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In this issue: the concluding part of William Burrow's article calls attention to what he sees as the central issue for a missionary Institute like the Society of the Divine Word today: the theological pre-suppositions on which its activities were based in the past have led to a problem of dependency by complicating the process of a local church taking over full responsibility for its own growth and development.

R. H. Lesser describes an ecumenical venture as a result of which "Christ was preached for the first time publicly and successfully in Ajmer although Christians have been in that city for nearly 100 years."

The report of the Kinshasha Colloquium on Womens' Religious Life in Zaire is of interest to those who try to encourage the missionary character of the local church as manifested in the charismatic calling to religious life. The Report does not see this missionary dimension as being particularly significant in the discussions at Kinshasha.

The next issue of the Bulletin will contain  
the  
Report of the Sedos Mission Research Seminar  
8th-19th March, Villa Cavaletti, Rome.

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Coming Events:

Friday, April 10th at Sedos	Executive Committee Meeting.
Tuesday, April 23th at Sedos	Latin American Meeting.

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Sedos Office will be closed from  
Thursday, 16th April through Wednesday, 22nd April.

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## FACING MINISTRY AND EVANGELIZATION DILEMMAS

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### SVD PRIORITIES (Contd).

William R. Burrows, SVD.

### PART II

#### The SVD in the Dependency Crisis in Catholic Evangelization

The SVD has traditionally been a major channel of Catholic efforts aimed at evangelization of non-Christian peoples. Changing world conditions, however, make it difficult to see how the traditional SVD pattern of mission work can long endure (i.e., the SVD as an agent of a "giving" north helping a "receiving" south). If missionary work is an outreach of the church to the unevangelized, then the US is as much missionary territory as is Ghana. Thus it is arguable that Catholic strategy is as much maintenance and as little missionary in the one as in the other. Then what does it mean for the SVD to play a vital part in contemporary evangelization?

Our ecclesiological position unfortunately makes it difficult for the SVD to start local churches and then move on to the quite different business of being the missionary arm of these local churches. The question thus focuses on the role of indigenous, Third World SVDs.

Pastoral or Missionary?: Asian, African and Latin American SVDs have been recruited and trained to take over works begun in their homelands by northern hemisphere SVDs. Gradually they have themselves been leaving home for other nations (e.g., Filipinos going to Papua New Guinea and Indonesia). Much has been written about the "missionary" character of the SVD necessitating an overseas commitment. It seems that the geographical concept of mission upon which that debate was based has been superseded by events and ought to be replaced by the more biblical concept of mission as outreach and primary evangelization.

Thus much of what Americans are doing in Ghana is pastoral, not missionary, and much of what some Filipinos are doing in Abra (alongside foreigners) is missionary, while what other Filipinos in the same area are doing is pastoral. This could be resolved if policies and priorities in Third World activities were sorted out and northern hemisphere contributions were considered as aid given to help local Christians contextualize gospel and church.

The SVD has considered its missionary and pastoral assistance in its religious aspect as it was colored by the theological presupposition that non-northern churches had to become Latin and Roman. If services provided by northern hemisphere provinces of the Society were considered as foreign aid, and the present structures were considered as entailing continued dependency of south upon north, then the basic presuppositions upon which we have been making our contributions would be seriously questioned.

It would seem that the SVD needs to determine whether its services encourage the development of truly contextual local churches or operate under the assumption that all Catholic churches must also be Roman (e.g., have fully-trained, male, celibate clergy directing them, with a common liturgical calendar and rite). It

should also ascertain whether it aids local Christians to become fully conscientized, developing the awareness that they, in dialogue with authentic tradition, determine the shape of ecclesial fellowship in the light of their own cultural traditions and social patterns.

Colonial expansion: In the first half of the 20th century the SVD clearly accepted most of the agenda of the northern powers in the heyday of colonial expansion--it was the mission of the colonial powers to "civilize" (sic) the rest of the world. This painful admission can be made without unduly condemning our predecessors. At the turn of the century, as great a philosopher of history and religion as Ernst Troeltsch could survey the riches of the non-Western world and cheerfully declare European culture and religion to be the highest flowering of the human spirit. Since World War II the pridefulness of that assessment has come to light, but many of the neocolonial ecclesiastical parallels to classical secular colonialism have been retained. High priority should be given to concretizing the institutional shape of our philosophical and theological insights into the relativity of Roman Catholicism as a human institution.

The majority of the people among whom we SVDs work have already become Christians, either Protestant or Catholic. This is not true in Japan, India and Indonesia where we have large missions, but the dynamics that lie behind this and the unlikelihood that Christianity will make much progress in mainland Asia under present conditions demand that we reassess our priorities in the light of the dependency crisis in world evangelism.

World religions: Traditionally Christian churches have had great numerical success where people have not been adherents of the higher religions and have had relatively meager results where people belonged to such religions. The degree of Westernization required to become a Catholic and the strange conceptualization of the message of Christ in Hebraic sacrificial and Hellenic metaphysical concepts have contributed to that lack of success. "Liberals" are said to pursue the truth while the "orthodox" teach the truth. But there are many brands of both liberalism and orthodoxy. As a Catholic liberal speaking about Catholic orthodoxy, I favor a dialogic course where evangelization would not preclude exploring even radical reformulations of doctrines when prayerful, religious encounters show that God's grace is present already even if differently conceptualized. Such a pluralist strategy produces hope of an ultimate convergence of world religions when respectful and reverent dialogue has helped persons of differing beliefs to reconceptualize doctrines which now appear insurmountably divisive. This, though, is itself a matter of faith.

A more practical and hopefully less controversial view holds that in order to wind up its initial work of evangelization, and to prepare for whatever shape evangelization takes in a still unforeseeable future, the SVD ought to be studying ways to help local Christians select models of Christian fellowship apt for an integrated religious and social life. Whether orthodoxy or liberalism prove more durable is less important than that we clearly recognize the nonbinding nature of the presuppositions of our traditional work.

Models of Christian fellowship: In many areas SVDs serve as pastors primarily because the elaborate structure of Roman Catholicism will allow only fully-trained, male celibates to take on pastoral nurturing in a church's third, fourth or 15th generation. I have suggested elsewhere (1980) that a dual anomaly is exemplified in this situation. First, life according to the evangelical counsels of poverty, obedience and celibacy ought to be a radical form of life lived in some tension with the workaday church. But Catholicism in the Middle Ages first domesticated religious life, making it--in the case of the active orders--merely a parachurch structure for special apostolates.

Second, Catholicism began insisting that normal pastoral ministry conform to the usages of this domesticated monasticism.

Thus Catholic theology of ordained ministry has been seriously distorted. The very success of the SVD in its Third World recruiting efforts, if it puts these clergy into pastoral work, contributes to the continued distortion of ministry. The way they address the questions will be linked to the SVD's answers to the questions of identifying models of pastoral ministry for the Third World church and deciding on its own future missionary endeavors and their shape. No internal problems can be solved without getting caught up in the church's general ministry dilemmas.

Lessons of history: It is dangerous to draw too many lessons from history, particularly from the New Testament and the early church, since it is easy to misjudge the difference between our experience and historical realities far in the past. However, at the risk of oversimplifying, it may be valid to recall that missionaries and bishops such as Paul of Tarsus, Ignatius of Antioch, Cyprian of Carthage, Augustine of Canterbury and Boniface of Germany faced a less complex task than missionaries in the past 100 years. Paul preached and left behind people to direct local churches. In time they became bishops who, in their turn, became the models of later missionaries. In the Middle Ages developments were unified and codified. By the time of such SVD greats as Fr. Freinademetz of China (d. 1908) and Fr. Limbrock of Papua New Guinea (d.1931), the founding of a mission was an enterprise for which the Code of Canon Law was very nearly as important as the Bible itself.

The central issue facing the SVD today is the theological presupposition of its work which in the past has led to a crisis of dependency by complicating the process of handing over a local church to local Christians. This vexing dilemma occurs because, though missionary and therefore requiring creativity and innovation to address the particular problems facing evangelization in the contemporary world, the SVD is profoundly wedded to Roman Catholicism and centuries of tradition. Innovation seems impossible because of the operating structures and the debts owed to the present model of ecclesial life. Here we cannot settle the problem of whether the Roman presuppositions are valid, but only point out how the crisis in world evangelization inexorably forces Catholics and SVDs to face these troubling issues.

#### HINTS OF A PROMISING STRATEGY?

Divine providence may be giving us a message in the decrease of Euro-American vocations to the SVD. The day is coming when we will not have the personnel in Europe or North and South America to replace our aging and dying colleagues around the world. The time seems appropriate to critically examine what we can still do to help the churches we have founded or aided so they may become self-reliant and self-ministering. Winding up this phase of our efforts may be the necessary condition for a new era in our evangelization service for the world church. This may be one way to respond to Fr. General Heekeren's invitation to reflect critically upon our works and their relationship to our missionary charism.

New ministries?: My own pilgrimage has included this past year living in a Black parish, pastored by a Black West Indian priest in the midst of Chicago, plus a five-year teaching assignment in Papua New Guinea. Added to time spent in seminaries, this has given me an appreciation for the hard work of my SVD colleagues. Nevertheless, problems do exist which can be traced to the SVD's traditional adherence to Roman Catholicism's basic policies. For instance, in Papua New Guinea where the SVD had a mandate to develop and administer a training program for indigenous diocesan clergy, 17 years of work terminated with an

acknowledged failure to complete this difficult task of creating a viable model of ordained ministry. The present model of the ordained ministry appears to be a block on the road to creating healthy, contextualized local churches. With an inability to wind up the first phase of our work in places such as Papua New Guinea, the SVD might be set inexorably on a circular course.

Except in Poland, SVD training and recruiting seems to be on an irreversible decline. A disproportionately large share of graduates from our training programs are fed back into internal SVD maintenance projects (recruiting and training). Few have any hope of finding enough new candidates to "make a difference" for the world church. Thus the SVDs' problems in Papua New Guinea are related to those the order faces in Europe and the Americas. Our traditional logistical centers probably lack vocations for the same reason some Third World diocesan seminaries are foundering.

In God's providence, are we swimming against the tides of history? Is this a time for a radical reappraisal of our efforts, or for merely trying to renew ourselves? Do we shift our emphasis away from aggiornamento to inner spiritual renewal? Both difficult, yet necessary. However, inner renewal is not as painful as external changes. Modernizing means admitting needs. Is it possible that the continual calls for renewal---at the expense of modernizing---are an easy way out of change?

It seems clear that the SVD is not seizing the historical moment, making judgments about its meaning and developing plans to wind up one phase of our missionary efforts in preparation for a new moment in world evangelism. It is difficult to judge the numerical growth of the society in the Philippines, India and Indonesia as well as in Poland. Perhaps in these lands Providence has its own agenda. A critical question, though, seems to be whether cultural, socio-economic and other historical factors are giving us a reprieve from the more basic and universal currents of the times.

Basic communities: Several promising grass roots revival movements such as the basic ecclesial communities may show that the time for reevaluation has come. In these movements the gospel enjoys rebirth in small groups which meet to study, pray, discuss and plan for concrete praxis. Such groups are intrinsically missionary because they insist that gospel living and outward-reaching activity are bound together inextricably.

Their basic theology is that Christianity is a matter of personal faith. Though one may be born into the church, it is also intrinsic to Christianity that the paradigm of faith is a free, personal act of attachment in response to Jesus Christ. Though the basic ecclesial community movement remains attached to the official church, there seems to be little thought that such communities ought to be considered as candidates for the name "church" and be given the faculties to celebrate a completely rounded Catholic liturgical life, complete with presbyter. Such a move would enable the SVD to wind up the questionable commitment to mainly pastoral work, and to begin placing new members in more innovative missionary apostolates. This demands a new position on clerical life, training and prerogatives.

Role of missionary institutes?: Thus it can be said that a society such as the SVD does not have a primary role in church policy planning, though it fulfills a service role in collaborating in carrying out practical, pastoral and missionary policies. This should imply an intrinsic right--as part of the local church--to a critical input into deliberations. Should the society judge that a high priority must be given to establishing viable forms of normal pastoral ministry in order to shift new members into more properly missionary, outreach apostolates, it would certainly be within its

rights to extend cooperation to churches which share this vision, and vice versa.

Thus to continue to appoint general duty pastors for bishops to assign to parishes in countries such as Paraguay or Zaire might be to prolong unnecessary dependency of the local church upon outside resources. The umbilical cord remains uncut at present because of the nonexistence of indigenous, ordained pastors. Perhaps by announcing a policy of appointing new pastors only to innovative apostolates, we might jar bishops' conferences into facing the ministry model dilemma.

This obvious politicizing may be frightening, but it is illusory to think we are neutral since we choose to support the Latin model of ecclesial organization. As major supporters of that system, we have a major stake in its success! If we recruit Third World members to assign them to normal pastoral ministry, we contribute to a continued Catholic distortion of the theology and practice of ministry. Freedom to shape the ordained ministry is warranted by both the New Testament and primitive church picture of that service. To take a step in the directions here advocated would be to escape the law of inertia presently operative within Catholicism.

One would have to be blind and deaf not to realize that our traditional activities are grinding to a halt in our historical homelands (i.e., recruiting and training people for the foreign missions). The question remains whether these are events of temporary duration (to be cured when the North Atlantic world faces up to its spiritual bankruptcy as some allege) or are the result of irreversible changes in social life which have to be adapted to by devising new forms of being a Catholic Christian.

"Six continents"?: New methods for evangelizing the North Atlantic world would thus have as high a priority as our traditional overseas apostolates. The North Atlantic would equally be targeted as Southeast Asia for missionary effort. Presently, our direct apostolate in the US is among Blacks. Long ago that effort became as much pastoral maintenance as missionary outreach. In addition, we often built schools to lure the children of Baptists into the church. This is only to point out that the SVD missionary outreach is fettered with the chains of Catholic clericalism.

More in keeping with our charism would be for SVDs to be the vanguard of a Catholic church effort to reach out to the unchurched and hopeless minority masses, not merely maintain formerly Irish or Czech parish facilities which are now Black because of Black immigration. Similarly, with the statisticians forecasting that half the American Catholic church will be Hispanic by the year 2000, someone must find a way to reach them.

It is unlikely that traditional Latin, Roman Catholic, clerical institutions will ever be able to mobilize to meet such pressing needs. The basic ecclesial community movement may be in danger of becoming faddish, yet it does provide a sense of what is possible. By recognizing the benefits of the basic ecclesial community movement and considering it to be church in the fullest sense, the SVD could work to create ordained ministry models which would allow these groups to enjoy a full life revolving around word, sacrament and outreach praxis. This would preclude the SVDs becoming bogged down in pastoral maintenance.

Problems of vocations: It seems unlikely that any Catholic order will ever recruit the large numbers which filled its seminaries a generation ago. Modernity has changed religious consciousness so that the world-negating-for-the-sake-of-heaven motives (which once led people into traditional orders) are gone forever. More innovations will be required if Catholicism is to meet the exigencies of the rest of this century. Perhaps ideas floated within





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## MISSION DOCUMENTATION

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Sr. Joan Delaney, MM.

(Report of a Workshop held at Urbaniana University, July 1980, sponsored by the International Association of Mission Studies.)

Approximately 30 archivists, librarians and missiologists attended the Workshop. Although there were members from a variety of countries, the majority came from Europe and North America. This reflected a situation referred to several times in the course of the workshop; namely that the concern for keeping and the ability to preserve mission history of the Third World is mainly done in countries of the First World. Many of the suggestions made during the meeting dealt with how this imbalance might be corrected. Some suggestions were that duplicates of material gathered by First World scholars might be given to the countries concerned and that simple uniform systems of classifying mission material should be devised to make it easier and less costly for Third World countries to gather their own material.

The talks covered a variety of topics. "Christian Scholarship and the Third World" stressed the need to decide what kind of information is to be kept, how it is to be conveyed and to whom it should be available. The need for self-reliance and the avoidance of cultural dependence was also emphasized. Account should be taken of the national emphases e.g., a history of the Church's involvement in the national literacy programme. It was also pointed out that such practical points as the type of paper to be used and the ways of storing material should not be overlooked. It was suggested that maintaining a duplicate set of materials in another country would offset problems of destruction of archives by political upheavals and severe climatic conditions.

In a paper on "The Use of Missionary Archives by Scholars", the value of mission material to scholars, some of whom are not interested in the Churches as such, was pointed out. While it is a helpful service to the scholars to have mission documentation made available, mission organizations often are not equipped to do this on a large scale and may have to decide how open they wish to make their documentation. The importance of a two-way collaboration was stressed: that the scholar should make a contribution to the mission organization in the form of a bibliography and in communicating in some way the results of his research.

An interesting account of a people's history of Latin America (CIHILA) revealed the need to rethink many of our traditional categories in order to do a history of the poor. Many histories are written on an administrative level which would be completely inadequate in this situation. The project is an ecumenical one and includes a training course for historians in order to introduce them to this new approach.

One of the highlights of the Workshop was the tour of the Vatican archives. The stormy history of the Vatican archives during the attacks on Rome supported the plea for duplicate sets of records in another country. Tours to the archives of Propaganda Fide, the library of the Urbaniana, IDOC and SEDOS were very much appreciated by the participants. There was also a demonstration of the newly installed computer system at the Generalate of the Society of the Divine Word. The papers, discussions, tours and participation in a papal audience made the workshop an invaluable experience for all who attended. IAMS through the president,



When we were to have the blessing of our new church, of course I invited him. And here arose a delicate situation. After the religious ceremony there was of course the feast, at which the Fathers imbibed somewhat. What to do with the non-drinking guests, especially the Reverend Minister? In the night, we arranged two separate groups. But that did not work, as one tended to merge into the other. And there was a certain amount of embarrassment. The next day at lunch someone had presented me with a bottle of whisky (a rare gift, as mostly we drank the local firewater) and I decided to have it in the coffee, as 'tiger's milk'. To my surprise Howard, a non-drinker and non-smoker, accepted a little 'tiger's milk' and even a cigarette, obviously to save us further embarrassment. I consider this one of the most Christian acts I have ever seen. That certainly sealed our friendship.

This of course naturally led to an ecumenical meeting at my mission in Mahuri--the first among missionaries in North India. Howard gave a homily in which he beautifully developed the priestly prayer of Christ, in John 17,20. I followed with a talk on 'exploring avenues'. Everyone remarked how closely our talks fitted together, though each had, of course, been prepared quite independently of the other. The next meeting was at his place in Dohad. But, soon after I was transferred and the meetings folded up. But in that time I had a chance to explore his mind. I do not think my experience was unique. Other missionaries have told me of similar experiences, though none, I think, experienced the warmth of friendship I had from Howard.

I would like to relate another experience, and this in a very different setting--the town of Ajmer. We have always had some sort of programme for Unity Week culminating in a joint prayer meeting. Some wanted to go further. The Church of North India minister suggested regular monthly meetings of Church leaders. Like many other worthy endeavours this began well but soon fizzled out.

#### A JOINT PASSION PLAY

Another project was more fruitful. Dr. David, a C.N.I. former Anglican, is, for various reasons, one of the Christian leaders in Ajmer. At a casual meeting, she suggested preaching Christ to the people of Ajmer through song and dance. After much consultation and many meetings there was formed the Ajmer Kristya Kala Sangh - the Ajmer Christian Artistic group. The object of the Sangh was 'to proclaim Christ through song, dance and drama'. At once there were objections from some of our more fundamentalist friends. 'Dancing is demeaning', they said, 'and should not be used for Christian propoganda'. Nor did a reference to David's dancing before the ark convince them. But when they saw the very reverent, indeed beautifully inspiring dance in Indian mode on a Christian theme of light overcoming darkness, done by the convent girls, they were mollified.

The first attempt of the Sangh was at Christmas. Much preparation went into it but not enough. It was announced as free, open to all, But not enough propoganda was done, and though, through the efforts of Dr. David, the Chief Minister of Rajasthan agreed to come, attendance was meagre. Also, the Pentecostal item tended to ridicule Pastors of the established Churches.

For the next project we prepared long in advance. The first decision we came to was that tickets should be sold, though cheaply, on the principle that a person who pays even one rupee (about 5p) for a ticket will come to see the performance. And our object was to proclaim Christ as widely as possible.

We were to put on the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. The first problem here was to find someone to play the central role. Some of our more conservative brethren did not want Christ to be represented on the stage. When it was decided that He would be, there were, I gather, a number of candidates for

the role. Eventually I was chosen, partly possibly because, coincidentally I had allowed my beard and hair to grow for two years. I was asked to produce a script. Using Dorothy Sayers' Man Born to be King, and much else and of course meditating much on the Gospels and with the aid of a nun and then the Hindi teacher of the convent (a Hindu) I did manage to do this within the week. For producer we roped in a young Hindu medical student. This was important because he was completely impartial in his criticism, which was strong and frequent. The cast from all the Christian Churches was enthusiastic enough but, because it was near the examination time, it was difficult to get students and it was extremely difficult to assemble all the working people at one time. Just one week before the dress rehearsal we were short of an apostle.

#### A SUCCESSFUL PRODUCTION

However, things worked out and it was an enormous success. We originally had 700 seats hoping that 500 of them would be occupied. In fact, on the first night, which was mainly for children, there were 1200. Everybody was loud in praise. Even my Hindi pronunciation, under the rigid direction of Ashok and the careful training of Mrs. Parishad had passed the test. Of course I prayed rather than 'played' the part. I had to meditate for at least an hour before each performance. This was facilitated by the fact that I needed no make-up at all, (I had dyed my hair auburn). Also, I found it necessary not to eat anything or even drink a drop of water from mid-day, so that I could really mean it when I said 'I thirst'. Especially in the heat of May in Rajasthan, this left me quite exhausted and as I carried the quite heavy cross through the audience (the drama was of course performed in the open air) I fell sometimes more often than was written into the text. After I was 'crucified' I sucked an orange to revive myself for the resurrection. For the second performance over 1500 people came. Many had to be turned away. Dr. David suggested we do a hitherto unplanned 'free show'. I was so exhausted after the second performance, I was almost ill and did not feel able. But Dr. David persuaded me, and, with the Lord's help, we did. In all nearly 5000 people must have seen it, many twice.

Though, and because, the effort was so ecumenical involving all the Christian Churches in Ajmer, there were problems. Judas was played by a fundamentalist Pentecostal preacher, who, I knew, was preaching to Catholics in town against devotion to our Lady. You can imagine how I felt when he kissed me. Our Lady was played, beautifully, by a church worker formerly Anglican, now Church of North India. We couldn't have the institution of Eucharist because of divergences of opinion. Yet the effort was immensely worthwhile. For the first time, Christ was preached publicly and successfully in Ajmer, though Christians have been in the city for nearly 100 years.

#### AT A DEEPER LEVEL

The next C.N.I. minister in Ajmer was most ecumenically-minded and extremely friendly. In fact, his own family was 'ecumenical'. One daughter had married a Catholic, another a Hindu. Though he was generous in his invitations, our then bishop was reluctant to allow us to preach in his church as we would of course have had to reciprocate the invitation. Still, we started and continued for some time prayer meetings of Church leaders.

Of course, in cities ecumenism is much easier. In Calcutta it flourishes. A Catholic priest lectures regularly in the C.N.I. Bishops College seminary. The late lamented Canon Biswas was invited to read a lesson at the C.B.C.I. meeting that was held in Calcutta.

At a deeper level, experts in the intellectual centre of the Church, in Bangalore, are conducting discussions with their other Christian confrères. I review books regularly for a C.N.I. theological journal, and some of my articles are to be published in it.

#### CONCLUSIONS

It can easily be seen from the above that the obstacles that obstruct progress in ecumenism in the missions stem from three heads:

- a) lack of theological knowledge on all sides,
  - b) lack of awareness of the problem and the urgency of it,
  - c) lack of courage to trust in the Holy Spirit, instead of in time-worn security.
- This basic fear of venturing into the unknown, of discarding old prejudices and habits in which we have grown up is, I believe, at the bottom of the above too and prevents any possibility of real study of the problem.

Yet the problem remains, Christian disunity in the missions, whether due to ignorance, apathy or malice or sheer fear, is one of the main obstacles to progress in evangelisation. Christ told us that love is the badge of Christians 'By this they shall know that you are my disciples...' and His last desperate prayer for the unity of His disciples climaxed in 'May they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me' (Jn. 17,20).

Of course the obstacles are not insurmountable. Christ's prayer can be realised. Otherwise He wouldn't have made it. I think the genuine carefully guided charismatic renewal is helping in this direction. Also useful, though at a different level and with a different type of person, is the Ashram movement pioneered by the Anglican Murray-Rogers, and his successor Ditnbhandu the Capuchin in the North, and Monchanin and Bede Griffiths at a far more intellectual level in the South.

The fact that must be faced by all Christians is that, unless and until we are one, our witness will not be credible, certainly by intelligent non-Christians; indeed our disunity must be a counterwitness nullifying much of the time, money and effort poured into evangelisation.

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Reference: THE OUTLOOK, Pontifical Missionary Union Quarterly Review, Volume XVII - Number 4 Winter 1980.

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## LA VIE RELIGIEUSE FEMININE AU ZAIRE

(In August 1979, 45 religious sisters from Zaire representing diocesan and international Congregations, met at Kinshasha to examine various aspects of African religious life for women. The Colloquium had been preceded by considerable consultation, preparatory documentation and collated replies to questionnaires. Special attention was given to the vows, prayer, and living in common. The theme of the apostolate of Zairean religious women, its present situation and place in the future did not provoke a similar interest. The fundamental question at the Colloquium was how to identify the way of life of the religious, should they live "with the people" and "share their way of life?"

Dr. Mary Hall of Selly Oak Colleges attended the Colloquium for P.M.V. and we print here an extract from the P.M.V. Dossier on the Colloquium..

References in this extract are to the Report on the Colloquium published by the Secretariat of USUMA, Kinshasha - Gombe or the polycopied Report of Mary Hall available through P.M.V.)

### MIROIR, MIROIR, ME DIRAS-TU...?

Les soeurs zairoises qui ont assisté au colloque ont manifesté un intérêt tout particulier à l'égard des commentaires des laïcs concernant l'image qu'ils se font de la religieuse. Il ne s'agissait en fait que d'une série d'opinions, mais les soeurs ont pu les méditer et faire leur examen de conscience. Miroirs de la société zairoise, leurs admirateurs, leurs opposants et les indifférents ont permis aux soeurs de se regarder vivre au milieu des réalités zairoises.

Elles ont été encouragées par la signification authentique qu'a la vie religieuse aux yeux de nombreux Zairois. Les arguments invoqués par ceux-ci étaient assez divers, mais généralement d'inspiration religieuse. Citons entre autres: la religieuse est le témoin de l'amour de Dieu; c'est une femme comme les autres qui a été appelée par Dieu et a écouté son appel. Elle a voué sa vie au service de Dieu, de l'Eglise et de l'humanité; elle fait confiance à Jésus-Christ, proclame la parole de Dieu, vit ses vœux et passe de longues heures à prier. Elle vit en communauté (V.11). Zairois et Zairoises ont déclaré entretenir de bonnes relations avec les soeurs; leurs arguments étaient une fois de plus parfaitement subjectifs, allant du sourire chaleureux au...modèle de foi.

Les religieuses font d'ailleurs aussi l'objet de critiques sévères, qu'elles ont prises très au sérieux, même si ces critiques étaient parfois nettement exagérées. Mais puisqu'il n'y a jamais de fumée sans feu, elles ont aidé les religieuses zairoises à faire leur examen de conscience (V.13). Il est tout particulièrement intéressant de constater que le groupe le plus sévèrement critiqué a été celui des jeunes filles de 15 à 20 ans, étudiantes pour la plupart. Ces critiques portaient essentiellement sur la vie religieuse en tant que style de vie qui doit en inspirer d'autres et accessoirement sur ses valeurs fondamentales.

C'est dans cette optique que la jeune génération en est arrivée à mettre un accent particulier sur les faiblesses des soeurs zairoises: la jeune religieuse est préoccupée de sa personne, ne refuse pas le flirt, obéit à ses caprices, oublie de prier et se désintéresse de la vie communautaire, a soif d'indépendance, se soucie trop de son bien-être matériel et est cupide; ses relations à autrui manquent de sincérité et elle passe dès lors pour une hypocrite (V.13). Les critiques les plus sévères visent les religieuses qui ne respectent pas le voeu de chasteté, encore qu'il s'agisse bien entendu dans la majorité des cas de femmes qui ont renoncé à la vie religieuse; toutefois à partir d'elles on porte le même jugement sur toutes les religieuses sans discrimination.

Etant donné les réactions des Zairois, il serait optimiste de conclure qu'ils se font une idée nette de la vocation et de l'essence de la vie religieuse. En bref, ils s'attendent à ce que la religieuse mène une vie de témoignage et que ses actes soient le reflet de sa sincérité et de sa fidélité envers son engagement (V.17). Les réponses des Zairois nous fournissent en outre quelques éclaircissements à propos de la façon dont ils conçoivent l'avenir de la vie religieuse. Leur optimisme est certes encourageant, mais leur attitude demeure conservatrice. Ils souhaitent avant tout que le nombre des religieuses augmente --double, triple, quadruple même-- "parce que la religieuse travaille pour la vie spirituelle qui est le principe même de la vitalité de l'individu et de tout le peuple, parce qu'elle donne sens à notre vie" et parce que "la religieuse travaille pour le bien-être temporel de ce peuple" (V.15).

Les Zairois estiment que les soeurs excellent dans les domaines dont elles sont traditionnellement responsables et qu'eux-mêmes connaissent bien. Pour une raison ou pour une autre, le message chrétien et les activités traditionnelles des soeurs sont, à leurs yeux, indissolublement liés. Rares sont les Zairois qui ont fait allusion à des projets originaux, typiquement africains dont la réalisation serait confiée aux soeurs et qui leur donneraient l'occasion de témoigner de leur vocation chrétienne dans la société contemporaine (V.19).

Les soeurs zairoises ont comparé les réponses fournies par les personnes interviewées à leur expérience personnelle et ont conclu que certains aspects de la vie zairoise contemporaine militent contre la vie religieuse féminine. Les jeunes filles qui se sentent attirées par la vie religieuse se découragent souvent lorsqu'elles prennent conscience des difficultés qu'il leur faudra affronter.

Dans la société zairoise, le rôle traditionnel de la femme est celui de mère pour la survie du clan. Sa valeur est fonction du nombre d'enfants qu'elle met au monde (V.36; Coll/28 et 37; Hall, p.3). Il lui est très difficile de refuser ce rôle traditionnel. Les gens se méfient de la jeune fille qui désire entrer au couvent. La réalité sociologique étant ce qu'elle est, la majorité des Zairois estime qu'une fille se réfugie au couvent parce qu'elle ne parvient pas à trouver de mari. Il semblerait que ce soit là une opinion moins répandue dans les familles qui sont chrétiennes depuis plus longtemps; ces dernières auraient plutôt tendance à considérer la consécration d'une jeune fille comme une bénédiction divine (V.32).

La solidarité, élément important de la vie zairoise, peut parfois suffire pour empêcher une jeune fille de répondre à l'appel de la vocation. Le clan intervient chaque fois que l'un de ses membres doit prendre une décision importante. A l'heure actuelle, étant donné que la majorité des familles sont pauvres, les jeunes filles sont tiraillées par des désirs contradictoires. Répondre à l'appel de la vie religieuse signifie s'opposer à l'éducation traditionnelle qui enseigne que le devoir des enfants est de venir en aide à leurs parents chaque fois que la situation l'exige. On considère donc que la jeune fille qui entre en religion n'assume pas ses responsabilités à l'égard de

sa famille, plus précisément à cause du voeu de pauvreté (Coll/17). Les chrétiens n'ont pas le droit de donner une fausse interprétation de ce dilemme des jeunes. C'est un fait que le statut social et le niveau de vie des religieuses sont souvent supérieurs à ceux de leur famille. Certaines congrégations internationales ont pris conscience du tiraillement des soeurs, et celles qui en ont les moyens ne dissimulent pas qu'elles viennent en aide aux familles des religieuses. Le procédé était peut-être déjà courant à l'époque coloniale, mais la discrétion était alors de rigueur. D'autres congrégations résolvent le problème en accordant à leurs aspirantes l'autorisation de travailler avant d'entrer au noviciat, leur permettant ainsi de rembourser à leur famille les frais que leur éducation a occasionnés (Hall, p.4).

La jeune Zaïroise recule devant le sacrifice que la vie religieuse exige d'elle, elle refuse surtout la forme de dépendance qu'elle signifie. Parmi les facteurs qui militent contre les idéaux et les valeurs défendus par la vie religieuse, on peut citer la vie moderne et ses tentations ou encore l'argent, clef de l'indépendance dans une société de consommation grandissante.

Ce contexte zaïrois - la description que nous en proposons ici est brève et par conséquent lacunaire - met les religieuses au défi de donner un témoignage concret et convaincant de leur consécration. Cependant, la contextualisation comporte deux processus: l'adaptation de la vie religieuse à la mentalité zaïroise et inversement de la mentalité zaïroise à la vie religieuse, dont la réussite n'est pas comparable. Au plan personnel, les religieuses ont approfondi leur engagement dans le sens de l'esprit de l'Évangile. Les directives de Vatican II et d'autres publications officielles les ont aidées dans ce renouveau. Pour elles, il va de soi que retourner aux valeurs évangéliques signifie pratiquer les conseils évangéliques qu'elles se sont engagées à observer. Elles sont en outre absolument convaincues que cette approche de la vie religieuse la renouvelle et l'enrichit profondément.

Aux yeux des soeurs zaïroises, la pauvreté est moins une privation de biens matériels qu'un partage de richesses spirituelles entre les membres d'une même communauté et entre ces derniers et le monde extérieur. En pratique, l'obéissance signifie un partage communautaire des responsabilités plutôt qu'une soumission passive à la hiérarchie.

À l'obéissance sans discernement aux ordres de la Supérieure a succédé le dialogue grâce auquel chaque religieuse peut désormais contribuer au progrès de la communauté. Le rôle de la Supérieure a lui aussi subi l'influence de cette évolution: elle était l'administratrice de la communauté, elle en est maintenant l'animatrice.

Les religieuses insistent également sur l'importance du voeu de chasteté. La chasteté a acquis une dimension spirituelle nouvelle, elle n'est plus considérée comme la négation pure et simple d'une dimension physique de l'être humain. Leur union au Christ est pour les religieuses le moyen de s'ouvrir à autrui sans exception, et d'aimer leur prochain d'un amour tout maternel (V. 22-23; Coll/3).

Ces nouvelles conceptions étant acquises, les soeurs doivent maintenant les adapter aux réalités zaïroises, de manière qu'elles soient compréhensibles par la population zaïroise dans son ensemble. Cet aspect particulier de la contextualisation n'en est toutefois qu'à ses débuts et il existe encore un écart considérable entre la théorie et la pratique. La preuve en est la façon dont les soeurs, en tant que Zaïroises, réagissent en face de certains aspects importants de la vie culturelle (V. 58). Certains événements qui sont, pour la société, des moments rituels cruciaux n'ont guère de signification pour les religieuses: ils ne concernent ni la vie de la communauté ni les relations que cette dernière entretient avec le monde extérieur.

Les religieuses zairoises savent très bien que les laïcs estiment qu'il y a une contradiction entre leur mode de vie et leur idéal. Actuellement le mode de vie des soeurs n'est pas à l'image d'une pratique authentique des trois vœux évangéliques.

La pauvreté comme mode de vie: pour la soeur élevée dans la tradition zairoise, le partage est une notion très importante qui détermine son comportement, sa sensibilité et ses opinions. Mais son statut de religieuse l'isole du reste de sa société: les soeurs vivent dans des maisons confortables et leur niveau de vie est supérieur à celui du Zairois moyen (V. 32 et 65; Coll/23 et 48). On comprend dès lors pourquoi aux yeux de leur propre famille, les soeurs font partie de la classe aisée de la société; c'est l'image que l'Eglise, en tant qu'institution, offre d'elle-même (V. 27). Etant donné l'ambiguïté de la situation, la soeur zairoise est assez facilement tentée de faire profiter sa famille des avantages matériels dont elle jouit. Les conditions matérielles dans lesquelles vit sa famille sont parfois suffisamment déplorable pour l'encourager à profiter de la situation; elle le fera d'autant plus facilement qu'en fonction des conceptions traditionnelles, cette attitude n'a rien de répréhensible.

Les Zairois ont un sens du commerce très développé - ce sont des acheteurs et des vendeurs nés--: les soeurs se laissent donc aisément entraîner dans des opérations commerciales et font taire leurs scrupules en faisant remarquer que le clergé en fait tout autant (V. 40; Hall, p.6). Les activités commerciales des prêtres - que nous ne tentons certainement pas de justifier--illustrent les difficultés rencontrées par les soeurs zairoises pour mettre la théorie de la vie religieuse en harmonie avec la pratique. Le revenu des prêtres zairois est raisonnable, surtout si on le compare au revenu de l'Africain moyen. Mais il faut aussi savoir que certaines soeurs disposent d'une somme équivalente rien que pour leur argent de poche. Il arrive souvent qu'un prêtre se trouve dans une situation difficile à cause des exigences abusives de sa famille, de son clan, etc., exigences normales au vu de la tradition. Les opérations commerciales sont la solution idéale qui lui permettra d'augmenter ses revenus. La législation canonique interdit ces pratiques, mais les prêtres n'ont pas fait le vœu de pauvreté. La situation de la religieuse est toute différente: elle a choisi un mode de vie par lequel elle s'oblige à pratiquer la pauvreté. Toutes les religieuses devraient donc prendre conscience de cette différence essentielle entre elles et les prêtres.

La chasteté comme mode de vie: au cours des dernières années, les religieuses ont progressivement adopté des habitudes qui étaient sinon des abus manifestes, du moins des compromissions. Elles n'ont pas échappé à l'attention des laïcs zairois dont les questions étaient d'autant plus embarrassantes qu'elles étaient sincères (V. 13 et 24). Il est donc normal que les personnes interrogées lors de l'enquête menée par l'USUMA aient très franchement exprimé leur opinion à ce sujet. Elles n'ont pas mâché leurs mots: la pratique du vœu de chasteté a fait l'objet de critiques sévères - certains ont même fait directement allusion à des cas d'inconduite scandaleuse. L'inquiétude de naïfs parents chrétiens ne devrait donc froisser personne: "si ma fille entre au couvent et décide ensuite de le quitter, elle risque de mener une vie déshonorante, pire que la vie d'une prostituée" (V. 21).

L'obéissance comme mode de vie: la pratique de l'obéissance est l'une des composantes de la vie religieuse dont les laïcs zairois, chose étonnante, ne se préoccupent guère. Les jeunes Zairois y sont franchement hostiles et la taxent de bêtise, d'aliénation et d'humiliation. On rencontre actuellement de plus en plus d'adultes qui partagent cette opinion. Le phénomène est d'autant plus remarquable qu'il est incontestablement en contradiction avec les normes traditionnelles: autrefois, les adultes considéraient l'obéissance comme une vertu importante. Les soeurs zairoises ont pris conscience du danger que cette

évolution représente pour la vie religieuse et ont mis les laïcs en garde, avec d'autant plus d'insistance qu'elles se sont rendu compte que ses effets se font déjà sentir au sein des communautés religieuses (V. 33).

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Reference: PRO MUNDI VITA: DOSSIERS, Revue Mensuelle - Avril, 1980.

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"AFRICAN MEETING"

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Progress Report:

The meetings held under the above title began with a decision of the Sedos Executive Committee in 21st March of 1980.

A group of African members of international Institutes affiliated to Sedos meet from time to time together with a few representatives of the Sedos Executive Committee. The objective is to share their experiences of living as members of international Congregations in their own countries and incidentally here in Rome. The long term objective is to identify and analyse opportunities and problems arising from the challenge of inculturating or incarnating the religious life together with its missionary or apostolic dimension in the different peoples of the African continent.

The meetings normally take place in the Borgo Santo Spirito. So far, the attendance has been about ten to twelve persons. The present Chairman is Father Benoit Kabongo, OMI. Sr. Sophie Kitoga, S.A. of Regina Mundi is secretary.

African members of International Institutes living in Rome are cordially invited to attend the meetings which are now beginning to deal with specific points on their agenda. The meetings are open to Sisters, Brothers and Priests. If you would like to attend or know of other African friends who would wish to attend please contact us here at Sedos, or Sister Sophie Kitoga, S.A. Tel. 94.20.568, or Fr. Benoit Kabongo, OMI. Tel. 63.70.251.

The last meeting of this group was held on 26th March, 1981.

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"LATIN AMERICAN MEETING"

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Progress Report:

The meetings being held under this title take place at present about once a month at the Sedos office. The objective is to help General Superiors or their Delegates who are visiting countries of Latin America by pooling up to date information on the situation in those countries with particular reference to the Churches there and to the work of members of Sedos Institutes. The meeting also aims to elaborate concerted action where possible in particular situations when a concerted approach could be useful, either in Latin America or among the Generalates. If you would like to attend these consultations please contact the Sedos office.

