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**“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me:  
- He has anointed me to bring the good news to the poor,  
- to proclaim liberty to the captives and new sight to the blind ,  
- to free the oppressed and announce the Lord’s year of mercy” (LK 4:18f)**



Peace comes with Justice and Reconciliation. Peace comes with respect for the human being and for the whole of Creation. Peace comes when the heart is open to the other and the channels of love are opened. May the Lord Grant us His Peace and Love as a reward for the endeavours of the year, and as a source of energy for the year to come!

To be anointed demands obedience to the prompting of the Spirit. In *“Shifting Perceptions of Mission. Values for Missionary Religious Life Today: Problems and Prospects”*, **Rose Nkechi Uchem, MSHR**, invites all religious to listen to the whispering of the Spirit constantly reminding us of our role as witnesses of the Kingdom of God.

*“The Second Special Synod of Bishops for Africa and the ‘African Reconciliation Project’: The Role of Missionary Institutes”*. **Paul Saa-Dade Ennin, SMA**, an African and a religious, reflects on the need for reconciliation in Africa and on the need for agents of reconciliation who can play a role in this delicate but vital mission. And he sees missionary Institutions as bridge-builders of dialogue and reconciliation.

Beginning with two personal experiences, **James H. Kroeger, MM**, explores the intimate relationship between the Eucharist and the Church’s evangelizing mission. The presentation asserts that the *“Eucharist- Mission”* connection is anchored in ‘paschality’ which is present in every person’s life and faith. Hence, missionaries themselves are to be paschal evangelizers.

**Nicanor Sarmiento Tupayupanqui, OMI**, analyses how the daily routine of the Latinos/as is the privileged place for human and divine interaction and encounter. In, *“The Human Experience in Hispanic/Latino/a Theologies”* he describes how a Latino/a theology based on the experience of the family and community, is creating a new way of being Church, new ways of ministry with emphasis on social justice issues and gender equality.

Lest we forget the words of St Paul – to proclaim the Word of God at any time and in anyway – **Fr Jean-Pierre Rakotoson** reminds us of the *“Mission dans les médias”*. To proclaim the Gospel through the media might not be as personal as direct proclamation; but it is not less ‘direct’ and it is a mission that needs to be done with joy in order to touch the hearts of people.

**Buon Natale!  
Happy Christmas  
Bonnes fêtes de Noël  
Feliz Navidad**

Fr Carlos Rodríguez Linera, OP  
SEDOS Executive Director

**Rose Nkechi Uchem, MSHR Ph.D.**

## ***Shifting Perceptions of Mission Values for Missionary Religious Life Today: Problems and Prospects***

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### **PREAMBLE**

**F**or many years now, many Africans have been going as missionaries to different parts of the world on cross-cultural mission outside their own countries and cultures. Yet, many people would not readily associate the term ‘missionary’ with an African. In the minds of many, it is a word that is more easily associated with Europeans for the simple reason that the first evangelizers in their part of the world were originally from the North Atlantic regions of the world. In my own experience similarly, it is unheard of for an international missionary congregation to invite an African to speak to them at their General Assembly. A recent personal experience was my first time to hear of it or to witness it. To their credit, the group specifically requested a female religious from the southern hemisphere to address them; to help them to reflect on ‘the Values for Missionary Religious Life Today: The Problems and Prospects’. In the process, I experienced ‘permission’ to speak about ‘issues in mission’ as I knew them. It was a freeing and edifying experience for me. The article that follows is the text of the paper I presented to the Medical Missionaries of Mary on the occasion of their Ninth General Chapter at All Hallows College, Drumcondra, Dublin, Ireland; on 19 March 2009. I have incorporated into this edited version the illustrations and further insights which came to me in the course of interacting with them in the small groups and in the plenary session and I have entitled it ‘Shifting Perceptions of Mission’. I am very grateful to the MMMs for their invitation and for the opportunity to experience on the spot precisely what I was talking about: ‘the openness to receive and to listen’, as an imperative for mission today.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

At the heart of Christian mission is the value of obedience. Yet the understanding and practice of both of these realities — mission and obedience — have been changing appreciably over a long period in the mission societies. In this light, the concern of this paper is the basic underlying values for commitment to mission in the context of vowed religious life. The aspects under consideration include: community life, responsible membership; availability for congregational ministries; and the areas of struggle regarding fidelity to the vows. I shall begin by clarifying some key words and the contexts of mission; using the African/Nigerian context as a case in point. I also highlight some of the changing perceptions of mission and the vowed life as well as the accompanying tensions and challenges as I see them. In place of recommendations, I offer a series of questions to stimulate further reflection. As regards method, at times I take a descriptive approach, at others, I take a critical, analytical, approach which calls for a re-examination of some assumptions and practices that tend to be taken as given. Understandably, my reflections in the paper are coloured not only by my own experience of the joys and woes of mission in cross-cultural settings but also those of my colleagues, Sisters of different congregations, with whom I have interacted through the workshops that I give. It is also influenced by my participation in the academic study of mission through membership of the International Association for Mission Studies.

### **II. KEY WORDS**

The key words are: **values, commitment, religious life, community, and mission.** *Values* refer to guiding principles, ideals, ethics, and expected standards of behaviour or performance

pertaining to a particular way of life; in this case, religious missionary life in a specific congregation. *Commitment* is all about steadfastness and devotedness to a cause of action, a project or a way of life for the entire duration, lifespan or time-frame of such project. *Religious life* could be taken to mean a way of life of “a community of persons who have come together to live under a rule of life (*regula*) expressed in terms of voluntary poverty, chastity/celibacy, apostolic obedience, prayer and contemplation” (Ogun 2008, p. 56; Idahosa, 2008). *Community* can be understood in terms of an aggregate of living creatures sharing existence and/or activity in a given environment; characterized ideally by interdependence. A *religious community* is a group of people drawn together by a common purpose, namely, response to a divine call. *Mission* refers to an assignment, a task or an undertaking for which one is commissioned. In the religious sense, mission refers to a response to a call to participate in God’s mission of transmitting the fullness of life to all creatures that has been made possible by Christ. A proper understanding of the meaning of Christ is essential to an adequate concept and practice of mission today. It is God’s mission; impelled by the Holy Spirit. Humans are participants and partners with God in mission. For this reason we should be talking not of basic underlying values but rather of the necessary dispositions and orientations for religious missionary life today. My presupposition is that community is necessary for mission and community itself is an expression of mission. I will take up the themes of Christ, mission and fullness of life later in the paper. Meanwhile let me try to paint the backdrop of mission in the global and local perspectives.

### III. GLOBAL AND AFRICAN/NIGERIAN CONTEXTS

By context of mission is meant all the situations, processes, dispositions and activities that characterize the unique locations in which we do mission. It connotes not only geographical and historical considerations but also factors such as the: political, economic, cultural, social and religious ambience of Church and society. Context also includes models of the world, church, and human person operative in the locality. The description here is not intended to be exhaustive but rather to stimulate reflection.

The global context of mission today is the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century which, on the one hand, is characterized by the growing culture of terrorism; threats to life and the accompanying sense of insecurity; the power-driven culture of war with the resultant mass displacement of peoples; the environmental crisis; the HIV/AIDS pandemic; globalization and its ambiguities, producing intractable levels of poverty even in mega-cities; human mobility and migration together with its interface with mission; unjust economic systems as part of the darker side of globalization taking their toll of the poorest of the poor on the face of the earth; the resurgence of slavery and the Slave Trade. On the other hand, there are increasing levels of the participation of women in governance and public life in various countries; a growing awareness of the need for gender justice; a call for the transformation of prevailing notions of masculinity.

The particular context of mission can be illustrated in the African/Nigerian context with which I am more familiar. Like the rest of the world, the concrete life situation in Africa is marked by light and shadow. On the brighter side, Africans have a sense of solidarity, family and community; respect for life and outreach to children, regardless of the fact one sometimes finds that these values have been corrupted or abandoned. Africans have a strong sense of the Sacred, the Creator, and of the spiritual world. They live in a cultural *milieu* in which the sense of The numinous is palpable and the human’s hunger and thirst for God knows no bounds. These positive cultural values could be channelled to enrich the global Church and society as a whole and also to reverse the abject condition with which Africa is often associated.

The emergence of Barak Obama as the first African President of the United States of America has turned over a new page for the world as did that of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as Liberia’s first constitutionally elected female president; unleashing the power of precedence in our world! Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iwuala, a Nigerian renowned for her high level of integrity, is currently the managing director of the World Bank (Tripp, 2009). Rwanda’s parliament has the

highest percentage of women in the world (56%). [However, statistics relative to life as it is known can sometimes raise other questions such as: What kind of women sometimes get elected or appointed to positions of governance in certain societies? What is their level of critical awareness and ability to challenge the *status quo* in unjust situations? Could it sometimes be the case that their election or selection is based on a dubious criterion such as those who would not rock the boat; puppets who represent an extension of the power and influence of the dominant group?].

The African context has been described as “characterized by a collective fact of misery” (Uchem, 2002, pp. 193-204) resulting from: historical and current injustices; inequality; a general sense of insecurity and the possible risk of meeting violence at any moment; the increasing poverty of many coupled with the insensitivity of many of the rich and privileged; political tension and the struggle for power without service; wars in some parts and the absence of war in other parts, that is mistaken for peace but is graveyard-peace; ethnic divisions and rivalries for supremacy, sometimes manifested in ‘God’s own household on earth’.

Related to people’s quest for God are the proliferation and commercialization of church sects; Catholic fundamentalism parading spiritualities which pre-date the Council of Trent and Vatican I; certainly not in touch with the renewal from the Second Vatican Council; vehemently resisting change and transformation. More particularly in Nigeria, the Church is experienced as “riddled with many paradoxes and contradictions” (Uchem, 2008). On the one hand, the churches are vibrant and flourishing numerically and, from all appearances, have a very lively and nourishing liturgy. On the other hand, there is a crop of highly educated laity and religious whose leadership gifts are not called into the service of their Church communities at whatever level — parish, diocesan or national. I am not talking of house-keeping or fund-raising roles but real pastoral engagements. Only a tiny few have been called into Church leadership positions. The rest are obliged to go about their own business or to migrate to the new generation Churches because there is no room for them ‘at the inn’. The situation has been described as “becoming more and more a Church in which only the clergy matters” (Ifeanyi, 2004, p. 8).

#### **IV. IMAGES OF THE WORLD, HUMANS AND MISSION**

The world is often presented negatively as ephemeral, temporal, not lasting. The other world is the real one; everlasting and good. Other contrasted realities are body/soul; earth/heaven, devil/angel, sinner/saint and so on. Both the world and the body are perceived as evil, dangerous, to be avoided and escaped from. Yet an updated and renewed vision of the world and of the body is holistic; and the human person is an integrated entity: body/soul/spirit. It goes without saying that in unraveling the values for mission today models of the vowed life come into play as do models of mission.

In the past, mission meant going outside one’s own country and culture to implant the Christian Church where it did not yet exist (Uchem, 2006). The human person was thought of as made up of body and soul. Hence, missionary endeavours aimed at saving souls and converting people to ‘the faith’. However, it also included education, health care and social services as well as pastoral care and direct proclamation of the word. Today, mission includes much more than all these. The focus of mission at present is the promotion of God’s Reign in the world; what the Bible calls the Kingdom of God; now also referred to as the ‘household of God’. It involves caring for the whole person and stimulating growth in all areas of the human personality, in accordance with Christ’s own vision and mission: “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10). In fact, this fullness of life extends to all God’s creatures and to planet earth.

If we are to engage meaningfully in mission, a proper understanding of Christ is crucial. Mission is all about promoting God’s Reign; that is modelling Christ, the model human being; making Christ present once again in this world by living out those signs and values of God’s Realm such as compassion and inclusion; treating each child, man and woman as Christ did

with dignity and without discrimination; regardless of their race, sex, age, social status, religion or occupation. For people excluded or marginalized by a system, it is news and it is good; but for those the system favours, it is upsetting and infringes upon law and order. This was what attracted so much opposition to Jesus and earned him the uncomplimentary perception that he was turning his society upside-down and the judgment was that he deserved to die (Uchem, 2001, pp. 198-202; Gittins, 2002; pp. 91-118). It was for this that Jesus laid down his life; to affirm the equal value of all human persons. It is also the fate of many 'followers of the way' who dare to take seriously this understanding of the passion of Christ. It is the price paid by those who practise justice and peace beyond merely talking about it.

## V. RELIGIOUS LIFE: PAST AND PRESENT

In the past, religious life was characterized mostly by negation, distance, abstinence and separation. It was viewed as a state of holiness and perfection. Religious saw themselves as a privileged class, set apart. Then Vatican II came along and proclaimed a universal call to holiness of all the baptized. Now all those things that were the exclusive preserve of religious missionaries in times past have been taken over by other people; not just by lay Christians but in some cases secular non-governmental organizations. Many religious lost their sense of identity. Some stayed and others left. 'What is the point of religious life when one knows that all are called to holiness and perfection; and all are called to mission and to model Christ in the world?'. When other people do these same works even better and perhaps pray even more than some religious, how might religious identify themselves or give meaning to their life? What attitudes and values can give religious missionaries a reason for their existence? In her book, *Fire in these Ashes*, Joan Chittister (1995) throws some light on this. Religious life is about the 'quest for the sacred', the quest for God, for union with God to which all are called. While all are called to seek God in contemplation as well as in activity, religious are called to lead the way. An example from south-eastern Nigerian cultural dance troupes conveys for me the image of 'leading a dance'. There are usually a few 'lead-dancers' who come out into the arena and perform a kind of overture to the audience. They rejoin the group and the whole troupe performs the steps together. This for me captures the contemporary theology of the religious life.

The word witness conveys the same sense as 'modelling'. Religious life rests on the theology of witnessing. It is not merely through speaking but rather through 'being'. It is the fact that what one is bears witness. For instance the goodness and truth in a person bears witness that God is real and God is good. This radiates to believers and unbelievers alike. Austin Flannery put it aptly when he said: "Religious can be sure that their manner of life, their actions and their speech transmit messages constantly to the rest of the world" (Flannery, 2009, pp. 53-63). When we think of 'modelling' Christ it is not as if a person were putting on a stage act but rather in an incarnational sense, making Christ present by her/his carriage and demeanour; in what one says and does and in how one says or does it. Most of all, it is shown by the manner in which one goes about his/her tasks; with nobility, dignity, sensitivity, graciousness, serenity and in a way that "evokes respect and admiration" (Flannery, 2009, pp. 53-63). The activities may be the same that others engage in, be it teaching, nursing, development work or administration; who and what one is shines through and bears witness in a remarkable way. I would agree with Sandra Schneiders therefore on the "the three pillars of Catholic religious life: the quest for God, mission and ministry, and community" (Schneiders, 2003, pp. 8-30).

As Joan Chittister (1995) remarks, the religious vows were not originally "an essential part of the religious life" (p. 99). It was simply a commitment to devote one's entire life to the search for God. The specification of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience were a later development. In more recent times, a more positive understanding of the vows is being encouraged. Even the terminology is being nuanced. For instance, voluntary poverty requires living simply for the sake of the poor. Consecrated celibacy entails a broadening of the heart to love inclusively and universally. Apostolic obedience involves mutual listening and action in response to a call to mission expressed as ministry in specific contexts. I would like to dwell more on the vow of obedience.

In some congregations, there is a growing understanding of the vow of obedience as requiring dialogue. I once had occasion to reflect on this development in the context of a formation programme, where initiative and maturity were highly prized but which almost began to create unforeseen problems. People took initiative and did what needed to be done with no reference to anybody let alone those in authority. Quite frequently some people took certain actions and someone else bore responsibility for those actions. That led me to propose a short formula for a contemporary practice of obedience: ‘initiative plus dialogue’.

### ***1. Listening as a paradigm for mission***

The problem I see with dialogue is: that it is not possible for two parties who do not see themselves as equal to engage in meaningful, authentic dialogue. Dialogue requires mutual listening. In life, people only listen to those for whom they have regard or respect. For instance, many men do not usually listen to women. Most adults do not listen to children. One can also try to recall trying to talk to a bishop: most that I know talk the whole time and I have great difficulty getting my own agenda [for which I sought the appointment] onto the discussion table. For this reason, it seems to me that more than proclamation of the word, what is required of missionaries of the third millennium is ‘listening’. I do not mean therapeutic listening; listening with empathy and all that; to hear what someone is really saying and accurately give feedback. That is very important and necessary but it is not what I mean. The listening I mean begins with this and goes beyond it to include an ability to receive new information about the mission context that one did not previously have and allow it to alter one’s prior mindset especially in the process of decision-making about mission. I am talking about listening in the context of mission and it is best illustrated with a case story.

### ***2. Listening in the context of mission***

Let us suppose that in a certain international missionary congregation there is a zone, a region, an area or a province about to take a decision regarding its mission priorities in light of their charism in a particular mission context, possibly somewhere in Africa. The charism of the group is healing in its various ramifications of medical, primary health care, nutrition, alternative medicine, counselling and so on. In an area/province/region/zone made up of twenty members where five or less are from various countries of the northern hemisphere and fifteen or more are from the southern hemisphere, say from various African countries; most likely, the African members would want to have a building, a facility, where people in need of any kind of treatment or care could be received and treated as in regular clinics. They might even suggest that members who feel otherwise called to exercise other aspects of the one charism of healing — alternative medicine; rural community/primary health care; counselling and so on — could also operate from there as a base. From my own experience and that of others I have worked with, most likely the five members or less from the northern hemisphere would not see the need for a practical facility and their view will out-weigh that of the numerical majority of fifteen or more; no matter what the latter might say or do or feel; and regardless of whether or not they know the context or issues at stake. It becomes a case of a ‘numerical majority without power’. In my view, if this happens only once or a few times, there is no problem; but if it happens repeatedly, on a regular basis, there is great cause for alarm. It is a recipe for anomie and group dysfunction.

Whenever the group of ‘fifteen or more’ looks back at their history and finds that this is a regular pattern, they should begin to question their membership. They may sense that something is wrong with their congregation; a systemic illness they are not free to name or probe. A time will come when such members whose feelings or opinions never count will begin to feel very frustrated. They may lose initiative and self-confidence. Apathy may set in. Some may develop a ‘crab’ mentality; an ‘in-fighting’ tendency; ‘pull him down’/‘pull her down syndrome’; or a feeling of ‘how can anyone among us develop above the herd?’. If it is a female congregation, more symptoms may become manifest, including those highlighted by Mary Condren in her excellent article on ‘Women and Colonization’, particularly the emergence of ‘colonial servants’

from among the powerless majority. The ‘colonial servants’ become ready tools in the hands of the ‘few-with-power’, to play out a script they have not written; all for a prize. I think that a way out of this tunnel, a way forward, is for the ‘few with more power’ than ‘the numerical majority’ to consider letting go of power, and to say to themselves: ‘Let us listen to what these Sisters/Brothers of ours are saying’. ‘Let us give their idea a chance’ and ‘let us give this project our whole-hearted support’.

I remember being present at a Mass to celebrate the inauguration of a particular province of a certain male religious order; and their congregational leader came out for that purpose. I was very deeply touched when the big man asked forgiveness of his confrères in that country for not listening to them all the time they were asking [for what was finally granted]. I so much wished and prayed that one day other congregations would follow suit to utter their own apologies for similar failures to listen in their mission context.

Similarly, the listening I am advocating is not therapeutic listening but one that entails changing one’s mind, one’s plan, in view of new information such that might influence the decisions and actions that need to be taken or not taken. In other words, listening is both hearing and doing. This especially concerns those with more access to power; people with authority. Authority involves the exercise of power in a group. It entails leadership and membership; the power to act, to lead a group to accomplish its mission. Authority is positive and is different from authoritarianism and domineering which are an abuse of power. A role consists of a part played by leaders or members in a group. Responsibility connotes the ability to respond and to take up a role; a readiness and willingness to accept the consequences of one’s choices, decisions, action and inaction. Responsible membership therefore entails active participation and involvement in a congregation’s mission and ministries. It is customary for members to be expected to listen to those in positions of leadership and authority; seldom the other way round. That is the cultural thing to do. However, a counter-cultural posture and a prophetic stance may be, for once, that big people listen to what the small people are saying; and when they have listened, act in light of the new information. It goes without saying that members should listen to leaders and leaders to members as in a two-way traffic. In this way all will be better disposed to listen and to hear what the Holy Spirit — whom we believe lives in each of us — is saying; not only to others outside of ourselves but also within us and in the events of our life. I am suggesting that the over-riding value for an authentic living of the religious missionary life especially in the context of community and mission is ‘listening’.

### **3. Community at the Heart of Mission**

The person and mission of Christ are the central focus of a religious community. Like the earliest disciples called together by Jesus, “come and see” (Jn 1:39), the Religious are called ‘to be with’ Jesus and ‘to be sent’. Thus, the heart of the call to mission is real intimacy with Jesus. This is to say the call to community with Jesus and with each other is also a call to mission. Mission in this sense is a proclamation in word and deed what we have tasted in that intimacy. Experience tells us that it is good and it is news. It is impossible to contain good news. It is incapable of being kept to oneself. What we have seen, what we have heard and touched with our own hands we cannot promise not to speak about (I Jn 1:1-4; Acts 4:20). It carries a sense of urgency about it. For each of us the Good News we are to proclaim has to have a tinge of the supreme insight we have come to through our experience in the quest of God. Like Magdalene who felt she was loved publicly and cherished by Jesus, gave her all; stood in fidelity at the foot of the Cross of the One who gave her full humanity; like Mary of Bethany, who sat at the feet of Christ as a disciple,





discussed theology; gained insight and acted out her deep insight into the meaning of Christ through her symbolic anointing of Jesus with her costly perfume (Jn 12:3); like Peter's mother-in-law, who having been touched and helped up by Jesus, got up and began to minister to Jesus and his community; very much also like Peter and Paul who learnt that God is no respecter of persons and that both Jews and Gentles share an equal human dignity and are equally entitled to Baptism and incorporation into the Body, the community of Christ.

In this way, all our ministries flow from the experience of union with God in Christ, and are geared towards leading people ultimately to a personal relationship with God. Our various ministerial activities therefore provide the external framework for this to happen. Through various gestures of caring and sharing in our ministries both within and outside our own communities, somehow, people can see in us who or what God is like.

As religious we are called to authentic community living, despite the struggle entailed the basic desire of many is to live healthy and authentic community lives. With the Eucharist at the centre of our lives, it follows that a 'Eucharistic' attitude and mentality should accompany us outside the chapel. Those very Gospel values we try to practise in our ministries outside are also the very ingredients needed in our community living. Moreover, there is a growing need in some Sisters as individuals and as communities to explore different ways of praying, using not only set prayers in the Breviary all the time but also sometimes using creative prayers composed by themselves allowing for sufficient flexibility.

Building community requires commitment; dedication; improved communication skills, especially listening; listening to what the Spirit is saying within one's heart; familiarity with the Good News in the Scriptures, the Constitutions, past Chapter Documents and the life of the Founder/Foundress; though with an up-to-date interpretation; taking account of the cultural and ethnic diversities within the congregation and rising to the challenges entailed; giving due attention to the values of hospitality, graciousness, fairness, courtesy, celebration and simplicity of life.

From lived experience in some congregations, the sources of concern regarding quality of life in many communities include: inadequacy in the area of interpersonal relating; existence of cliques, divisions; poor conflict management skills; a tendency towards selfishness and individualism; (sometimes) large size of communities and unduly frequent transfers; inter-ethnic tensions around inferiority/superiority issues; accumulated hurts and baggage, which call for healing. Some of these problems suggest a key need for improved conflict management and communications skills or perhaps more integral human development, namely, developing an adequate sense of self. Furthermore, there is a need to review the operative type of government and leadership style so as to increasingly move toward more democratic, participative, shared leadership and authority structures. Such growth would be a counter-witness to male structures of domination, hierarchical, stratified, autocratic styles of leadership in Church and society.

Healthy communities can be promoted by helping individual members and whole communities to heal their inner wounds and build up their sense of self-esteem. It will also be beneficial to take account of proper transitioning pertaining to movements/transfers: from one country to another; from the novitiate into community life; from one community to another; from one ministry to another; also from active ministry to retirement, even focusing on concerns around aging and health issues. Particular attention is to be given to Sisters caught up in traumatic experiences for instance in war zones, road accidents, encounters with armed robbers, or any other kind of violence.

We remind ourselves that community is about people and not about a place. Community is built and not received ready-made. Personal maturity is crucial to a healthy and happy community living. Relationships are at the heart of community and communication is the lifeline of relationships. Some problems in community living can be traced to the reality of who we are as African, Irish, American, English, Polish, Indian, or other; and who we are as women who bear the unwholesome

legacies of internalized oppression (Uchem, 2002, pp. 51-52). Other cases may be caused by shadow projections and various kinds of trauma. This calls for integral human development, on-going healing and reconciliation at personal, inter-personal and communal levels.

## VI. SOME AREAS OF STRUGGLE

The vision and strategy for religious missionary life were much clearer in the time of Mother Mary Martin and Bishop Joseph Shanahan; but in our day it is not so clear any more. Much soul searching is required to see a way forward. Many challenges face missionaries today (Uchem, 2006). These include the meaning and practise of mission which has changed and continues to change; the world has changed and has continued to change politically, culturally, economically, socially and technologically. Others are: justice and peace in the face of so much injustice in the world; the need for ecumenical dialogue, inculturation as well as the missionaries themselves. Formerly, the missionaries were mainly from the northern hemisphere but today, thanks be to God, there are many missionaries from the southern hemisphere working within and outside their particular Churches.

Accordingly, there is an additional challenge of access to mission funding. Some African missionaries who belong to international organizations have difficulty in accessing funding assistance for their mission. Within their own country they are often discriminated against in favour of the diocesan clergy whom the lay people support more readily. By comparison, the male religious seem better off economically than the female religious. When it comes to grants from overseas funding agencies, members of international missionary congregations are sometimes discriminated against on account of their supposed international connections. Priority consideration seems to go to religious congregations of diocesan right. One clear instance of this was during a national conference of religious in one country where funds for the training of novices were disbursed by the church official through whom the funds came in. The situation gets still more complicated when some international congregations introduce certain bottle-necks within their own ranks which further restrict access to funds by their own members from the southern hemisphere. Considering all these experiences from the perspective of female religious from the southern hemisphere, the areas of struggle are many and the challenge weighs heavily on African missionaries on mission in Africa. Reflecting further on the vicissitudes of the mission '*ad gentes*' on the African continent I have articulated what I call 'shifting perceptions of mission' which raise certain questions for reflection.

### **1. Shifting Perceptions of Mission**

In *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), Pope John Paul II spoke about 'the new frontiers' of mission and referred to the new worlds of mission and new social phenomena (nn. 30, 32, 37). "There must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel and to establish new Churches among peoples and communities where they do not yet exist" (n. 34). In the light of the 'new frontiers' of mission and 'new worlds of mission' and the Pontiff's later and almost contradictory insistence on "the mission '*ad gentes*'", what are the implications for international missionary congregations?

### **2. Geographical territory**

We may recall that there has been a post-colonial critique of 'cross-border mission' considering that in many places, the first wave of the missionary movement took place side by side with the process of colonialism with all the attendant cultural, religious and political impositions (Smith, 2004). This becomes a reminder to present-day missionaries to be conscious of not repeating the mistakes of the past; imagining oneself as carrying a superior message, 'the gospel', part of which in the long run may be nothing other than exporting one's own culture. The question now is: Does mission always have to be defined by geography?

### **3. Embargo on visas and employment**

There is a growing sense of nationalism and an accompanying measure of bureaucratic red

tape in many countries today which makes it increasingly difficult for missionaries to obtain a visa to enter those countries. Their Governments, for example, are not willing to offer employment to non-nationals (missionaries). Some have very tight regulations about recruitment into government paid positions. In such cases what possibilities for ministry placement are there for young missionaries arriving newly in such a country? In light of this: What are the implications for a congregation that defines itself primarily as 'missionary'?

#### **4. Reverse mission**

'Reverse mission' is understood differently by different people. Africans see 'reverse mission' in terms of going as missionaries to Europe and the U.S. to re-evangelize them just as the early European, American and other missionaries came to their lands years ago. On the other hand, Europeans and Americans see 'reverse mission' as returning from various mission fields to their homelands to re-evangelize their own people. Obtaining a VISA to these countries is not easy either; nor do the missionaries from these regions actively encourage their own members from the southern hemisphere to go to these places specifically for mission as different from studies or one form or other of intra-congregational ministry.

#### **5. Governance and interculturality**

In some international congregations, some members have had to be pulled out of full-scale ministries in their home province/region to be sent to another for the sake of 'cross-border mission'; but arrived there only to find that they were not particularly needed to fill a specific role in the province/region's mission but rather to fill some kind of baby-sitting role until the major players in the field were ready to pull out, close down or return to their home country. Without making any plans or provisions for the future of the younger members in mind, institutions, houses and ministries of a particular congregation or province have sometimes been closed down or handed over to other congregations against the express wishes of the younger members who in the long run might be the ones to bear the brunt of such decisions. In such cases where can the line be drawn between past colonial practices of domination and the present seemingly intercultural chauvinism in the situation?

#### **6. Information technology**

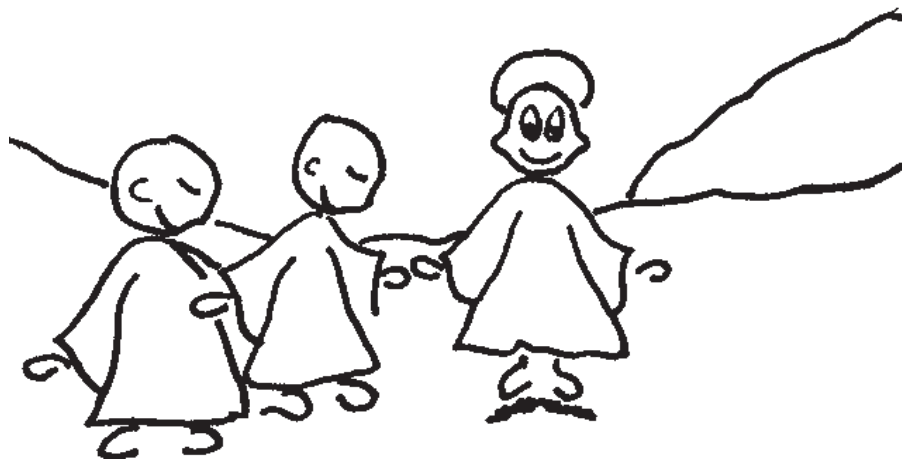
Depending on one's ministry, the increasing availability of information technology today, makes it possible to reach out to thousands of people through the television, the web or other media in contrast to the traditional methods of mission with the limited number of people one could ever hope to reach within a lifetime. We recall Bishop Shanahan's treks on foot, bicycle, and motorcycle and compare them with today's options for mission by car, plane, internet, and so on. What challenge does the increasing availability of information and communication technologies pose to traditional concepts of mission?

### **VII. CONCLUSION**

On the whole this paper has been grappling with the issues of religious life, community, and mission. There is an over-arching question: What needs to change in the understanding and practice of mission across congregations? The point has been made that mission is a response to the invitation to participate in God's mission of transmitting to all creatures the fullness of life which has been made possible by Christ. Ideally, religious life is lived out in community and community is at the heart of mission. The essence of the religious life is the quest for God; and secondarily mission, ministry and community; making these a life project. Despite the struggle entailed our call as religious is to live authentic community life as a witness to God's Reign in the world. Amidst shifting perceptions of mission and the vowed life the challenge is to guard against counter-witnessing. I have suggested 'listening' as a paradigm for responsible membership and leadership in religious life because of its prophetic value. Counter-cultural as this is, it will certainly speak to the hearts and minds of the men and women of our time. There could be no better expression of fidelity to the vows than through listening to what the Spirit is saying today.

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## **The Second Special Synod of Bishops for Africa and "the African Reconciliation Project": The Role of Missionary Institutes**

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### **1. Introduction**

It is almost 15 years since the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops was held in Rome and the fruits made available in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Ecclesia in Africa*" of Pope John Paul II. The First Synod for Africa did confront a lot of the challenges facing the African Church and the African continent today: evangelisation, the family, Justice and Peace, the mass media, war and conflict, the debt burden and the arms trade, corruption and dictatorship, youth, disease refugee situations, etc. However, one can term it, without any fear of contradiction, as "the Special Synod on Inculturation". The question of Inculturation was the key underlying theme of the Synod. The propositions of the Synod opened a wave of discussion on how the Gospel, the Word made Flesh can become incarnate, meaningful and relevant to the people of Africa through an Inculturated evangelisation. The ecclesiology of "Church as Family of God", one of the fruits of the Synod, remains one of the main ecclesiological themes in Africa today.

Today, there is a Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops taking place in Rome from 4 to 25 October 2009. The theme for this Second Synod for Africa "The Church in Africa in service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace" is, in my opinion, very appropriate and in fact long overdue. In this article, I shall try to look at the need for reconciliation in Africa and the role missionary Institutes in Africa can play in this delicate but vital mission of the Church. I shall do this from my own point of view as an African who is a member of an International missionary Institute.

### **2. Why hold a Second Synod for Africa?**

As Pius Rutechura puts it "convening the Second Synod of Africa, the interpretation is that the Church in Africa has an unfinished agenda";<sup>1</sup> and that agenda is in the area of reconciliation, justice and peace. The *Instrumentum Laboris* asserts that "the present Synodal Assembly is to be considered in the continuing dynamics of the preceding one".<sup>2</sup>

The pastors in Africa feel that further discussion needs to be done on the problems already treated at the preceding Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops and taken up in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*. At the time, they used the model of the Church in Africa as the Family of God which evangelizes through witnessing: 'You are my witnesses' (Acts 1:8). At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Church wishes to continue to reflect on her mission of communion and her commitment to serve society in proclaiming the Gospel from a new vantage point, that of being "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world".<sup>3</sup>

Let's hope this Second Synod will not be a mere change of slogan from "You are my witnesses" to "You are the Salt of the Earth, You are the Light of the World".

### **3. The Aim of the Synod**

One key question that needs to be clarified in the *Aula* is the objective this Second Synod

seeks to achieve. I have attended a number of seminars and group discussions in Rome on the Synod and many speakers and contributors point out a number of issues that are either missing in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, or are not given adequate attention.<sup>4</sup> While there are a lot of serious issues affecting Africa, I believe that it is right for the Synod to focus on a particular issue instead of touching on every single subject. As the famous saying goes, “Jack of all trades, master of none”. Few will disagree that, looking at Africa’s recent history, Reconciliation, Justice and Peace are vital issues in Africa at this moment in time. In the words of Bishop José Câmna na Bissign of Bissau, “the Church must deepen this reflection and reveal the real causes of conflict”.<sup>5</sup>

Returning to the initial question: what does the Second Synod for Africa intend to achieve? Needless to say Africa has a lot of problems. Nevertheless, Africa is not the only continent in need of reconciliation. In fact the whole world today needs reconciliation: wars, terrorist attacks, xenophobia, corruption, greed and economic exploitation, human trafficking, drug menace and violence; these are found not only in Africa but on almost every continent. Maybe the Church in Africa wants to set the pace and give a new paradigm of reconciliation to the world. In the words of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the Church, Family of God in Africa, “desires to open herself more and more to the mission *ad intra* on the continent itself and *ad extra* towards the Churches of other continents in contact with her; so, that this openness can be a “witness ... to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8)”.<sup>6</sup>

Yet one cannot deny the fact that Africa south of the Sahara is faced with a problematic future.<sup>7</sup> It has the lowest development index of any part of the world, and the highest financial corruption;<sup>8</sup> James O’Connel puts it paradoxically this way:

[Africa] is beset by disease and famine; it is riddled by many divisions and conflict; it has had too many despotic governments unwilling to hand over power when they have lost legitimacy; it harbours financial corruption; and it is bedevilled by inefficient bureaucracies. Yet it has peoples who are capable of great ingenuity and labour; who deeply value order and personal integrity; who esteem peace and revere peace-makers; who suffer hardship with enduring fortitude; who make sacrifices for family solidarity and clan/village links; who are truly warm in temperament and friendship; who sparkle with humour; and who have an enduring sense of God. But, overall, what on earth has gone wrong?<sup>9</sup>

*A priori*, the Synod identifies conflict and strife as being at the heart of what has gone wrong<sup>10</sup>, and thus sees reconciliation as a way forward to resolving this puzzle. And so, to be considered meaningful, the Synod must provide concrete plans to get Africa out of the cycle of hopelessness it finds itself in. In other words, the Synod should “assist Africa to emerge from poverty and marginalisation in the overall movement of globalisation”.<sup>11</sup> My hope is that the Synod does not become an exercise of theological jingoism and a theoretical inculturation: there are more than enough theological materials, including magisterial teachings on reconciliation, on justice and of peace, such that we do not need a new one. What is needed is a concerted effort to identify the root causes of problems, and faction out suitable plans (how not why) to help in solving the myriads of problems facing Africa today.

#### 4. Reconciliation, what is it?

The concise Oxford dictionary gives the meaning of reconciliation as: “Restore friendly relations between; settle (a quarrel); make or show to be compatible; make someone accept (a disagreeable thing)”;<sup>12</sup> In other words, reconciliation is a change from enmity to friendship. It is mutual; it is a change wrought in both parties who have been at odds, but who now agree to bury the hatchet and move forward.

The *Lineamenta* presents reconciliation in this way: on one hand, to mean “simply an agreement, a consensus or the resolution of a problem or dispute, and on the other hand, the elimination of animosity or an end to violence ... what is important is to re-establish a normal relationship, resume communication and go beyond the dispute. From this vantage point, reconciliation has a pragmatic character; it is a language of learning to live with others, in pluralistic society, and to manage conflicts peacefully”.<sup>13</sup> The *Instrumentum Laboris* for its part

does not attempt to define reconciliation but instead looks at different aspects of reconciliation: socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural.<sup>14</sup>

From the foregoing, we can deduce that the term “reconciliation” presupposes the following:

- a) It involves at least two parties.
- b) There is an unpleasant incident causing dispute, conflict, grievance, animosity.
- c) One party is probably alleged or accused of being involved in this unpleasant incident.
- d) This event has led to the breakdown of communication, affecting a normal relationship to exist between the parties concerned.

Thus, the act of reconciliation involves bringing the parties together to reestablish a normal relationship between them. This entails, opening a channel of communication, dialogue between the parties, revealing truths about facts and roles of those involved, the acceptance of wrong doing, an agreement of compensation for the wrong done, and a mutual ‘burying of the hatchet’ and moving on.

## 5. Reconciling Africa

As mentioned earlier, reconciliation presupposes events (mostly negative ones) which have caused harm, grief, and pain, and which have resulted in the breakdown of social cohesion (animosity and mistrust). *Ecclesia in Africa* compared Africa to the man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell into the hands of robbers, who took away his possessions and beat him leaving him half dead on the road (cf. Lk 10:30-37).<sup>15</sup> Raymond Aina, in his own way, describes Africa as a “weeping and bleeding continent”.<sup>16</sup> So, the question is: who are those allegedly responsible for the sorry state of affairs in Africa today and what exactly did they do? Consequently, for the “reconciliation project” in Africa to succeed, I believe the following are essential:

### 5.1. An honest review of the past and healing of memory

There is currently a subtle but interesting debate going on, especially among Africans as to the best approach to deal with Africa’s tragic past. On one hand, there are those who feel that looking at the past only results in blaming others for Africa’s woes, and prevents a forward looking vision of responsibility and self-determination; for them the best option is to leave the past to history and concentrate on the present; let Africans take their destiny in their own hands and chart a better future for the continent. On the other hand, there are those who believe the past and the future are linked by the present: the past shaped the present and the present shapes the future. For them, one cannot just wish the past away and gloss over the numerous, and unfortunately, sad events that have contributed in making Africa what it is today. For this group, the better option is to revisit the past and learn from it; if not Africa risks repeating the same mistakes of the past, and continue in the vicious cycle it seems to be in at present. In my opinion in creating a path towards harmony, it is imperative to visit the past. Like in the game of soccer, you sometimes need to move the ball backwards to be able to move it forward.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* acknowledges the role past events have played in the African saga: “Political instability, so seriously compromising peace on the African continent, has deep historical roots: slavery, colonization and neo-colonization”.<sup>17</sup> While the three issues mentioned here seem to point fingers at people outside Africa, the document mentions a lot of issues from Africa’s past that are internal to the continent. The document examines them through the sociological prism of politics, economics and culture. However, I prefer to classify these using the geographical and territorial criteria: local (national), Regional and International. I believe this makes the categorization of responsibility clearer, as well as helping the Church to plan her response accordingly for better effectiveness.

#### 1. Local and National issues for reconciliation

Under this group we are talking about the different areas of conflict and strife that are eroding national cohesion and thus peaceful and harmonious coexistence.<sup>18</sup> In fact, it constitutes

the greater percentage of issues hampering Africa's forward march, and it would be the responsibility of the local Churches and the National Episcopal Conferences to implement whatever propositions there are to bring reconciliation. The issues to be looked at here include ethnic and tribal prejudice;<sup>19</sup> impunity and abuse of State institutions especially through the armed forces and paramilitary services,<sup>20</sup> bad governance from political leaders;<sup>21</sup> corruption and misuse of public funds by civil servants, religious intolerance and exploitation,<sup>22</sup> indifference or collusion of civil society, unprofessional journalism.<sup>23</sup> Etc.

### 2. *Sub-regional and Pan African issues*

Issues in this category will be handled by Regional and Sub-regional Conferences of Bishops and other Regional Institutions. A few example of such issues include, destabilization of neighbouring countries,<sup>24</sup> xenophobia and harassment of fellow Africans,<sup>25</sup> indifference and lack of solidarity among African civil Societies,<sup>26</sup> etc.

### 3. *International issues*

These would include the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade – Europe, America and African Chiefs,<sup>27</sup> excesses of colonialism: killings, brutalities, land-grabbing,<sup>28</sup> etc, post-Independence interference,<sup>29</sup> the arms trade,<sup>30</sup> economic injustice caused by the insatiable gluttony of Western (and now Eastern – China and India) capitalism<sup>31</sup>, human rights abuses of African immigrants abroad,<sup>32</sup> etc. The African Church will need the help of her Sister Churches on the other continents to deal adequately with these issues.

## 5.2. *Truth and acknowledgement of wrong doing*

**“And you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free”** (Jn 8:32)

True reconciliation demands that people, individually and collectively, own up to their actions by confessing their roles and the part they played in whatever issue under review, in a spirit of openness, truth and honesty. “At the present moment, in many places on the African continent ‘men ... by their injustice have made truth a captive’ (Rom 1:8). Truth then needs to be set free”.<sup>33</sup> The Church's liturgical rite of “Confiteor” is a good paradigm. There is need for public, individual and collective *mea culpas* from various categories, classes and sectors of the African Society. Several African nations have followed the South African example, yet these government exercises seem not to have gone far enough. I feel the Church can be of great help here as a neutral player and an institution that still retains some form of respect. Reconciliation in life comes about by creating room for forgiveness. And forgiveness can only be given when the truth is known and acknowledged. In the words of Pope John Paul II: “no peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness: for true peace is the work of justice”.<sup>34</sup> And I will add: no forgiveness without the truth!

## 5.3 *Need for Justice and Atonement*

The South African model of “Truth and Reconciliation commission” entailed a voluntary acknowledgement of guilty and a ‘reward’ of amnesty (forgiveness) without any form of compensation. The *Instrumentum Laboris* rightly questions the efficiency of this model: “Is the effectiveness of such commissions not limited by their voluntary character and the lack of some form of reparation or compensation?”<sup>35</sup> I am of the opinion that forgiveness without any form of atonement or reparation amounts to impunity, the very culture eroding the fabric of Society and perpetuating armed conflict and abuse of the rights of citizens. Without some form of compensation and reparation (even symbolic ones), there is a risk of repeating the same ills in the future.<sup>36</sup> In this regard, Africa must draw from both its traditional “Palaver tree” style of reconciliation (where some form of atonement is necessary to bring the issue to a close), and the Western form of compensation for wrong doing.<sup>37</sup>

In the same way those responsible for making and supplying the illegal arms (Africans and non Africans) used in conflicts in Africa must be made to accept their responsibility and pay compensation;<sup>38</sup> the European nations and American States that were involved and benefited from the Slave Trade should be made to accept their responsibility and make some form of compensation; African Chiefs and Elders on the other hand must acknowledge their role in



this tragic trade and make some form of reparation to the Africans in the Diaspora.<sup>39</sup> Also there is a need for the African States to acknowledge their role in the abuse of foreigners and immigrants in their respective countries and to be made to give some form of compensation.<sup>40</sup> There are of course, the many atrocities committed within individual States that have to be dealt with. Among them are the whole corruption canker and the stashing of public money in Swiss and other foreign offshore bank accounts.<sup>41</sup> It is time that the perpetrators be brought to book and made to repay those sums of money.

I want to repeat once more that acknowledgment of guilt and forgiveness, without due justice or atonement, is a continuation of the culture of impunity. Crime has no expiry date neither has justice; any form of reconciliation without some form of reparation, risks the repetition of these ills and counter revenge by the victims.<sup>42</sup> Atonement invariably helps to repair the damage caused, appease the victim, restore justice and reform the offender.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, atonement is and should be an indispensable part of the "African Reconciliation project". In this way, "justice becomes a path leading to forgiveness and true reconciliation, thereby restoring communion".<sup>44</sup>

## 6. The reconciling mission of the Church in Africa today

St Paul says the mission of the Church is that of reconciliation:

"All this is the work of God who in Christ reconciled us to himself, and who entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation. Because in Christ God reconciled the world with himself, no longer taking into account their trespasses and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we present ourselves as ambassadors in the name of Christ, as if God himself makes an appeal to you through us. Let God reconcile you; this we ask in the name of Christ" (II Cor 5:18-20).

Faced with the difficult situations mentioned above, the Church in Africa has responded through various forms of proclamations: Pastoral Letters, communiqués, preaching, press releases and press conferences. Through these means, the leaders of the Church hoped to touch people's hearts and that their ensuing conversion would transform society. However, "proclamation, no matter how prophetic, can inadvertently contribute to a privatization of morality";<sup>45</sup> a situation where serious social and political injustices and evils are narrowed to lack of personal piety; hence the ecclesial remedy is focused on individual conversion, leaving behind the larger social and community ramifications of these gross social ills. In other words, proclamation leaves the initiative to individuals to determine whether they want reconciliation or not. But, as we have pointed out, the case of Africa is not just an individual matter, it cuts across all strata of society: State institutions, ethnic and religious groups, communities, regional and international sectors. The idea of individual conversion and private *mea culpa* is simply not enough and largely begging the question. The stakes are so high, that African reconciliation can no longer be a private decision.

It is true that, in the long run, lasting peace cannot be imposed, and has to be the fruit of individual and community choices. It is also true that reconciliation is a pre-condition for lasting peace. Thus, for Africa to benefit from the Reconciliation project, it must go beyond the individual, and therefore, beyond proclamation. The Church in Africa must gear herself to deal with the cumulative sins of Africa's past that continue to weigh her people down. She must be engaged in the purification of the collective memory, to help repair strained relations, re-establish productive and harmonious communication among the different sectors of the reality called Africa. The task may look daunting, but the Church, Family of God in Africa can take solace in these words of Pope John Paul II: "God can create openings for peace where only obstacles and closures are apparent".<sup>46</sup> The hour is imperative for the Church. Prof. Mary John Waliggo, writing a few years before the Rwanda genocide said: "The future of the Christian Church will be slippery if Christianity fails the African people in the hour of their dire need. The future generation will want to know where the Church was when people were suffering; what message was given to bring hope, challenge, reprimand".<sup>47</sup> This is the task facing the Church, Family of God in Africa. How can missionary institutes working on the continent get involved in this African reconciliation project?

## 7. Role of Missionary Institutes in the African reconciliation project

Missionary Institutes have undergone a lot of transformation in the face of the changing realities of the African Church. From pioneers and trailblazers in the early era of missionary enterprise in Africa, they have subsequently become auxiliaries and collaborators in recent years. In fact, there was a time when missionary institutes were asking the question whether they were still needed in an African Church that has become very much indigenized. The question of the continuous presence of missionaries (especially foreign ones) in the African Church has been a thorny question in African circles, notably among some African theologians.<sup>48</sup> Some assert that the missionary era is over; and that the Church in Africa is capable of running her own affairs and carrying on the task of evangelization without these missionaries; that the local Church should be left alone to inculcate the Gospel values into an African context, and liberate it from the European trappings the missionaries imposed on Africans. In fact some missionaries, especially after the Second Vatican Council felt they were no longer needed and that their role in the evangelization of Africa was truly over. In some cases, the desire of the indigenous hierarchy to give shape to their own local Church, and to manage everything by themselves, give the impression that these missionaries are merely tolerated, rather than wanted.<sup>49</sup> This brings me to the first area missionary institutes, especially international ones, need to address:

### 7.1 *Change of mentality*

I believe there is need for a radical change of mentality by the local hierarchy and clergy as well as by international missionary institutes themselves. This change has to do with the view that missionary institutes are foreign and thus not part of the local Church. The attitude of some of the international missionary institutes has also contributed to this worldview: the idea that they have come to help and afterwards will leave, even when most of these institutes have a good and growing number of members from the locality. There is need therefore to make the local hierarchy understand that the missionary institutes whether local or international are part and parcel of the local Church; their clergy form one presbyterium with the diocesan clergy and the bishop; their religious and lay collaborators, with the entire baptized brothers and sisters, form one family of God. Therefore, everyone has a share and a stake in the prophetic mission of the Church, especially in the ministry of reconciliation.

In this regard, it is important for the missionary institutes to give a “local face to their institutes”. I feel at this juncture in the development of the Church in Africa, it is imperative for missionary institutes to keep a sizable number of their African members in their local Churches of origin to bond with the local Church and to impress on them that, though they may have a particular charism, they are part and parcel of the local Church. This is vital for any contribution these institutes may bring to the delicate mission of the local Church, especially in the area of reconciliation, justice and peace, where emotions, national dignity and pride are at play; where some people might not want “interference” from “foreign” quarters.

### 7.2. *Creating the needed ecclesial structures for reconciliation*

As mentioned earlier, for a genuine reconciliation to take place there is need for avenues of dialogue and communication between the parties. The Church will need to create an enabling environment, a *habitus*, *community space*, or “*Palaver tree setting*” for this dialogue. While the Church in Africa may have her own shortcomings, her impartiality, where it exists, is very much appreciated, and she has been invited to mediate in several processes of national reconciliation.<sup>50</sup> However, this time around, the Church should not sit and wait to be invited, because she has the potential to guide Christians and non-Christians alike on this path of reconciliation through her various structures (local, national, regional and international).<sup>51</sup> The Missionary Institutes could be very instrumental in this. Most of these institutes have a longer history than the local Churches in Africa. They also have experience, human and material resources that could be of immense help in setting up ecclesial structures for this mission of reconciliation. Moreover, there is need of follow up structures, watchdogs, and pressure groups, and the missionary and religious institutes could be very helpful in these areas.

### **7.3 Training agents of reconciliation**

For there to be a genuine reconciliation for a sustainable justice and peace on the African continent, there is need of well trained and qualified people who are committed to this cause, and ready to “lay down their lives for the brethren” (I Jn 3:16). The document acknowledges the importance of conscientization of the citizenry in areas of conflict management, electoral practices, checking of government actions, upholding human rights, etc., through formation programmes aimed at grass root mobilisation.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, there is need to have people engaged in this ministry full time. With the enormous pastoral needs of the Church in Africa today, as well as the financial constraint such a ministry involves, it would be difficult for many dioceses to do this alone. In this light, religious and missionary institutes are better placed to commit full time trained personnel to this project of reconciliation. It offers a great opportunity to Institutes to complement and diversify their contribution to the local Churches, radicalising in this way their rich charisms and prophetic witness both to the Church and to society.

### **7.4 Advocacy and networking between local, regional and international groups**

The causes of conflict, injustice and poverty in today’s globalised world go beyond national boundaries. And as the *Instrumentum Laboris* points out, it will require “the development of [ecclesial] partnerships among the Churches of different continents [that] would favour an exchange of experts in different fields related to justice and peace and ... enable them to collaborate in the cause of justice and peace at international events in the name of their shared faith in Jesus, the Prince of Peace”.<sup>53</sup> Many ordinary Africans do not know the role and work of International bodies and Institutions in building a just and equitable world. In fact in the minds of many Africans, these organisations are part of the problem. The truth however, is that without the required input and policy change in the operations of these International bodies, the “African reconciliation project” will be mere lip service and a complete mirage, because decisions made in these International bodies, mostly in the northern hemisphere have an enormous and long lasting impact on the lives of hundreds of millions in the Southern hemisphere including Africa. This is why advocacy, lobbying and networking are crucial ingredients to any meaningful reconciliation and sustainable peace on the African continent.

Advocacy is a strategy which calls for the greatest possible cooperation among groups who have as their common goal the creation of a more just world.<sup>54</sup> In this area, religious and missionary institutes have valuable experience to share with the local Churches in Africa. Organisations like the AEFJN and the AFJN are specifically designed for this kind of advocacy and lobbying activities. However, there is need for greater collaboration and networking between local organisations in Africa and those in the northern hemisphere to coordinate efforts in highlighting specific issues.<sup>55</sup>

### **7.5 Building Bridges of dialogue and reconciliation**

It is a fact that in many African countries, ethnic and sometimes religious affinities are the main lines around which politics are organized. These have sometimes led unfortunately to the division and strife that have devastated many African countries, and caused a lot of hurt and mistrust among communities.<sup>56</sup> The ability to build political and national cohesion and bring the different groups to “accept that leaders of peoples have to negotiate with one another as representatives of their ethnicities and communities while seeking at the same time to elaborate policies that enable all the groups to find an interest in collaboration and compromise”<sup>57</sup> has proven to be a Herculean task for many African States.

Unfortunately, in some of these cases, Church officials have been found wanting: “divisions, based on ethnic, tribal, regional or national lines and xenophobic mentality, have been observed in some ecclesial communities and in the words and attitudes of some Pastors. Moreover, responses to the *Lineamenta* indicate some strife between bishops and their presbyterate and the tendency of some bishops in national episcopal conferences to take positions favouring a specific political party. As a result, these episcopal conferences are no longer able to speak with one voice in an appeal for unity”.<sup>58</sup> Such tendencies have put some local Churches in a poor position to be bridge builders and agents of reconciliation. In such compromised cases, missionary institutes may be of help, as neutral negotiators of peace and reconciliation in the community.

### **7.6 Witness to intercultural, interethnic and international living**

The multinational, multi-ethnic and multicultural diversity of missionary communities could offer models of building communion and multi-ethnic cohesion in African societies. Most missionary institutes now have members from different local ethnic groups as well as from diverse nationalities. While it is true to say that it has not been easy in some communities; subtle discrimination along national lines, north-south divide, domination by some ethnic groups; however, many of these communities offer a real witness of multiethnic and multicultural living: it is a challenge that missionary institutes should take up and strive to uphold the richness of intercultural living in their communities. It will be a compelling statement to the diocesan Church as well as the local community of God's inclusiveness, and thus invite them on this practical journey of mutual respect and appreciation of the cultural and ethnic differences with the other; an invitation to peaceful coexistence and to savour the joy and enrichment that comes with having a multicultural and multiethnic society. In this way missionary and religious institutes will indeed become the "salt of the earth" and "light to the world" in a multifaceted society.

## **8. Conclusion**

It is not an understatement to say that "the need for reconciliation on the continent is today more urgent than ever".<sup>59</sup> This reconciliation is much needed to regenerate the African people, and indeed the whole human family. The "African reconciliation project" the Holy Father is embarking on through this Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa is a laudable one. However, for it to be successful everyone who has Africa at heart must be engaged; for a heart full of love always has something to give. There is a Zimbabwean proverb that says: "when spider webs unite they can tie up an elephant".<sup>60</sup> As the local Churches in Africa mobilize their energies and resources to engage the continent and its people in a dialogue of reconciliation, healing and progress, they will need all the help they can get, and will be counting in no small measure on their fathers and mothers in the Faith: the very missionary Institutes that sacrificed so much to bring them the Good News of Jesus Christ — the Prince of Peace. The engagement of these missionary Institutes will go a long way in determining whether at the end of the day it will be said this time around that "when all was said and done, more was done than said". This is our hope for this Second Special Synod for Africa!

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### **(Footnotes)**

<sup>1</sup> Pius Rutechura, "Church in Reconciliation: Justice and Peace in the AMECEA Region", *AFER* 50/3-4 (2008) p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Instrumentum laboris* nn. 14-15.

<sup>4</sup> Among some of these issues are Immigration, urbanisation, refugees, women and children issues, interreligious dialogue, role of missionary institutes, advocacy etc.

<sup>5</sup> Mons. José Camnate, "Prima di tutto riconciliarsi?", interview in *Nigrizia* (June 2009) p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 148.

<sup>7</sup> James O'Connell, "A Continent in transition: balancing hopes and fears in Sub-Saharan Africa", *SMA Bulletin*, 123 (2006), p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Thirty four of the world's least developed countries are in Africa. While the rest of the world is seeing their development index inch upward like the case in Asia countries, that of Africa seems to be going in the opposite direction. UNDP Human development Report gives staggering statistics. Cf. Transparency International, 2004; [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)

<sup>9</sup> James O'Connell, "A Continent in transition: balancing hopes and fears in Sub-Saharan Africa", *SMA Bulletin*, 123 (2006) p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 11.

<sup>11</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 8

<sup>12</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, s.v. "reconcile".

<sup>13</sup> Second Special Synod of Bishops for Africa, *The Church in Africa in service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace, Lineamenta*, Vatican City 2006, p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, nn. 8, 50-52.

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 14 September 1995, cf. n. 41.

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Aina, "The Mission of the Church in Africa Today: Reconciliation?", *AFER* 50/3-4 (2008) p. 219.

<sup>17</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 64.

<sup>18</sup> Many African countries seem to be lacking the basic “Social Contract” for co-existence as elaborated by Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, as there seems to be no agreement to co-exist among the different groups in the countries of Africa except the colonial decision that herded them together.

<sup>19</sup> We can mention the tragedy of the Rwanda and Burundi Genocides; the rivalry between the Luos and the Kikuyu’s in Kenya, the ethnic divide between the Ibo, the Yorubas, the Hausas and the minority tribes in Northern Nigeria; the ever recurring ethnic conflict between the Maprosis and the Kusasis, the Abudus, and the Andanis in Northern Ghana; the ethnic question in the Darfur Conflict, etc.

Political parties have used ethnic, tribal or regional sentiments to rally populations to their cause in a bid for power, instead of fostering living together in peace. *Cf. Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 50;

<sup>20</sup> It has been calculated that in Sub-Saharan Africa there were 80 successful *coups*, 108 failed *coup* attempts and 139 reported *coup* plots between 1956 and 2001. Each time there were reprisals against supposed opponents. Most crimes committed against people are caused by the State. The brutality of the Armed Forces and paramilitary against the people they are suppose to protect, done with absolute impunity, continue to go on in many African countries – Togo, DR Congo, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Guinea, Zimbabwe, etc. The Armed Forces have a lot to answer for and to be reconciled. *Cf.* Raymond Aina, “The Mission of the Church in Africa Today: Reconciliation?”, *AFER* 50/3-4 (2008) p. 227; Chris Cunneen, “Exploring the relationship between Reparations, the Gross violations of Human Rights, and Restorative Justice”, in *Handbook of Restorative Justice: A Global Perspective*, eds. Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft, London, New York, 2006, p. 357.

<sup>21</sup> Some political leaders show an insensibility to the needs of their people. They follow their own policies and hold in disdain any idea of the common good. Lacking a sense of the State and democratic principles, they work out political deals which are unilateral, partisan, favour-driven and ethnocentric. At the same time, they foster division to secure their rule. In some places, the party in power tends to identify itself with the State. In this way, the notion of authority is conceived as “power” — parties of power, power-sharing — and not as “service”. Sadly, some women and men in political life are displaying a grave lack of culture in political matters. They unscrupulously violate human rights and use religion and religious institutions for their own purpose (*cf. Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 23).

<sup>22</sup> It is unfortunate but true to say that in some instances religion and religious leaders have been part of the problem. One can mention the incessant religious violence in Nigeria that has claimed thousands of lives; the exploitation and milking of unsuspecting followers by the new religious sects and self-acclaimed prophets; the collusion between some religious leaders and government officials for material gains.

<sup>23</sup> The use of the *media* to promote ethnic tensions and political division; the media was one of the institutions accused in the Rwandan Genocide.

<sup>24</sup> Here, we are focusing on the role countries have played or not played in the destabilisation of their neighbours. For example, the role of Libya, Burkina Faso and the Côte d’Ivoire in the wars of Sierra Leone and Liberia; the involvement of Chad, Central Africa, Sudan, etc, in each other’s instability; the role of Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Angola and DR Congo in the conflicts of the Great Lakes Region, etc.

<sup>25</sup> We have witnessed tragic scenes of xenophobia, where foreigners were looked upon as symbolizing the misfortunes of society and became scapegoats. As a result, people were burnt alive and hacked to pieces; families scattered and villages destroyed. For example the recent violence against immigrants in South Africa, the expulsion of Ghanaians from Nigeria in the 1980s, the earlier expulsion of Nigerians from Ghana in the early 1970s, the killing and expulsion of Ghanaians from the Côte d’Ivoire after the ASEC — Kotoko soccer match in 1994, the singling out of Burkinabes during the Ivorian conflict, etc., (*cf. Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 50).

<sup>26</sup> Africa prides itself of having a culture of solidarity, but it appears to be ethnocentric solidarity. I am often amazed how little African civil groups show public support for events happening beyond their borders, unlike their Western or even Asian counterparts. For instance, how many African countries have organised a public march in support of the people of Darfur, or pressed for free and fair elections in other countries, or against the excesses of xenophobia either in African countries or in countries outside Africa? Not even in the case of tragedy — drought, floods, sporting disaster, has there been a show of support from other African brothers and sisters. Inaction is also a crime.

<sup>27</sup> The over 300 years Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is the worst human tragedy in history which has left profound scars on both Africans and Europeans, but most especially, on people of African descent in the diaspora. It ravaged many regions of Africa, took thousands of able youth away, cruelly fostered tribal warfare and distrust among neighbours and diverted energy from ventures like agriculture and legitimate trade.

<sup>28</sup> There are issues for example of the British use of excess force against the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, the brutal, bloody and illegal ways White Settlers in many parts of Southern African countries like Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia, South Africa, etc., took away tracks of fertile land from the indigenous Africans and appropriated them to themselves.

<sup>29</sup> The key events that began the downward spiral of African instability; e.g. unresolved questions like the role of the

CIA in the overthrow of Nkrumah, the role of Belgium in the murder of Patrice Lumumba, the involvement of the U.S. and Russia in the ideological war in Angola; the French legitimatisation of dictatorships in Togo, Gabon, Congo, Burkina, Chad, Cameroon, which aids the institutionalisation of impunity and abuse of power.

<sup>30</sup> It is estimated that about \$284 billion have been spent on arms and conflicts in Africa between 1990-2005, which, is about the same amount given to Africa during the same period as foreign aid. What was the money used for: to destroy, kill, maim, rape, and displace hundreds of thousands of Africans. Those responsible for aiding this trade of death should be invited to the reconciliation party, (*cf.* International Action Network on Small Arms, Oxfam International and Safer World, *Africa's Missing Billions: International Arms Flows and the Cost of Conflict*, IANSA, October 11, 2007, pp. 1-38).

<sup>31</sup> There are places and peoples torn apart by violence fuelled by demands for oil, diamonds, gold and fish: the Blood diamonds of Sierra Leone, the conflict in the DR Congo, and the environmental degradation and the insecurity raging in the Niger-Delta of Nigeria, etc. How many lie dying because of trade embargos and the imposition of systems of trade by international financial institutions that leave African markets flooded with finished goods from abroad, killing the fragile local industries. Likewise, raw materials are exploited with permissions which lack any precise criteria. At the same time, financial returns are largely detoured in ways which result in their unequal distribution in society. Programmes proposed by international financial institutions for restructuring the African economy seem to be having a dire effect. International aid to institutions concerned with the fate of entire populations oftentimes comes with unacceptable conditions. This "imposed" restructuring has consequently lead to, on the one hand, a very fragile African economy, and, on the other, a deterioration of the fabric of society, seen in increased crime, the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, and the massive migration from rural areas, leading to the overpopulation of cities. Multinational organizations continue systematically to invade the continent in search of natural resources. In complicity with African leaders, they oppress local companies, buy thousands of hectares of land and expropriate populations from their lands. Their adverse effect on the environment and creation affects the peace and well-being of the African people and, thus, the prospects of their living in harmony. The activities of the Chinese and Indians in Africa, especially in the timber and mining sectors, are becoming very worrying as they have no respect for the least of international standards. Recently, a court case in the UK has exposed and convicted a UK Company, Mabel & Johnson, of a systematic policy of inducing favours in the form of contracts from African political and high public officials through bribery and corruption, (*cf.* *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 23; 25; <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=169328>).

<sup>32</sup> We are talking about the inhuman treatment meted out to African immigrants in Western countries: Workers' salaries are insufficient, if indeed they are paid at all. In some places, a true slavery still exists; harsh and oppressive immigration laws; and outright discrimination, even in ecclesial settings. It is common knowledge that Europeans migrated *en masse* in the past centuries and as recently as the 20<sup>th</sup> century during the World Wars, to Africa, America, Asia and Australia. Now that the receiving nations then, are now returning the favour, it has become a problem for Europe. Now or then, it is the poor and the vulnerable that migrate looking for a better life. What is globalisation if goods and money (even drugs) can cross borders, but not people?

<sup>33</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 45.

<sup>34</sup> John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace: "No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness"* (08.12.2001), 14: *AAS* 94 (2002) 135.

<sup>35</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 8.

<sup>36</sup> We already have examples of these repetitions today; the culture of "electoral decorations" called democratic elections; the phenomenon of replacing the "old guard" dictators with their sons, to continue the same oppressive systems and build a family dynasty (Eyadema Togo, Bongo Gabon, Kabila Congo; who is next?); And just a few days ago, we witnessed the high handedness of the new military junta in Guinea in an opposition rally killing scores of people. How long will such fragrant impunity go unpunished?

<sup>37</sup> It is common knowledge now that Germany was made to pay compensation for the World Wars it unleashed on the world as well as reparations to the Jews; Recently, the Libyan leader was made to pay huge compensation to the families of the victims of the Lockerbie plane crash allegedly masterminded by Libyans; and also to the families of victims of IRA bombings, because it is believed that the bombs used were supplied by Libya.

<sup>38</sup> A BBC Report on 15 March 2000 estimated that there were 100 million illicit small arms circulating in Africa. In 2000 and 2001, Slovakia, for example, exported arms, which it was shedding to enable it enter the European Union, to Liberia and Angola. As Pope Benedict rightly observed, "the countries of the industrially developed world profit immensely from the sale of arms, while the ruling oligarchies in many poor countries wish to reinforce their strong hold by acquiring even more sophisticated weaponry", (*cf.* Benedict XVI, *Message for the World Day of Peace: "The Human Family, a Community of Peace"*, 08.12.2007, n. 14: *L'Osservatore Romano, Weekly Edition in English*, 19-26.12.2007, pp. 8-9.; John B. Kwofie, "Presentation of the Lineamenta for the Second Special Synod for Africa", *SMA Bulletin* 123, 2006, p. 58).

<sup>39</sup> From my personal experience in the USA, there is an unhealthy relationship between African Americans who are descended from the Slave Trade and recent African migrants from the African continent, unlike the other groups in the U.S.

— the Irish, the Italians, the Asians, etc. And this is a direct result of the Slave Trade. As a result the African continent does not benefit fully from the cultural and financial wealth in the form of investments from the people of African descent in the new world, in contrast to what Europeans and now Asians enjoyed from this. However, I believe a meaningful ceremony of reconciliation and some form of reparation to the African Diaspora by African Chiefs can go a long way to healing this relationship. I remember an episode in a Ghanaian village where a woman of African descent from the Diaspora approached a local Chief to buy land because she had decided to settle in Ghana. The Chief, first of all apologised to her for the role of Chiefs in the Slave Trade, and in compensation gave her a piece of land for free. This is an example that can be built on.

<sup>40</sup> Some few years back it was alleged that forty-four Ghanaians were killed in cold blood in The Gambia by Gambian forces. Of course the Gambian Government denied any knowledge. Thankfully, with sustained pressure on the Gambian Government by their Ghanaian counterpart at the recent AU summit in Libya, The Gambia acknowledge the killing of only six Ghanaians and agreed to pay compensation. This is just a start, but something that must be taken seriously to avoid reprisals and revenge killings later.

<sup>41</sup> We now know that it is possible for the Swiss Banks to disclose the names of those holding bank accounts with them thanks in no small measure to the world financial crisis, and the pressure from the Obama Administration to bring to justice those who evade Government taxes through these secret off-shore bank accounts. This could be a good omen for the African people.

<sup>42</sup> The *Instrumentum Laboris* mentions the demand for justice by minority groups through armed conflict. While this is not the way to go, lack of some form of compensation will continue to breed these kinds of response. We have the example of the Niger Delta, and the revenge killings in the wake of religious violence in Nigeria.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Code of Canon Law 1983*, Canons 1312; 1341.

<sup>44</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 44

<sup>45</sup> Raymond Aina, “The Mission of the Church in Africa Today: Reconciliation?”, *AFER* 50/3-4 (2008) p. 229; cf. Hendricks Jr. *Politics of Jesus*, p. 253.

<sup>46</sup> John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace: “No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness”* (08.12.2001), n. 14: *AAS* 94 (2002) 139.

<sup>47</sup> Waliggo John, “Making a Church that is truly African”, in *Inculturation: Its meaning and Urgency*, John Waliggo, *et al* (eds.) Nairobi: St. Paul Publication, 1986, p. 24; quoted in Raymond Aina, “The Mission of the Church in Africa Today: Reconciliation?”, *AFER* 50/3-4 (2008) p. 219.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Jean Marc Ela, René Luneau, Christiane Ngendakuriyo, *Voici le temps des héritiers — Églises d’Afrique et voies nouvelles*, Paris Karthala, 1982, p. 235-236; Kalilombe Patrick, “Missionary Societies in Africa Today”, *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, 31/3 (1989), pp 183-189; Koek John, “La relation des missionnaires à leur Église d’accueil”, *Bulletin SMA*, 93 (1994) pp. 18-36.

<sup>49</sup> P. Kalanda, “Missionary collaboration with the local Churches in AMECEA countries –evaluated”, *AFER* 31/6 (1989) 332.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 9

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, nn. 128-135

<sup>53</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 122.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Micheal McCabe, “Advocacy and Lobbying as imperatives of mission today: a theological reflection”, *SMA Bulletin* 123 (2006), p. 100.

<sup>55</sup> For example, if there is a concerted effort to prevent the main protagonists in the Ivorian crisis (Laurant Gbagbo, Henri Konan Bédié, Alassane Ouattara, Guillaume Soro etc) from contesting the forthcoming General Elections, through locally organised peaceful marches and pressure from Church leaders as well as lobbying International bodies like the ECOWAS, AU, EU, UN etc, there may be a chance to end the stalemate that currently prevails in that country.

<sup>56</sup> One of the worst cases apart from the Rwandan Genocide is the 1966 Hausa and Kanuri massacres of Igbos in Northern Nigeria that were a precipitant of secession and civil war, and it continues to be a factor in the often religious violence in the North and revenge reprisals in the South.

<sup>57</sup> James O’Connell, “A Continent in Transition: Balancing Hopes and Fears in Sub-Saharan Africa”, *SMA Bulletin* 123 (2006), p. 45.

<sup>58</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 53

<sup>59</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 147

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Micheal McCabe, “Advocacy and Lobbying as imperatives of mission today: a theological reflection”, *SMA Bulletin* 123 (2006), p. 100.

**James H. Kroeger, M.M.**

## ***Eucharist and Evangelization An "Asian" Reflection***

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Allow me to begin this reflection by narrating two personal experiences, because they have helped shape my views on the interrelationship between the Eucharist and the Church's mission of evangelization in the vast continent of Asia. Recall, also, that inductive approaches to theologizing have always been characteristic of the "Asian theology" that has emerged from the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences). In addition, stories and personal experiences communicate effectively; they tell us who we are and how we are linked with others. They help us explore the deeper dimensions of life and the mysteries of our own being. Stories, especially personal encounters, possess tremendous power as they impact our life and our faith.

**A BANGLADESHI BEGGAR.** During the Lenten Season some few years ago, while I was a visiting professor in Dhaka, Bangladesh, I had a "graced moment", a "defining experience" on my missionary awareness and perspective. It has remained seared in my consciousness and has forced me to ask many foundational questions about mission and my own faith commitment. It involves a Bangladeshi beggar woman.

I saw her on the road, in front of the large walled compound of a wealthy family dwelling. I could not see her face clearly, as she was several hundred feet ahead of me. Her tattered clothes covered a malnourished body; she was alone, although other beggars were walking ahead of her on the road. I was proceeding along the same path, leisurely taking a late afternoon walk.

Suddenly a luxury car approached with its horn blowing. The driver probably wanted the beggars to disperse and also wanted the servants to open the gate of the compound. The woman appeared startled as the car turned sharply in front of her and the gate swung open. Within seconds two large dogs emerged from the compound and jumped at the woman, knocking her to the ground. She screamed and cried both from fear and the pain caused by the dogs nipping her. I stood frozen, horrified at the sight.

A well-dressed woman promptly emerged from the chauffeur-driven car. She ordered the driver to take the car into the compound; the dogs were called to return inside; the servants were commanded to close and lock the gate. And, the beggar woman? She was left alone on the ground — outside the gate (*cf.* Heb 13:12). I stood helpless, gazing at this appalling scene.

Only the other frightened beggars came to the aid of the woman. They alone showed mercy and compassion. I stood at a distance and wept at this scene of crucifixion. I admitted to being a guilty bystander. My fears and inadequacies left me paralyzed. I had not one *taka* coin in my pocket to give; I could not offer one word of consolation in the Bengali language which I did not speak; I did not approach the woman for fear of misinterpretation that a foreign man would touch a Bengali woman in public in this strictly Islamic culture. I simply wept in solidarity. I wept long and hard. And, in succeeding years, I have frequently returned to that scene and prayed to God: "Do not let me forget that experience. Allow it to shape my life, my mission, my faith vision. Permit it to remain a 'defining moment' in understanding my mission vocation".



**STREET-SIDE EUCHARIST.** Some few weeks ago I was stuck in heavy traffic in Manila for at least ten minutes. I was riding a taxi because I had several large packages with me. There I saw a deeply moving scene on the sidewalk. In the shade of an old dilapidated building, I saw two very elderly people, probably husband and wife, maybe in their seventies or eighties, whose their total attention was focused on a small crippled girl in a make-shift wheelchair: The little lass appeared to be six or seven years old.

The grandfather was patiently spoon-feeding the girl, who obviously had difficulty in swallowing the food. I thought to myself: Was the girl injured in an accident? Was she crippled from birth? Was she without the necessary medicines as a child that could have prevented her from catching polio? The grandmother never stopped fanning her darling little girl to help relieve the oppressive Manila heat (and the pollution caused by the dense traffic). With her other hand, grandma was lovingly stroking the girl's head and left arm.

The scene exuded tenderness, caring, commitment, compassionate service. Jesus' words at the Last Supper spontaneously came to mind: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). "You should wash each other's feet. As I have given you an example, you must copy what I have done for you" (Jn 13:14-15). Yes, I felt that I was witnessing a sacrament, a "eucharist" — right there on the lonely sidewalk!

**EMBRACING A BROKEN WORLD.** These experiences of the Bangladeshi beggar-woman and the crippled girl in Manila (each of you could supply countless additional experiences) force us to look closely at the large scale of suffering in the contemporary world. Often, such human misery is reduced to cold statistics; still the numbers are staggering.

It has been noted that 40,000 children under the age of five die every day due to lack of basic vaccines that prevent childhood diseases; each day 500 million people go hungry; over one billion people live in extreme poverty; 40 million people die yearly of malnutrition and hunger. In Southeast Asia (SEA) alone (population 1.3 billion), 85% live on less than \$2-a-day; after sub-Saharan Africa, SEA is probably the worst-off region when it comes to poverty and illiteracy. The list of such concrete suffering and the devastating consequences seems endless.

Experiences like those on the roads of Dhaka, Bangladesh and Manila, the Philippines forcefully remind us not to view people as statistical abstractions or faceless victims. Christians are called to embrace the world and suffering humanity. They, as Sobrino notes, must recognize "the existence of a crucified people" and strive to "take them down from the cross" (Sobrino, vii).

Suffering and the reality of a broken world are inherent to the human situation. No one escapes these common and universal realities; they are not borderline phenomena; they are at the centre and depths of human existence. As Pope John Paul II has noted: "The reality of suffering is ever before our eyes and often in the body, soul and heart of each of us" (*La Realtà*, 27 April 1994, n. 316).

The suffering that is inherent in human experience impacts the situation of each local Church as she lives out her missionary calling. It challenges one's view of evangelization as well as all of Christian life. Human brokenness becomes a clear point of insertion for reflection on the meaning of Eucharist and evangelization. The local Christian community is to embrace suffering humanity, just as Christ "pitched his tent among us" through the incarnation.

John Paul II has noted that suffering is "a universal theme that accompanies humanity at every point" (*Salvifici Doloris*, 11 February 1984, n. 2) of human existence. "The Church has to try to meet humanity in a special way on the path of his suffering" (*ibid.*, n. 3). Missionary and Eucharistic by nature, each local Church must look squarely at the fundamental realities of the world today, allowing them to impinge upon her and disturb her in their stark reality.

Again, it was John Paul II who wrote some penetrating words in his document for the "Year of

the Eucharist' (2004-2005); in *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (7 October 2004) the Pope noted: "I think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants. These are evils which are present — albeit to a different degree — even in areas of immense wealth. We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (*cf.* Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged" (n. 28).

In his *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003) the same Pope notes that the Eucharist "increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today" (n. 20). He further challenges Christians by quoting the poignant words of Saint John Chrysostom: "Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad. He who said: 'This is my body' is the same who said: 'You saw me hungry and you gave me no food', and 'Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me...'. What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices when your brother is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well" (*ibid.*, footnote n. 34).

**PASCHAL PERSPECTIVES.** All human life has a paschal configuration; its pattern continually moves through death to renewed life. Life's paschal paradigm, universally shared by all people (although varying terminology may be used), sees people struggling to move through darkness to light, through captivity to freedom, through dryness to growth, through alienation to union, through suffering and brokenness to wholeness. Becoming Church today in Asia demands an engagement with humanity's experience of life and death realities.

Catholic theology asserts that the Spirit of God is present and active within the lives of all peoples — even in their experience of brokenness. God's grace is always present and operative. The Second Vatican Council forcefully stated that, as Christian believers, "we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal Mystery" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22). This is the only quote that is used three times in the Pope's mission Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 December 1990, (nn. 6, 10, 28). In his writings, John Paul II used the phrase repeatedly; certainly, it is one of his guiding mission principles.

This text of Vatican II affirms the action of the Holy Spirit in the hearts to all people. Christians believe that the Spirit of God is constantly at work in ways that surpass human understanding. The universal work of the Spirit serves to enlighten people's experience of their paschal realities of dying and rising; life itself, including suffering, has the possibility of enabling all peoples to experience God's salvation through the Paschal Mystery.

Note that *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22 declares unambiguously that there is only one way which leads to everlasting salvation, a way which is valid for Christians as well as non-Christians, and that is: association with the Paschal Mystery. The redemptive grace of Christ is available to all who in their own way and even without knowing it obey the law of the Paschal Mystery and take it as a guiding norm for their consciences and lives.

The Christian faith is, at heart, a paschal faith. Thus, if all reality has a paschal paradigm and all life is shaped by rhythms of life through death, then Christian faith will continue to find elements of this very mystery hidden in the history and lives, cultures and religions of peoples of diverse faiths. These paschal elements will probably be most evident when seen through life's trying situations of suffering and brokenness. Here in Asia we continually experience unique ways through which the Holy Spirit brings people into direct encounter with the Paschal Mystery and, yes, with God's salvation in Christ.

The Cross of Jesus is the paramount Christian symbol, because it reminds Christians of

the centrality of the Paschal Mystery in their faith lives. Kosuke Koyama notes: “If Jesus Christ of the cross stands at the centre of Christian theology, the Christian Church, the Body of Christ, must be called the Church of the Cross” (Koyama 1994, 3). All Church missionary activity will focus on the paschal nature of life, of faith, of salvation. Evangelization is always cruciform, always signed by the Cross: *Cruce probat omnia*.

Saint Paul spoke of his missionary consciousness in writing to the Corinthian community: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (I Cor 2:2). To Jews who demanded miracles and Greeks who searched for wisdom, Paul proclaimed a crucified Christ. This message was offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles (*cf.* I Cor 1:22-25). All the Synoptic Gospels affirm that the Cross is the only path whereby one follows Jesus (Mt 10:38, 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23, 14:27). The Cross is central to Jesus’ act of *kenosis* (Phil 2:5-11); it is pivotal in our salvation from sin (I Pt 2:24).

Pope John Paul II has written: “The mission of the Saviour reached its culmination in the Paschal Mystery” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 6 November 1999, n. 12). Thus, the Cross is not an accidental of Christian faith and mission. As David Bosch writes, the Gospel affirms that “in the suffering Jesus, God embraces the suffering of the world for the sake of humanity.... Moreover, in Christ, God does not necessarily save us *from* suffering, but *in* and *through* it.... Christ suffers when we suffer. The pain people suffer is the pain of Christ himself” (Bosch 585). Christians are called to live into the Mystery of the Cross.

**LINKING EVANGELIZATION AND EUCHARIST.** Having noted the reality of suffering in our broken world and having outlined the paschal nature of all reality and of the Christian faith in particular, the discussion now seeks to elucidate the intimate connection between evangelization and the Eucharist. John Paul II has affirmed “the urgency of missionary evangelization” because “it is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world” (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 2).

For Paul VI, the entire Church, including each member of the local Church, realizes her “deepest identity” and “her very nature” when she engages in missionary evangelization (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, n. 14). She is to be always and everywhere “the universal sacrament of salvation” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 48; *Ad Gentes*, n. 1). For her, to live is to be missionary!

“Evangelization will also always contain — as the foundation, centre and at the same time summit of its dynamism — a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 27).

The centre of this Spirit-inspired transformation is a loving God; all becomes focused on God’s love poured out in the person of Jesus through the Paschal Mystery. Evangelization embraces the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit; it is nothing other than the proclamation of the central mystery of Christian faith: the Paschal Mystery.

The Paschal Mystery becomes the integrating focus of all missionary evangelization — as it is the centre of the Eucharist. It is foundational because all life has a paschal paradigm — as exemplified in the brokenness of the world in which we live. The “passion of humanity” ever present in war, famine, oppression, poverty, sickness, hatred, and death is to be the ground in which the seeds of new life, hope, resurrection, and ultimately salvation germinate and bear fruit. This paschal nature of all life and experience (poignantly illustrated by my personal experiences in Bangladesh and Manila) continually provides openings for a deep missionary encounter — and an authentic conversion and transformation into the mystery of God’s love. In a word, *the Eucharist which celebrates Christ’s Paschal Mystery is the genesis of all missionary evangelization*.

Recall that illuminating Vatican II quote: “we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all

the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal Mystery” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22). Thus, every human person — without any exception — has an opportunity to encounter the saving Paschal Mystery which emerges in and from his or her own life experience which itself has a paschal form (*Redemptor Hominis*, n. 14). All life, all human experience, all salvation has a paschal character. This is a fundamental human, religious, and Christian insight. All is filled with “paschality”. Mission and evangelization, liturgy and the Eucharist, redemption and salvation — all follow this same paschal structure of life.

Missionaries and evangelizers centre everything on a radical acceptance of the paschal nature of reality. Genuine evangelization and authentic Eucharist mean embracing a broken world and a crucified humanity through the optic of the omnipresent Paschal Mystery. Christianity seeks a transformation to the paschal view of life. This is the focus of all forms of missionary service rendered by Christians in their local Churches to humanity in today’s peace-starved world.

Writing to the youth of the world, John Paul II noted: “the vocation and missionary commitment of the Church spring from the central mystery of our faith: Easter (*Message for the Ninth and Tenth World Youth Days*, 21 November 1993). Christians embrace the fact: “The Paschal Mystery of Christ’s Cross and Resurrection stands at the centre of the Good News that the apostles, and the Church following them, are to proclaim to the world” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 571). “Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death ...” (I Cor 11:26).

Before crossing any borders of culture or religion to announce the Paschal Mystery, missionaries should seek their own transformation into the same paschal mindset of Jesus (I Cor 2:16; Phil 2:5). Their missionary outlook reflects attitudes of poverty, powerlessness, and vulnerability; they seek personal conversion; they wish to fall in love unconditionally with Christ — and this means incorporation into his Paschal Mystery. To the extent that any evangelizer embodies the suffering Messiah’s self-transcending way of the Cross and Resurrection, that person achieves an authentic paschal identity. It is an understatement to assert that the Eucharist is pivotal in this transformation.

It is only with a paschal perspective, enhanced by a frequent encounter with Christ in the Eucharist, that the evangelizer can perceive reality correctly and insightfully. Blessed Teresa of Calcutta asserts that as we recognize Christ broken for us in the Eucharist, we will more readily see Him in the broken bodies of our suffering brothers and sisters. The converted missionary finds in the Cross and Resurrection of the suffering Messiah the strength and wisdom to address both suffering humanity as well as those who are rushing along the road of individualism, materialism, and consumerism. “Paschality” becomes the measuring rod for all endeavour of evangelization, for the very life of the local Church. Thus, John Paul II can boldly assert that *The Eucharist is the Principle and Plan of Mission (Mane Nobiscum Domine*, n. 24).

**ADDITIONAL “EUCHARISTIC MISSION” COROLLARIES.** This presentation has briefly tried to show, through a concentration on the Paschal Mystery, the intimate relation between evangelization and the Eucharist. Both are anchored in the experience of the Paschal Mystery. A deepened “paschal consciousness” flows over into the lives of all disciple-apostles; they become “paschal evangelizers” in their own lives and through their approaches to the multi-faceted missionary activity of the Church. In the context of today’s broken world, the enormous affliction and suffering of humanity, such a “paschal consciousness” appears particularly insightful, necessary, and relevant; it is radically and uniquely Christian!

In this concluding section of this presentation, other “Eucharist-evangelization” themes and their intimate relationship to paschal mission approaches are noted. The insights, flowing from a Paschal-Mystery-centred evangelization, are numerous; these “corollaries” are only mentioned very briefly (a full elaboration exceeds the scope of this presentation); an extensive, current bibliography is provided for further reflection on this very rich pastoral-theological theme.

(1) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” emerges from the profound unity of all humanity in its sharing of the common paschal experience of rising through dying. Peoples of all faiths face the questions of suffering as well as the mystery and meaning of life.

(2) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” uses an inductive approach based on experience to understand the Church’s call to mission, particularly in the Asian context. Each local Church is called to be active in “scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 4); human suffering and brokenness are contemporary “signs” and they constitute a pivotal missionary challenge today.

(3) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” strongly affirms the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the world, both in and beyond the boundaries of the Church. The Spirit is constantly directing all people to a God-encounter through their sharing in the Paschal Mystery.

(4) For Christians, “the Eucharist shows itself to be the source and the apex of the whole work of preaching the Gospel” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 5; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 11, *Ad Gentes*, n. 9). “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” is the natural consequence flowing from one’s “God-encounter” in the Eucharist.

(5) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” demands that missionaries be people of integrity. Their proclamation begins with their own paschal experiences and links them with people who share identical experiences (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1). Mission is not something superimposed upon reality; mission emerges from the commonly shared realities of missionaries and their dialogue partners of various faiths.

(6) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” requires a radical conversion to the values of a crucified-risen Lord; mission begins only when personal transformation has been initiated. It is the transformed missionary who can authentically call others to a deeper encounter with the Paschal Mystery.

(7) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” demands integration of contemplation with missionary praxis. No one can authentically address the “passion of humanity” without possessing a deep contemplative faith; one must reflectively live into the Paschal Mystery in the midst of one’s daily experiences.

(8) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” emphasizes that the work of the evangelizer involves both listening and speaking. Listening for the Spirit’s action within the hearts and lives of people is a prerequisite for speaking of God’s paschal love and saving deeds.

(9) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” lays bare the sinfulness of today’s world which is so often enslaved by materialism, consumerism, individualism, greed, and pride. A paschal mentality challenges both personal and social sin; it demands true conversion.

(10) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” respects the free will and personal conscience of everyone; at the same time it is a call to conscience for generous people (Christians and people of other living faiths alike) to be committed to addressing the suffering of humanity.

(11) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” easily enters into dialogue with the followers of other religions. All religious traditions face identical human and spiritual questions and mysteries (the meaning of life; human suffering; a broken world; human limitations, etc.). Dialogue enables peoples of faith to mutually explore and respond to these questions of life and death.

(12) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” connects intimately with today’s challenges

of peace, justice, development, and ecology. It invites all to live in solidarity with their neighbours and to be prepared to suffer and die so that others may live. Again, such a paschal life-style demands profound conversion.

(13) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” can be lived in all cultural contexts and situations. As a missionary approach it easily finds an inculturated home among diverse peoples. Paschal mission is clearly transcultural. Just as the Christian community that gathers for Eucharist is multi-cultural, so too are the many peoples reached by the eucharistically renewed disciples of Jesus.

(14) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” aims to be a holistic approach to mission, integrating the personal and social, the human and divine, the material and spiritual. It is an incarnational approach to being in mission.

(15) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” emphasizes humble and self-effacing approaches to missionary activity. As ordinary gifts of bread and wine are offered at the Eucharist, so also Christians, believing in the beauty and truth of their message, seek to offer it with humility, generosity, sincerity, and authenticity.

(16) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” is at heart a Scripture-based mission approach. It follows the teachings and example of Jesus who came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28).

(17) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” embodies an emphasis on witness and even a willingness to endure suffering, persecution, misunderstanding, and martyrdom (contemporary realities in certain parts of Asia). Missionaries knowingly and willingly embrace vulnerability, because in Christ God reveals himself precisely in weakness rather than in power (II Cor 12:9-10).

(18) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” is at heart a soteriology. Following the paschal path in mission, celebrated in the Eucharist, brings both evangelizer and people into a direct experience of salvation in Jesus Christ, who “bore our sins in his own body on the cross; ... through his wounds [we] have been healed” (I Pt 2:24).

(19) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” integrates well with the sacramental dimension of the Church. All Christians are missionary by virtue of their baptism into Christ’s death and Resurrection (Rom 6:3-4). The Eucharist is the paschal meal that celebrates the death and Resurrection of the Lord until He comes (I Cor 11:23-26); the Eucharist remains the “ongoing sacrament of mission” for Christians.

(20) “Paschal-Eucharistic Evangelization” transforms the individual missionary into an attractive and credible witness. Missioners of the caliber of a Blessed Teresa of Calcutta manifest the transforming effects of the Paschal Mystery in their lives, and today’s world welcomes such authentic witnesses, icons of paschal faith and service.

**CONCLUDING REFLECTION.** This presentation began with a narration of two personal experiences: an encounter between a missionary and a Bangladeshi beggar-woman and a street-side “eucharist” in Manila. These “defining experiences” have produced much deep reflection on the nature of the Eucharist and missionary evangelization. This missionary remains filled with gratitude for those God-given experiences of grace. More reflection needs to be given to the wealth of insights that can still emerge from viewing mission and evangelization through the optic of the Eucharist and the Paschal Mystery. Finally, relying on God’s grace, this missionary looks forward to meeting that Muslim Bangladeshi beggar-woman as well as the crippled Filipino girl and her grandparents once again in the resurrected life with Christ the Lord in heaven. Because they so deeply shared the Paschal Mystery while here on earth, I am most confident they will be there!

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**Nicanor Sarmiento Tupayupanqui, OMI**

## ***The Human Experience in Hispanic/Latino/a Theologies***

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### **Introduction**

The Second Vatican Council Fathers eloquently expressed the intimate bonds between the Church and humanity: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is community composed of men”.<sup>1</sup> The Council Fathers affirm that the Church is a human community, where human experiences of the “poor” and the “afflicted” are at the centre of believers’ concern. The “followers of Christ” are made up of local and concrete human groups with their own cultural and ethnical configurations, their own social and economical situation of poverty or wealth, and their political status of privilege or marginalization. For example, the cultural and religious experience of the Hispanic/Latino/a communities and of other cultural groups in the United States are part of the Church’s experience.

In recent years, the proponents of local and contextual theologies have been taken seriously. The “present human experience” is now a theological source. Stephen Bevans affirms: “There is no such thing as “theology”; there is only *contextual* theology: *feminist* theology, *Black* theology, *liberation* theology, *Filipino* theology, *Asian-American* theology, *African* theology”,<sup>2</sup> and Hispanic/Latino/a theology. For Bevans, contextualization is not an option, but a theological imperative. These theologians of contextual theologies take into account the local culture, knowledge and history along with Scripture, Tradition and the “present human experience or context”. The “context” is made up of the experiences of individual and communal experiences. The person’s “experience of success, failure, births, deaths, relationships”,<sup>3</sup> as an undocumented immigrant, or refugee in exile that allows or prevents the person from experiencing God in his/her life. There are also communal experiences of feeling foreign in one’s own country of birth, experiencing the powerlessness of a minority group in the midst of a dominant society, feeling disadvantaged in unequal market opportunities and so forth.

In this paper, I will explore the challenges and promises that individual and collective experiences of the Hispanic/Latino/a communities are posing in their theological writings. I will reflect on how everyday life, the experience of the Latinos/as in the neighbourhoods and communities are offering new insights to Christian local churches of this country. I will read critically the writings of the Latino/a theologians who have written on this topic. I will also offer my personal thoughts and comments on the contributions and challenges that Latino/a daily life experience poses to the Hispanic/Latino/a theology and community.

### **1. *Lo Cotidiano*: Departure Point for Contextual Latino/a Theology**

*Lo cotidiano* — everyday routine — is the place of human life and experience. Both the individual and collective experiences of the Hispanic/Latino/a people happen in the context of everyday life. Experience of childbirth, parenting, friendship, commitment, success, happiness, illness, death, betrayal, failures, and mistakes happen in the midst of everyday life. The collective experience of being a member of a minority, culturally and racially oppressed, working in low paid jobs living in fear of being deported, populating poor areas of the cities, with limited or no access to economical and political power to training or to formal education are some of the experiences of millions of Hispanic/Latino/a immigrants in the United States. As Gary Riebe-Estrella writes: “In area after area of our lives, we find ourselves living on the

periphery of the U.S. society... We enter the pages of U.S. history not as equals but as the conquered".<sup>4</sup> This is the reality of the Latinos/as along with the experience of the other minority groups such as the Native American, African American and Asian American who have migrated to this country.

Justo L. González, a protestant Latino theologian has revisited the sources of the contemporary theology: Scripture, Tradition, experience and imagination. González adds reason/imagination to the three theological sources of Scripture, Tradition and present human experience described by Bevens' work. Gonzalez agrees that "theology is a rational enterprise but not to the detriment of imagination, commitment and aesthetics" considered as the other cognitive areas of human life subject to theological reflection. He has broadened the narrow understanding of "experience" from "one's personal religious experience, one's encounter with God, one's sense of calling and mission", proper of the "egocentric societies", to a more collective understanding of "experience" of the "sociocentric organic" cultures where "individuals find their meaning through their place in a complicated network of relations, and that those relations are considered prior to the individual".<sup>5</sup>

In the original text, Riebe-Estrella's understanding was that in "egocentric contractual" cultures "the fundamental unit of society is envisioned as the individual"; and in the "sociocentric organic" cultures "the fundamental unit of society is envisioned as a group, primarily the family".<sup>6</sup> The coexistence of people from these two different worldviews has proven that the values they bring can help each group to be conscious of the existences of the other. For example, the emphasis of North American society on the independence and self-realization of the individual can foster more autonomy and personal achievement for the Latino/a immigrant. At the same time, the emphasis on family and community values over the individual's may create more interdependent families and communities in North American societies. The events of everyday life provide opportunities for interaction, dialogue and criticism between the members of the "egocentric contractual" and "sociocentric organic" cultures of this country.

Everyday life, "daily living", "daily life", "everyday cultural practices" has been used as an analytical category in cultural studies and feminist theories. Joe Moran, referring to *The Practice of Everyday Life* of Michel de Certeau, states: "everyday cultural practices, such as walking, playing games, reading, shopping and cooking, slip through the extensive power because of their perceived triviality and banality. These activities can then be used as a way of subtly resisting the dominant culture from within, appropriating it for subversive purposes".<sup>7</sup> The everyday cultural practice, as an analytical category, is profoundly related to all kinds of human activities, its ordinariness make it unperceptible and ignored by the dominant society, but it is a "strategy" and "tactics" for the powerless members of society. The practices of everyday life function as strategies and tactics to get around the constraining rules of the dominant society by the way of practicing these ordinary events of life. The cultural notion of *lo cotidiano* has been present in the Hispanic/Latino/a communities guiding their way of doing, thinking, feeling and celebrating life. It has always been the privileged place for Latino/a imagination and creativity to critique and counteract the pressures of the dominant society. I can picture the subversiveness of Hispanic/Latino/a immigrants when they close the public route for their procession, or missed a job because family obligations came first, when poor families celebrate *quinceañeras*, All Souls' Day, patronal feasts or expend money on expensive *mariachi* bands, and one day exhibit church decorations in the midst of their poverty.

*Lo cotidiano* has been excluded from or ignored by the theological arena because it deals with the ordinariness of people's lives. Everyday life may be a place for practicing Christian ideals and morality, piety, devotion and the affairs of this world but it cannot be a place for "seeking understanding of faith", called theology. The emergence of the contextual theologies in the twentieth-century, especially Liberation Theology, have brought back "the present human experience" to the forefront of contemporary theological reflections. The analysis of the reality, the ordinary experience of the poor, exploited, and marginalized became the departure point of Liberation Theology. Suddenly, the struggle for survival of the peasants in the Andes of Peru, the exploited miners in Bolivia, the precarious life conditions of fishermen in Brazil, the low paid factory workers in Mexico, the deplorable situation of the farm-worker in El Salvador, and the cheap source of immigrant labour in the U.S. became the place where God speaks. I can affirm that "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1), the grace and sin, the life and death of contemporary men and women are part of the concerns of the Christian churches and their theologies. Christianity

is about life and “life in abundance” (cf. Jn 10:10) for all, not only for privileged people.

The Hispanic/Latino/a theologians, from a range of the different Christian denominations and different theological disciplines, have theologized “*lo cotidiano*” either implicitly or explicitly in their writings. Justo L. Gonzales speaks about the “cotidiano” as experience passed from generation to generation called “wisdom”.<sup>8</sup> Samuel Solivan recounts that Latino/a personal and communal experience is expressed in the “new *coritos, la danza, and el bolero*” as Hispanic seasoning, “*la sazón Hispana*”.<sup>9</sup> One of the Latina theologians who develops “*lo cotidiano*”, in a more systematic way, as an analytical and theological category for doing Hispanic/Latino/a theology is Maria Pilar Aquino. She writes: “The theological significance of daily life as source and locus of U.S. Latino/a theology is grounded in the fact that it is here, where the real life of real people unfolds, that God’s revelation occurs. We have no other place but *lo cotidiano* to welcome the living Word of God or to respond to it in faith”. She continues: “theologically, daily life has salvific value because the people themselves, in *lo cotidiano* of their existence ... experience the salvific presence of God here and now in their daily struggle for humanization, for a better quality of life, and for greater social justice”.<sup>10</sup> I want to emphasize some of the theological considerations from Aquino’s work. First, the genuine human “real life of real people” experience happens in *lo cotidiano*, with all that human nature is capable of, its greatness and weakness, its openness and limitations, its pride and struggle. Second, “God’s revelation occurs” in this contradictory and messy place of daily life, in this sense, I can say without any doubt that human and divine life meet in the ordinariness of daily life. Finally, the men and women of our times, refuse or accept the “salvific presence of God here and now”, by embracing or refusing God’s only salvation history in the human experience of everyday life. Aquino sums up perfectly by saying; *lo cotidiano* is “the context within which all the experiences of evil and hope, of grace and sin, of salvation and condemnation occur”.<sup>11</sup>

Latino/a theologians address the grassroots who live and experience daily life in *el barrio, la comunidad* or *el pueblo*. The Magisterium of the Catholic Church calls them “secular”, which means, those who “live in the world” witnessing to the Gospel and Christian values. John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* said: “They are persons who live an ordinary life in the world: they study, they work, they form relationships as friends, professionals, members of society, cultures, etc.... *The “world” thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation ...*”.<sup>12</sup> In my opinion, this passage can provide a magisterial foundation for the claim of the Latino/a theologians who explore everyday life as a theological locus. John Paul II argued that the life and experience of those who live in the world cannot be defined “only in a sociological sense, but most especially in a theological sense” (*ibid.*, n. 15); because God handed the world to women and men, so that they can participate in the work of God’s creation and recreation in time and history. Since these women and men, in our case, the Latinos/as of our times are part of the larger society and members of different cultures, lead us to the next section of this paper that will expand the experience of Latino women and men in *el barrio, la comunidad* or *el pueblo*.

## 2. ***El Barrio and la Comunidad: Webs of human and religious experiences***

The wide range of human and divine experiences of the Hispanic/Latino/a people occurs in the ordinariness of the everyday life. These daily experiences and activities of the people take place in *el barrio* or *la comunidad* (the neighbourhood and the community). *El barrio* becomes the geographical concretion of the Latino/a families, of the extended biological family (uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents) and of the spiritual families (*compadres* or co-parents, godparents, sponsors, spiritual brotherhood or sisterhood), and of the men and women of one’s country of origin (countryman/woman, *paisanos, conpoblanos*). The sociological and cultural configuration of *el barrio* varies depending on its location and on the people who live in it. One may find neighbourhoods with people from different Latino cultures and nationalities; or neighbourhoods with a majority of people from one country or region. For example, “the little Havana”<sup>13</sup> in Miami is a predominantly Cuban neighbourhood, or a neighbourhood in San Fernando Valley which is predominately Mexican, or neighbourhoods with a majority of people from Central America, the Caribbean or South America.

The people in the *barrios* form different types of communities. *La comunidad* can designate social, civil, political and religious groupings of the Latinos/as. It can designate the Latinos in general as *la comunidad Latina* in the United States, or *la comunidad Latina* of New York. In Christian circles *la comunidad* indicates the different types of Christian communities at the

various levels of Church organizations or congregational membership. Miguel A. De La Torre and Edwin David Aponte add colour to my assertions by saying: “Latinos/as are not a monolithic group.... They are as different as the colours of the rainbow. Yet, some common themes do recur in the shared attempt to understand God”.<sup>14</sup> The metaphor of the “rainbow” expresses beautifully the cultural diversity and the fluidity of the cultural changes that Latinos/as are exposed to in this country. The old Christian saying of “unity in diversity” may be applied to the struggle and hopes of the Latino/a communities in the United States because of the common themes of family, culture, and faith that unite them.

Latino/a theologians have reflected on the importance of *la familia, el barrio, la comunidad, and el pueblo*. Harold J. Recinos describes the cruel reality of the Latino *barrios* in the United States: “Latinos in the *barrio* experience life between suffering and death in a society that negates their right to exist with human dignity”.<sup>15</sup> The loss of young men and women through street violence and gunfire, the uncertain future of the young drug addicts, the tears of the grieving mothers, the conditions of oppression and misery represent the “broken body of Jesus” and it is demanding a more active involvement of the Christian churches. In the midst of the reality marked by suffering and death Recinos points out: “Nevertheless, the God who defends life is present in the *barrio*”.<sup>16</sup> He draws this positive image of the *barrio Latino* from the experience of the refugee Salvadorans’ in the United States. Recinos proposes two images of Jesus for a liberative theology in the *barrio*. First, “Jesus is depicted as the suffering Christ who is accessible to those whose own suffering requires comforting”; and second, “Jesus depicts him[self] as the glorified Christ who overcomes death and the sin of the world”. He continues, arguing that “the reality of the *barrio* requires a liberative theological reading of Jesus’ ministry”.<sup>17</sup> Recinos’ theological observations may lead us to a thorough understanding of the spirituality of the suffering Christ, when Latinos/as take part in the live Way of the Cross on Good Friday.

The Latinos/as establish group oriented relationships. The identity of the person comes from the family and the group. Gary Riebe-Estrella has analyzed through anthropological tools the complicated family and extended family networks of relationship in the Latino communities; he proposes: “Among the sociocentric organic Latinos, all relationships use family as their paradigm. Friends really become family members”.<sup>18</sup> According to De La Torre and Aponte, the family paradigm has also been applied to the Christian congregational membership where the baptized members “refer to each other as *hermano* (brother) and *hermana* (sister)”.<sup>19</sup> In Protestant circles the congregation becomes *segunda familia* (second family) providing social and spiritual support for its members. For Riebe-Estrella, De La Torre and Aponte, family relationships are closely tied to the relationships of “*la comunidad*” and “*el pueblo*”.<sup>20</sup> The endearing terms among the Latinos that express this reality of being a *pueblo* are *mi gente, mi pueblo, mi raza* which ultimately pictures the larger Latino family, *la comunidad*.

The Hispanic/Latino/a theologies seriously take the *barrio* as the locus of a new Church, “the new people of God”.<sup>21</sup> The family, as a paradigm of new relationships grounded in deep biological and spiritual relationship, is promising a Latino/a perspective of being Church. Certainly, family, neighbourhood, community and *pueblo* have been reflected in the writings of Feminist and *Mujerista* theologians and the Hispanic/Latino Liberation theologians in general. According to Riebe-Estrella: “church as People of God witnesses to the fact that this familial relationship of humanity, and the Latino sense of *pueblo* pushes the egocentric understanding of the U.S. society to a more sociocentric understanding of the interrelatedness of all people”.<sup>22</sup> I want to close this section of my paper with the recommendations of De La Torre and Aponte: “*Comunidad* must be the touchstone by which we comprehend the Hispanics’ perception of God and themselves, the starting point in developing a Latina/o theological perspective”.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. *La Experiencia as the Wisdom of the Community*

In the dictionary I found the following definition of “experience” as “the conscious events that make up an individual life, [and] the events that make up the conscious past of a community or nation or humankind generally”.<sup>24</sup> The Hispanic/Latino/a theologians have included not only the “conscious events” but the “subconscious”, and “even the suppressed”<sup>25</sup> experiences of the people in their theological reflections. Everyday experience involves the “real life of real people”; includes conscious and unconscious memories of the past, interwoven with complicated family relationships, and the consciousness of being a *pueblo*. In this sense, *lo*

*cotidiano* becomes a place for human and divine encounter. As Orlando O. Espín writes: “No experience of the divine occurs in a vacuum. [It is] ... contextualized in a concrete culture, in a concrete society, and in a concrete history”.<sup>26</sup> Espín’s assertions are crucial to affirm that one’s encounter is conditioned by one’s cultural symbols, spiritual practices, faith expressions, language, world views, and patterns of imagination. The Latinos/as are exploring daily experiences of life, the family and community relationships, and the rich cultural values and expressions to do their theology from their own context of old or new immigrants.

Hispanic/Latino/a theology is about life. It aims to bring the Hispanic/Latino/a cultural heritage into the theological debate by asking and answering questions of who we are as humans, as believers, and as community. In the words of Clement Sedmak: “theology talks about *our* identity in the light of who God is. Theology talks about *our* lives in the light of God’s Creation, and it talks about God’s Creation in the light of God’s life with us. That is why theology talks about life”.<sup>27</sup> Latino/a theologians have written extensively about the importance of “life” in their theology. They have theologized *la vida* [life] in the ordinariness of daily life, and in the context of family and community. For Gary Riebe-Estrella: “*vida* [life] for Latinos is understood within our sociocentric cultural world as a shared reality... *Convivencia* [living together] is not simply the result of biology or a chance happening; it is a togetherness that is conscious and intentional, experienced by *compañeros*”.<sup>28</sup> The importance placed on themes such as life, family, neighbourhood, *barrio* and community is typical of the Latino/a theologians’ criticism of the dominant culture. For example, De La Torre and Aponte have eloquently stated: “In a North American context where individualism is on the increase, a countervailing impulse in *comunidad* among U.S. Hispanics exists. Even within the diversity of national origins, race, language facilities, denominations, and class, the omnipresent prominence of the notion and experience of community is the unifying factor and a resource for ministry, engagement with the dominant Euroamerican culture, and theology”.<sup>29</sup> Theologians do not live in the clouds; they are social actors with a particular place in society, particular theological themes, who represent particular social and cultural groups, like the Latino theologians.



The United States is a land of immigrants. The history of the U.S. has experienced many waves of immigrants, men and women from different regions of the world who came in the hope of a better future. The experiences of immigrants have made the rich social and religious configuration of this country. John Paul II stated in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*: “many people and families from Latin American countries who have moved to the northern parts of the continent, ... constitute a substantial part of the population. They often bring with them a cultural and religious heritage which is rich in Christian elements”.<sup>30</sup> The Pope acknowledged that the Latinos/as “constitute a substantial part of the population” of the U.S., but they represent half the population of the Catholic Church and they are the most active members of the Church. Certainly, the Latino/a “cultural and religious heritage” is shaping new ways of doing ministry based on familiar relationships, ministry with emphasis on social justice, gender equality and interculturality.

I want to conclude this section using the metaphors “little theologies” of Sedmak and the “little stories” of Alejandro Garcia-Rivera. Latino/a theologies are “little theologies” in the way they theologize the ordinary events of daily life. Using the term “little theologies” does not diminish the intellectual and academic rigour in their deliberations. Commenting on the work of Garcia-Rivera, Fernandez writes: “These ‘little stories’ unlock the imagination and provide access to the ‘big story’, or the universals that help to create our world of meaning”.<sup>31</sup> Latino/a theologians have produced many of these meaningful “little stories” and “little theologies” to provide meaning for their communities in time and history. The harvest of the

Latino/a theologies is plentiful, I hope that the contributions and challenges brought by these theologies will further enrich the Christian theologies of this country.

### Conclusions

The human and religious experiences of the Latino/a community are rich in so many different ways. The theological themes discussed in this paper proved the richness and complexity of daily life experience and the experiences of the *barrio* and community. After this brief analysis I want to offer the following conclusions:

*First*, the everyday life, daily life, daily living of the Latinos/as is the privileged place for human and divine interaction and encounter. It is in the messiness of daily life that people experience the presence or absence of God. It is in the experience of daily life that people answer God's call in faith or reject it.

*Second*, daily life has been used by Latino/a theologians as an analytical and theological category to counteract the pressure of the dominant society. The daily experience as a theological category offers the theologian a concrete context, history and culture on which to theologize. Everyday life emphasizes that theology is about the life and identity of the people.

*Third*, daily life experiences happen in the *barrio* and community. The *barrio* is a complex network of biological and spiritual family relationships, because the Latinos/as are a group oriented people. The Latinos/as' identity derives from their family and community.

*Finally*, Latino/a theology, based on the experience of the family and community, is creating a new way of being Church, new ways of ministry with emphasis on social justice issues and gender equality. I look forward to the fruitful development of the Latino/a theology in the United States.

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### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Walter M. Abbott, S.J., *The Documents of Vatican II*. Translation Editor Rev. Msgr. Joseph Gallagher (New York: Guild Press, America Press, and Association Press, 1966), 199-200. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1 (GS, 1).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*. Revised and expanded Edition ed. Faith and Cultures (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Gary Riebe-Estrella, S.V.D., “Pueblo and Church”, in *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, ed. Orlando O. Espin and Miguel H. Díaz, (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 178-179.

<sup>5</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, “Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Imagination: A Redefinition”, in *The Ties That Bind: African American and Hispanic American/Latino/a Theologies in Dialogue*. Ed. Anthony B. Pinn and Benjamin Valentin. First ed. (New York, London: Continuum, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Riebe-Estrella, “Pueblo and Church”, in *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, 173.

<sup>7</sup> Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity*. First ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 66.

<sup>8</sup> Gonzalez, “Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Imagination: A Redefinition”, in *The Ties That Bind: African American and Hispanic American/Latino/a Theologies in Dialogue*, 69.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Solivan, “Sources of a Hispanic/Latino American Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective”, in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada María Isai-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 143.

<sup>10</sup> Maria Pilar Aquino, “Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology: Toward and Intercultural Theology for the Third Millennium”, in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*. ed. Ada María Isai-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 39.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*, n. 15 (Ottawa: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1988), 36.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami*. First ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 90. The “little Havana” has not only a predominantly Cuban population but the landscape of the Cuban neighbourhoods takes the form of the homeland map.

<sup>14</sup> Miguel A. De La Torre and Edwin David Aponte, *Introducing Latino/a Theologies*. First ed. (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 43.

<sup>15</sup> Harold J. Recinos, “The Barrio as the Locus of a New Church”, in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada María Isai-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 183.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 184, 185.

<sup>18</sup> Riebe-Estrella, “Pueblo and Church” in *From the Heart of Our People*, 175.

<sup>19</sup> De La Torre and Aponte, *Introducing Latino/a Theologies*, 66.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. See Riebe-Estrella, “Pueblo and Church” in *From the Heart of Our People*, 175-176.

<sup>21</sup> Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II, Lumen Gentium*, nn. 9, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Riebe-Estrella, “Pueblo and Church”, in *From the Heart of Our People*, 184.

<sup>23</sup> De La Torre and Aponte, *Introducing Latino/a Theologies*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. Eleventh ed. (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2005), 440.

<sup>25</sup> Gonzalez, “Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Imagination: A Redefinition”, in *The Ties that Bind*, 69.

<sup>26</sup> Espin, “Popular Catholicism: Alienation or Hope?”, in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, 310.

<sup>27</sup> Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theologies: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity*. First ed. (New York: Orbis Books, 2002. Reprint, Third 2005), 7.

<sup>28</sup> Riebe-Estrella, “Theological Education as Convivencia” in *From the Heart of Our People*, 211, 112.

<sup>29</sup> De la Torre and Aponte, *Introducing Latino/a Theologies*, 65.

<sup>30</sup> John Paul II, *The Church in America: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in America* (22 January 1999). (Sherbroke, QC: Mediaspaul, 1999), 108 (n. 65).

<sup>31</sup> Eduardo C. Fernández, *La Cosecha: Harvesting Contemporary United States Hispanic Theology (1972-1998)*. First ed. (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000), 61.

**P. Jean-Pierre Rakotoson**

## **Mission dans les médias**

*Le P. Jean-Pierre Rakotoson (dit Jean-Pierre Mala) est un jeune prêtre malgache, ordonné en 1996 pour l'Archidiocèse de Fianarantsoa (Centre-Sud de l'île), d'où il est originaire, actuellement responsable de la radio diocésaine de Fianarantsoa.*

**D**ouze ans déjà que j'ai été ordonné prêtre ! Je m'appelle Rakotoson Jean Pierre (Mala). Je suis prêtre de l'Archidiocèse de Fianarantsoa, et mes parents avec mes sœurs et frères habitent dans la banlieue de la ville de Fianarantsoa. Fianarantsoa compte environ 170,000 habitants, elle se trouve sur les Hautes Terres, à 400 km au sud de Tananarive, la capitale de Madagascar.

### **Porter l'Évangile dans la brousse**

Juste après mon ordination, en 1996, le diocèse m'a envoyé aider des prêtres travaillant dans une brousse à l'Ouest d'Ambositra (qui est devenu un nouveau diocèse à partir de l'année 1999). Les prêtres aînés m'ont aidé à améliorer ma pratique pastorale durant cette période de « stage ». Le contact avec la pauvreté des ruraux m'a beaucoup instruit. En fait, la population de cette zone est composée de paysans pauvres.

La terre est aride et la sécheresse amplifiée par les feux de brousse ne fait que compliquer la culture et par conséquent la vie de ces gens. C'est là-bas aussi que j'ai pu mettre en pratique tous les cours que l'on nous a donnés au grand séminaire. Ce n'est pas évident de pratiquer dans le monde rural malgache ce que les professeurs nous ont livré en classe. J'ai pris conscience de l'importance du contexte et de la réalité locale pour l'annonce de la Bonne Nouvelle.

Un des efforts que nous avons fait ensemble est de ne pas séparer l'Évangélisation et Promotion humaine. Inspirés de la parole de Saint Irénée disant : « *la gloire de Dieu c'est l'homme vivant* », on est conscient que l'on ne peut pas annoncer l'Évangile à quelqu'un qui meurt de faim ou à quelqu'un qui est martyrisé par les violences causées par les bandits (voleurs de bœufs et cambrioleurs qui faisaient la loi dans la région durant cette période). On a donné aux catéchistes des formations sur les techniques de culture suivies de pratique sur le terrain. La technique moderne de plantation de riz et l'avantage d'employer des engrais sont les

« menus » le plus servis durant leur réunion mensuelle. On leur livrait aussi une formation sur la gestion et sur l'animation pour qu'ils deviennent des modèles dans leur village. En tant que proclamateurs de l'Évangile et animateurs, les catéchistes doivent donner l'exemple aux autres chrétiens et cela commence avec leur niveau de vie. Ceci montre que l'annonce de l'Évangile ne doit pas être séparée du souci de permettre une vie digne de l'homme.

Parmi les bons souvenirs que j'ai retenus de ma brève expérience pastorale de brousse, je peux citer aussi l'importance de la visite à domicile que l'on a organisée avec les curés des autres districts durant trois mois. Cela demande beaucoup de temps et beaucoup d'effort, mais c'est plus efficace dans le sens que cette pratique met au premier plan le dialogue direct avec les personnes et nous permet aussi de connaître leurs problèmes, leurs souhaits et leurs occupations dans la société où ils vivent. Même le fait d'entrer chez eux est déjà un moment important pour les gens visités. Cela pourrait être aussi une actualisation de ce que Jésus a fait en allant à la rencontre des gens, durant son ministère en Palestine, il y a 2,000 ans.

### **Annoncer Jésus Christ avec les moyens de communication sociale d'aujourd'hui**

Depuis août 2004, l'évêque m'a nommé responsable d'une radio diocésaine (radio Tsiry) qui se trouve au centre de la ville de Fianarantsoa. Cette radio est au service de la pastorale diocésaine et c'est un support pour l'annonce de la Bonne Nouvelle. La radio Tsiry couvre 50 % de l'étendue du diocèse de Fianarantsoa et émet à la fréquence de 105 Mhz. La programmation de la radio Tsiry se divise en trois ensembles : programmation religieuse, programmation éducative et culturelle, programmation visant le développement (agriculture, élevage, environnement), les informations et les divertissements.

La programmation religieuse se fait surtout



le matin et le soir (2 heures le matin et 1 heure le soir). Cette programmation est composée par une lecture de la parole de Dieu pour chaque jour, suivie d'un commentaire de cinq à huit minutes. En plus de cette lecture, il y a aussi les prières du matin et du soir que l'on enregistre par avance pour chaque jour ; les émissions visent à clarifier d'une manière simple la doctrine chrétienne. Le tout est couronné par des chants religieux dont le répertoire est à enrichir sans cesse pour que cela soit « attirant ».

Les autres programmations sont porteuses des valeurs évangéliques aussi, même si elles le font d'une manière indirecte. Elles sont faites dans un cadre respectant les valeurs chrétiennes comme l'amour du prochain ou le respect de la vérité. La radio se veut aussi être promotrice de communion et d'unité. C'est ainsi que l'on peut dire que les programmes de la radio ne font que tendre vers la proclamation des valeurs évangéliques.

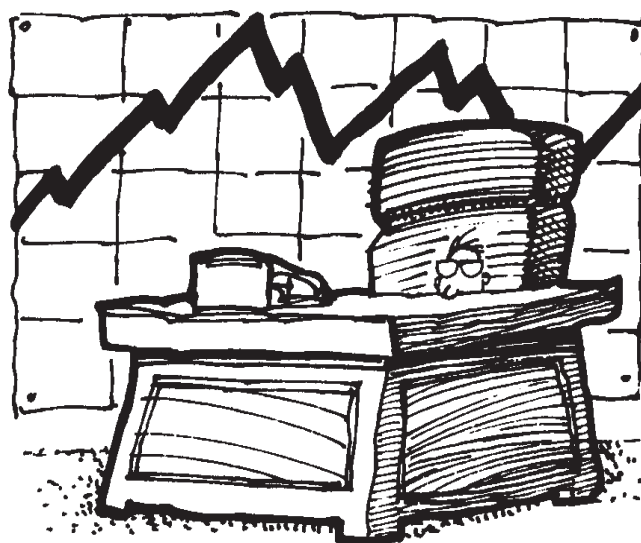
Parler ou annoncer l'Évangile à travers les médias semble être une chose facile, mais en fait ce n'est pas si facile que cela. Une des expériences que l'on a retenue durant ces quatre ans de pratique à la radio est le fait de savoir que l'annonce de l'Évangile dans les médias ne se fait jamais à la hâte. Avant de commencer une émission religieuse, il est nécessaire de connaître le destinataire de celle-ci et ses aspirations ; il faut bien réfléchir aussi sur ce qu'on veut communiquer aux auditeurs et sur le comment le communiquer (forme) ; à quel moment et pour quelle durée. Mieux vaut dépenser des semaines à réfléchir sur cette émission à faire que la commencer avec hâte pour s'arrêter trop tôt. Les auditeurs, une fois ennuyés des deux ou trois premières émissions mal préparées, « zappent » sur d'autres stations et c'est fini pour votre programmation. Les auditeurs sont des « clients » à fidéliser donc il faut leur offrir quelque chose d'attrayant pour que le message soit bien reçu.

Même si l'Évangile n'est pas une marchandise à étaler au supermarché, nous autres travaillant dans le monde des médias, nous empruntons la technique de la communication pour faire passer le message évangélique que le Christ a destiné aux hommes d'aujourd'hui. Souvent on veut dire en une seule émission tout ce que l'on pense à propos de l'Évangile et de ses valeurs. Ainsi la programmation devient très lourde et moins attirante. Pourtant un message bien enveloppé et bien conçu vaut mieux que des messages entassés dans une émission. Il faut savoir doser le message à transmettre pour que cela soit facile à « digérer ».

Dans la société d'aujourd'hui, même ici à

Fianarantsoa, Madagascar, les gens donnent plus d'importance à l'apparaître qu'à l'être. C'est l'apparence qui prime avant tout ; le contenant est plus valorisé que le contenu. Il suffit de voir ce que les gens font en échangeant des cadeaux aujourd'hui. On donne un soin important à sa couverture (papier cadeaux) et à sa forme attirante. Le cadeau à offrir semble perdre sa valeur (même s'il s'agit d'un objet coûteux) si l'enveloppe n'est pas attirante. Ceci est un exemple reflétant la réalité de nos jours. Pour offrir à travers les médias l'Évangile, il faut qu'il soit bien « enveloppé » si on veut qu'il soit reçu par les auditeurs.

La vie d'un prêtre dans le monde des médias n'est pas facile. Travailler à la radio par exemple,



est un travail sans répit qui vous tient du matin au soir. En effet, la radio doit marcher depuis 5 heures du matin jusqu'à 22 heures de la nuit et le responsable doit être au courant de tout ce qui se passe à la station. Il doit en outre chercher toujours quelque chose de nouveau pour améliorer sans cesse la programmation. Le risque de se perdre dans « l'activisme » est très grand alors si l'on ne fait pas attention.

Annoncer l'Évangile à travers les médias (même si cela n'a pas le même accent que l'annonce directe) n'est pas aisé, mais c'est un service d'Église que l'on tient à accomplir avec joie. Je m'efforce d'aller toujours de l'avant, malgré le problème financier (qui est un véritable casse-tête également), pour rendre attrayant la programmation afin que le message touche son public. A la suite du pape Paul VI (*Évangélii Nuntiandi*, n° 45), je me sentirais coupable si je n'arrivais pas à utiliser comme il faut ces merveilles que le millénaire nous offre.

Réf. : *Mission de l'Église*, n. 161, Octobre-Novembre-Décembre 2008, pp. 45-48.

## **SEDOS ANNUAL REPORT 2009**

*“SEDOS is a forum open to Institutes of Consecrated Life, which commit themselves to deepening their understanding of global mission. SEDOS encourages research and disseminates information through its bulletin and website, public conferences, working groups and its annual seminar”*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

**S**EDOS is closing the year 2009 with rich exchanges and debates on Africa and the African mission brought about by the Synod for Africa. These events have opened the way for more research and reflection in the year to come. The year 2009 has also been a year in which we, once again, witnessed many Congregations holding General Chapters and electing new teams to the organizational headquarters, thus giving us the opportunity to welcome many new faces among the members of SEDOS. We welcome them and look forward to their new ideas and advice to improve our services. Likewise, we express our gratitude to those who have finished their term in Rome for all the help, support and encouragement they have provided us with.

Let us not forget that, it is thanks to the efforts and generosity of all of you that SEDOS has continued to produce some good results during the year 2009. We continue, as a family, to be committed through word and deed to the study of Mission thus making our small contribution to the building of the Kingdom. Yes, we believe that we have had another fruitful year thanks to the commitment of the Institutes members of SEDOS and especially to the many personal contributions. Thank you, each and all, for your missionary spirit.

Our special thanks go to the members of the **Society of the Divine Word** for their commitment and generosity. Year after year they continue to generously offer the premises to house the Office of SEDOS, a contribution that cannot be repaid but by the Blessing of the Lord. We warmly thank the **Brothers of the Christian Schools** for offering their premises to host all the SEDOS Conferences for just a nominal fee, a contribution that makes it possible to continue offering this service. We also wish to remember and thank those of you who kindly sent your books and magazines to our Documentation Centre, especially the **Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers** who always make sure SEDOS receives copies of the new titles published by **ORBIS Books** and the **Editrice Missionaria Italiana (EMI)**.

Our gratitude goes to the Members of the **SEDOS Executive Committee** who have given their time all through the year, and their encouragement and advice in order to facilitate and make possible SEDOS' diverse activities. Special thanks to Fathers Teresino Serra, MCCJ, Pierre-Paul Walraet, OSC, and James Mc Closkey, CSSp, for all the years and effort they have dedicated as Members of the Executive Committee to SEDOS. We wish them all the blessings of the Lord to fulfil their responsibilities in their new workplaces.

Naturally we remember with gratitude our Partners and Sponsors in Mission formation, **Misereor, Missio Achen and Missio Munich** for the continuous material and moral support they generously provide us with. They are always silently walking with us and their support is warmly felt and greatly appreciated.

We also wish to say *'thank you'* to the many friends who throughout the year have sent us so many words of encouragement.

## SEDOS ORGANIZATION

The President and the Members of the Executive, who supervise and manage the activities of SEDOS as a body, are the ones who dedicate the most time and energy to make sure that the activities organized serve to foster research and encourage the members to explore new paths of mission.

### ***Executive Committee Members for the Year 2008-2009:***

**President:** § Fr **Edouard Tsimba**, Superior General of the Congregation of Immaculate Heart of Mary. Elected to the Executive in 2007.

**Vice-President :** § Sr **Maria Pilar Benavente Serrano**, Superior General of Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa. Elected to the Executive in 2007.

**Treasurer:** § Sr **Monika Lita Hasanah**, General Councillor of the Ursuline Roman Union. Elected to the Executive in 2003.

§ Fr **Teresino Serra**, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries. Elected to the Executive in 2004.

§ Sr **Inés María Gutiérrez**, General Councillor of Holy Union Sisters. Elected to the Executive in 2005.

§ Sr **Elisa Kidanè**, General Councillor of the Comboni Missionary Sisters. Elected to the Executive in 2005.

§ Fr **Pierre-Paul Walraet**, General Councillor of the Order of the Holy Cross (Crosiers). Elected to the Executive in 2001.

§ Fr **James Mc Closkey**, General Councillor of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Elected to the Executive in 2008.

§ Fr **Pio Estepa**, Member of the Society of the Divine Word. Elected to the Executive in 2007.

§ Sr **Felicia Harry**, Superior General of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles. Elected to the Executive in 2008.

§ Sr **Filo Hirota**, General Councillor of the Mercedarian Missionaries of Berriz. Elected to the Executive in 2008.

§ Fr **Carlos Rodríguez Linera**, Order of Preachers (Dominican Order). Re-elected as Executive Director in 2006.

As mentioned above, this year Fathers Teresino Serra, Pierre-Paul Walraet and James Mc Closkey have completed their terms as Members of the SEDOS Executive Committee after a few years devoted to the service of our brothers and sisters. We appreciate the time and energy they all have dedicated to our mission.

### ***SEDOS Staff***

The Office continues to work with a minimum staff that facilitates the administration and helps to reduce the overall expenses.

In charge of the publication (Bulletin and Homepage articles) and general office administration is *Mrs. Ilaria Iadeluca*; with *Sister Celine Kokkat, JMJ*, caring for all aspects of the Documentation Centre. Apart from their specific tasks they are also called upon to share in the organization of the different activities throughout the year. *Ms Philippa Wooldridge*, as proof-reader, continues to offer her professional services. *Mr Bernard Perez* is the person in charge of the maintenance and development of the Webpage, on a part-time basis, as well as training the staff in the use of the programmes.

## LOOKING AT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE YEAR

SEDOS continued the policy of maintaining and strengthening its relationship with the different groups and Institutions related to global mission, be they Catholic or from any other Confession, in Rome and at an International level. We have continued to make efforts to ensure that SEDOS was represented at most meetings and at events related to Mission endeavours, offering and making our resources available and known to the staff and students of Universities and the Members of different commissions and committee groups.

SEDOS has been present and cooperated with most of the activities organized by the **USG** and **UISG** and their Commissions, even as co-sponsor in some of their activities. SEDOS has kept up regular exchanges and close contact with the Executive of the **IACM** (International Association of Catholic Missiologists), cooperating mainly in the areas of research articles and publications. Also frequent contacts with the Institutes of Missiology in South America, India and Africa are being maintained and strengthened through the e-mail, visits of their members to Rome and encounters at International events. SEDOS also cooperates with the WCC, participating in the Ecumenical events leading to the celebration of the Centenary of the Declaration of The Missionary Conference — Edinburgh 1910-2010.

### A. - SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES -

In organizing our activities for the year, we have continued our efforts to cooperate with other groups and Organizations in Rome by sharing resources in planning and carrying out Annual Conferences. Thus we seek to maximize the choice while maintaining a wide range of themes and avoiding overlapping and duplication.

Thanks to the continual financial assistance and spiritual support received from **Misereor**, **Missio Aachen** and **Missio Munich** SEDOS has been able to organize and co-sponsor a variety of educational Conferences as well as the Residential Seminar in Assisi.

#### **CONFERENCES:**

- **2 December 2008** — Annual General Assembly  
**“The Spirituality of Mission as Dialogue”**

Speaker: Amelia Kawaji, MMB

- **27 March 2009** — **SEDOS - USG/UISG-ACA (African General Councillors Association)**  
**“Lineamenta Synod for Africa”**  
**“Women in the Church of Africa”**

Speakers: Emmanuel Kofi Fianu, SVD, and Hélène Mbuyamba, MSOLA

- **12-16 May 2009** — **SEDOS - JPIC SEMINAR**  
**“Creation at the Heart of Mission”**

Speakers: Fr Denis Edwards, Fr Sean Mc'Donagh, SSC, Sr Leonor de La Santa, FMM and Sr Francis Orchard, CJ

- **10, 16 and 24 October 2009** — **SEDOS - USG/UISG**  
**SYNOD AFRICA**

**“Prophetic Role of the Church in African Society”**

**“Role of Women in the Church of Africa”**

**“Religious Life in Africa Today: What is our Role?”**

Round-table Speakers: 12 Superior Generals and Councillors attending the Synod at the SEDOS Residential Seminar.

## **RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR**

This year the Annual SEDOS Residential Seminar was jointly organized by SEDOS and the JPIC Commission of the USG/UISG, all in line with our policy of Inter-Congregational cooperation. The Seminar was held at Assisi from the 12 to 16 of May, and there were 246 participants sharing their experiences and their commitment to Ecological issues. The theme of research was: **“Creation at the Heart of Mission”**. Being a jointly organized Seminar, it was open to all Congregations and the theme aroused an overwhelming response. Therefore the Seminar was moved from Ariccia to Assisi. It was fitting not only to have the encounter at Saint Francis’ place, but also the high number of participants compelled the organizers to look for a bigger place.

The structure of the Seminar, although not exactly typical of SEDOS’ methodology, offered a balanced combination of input between the Speakers and personal experience-sharing in working groups.

Next year (2010) our Annual Seminar will again be held at Ariccia from the **18 to 22 of May**. The research theme and discussion will be: **“The Prophetic Challenge of the African Churches”**. Based on the Synod for Africa, it will focus on the issues already discussed during these months and will seek to put the emphasis on formation.

## **B. - SEDOS WORKING GROUPS -**

Our SEDOS Working Groups (**Economic Justice, Ad Gentes, Donne Ad Gentes** ) have continued to facilitate the exchange of ideas and the deepening and detailed study of the themes presented at the Conferences. The Director tries to participate, gather information and material from as many as possible of the active working groups in Rome.

## **C. - SEDOS PUBLICATION -**

### **SEDOS BULLETIN**

The publication of the SEDOS Bulletin continues to be one of the main tasks of the Office personnel. The publication is mainly in English with two French articles. The issue of contributions in Spanish in the Bulletin continues to be unresolved, but would interest a large body of members. We continue to have some exchanges with the Editors of *Spiritus*, French and Spanish, as well as *Vida Religiosa*.

Our databank on subscriptions continues to be updated and we are offering Members the choice of ‘free On-line’ subscriptions in order to lower the expenses of postage. All the subscribers who request it are now being provided with a password to enable them to access the Bulletin on-line, and they are encouraged to have an electronic subscription that will help in cutting down the cost of printing and postage. The Subscription prices for 2010 have not changed; it will still cost *Euro 30,00 for Europe* and *Euro 45,00 (55,00 US\$)* for outside Europe. The number of subscribers at the end of 2009 was 791; including 126 exchange copies and 59 complimentary copies.

The editorial policy has continued to maintain the global scope of the articles inserted. Herewith we invite and encourage all the members of our Congregations engaged in research studies on Mission, to write and send their papers to the SEDOS publication desk. We need the research efforts of our members to maintain and nourish the flame of SEDOS. We also invite and encourage all our readers to share their insights with us either by writing or sending information about the

many interesting articles they have come across so that we can make them available on the Web to everybody.

### ***SEDOS HOMEPAGE***

The SEDOS webpage (<http://www.sedos.org>) continues to offer a variety of articles, links and information in different languages for the use of many Institutions of Education, as well as for a large number of individuals who visit and download the material. This fact serves as an encouragement to us, but also keeps the Office on the alert for ways to improve the webpage by posting more information and widening the scope of the much sought-after information on mission. This year we have been able to post the catalogue of the Library as well as an archive with the past SEDOS Bulletin Publications back to 1980. Hopefully, by next year the entire collection of the SEDOS Bulletin will be available on-line.

### ***DOCUMENTATION CENTRE***

The Documentation Centre continues to be open and available to all, although the personal visits to the Library are not many. Sister Celine takes care of updating the Library and documenting the magazines we receive, as well as updating the Catalogue database that has already been placed on the SEDOS website.

As you know, SEDOS does not have a budget to buy books and our Library grows thanks to our Members' contributions. Some Congregations send us a free copy of the publications of their members in matters related to mission; some members offer the Library the books they have bought that are of interest to all. We encourage the members to help us gather a comprehensive documentation on mission by sending us their books and articles. We also request the members to send us information of 'on-line' libraries, archives and/or collections of documents that we could link with, in order to expand the information provided.

### **LOOKING AHEAD**

After 40 years of service to the Church encouraging research on Mission trends, SEDOS still continues its efforts to be an open forum for Missionary Religious Institutions, and not only for them, but for all Missiologists from both the Catholic and Protestant Churches. The Members of the Executive are confident that SEDOS can become a hub for information and exchange between different missionary institutions and, hence, it has already begun to modernize the Office in order to facilitate the fulfillment of its mission: fostering and raising awareness of mission.

Through links on the website, SEDOS is trying to create a network, to become a kind of "search engine" or "hub" to help readers to find the information they need, and direct them to publications issued by Institutes of Missiology, to conferences and courses that are being held on all the topics related to Mission. If SEDOS could achieve this aim, it would facilitate the gathering and channelling of resources and information on Mission trends from and to the different Missiology Institutes around the World. SEDOS must "push" its readers towards the new frontiers of mission, as well as continue networking with different groups, strengthening the relationships with other Churches and other religions.

**Networking** could be strengthened. SEDOS' contact with the Continental and Regional members of our Institutes could be developed so as to 'branch off' into those regions and establish virtual offices sharing the responsibility for publishing, gathering documentation and organizing Regional Conferences and Symposiums. The possibility of creating a virtual office involving more committed people is something that should be considered for the future development of SEDOS.

**Bulletin.** At present we are studying the possibility of having editorial ‘working teams’ to publish the Bulletin. These working teams could be responsible for: gathering the relevant articles, focusing on themes or regions, editing them and publishing the Bulletin. Language, or the use of different languages, could be another of the possibilities being considered. Discussion could take place on whether to publish the Bulletin in different languages, according to Region.

We continue to work on the Bulletin Archive and have already posted the numbers of past SEDOS Bulletins (2009 to 1980) on the website. We will continue to digitise the contents of the back issues of the Bulletin down to 1969. Once this is finished, we shall be able to offer a valuable collection on the development of missionary thinking since the Second Vatican Council. We also plan to offer the whole contents on DVD format so as to facilitate the distribution and use of the material.

Regarding Research Conferences for the year 2010 and 2011 we shall continue to plan them in cooperation with the different religious organizations — USG/UISG and others, like JPIC, AEFJN. We will continue our dialogue with our Member Congregations to collect their valuable comments and ideas in identifying the trends of mission. Areas of research for the near future will be: *The Synod for Africa: New Frontiers of Mission. Economic Justice. Engaging the World in Prophetic Dialogue. Islam, How to Dialogue? Mission and Spirituality. Migration. Women and Laity in the Church. Urban Mission. Social Communications.*

These are our main goals for the near future, from the many possibilities open to us. Naturally, this calls for the commitment of material resources and personnel on the part of the Religious Congregations Members of SEDOS.

Lastly, I wish to take this opportunity to thank all and each one of you for the help, encouragement and friendship you have offered me during these six years at the SEDOS Office. I may say that my life has been greatly enriched by your commitment, efforts and belief. I can really say that my hope for a strong Kingdom of God has been strengthened all thanks to you. Your friendship, cooperation and understanding have taken away many of the difficulties and worries of the Office.

May God continue to bless your works. Thank you!

Respectfully yours,

Carlos Rodríguez Linera, OP  
SEDOS Executive Director



## ***Events***

### **NEXT SEDOS SEMINAR 2010**

**18–22 May**

***"The Prophetic Challenge  
of the African Churches"***

**- ARICCIA -**

**"CASA DIVIN MAESTRO" -**

***Daily Sub-themes: (With emphasis on Formation)***

**18, Tuesday evening:**

*Overall situation of Africa: Political, Social, Economical, Religious*

**19, Wednesday:**

*Kerigma: Evangelizing for Non-Violence*

**20, Thursday:**

*Koinonia: Building Communities in Justice and Peace*

**21, Friday:**

*Diakonia: Being Instruments of Reconciliation*

**22, Saturday:**

*Guidelines for Formation*

***... more details will follow***

***MERRY CHRISTMAS  
AND A BLESSED NEW YEAR  
TO ALL OF YOU!!!***