church primarily according to its hierarchical structure, beginning with the Pope and Bishops and working its way to the person in the pew. Instead, before discussing the Church's hierarchical structure, it spoke of the People of God, all of whom — women and men — receive in baptism the commission for service to the Gospel.

The fathers of the council affirmed the "priesthood of all believers", which had not been emphasized since the Reformation due to the Reformers' rejection of Church teaching about holy orders. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, affirms that while the ordained priesthood and the common priesthood differ "essentially and not only in degree", they exist for one another (n. 10). As Pope John Paul II wrote in 1990, the ordained priesthood "is not an institution that exists 'alongside' the laity or 'above' it. The priesthood of Bishops and priests, as well as the ministry of deacons is 'for' the laity,

and precisely for this reason it possesses a ministerial character, that is to say, one 'of service'" (1990 Holy Thursday Letter to Priests, n. 3). The ordained priesthood and the common priesthood are to work together for the sake of the Gospel.

Thus from the council comes the affirmation of the mission of the Church as belonging to the whole People of God on pilgrimage to the kingdom. Each of us is called to accept the responsibility of giving witness and service to the world in the name of Christ. Each of us is incorporated into the body of Christ by baptism. And as a result of this incorporation, every Christian shares in each aspect of Christ's threefold mission: to teach, to sanctify and to govern.

Related to this changed understanding of responsibility for mission, there has developed within the church a different and broader insight into ministry. In the vision of the Second Vatican Council the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) are the starting point for any consideration of the Church's ministry, for it is through these sacraments that each person is called to and empowered for ministry. The council went on to say that each person committed to further the mission of the Church should be recognized by the faith community as actively participating in the Church's ministry. Thus the council emphasized that there is one People of God but many forms of service.

Also, since the council did not look on the world as totally bereft of God's saving presence, the Church's mission was now not solely a one-sided one of bringing salvation to the world. It is also a mission to identify the grace-filled riches present in the mysteries of human life, of which the world itself may not yet be fully aware. Thus the council also spoke of mission and ministry in the context of the human experience.

We find the clearest expression of the integration of the Church and the world in *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which represented the beginning of an effort to bridge the estrangement of Church and world. *Gaudium et Spes* described the links between Gospel and culture. Its perspective was determined by its vision of the human person and the rights and duties belonging to each one.

With regard to the rights of women, even before *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church had begun to recognize a new situation developing with regard to a more equal role for women in society. This was seen as a positive sign of the times. In his 1963 Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII identified "three things which characterize our modern age" (n.39). The second of them had to do with "the part that women are now playing in political life". Pope John went on to write, "Women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity. Far from being content with a purely

passive role or allowing themselves to be regarded as a kind of instrument, they are demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons" (*Pacem in Terris*, n. 41).

*Gaudium et Spes* recognized the urgency to further the cause of treating all women and men with dignity and equality, emphasizing the rights and freedom of every person (n. 60). The document refers to "new social relationships between men and women" (n. 3) and for the first time refers to marriage as "an intimate partnership" (n. 48), an emphasis and focus that were new at this level of the teaching of the universal Church.

The Second Vatican Council also called for a recognition of the equality of persons within the Church. In *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the council recognized the wonderful diversity in the Church and taught that there is "in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex" (n. 32). All share a true equality with regard to their dignity and to the common activity of all the faithful for the building up of the body of Christ.

### Changing Role of Women

With regard to women's changing role, I want to look first at how this is occurring in society at large. When we look at some of the societal changes of the past 35 years in our country, I think it is fair to say that during the last generation the change in women's roles can be described as increased freedom, that is, the degree of legal and social freedom women experience themselves as enjoying. These changes include shifts in patterns of relationship between men and women in marriage and in family life, legal protections in the workplace and in education, and a new awareness of sexism in virtually every social structure, including the Church. In addition, both men and women are developing skills and confidence in a variety of roles that were once the domain of the other gender.

The really significant change, however, is in the self-concept of women, in a movement toward autonomy and self-determination, where the self is not defined solely in terms of a relationship to a man. Some equate this developing self-concept with a rejection of the traditional roles of wife and mother. On the contrary, I think that this self-concept is not only compatible with these roles; it makes a contribution to living them in a more salutary fashion.

The signs of progress are all around us. Women have headed some of the most important and largest nations on earth such as Great Britain, India and Israel. Two women serve on the Supreme Court of the

United States, and a woman serves as U.S. secretary of state. Women serve in the House and Senate and as governors. A woman entered the presidential race last year and was considered a serious and viable candidate. Women are now in boardrooms as well as classrooms; they serve as chief executive officers of major corporations.

Still, more is needed by way of reform. For example, how will children be cared for? What about the women who do not have the economic and educational resources needed to move upward in our society? Their choices are few, and the pressures are many.

There has been progress, yes, but there still remains a cycle of helplessness among so many women who have barely enough resources to live by. We know, too, that the new poor are single mothers and children. Progress in our society is sporadic.

What progress can we chart in the Church? Over the past 35 years, many official Church voices have been raised on behalf of women's increased participation in the Church. The documents of Vatican II, as I mentioned earlier, Papal statements, statements of individual Bishops, synodal statements, the many statements of Pope John Paul II, especially his Letter "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women", the 1995 statement of the U.S. Bishops, "Strengthening the Bonds of Peace", and the 1998 statement of the Bishops' Committee on Women in Society and the Church, "From Words to Deeds", all speak persuasively to the principle of equality.

Changes in the role of women in the Church, however, have also been shaped by circumstances unforeseen by the fathers of the Second Vatican Council. For example, the number of laywomen and laymen wanting to play a more formally active role in Church ministry and the unexpected decline in the numbers of active clergy and religious in the United States are phenomena that have significantly influenced changes in who is ministering in the Church at the dawn of the third millennium.

There is no doubt that today more women are involved in numerous and varied ministries on both the parish and diocesan levels than there were in 1965 or 1975. Some of these changes reflect a shift in the deployment of personnel in traditional forms of ministry. We have experienced in this country, and will continue to experience, a decrease in the number of women religious serving in schools and hospitals. At the same time, the number of lay and religious women serving in parish-based ministries (such as religious education, youth ministry, sacramental preparation programmes, services for the sick, the elderly and the disabled) has continued to increase over the same period.

A recent study conducted by the National Pastoral Life Center in New York for the Bishops' Subcommittee on Lay Ministry reports that 82 per cent of parish lay

ministers are women. In addition, growing demands for pastoral ministry have witnessed increasing numbers of women providing institutional pastoral care in health care facilities as prison chaplains, in direct services to the poor and homeless, and in services to women and children.

More recently, perhaps over the past 10 years, the number of women holding decision-making positions in parishes and Dioceses has increased as well. Today women serve as parish coordinators, pastoral associates or assistants, heads of diocesan departments and secretariats, chiefs of staff and as chancellors, positions traditionally held by ordained priests.

As a canon lawyer — a specialty an increasing number of women are interested in, let me say a few words about the Code of Canon Law and its treatment of the role of women in the Church. Although canon law is not often thought to be particularly "friendly" toward women, (an allegation that was certainly true under the 1917 Code), I do think that the revised code has helped to advance the role of women in the Church, if only slightly, by its acknowledgment of a proper role for the laity in the mission and ministry of the Church. Laypersons, and therefore women, are permitted to perform several liturgical functions and hold a number of ecclesiastical offices heretofore open only to clergy.

However, while we acknowledge the undisputed fact that many more positions in the Church are now open to women than were 35 years ago, progress has not kept pace with the call issued by the institutional Church itself, in a spirit of co-discipleship, for increased participation of women in church service.

Women, for example, are still prohibited from exercising certain liturgical functions such as preaching the homily and being officially installed as lectors or acolytes. Women are still barred from holding certain offices in the Church, particularly those which require the exercise of the power of governance or jurisdiction; nor can a woman be appointed an episcopal vicar, say, for example, vicar for religious.

So, despite the beginnings of progress, there remains a cycle of frustration among those women in the Church who want to be genuine partners in ministry, who seek better ways to serve and create a caring community, who want to be judged by their character and competency and not by preconceived notions of their roles, and who want the Church as an institution and community to be committed to creating a human environment of collaboration in which the dignity of every person is respected and each baptized believer is called and given a chance to use the gifts God has given to him or her.

### **Challenges for the Future**

At this moment in our history, what then are some

of the issues and challenges that we face as we move into the third millennium?

I have selected three areas in which I believe women can be influential in effecting further change for the lives of women in the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, areas that present both challenge and opportunity in shaping that future.

First, Pope John Paul II, in his various statements and addresses, as well as the Bishops of the United States have given attention to societal reforms that would support women's right to equality in society at large such as equal pay, equal opportunity for advancement, equal pension and benefit plans, child care provisions, flextime and alternate work schedules. In an effort to eliminate obstacles to fair treatment in the Church, it seems to me that the first and foremost challenge we face is to be advocates for women in the society in which our Church lives, especially for those who are economically disadvantaged. We should be concerned about such issues as just wages, equality of women with men in the workplace, equal opportunities for education, and the value of parenting and family life. As we all know, the concerns of women are not confined to the Church. The movement to address such concerns, in fact, began outside the Church and gradually has made itself felt within.

The second area of challenge concerns models for ministering in the Church. In his exhortation on the vocation and mission of the lay faithful, *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II states that "it is necessary that the Church recognize all the gifts of men and women for her life and mission, and put them into practice" (n. 49). The Holy Father goes on to encourage the "coordinated presence of both men and women ... so that the participation of the lay faithful in the salvific mission of the Church may be rendered more rich, complete and harmonious" (n. 52). To support such coordination, we should encourage official Church leadership in their efforts to promote collaborative models of ministry in which clergy, lay and religious work together as responsible, capable persons in service of the Church. In "Strengthening the Bonds of Peace", the U.S. Bishops call for ongoing dialogue between women and men in the Church and pledge themselves to continue the dialogue "in a spirit of partnership and mutual trust".

Collaborative ministry, if taken seriously, will require parish staffs and archdiocesan offices to promote the inclusion of women in ministerial work and collegial decision-making. To build a community of collaborative ministry is to build a community characterized by mutual respect for the gifts of all of its members and an openness to their participation in the life of the community according to those gifts and in accord with the respective status and role of each person.

Third, if we are to enhance the role of women in the Church today, women must take advantage of the

opportunities to participate in those areas of church life that are legitimately open to them, that invite women to use their gifts for the building up of the body of Christ and for its mission of salvation. It is true that the opportunities for such service will vary from Diocese to Diocese and even from parish to parish. Where they do not exist we should advocate the opening of such ministries to women; where they do exist we should encourage and affirm the participation of women as readers of the word of God, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, altar servers, members of diocesan and parish councils, team ministry participants, marriage and family life counselors, child and adult catechists, spiritual directors, educators, members of diocesan and parish committees, participants in diocesan synods and collaborators in decision-making and policy-setting processes.

Finally, we must go beyond encouraging and affirming the involvement of others. Women themselves must become active participants in the mission and ministry of the Church. Pope John Paul II urges us to put into practice all the gifts of men and women for the life and mission of the Church, to make real the possibilities that have already been stated by the Second Vatican Council for the mission of the community (*Christifideles Laici*, n. 49). The Pope goes on to say that the acknowledgment in theory of the active and responsible presence of women in the Church must be realized in practice (nn. 51-52). He challenges us "to move from words to deeds" as we move forward into the new millennium.

## Conclusion

In concluding, let me try to draw the two parts of my talk together. As an organized community of people with a body of belief and law that governs all, the Church will continue to face the issues and challenges associated with the role of women in the Church. Women and men together should have more than a passing interest in this issue, since it is undoubtedly one of the ones contributing in large measure to the shape the Church takes in the future.

But there is another side of the story, one that should be remembered especially by those grown fainthearted and weary in the face of discussions — and sometimes outright arguments — over law and theology. The Church exists not only as an organized society, with leadership and rules, visible for all to see, like any other society. It is also the community vivified by the breath of the Holy Spirit, who blows whither he wills and by the grace of Christ, which is not limited to the few but poured abundantly on all. If you are ever tempted to forget how dynamic and alive our Church is and needful of the gifts we have to bring, I ask you to remember just four names: Katharine, Edith, Dorothy and Mary.

**COMING EVENTS**

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**FOR YOUR AGENDA**

**SEDOS GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2000**

Tuesday, 5 December, 2000 — Morning  
Brothers of the Christian Schools,  
Via Aurelia, 476,  
00165 Rome.

**JOAN CHITTISTER, OSB, USA**

**A FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY FOR MEN AND WOMEN**

**TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE, OP, Superior General**

**A MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY FOR A NEW WORLD**

**WORKING GROUPS**

**Wednesday, 11 October** China Group 15:30 hrs at **SEDOS**