

Editorial **34**

China's Christians: Catalysts of Social Change —
19th National China Conference
Wilhelm K. Müller, S.V.D. **35**

Droits et misères de l'enfant en Afrique.
Enquête au cœur d'une "invisible" tragédie
Anatole Ayissi, Catherine Maia, Joseph Ayissi **42**

Marginalization of Women in a Globalized Society:
The Impact of the Information and
Communication Technology (ICT) on Women
Mary Bosco Ebere Amakwe, H.F.S.N. **48**

Catholic Social Teaching and Poverty Eradication —
Key Concepts and Issues
Peter Henriot, S.J. **57**

Coming Events **64**

Editorial

The March/April issue of our Bulletin opens with a contribution from Fr WILHELM MÜLLER, S.V.D., who has been living for many years in mainland China. He tells us of China's young intellectuals who, with painstaking scrutiny, are trying to find out what positive values Christianity might offer to the process of social change in modern China. He feels Christian witness can make a fourfold contribution to that searching society: faith in God revealed as a person, faith in man and his supreme dignity, recognition of the reality of personal evil to be overcome and forgiveness in Jesus, who helps us to overcome guilt.

ANATOLE AYISSI, CATHERINE MAIA, JOSEPH AYISSI, dedicate their study to the persistent violation of Children's Rights in Africa. In spite of fine declarations in defence of Children's Rights these have not been fulfilled. They indicate three main reasons for this difficult situation: economic misery where children are the first victims, decreasing quality of education and a continuously fragile health service. Thus, the children's often dramatic situation puts the whole continent's future in danger.

MARY B. EBERE AMAKWE, H.F.S.N., takes a critical look at the situation of women in the internet technology. She explains how in modern society, where profit is paramount, where everything is sold, too often women also are sold and victimized, because, as she points out, technology is not neutral but mirrors the ideas and values of those who own and control it. She warns that modern technology can become the 'extension of man' and the 'retraction of women'. Therefore, women cannot afford to stay away from that world, since it is there that the "globalization of women's rights" is having its definite test.

In our concluding article we offer you a conference PETER HENRIOT, S.J., gave in Uganda. He is a well-known specialist on the Church's social teaching, with many years' experience in Zambia. He explains how the *proclamation of the Gospel* and the *practice of lived justice* are able to transform human hearts and concrete structures, thus tending to an ideal that we pray for every day: 'your kingdom come'.

Fr Walter von Holzen, S.V.D.
Acting Director of SEDOS

For more on Mission
visit our Home Page
Articles in 4 languages
[http:// www.sedos.org](http://www.sedos.org)

Please note
Our E-Mail address:
sedos@pcn.net

Secretaries:

Publications: Ilaria Iadeluca
(redactionsedos@pcn.net)

Subscriptions and Accounting: Margarita Lofthouse
(accountingsedos@pcn.net)

Documentation Centre: Federica Pupilli
(documentationsedos@pcn.net)

Proof-readers:

English: Philippa Wooldridge
French: André Notelaers, OSC

China's Christians: Catalysts of Social Change

– 19th National China Conference –

– Wilhelm K. Müller, S.V.D. –

After a day and a half's reflection on "Spiritual Growth and Social Change in China", the following presentation's focus is the role China's Christians may have in the process of change, which society is undergoing in China today. The presentations, workshops and discussions have dealt extensively with the general theme of the Conference and have shed ample light on the concrete contribution of Christians towards social change in China. There is probably not much exciting news that I can add to the already rich information and insights we have shared in our meetings.

Catalysts of Social Change

"China's Christians: Catalysts of Social Change". The term "catalyst" is borrowed from natural science and means: "*1) a substance (as an enzyme) that initiates a chemical reaction and enables it to proceed under different conditions (as at a lower temperature) than otherwise possible; 2) an agent that induces catalysis; broadly, one that provokes significant change, 'his book was the catalyst of the peace movement'*".¹ This last part of Webster's definition, applied to China's Christians, would suggest an expectation of a "significant social change" brought about by their action. Considering the almost negligible size of the Christian Community in the vast human ocean of China, the implication could appear as some sort of megalomania calling for a charismatic faith in the power of Christian action in China.

The first part of Webster's definition of a "catalyst" — "*a substance (as an enzyme) that initiates a chemical reaction and enables it to proceed under different conditions than otherwise possible*" — applied to China's Christians, is a welcome description of what their role in the process of social change in China should and could be, limiting their action to that of helping and facilitating, without demanding from them any Herculean involvement and achievement. The function of a catalyst presupposes the existence of some matter, of

some substances which enter into a process of transformation, aided by the ingredient of the catalyst. The main agents of transformation are the given substances, while the catalyst only initiates and facilitates the process.

The comparison of the function of Christians in the process of social change in China with the function of a catalyst invites us to focus our attention and expectation on the given substance, that is, on China's society, as it has developed through the ages and as it exists concretely today. It needs an honest and sympathetic analysis of the actual situation of China's society, its problems and its innate potentialities for renewal and society building; it needs a discernment of the principles, tendencies and patterns of thought and sentiment, which have been the foundation of the social organization in the past and have guided its functioning in many diverse historical settings. If Christians are catalysts for social change in China, they must believe in China and trust that the genius of China will finally work out such solutions as are needed and are consonant with the national character.

Glimpses of Chinese society

I will not attempt to offer a thorough description and analysis of the society of China. In a few words I will try to recall what we all know about China today, be it from our own experience as being Chinese or having spent considerable time in China, or be it from the wealth of information at our disposal in current publications and in news reports in journals and the media.

The first thing that impresses you, when you come to China is the multitude- of people. On my first day in Beijing, when I passed through Wangfujing, the Ginza of Beijing, and saw the flood of people, I asked the taxi driver: "What are they demonstrating for?". I couldn't believe it, when he told me, that this was normal and everyday life. Often you are apologetically told

“*Zhongguoren tai duo* — There are too many/very many Chinese”. Nobody ever wanted to answer my questions “*Shui tai duo? Shi ni tai duo? Shi wo tai duo?* — Who is too much, you or I?”. As in other Asian societies you are confronted with the reality and problem of over-population, you physically feel it when you find yourself squashed in the public bus or in the rush-hour metro of Beijing (an ideal setting to meditate on St John’s *And the Word became flesh!* 1:14). You see the younger generation thronging into the many schools of all levels. You hear that everybody nurtures the hope of making it to university, which for most, however, remains an unrealistic dream and source of great frustration. You see crowds of construction workers putting up a new, super-modern capital. You cannot avoid seeing the masses of young people from the countryside who spill out from Beijing’s central railway stations and who come in the hope of finding employment in the Capital. You read about big State enterprises which have folded up, sending wave upon wave of unemployed workers into the streets.

Moving around the cities of Beijing or Shanghai you are overwhelmed by the sight of these super-modern megalopolises, their banking palaces, hotels, shopping centres, high rise buildings, avenues. You can find whatever you want in the shops, the restaurants, the libraries. The volume of traffic is steadily increasing. Often, especially when you are in a hurry, you find you are stuck in a traffic jam on one of the circular highways. It makes you fear that it will be soon so dense that no wheel will be able to move anymore. Whereas, in 1985 it was hardly possible after 8 o’clock at night to find something decent to eat, there now seems to be no end of hotels and restaurants which cater to your needs and tastes at any time of the day or night. In its capital and in other cities China demonstrates its newly acquired wealth and a high degree of development on all levels, a development which, with China’s entry into the World Trade Organization and in the run up to the Olympic Games to be held in Beijing in the year 2008, is expected to advance with ever greater effectiveness and speed.

We are aware, of course, that this is not the whole story of China today. Not all citizens are privileged to share equally in the newly acquired wealth (see the statistical figures which have been presented earlier in this Conference). “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” tends to become a ruthless form of capitalism, with the problems of unemployment, poverty, alienation, loss of meaning, and crime. The soaring numbers of unemployed people in the urban industry, the migration of countless young people from the countryside to the cities, the dissatisfaction and anger of peasants and workers with the administration, the incredible corruption, even at highest party and govern-

ment levels, may turn into dangerous elements of instability and social unrest.

This threatening situation is caused and aggravated by a deplorable loss of values. The development of the centuries had already undermined the traditional value system of China. Confucianism and Neo-Confucian thought, which had been the foundation and rationale of all social institutions, proved inadequate when confronted with the evolution of modern society under the impact of the West’s multiple invasion of China. The decline of the Manchu Dynasty and its fall in 1911 ushered in a period of anxious search for national identity and social change. Propagation of the faith in science and concurrent positivistic thinking, connected with the names of such people as Dewey, Russell and Hu Shih, have contributed to the loss of confidence in China’s tradition. A great number of young idealists turned to the ideology of Communism for the solution of the nation’s burning problems, generously investing their talents and enthusiasm for the realization of the social ideal. We have to give credit to that idealistic and quasi-religious fervour of the early generation of Communists. After the experience of several decades with the reality of Communism [*Realkommunismus*], especially during the years of the so-called Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the idealistic fervour of the early years has vanished and after the destruction of this last ideal, the question of values has acquired a new urgency. Decades of anti-idealistic and atheistic education have obstructed the way to seek and find true values and meaning in life for many. The newly acquired wealth is inducing many to look only for the acquisition of money, material goods, enjoyment, position and power. And this tendency is heavily aided by the practical materialism, hedonism and atheism of our Western world, lived in the market-place of the global village, preached on our web sites, which are eagerly scanned by more and more technologically-minded bright young people in China.

The result of this materialistic orientation is a widespread uneasiness with the state of society, and apprehension in the face of delinquency, drug abuse, the break-up of marriages and families, abortion, and all the negative phenomena, which have been brought up several times during this Conference. The lack of spiritual leadership and moral example from many in positions of high responsibility leave the younger generation especially like sheep without a shepherd.

The ideal society

This state of today’s society is a far cry from the ideal society which the early missionaries of the 16th and 17th centuries thought to have found in China and of which they transmitted glowing descriptions to Europe. They mentioned the great harmony which ide-

ally existed between Heaven and Earth and Man, and which the Emperor, the Son of Heaven, had had the mandate to hold together. The Emperor himself had in the first place the obligation to cultivate in himself the cosmic harmony and the human virtues, which would automatically guarantee the harmony and good functioning of society. Typical of this assumption is the often quoted passage of the Confucian classic called "Great Learning" (*Daxue*), n. 3: "*The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to regulate their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge*".²

European scholars who avidly read the reports of the early missionaries, among them the famous German scholar Leibniz, were inclined to believe in this ideal society of harmony and culture, partly also because the spirit of the Age of Enlightenment was pleased at the discovery of an ideal society which, for its harmonious functioning, apparently did not need the existence of a personal God and of a Church.

Early missiology

The missionaries themselves, at least a sizeable group of them, seemed, however, not totally convinced of the perfect state of this society. During the famous Controversy of Rites³ the group around P. Bouvet, S.J. and P. Foucquet, S.J.,⁴ called the "Figurists", held the opinion that in the grey past the Sages of China had known and passed on to posterity the true principles about Heaven and Earth and Man, and that the society of their times was the incarnation of those principles. Later generations, however, were supposed to have tampered with the wisdom of the Sages, misinterpreting their insights and falsifying their written transmission in the Chinese Classics. Therefore, the "Figurist" missionaries saw their mission as the task of purifying the Classics and helping the Chinese to rediscover the original form of their principles. Once the original principles were put back into place, China would automatically recover her knowledge of the True God, find in the Classics all the truth of a supposed "Uroffenbarung" (primeval revelation) and apply the principles to the functioning of a good human society.

In the mind of Figurism, the catalyst function of Christians in China would mainly consist in the endeavour to restore the original Chinese tradition, which then by itself would solve all the problems. The representatives of Figurism were deeply convinced of China

and of her original principles. Their legacy to the missionary Church in China has been an attitude of admiration and respect for the Chinese Sages of the past. Although the leading ideas underlying their research had soon been abandoned, these missionaries certainly have to be commended and followed in their attitude of respect for and trust in the Chinese genius.

Some basic principles

Among the principles underlying the traditional Chinese society just a few shall be mentioned *en passant*.

Goodness of human nature

Ancient Chinese thought was characterized by a basically optimistic view of human nature, as expressed in the famous axiom *ren xing shan* "man by nature is good", defended mainly by the philosopher Mengzi (371?-289? B.C.) who "proved" this thesis by the same universal reaction of concern and spontaneous will to save a child in danger of falling into a well and of drowning.

Optimistic faith in the goodness of human nature is a requirement for any selfless engagement in favour of eliminating the evils which beset human society and for contributing to the achievement of a society, which could be classified as ideal. At a time in which we are struggling against terrorism, crime, corruption, perversion, war, discrimination, poverty, and where we see so little progress, one easily could lose hope in the possibility of ever achieving the ideal and easily become sarcastic. Faith in the basic goodness of all human beings and an eye for the perennial yearning of the human heart to see the good realized, make it possible not to abandon the quest, but to go on labouring for the creation of a worthwhile society.

Together with this fundamental optimism, we find in traditional Chinese thinking a healthy realism, expressed in a slogan which seems to negate the first principle and which says *ren xing e*, "man by nature is evil". This has as its basis the ever present experience of evil and crime perpetrated by people. The formulation of this realistic axiom is connected with the name of the philosopher Xunzi (probably between 298-238 B.C.).⁵ Whereas the first axiom underlines the possibility of education and of progressive achievement of good, the second one is complementary to the first and stresses the necessity of education: "*Human nature is evil, and the good which is in him, is the result of his efforts*".⁶

The Family

The individual, subject of the first two principles, in traditional Chinese thinking, was never seen as iso-

lated by himself, but always as being integrated into the basic social institution, the family. He defined himself always in relationship to the members of his family.⁷ This carefully mapped-out description of each one's position in the extended family context, regulated the relationships and the individual's duties and rights. The family structure provided for the need of the individual, who in turn saw his primary obligation in contributing to the well-being and the orderly functioning of this nucleus of society. Marriage, which affects the extended family community, was not in the first place left to the choice and decision of the two individuals, but was considered a matter to be decided upon by the elders, the natural leaders of the family. Little room was left for personal freedom and the evolvement of individualism, as it had come about in the West. The painful clash of the generations and the struggle of the individual to wrench his personal freedom from the rigid family structure has been the subject of many pieces of modern literature.⁸

The State and society were conceived on the pattern of the extended family. A reflection of this situation is found in the popular saying *Si hai zhi nei jie xiongdi ye*, "All who live surrounded by the four oceans, are but older and younger brothers". Knowledge of people beyond the frontiers of oceans and mountains still being very dim, the saying only directly concerned the Chinese people and declared all in China to be but one enlarged family of brothers. It is, however, often invoked in view of foreigners and human relationships among Chinese and non-Chinese individuals and peoples. Foreigners, though not honoured with the appellation of *tongbao* "child of the same womb", find it relatively easy to live with Chinese peoples and to have this specific feeling of being members of the extended Chinese family.

The heritage of Buddhism

Beyond the native principles underlying traditional Chinese society, we have to pay attention also to the ingredient of Buddhism.⁹ Although Buddhism came from India and is recalled even today as a foreign religion, come from the West, it has had a deep impact on China, changing many Chinese ways of thinking and acting.

Arriving in China towards the end of the former Han dynasty (206-23 B.C.), it met a situation of painful intellectual and spiritual uneasiness. The Confucian ideology, which in the early stages of the Dynasty, had offered a unified world view and the orthodox guideline for the functioning of government and society, and was defended mainly by Dong Zhongshu (c. 179 — c. 104 B.C.), towards the end of this period drew heavy criticism from sceptics and naturalists, which eventually undermined the impressive cosmic and social construction of the Han Dynasty. Wang Chong (A.D. 27

— c. 97) was the main spokesman of this group. Causing the eventual ruin of the mighty Han Dynasty, the entrenched old-time aristocrats, the new-rich families, relatives of empresses and imperial eunuchs and their families who were promoting their own selfish interests. The peasantry, the vast majority of the population and backbone of society, sank deeper and deeper into poverty and utter misery. From A.D. 166, following the violent attack of the eunuchs against the intelligentsia, and the tragedy of slander, massacre and assassination, the leading forces of society were heavily weakened. In 184 and in 189, the desperate peasantry rose up in the famous Yellow Turban uprising. Once again, the conflicting parties of the Dynasty united to put down the rebellion, causing a holocaust of millions of lives and devastating large areas of the country. By 220, the Han Dynasty had exhausted itself, and the country broke apart. For 369 years, the country remained divided into North and South and was governed by a sequence of weak Chinese dynasties in the South and by a number of nomad dynasties in the North. It was only in 589 that the Sui Dynasty succeeded in uniting the whole nation again. In 618, the power was passed on to the Tang Dynasty, which became the starting point of a united China, for most of the time until today.

Buddhism might first have been regarded as another branch of native Taoism, due to its emphasis on meditation, breathing techniques and dietary prescriptions. The impression was somehow confirmed by the use of Taoist terminology in the early translation of Buddhist scriptures. The distinctiveness of Buddhism was definitely clarified by the Chinese monk Shi Dao An (312-85), who developed a new buddhist terminology. Generations of Indian and Central-Asian monks as well as Chinese monks translated the immense amount of buddhist sacred scriptures and commentary literature. As time went on, new scriptures and more commentaries were written in China itself. By the time Buddhism arrived in China, it had traversed Central Asia or the South-East Asian countries, and had developed into the typical form of Mahayana Buddhism. The metaphysical speculations, the psychological inquiries into the nature of man, appealed to the intelligentsia. Mahayana devotion and liturgies made a deep impression and found the generous support of the highest strata of society. But the broad illiterate masses were mainly attracted by the figures of the compassionate Buddhas and the all-present and helpful Bodhisattvas, who represented for them a safe haven in the ocean of suffering, which formed much of their lives.

It would take too long to describe all the contributions which Buddhism has brought to social and cultural life in China. It visibly opened up the horizon of China, not only by introducing a selection of Indian cul-

ture to China, but more so by popularizing the careful approach to reality of Madhyamika, the central philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism, which hesitates to make definite statements about reality, emphasizing that reality or truth lies beyond all human conception and possibility of expression.¹⁰ Buddhism deepened China's perception of human nature, underscoring its spiritual and otherworldly character. In this way, the present life, family and worldly possessions were given a relative value. The great number of monks and nuns was a visible departure from the traditional place the family occupied in Chinese thinking.¹¹

The most beneficial influence on Chinese society came from the Buddhist ideal of the Bodhisattva.¹² The Bodhisattva, the "Enlightenment Being", having, in the course of innumerable reincarnations, acquired an endless store of spiritual merit, done away with all traces of evil karma, and having attained the highest perfect enlightenment (*anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*), which would entitle him, at any moment, to enter into the final perfect *nirvana*, has made the vow to remain in the world of suffering beings, in order to help them to attain final deliverance and leave the painful cycle of reincarnations. Only after all suffering beings have attained the final goal, would he himself claim his rights and enter into *nirvana*. Whereas in the earlier form of Buddhism, Hinayana Buddhism, the ideal was the *Arhat*, the monk who through his own efforts has attained perfect enlightenment and enters into *nirvana*, severing all links with the world of suffering, in Mahayana Buddhism, the new ideal was seen in the form of the Bodhisattva. This development presented the followers of Buddhism with an ideal of altruistic love, which hardly could be conceived higher. It inspired the Chinese followers to turn very concretely to their fellow men and to serve them in their needs. Arthur F. Wright points out that "*the growth of Buddhism as a common faith was accompanied by a great increase in charitable works of all kinds. Buddhist monks had been the first to open free dispensaries, and in time of epidemics the clergy ministered to thousands in the stricken areas. They established free hospitals, to which, by Tang times, the State was contributing support. Buddhist congregations supported the chains of free or low-cost hostels ... and, such charitable enterprises as the building of bridges and the planting of shade trees along well-travelled roads*".¹³

We find a reflection of the enduring influence of the Bodhisattva ideal in the person of Lei Feng, the idealized communist soldier, surrounded by legendary accounts of his selfless service to the people, dying in an accident while trying to help somebody. Chinese today are well acquainted with this figure whom Mao Tse-dong had all young people emulate during the yearly "Learn from Lei Feng campaign". The Bodhisattva ideal is evoked by Liu Shaoqi, the first Presi-

dent of the Peoples' Republic of China, who described the ideal communist party member as one "*who grieves before all the rest of the world grieves and is happy only after all the rest of the world is happy*". Liu Shaoqi applied to the communist cadre, what Fan Zhongyan (989-1052) had attributed to the new ideal of the Confucian scholar: "*One who is first in worrying about the world's troubles and last in enjoying its pleasures*". Neo-Confucianism, in its fight against Buddhism, had adopted the Bodhisattva ideal, incorporating it into its own store of moral values. Fan Zhongyan might have referred to the formulation of the ideal, found in Santideva's *Bodhicaryavatara*: "*May I become an unfailing store for the wretched and the first to supply them with the manifold things of their need. My own self and my pleasures, all my righteousness, past, present and future, I sacrifice without regard, in order to achieve the welfare of all beings*".¹⁴

Christians and Social Change

"China's Christians: Catalysts of Social Change?". In their passionate concern for China's future, young intellectuals have subjected traditional Chinese thought and ideals to a painstaking scrutiny, asking at the same time what positive values Christianity might be able to contribute to the process of social change in China. Among the most representative of these thinkers we may consider the well known Professors Tang Yi, He Guanghu, Yang Huilin, Zhuo Xiping and Liu Xiaofeng.¹⁵ Taking up and pursuing their indications, the following can be stated:

1. To empower the traditional principles and ideals of China for the functioning of human society and eventually to effect those changes which might be necessary, there has to be one absolute, ultimate point of reference. Traditional cosmological and social speculations, inspiring as they are, do not have this character of ultimacy. They do not provide an answer to the existential questions of human existence, the existence of the world, of history. As human beings, we want to relate to an Ultimate, which has the character of a person. We want to know, from where we came and why we are as we are. We want to know the meaning. Concepts such as Heaven, the Great Primordial Oneness, Nature do not yield such an answer, and we are left alone in the vast, dark and cold universe.

Christians are catalysts for social change, if they are deep down convinced of and pass on to other people by their lives above all, but also by their word, their faith in God who is that Ultimate, which has revealed itself as a Person, as God, as creator of all that is, calling itself Yahwe, the "I am who am", the "I am for you", the "God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob". He is the God who speaks to his creatures, revealing himself in his historical relationships dealing with his people, giving in-

structions, demanding obedience and asking account for our personal deeds. The cosmos and man in it, is not the blind outcome of blinkered and unintelligible energies, but is designed, wanted, created by God, who “in the beginning created heaven and earth” by saying “let there be”.

By sharing their faith in God who is the Creator of all things, the ultimate source from where we come, Christians make the greatest contribution to the stability of society. This faith brings light into the origin of all, and invites all to perceive the meaning and purpose of all. As the origin of the world does not lie in a blind accident, and as the world is not the outcome of the accumulation and condensation of karmic events of former universes (as Buddhists declare it to be), but is created by the will of God who is Love and has a heart, in the same way its future is not shrouded in darkness and left to the mercy of blind developments, but lies in the hands of the merciful God. People who have this conviction, are well equipped to stand in this changing world, whose developments have certainly frightening aspects. Christians in China are to be beacons of hope in the darkness which seems to invade our contemporaries.

2. Christians in China are catalysts of social change, if they share their faith in man, who has been “created by God in his own image and likeness” (cf. Gn 1:26). Human dignity and rights are not a concession granted by any human power, but are at the very essence of the individual, due to being created as son and daughter of God and called to share in God’s divine and eternal nature. Respect for the dignity and rights of the human individual is guaranteed by this faith in man’s origin.

Evidently, as our experience shows, the principle of the dignity and rights of the concrete human person is, too often, also practically overlooked by Christians, who therefore need constantly to be reminded to live up to what they profess in their faith.

3. Christians in China are catalysts of social change, if they face the reality of evil, of sin, of guilt. The traditional Chinese statement *Ren xing shan*, “man in his fundamental nature is good”, needs to be interpreted as “man is basically made to be good”. But it must be supplemented by the acknowledgement of the experience of bad and destructive tendencies in the individual, pointing out that there is also some fundamental flaw in human nature, as it concretely exists. Acknowledgement of some fundamental flaw calls for the attention and correction of a blind optimism in human nature.

It needs no intellectual acrobatics to acknowledge the all-pervading evil of personal sin and guilt, which has a self-destructive tendency and does harm to human society. However, too often we have the experience that people do not shy away from doing evil, from pur-

suing their own selfish purposes to the harm of other people, if they can do so without being seen and without the danger of being punished. This attitude is all pervading. We simply might recall the scandalous examples of corruption, which are coming to the surface one by one and in many countries, including China. In these cases we are faced by a great danger to human society, all the greater, as these cases involve people in high and influential positions in the world of politics, the economy and education. But on a lower and personal level, the tendency not to shy away from evil, if it can be done without loss of face and without being punished, is also to be considered a great danger.

Christianity has often been accused of having infected mankind with a complex of guilt. And in fact, it cannot be denied that exaggerations have caused many neuroses. However, it is equally true, that not wanting to acknowledge personal evil as evil and storing away and trying to forget what objectively has been evil, creates a much greater psychological sickness in mankind and represents a much greater danger to society than any personal neurosis, leaving it open to ever greater evil and ever more refined ways of hiding it. Acknowledgement of sin, of guilt is something precious, is the possibility of a new beginning. Sincere confrontation of a past guilt through acknowledgement, penance and conversion brings about peace for peoples and for individuals. Ancient Chinese tradition has already spoken about the blessing of conversion after acknowledgement of one’s failings, as you find in the famous passage of *The Analects* of Confucius (xix, 21): *Junzi zhi guo ye, ru ri yue zhi shi yan; guo ye, ren jie jian zhi, geng ye, ren jie yang zhe* — “The faults of the superior man are like the eclipses of the sun and moon. He has his faults, and all men see them; he changes again, and all men look up to him” [presented as calligraphy to Pope John Paul II during the Holy Year, in reference to the confession of sins committed by the Church during her 2,000 years of history].

4. Christians contribute to healing the wounds of society, the sickness of sin and guilt, when they share their faith in God who is Love, and in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, made Man, who has carried the sin of all mankind and has made satisfaction, offering forgiveness to all who believe and want to accept it. We are not left alone with our guilt. We know that in spite of our best intentions, we are inclined to evil and that the “just man sins seven times a day”. Or as St Paul says, “Though I wish to do what is right, the evil within me asserts itself first” (Rom 7:21). “Alas, for me! Who will free me from this being which is only death? Let us give thanks to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!” (7:24-25).

5. It goes without saying, that it would not be enough

for Christians only to know and to profess these basic truths of their faith. It is for them a matter of interiorizing what they profess and applying it to their actions. Their generous involvement in development projects for human society, their efforts to make love of God and neighbour the leading principle of their relationship with everybody are the convincing proof of the truth they want to communicate to others.

6. Much is being expected from China's Christians! Will they be able to live up to such expectations, in a better and more convincing way than we have done? In justice we have to declare, that China's Christians alone cannot be made responsible for fulfilling the function of "catalysts for social change". In the globalization of our present-day world, this responsibility lies as much with China's Christians, as it lies with America's Christians and the Christians of the whole world. The efforts of China's Christians definitely need the cooperation of Christians the world over. China has opened up to the world, and the Christian world lies as an open book before the eyes of China, and everybody can read it. And so finally, let me reformulate my topic and say "**Christians of the whole world: — catalysts for social change in China**".

Notes

¹ Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1988, p. 214.

² James Legge, *The Four Books*, with English translation and notes.

The Chinese word translated by Legge and others as the "extension of knowledge to the utmost", is *ge wu*. The passage became a fundamental tenet in Neo-Confucian spirituality, cherished by Zhu Xi (1130-1200), the Song time patriarch of this school, which had as its goal the elimination of all traces of Indian Buddhism and the restoration of the original Chinese heritage. Strangely enough, by its ferocious opposition to Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism had to tackle all the metaphysical and psychological positions Buddhism had developed, and became thereby so deeply enmeshed in Buddhist problems, that someone could say, that Neo-Confucianism has done more for the Chinese transformation of Buddhism than the many Buddhist missionaries had done before. The above quoted passage, for example, with its "extension of knowledge to the utmost", brought into Neo-Confucianism the controversy about the gradual and sudden enlightenment of Zen Buddhism, Zhu Xi being considered more as the exponent of gradual enlightenment and Wang Shouren (Wang Yangming, 1472-1528) the exponent of sudden enlightenment. — In modern times, especially under communist attacks against any form of idealism, Zhu Xi and his followers have been vehe-

mently criticized for their thought which was judged as being out of touch with the reality and the problems of Chinese society.

⁴ W.K. Müller, "Jean François Foucquet's Reading of the Daode Jing and Other Chinese Classics", in *Dongxi jiaoliu luntan*, N. 2, Shanghai Wenshu Chubanshe, 2002 (read in Chinese at Hangzhou University, 1998).

⁵ Hermann Köster, SVD, *Hsün-tzu* (complete translation), Steyler Verlag, 1967, pp. 301-314.

⁶ Köster, p. 301.

⁷ Classical dictionaries of the Chinese language list no less than 120 terms, which define the position of the individual with regard to the members of his family, a remarkable feat of sociological lexicography.

⁸ See, for example, Ba Jin, *The Family*, describing the tragic breaking up of a family under the impact of modern Western ideas and individualistic tendencies.

⁹ From the many books and articles, which deal with all aspects of Buddhism in China, and are written in Chinese, Japanese and Western languages, I only mention Kenneth K. S. Chen, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*, 572 pages, Princeton University Press, 1964; *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, 345 pages, Princeton University Press, 1973; Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, 144 pages, Stanford University Press, 1959.

¹⁰ T. R.V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, 372 pages, George Allan and Unwin, 1954; D. T. Suzuki, *On Indian Mahayana Buddhism*, 284 pages, Harper Torchbooks, 1968; Richard H. Robinson, *Early Madhyamika in India and China*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1967; Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness, a Study in Religious Meaning*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1967.

¹¹ *Chu jia de ren*, "one who has left the family", is a speaking designation of monks and nuns.

¹² Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, London, 1932.

¹³ Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, p. 75; also Kenneth K.S. Chen, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, p. 296 et *passim*.

¹⁴ Quotations from Arthur F. Wright, *l.c.*, pp. 93 and 122.

¹⁵ Arnold Sprenger, SVD, "A New Vision for China. The Case of Liu Xiao Feng", a paper delivered at the International Symposium on Religious Education and the Development of Chinese Society, Taipei, 4-6 Dec. 1989; A. Sprenger, "Die Intellektuellen und das Christentum in China", in *Katholische Missionen*, no. 2, (March-April) 1995, pp. 45-50; Leo Leeb, S.V.D., "New Perspectives? Some Observations Concerning Scholars in Mainland China Studying Christianity", in *Verbum SVD*, 431:3 (2000, pp. 435-443).

Ref.: Text from the Author for SEDOS.

Droits et misères de l'enfant en Afrique. Enquête au cœur d'une "invisible" tragédie

– Anatole Ayissi, Catherine Maia, Joseph Ayissi –

La session extraordinaire de l'Assemblée générale des Nations Unies consacrée aux enfants, qui s'est tenue au mois de mai dernier à New York, a offert "aux dirigeants du monde entier l'occasion historique de renouveler leur engagement à créer un monde digne des enfants".¹ On se rappelle qu'au terme du premier Sommet mondial sur l'enfance (septembre 1990), une importante Déclaration finale promettait solennellement de "donner un avenir meilleur" aux enfants de la planète. A l'époque, tous les espoirs étaient permis, nourris par leur coïncidence avec deux événements de taille: d'une part, la fin de la Guerre Froide et le début, bruyamment annoncé, d'une "nouvelle ère pour l'humanité";² d'autre part, l'entrée en vigueur, en 1990, d'une ambitieuse Convention relative aux droits de l'enfant (CDE) qui, pour la première fois, faisait de l'enfant un sujet du droit international et non plus seulement un objet d'assistance. Plus que de simples "succès diplomatiques", ces évolutions étaient alors censées augurer l'avènement d'une ère radicalement nouvelle pour les enfants.

De manière constante et de concert avec la communauté internationale, le continent africain a affiché sa volonté de ne pas demeurer en marge de ce mouvement de fond. C'est ainsi que les Etats du continent, représentés au Sommet de 1990, ont unanimement adopté la Déclaration finale et le Plan d'action décennal émis à l'issue de la rencontre. De même, aujourd'hui, la communauté africaine dans son ensemble condamne officiellement les misères faites à l'enfance et prodame sa "foi inébranlable" dans les principes et idéaux de la CDE.

Pourtant, en deçà du vernis des déclarations officielles, le destin de l'enfant africain continue de susciter de légitimes inquiétudes. Cette analyse, qui privilégie l'étude des pays d'Afrique au sud du Sahara, fait le point sur les progrès réalisés dans le domaine des droits de l'enfant africain. Elle vise à attirer l'attention sur le fossé grandissant entre l'idéal juridique et les conditions de vie concrètes de ces enfants, ainsi que sur les conséquences fatales probables de cette situation, non seulement sur le bien-être des enfants, mais aussi sur l'avenir même du continent en tant que communauté de destin.

Les droits de l'enfant africain

La Charte africaine des droits et du bien-être de l'enfant, adoptée en juillet 1990 par l'Organisation de l'Unité Africaine (OUA), rappelle que "l'enfant occupe une position unique et privilégiée dans la société africaine". La Charte égrène ensuite une série de normes dont certaines, hautement innovatrices, vont bien au delà des exigences de la CDE et placent l'enfant au cœur des enjeux et impératifs de paix, de développement et de progrès. Dans le même esprit, les quinze Etats membres de la Communauté économique des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest

(CEDEAO) se déclarent "conscients que les enfants sont l'avenir de toute nation, et constituent les bâtisseurs de demain". En conséquence, les dirigeants ouest-africains déplorent "les violences généralement exercées sur ces enfants" et invitent "les gouvernements des États membres [de la CEDEAO], les organisations internationales et non-gouvernementales, la société civile et les associations féminines à coordonner leurs efforts en vue de la mise en place de dispositifs coercitifs appropriés permettant de mettre un terme à ce phénomène".

Délivrée à l'issue de la Réunion spécialisée sur le trafic des enfants en Afrique de l'Ouest et Centrale, conjointement organisée en janvier 2001 par la République de Côte-d'Ivoire et l'Organisation internationale de la Police criminelle (INTERPOL), la Déclaration de Yamoussoukro, quant à elle, déplore "l'émergence et le développement du phénomène du trafic et de l'exploitation des enfants" et le qualifie, "sous toutes ses formes et à quelque fin que ce soit", de "nouvelle forme de criminalité". Rappelant que "les enfants sont les bâtisseurs des nations de demain et porteurs des espérances du futur", la Déclaration proclame la nécessité et "l'urgence de l'adoption d'initiatives régionales pour le bien-être des enfants". C'est dans ce dessein que, passant de la parole à l'acte, les cinq pays membres du Conseil de l'entente (Bénin, Burkina Faso, Côte-d'Ivoire, Niger et Togo) ont institué, en mars 2002, "un laissez-passer pour accompagner les enfants mineurs voyageant au sein de leur espace communautaire". La mesure vise à éradiquer et prévenir le trafic grandissant des enfants de la sous-région.

S'agissant particulièrement de la question des enfants utilisés comme instruments de violence armée, l'OUA s'est engagée depuis quelques années dans une large campagne d'information et de sensibilisation,

conformément, notamment, à la Résolution sur le fléau des enfants africains dans les conflits armés adoptée par la 44^e session ordinaire du Conseil des Ministres au mois de juillet 1996, et à la Déclaration de Maputo adoptée trois ans plus tard par la première Conférence africaine sur l'utilisation des enfants comme combattants.

Des promesses non tenues

Cette dynamique montre bien que la dernière décennie du XX^e siècle aura été celle d'un engagement diplomatique, juridique et politique sans précédent en faveur des enfants. Ce fut une période justement qualifiée par le Secrétaire général de l'ONU de "moment d'inhabituel optimisme", et au cours de laquelle les autorités politiques mondiales et africaines auront tenu à montrer qu' "assurer le bien-être de nos enfants a toujours été l'aspiration la mieux partagée du monde".³ Malheureusement, pour la majorité des enfants africains, la grande espérance née de cette effervescente activité diplomatique et juridique attend toujours de prendre corps dans leur vie de chaque jour.

Un examen sans complaisance de la décennie écoulée montre que les indéniables progrès dans l'univers du droit et les vibrants succès dans le monde diplomatique n'ont pas été suivis d'avancées tangibles sur le sol africain. Le contraste demeure saisissant entre la robustesse de l'arsenal normatif et l'extraordinaire fragilité des conditions d'existence de la grande majorité des enfants africains. Bien sûr, des résultats encourageants ont été obtenus dans certains domaines, tels que la vaccination, la lutte contre la poliomyélite ou le tétanos néo-natal. Cependant, de manière générale, l'enfant africain continue de végéter dans des conditions extrêmement précaires.

A quoi tient cet échec du droit et du politique à garantir efficacement les droits de l'enfant en Afrique ? Si l'on peut relever l'absence de bonne foi de nombreux dirigeants africains, ce manque de volonté politique n'est pas seul en cause. Dans nombre de pays du continent, les autorités publiques, la société civile et de nombreuses organisations non-gouvernementales prennent réellement à cœur la question des enfants. Mais la majorité des pays africains cumulent plusieurs facteurs invalidants qui se renforcent dans un cercle vicieux. Ainsi, aux facteurs structurels qui tiennent à l'échec des politiques de développement économique et social, aggravé par leur marginalisation dans le processus de mondialisation, s'ajoutent des facteurs conjoncturels liés à l'absence de démocratisation, à la déliquescence du pouvoir étatique, ainsi qu'à des conflits armés persistants.

La misère économique

La grave crise économique que subit actuellement

l'Afrique affecte au premier chef les enfants, "caste d'abandonnés, sans assistance et avec très peu d'espoir de s'en sortir".⁴ Ainsi, de plus en plus nombreux sont les enfants du continent qui sont contraints de "se débrouiller par eux-mêmes" pour survivre.

La Troisième Commission des Nations Unies — en charge des Affaires sociales, humanitaires et culturelles — qualifie le travail des enfants de "l'une des plus pernicieuses menaces" contre leur intégrité morale et physiques.⁵

Le travail est pourtant en passe de devenir la seule voie de survie de nombreux enfants en Afrique. En Côte-d'Ivoire, par exemple, pays relativement aisé à l'échelle du continent, le gouvernement reconnaît que "la paupérisation des familles [...] pousse les parents à avoir recours aux revenus du travail de leurs enfants". De plus, dans les grands centres urbains du pays, on constate "l'existence d'une prostitution occasionnelle, masquée par des activités de façade (vendeuses ambulantes, petits gardiens, domestiques) et une prostitution professionnelle encadrée par des réseaux criminels évoluant en marge et hors de la loi". Au Gabon, "on observe une augmentation du nombre d'enfants travaillant avant l'âge de 16 ans de manière informelle. Si certains enfants travaillent pour leur compte et à leur rythme (laveurs de voiture, gardiens sur les parkings), d'autres sont exploités par des adultes. C'est notamment le cas des enfants victimes de trafic (Bénin, Togo, Nigeria)".⁶ De manière générale, à mesure que s'est accentuée la dégradation de la situation économique gabonaise, "le recours au travail des enfants s'est développé".⁷

Dans de nombreux pays africains considérés comme "prospères" par des voisins pauvres, le travail des enfants est directement lié à une autre conséquence de la crise économique, en l'occurrence l'émigration — souvent clandestine et criminelle — des enfants qui travaillent au-dessous de l'âge minimum légal et d'origine étrangère". Toutefois, même dans ce pays relativement riche (à l'échelle de l'Afrique), le "phénomène commence à toucher les enfants gabonais ; [...] il est surtout visible dans les principales villes et présente quelques caractéristiques qui lui sont propres" ; entre autres : le fait que, "à l'inverse des enfants étrangers, les enfants travailleurs nationaux ne sont pas issus de trafics, ni employés par leurs parents. Ils sont le plus souvent en rupture familiale ou scolaire et viennent parfois des couches pauvres de la population".

Le drame de la majorité des enfants utilisés comme main-d'œuvre corvéable dans les grandes plantations industrielles, d'Afrique de l'Ouest et Centrale notamment, a conduit certains observateurs à soutenir que "l'esclavage et la traite des Noirs existent encore en Afrique, mais, cette fois-ci, les négriers sont les Africains eux-mêmes, et leurs marchandises, des enfants africains".⁸ Ce sont là des déclarations osées, au vu de ce que fut — et continue de

représenter — la “Traite de Nègres” pour l’Afrique et les Africains. Force est malheureusement de reconnaître que l’extrémisme du propos est peut-être à la mesure de la démesure des tragédies vécues par les enfants sur ce continent. En effet, comment réagir autrement face, par exemple, au scandale de l’Etireno, ce « bateau de la honte » dont la tragique cargaison d’enfants n’est pas sans rappeler l’enfer d’autres cargaisons d’humains affrétés il y a quatre siècles dans les mêmes conditions et à partir des mêmes côtes ouest africaines!⁹ Ou encore lorsqu’on est confronté à la mort tragique, en février 2000 en Grande-Bretagne, de la petite Victoria Climbié de nationalité ivoirienne, “bonne à tout faire” à peine âgée de 8 ans!⁹

De manière générale, l’on observe que, “chaque année, quelque 200.000 enfants des régions les plus pauvres d’Afrique sont vendus comme esclaves”.¹¹

Doublement victime — d’une crise économique galopante et d’une abominable résurrection du mythe du “Nègre dur à la tâche” — l’enfant africain est en train de devenir une “denrée” fortement sollicitée à travers le monde entier, à des fins d’exploitation économique ou sexuelle. En Europe, dans un pays comme la France par exemple, l’on constate une “aggravation de la prostitution des mineurs [...] de plus en plus souvent venus de l’étranger, en particulier d’Afrique”.¹²

Il est important de noter que le trafic des enfants, aussi grave soit-il, n’est toutefois qu’un maillon particulièrement triste du long chapelet des misères de l’enfance africaine. Pour celles et ceux des petites Africaines et des petits Africains qui ne sont pas vendus comme outils de travail ou de plaisir, la situation n’est pas meilleure, au vu notamment de leurs conditions d’éducation et de santé.

L’éducation en régression ¹³

La santé et l’éducation sont deux priorités d’extrême importance au cœur de la galaxie des droits de l’enfant.

Malheureusement, le moins que l’on puisse dire est que la condition de l’enfant africain n’est guère brillante dans ce domaine. De manière paradoxale, cette condition s’est considérablement dégradée au moment même où le droit réalisait de grands progrès dans la promotion du droit de l’enfant à l’éducation et à la santé.

Les systèmes éducatifs ne se sont peut-être jamais aussi mal portés depuis l’indépendance du continent, il y a quatre décennies. Dans plusieurs pays, les taux de déscolarisation et de désalphabétisation (phénomène inédit) sont galopants. Et cela est loin d’être uniquement le cas des pays “particulièrement pauvres”. Dans un pays comme le Cameroun (relativement aisé à l’échelle du continent), “le taux de scolarisation est en baisse depuis 1991”. Et il ne s’agit pas ici de simples variations négligeables à la baisse. Pour l’année scolaire

1992/1993, près de la moitié de petites Camerounaises et de petits Camerounais en âge scolaire “n’ont pas été scolarisés”.¹⁴ Dans une interview au quotidien *Cameroon Tribune* (18 février 1996), le Ministre de l’Education nationale insistait sur les “implications dramatiques sur le processus éducatif” de “la grave crise économique qui frappe le Cameroun”.

En Côte-d’Ivoire, où le gouvernement fait de l’éducation “une priorité”, “40 % du budget national [est] alloué à l’éducation”. Ce chiffre pourrait laisser croire que l’éducation de l’enfant ivoirien se fait dans d’excellentes conditions. Loin s’en faut, puisque les “40 % du budget national” mentionnés n’ont jamais été, même en temps normal, à la hauteur des immenses défis d’éducation à affronter dans ce pays. Par ailleurs, lorsque l’on sait que, suite à la crise économique, le budget de la Côte-d’Ivoire (tout comme celui des autres Etats africains) n’a cessé de subir de drastiques cures d’austérité, on est mieux à même de percevoir l’illusion des chiffres et la futilité des ordres de grandeur. Pour l’année scolaire 1993/1994, par exemple, au moins la moitié des petits Ivoiriens en âge d’aller à l’école n’a pas été en mesure d’être scolarisée.

Au Gabon, sur cent élèves qui entrent à l’école primaire, “moins de trente accèdent à la Sixième, et un seul réussit à passer le baccalauréat”. En dépit des sommes que l’Etat gabonais consacre à l’Education nationale, “le Principe de l’école gratuite et obligatoire est difficilement appliqué dans toutes les écoles publiques du pays”.

Quand on sait que le Cameroun, la Côte-d’Ivoire et le Gabon sont considérés comme relativement privilégiés à l’échelle du continent, l’on ne peut que mieux imaginer la condition des enfants dans les Etats moins fortunés. Au Mozambique, par exemple, sur mille enfants qui entrent en première année de maternelle, moins de soixante-dix atteignent le CM2. En général, “les équipements scolaires sont insuffisants”. Des outils de travail de base tels que les tableaux, les cahiers, la craie, les livres, manquent cruellement. Dans le secondaire, le gouvernement relève “un manque notoire” de laboratoires, d’équipements audiovisuels, d’ordinateurs. Au moins le tiers des salles de classe disponibles est construit en “matériaux précaires”, donc provisoires.

Certaines régions du continent affichent cependant des taux de scolarisation stables, ou même “en progrès”. Malheureusement, de manière générale, la qualité des enseignements est en régression. Or, souligne l’UNESCO, il n’est pas suffisant que les enfants fréquentent une école, la qualité de l’éducation est essentielle et une éducation de médiocre qualité peut s’avérer aussi néfaste pour la société que pas d’éducation du tout. En Côte-d’Ivoire, on constate “une stagnation des taux de scolarisation, des programmes scolaires inadaptes, une dégradation des infrastructures, des con-

ditions pédagogiques défavorables avec un taux d'échec élevé (seulement 25 à 30 % de réussite chaque année)". Au Gabon, la "sous-qualification des enseignants" et le "surpeuplement des classes" représentent deux grands fléaux pour le système éducatif. A Libreville, on note une moyenne de cent élèves par classe. En zones rurales, les écoles "sont souvent construites en matériaux peu durables et manquent de mobilier et de supports pédagogiques". Pour 16 % des élèves gabonais en zones rurales, "il n'y a qu'un maître pour enseigner les six niveaux du primaire, et dans certaines écoles il n'y a pas de maître du tout". Nous sommes ici face à une autre absurdité des réalités locales africaines : la création d'écoles sans maîtres !

La santé fragilisée

En matière de santé, la condition des enfants africains n'est guère meilleure. Au Cameroun, tout comme dans de nombreux autres pays africains, l'inégalité adultes/enfants devant les probabilités de mort précoce est significative, du fait que "la mortalité infantile et la mortalité maternelle sont relativement élevées". La solution à ce défi est loin d'être en vue, étant donné que, malgré les "efforts considérables" qui "sont faits dans le sens du renforcement de l'encadrement prénatal et du suivi postnatal [...], les ressources humaines, financières et matérielles ne suivent pas toujours face à des besoins sans cesse croissants" (insiste le gouvernement camerounais). En 1991 (c'est-à-dire plus du quart des enfants camerounais souffraient d'une malnutrition chronique, "14 % d'insuffisance pondérale et 4 % de malnutrition aiguë". Et ce ne sont là que des "moyennes nationales [qui] cachent en réalité des disparités régionales encore plus accentuées".¹⁵

Les enfants ivoiriens ne se portent pas mieux. En effet, le gouvernement reconnaît que "le système de couverture sociale est [...] insuffisant", et l'État se retrouve dans l'incapacité de garantir efficacement le droit à la santé de la majorité de ses enfants. Quant aux enfants gabonais, "malgré le nombre de textes législatifs et de projets en la matière, on note que les soins de santé sont payants, que le coût des médicaments reste élevé, et que le contenu des textes relatifs à la sécurité sociale n'est pas traduit dans les faits". Ainsi, bien que "l'ordonnance n° 001/95, qui porte sur l'orientation de la politique de l'État gabonais en matière de santé, retienne comme priorité la protection de la mère et de l'enfant, ainsi que l'hygiène et la prévention", dans les faits il y a "un décalage entre certains hôpitaux qui disposent d'équipements de pointe et les centres de santé mal équipés". Cela est également le cas au Mozambique, pays plongé dans une indicible misère à cause de deux décennies de violence armée. La Déclaration des droits de l'enfant mozambicain a beau énoncer, dans son article 8, que l'enfant a droit à la santé, à un environnement sain et à une nourriture décente, dans les faits nous sommes loin du compte. En 1992, par exemple, plus de la moitié des

enfants mozambicains souffraient de malnutrition chronique. Les statistiques actualisées manquent, mais tout porte à croire que la situation n'a pas beaucoup changé depuis dix ans (en 1996/1997, par exemple, plus de 60 % des populations urbaines et plus de 70 % des populations rurales mozambicaines vivaient "dans un état de pauvreté absolu"¹⁶).

En 1992, un rapport de l'UNICEF constatait qu'en Afrique "la proportion des enfants qui souffrent de malnutrition a augmenté [et] la proportion des enfants scolarisés a chuté". Dix ans plus tard, pour nombre de ces enfants, la famine demeure une menace à affronter au quotidien, et l'école, un grand rêve dont on ne peut affirmer qu'il deviendra un jour réalité.

L'état de santé général des enfants, déjà hautement précaire, est gravement endommagé par le fléau du VIH/SIDA, qui place l'Afrique face à des "défis gigantesques".¹⁸

Quand ils ne sont pas abandonnés comme orphelins sans soutien, les enfants africains sont eux-mêmes victimes de la terrible maladie. Sur 1,3 million d'enfants malades dans le monde, environ 1 million sont africains; comme le sont également 95 % des 13 millions de petits orphelins aux parents décimés par le VIH. Quant à la transmission intra-utérine, les deux tiers des cas surviennent actuellement en Afrique.

Violence armée et défaite du droit

En plus du manque d'éducation et de santé, dans ceux des pays devenus sans État, ou continuant miraculeusement de subsister avec tout juste un résidu d'institutions publiques (Somalie, Sierra Leone, Libéria, République Démocratique du Congo, Soudan, etc.), des générations entières d'enfants ne savent rien d'autre de la vie que la violence homicide à large échelle. Cette autre particularité des misères de l'enfant africain place la question des droits de l'enfant au confluent des exigences de la règle de droit et des contraintes de sécurité.

Le phénomène des "enfants de guerre" est loin d'être une simple et marginale excroissance des situations de conflit armé. Il est en train de devenir une tendance générale qui, dans de nombreux pays, atteint une majorité d'enfants. Au Libéria, l'UNICEF estimait en 1994 qu'à peu près 20 % des 60.000 combattants libériens étaient des enfants de moins de dix-sept ans. Nombre de ces combattants aux dents de lait étaient âgés de moins de dix ans au moment de leur enrôlement dans l'armée de libération. Au Soudan, pays d'une région à forte tradition d'enfants combattants,¹⁹ ces "garçons perdus" sont encore plus nombreux.²⁰ Au cours des seize années de guerre civile au Mozambique, "10.000 enfants ont été enrôlés souvent de force dans la guérilla de la RENAMO ou au sein de l'armée

gouvernementale”.²¹ Certains de ces braves “soldats” avaient “tout juste six ans”. Tout au long de la guerre civile mozambicaine, au moins “92% des enfants ont été séparés de leur famille ; 77% ont été témoins de meurtres en masse ; 88% ont été témoins d’abus physiques ou de torture ; 51% ont été eux-mêmes abusés physiquement ou torturés ; 63% ont été témoins de kidnapping et d’abus ont été obligés de travailler comme porteurs ; 28% des enfants kidnappés (tous des garçons) ont été entraînés comme combattants”.²³ En Angola, “une enquête a révélé, en 1995, que 36% des enfants avaient accompagné ou soutenu des soldats, et que 7% des enfants angolais avaient fait feu” sur un être humain.²⁴ En Ouganda, on estime que L’armée de Résistance Nationale (aujourd’hui au pouvoir) comptait quelque 3.000 enfants (dont 500 filles) dans ses rangs.²⁵ Quant à l’Armée de Résistance du Seigneur, qui combat l’actuel gouvernement ougandais, on évalue à au moins 10.000 le nombre d’enfants enrôlés dans ses rangs. Ces enfants sont utilisés comme combattants, domestiques, porteurs ou esclaves sexuels.²⁶ En Sierra Leone, depuis 1991, le terrifiant Front Révolutionnaire Uni avait pour “stratégie de guerre” de faire “des razzias dans des villages, afin de capturer des enfants pour les engager dans ses rangs”.²⁷

Quant à la petite fille africaine brisée par la violence armée et espérant avoir enfin trouvé refuge dans un campement d’assistance humanitaire, elle n’est pas du tout protégée contre la perversité de certains individus sans scrupules et sans pitié, qui n’hésitent pas à la réduire à l’état de “chair à plaisir”. Une enquête récente, menée conjointement par le Haut Commissariat de l’ONU pour les Réfugiés (HCR) et par l’ONG britannique Save the Children, dévoile ainsi un réseau d’exploitation sexuelle des enfants dans les camps de réfugiés, au Libéria, en Guinée et en Sierra Leone. Les petites filles sont obligées par certains “agents humanitaires” d’offrir des faveurs sexuelles en échange de pitance.²⁸

S’agissant toujours du rapport de l’enfant à la violence, demeure également entière la question de la justice pénale et celle des droits de l’enfant en temps de paix ou de guerre. Généralement, les États africains manquent à la fois de cadre juridique et de capacité institutionnelle dans ce domaine. Ainsi, par exemple, dans les prisons de Conakry, en Guinée, sont enfermés de nombreux enfants et mineurs de moins de 18 ans. Généralement, “ce sont surtout des enfants qui vivaient dans la rue, car leur famille était trop pauvre pour s’occuper d’eux. Ils ont été arrêtés par la police parce qu’ils se bagarraient, mendiaient ou volaient pour manger”. Partout en Afrique, des centaines — sinon des milliers — d’enfants sont entassés dans des prisons surpeuplées et de grande insanité. Ces enfants “sont parfois dans les mêmes cellules que les adultes, qui mangent souvent les repas des jeunes”.²⁹ Au Rwanda, des centaines de gamins emprisonnés doivent répondre du terrible chef d’accusation de “génocide”.

Généralement, ils ne bénéficient ni d’assistance juridique, ni d’aide psychologique appropriées.

L’avenir hypothéqué

L’ampleur des misères de ces enfants est telle que la distance demeure immense entre la réalité et les règles de droit. En adhérant aux instruments juridiques de protection des droits de l’enfant, les États africains souscrivent pourtant à des engagements d’où découlent des obligations internationales. S’agissant de la Convention relative aux droits de l’enfant, par exemple, “les États parties s’engagent” non seulement “à respecter les droits qui sont énoncés dans la présente Convention”, mais aussi “à les garantir à tout enfant relevant de leur juridiction” (article 2). L’UNICEF est sans ambiguïté sur la responsabilité, en la matière, des autorités publiques : “Les gouvernements et institutions internationales doivent assumer leurs responsabilités en ce qui concerne les initiatives qu’ils prennent pour placer la question des droits et du bien-être des enfants au premier rang des préoccupations”. Pour l’organisation statutairement chargée de promouvoir et de garantir le bien-être de l’enfance, “ceux qui ne le font pas devront rendre des comptes”.³⁰

Le continent continue néanmoins d’évoluer en marge ou hors des normes et principes auxquels il a librement et souverainement souscrit. Les questions de domestication du droit international et d’adaptation aux circonstances nationales dans lesquelles ce droit est appliqué, de même que celles relatives à l’effectivité des institutions compétentes chargées d’appliquer localement des standards juridiques universellement définis, demeurent sans réponse pour nombre d’États du continent. Quant à l’enfant africain, il est progressivement en passe de devenir le laisser-pour-compte de sociétés végétant elles-mêmes à la limite de la survie.

Cette évolution est extrêmement préoccupante, car c’est le destin même de tout un continent qui est en jeu. Parce que les enfants sont l’avenir des peuples, en leur sacrifice s’opère, de manière consubstantielle, le sacrifice même de l’à-venir. Dans des termes lourds de signification, les enfants eux-mêmes ne cessent de nous le rappeler : “Si nous sommes l’avenir et que nous sommes en train de mourir, alors il n’y a plus d’avenir”.³¹ L’UNICEF, qui qualifie les enfants de “semences de paix”, attire l’attention sur le fait que “le développement durable d’un pays, la paix et la sécurité dans le monde ne sont possibles que si les droits et le bien-être des enfants sont garantis”. Dans ce contexte, où droits de l’enfant et progrès des nations sont liés, “le rôle des dirigeants consiste intrinsèquement à s’acquitter pleinement, systématiquement et à n’importe quel prix de (leur) responsabilité”.³² L’Afrique s’acquitte-t-elle au mieux de sa responsabilité vis-à-vis des droits et du bien-être de ses enfants ? Il ne sert peut-être

pas à grand-chose de répondre à cette question, les faits étant suffisamment éloquents.

Notes

* Anatole Ayissi, Nations Unies (UNIDIR), Genève ; Catherine Maia, Université de Bourgogne ; Joseph Ayissi, Institut des Hautes Etudes Internationales de Genève.

1. Déclaration de Kofi Annan, Secrétaire général de l'ONU, *Nous les enfants: honorer les promesses du Sommet mondial pour les enfants* (New York : Nations Unies, 2001).

2. Parmi les célèbres déclarations de l'époque, citons: "The era of confrontation and division [...] has ended. We declare [...] a new era of democracy, peace and unity" (OSCE, *Charter of Paris for a new Europe*, 1990) ; "The end of the Cold War [...] is a blessing. It is a time of great promise" (George Bush, *America's Role in the World*, 1993) ; "We can envision a new era [...]. We are off to a promising start" (Bill Clinton, *Address to the 52nd UNGA*, 1997).

3. Kofi Annan, "Avant propos", *Nous les enfants : honorer les promesses du Sommet mondial pour les enfants*, *op. cit.*

4. Témoignages recueillis par l'un des auteurs auprès des enfants dans plusieurs pays d'Afrique de l'Ouest (Libéria, Sierra Leone, Guinée, Côte-d'Ivoire, notamment) et du Cameroun.

5. Fifty-Sixth General Assembly, Third Committee, 26 October 2001, *Threat of Child Labour, Need for Priority Attention to Education Stressed, as Third Committee Continues Discussion of Child Rights*.

6. Comité des droits de l'enfant, *Examen des rapports présenté par les États parties en application de l'article 44 de la Convention*: Gabon, Doc. Nations Unies, CRC/C/41/Add.10, du 13 juillet 2001, p. 16.

7. Sauf indication contraire, chaque fois qu'un gouvernement africain est cité dans cette section, il s'agit des informations tirées des différents rapports présentés par les pays africains au Comité des droits de l'enfant à Genève, sessions de 2002. Les documents cités peuvent être consultés dans : http://www.unhchr.ch/french/html/menu2/6/crc_fr.htm.

8. "L'esclavage et la traite des Noirs existent encore en Afrique [...] sous une forme nouvelle", mais avec la spécificité que "cette fois-ci, les négriers sont les Africains eux-mêmes, et leurs marchandises, des enfants africains", extrait de Joëlle Bilé, "Esclavage : le bateau de la honte", *L'Autre Afrique*, 19 décembre 2001-8 janvier 2002. Voir aussi Olenka Frenkiel, "Trafic d'enfants africains : "Etireno, le bateau de l'esclavage", un article du *Mail and Guardian* de Johannesburg, repris dans *Courrier International*, n. 580, 13-19 décembre 2001, p. 66.

9. Olenka Frenkiel, *op. cit.*

10. BBC, "African children "Enslaved in UK" http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/uk/england/sid_1644000/1644406.stm

11. Olenka Frenkiel, *op. cit.*

12. http://www.radio-france.fr/reportage/report_jour/

13. Voir note 7.

14. Université Catholique d'Afrique Centrale (UCAC), *Dignité humaine en Afrique* (Yaoundé: Presse de l'UCAC, 1996), p. 225.

15. *Id.*, pp. 227-228.

16. *Understanding Poverty and Well-Being in Mozambique: the First National Assessment (1996-97)*, Ministry of Planning and Finance, Eduardo Mondlane University, International Food Policy Research Institute. December 1998.

17. UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 1992* (New York : UNICEF 1992).

18. "Afrique : les défis gigantesques d'une longue épidémie" in ONU-SIDA, *Rapport sur l'épidémie mondiale de VIH/SIDA*, Genève, juin 2000, p. 8.

19. Voir Douglas H. Johnson, "The structuring of a Legacy: Military Slavery in Northeast Africa", in *Ethnohistory*, 36: 1 (Winter 1989), pp. 72-88.

20. Voir *Sudan, The Lost Boys* (New York: Human Right Watch/Africa), November 1994, Vol. 6, n. 10. L'impossibilité d'obtenir des statistiques fiables des sites de guerre ne permet de raisonner, pour l'heure, que sur des chiffres approximatifs, très probablement sous-évalués.

21. Comité Français de l'UNICEF, *Les Enfants et la guerre 1996* (Paris : Comité Français de l'UNICEF, 1996), p. 12.

22. Voir UNICEF, *La Situation des enfants dans le monde 1996* (New York/Genève : UNICEF, 1996), p. 18 sur l'usage des enfants par la RENAMO en général, voir William Finnegan, *A Complicated War: The Harrowing of Mozambique* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

23. Estimations faites par N. Boothby, A. Sultan, P. Upton, *Children of Mozambique, the Cost of Survival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), et reprises par le gouvernement mozambicain dans *Committee on the Rights of the Child. Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under Article 44 of the Convention*: Mozambique, Doc. Nations Unies, CRC/C/41/Add. 11, 14 May 2001.

24. UNICEF, *op. cit.*

25. *Id.*, p.17.

26. "UNICEF calls for release of child soldiers by LRA", 5 March 2002, <http://www.unicef.org/newsline/02pr06lra.htm>

27. UNICEF, *op. cit.*, p.18.

28. Voir *Le Monde* du 27 février 2002, "L'abus sexuel d'enfants dans des camps de réfugiés d'Afrique".

29. "Laide aux enfants prisonniers", <http://www.ac-rennes.fr/tic/projets/rbe/ecoles/ecoles22/radio/plemyguinee.htm>

30. UNICEF, *La Situation des enfants dans le monde 2002* (New York: UNICEF, 2002), p. 7.31. "If we are the future, and we are dying, there is no future", in <http://www.unhcr.ch/children/index.html>

32. UNICEF, *La Situation des enfants dans le monde 2002* (New York: UNICEF, 2002), p.17.

Réf. : *Études (revue de culture contemporaine)*, octobre 2002, pp. 297-309.

Marginalization of Women in a Globalized Society: The Impact of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on Women

– Mary Bosco Ebere Amakwe, H.F.S.N. –

Introduction

In the ‘information age’ or ‘information society’ in which we live, the household word is ‘new technology’ which in Western terminology means new discoveries in the area of science and which automatically depicts power and power in the ordinary sense of the word is masculine. According to Linn:¹

*Even a cursory review of the scholarly literature on technology reveals that constitution of the terms ‘woman’ and ‘technology’ are not separate practices; they are related terms in a vocabulary of power-relations that defines the objects men make and manipulate and the work they do as ‘technical’; conversely, this vocabulary treats the objects women make and manipulate and the work they do as ‘nontechnical’, ‘natural’, sometimes even ‘nurturing,’ ‘humane,’ or ‘humanistic’.*²

This is the point Hillman³ made when he said that, “the specific consciousness we call Scientific, Western and Modern is the long sharpened tool of the masculine mind that has discarded parts of its own substance, calling it ‘Eve’, ‘female’ and ‘inferior’”. Armstrong⁴ argues that when histories of technology mention women (and they do so rarely), women are usually conceived as “consumers” of technology, as users of telephones, typewriters, and facsimile machines. Many authors agree that this conception of ‘woman’ in regards to the use of new information and communication technology especially the Internet is reinforced by globalization. Bhasin⁵ defining globalization said that:

It means *profit* is paramount. For profit anything will be made and sold: armaments, pornography, junk drinks and food, violence, just anything. Globalization means *consumerism* of the worst kind and *plunder of nature*. Globalization means *centralization* of control over resources and decision-making. Globalization also means *lack of popular participation*. Globalization means an attack on *diversity* whether it is agricultural diversity or cultural diversity.... Globalization means the cul-

ture of the rich and powerful becomes the culture of the others. Globalization means *increase in violence and militarisation*.... Globalization also means *patriarchy* becoming more powerful, more entrenched. In this global village control over knowledge and information is an important source of power.

Tiongson⁶ voiced the same preoccupation when she said:

Globalization and the convergence of various forms of new information technologies have fuelled the widespread and rapid promotion of ideas and values at the local, national and global levels in a scale and intensity never before experienced. Women are now seriously examining how this development has engendered or hindered the advancement of the status of women and the attainment of equality between women and men.

It is this problem that this article wants to highlight. Although socially and otherwise, women are excluded and are negatively affected by these technologies, but in the last decade, women have advanced in the use of these ‘machines’. At the same time women have been doing studies and waging war against their exploitation through and by these technologies, they have been pushing governments for a proper regulation in the use of the ICTs especially the internet though with less result.

1. Internet debate and its impact on women:

1.1. Negative Aspect

1.1.1. Encourages Pornography

Although the Internet is a relatively new technology, many concerns regarding it are not new. In the analysis of Turkle:⁷

Computers have become the preeminent objects with which biologists have come to think about population dynamics, geneticists about genetic mutation and crossover, ethicists about what constitutes life, online

gamesters about self and not-self – in other words, personal identity. . . . Immense shifts have developed in those fields in which computers have become objects-to-think-with. Unlike the older generation of powerful computers . . . the current crop of microcomputers has attracted programmers and users on the fringes of academic and industrial computer culture, many of whom pose very different questions which have in turn opened up such new fields of inquiry as emergent artificial intelligence and artificial life. In the less rarefied worlds of online games and Internet Relay Chat, people assume online identities, virtually cross-dress and have textual TinySex.

This “TinySex” is a kind of programme, which has to do with the transmission of sexual material and information over the Internet. The popularization of this type of programme in the Internet has aroused the concern of many psychologists. One of the more consistent concerns of researchers is the presence of pornography and erotica and the expression of sexuality on the Internet. An on-line survey of Internet users conducted by Stern and Handel⁸ suggests that sexual pursuits, ranging from visiting web sites with sexual themes to intense online sexual interactions, may be the most common use of the Internet. Probably one of the most unexpected uses surrounding the growth of the Internet concerns the development of online relationships and their potentially addicting nature. Griffiths⁹ asserts that “pornographers have always been the first to exploit new publishing technologies”, for example photography, videotape, Internet, etc. According to the 1999 study of Sprenger,¹⁰ it was “estimated that the online pornography industry will reach \$366 million by 2001”, although other estimates like that of Blue Money¹¹ around the same period suggested it was already \$1 billion.

Similarly, Hughes¹² in her study traced this argument back to the mid-1990s when the hottest place for commercial development was the Internet with sex-related commercials. According to her, “in early September 1995 there were 101,908 commercial domains on the Web, which was 26,055 more than at the end of July and 72,706 more than at the end of 1994. The sex industry was leading the way”. In another study, Hughes affirms that “Web pornographers are the most innovative entrepreneurs on the Internet”¹³ and their transactions are principally with the image of women because according to Oldenkamp,¹⁴ the majority of pornography viewed on the Internet depicts women as sexual objects and thus reminds women of their unequal status within society since the majority of the viewers of pornography on the Internet are men. Similarly, Hughes found that the “largest pimps on the web, the buyers for live strip shows are 90 percent male, 70 percent are between the ages of 18 and 40. The buyers are young men in college, and businessmen and professionals who log on from work”.¹⁵ Even where the

Internet services were meant for good, men still use it for pornographic reasons. For instance according a 2000 report of the *New York Times*, in a remote, Cotopoxi region of Ecuador, the Internet was introduced under the tutelage of aid workers. The peasants planned to gather crop information and sell their crafts over the web. However, it was discovered that some of the men were using the computer to visit pornographic sites.¹⁶

1.1.2. Encourages International Prostitution and Women Trafficking

When those with power introduce a new technology into a system of oppression and exploitation, it enables the powerful to intensify the harm and expand the exploitation.¹⁷ This characterizes what is happening as predators and pimps, who stalk, buy and exploit women have moved to Internet sites. It is good that sexual abuse and exploitation are not indigenous to all patriarchal cultures, institutions and nations, but the recent, rapid economic and political restructuring in many regions of the world has escalated this problem. This restructure referred to as globalization involves large shifts in wealth, employment and population in a complex set of processes that is freeing those with power from local, national and even international regulations and control. Supranational corporations and international banking institutions that are richer and larger than most countries, and organized crime syndicates that are richer and larger than some countries, are setting the pace and are no longer accountable to any national or international government. In this milieu, women are increasingly becoming commodities to be bought, sold and consumed by tourists, military personnel, organized crime rings traffickers, pimps and men seeking sexual entertainment or non-threatening marriage partners.

Accompanying and facilitating globalization is a revolution in communications and technology. The computer-based telecommunications system — Internet can send texts, images, audio and video files around the world in milliseconds. Significantly, the cost of access to this global communications network is within the financial reach of most people in wealthier nations. Within the last five years the Internet network with its worldwide audience has been undergoing commercialization. Some of the commodities as already noted, are women. The Internet has accelerated and deepened the marketing of women for the purposes of sexual exploitation. I regard this as a human rights disaster. For instance, according to the Report of Coalition Against Trafficking in Women,¹⁸ there are approximately 200 million people around the world who are forced to live as sexual or economic slaves and women are the majority. Xinhua News Agency¹⁹ reports that in recent years, 10,000 Nigerian women have been trafficked into Italy alone and according to the United Nations,²⁰

between 700,000 and 2 million women and children worldwide are trafficked every year. Singling Nigeria out, about 50,000 Nigerian women engaging in sexual business have been stranded in the streets of Europe and Asia.²¹

This 'mega net' business is mostly done through the Internet. Forums of the Internet have become meeting grounds for pimps selling women, predators buying women or stalking victims. Web sites and newsgroups have become show-rooms and bragging spaces for every type of violence perpetrated against women. According to the Report of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women already cited,

The Internet is used by predators and amateur pimps to exchange information on where to go to buy women and girls in prostitution, exchange pornographic images and videos, and even broadcast in real time the sexual abuse.... Predators use the Internet to contact victims and display their abuse of women.... Pimps are using the Internet as a commercial venue to advertise and sell several types of sexual exploitation of women.... Commercial prostitution tours are advertised and arranged. Mail-order-brides are displayed and contact information sold to men seeking wives or sexual partners, followed by "romance tours" to meet women. Advertisements and sites for pornographic images and videos, strip shows and live sex shows saturate the web.²²

Hughes in her study explained that men describe taking a computer print out of hotels, bar addresses and phone numbers with them on their trip, or describe in detail how they used the Internet search engines to locate sex tours. Currently, there are details on finding and buying prostitutes available for 97 European cities. The country with the most posting is the UK, followed by the Netherlands and Germany.²³

In another report, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women gave the description of how predators and pimps use the web to give other men detailed reports about their buying experiences which include: information on where to go to find prostitutes, hotel prices, telephone numbers, taxi fares, cost of alcohol, the sex acts that can be bought, the price for each act, and evaluations of women's appearances and performances.²⁴ Explaining this further the report said:

In the men's writings, the women are completely objectified and evaluated on everything from skin colour to presence of scars and firmness of their flesh. Women's receptiveness and compliance to men buyers is also rated, the men buying women and posting the information see and perceive the events only from their self-interested perspective.... A country's economic or political crisis and the accompanying poverty are advantages which produce cheap available women for

the men to buy. Often men describe how desperate the women are and how little the men have to pay.²⁵

Using the economic and political crisis in Cuba as an example the report explained that although the United States has had a trade embargo against Cuba for 36 years, and the State Department discourages Americans from travelling to Cuba, "some find the taboo of prohibition alluring, and in 1998, 50,000 Americans visited Cuba and the majority of these travellers are predators and pimps".²⁶ From their experiences, which they narrate online, these men recognized that the women in Cuba are not engaging in prostitution by choice but by need. These men buy the women nonetheless and brag to other men about how inexpensive these women are. These predators and pimps write to peer groups of men who buy women and girls in prostitution. They share their experiences and give each other advice and information on where to go to find women and girls and what they might expect in that particular city or establishment. For instance one of the men wrote:

These women are not whores by choice, nor are they doing it just to buy jewelry. Because they are average women caught in circumstances beyond their control it is all that much easier to fall for them — and even harbour the idea of marrying one of them and bringing her back with you. At the same time, a guy with enough hard currency can have the time of his life in what is probably the most romantic city in the world.... In ten days I met and entertained five women; four were 18 or 19 years old.... Some of the girls never asked for money. Give them something anyway. Bring some old clothes. Small presents are quite welcomed.²⁷

Adding to this sad story Hughes described the work of the so-called "Mail order bride agents". The agents offer men assistance in finding a "loving and devoted" women whose "views on relationships have not been ruined by unreasonable expectations". The agencies describe themselves as "introduction services", but a quick examination of many of the web sites reveals their commercial interests in bride trafficking, sex tours and prostitution. The new technology enables these men to update their web pages quickly and easily; some services claim they are updating their selection of women weekly. Their online catalogues offer women mostly from Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America, although in mid 1998 special catalogues of women from Africa appeared. They are called "African Queens", and "Brides of Nubia".²⁸ In these catalogues Hughes explained:

Pictures of the women are shown with their names, height, weight, education and hobbies. Some catalogues include the women's bust, waist and hip measurements. The women range in age from 13 to 50.

One of the commonly promoted characteristics of women from Eastern Europe is that they “traditionally expect to marry gentlemen that are 10 to 20 years older”. The women are marketed as “pleasers”, who will make very few demands on the men, and will not threaten them with expectations in their relationships, as women from the U.S. and Western Europe are said to do.²⁹

The most advanced technology on the Internet is live video conferencing, in which live audio and video are transmitted over the Internet from video recorder to computer. This advanced technology is being used to sell live sex shows over the Internet. Real time communication is possible, so the man can personally direct the live sex show as he is viewing it on his computer. The only limitation on this type of global sex show is the need for high-speed transmission, processing and multimedia capabilities. The software required is free, but the most recent versions of web browsers have these capabilities built into them. As more men have access to high-speed multimedia computer and transmission equipment, this type of private sex show will grow. The sad thing is that there are no legal restrictions on live sex shows that can be transmitted over the Internet. As with all Internet transmission, there are no nation-State border restrictions. With Internet technology a man may be in one continent while directing and watching a live strip show, a live sex show, or sexual abuse of a woman in another continent.³⁰

Although sexual exploitation has been around for a long time, in the last couple of decades there has been tremendous increase in the global sex industry and trafficking in women. Sexual exploitation of women has become so pervasive, that it is accepted and often normalized. Forms of sexual exploitation depend on a demand market, in which men choose to buy and sell women’s bodies and sexuality for sexual gratification, profit or advancement. It is a practice, which reduces the women of the world to a second class status. Sexual exploitation inflicts grave harm on women’s minds and bodies, and aggravates the harm of existing inequalities. If a woman’s life is limited by lack of education and employment opportunities, by racism, by illegal immigration or migration, by economic or political crisis, by childhood sexual, physical or emotional violence, or by poverty, then sexual exploitation will aggravate and intensify the inequalities, disadvantage and harm. Sexual exploitation going by the current euphemism of “Sex work”³¹ is not a solution to poverty, violence, or lack of equal opportunities. Prostitution and trafficking are not victimless crimes, or just another form of work, as profiteers of these trades would have us believe. Even when women voluntarily enter into these situations, in the hope of making money or finding a better life, the dynamics of the brutal, often illegal sex industry, quickly leave the women with few other op-

tions and make them powerless to quit the dirty job.

The European Commission recognizes that trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a type of organized crime that is on increase. The profits are high and there are few effective barriers at the moment. Because there is little regulation of the Internet, the traffickers and promoters of sexual exploitation have rapidly utilized the Internet for their purpose.³²

1.1.3. Encourages social alienation, isolation and discrimination

... People often speak of a new world, a new society, a new phase of history, being created ... by this or that new technology.... Most of us know what is generally implied when such things are said. But this may be the central difficulty: that we have got so used to statements of this general kind, in our most ordinary discussions, that we can fail to realize their specific meanings.³³

In addressing the negative effect of the new information and communication technology on women, Golding and Murdock advised that “... the important issues posed by the new communications technologies are best addressed by revisiting the basic questions about social inequality and patterns of social access and exclusion”,³⁴ and Frissen³⁵ suggests that “we work on the premise that technology is not neutral but made up of the ideas and values of those who own and control the technology”, because

men control the use of technological resources, it is inevitable that it is imbued with male-centred values and women do not have the same access to technology as men because technology is socially and culturally constructed as a male practice carried out in male dominated institutions.³⁶

Warnick³⁷ sees these ‘machines’ as “constructed by predominantly male programmers, inhabited by young men raised on Battle Zone computer games, and frequented by seekers of cyberporn”. She affirms that in the real sense of the word the Internet “excludes and marginalizes women even while it attempts to invite them on-line”.³⁸ And Sinclair³⁹ sustains that the “sheer size and seeming complexity of the Internet seemed to have a chilling effect on women’s interest in venturing on-line”. The author described the Internet as a “vast realm,” a “trackless forest”, a “seemingly borderless world”, a “digital jungle” and a “bizarre universe”.⁴⁰ This “huge and unknown space” was viewed by Sherman⁴¹ as having “dark alleys and odd characters to avoid”. Characters like “virtual adultery” which affects women in one way or the other. For instance, studies show that “virtual adultery” causes divorce mostly in the West.⁴² A woman can divorce or be divorced because of this.

Spencer⁴³ described the Internet as a “toxic environment for women”. If control and power are the Internet’s grammar, sexual harassment, she argues, “is its subtext”. Furthermore, she affirms that Internet “discourse is male; the style is adversarial”.⁴⁴ Chat Garcia⁴⁵ making a general observation asserts that the new ICTs also have created contradictory realities for women – “from new work opportunities (particularly in production of electronics and computer hardware; computer encoding) to increased unemployment (bank tellers, telephone operators), greater interaction and intercultural exchange and activism to deeper exclusion”.

This is the point Webster⁴⁶ made when she said that in the information society, the position of women in the labour market is in no way contributing to greater gender equity because according to her:

work remains one of the key areas in which women are currently excluded from full social and economic enfranchisement and from the opportunity to develop to their full potential as members of society. Moreover, the world of work is at the centre of other forms of gender-based exclusion — from trade union activism, from political involvement, from culture and the arts, and from scientific and technological endeavour.⁴⁷

On the other hand, Tiongson observed that:

Science and technology education continues to be biased against girls and women, which explains why they are underrepresented in the technical aspects of the information and communication sectors. Women have not been raised and trained to engage in science and technology. Thus women are mostly concentrated in assembly and clerical work while only a few are engaged in computer systems administration and technical development. Women in low grade technical and service jobs also make up the largest group of computer users.⁴⁸

Similarly, Heather Menzies, a writer on New Technology and its Impact on Women’s lives, warns of “new technology becoming, literally, the extension of man, and by extension, the retraction of women”. According to her, the new technology also meant the

Elimination of many service-related jobs traditionally held by women, such as telephone reception and banking services, or the transfer of such work into the home where workers are employed on contract, constantly monitored through their telephone or computer, responsible for their own overheads and insurance and offered no benefits. Women who work in these conditions find they have little reason to go out during the day or be concerned about their appearance.⁴⁹

In a “globally networked digital universe”, Heather identifies the

digitization of work and learning which also allows for de-institutionalization. The “machine” is all around us, in the wires that run through the walls and floors, telephone lines that surround our homes and workplaces, and in transmissions from satellite to satellite over our heads. Less and less do we need to be in the same place to take the same course or work for the same company; less and less is there a need for humans to be involved at all. Instead of being used to extend what people already do, machine intelligence is replacing human intelligence, human judgment and involvement.⁵⁰

The result of this, Heather cautions, is the “disappearance of women as social beings”.⁵¹

To avoid this disappearance, something has to be done and Webster⁵² gave some indications by asking:

What are the factors promoting the improved social inclusion of women in a future information society?

What exclusionary factors operate and how persistent are they? How may women of different ethnic groups fare in the emerging information society? And are the improvements in girls’ educational performance sufficient to secure them all a more equal place in the workplace and in other areas of social life? Finally, what policy initiatives – in addition to those already under way – would contribute to greater gender equity?

Doing something means bridging this ‘digital divide,’ which affects women in so many ways and Foley⁵³ advocates that “measures be taken to end the unjust discrimination dividing the rich from the poor, both within and among nations, on the basis of access to the ICTs. Another divide operates to the disadvantage of women, and it, too, needs to be closed”.

What can be done?

1. Democratization of access, control, and rights over the use of ICTs:⁵⁴

a. Women must look into appropriate technologies, explore new models, push for public access and open source licensing.

b. Governments should encourage and “protect women’s rights in regard to Internet access and other aspects of the new information technology”.⁵⁵

c. Governments should involve women in policy decisions and frameworks that regulate these technologies, that is, women’s participation in the industry of new technologies: in decision-making about who is re/trained to use technology; loss of jobs or loss of authority as a result of the encroachment of technologies.⁵⁶

d. Support women’s participation in the ICTs by

providing resources and infrastructure for women. Access to computers, telephones and the skills to use them enable women to join the information revolution.⁵⁷

e. Creating web sites for women to foster women's use of information technology for policymaking, advocacy and leadership.⁵⁸

2. Education and Training:

a. Women should have a role in shaping and redesigning the technology. Education and training must focus not only on using the technology but also on fully understanding it.

b. Training of women on where to find useful information, how to organize and use information for advocacy.

c. Internet resources should be established as part of the school curriculum.⁵⁹

d. Redefine computer literacy to include the life-long application of relevant concepts, skills, and problem-solving abilities.

e. Change the public face of computing by making the public face of women in computing correspond to the reality rather than the stereotype.

f. Educate students (especially women) about technology and the future of work.

g. Rethink educational software and computer games so that girls will recognize themselves in the culture of computing.

h. Support efforts that give girls and women a boost into the pipeline by creating and supporting computing clubs and summer school classes for girls, mentoring programmes, science fairs, and programmes that encourage girls to see themselves as capable of careers in technology.⁶⁰

i. Running and developing educational programmes addressing the use of the Internet by prostitution customers for the purpose of trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation of women and girls.

3. Need for regulation policy on the part of Governments and States

a. Urgent need to review, amend, and enforce existing laws, or enact new laws, to prevent the misuse of the Internet for trafficking, prostitution, and the sexual exploitation of girls and women.⁶¹

b. Support for a rating system on the Internet, so that pornography can be rated and software programmes screen it out.

c. Support for international judicial and police cooperation in the investigation of the misuse of the Internet for the purpose of promoting and/or carrying out trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation of women and girls. Countries that send the men on tours and receive the mail order brides should also ban the

operation of such agencies and prohibit the advertisement of these services from computer servers in their countries.⁶²

d. Governments and States should investigate and use as evidence of crimes and acts of discrimination advertising, correspondence, and other communications over the Internet to promote sex trafficking, prostitution, sex tourism, bride trafficking and rape.

e. Maximum cooperation among governments, national and regional law enforcement bodies in order to combat the escalating trafficking and prostitution of women and the globalization of this industry.⁶³

4. Need for the formation of International Regulatory bodies like the:

a. Independent Tiplines and Vigilantes: Anti-pornography association formed in the United States and Western Europe in 1997.

b. PedoWatch: a non-profit organization in the United States committed to reducing the sexual victimization of children by predators on the Internet.

c. Ethical Hackers Against Pedophilia (EHAP): A 17 member secret organization of skilled computer technicians that surfs around the Internet looking for sex offenders who abuse children and women.

d. Internet Combat Group: a hacker vigilante group founded in England in 1977 dedicated to knocking predators of children off the Internet.

e. Morkhoven: A Belgian anti-pornography vigilante group, which does not operate on the Internet, but in July 1998 was instrumental in exposing an international Internet child pornography ring.⁶⁴

5. Formation of International Women's Rights Organization:

An organization that, together with the international feminist movement for women's rights, and other women human rights activists and organizations, will work to make the crimes of sexual exploitation of women and girls visible.

6. Globalizing Women's Rights and Dignity:⁶⁵

The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁶⁶ states that: "All men are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Article 1); "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude" of any kind (Article 4); "No one shall be subjected to torture, or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment" (Article 5). So sexual exploitation violates human dignity and bodily integrity and is a violation of the human rights of women and their chance for equal opportunities in society. Therefore it should be fought against.

Conclusion

Acknowledging that the Internet can be a valuable medium of communication, and noting that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights identifies the right to freedom of expression as a fundamental human right,⁶⁷ women have to be full members of the computer culture.⁶⁸ We cannot afford to stay away because already women's absence so far in regards to ICTs is costing us a lot. This is why Jansen argues that "the price paid for the absence of a critical consciousness about gender in discussions of communications and technology is the reproduction of old patterns of power and privilege in the social distribution of knowledge".⁶⁹ Since information is power, there is need for women to empower themselves through the ownership and use of the Internet technology because Internet experience helps us to develop models of psychological well-being that are in a meaningful sense postmodern.⁷⁰ These models admit multiplicity and flexibility because according to Alloo — with the Internet, we have the challenge of not only mastering the technology but also facilitating its services in terms of information and interactive communication to communities. We have to create a cyber culture of women whereby we interact and produce our analysis and reality and feed them to the global community. Instead of allowing ourselves to become sponges or have a victim syndrome, women's networks should use the Internet to create our news and views.⁷¹

This will help women make a real change and promote women's dignity and equality, by defining forms of sexual exploitation as human rights violations and crimes against women, which should not be allowed in our communities or on the Internet.⁷²

It is clear that women do not reject the new technology *per se*. Women would just like to create conditions that will give us better control over the use of and access to them. We know that the issue of how to gain control is the most difficult one but at the same time, women should stop whining and instead hop onto the fast train of information technology and globalization and take control when we are in it.⁷³ Computer literacy is becoming an indispensable tool for organizing and mobilizing communities throughout the world, and women need to use these tools. We should try to overcome the five major barriers when we want to use the Internet especially for the first time. Bogstad listed them as:

1. a tendency in our culture (which women themselves take in) to think women can't handle technology;
2. a tendency on the part of computer people (still more men than women) to mystify the machines and processes or at least to make the introductions too complicated;
3. the fact that women often have busy lives and have to be practical with their time, yet there is a need to 'play' with computer software as part of the leaning proc-

ess; 4. the problem of locating the place Internet and electronic research should have in the overall research process; and 5. the problem of 'imagining yourself in Cyberspace' and understanding what part of the resource you are using as you use it.⁷⁴

Again it is true that many women have not been taught to feel comfortable with technology; even many of us are simply apathetic about it. But it will be a tragedy Wertheim⁷⁵ warns, "if our progress in the workplace were halted by our own passivity". Sherman advised that "women need to throw out excuses and embrace technology, especially something as useful and far-reaching as the Internet, otherwise we are the ones holding ourselves back from truly gaining power in this area".⁷⁶

Notes

¹ Pam, Linn. "Gender Stereotypes, Technology Stereotypes". Quoted in Sue Curry, Jansen. "Gender and the Information Society: A Socially Structured Silence". *Journal of Communication*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1989, 106, pp. 196, pp. 196-215.

² Ibid.

³ James, Hillman. *The Myth of Analysis*, New York: Harper & Row, 1972, p. 250.

⁴ Nancy, Armstrong. "The Gender Bind: Women and the Disciplines". Quoted in Sue Curry, Jansen. "Gender and the Information Society: A Socially Structured Silence". *Journal of Communication*, vol. 39, no. 3, 1989, 106, pp. 197, pp. 196-215.

⁵ Kamla, Bhasin, "Women and communication alternatives: hope for the next century". *Media Development*, vol. XLI, no. 2, 1994, p. 5, pp. 4-7.

⁶ Mari Luz Quesada Tiongson, "The State of Women and Media in Asia: An Overview". Isis International Manila for the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) September 1999, <http://www.isiswomen.org/womenet/index.html>, p. 6, pp. 1-15.

⁷ Sherry, Turkle. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995, p. 4.

⁸ Steven E. Stern and Alysia D. Handel, "Sexuality and Mass Media: The Historical context of psychology's reaction to sexuality on the Internet", [Part 1 of 2]. *Journal of Sex Research (The)*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2001, pp. 283-294.

⁹ Mark, Griffiths, "Sex on the Internet: Observations and Implications for Internet Sex addiction", (Part 1 of 2). *Journal of Sex Research (The)*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2001, p. 333, pp. 331-340.

¹⁰ P. Sprenger, "The Porn Pioneers". *The Guardian*, September 30, 1999 (Online), pp. 2-3.

¹¹ Blue Money, *The Guardian*, May 27, 1999 (Online), p. 5.

¹² Donna M. Hughes, "The Internet and the Global Prostitution Industry", (Part 2 of 2). *Women in Action*, vol. 72, 1999, p. 3, pp. 1-5.

¹³ Donna M. Hughes, "Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation on the Internet". *Women in Action*, vol. 70, 1997, p. 4, pp. 3-5.

¹⁴ Evelyn, Oldenkamp, "Pornography, the Internet and Student-to-Student Sexual harassment — a Dilemma Re-

solved with Title VII and Title IX”, (Part 1 and 2). *Duke Journal of Gender Law and Policy*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1997, p. 160. pp. 159-169.

¹⁵ Donna M. Hughes, “The Internet and the Global Prostitution Industry” (Part 2 of 2), p. 2.

¹⁶ *New York Times*, “When Villages Go Global: How a Byte of Knowledge can be dangerous too”. *New York Times* (National Edition), CXLIX (51,381): 4; 4 May 2000, (Online).

¹⁷ Donna M. Hughes, “The Internet and the Global Prostitution Industry” (Part 2 of 2), p. 4.

¹⁸ Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. “Pimps and Predators on the Internet-Globalizing the Sexual Exploitation of women and Children”, [Part 1 of 16]. 1999, (Online) <http://blue-fox.com/nepal>, p. 3. pp. 1-4.

¹⁹ Xinhua News Agency, “10,000 Nigerian Women Trafficked into Italy”. January 11, 2002. (Online) <http://quotes.freerealtime.com/dl/fit/N?SA>, p. 1. pp. 1-2.

²⁰ United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. <http://www.undp.org/fwcw/dawfvcw.html>, 1999.

²¹ Xinhua News Agency, “10,000 Nigerian Women Trafficked into Italy”, p. 1.

²² Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. “Pimps and Predators on the Internet-Globalizing the Sexual Exploitation of women and Children”, [Part 1 of 16], p. 4.

²³ Donna M. Hughes, “Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation on the Internet”. <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/catw>, 1997, p. 2. pp.1-6.

²⁴ Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. “Pimps and Predators on the Internet-Globalizing the Sexual Exploitation of women and Children”, [Part 2 of 16]. 1999, (Online) <http://blue-fox.com/nepal>, p. 2. pp. 1-5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 3.

²⁸ Donna M. Hughes, “The Internet and the Global Prostitution Industry” (Part 2 of 2), p. 1

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 2.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 4.

³² Donna M. Hughes, “The Internet and the Global Prostitution Industry”, (Part 2 of 2), p. 1.

³³ Raymond, Williams, “The Technology and the Society”, in Bennett, T. (Ed) *Popular Fiction: Technology, Ideology, Production, Reading*. London: Routledge, 1990, p. 9. pp. 8-17.

³⁴ P. Golding and G. Murdock, “Unequal Information: Access and Exclusion in the New Communication Market Place”, in Ferguson, M. *New Communication Technologies and the Public Interest: Comparative perspectives on Policy Change*. London: sage, 1986, p. 83. pp. 83-91.

³⁵ V. Frissen, “Trapped in Electroin Cages? Gender and New Information Technologies in the Public and Private Domain: An Overview of Research”. *Mass Culture and Society*, vol. 14, 1992, p. 31. pp. 31-49.

³⁶ Susan, Siew and Wang Lay Kim. “Do New Communication Technologies Improve the Status of Women?”. *Media Asia*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1996, p. 74. pp. 74-78.

³⁷ Barbara, Warnick, “Masculinizing the Feminine: Inviting

Women On Line Ca. 1997”. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*. Vol. 16, no. 1. 1999, p. 1. pp. 1-19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ C. Sinclair, *Net Chick*. New York: Henry Holt, 1996, p. 6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. x.

⁴¹ A. Sherman, “Claiming cyberspace: five myths that are keeping women offline”. *Ms.*, vol. 6, p. 27. pp. 26-28 (online – FAO Database, Rome).

⁴² J.Z. Grover, “MUDdy Waters”. *The Women’s Review*, Inc, XIII (8): 9-10, May 1996, p. 1. pp. 1-4. (online – FAO Database, Rome).

⁴³ Dale, Spencer, *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace*. Canada: Garamond Press, 1997. p. 84.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 86.

⁴⁵ Ramilo, Chat Garcia, “Empowering Women in the Global Information Era”. Paper presented at the Conference on Vision for Asia-Pacific Women in the Information of the 21st Century — Women’s Status and Communication Technology Information Era, Seoul, Korea, November 1998, <http://www.isiswomen.org/womenet/indes.html>, p. 2. pp. 1-6.

⁴⁶ Juliet, Webster, “Today’s Second Sex and Tomorrow’s First? Women and Work in the European Information Society”. in Ken Ducatel, Juliet Webster, and Werner Herrmann (Eds). *The Information Society in Europe: Work and Life in an Age of Globalization*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2000, p. 120. pp. 119-140.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 120-121.

⁴⁸ Mari Luz Quesada Tionson, “The State of Women and Media in Asia: An Overview”. p. 6.

⁴⁹ Menzies, Heather, “Janus Project Workshop — New Learning Technology and Women-Proceedings” [Part 1 of 6]. Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, March 1997, <http://www.nald.ca/cclow.htm>, p. 3. pp.1-6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Juliet, Webster, “Today’s Second Sex and Tomorrow’s First? Women and Work in the European Information Society”. in Ken Ducatel, Juliet Webster, and Werner Herrmann (Eds). *The Information Society in Europe: Work and Life in an Age of Globalization*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000, p. 120. pp.119-140.

⁵³ John P. Foley, “Vatican Aide’s Address on Information Technologies.” *Zenit.org*, June 19, 2002, p.1. pp.1-2.

⁵⁴ Mari Luz Quesada Tionson, “The State of Women and Media in Asia: An Overview”, p. 13.

⁵⁵ Pontifical Council for Social Communications. *Ethics in Internet*. Città Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002, no. 17, p. 24.

⁵⁶ Menzies, Heather, “Janus Project Workshop—New Learning Technology & Women-Proceedings” [Part 1 of 6], p. 6.

⁵⁷ Rosemary, Okello, “Women and the Web”, p. 1.

⁵⁸ United States Agency for International Development (USAID). “Gender, Information Technology, and Developing Countries: An Analytic Study”, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Evelyn, Oldenkamp. “Pornography, the Internet and Student-to-Student Sexual harassment — a Dilemma Re-

solved with Title VII and Title IX”, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Sharon, Schuster, “Tech-Savvy: Educating Girls in the New Computer Age” [Part 1 of 2], pp. 4-5.

⁶¹ Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. “Pimps and Predators on the Internet-Globalizing the Sexual Exploitation of women and Children,” [Part 14 of 16]. 1999, (Online) <http://blue-fox.com/nepal>, p. 4. pp. 1-4.

⁶² Donna M. Hughes, “The Internet and the Global Prostitution Industry”, (Part 2 of 2), p. 5.

⁶³ Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. “Pimps and Predators on the Internet-Globalizing the Sexual Exploitation of women and Children,” [Part 14 of 16]. 1999, (Online) <http://blue-fox.com/nepal>, p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* [Part 13 of 16]. 1999, (Online) <http://blue-fox.com/nepal>, p. 1-2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 1.

⁶⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Report 2000*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 14.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Dale, Spencer, *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace*, p. 87.

⁶⁹ Sue Curry, Jansen, “Gender and the Information Society: A Socially Structured Silence”, p. 196.

⁷⁰ J.Z. Grover, “MUDdy Waters”, p. 4.

⁷¹ Fatma, Alloo, “Globalization and ICTs can empower women, youth and NGOs”, p. 2.

⁷² Donna M. Hughes, “Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation on the Internet”, p. 5.

⁷³ Victoria, Tauli-Corpuz, “ICTs: The Impact on Women and Proposals for a Women’s Agenda” [Part 2 of 2]. *Women in Action*, no. 2, 1999, p. 5. pp. 1-5. (Online — Database FAO Library, Rome).

⁷⁴ Janice M. Bogstad, “Women and the Internet at the NGO Forum for the Fourth UN World Conference on the Status of Women”, p. 2.

⁷⁵ A. Sherman, “Claiming cyberspace: five myths that are keeping women offline”, p. 153.

⁷⁶ Margaret, Wertheim, “Women, wake up about Computers!”, quoted in Barbara, Warnick, “Masculinizing the Feminine: Inviting Women On Line Ca. 1997”. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*. Vol. 16, no. 1. 1999, p. 10. pp. 1-19.

Ref: Text given to SEDOS by the Author.

Catholic Social Teaching and Poverty Eradication

Key Concepts and Issues

– Peter Henriot, S.J. –

The social teaching of the Church has been one of the central concerns of the moral reflection and teaching of Fr Arokiasamy. We are happy that we are allowed to reprint in this issue the article dedicated to one of the best known scholars on the role of moral Social Teaching in the modern world.

I attempt here to provide a *conceptual framework* that will both clarify the meaning of poverty eradication and situate it within the principles of Catholic social teaching. *Clarification* is indeed important, though not always easy. I'm reminded of a true story of something that occurred during one of our regional workshops in Zambia, designed to get local people ("grass roots") to offer their perspectives and recommendations on the preparation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).¹ As far as possible, the workshop was conducted in the local language, which in this instance was ciTonga, in the Southern Province of Zambia. One of our staff asked the participants to suggest the best word for "poverty" — and this was easily supplied. And then for "poverty eradication" — but then no suggestion came. Finally, one of the elders commented, "We have always had *poverty* so we have a word for that, but we have never had *poverty eradication*, so we have no word for that!"

For me the challenge this morning is to address three questions:

1. What is poverty eradication?
2. What is "Catholic social teaching"?
3. How can CST influence poverty eradication?

1. What is Poverty Eradication?

I do not feel it is necessary before this group to provide a detailed definition of "poverty". Rather let me begin by simply asking you to pause for a moment and to put before your head and your heart a person whom you would describe as "poor". Let it be a woman, a man, a child, whom you have encountered in the recent past. Perhaps it is a relative, a member of your family, or a working companion, a neighbour, a person who has come to your door or whom you have passed

on the street. Let that person enter into your head — with all the analytical reasons for her or his poor condition, and enter into your heart — with all the feelings, emotions, spiritual responses evoked by his or her presence. Let that person be with us during our days together.

That there are many, many poor in our midst is an undeniable fact. Figures for Uganda tell us that 35% of the population live below the poverty line, down from 52% a few years ago. In Zambia, 80% live below the poverty line, up from 70% ten years ago.

Poverty is of course a multi-faceted phenomenon. We can speak of:

- Money deprivation — people living below a particular line, e.g., the World Bank's suggested line of one US dollar a day.
- Services deprivation — e.g., lack of adequate health or education services.
- Access deprivation — e.g., very difficult access to water supply.
- Voice deprivation — e.g., exclusion from effective participation in decision making.
- Gender and geographic inequalities and consequent deprivations, etc.

Note that I speak here of poverty in *physical, material* terms — the way most people ordinarily use the term. Sometimes religious people tend to talk about poverty in broad terms, emphasising spiritual poverty, psychological poverty, etc. I personally don't think that this is at all helpful for our discussion here. When we speak of poverty — and its eradication — let us be very specific in referring to material want, physical deprivation, lack of basic necessities, economic insufficiencies, with consequent political inadequacies.

From the outset, let us be clear that poverty is a *sign*, a symptom of something very wrong in human society. And it is also a *cause*, an influence that perpetuates an unacceptable situation in human society.

What do I mean by that?

Recall the great definition given by Pope Paul VI in

his 1967 *Progress of Peoples* (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, n. 20) “Development is the movement from less human conditions to more human conditions?”.

- Poverty is a *sign* that development has not occurred, if people are not enjoying the basic human conditions owed to them by reason of their innate dignity as daughters and sons of God, made in God’s image.

- Poverty is a *cause* that blocks that development by preventing people, from working toward these human conditions, marginalising them in the process of empowerment and achievement and thus bringing about more inhumane conditions.

Poverty is not, I repeat *is not*, a necessary, inevitable human state of being or an acceptable God-willed situation. It is a consequence of the way we humans have designed the economic, political, social, cultural, gender, ecological and religious structures of society. *It is the explicit outcome of conscious decisions made by some humans.* This fact is obvious — simply reflect that there is sufficient food produced in the world today to eliminate global hunger. But economic and political decisions have been made that prevent access to a daily sufficiency of food to more than two billion of our sisters and brothers this very day. Or closer to home, Uganda — or Zambia, or so many other African States — have adequate *resources* to meet basic needs such as housing, clean water, education and health services, but lack committed *priorities* to put those resources at the disposal of true national development. Simply put, Ministers drive Mercedes, children lack schoolbooks!

That is why I frequently prefer, both on analytical grounds of clarity and political grounds of motivation, to speak not of the “poor” but the “impoverished”. People are *impoverished*, in the sense that their condition is by and large an imposed condition, the result of policies, programmes, priorities, and politics! They are indeed *poverty-stricken*, to use another phrase. Oh, yes, of course, some people are poor because they are lazy, lack responsibility, and are culturally ready to accept their deprivation. Oh, yes, maybe 1% of the 80% in Zambia.... But let’s be realistic and talk about the vast, overwhelming majority, not the handful of exceptional cases!

I emphasise this obvious point because one still can hear in many circles the assertion that poverty is really a natural situation, one that we cannot realistically speak of ever eradicating. And then the positive, supposedly irrefutable point is made from Scripture, “Didn’t Jesus say, “The poor you will always have with you!””.

But my friends, please recall two points. First, Jesus made this as an *empirical observation* not as a *policy mandate*! Yes, the poor are in our midst, and indeed in

great numbers, but that does not mean we should be sure that our policies are such that we perpetuate their presence! Second, and the strongest point, Jesus made that comment in the scriptural context of the Old Testament recognition that the presence of the poor in our midst is a sign that we are not living out the Covenant. Deuteronomy makes this very clear. And that is why Jesus could say so strongly, echoing Isaiah, that his mission was to “bring good news to the poor”, overturning their structural and structured situation by such as means setting prisoners free, opening the eyes of the blind (including the blind political and religious leaders!), lifting up the oppressed and proclaiming and establishing the Jubilee rule of freeing slaves, redistributing land and cancelling debts.

But what about this phrase, “poverty eradication” — is not that a bit idealistic, even quite unrealistic? Let me make the appropriate distinctions and then conclude why I believe we must keep that phrase as our solid guide.

- *Poverty alleviation* — this is the work of lessening the suffering of the poor, meeting their immediate pressing needs. Welfare, handouts, social security, safety nets, etc. Deal with the widows and the orphans, the elderly and the handicapped. This is, basically, the *assistance of charity*.

- *Poverty reduction* — this is the task of lowering the number of those living below the poverty line, eliminating them from the rolls of the deprived. Provide them with jobs, with health and education services, with opportunities to rise above the poverty line. This is basically, the *commitment of development*.

- *Poverty eradication* — this is the challenge of restructuring society so that the impoverished disappear, the immense absolute numbers decrease to minimal exceptional cases. This calls for planning, for priorities, for shifts in power, for restructuring society, for “revolution”. This is, basically, the *transformation of justice*.

Now why, in programmes we discuss here for Uganda, for Zambia and the rest of Africa, do we speak of *poverty eradication*? Let me give a parallel case, possibly more at home in this religious gathering. Let me compare poverty to *sin*. For, example, the sin of corruption, or adultery, or racism or sexism. All serious evils, all to be condemned, all to be overcome with God’s gracious help.

- *Sin alleviation* — well, the sin of corruption or adultery, racism or sexism, continues, but we lessen its impact on people who might suffer its consequences, we comfort but do not confront.

- *Sin reduction* — we try our best to lessen the instances of corruption and adultery, racism and sexism. We pass restrictive laws, we educate and promote moral development to reduce the number of sins.

- *Sin eradication* — we work to change the attitudes of hearts and the structures of society that make sin present,

that encourage and facilitate corruption, adultery, racism and sexism. While recognising the universal and lasting presence of “original sin”, we promote a *conversion* that would do away with its influence and its suffering.

Now you and I know that it is not possible to completely eradicate sin in this, our human vale of tears. We have no heaven on earth! Yet this is an ideal that we labour to achieve, that we struggle to establish. Because we have a vision of honesty, of fidelity, of respect for human dignity, we don't rest with only alleviating the suffering of sin or reducing its many instances. No, we commit ourselves to cooperate in realising the ideal that we pray for every day: “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!”.

And so it is in the task of poverty eradication. This phrase or concept, with its attendant policies and priorities, gives us a vision that motivates our hearts and guides our heads — ultimately, that opens our hands in our involvement.

Let me add that it also gives us a particular direction in our work. One of our close partners in the work of justice, development and peace in Zambia, Professor V. Seshamani of the Department of Economics of the University of Zambia, has cautioned that to focus on the reduction in numbers of those classified as poor — e.g., reducing the poverty statistic by 15% or 20% in the next ten years — can miss the most important dynamics of society. For we can have policies that provide those close to the line of poverty with improved conditions (e.g., health, housing) and thus pull them above the line, thereby reducing the absolute number to some desired goal.

But these very desirable policies might not “trickle down” to those living far below the poverty line, the really destitute. Yes, some improvement, but in the *instances* of poverty and not in the *intensity* of poverty. Professor Seshamani argues — and he influences our own work in Zambia — that poverty strategies should focus primarily on the extremely poor to enable them to move progressively to less extreme, less inhuman, levels — even if this does not significantly reduce the absolute levels of poverty. While such a policy might not appeal to our international partners or national political leaders who emphasise poverty *reduction*, it promises to lay a more solid foundation for the poverty *eradication* that must be our clear goal.

2. What Is Catholic Social Teaching?

Now I turn to that part of the title of our two days together that holds for me the most significance. For it is here that we focus primarily on what policy makers call the “value added” dimension — what specifically can the Church contribute to this whole

discussion of poverty eradication?

I must admit that I am at home here! Several years ago, two Jesuit colleagues and I wrote a book on the social teaching, called *Our Church's Best Kept Secret!* And I continue to teach a course each year in Lusaka in our major seminary on “The Churches' Social Teaching”. We look both at the documents of the Universal Church, those of our African Church such as the teaching coming from the African Synod and various episcopal conferences, and the very prolific writings of our Zambian Bishops.

So now, let me in the space of *five minutes* present the content of *five weeks* of that course:

By CST, I mean the body of social wisdom, about human individuals in society, and about the structures of society that enable humanity to come to its fullness, as can be found in:

- Scripture
- Writings of theologians
- Documents of churches
- Witness of just persons and communities.

Sometimes we tend to focus primarily on the documents, but we know that the authority and the authenticity, the relevance and the credibility of the documents come from their foundation in Scripture, their clarification in theological reflection, and their evidence in lived experience.

The purpose of the social teaching can be said to be three-fold:

- *To guide individual consciences in making just decisions* — e.g., about wages to pay, the treatment of women, the respect for the environment.
- *To shape the response of the Church to social issues* — e.g., about racial attitudes, political involvement, care for the poor.
- *To influence the activities of the public sector* — e.g., about economic policies, international relations, peace and war decisions.

These purposes — *personal, ecclesial and societal* — are the reason why CST is so important in the world today, especially here in Africa. Indeed, for us Christians, we can understand why Pope John Paul II has called the CST an *integral part of evangelisation*.

A systematised content of this social teaching can be found in:

- *Lists of key issues and topics* — e.g., from *Our Best Kept Secret*, from the economic Pastoral Letter of the South African Bishops, in the statement in our background papers by the Religious Working Group on the World Bank and the IMF.
- *Development of major themes* — e.g., the statement of the Bishops of England and Wales on *The Common*

Good, the analysis offered in our background papers by Bishop Diarmuid Martin on globalisation, the Zambian Bishops' recent Pastoral Letter on political responsibility, *Discipleship and Citizenship*.

- *Focus on a particular issue* — e.g., the debt crisis (in our background papers), the call for poverty eradication (which I will develop here).

The important thing to note about the Church's social teaching is that it does not provide a set of answers or a course of prescriptions. Rather it offers guidelines, questions to ponder, directions to follow. It is a *light for our paths, not a roadmap for our journeys*.

3. How Can CST Influence Poverty Eradication?

In continuing to offer clarifications of key concepts utilised in our discussions here these days, let me now look specifically at poverty eradication in the light of the Church's social teaching. I want to build on the framework of an earlier ethical analysis that I offered in the recent CIDSE-*Caritas Internationalis* paper, *From Debt to Poverty Eradication*, that was edited by Kathleen Selvaggio of Catholic Relief Services.

Can we provide an approach to poverty eradication that offers a viable alternative to the rigid prescriptions of orthodox economics (or what is often referred to as the "Washington Consensus" developed by the World Bank, IMF and USA Treasury)? This orthodox economics controlled the recent Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) and now pre-determines so much of the PRSP activities today. But to offer an *alternative* approach requires more than a mere outline of different policies and strategies. Fundamentally, it requires another vision of what is valuable, another perception of what is possible, another recognition of what is required.

I believe that we can be helped to offer that vision, perception and recognition through reflection upon the heritage of our Church's social teaching (CST). While I must repeat that Catholic Social Teaching does not offer specific answers and concrete programmes, I want to emphasise that it does provide a framework of principles and values that enable us to address specifics in a holistic fashion.

Regarding the issue of poverty eradication as the desired goal of policies to be pursued by the Government of Uganda with the support of the Church in Uganda, there are four stages that should be influenced by Catholic Social Teaching:

- *Entry point*: what is the foundation for our approach to poverty eradication programmes?
- *Process*: how is the poverty eradication strategy designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated?
- *Content*: what are the major priorities that are mani-

festated in the programmes, who is benefiting from the changes and who is bearing the burden of the changes?

- *Outcome*: what are the consequences in society at large of the poverty eradication programmes?

(i) *Entry point*

Catholic social teaching takes as its entry point into policy formulation a belief in the *fundamental dignity of every human person*. Made in the image and likeness of God, every woman and every man has basic rights and corresponding duties. These are inalienable and are not the consequence of benign State action but rather of generous creative endowment. That is to say, the State does not grant rights, only God grants rights. The State has the obligation to protect, foster and promote rights.

The dignity of every person arises not from any human quality or accomplishment nor is it the consequence of any human achievement or attainment. It knows no specification because of gender or race, age or economic status. In economic parlance, human beings are not units of production or outputs of transformations. Human beings are not the *objects* but the *subjects* of economic activity. Put simply, *the economy exists for the person, the person does not exist for the economy*.

This belief in the fundamental dignity of every human person requires not only that people be treated in ways that reflect and respect their inherent dignity, but also that every policy, every programme and every priority be measured and evaluated by whether it enhances or diminishes human life and dignity. To speak directly to the issue of poverty eradication, this principle of CST serves as an *entry point* that orients all else that follows. We are not dealing with technical or mechanical or automatic or purely natural arrangements in society. We are dealing with arrangements affecting persons whose worth and dignity is a consequence of their imaging the infinite worth and dignity of their Creator.

(ii) *Process*

The equal dignity of each human person demands that decisions that affect persons involve those persons in the process of decision-making. According to the conditions required by the World Bank and the IMF, the preparation of the PRSP must involve "meaningful participation of civil society". In the discussion this afternoon of the Zambian case study, we will hear what participation has in effect meant in one concrete instance. But it is important to emphasise here that participation in the PRSP process is not simply a *political* device to gain support of the programme but rather it is an *ethical* demand to guarantee legitimacy to the orientation of the programme.

I want to argue that respect for the involvement of

“civil society” can be seen to be a contemporary expression of the traditional Catholic Social Teaching principle of “subsidiarity”, i.e., the requirement that decisions should be made at the closest possible level to the people affected. Subsidiarity disperses authority to the maximum feasible local focus by involving people not in perfunctory *consultation* — “What do you think of this document we expert outsiders have prepared?” — but in genuine *participation* — “What shall we do together to come up with a consensual document?”. As we all know, in policy preparation there is a world of difference between *consultation* and *participation*!

Involvement of civil society thus requires both (1) *democratic mechanism* that assures adequate representation of all interests and (2) a *technical capacity* that assures competent input into the process.

Commitment to the democratic mechanism is influenced by Catholic Social Teaching’s respect for the rights of individuals to participate in choices that affect their lives. When the World Bank and IMF emphasise that the PRSP must be “home grown” (i.e., designed through processes driven by countries themselves), this must be accompanied by concrete steps that ensure that all parties operate in a public, transparent and accountable fashion. For example, a public review of agreements between lending institutions and governments must be mandated at each stage.

Putting the principle of subsidiarity into practice in the PRSP process requires that national governments and their citizens should ultimately hold authority to decide their own economies and national development plans, according to their knowledge, experience and values. In my opinion, it is neither ethical nor efficient for the World Bank or the IMF to hold a “veto” power over PRSP documents that arise from a well-deliberated and widely consultative process.

Furthermore, commitment to strengthening the capacity of civil society to comprehend and analyze technical information on poverty and economics is also essential if subsidiarity is to be truly effective. Therefore, emphasis on the rights to participation requires that the new opportunities for input into PRSP must be strengthened through capacity-building efforts (information gathering, analytical skills, advocacy planning, etc.). I am pleased to say that our efforts in Zambia have indeed been assisted to secure a very high level of competence.

(iii) *Content*

The substance of economic reform programmes that are influenced by Catholic Social Teaching should be marked by two fundamental principles:

(1) mutually shared rights and responsibilities, or the promotion of the *common good*; and (2) special concern for the least advantaged in society, or the preferential *option for the poor*.

Firstly, common good considerations raise basic questions about results in the ordinary lives of citizens:

- Who receives the *benefits* from economic reform programmes?
- Who bears the *burden* that such programmes create?

The principle of the common good requires that the elements of the reform programmes should benefit everyone in society, not simply the rich and the powerful. The benefits must be clearly directed towards all. So-called “trickle down” benefits coming to the less advantaged from the investments and achievements of the rich — something always more *promised* than *realised* — are simply not acceptable.

Moreover, the burdens of economic transition toward a more open market — such as down-sized budgets, retrenched work forces and market-driven increases in the cost of living — should not fall only on those who already are suffering from economic hardships, leaving fairly unscathed the already advantaged sectors of society. The common good requires a sharing of burdens as well as blessings.

Let me highlight here what I believe to be one clear consequence of an emphasis upon promotion of the common good. This is the qualified place to accord the operations of the *free market*. Yes, the Church’s social teaching has been suspicious of command economies (socialist models). But it has also been suspicious of liberal economies (capitalist models). The challenge to both comes from the same principle: the promotion of the common good. So in the construction of poverty eradication programmes, we have to weigh the operation of the market, or, to put it into the jargon of the day, we must appraise macro-economic structural adjustments in light of their impact on the value outcome of their operations. I like the expression of one analyst I recently read: “The market may be a good *servant* but it is a bad *master*”.

Second, the principle of the option for the poor means that the content of economic reform programmes must be evaluated in terms of their impact on the most vulnerable part of society, the poor, especially women and children. The content of poverty eradication programmes obviously are oriented toward the poor, but whether or not the poor actually benefit is something to be constantly monitored and diligently evaluated.

Pro-poor programmes should provide not only *social sector* development (e.g., health and education)

but also *productive sector* opportunities (e.g., agriculture services for small farmers, youth employment generation schemes, micro-credit facilities for women, etc.). Economic growth objectives must be pro-poor from the start. Poverty concerns should not be tacked on to traditional macro-economic policies as after-thoughts. And when tensions or trade-offs emerge between growth-oriented and poverty-oriented policies, they should be resolved in favour of poverty-oriented policies.

To repeat points made earlier, these content concerns from CST for both the common good and the option for the poor can be summed up in the oft-cited principle that the economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy. This states clearly the primacy of human dignity and rights as the foundation for all economic activity.

(iv) *Outcome*

Finally, we can rightly ask, where is this poverty eradication emphasis headed? In the long run, what would we hope to achieve?

The overall vision of Catholic Social Teaching for society is expressed in the principle of *solidarity*, the recognition of the interconnectedness — *ethical* as well as *empirical* — of personal and institutional activities that make up the social fabric of human existence. In Catholic Social Teaching, solidarity is promoted in conscious acts that build community. When economic activity undercuts community — e.g., creating great gaps between rich and poor — then solidarity is destroyed. Poverty eradication programmes and promotion of pro-poor economic growth build up real solidarity.

If ever we wanted to sense the *idealistic* character of CST, it is here when we speak about the principle of solidarity. Pope John Paul II has spoken most eloquently about solidarity — moving it beyond mere interdependence or a system of interrelationships based on economic factors alone. He calls it a moral category, rooted ultimately in the religious fact of the community of solidarity manifested in the life of the Trinity.

Solidarity among humans is not vague compassion for the less privileged but active structuring of a society of mutual sharing. The outcome for a poverty eradication programme would be a society where great gaps between rich and poor do not exist, at national as well as global levels.

Let me be clear: solidarity does not demand an *egalitarian* society where everyone has exactly the same. But it does demand a more *equitable* society where the gross inequalities of participation and distribution are

eliminated. And that, as you can appreciate, is an immense task!

Another component of solidarity that must be emphasised is *ecological*, since we humans are always members of the earth community and must be respectful of the rights and demands of that community — e.g., environmental justice. This means that the outcome of poverty eradication programmes must also be evaluated in terms of the impact on the community of creation. To be honest, this is something that we are still learning in the unfolding of the Church's social teaching.

Finally, let me note that the outcome of solidarity offers a powerful reason for support of the *Jubilee principle* of cancelling debts, redistributing land and freeing slaves. For these are concrete actions aimed at restoring the bonds of broken community and thus assuring the reality of solidarity. In recent years, there may have been some people who were surprised at the very strong support at every level — from Pope to local parish — of the Jubilee 2000 movement. But for those aware of the clear lessons of the Church's social teaching, especially the teaching on solidarity, there is no surprise!

Conclusion

I have attempted this morning to clarify some of the key concepts about poverty eradication and Catholic social teaching. I want to conclude with a few remarks about the way forward, both in our conference these days together and in what happens afterwards in the role of the Church.

First, I urge that the Church's social teaching should be the lens through which we examine the other topics of this conference: the structures of debt, the campaign for debt cancellation, the value of civil society, the role of the Church. This is not a conference sponsored by the World Bank or the Ugandan Government. It is a conference sponsored by the Catholic Church and therefore its deliberations must be guided by the scriptural principles that find clear articulation and cogent demand in the social teaching of the Church. Let us at each step of discussion reflect the emphases on human dignity and rights, on subsidiarity, on the common good and the option for the poor, on solidarity. I believe that *our principles have political power* — let us use them accordingly!

Second, I urge that all of us here commit ourselves to a better personal understanding and wider public education about the Church's social teaching. For too long it has been "our best kept secret"! I have not sprinkled my presentation this morning with quotes from Popes or footnotes from documents. I've tried to give something of the overall framework of CST in hopes of stimulating among you either *new* interest or

renewed interest in this very relevant body of social wisdom. Let us take steps to be sure that this teaching is in our schools and seminaries, our homilies and handouts, our small Christian communities and diocesan offices.

Remember the suggestion that I began my paper with, that we put before our heads and hearts a person who is poor. I now ask you to pause for a moment to recall that person, very specifically and concretely. And then remember the burning words of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: "Whatever you do for the least of my sisters and brothers, you do for me." That is the focus for our reflections on Catholic social teaching and poverty eradication. That is our invitation, our challenge, our grace.

Thank you very much!

Notes

¹ PRSP stands for "Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper", the document that the IMF and the World Bank require a poor country to prepare if it is to receive any debt relief. In effect the PRSP becomes a national development plan to orient resources toward priority; areas to meet the needs of the poor (P. Henriot).

Ref: *Vidyajyoti (Journal of Theological Reflection)*, Vol. 66, n. 8, August 2002.

[*Presentation at:* Conference on Debt Relief and Poverty Eradication in Uganda: The Roles and Responsibilities of the Catholic Church, Kampala, Uganda, 8-10 November 2001].

Books

EMI (Editrice Missionaria Italiana), Bologna

- AA.VV., *Lo sviluppo infinito (Riflessioni sulla crisi dell'homo oeconomicus e sull'attualità del rapporto economia e società)*, 2002.
- Benevelli, Daniela, *Il tesoro invisibile (favole, fiabe e racconti di 15 Paesi)*, 2003.
- Chiarucci, Marco, *Apri gli occhi mia Chiesa (Lettere dal Brasile)*, 2002.
- Follereau, Raoul, *Stringere le mani del mondo (scrivo a voi giovani)*, 2003.
- Follereau, Raoul, *Costruire la civiltà dell'amore (antologia di scritti di Raoul Follereau)*, 2003.
- Lapa, Renza, *Nelle mani di Dio (Enrico Bartolucci missionario comboniano)*, 2003.
- Mmaka Acava, Valentina, *Jabuni. Il mistero della città sommersa (il rispetto per la natura e per i popoli indigeni raccontato ai ragazzi)*, 2003.
- Ndiaye, Baye/Padula, Marco (a cura di), *Le immagini dell'Africa in Europa (l'avvicinamento culturale ed economico euro-africano. Un percorso che parte dall'Italia)*, 2003.
- Tresoldi, Efrem, *Osare futuro (il mondo delle beatitudini)*, 2003.
- Zaccherini, Gianni, *Il libro dei libri*, 2003.

Editorial Nueva Utopía y Librerías, Madrid

- Casaldaliga, Pedro, *Al acecho del Reino*, 2003.
- Girardi, Giulio, *El movimiento subversivo de Jesús en la sociedad capitalista*, 2003.

Coming Events

2003 SEDOS Open Seminar

The 2003 Seminar of SEDOS, co-sponsored by the Commission for Interreligious Dialogue of the Union of Superiors General (USG), will take as its *motto*: "Called to a new vision of others and of ourselves through interreligious dialogue: focused on Islam". This year's Seminar will be an open seminar instead of the usual residential one at Ariccia. It will take place in Rome, in the Aula of the Augustinianum.

The dates are 19 to 23 May, each afternoon from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Dialogue is an important value in itself. It is a way of life. Dialogue between Christians and Muslims will run as a thread through the programme of the Seminar. Participants will be listening to experiences from representatives of Muslim and Christian communities, encountering one another in faith through dialogue and sharing of life. Among religious institutes and ecclesial movements there is a strong desire to grow in dialogue with other religions and spirituality in order to deepen one's understanding of other faith traditions and indeed of one's own. During the seminar, particular attention will be given to initiatives, taken by religious congregations and ecclesial movements, of sharing life and faith among and with the Muslim People. A Muslim and a Christian woman will be invited to reflect and dialogue from a woman's perspective on the challenges of faith in our modern world. The seminar will also examine how the Catholic Church leadership and that of Islam practise interreligious dialogue on a global level. Moreover, the programme will offer theological reflections on religious pluralism and also on Muslim and Christian spirituality of dialogue.

In short, the 2003 SEDOS Seminar aims to be a life-giving interreligious encounter, offering to all participants, prospects and hopes for dialogue. More information will be available on the SEDOS website (www.sedos.org) and in the *SEDOS Bulletin*.

Working Groups

Wednesday, 12 March, China Group 15:00 hrs at SEDOS
Monday, 31 March, Debt Group 15:30 hrs at SEDOS