

No.15/83

15th October, 1983

In this issue: Fr.Pantin's address to the *4th International Conference of the Community Education Association*

contains the personal record of a transformation in outlook and ministry which has affected his own life and the lives of many others.... "You listen to the people. You listen to them for periods varying from a year to three years before attempting any organised project. In fact even when you start doing something with them, you never stop listening"....

The article "New Pagans" serves as a partial introduction to the next Sedos Seminar on *Dialogue with "Post Christians"*. Are they new "pagans" or followers of new flourishing religions or searchers for a "new Christianity"?

The growth of missionary Societies and Congregations across geographical and racial boundaries causes tensions which are not easily or superficially dealt with. Fr. Jette's letter is a gentle call for understanding acceptance and reconciliation which, itself, raises the more fundamental question of the incarnation of consecrated life in situations radically new. "How can I respond faithfully, integrally to the religious challenge of a 16th century (or 18th century) charismatic founder of a society in Europe and at the same time remain faithful to the traditional, personal, family, social, religious demands of the family in Mozambique to which I belong?" was the question put to me last year. Are we only tentatively approaching the possible answers?

The complete text of the P.M.V. Bulletin on the situation of the Canadian Amerindian provides a positive assessment of the present state of the apostolate among the Indians in that Church.

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### Coming Events:

Dialogue with Buddhists  
(All welcome)

Tuesday, October 11, 1983. 9.30 - 17.30. Eucharistic Celebration, 16.30.  
Lunch Available: Centro di Spiritualità e Cultura (Suore Passioniste)  
Via Don Carlo Gnocchi, 75 (off the Via di Boccea) Tel. 62.40.860.

(Continued overleaf)

Coming Events (Continued):


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SEDOS SEMINAR  
DIALOGUE WITH "POST-CHRISTIANS"

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On Tuesday, November 8, 1983. 9.30 - 17.30. Eucharistic-Celebration, 16.30.  
F.S.C. Generalate, Via Aurelia, 476. Tel. 62.01.01. Lunch Available.  
"Is post-Christian youth on the verge of de-secularisation?"

This seminar will present the religious aspects of the movements for individual, bodily and emotional perfection within the ecological movement and will discuss and assess the Christian answer towards these "uncivilised" religious experiences.

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SEDOS "UP-DATES"

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MOZAMBIQUE: Speaker: Fr. Salvatore Calvia, Superior General, MCCJ, who spent July, 1983 in Mozambique.  
(Oct. 14) Meeting on Friday, Oct. 14, 16.00 hrs. at the  
Comboniani Generalate, Via Luigi Liglio, 80. Metro.  
Laurentina. Tel. (MCCJ) 59.11.450 or Sedos, 57.13.50.

SOUDAN: Speaker: Sister Giuseppina Tresoldi, Assistant  
(Oct. 19) Superior General, SMC., who is at present in Soudan;  
returning, Oct. 13, 1983.  
Meeting on Wednesday, Oct. 19, 16.00 hrs. at the  
SVD Generalate, 1, Via dei Verbiti.  
Metro. Pyramide. Tel. (SVD) 63.84.609 or Sedos 57.13.50

SOUTH AFRICA: Speakers: Frs. Ignaz Dekkers and James Mc Grath, CSSR,  
(Nov. 21) Assistants Superior General, who are at present in  
South-Africa, returning Nov. 12, 1983.  
Meeting on Monday, Nov. 21, 16.00 hrs., at Sedos. Metro.  
Pyramide. Tel. (SVD) 63.84.609, or Sedos 57.13.50.

All are welcome to these meetings.

News:

Sedos "Up-dates". Superiors General and their Assistants are in constant contact with mission situations. Many members have suggested that Sedos could provide a valuable service by arranging meetings with those who have returned from situations or places of significant interest for other Sedos members. We have arranged three such informal meetings in October and November. Details above. (See also Bulletin 14/83, Coming Events).

Apologies for the error in the French introduction to the article on *Community Education* in this Issue. The Conference referred to was *La Quatrieme Conférence Internationale de la "Community Education Association"*.

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## COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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Gerry Pantin CSSp.

*(Le Père Gerard Pantin est directeur administratif de SERVOL, en Trinidad. Nous présentons ici un extrait de son discours d'introduction à la Quatrième Conférence Internationale de la "community Association" qui s'est tenue à Dublin (Irlande) du 8 au 12 août 1983. Dans cette allocution, il met l'accent sur l'importance de l'écoute des autres dans un projet communautaire et sur les difficultés insidieuses que l'arrogance culturelle peut opposer à cette essentielle capacité d'écoute.)*

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What I want to talk to you about is not family, health, unemployment, lifelong learning or special education. These will be comprehensively discussed in your workshops and I will refer to them only in as much as they illustrate the points I am trying to make. I have elected to take the common denominator of all these subjects, the community and focus my attention on this central theme. Whatever discipline interests us, it is always people with whom we have to deal, that group large or small, enthusiastic or hostile, whom we are accustomed to refer to as the community. How do we deal with these people? What approach should we take? Are there errors to be avoided? These are basic questions which must be answered even before we start speaking health, education or employment.

In 1970, there were very serious riots in my country, Trinidad and Tobago, culminating with a mutiny within the army and an attempt to overthrow the Government by force of arms. As a direct result of this and after some months of soul-searching, I decided to quit my job teaching science at St. Mary's College and to go into the ghetto areas of the capital city, Port of Spain, to see whether I could "help" the community. After thirteen years I am still trying to "help", the only difference being that the fledgling organization called SERVOL which I set up in '70 with twenty housewives, a dozen volunteers from the army and navy and no money, has evolved into a group of ninety paid workers with several large centres but still with no money. Everything I will tell you today I learnt from Servol or with Servol (which, by the way, stands for "Service Volunteered for All."). You will readily perceive, that though this paper deals with a number of themes and ideas, it also represents my own personal journey from a structured, rigid, authoritarian experience of education in a traditional High School, to a broad, flexible, participatory view of education as something we accomplish through a process of dialogue with the community.

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF IGNORANCE

All teachers are born ignorant; I have had the unusaul experience of having ignorance thrust upon me at the age of forty-two; Imagine what it is like to have an honours degree in Science, a diploma in education and a licence to teach theology, and to walk into the ghetto world of switchblades, guns and sudden violence in an attempt to "help" the community. Suddenly, I was a child again, stripped of all pretentions and illusions, confronted by naked hostility and suspicion and having no idea where to begin.

"Ask them!": There and then, under the inspiration of sheer panic, I discovered my philosophy of ignorance. A little voice within me whispered, "Why not ask them how they wanted you to help? I leapt upon this as from an Archimedean bathtub and for the last thirteen years, it would be true to say that practically everything we have tried to do with the community has been prefaced by the simple question: "How can we help you?"

It was a short step from this experience to practically institutionalize this basic stance when confronted with a group of people: never presume that you know the needs and priorities of people; confess your utter ignorance of their background, the way their minds work, the reasons for their attitudes and ask them how they would like you to help. A quotation from our very first booklet in 1975 will illustrate how far we were prepared to push this:

*"If Servol privately feels that unemployment is the major problem but a group insists that a basketball court is top priority, it will work with the group to build a basketball court. If a village really needs water, but insists that it wants electricity, Servol will work with the village to obtain electricity.*

*This is based on the conviction that once a community succeeds in implementing any idea that is genuinely its own, they will always take a second and a third step towards further development, whereas, should the idea come from outside, often enough it will be enthusiastically accepted at first only to fail subsequently; and even if it does not succeed through the dedicated efforts of the social worker, the development process does not continue, for the simple reason that it never began."*<sup>1</sup>

"Listen": The second step is just as crucial: you LISTEN to what they say. Not in the abstracted, prefuntory manner of one who is just humouring a child, but with the single-minded intentness of an advocate hanging on to each word of a key witness. Here is how I expressed it in an unpublished manuscript:

"First, you get in there and you listen to the people. You listen to them for periods varying from a year to three years before attempting any organized project. In fact, even when you start doing something with them, you never stop listening. You listen until you are tired of listening and then you listen some more. You listen until all the cultural arrogance has been drained from your mind and

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<sup>1</sup>/ "Servol: 1970-74" p.5, Superservice Press, Port of Spain. 1975

you really begin to hear the voice of the people as the important element in their own development and as far more important than the wonderful schemes and ideas that are turning around in your busy little brain.

Second, you then begin to set up tiny low-cost projects which the people have said they want. You are content with a shoe-string budget which is best covered by the economic resources of the people themselves and you resist the temptation of injecting large sums of money at this stage. Above all, each step is only taken after numerous discussions with the people, thus ensuring their involvement in both the planning and implementation of the project. This is not to say that you totally disregard your own views and your own approach; far from it. But these views, this approach, is simply one which you allow to impinge gently on the views and approaches of the community, both sides having respect for the other, both sharing in the learning process.

Third, you let the thing grow in its own way and in its own time. Sometimes it remains a small but significant project; other times, it simply leaps into prominence as an alternative educational model; most of the time, it oscillates between these extremes; not infrequently, it collapses. Whatever the result, there is nearly always a distinct but intangible result in terms of the total development process among the community, in which you are merely one of many influences and which stretches over a much longer period of time than your involvement with the people."

Process rather than Content. We attached so much importance to this listening stance that we often became more involved in the process rather than the content of educational models and used established structures as tools in our dialogue with the community. Here is how Puth Montrichard puts it in the most recent of the Servol publications:

"All of Servol's work begins by the intervention of the organization into a community of poor people. The latter are nearly always, and understandably, suspicious and hostile to the newcomers, since the fabric of their lives has been woven around countless threads of broken promises, disillusionment and exploitation by strangers who have come smiling into their area.

The process of overcoming the suspicion and hostility is often a long and wearisome one; that is why Servol has sought for and discovered a short-cut method: you start a nursery school.

To this nursery school come parents with their children; around its doors saunter the "boys on the block" curious to see what "scene yuh on"; in fact, a cross section of the community is quickly encountered by the simple fact of opening a nursery school.

The school then becomes a sort of listening device through which you can listen attentively to what the people tell you about themselves, their area, their leaders, their hopes, their disappointments and their plans for the future. It enables you to intervene respectfully in the lives of this community by listening to them and ensuring that they play an integral part in both the planning and the implementation of the proposed project. It saves you from the cultural arrogance where-by you assume that you understand the problems of this community and presume to offer your solutions and your priorities as readymade answers to a complex situation.

*In short, it prevents you from making a lot of mistakes."*<sup>2</sup>

Cultural Arrogance: What basic error, what fundamental character defect do we overcome by this attitude of patient, humble listening? It is the fatal flaw of CULTURAL ARROGANCE. To assume that because a man comes from a certain country, or belongs to a specific ethnic group or has benefitted from a certain type of education this automatically makes him superior to another is what I term cultural arrogance. Nor does the individual in question necessarily have to be an unpleasant, aggressive person. Very often the worst mutants of this virus are to be found in gentle, kind-hearted people who have been brought up in a background which has so blandly assumed the intellectual, moral and technical superiority of his type over others, that he takes it for granted. Such a person walks into a community situation not only with the calm assurance that he has a lot to offer but with the absolute certainty that he can help. Were anyone to ask him whether he thought that he might be helped in the encounter, the answer would very probably be a puzzled look and a polite, "I beg your pardon?" The most he would concede (were he an academic) was that the year spent in the community did help him in the writing of his thesis on "Sociological aberrations encountered in group dynamic experiences with disadvantaged people."

If there is no genuine dialogue between the worker and the group then you can be quite certain that cultural arrogance is present. If the worker becomes the teacher and the group a bunch of docile pupils the same applies. Cultural arrogance is eliminated only when both sides recognize that they have as much to receive as to give and if, the longer the dialogue continues, each begins to actually feel guilty at having benefitted far more from the encounter than the other. It is only when this insidious attitude is recognized and overcome that the worker can authentically and sensitively interfere in the lives of others.

Respectful Intervention: When you have become converted to your philosophy of ignorance, established a listening stance as an integral part of your approach and banished cultural arrogance (at least to some extent), you find yourself developing an attitude to your work with people which I call RESPECTFUL INTERVENTION.

Anthropologists, sociologists and such like people have debated endlessly the pros and cons of interfering in the lives of other people. Some feel it is the right and duty of those who have acquired knowledge or technology to "help" others by handing it on to them. Others, dismayed at the results of crude and insensitive interference in the lives of simple people, maintain stoutly that the best way we can help them is to leave them alone. In fact, the debate is only of academic interest. Whether we like it or not, approve it or not, people will always interfere in the lives of other people. If this is so, it would be downright silly for those who meditated deeply on the subject and are acutely aware of the problems involved, to stop aside and allow the greedy, the avaricious and the insensitive to have a clear field in this area. So it boils down to an attempt to hammer

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<sup>2/</sup> Ruth Motrichard: "Servol Faces the Eighties" p.13

Servol Printing Services, Port of Spain, 1980.

out a theory of interference which will do the least harm and the maximum amount of good. It is this theory which I refer to as respectful intervention. Here is how it works in practice:

You are a man who has decided to do some community work in a ghetto area. You have no illusions about the task. The mixture of hostility, cynicism and amusement which you can read in the faces of the group facing you, is an uncomfortable reminder that you are not the first or even the twentieth person who has sat with them to attempt to "help" them. They have seen it all before and the attitude which comes across is: how long will this one last and to what extent can we rip him off before he goes?

So you ask the now traditional Servol question: "How can I help you?" and you are given a variety of requests, some of which are genuine, others being more in the nature of a test to see whether you are genuine. You are careful to promise nothing except that you will try; in fact you recognize that the less you say at this stage, the better; actions speak louder than words.

You come back a few days later to report on the homework given you by the group: you have obtained jobs for "Big Red", "Shooter" and "Ball"; you have secured the use of a school hall for the group to have a fund-raising dance and one department store will knock half the price off a football if the group comes up with the other half. There is grudging agreement that you have tried and the dialogue deepens: what they really want is a basketball court! You return two weeks later with plans drawn, an estimate of four thousand dollars and with the demand that they must raise half. Loud protestations, much cursing: the man is mad, we are poor people, why can't he get some of his rich friends to donate it? Patiently, you explain that this has to be a community effort and that we (it has become we) can raise eight hundred dollars from the dance and another twelve hundred from some other function. What function? A raffle, and eventually it is agreed that if you collect three prizes, they will sell the tickets. Two months later we have two thousand dollars, you have twisted a businessman's arm to put the other two thousand and the court is built.

In all the discussions and the actual work you keep on listening to what they have to say about themselves, their lives, their hopes, their fears. You are trying to get under their skin to try and understand the reason for their behaviour patterns, their strengths and their weaknesses. You are fully aware that you are only scratching the surface and that deeper things must follow but patience and working at the speed of the community are vital factors. Each time a goal has been achieved they come up with another scheme, another idea, which is what they really want. Because what they really want is to be independent men and women in their own right, to make their own decisions and to have access to those structures of power, influence and finance, which are essential factors in getting anything accomplished in this modern world. They recognize however, that for the moment, they can only work through you and through small projects; but it is their hope (and it should be yours) that one day they will be able to function on their own without any help from you or anyone else.



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LES "NOUVEAUX PAIENS"  
ET LA MISSION

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Jean Vernette

*(Post-Christian "paganism" is not a characteristic only of European and North-American Society. It is found also in Asia, Africa and Latin America perhaps in a special way among "intellectuals". It does not necessarily mean a turning away from religion, but is often manifested in an attraction for forms of Hinduism and Buddhism which have little to do with the authentic and venerable traditions of the Vedas or the Buddha, a return to tradition or tribal religions and a turning to new religions and sects. This slightly abbreviated article from Missi can serve as an introduction to the topic of the Sedos Seminar on Dialogue with Post-Christians which will be held on November, 8, 1983..Ed.)*

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"IL SE PASSE DES CHOSES" UN PEU NEUVES  
AUJOURD'HUI DANS LE CHAMP DU RELIGIEUX.

Aujourd'hui - et cela est nouveau - l'Occident est soumis à un double mouvement, de dépérissement des Eglises sous certaines de leurs formes institutionnelles, et de surgissement d'une multitude de religions sauvages. Hier le phénomène "religieux" majeur était celui de l'incroyance, sous les formes bien connues de l'athéisme militant ("Dieu est mort!"), de l'agnosticisme poli ("Dieu? connais pas!"), de l'indifférence ("Dieu? ça ne m'intéresse pas"), ou du matérialisme pratique ("Dieu? à quoi ça peut bien servir?"). Celle-ci demeure. Mais des courants de recherche spirituelle commencent à la sillonner, dans un contexte post-chrétien. Et l'on discerne d'importants déplacements de mentalité: retour du religieux, déplacement du sacré, et tout particulièrement réveil des paganismes. Si bien que l'on peut parler aujourd'hui de l'apparition du "néo-païen occidental".

"Retrouver la vraie vie", loin de la ville et de ses rythmes fous. Se plonger dans la mer pour s'y purifier et s'y régénérer: "Vous en sortirez tout neufs!" promet le Club Méditerranée. Le symbolisme religieux point à fleur d'image. Symbolisme de la mer-mère qui féconde et purifie. Mais aussi mythologie du Dieu soleil présidant au destin des hommes, d'Aphrodite et Bacchus fondant le culte du corps et du plaisir, de l'Age d'or où l'on retrouve le bon vieux temps d'autrefois. Résurgence du vieux fonds païen de l'homme occidental.

C'est de cela que je voudrais parler ici-et-maintenant. Parce que c'est le moment d'en parler. "Il se passe des choses aujourd'hui" dans le champ du religieux. Des choses un peu neuves.

Cela importe directement à la mission, car les formes d'annonce de l'Evangile sont parfois à recentrer en fonction des évolutions sociales. Et cela ne concerne pas seulement la mission en Europe, mais bien la mission sur tous les continents: car les courants circulent



rapidement dans le marché-commun du religieux contemporain.

Les gens ne sont plus chrétiens: sont-ils devenus irreligieux? En effet, ce n'est pas parce que les Eglises ont perdu de leur vigueur que "la religion" a disparu. Elle s'est même engouffrée parfois dans les espaces laissés vacants par leur retrait. Retrait voulu, au nom d'une volonté de purifier la foi chrétienne des scories d'un sacré magique; ou retrait subi, sous les coups de boutoir de la sécularisation et de l'incroyance. Les gens ne sont plus chrétiens: cela ne signifie pas qu'ils soient devenus irreligieux. Peut-être sont-ils devenus "païens": c'est-à-dire et religieux et non-chrétiens.

On disait l'homme occidental définitivement libéré de l'aliénation religieuse par la désacralisation du monde: on ne se fie plus à la prière - de-demande des Rogations, mais à l'efficacité technique de l'irrigation... Or, voici que, déçu par les mythes de la rationalité, de l'efficacité, de la rentabilité, il se met à les contester radicalement, à rêver d'un Tout-Autre et d'un Ailleurs.

Mais ce rêve prend souvent des formes païennes. Car la faim d'aventure spirituelle conduit aussi bien à l'adoration qu'à l'idolâtrie, à l'icône qu'à l'idole. Et cela concerne directement la mission.

Une floraison de religions nouvelles: Le paganisme a toujours été une religion florissante. La prolifération des sectes en est un des symptômes révélateurs aujourd'hui. Mais on le voit surtout poindre dans les creux et les crêtes d'une puissante vague de religions-de-remplacement qui commence à transformer singulièrement le paysage religieux contemporain. Les nouvelles sagesse d'Occident connaissent un développement rapide, répondant à un besoin de rites initiatiques, de secret et de sacré: Rose-Croix, Graal, Nouvelle Acropole. Un fait significatif: depuis vingt ans les Loges maçonniques ont doublé leurs effectifs. Ils viennent surtout de la jeune génération. Et la parole des nouveaux initiés est fort éclairante sur les motifs de leur adhésion.

Sur un autre registre, voici les gnoses scientifiques, comme celle de Princeton: des savants de renommée mondiale élaborent une vision religieuse du monde dans une approche qui se veut strictement scientifique: "nous devons poser l'existence de Dieu au terme de nos recherches". C'est une sorte de spiritualisme panthéiste.

C'est le raz-de-marée de l'occulte et de l'étrange. Les collections ésotériques toujours plus fournies offrent les "secrets" des grands Initiés pour devenir un être-supérieur ou "réalisé". Retour en force de la Kabbale, de l'astrologie, du spiritisme, de l'alchimie. La presse de l'occultisme a sa fidèle clientèle. Et 4 millions de Français consultent régulièrement l'un des 8 000 devins patentés de l'hexagone (ou des 20 000 travaillant au noir...), leur laissant chaque année quelque deux milliards de francs dans l'escarcelle.

La fascination de l'Orient: C'est l'attrait des Voies de méditation - Yoga, zen, voire méditation transcendante. C'est la fascination de l'Orient: on se détourne du christianisme occidental, dont on se déclare déçu avant même d'en connaître la tradition mystique, pour se tourner vers l'hindouisme et le bouddhisme,

comme dernier refuge de l'intériorité et de la sagesse. Mais beaucoup ne le rencontrent malheureusement qu'au travers de ses sous produits à usage de l'occidental, qui n'ont guère à voir avec l'authentique et vénérable tradition des Védas et du Bouddha.

Entendons-nous bien: je ne dis pas que tous les membres des groupes que je viens de citer sont païens! Je connais des rosicruciens, des méditants de la Méditation Transcendantale, des antrhoposophes, qui se veulent en même temps fidèles à leur appartenance chrétienne. Je dis seulement que surgissent aujourd'hui des formes de plus en plus nombreuses de déïsme qui ne se réfèrent plus au Vrai Dieu de Jésus-Christ. Certaines sont christianisables. D'autres ne le sont pas.

Il est urgent d'en prendre acte: pour discerner. Sinon les chrétiens du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle se réveilleront un beau jour dans un monde devenu païen, comme ceux du IV<sup>e</sup> se sont réveillés dans un monde devenu arien.

Essayons donc de cerner, au-delà des groupes constitués, les grands courants du néo-paganisme contemporain.

C'est ce vitalisme profond qui favorise l'intensité de la vie plus que sa conversion: "Vivre!" "être soi-même!" Et surtout: "être bien dans sa peau!". C'est l'expression-clef du bonheur pour aujourd'hui... Beaucoup sont ainsi à la recherche d'un vivre-autrement, et d'un vivre-heureux. Tellement de gens sont "mal dans leur peau!", tendus, inquiets, dans une société asphyxiante.

Du coup voici de retour les divinités du Panthéon antique. Elles reprennent plus spécialement droit de cité à travers la mythologie des loisirs. Adonis avec la religion du corps et du plaisir sensuel, Poséidon et le culte de la mer et de la plage, tout l'Olympe avec le culte du ciel - bleu, bien sûr! -. Le but suprême de l'existence est de "vivre à fond". Les réminiscences de Nietzsche le "superpaïen" sont proches.

Pour parvenir à "être bien dans sa peau", les groupes de psychothérapie et de thérapie corporelle sont là, devenus religions de remplacement chez plusieurs. "On va chez son psychothérapeute comme on allait autrefois à la messe, plus anciennement chez le sorcier du village, et l'on attend et obtient les mêmes effets"...

Le néo-paganisme, c'est une communion avec la Nature qui l'identifie à Dieu, tel le retour à la terre-mère alimentant certaines ferveurs écologistes. Le culte de la Nature est d'ailleurs dans le droit-fil des religions naturelles et de l'animisme.

Le mouvement écologiste lui-même ne serait pourtant qu'un simple fait social actuel, né d'une déception de notre modèle de société du refus d'un type de croissance absurde, et d'une volonté d'ouvrir la voie à un nouvel art de vivre. Mais cette saine contestation revêt parfois les traits d'un catastrophisme religieux proche des terreurs de l'An Mil, et des prédictions agitées par les sectes millénaristes tels les Témoins de Jéhovah.

"La différence avec le christianisme". Le néo-paganisme, c'est aussi ce panthéisme cosmique pour lequel Dieu n'est plus un être personnel, mais un "ça" imprécis, comme dans les techniques de méditation s'inspirant du bouddhisme et de l'hindouisme. Un Dieu identifié au souffle de l'homme. Un Dieu placé à portée de la main au bout du chemin, de la Voie pour atteindre l'infini, l'absolu. On voit la différence avec le christianisme, où c'est Dieu qui va vers l'homme, l'infini vers le fini.

Autre expression du néo-paganisme: un syncrétisme souvent sentimental, qui récuse toute Révélation historique particulière, sous couvert de tolérance religieuse: "toutes les religions se valent!" On va donc en faire la "synthèse" (= "syncrétisme").

La "transcendance" de la Révélation biblique culminant en Jésus de Nazareth, "Parole unique du Père", disparaît dans le flou de ce qu'on appelle la "tolérance doctrinale"; un refus des dogmes assimilés au "dogmatisme". "Pourquoi toutes ces différences entre les religions? Mettons en commun ce qui nous unit! Ce sont les dogmes qui séparent!" Ce courant de pensée est largement répandu aujourd'hui.

Le néo-paganisme, c'est un utopisme généreux mais vague, sans espérance définie, sans origine ni fin, qui attend les lendemains-qui-changent ou le retour à l'âge d'or. Le mythe messianique marxiste en est typique. Mythe "messianique" car la lutte des classes dans la pensée de Marx est comme un combat apocalyptique entre les forces du bien et du mal, débouchant au terme dans la société sans classe, qui est paradisiaque. Lénine l'a sans cesse répété: ce sera un règne de Dieu, sans Dieu, la construction réelle du règne millénaire de paix et de justice illusoirement promis par le messianisme judéo-chrétien.

"Comment peut-on être païen?": Le propos des théoriciens néopaiens, - et je le répète, ce terme n'est chargé ici d'aucune nuance dépréciative: il désigne simplement les croyants se référant à un autre Dieu que celui de Jésus-Christ-, n'est pas de pratiquer un retour-en-arrière. Il est de permettre à l'homme occidental de se réapproprier une partie de lui-même aujourd'hui. A leurs yeux, le christianisme est en effet une déviation de la spiritualité et du sacré. En coupant les peuples européens de leurs traditions religieuses païennes, le monothéisme chrétien aurait éloigné Dieu des hommes en l'exilant hors du monde.

Un néo-paganisme florissant à la rescousse d'un christianisme déclinant? C'est alors que surgit un redoutable dilemme pour la mission: faut-il combattre le paganisme? ou faire alliance avec lui contre l'incroyance? Le retour du religieux apparaît en effet certains comme une chance à saisir par le christianisme en ce siècle de matérialisme triomphant. D'où la tentation d'ouvrir la porte subrepticement aux supplétifs néo-paiens pour les envoyer aux remparts repousser les vagues déferlantes de l'incroyance.

Mais la présence de ces alliés de circonstance - quelque soit le sincère respect que l'on éprouve à leur endroit - renforce au contraire chez les incroyants la conviction déjà bien ancrée que le christianisme n'est finalement que l'un des nombreux sous-produits d'une mentalité pré-critique, de la religiosité et de l'irrationnel.

Le sacré et le saint, de l'idole à l'icône: De fait, la divinité objet de ces multiples quêtes spirituelles est sansvisage. Ce "sacré" n'est pas "saint"; et il n'est pas toujours sain. L'attrait actuel pour l'insolite, l'irrationnel et les sciences-parallèles traduit certes une rébellion contre un modèle de société qui n'a pas tenu ses promesses. On ne peut voir pour autant dans le foudroyant succès des "Prophéties de Nostradamus" - 650.000 exemplaires vendus - une "pierre d'attente de Jésus-Christ".

Mais cet appel en creux enprime aussi l'attente d'un visage: du Visage qu'il nous appartient de révéler, car il n'est pas le terme obligé du parcours. C'est l'objet propre de la mission: passer de l'idole à l'icône.

Les dispositifs pastoraux sont-ils adaptés? Les dispositifs pastoraux sont-ils adaptés à cette situation assez inattendue? Pas exactement. Lapastorale en cours s'est en effet appareillée à la fin de la guerre, - et avec une rare capacité d'invention missionnaire, pour l'évangélisation d'un type d'homme incroyant sécularisé dont on avait toutes raisons de prévoir qu'il serait bientôt le modèle dominant en Occident. Et il l'est devenu pour une part. Elle semble moins apte à annoncer l'Evangile au néo-païen occidental que l'on n'attendait guère, à la fois religieux et non-chrétien.

#### NOUVEAU CHANTIER POUR LA MISSION

Et des questions un peu inédites commencent à se poser:

L'Eglise doit-elle recommencer à gérer et évangéliser un sacré et un religieux qui s'investissent en de si pitoyables parodies, depuis qu'on les a rendus à l'état-libre? On voit le grave danger d'un retour en arrière; on voit aussi le pourquoi de la question.

Quelle communauté alternative offrir à des jeunes en recherche de climat mystique et de chaleur humaine qui s'orientent vers les groupes religieux marginaux?

Comment révéler le Dieu de Jésus-Christ au néo-païen qui se définit explicitement par le refus de la tradition judéo-chrétienne? Quelle pastorale mettre en place pour rejoindre les gens qui ne sont "demandeurs" de rien à l'Eglise, mais "chercheurs" de quelques chose?

Vaste chantier sur laquelle la mission va consister sans doute à identifier et promouvoir ce qui est christianisable - défense de la nature, redécouverte du corps, réapprentissage de l'intériorité par exemple, et ce qui ne l'est pas - culte de la Race et de la Révolution, de l'Eros et du Profit, dont chacun peut Vérifier les fruits amers de déshumanisation.

Mais la "mission au néo-païen" devrait nous appeller aussi à redécouvrir les richesses de notre propre patrimoine: de la tradition franciscane de communion avec la création à la tradition mystique de Ste Thérèse et de St Jean de la Croix; de la tradition des gurus chrétiens de l'Ecole Française à celle des starets de l'Orthodoxie. Invitation pressante à retrouver le courant du grand fleuve de la Tradition, après en avoir désensablé les sources.

Il est certes, d'autres problèmes importants pour la mission: l'incroyance et l'évangélisation des nouvelles cultures, la justice et la paix dans le monde. Celui-ci nous est simplement moins familier, parce que plus neuf et moins facile à cerner.

Mais il ne peut attendre, car il touche directement la jeune génération, celle dont dépend l'avenir de la foi pour la fin de ce siècle. Et il n'est pas sans solution: n'a-t-il pas été celui des toutes premières générations chrétiennes?

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## RECONCILIATION

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Fernand Jette, OMI.

*("A mesure que la Congrégation s'universalise, qu'elle s'ouvre à des peuples non occidentaux, elle doit se libérer de certaines étroitesse et préjugés. Un Oblat africain, engagé dans la formation, en faisait la remarque dernièrement: Certains secroient propriétaires de la Congrégation. D'autres par contre, se sentent toujours 'chez les autres'. Nous ne pouvons ouvrir nos portes aux jeunes d'Afrique, s'ils doivent se sentir des étrangers chez nous..... Nous venons avec une vision du monde différente: pour l'Africain, importance des relations; pour l'Européen, importance de la tâche, du travail"...).*

The Synod of Bishops will again be in session next September 29th. It will be the seventh time since the Council. The last four sessions dealt with "Justice in the World" and "The Ministerial Priesthood" (1971), "Evangelization in the Modern World" (1974), "Catechesis in Our Time" (1977) and "The Christian Family in Today's World" (1980).

Oblates cannot be indifferent to such meetings. They manifest the Church's life in all its diversity and determination to find new, more effective ways of evangelizing today's world.

To prepare for this Synod, the Superiors General met at Villa Cavalletti, near Rome, on May 25-28. They were gathered to reflect on this event together, and to consider how religious life may be challenged by this Synod's theme - "Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church" -- and what religious life can contribute thereto.

In point of fact, several rather positive elements emerged from this meeting. I would like to share with you the thoughts this gathering suggested to me.

Reconciliation within oneself: During the years following the Council, a good number of religious were shaken in their personal life and deep convictions. The questioning and the many changes seriously affected their practice of prayer, their striving for personal discipline, their relation to the world. In most cases, after the inevitable searching and groping, the proposed changes were found to be justified, even necessary for an appropriate renewal of religious life.

Unfortunately, however, because of a certain weariness and lack of dialogue, many religious have remained at a standstill. The first phase of renewal led them to abandon some of their former attitudes; today they feel too exhausted to embark on the second phase, that of integrating their life into a new outlook. Thus, for example, because a definitive edition of the new breviary did not materialize soon enough, they began to omit the recitation of the divine office altogether; and today, when the breviary reform is accomplished, they no longer manage to recite it regularly and completely. The same is true for mental prayer, the practice of obedience, and sacramental confession.

We Oblates have not escaped this phenomenon. To break out of it, a first step is essential: we need to be reconciled with our own selves and with today's Church. In the light of the new Constitutions and Rules and of Vatican II as interpreted by the Church's authentic magisterium, we need to face the truth and accept to be transformed by it. This is the starting point, the only starting point, for true spiritual and missionary renewal.

In this field there is a very important factor for us to contend with: we must not saddle the young men who join us with the burden of a trial they themselves have not experienced. Yes, they too need reconciliation and conversion, but in quite a different line: they need to be converted to Jesus Christ with all the enthusiastic thrust of their youth; they do not need to be reconciled to the new world whose sons they are, nor with today's Church for whose presence they have been longing.

Reconciliation with those around us: Being a religious also means being a promoter of unity and reconciliation among those with whom we live. Daily, if we are alert, we will perceive particular calls in this sphere: there is the need for reconciliation between the different generations; between persons of differing mentalities, of varying apostolic or political positions, between persons of different social classes, beliefs, colour and race, between persons possessing different charisms as, for instance, a group of religious and their bishop in a given diocese.

These conciliation needs exist as much within religious life as they do outside it. Sometimes a hardening of positions has arisen between religious or apostolic groups which make all dialogue and true collaboration very difficult, if not even impossible. This is a scandal for those who observe our way of life.

As the Congregation becomes more universal and open to non-Western people, it needs to free itself from certain attitudes of narrow-mindedness and bias. An African Oblate, engaged in formation ministry, recently made some comments in this regard. He said:

Some think they own the Congregation. Others, to the contrary, always feel they are "staying with others". We cannot open our doors to young people of Africa if they are made to feel themselves strangers in our midst.

The young people who come to us are neophytes, and so we need to have some understanding. No one is helped if all we do is criticize. And if setbacks do occur, all of us should bear them together. Criticism cannot foster a real vocation. (...)

Something we often hear is this: 'As for him, we'll see!' This is destructive. We are content to simply watch what another does, instead of coming to support and encourage him.

Each of us come with a different outlook on reality. For Africans, relationships are important; for Europeans, it is work and the job at hand. We can spend our time criticizing each other: each one becomes more closed to the other and no progress is made. We need to be mutually converted.

Dialogue needs to be achieved between us, Europeans and Africans. Until now you were the only ones, and there has only been monologue. As we accept young Africans, we must achieve dialogue. If religious cannot come together, who can? setting up separate communities (some for Africans, whites in others) would be a very grave step.

We need to be mutually converted and achieve communities that are signs of love . . . Very often we make mistakes, without there being any malice. Good will is not enough. Often we remain in the state of monologue, closed within one's culture and attitudes. We do not open up to the other person.

(Excerpt from the Cameroon-Chad newsletter, Entre Nous, May 1983)

Allow ourselves to be reconciled with God: As we can see, conversion, repentance, reconciliation are issues that directly concern us. In the final analysis, all human reconciliations, within our own selves as well as with others around us, are possible and lasting only if each one of us admits, before God, to being but an ordinary creature and a sinner with limitations and weaknesses. Reconciliation is inseparably linked to humility.

Sin is stamped on this or that unjust social structure. The Church has been increasingly aware of this, an awareness that is both a gift of light and a new missionary appeal. But if sin is present there, it is because it is first of all present in the hearts of people. "We implore you, in the name of Christ, "St Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "be reconciled to God!" (2 Cor 5:20).

Pope John Paul II tends us this same invitation in this Jubilee Holy Year of the Redemption. Taking my cue from him, I, in turn, also extend it to you.

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THE AMERINDIAN REALITY  
AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CANADA

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THE ECCLESIAL SITUATION OF THE AMERINDIANS,  
PAST AND PRESENT

*(Ceci est un extrait légèrement abrégé du Bulletin Pro Mundi Vita No. 93/2, 1983. L'original a d'abondantes références et un tableau intéressant qui indique les dix groupes linguistiques comportant cinquante huit sous-groupes linguistiques reconnus par le Département des Affaires Indiennes du Gouvernement Canadien. Ces chiffres se réfèrent seulement aux Indiens "enregistrés", qui s'élevaient à une population dépassant les 300.000 au recensement de 1980. Intéressants pour les lecteurs du Bulletin de Sedos sont les ressemblances et contrastes avec les efforts réalisés en d'autres parties du monde pour proclamer la Bonne Nouvelle.)*

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The beginning of Canada's missionary epic coincided with the establishment of Samuel de Champlain's fur trading post in Quebec in 1608 and the arrival of the Jesuits among the Hurons in 1634. It came to a symbolic end in 1967 when the apostolic vicariates, dependent on the sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, were turned into archdioceses and dioceses by decree of the Holy See. Thereafter, there were no "missionary territories" in Canada. It had taken three and a half centuries to implant the Catholic Church in an area stretching from the American frontier to the polar ice and from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Civilize to save: Yet a realistic look at today's situation shows that establishing the Catholic Church among the Amerindians is far from over. The pastoral work of today's "missionaries" probably differs little from what priests and other pastoral agents are doing elsewhere in the country: from the point of view of structures and pastoral services, the Church in the polar region is more and more like the Church in Halifax, Montreal, Edmonton or Vancouver, but behind this institutional resemblance lies a rather special situation which, even though the "whole Church is missionary" (*Ad gentes* 35), makes the evangelization of the Amerindians still a truly unique challenge.

The ecclesial situation of the Amerindians is, in short, this: the Church set up among them is the Church of the Whites, with the latter's structures, organization, ministries and apostolic programmes. It is a Church that has less and less appeal for the vast majority of Amerindians in their day-to-day lives; a Church which has never quite succeeded in upsetting the traditional religious universe of the Amerindians and which today feels itself at a loss in the face of the rapid deterioration of their social condition.

We are particularly struck by three factors:

- (i) The Amerindians' unresponsiveness to what is most specific to this Church of the Whites: its clerical character. Despite very intense missionary efforts, there is no Amerindian bishop in the whole of the Catholic Church of North America, only ten or so Amerindian priests, and a very limited number of persons in religious life.
- (ii) The astonishing survival of native religious traditions (see below) despite the administration of the sacraments and catechization on a massive scale, and despite the discriminatory laws of the Canadian government.
- (iii) The almost catastrophic social situation of the Amerindians, whether living on their reservations or in the big towns (alcohol, drugs, suicide, etc.) despite the renaissance spoken of above.

The men and women who set out three and a half centuries ago to establish the Church in Canada could hardly have envisaged this. Had they not come to civilize the "savages" before admitting them into the Church? Had they not come to extirpate their paganism before offering them true religion, revealed by Christ? Henri Maurier's thesis that the spread of the Christian message has always been realized within a framework of imperialist State expansion, with European missionaries imposing, in an aggressive manner, a veritable change of civilization on "non-civilized" peoples of other continents, is just as true in North America as it is elsewhere, perhaps even more true. "Civilize to save" was the credo of the great majority of missionaries in North America.

Contemporary historiography in the field of missionary expansion in North America very broadly confirms this "civilizing" side of mission. The most striking examples of this are to be found in the writings of the great nineteenth-century missionaries, which continually stress the four basic elements involved in establishing the Church among the Amerindians: agriculture, education, morality and, more generally, civilization. Just as the Pilgrim fathers considered themselves the "chosen people", so the good French-Canadian (Catholic) families who, with encouragement from their clergy and help from the government, came to live in the vast plains of the Canadian West, were given the special mission of helping to civilize and convert the "poor savages", among whom they were henceforth to live.

"Itinerant" mission: permanent mission "station": Another highly significant factor as far as inculturation is concerned, has been revealed by the study of the history of missionary expansion, namely, the switch from an "itinerant" missionary life to that of the permanent mission station. In certain regions, this came about only towards the beginning of the present century or even later. It marks a change in missionary concepts. There was an early period during which the itinerant missionary, living in close contact with the Amerindians and almost totally dependent on them for transport, food and shelter, practised a real form of inculturation despite his "fixist" idea of the Church. Then followed a period during which the Church was established through the creation of missionary centres (with a church, presbytery, convent, residential school, clinic, etc.) around the central figure of the priest who was to become more and more a functionary or administrator.

The general idea lying behind this evolution is evangelization seen in terms of implanting a Church along the lines of what is found in the missionary's country of origin. Accordingly, even after the conversion of entire populations - achieved in the period of the itinerant missionaries - evangelization was still incomplete as long as those new Christians were not inside the institutional framework of a proper church, with its proper school, its proper hospital and other concrete institutions of the type familiar to us in countries of the christendom of olden times.

#### THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN AMERINDIAN TERRITORY

The Amerindians as seen by the missionaries: The Church that was sown among the aboriginals of North America was the "unequal society" spoken of by Popes Leo XIII and Pius X, who drew a radical distinction between hierarchy and faithful. The Church since the Council of Trent, in line with this dualist "clergy/laity" schema, had tended to stress almost exclusively the role of the ordained minister in the transmission of Revelation and the Church's sacramental system. The Church was, then, a hierarchical institution which made Christians, rather than a People of God made up of Christians; it was a Church that asked the laity to contribute very little in the theological or pastoral domain. And their exclusion from these spheres was all the more strict by reason of the colonialist attitude towards Amerindians, evinced from the outset by most missionaries. How could "hordes of formerly cruel and barbarous men" be counted on to build up the Body of Christ? asked Mgr. Taché (1823-1894). What, asked Mgr. Grandin (1829-1902), can be done with "the poor savages among whom the missionaries live" in a Church whose universal mission has been entrusted to the civilized peoples of Europe?

This mid-nineteenth-century missionary view tended to carry over into the 20th century, when more Catholic missions were set up. In 1969, a Catholic missionary team in Buffalo Narrows (Keewatin) noted that C.E. Hendry in his book, *Beyond traplines*, described in brutal but realistic fashion the situation of Indians and Eskimos in Canada, saying that certain missionaries continued to treat Indians as if they were children. They thought that, although the book was written with the Anglican Church in mind, there was something there for us to note too.

From seeing the Indians as children, it is an easy step to see them as *irresponsible*. In a report presented to the Extraordinary General Council of the Congregation of Oblates (1969), the missionary team of the vice-province of Mackenzie, which was worried about the aging of its personnel, opted to promote the role of the Christian laity. They noted, however, that while the only positive means they could employ was to *encourage the Christian laity*, from the very outset they were up against "the irresponsibility of the Indians on the human, personal, family and social levels (all the more, therefore, on the plane of the Christian community) and their lack of thought for the morrow and whatever else is not tangible at the moment".

The Amerindians' share in establishing the Church: To call one of the oldest peoples in the world irresponsible, on the human, personal, family or social

plane, seems unjust: if the accusation were true, this people would no longer exist. It seems important to stress once again that for a long time the itinerant missionaries depended almost entirely on the aboriginals for transport, food and shelter. It is proper here to emphasise the participation of the Amerindians in the establishment of the Church among them. Ronda and Axtell point out that it is precisely this stress on the Indians *playing an active part* in mission that constitutes a turning point in contemporary historiography concerning mission development in North America.

Such participation went beyond the giving of material assistance to the missionaries: it involved an explicit option on the part of certain groups of Indians for the Catholic, or Anglican, or some other Church, and a resolve to transmit the faith after the eventual departure of the missionaries. Some groups of Amerindians chose to welcome Catholic rather than Protestant missionaries because they found in the Catholic religion certain elements (for example, the cult of the saints, the world of the angels, the scope of the liturgy) which were better suited to their sensibility and which corresponded to their traditional religion (the cult of ancestors, for example, the world of spirits, the importance of religious ceremonies). On the other hand, it could happen that the Amerindians would gently explain to missionaries why their presence was not welcome, as can be seen from what Sa-go-yeu-wat-ha, chief of the Seneca, said to missionary Cram of the Evangelical Mission Society in 1805:

*"Brother, we do not understand these things. We are told that your religion was given to your ancestors, and transmitted from father to son. We, too, have a religion which our ancestors received and have handed down to us, their children... Brother, you have now heard our words, and we have nothing more to say for the moment. As we are about to depart, we come to shake your hand, with the wish that the Great Spirit protect you during your trip and bring you back to your friends without harm."*

The implanting of the Church among the Amerindians was therefore not due to chance, or to the initiative of the missionaries alone, but also to the active participation of the aboriginals.

The same can be said about the Amerindians themselves handing on the Christian faith: There are cases where this was done inside a particular group, or by one aboriginal group to another, with no direct intervention from the missionaries. Margaret Denis reports that the Tlinkit Indians of Teslin (Yukon) had been evangelized by the monks of the Russian Orthodox Church when Alaska still belonged to Russia, and when the last Russian Missionary was leaving Teslin (about 1900), he told the faithful to expect the coming of the Catholic missionaries. They waited for 37 years before the first Oblates arrived, and the latter found that the Indians had remained faithful to their Orthodox faith. The religion of the old people in the village still bears the stamp of the Russian Orthodox Church.....

But the best example of active participation in mission is what Thomas Connolly calls the "Iroquois connection". It was Iroquois converts to Catholicism who, on their canoe trips in the west in the service of the Hudson Bay Company at the beginning of the 19th century

laid the foundations of evangelization among the tribes on the far side of the Rocky Mountains: the Coeur d'Alene (State of Washington), the Pend d'Oreilles (Montana), the Flathead and the Nez Perce.

Conversions in a situation of crisis: We have mentioned these reactions of the Amerindians, in order to counteract a certain impression that the mission was the heroic work of missionaries alone. The traditional picture of the Indian as a passive child or an irresponsible adult came largely from persons thinking they represented a superior religion (Christianity) and from historians failing to analyse sufficiently the actual context in which the Amerindian tribes were converted to Christianity.

We also think it worth stressing that many conversions took place during a real socio-political crisis, for the missionaries undertook evangelization at the very time when, in many places, the cultural world of the Amerindians had already been destroyed by the colonial powers. Christianity being presented essentially as a religion of Salvation, the missionaries themselves, in those concrete circumstances, appeared as veritable saviours, offering to the Indians what was necessary for survival: Thereafter, the Indians were to depend almost entirely on the missionaries - though this does not mean to say that the Amerindians should necessarily be regarded as "rice Christians" or that there were no authentic conversions. *This situation of dependence*, the outcome of the crisis resulting from the North American aboriginals' first contacts with Europeans, helps to explain how the Amerindians became passive members, or barely committed members (having nothing to give and everything to gain) of a clerical Church, which, moreover, in that epoch, did not count much on the multitude of the faithful.

The situation today: How far the Amerindians really belong to the Church depends on the cultural situation in which they find themselves. In the first place, there are the primitive aboriginals (in the best sense of the word), conscious and proud of their culture, who have preserved a nomadic fishing and hunting style of life. Though they have become Christians, colonization has had little effect on their lives, and they hardly fit at all into ecclesiastical institutions.

Secondly, there are the Amerindians who are midway between traditional and Euro-Canadian culture. With the gradual compenetration of the two cultures, they experience profound crises in their ecclesial life: they wonder how to reconcile ancestral religious ceremonies with the Christian religion and are taken aback at the return of some Indians to the old ways. They suffer greatly from the bad side of modern civilization (alcoholism, drugs, sexual promiscuity, etc.) yet find their Christianity offers no solution to these evils.

Thirdly there are the Amerindians who have taken all they can from the White culture without ever becoming truly assimilated or integrated into White society: these will always remain "Indians", and never feel at home in the Church of the Whites, even though they may have adopted a western way of life. Surveys carried out over the past ten years all show that few aboriginals take on, in any significant way, responsibilities at the ecclesial level. The majority of conversions took place in the time of the itinerant missionaries, few since; and there have been very few transfers from one Church to another (except recently to the charismatically oriented Churches which are enjoying great popularity). The main causes of the increase in the number of Catholics are child-baptism and the high birth-rate among Catholic aboriginals. The institutional Church has grown in size, but participation in ecclesial life has gone down considerably. . . . .

Ref. Pro Mundi Vita. Bulletin 93, 1983/2.