

88/No. 90

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IN THIS ISSUE:

The NEWS section is somewhat extended to include some items of interest, also there is some recommended reading.

This issue is directed towards the Seminar at the SEDOS Annual General Assembly on PARTICIPATION OF MEN AND WOMEN IN MISSION. Most of the contributions are by women, from Europe, South Africa, Asia and the United States of America. All touch on the theme of participation between women and men in situations of mission - including Ireland.

We felt like changing the title of the beautiful piece A WOMAN OBSERVED, to "Partnership in Mission" to fit in with the topic of the coming SEDOS Assembly but it was suggested that perhaps "Lack of Partnership in Mission" would be more apt! So we decided to leave it as it was, - A Woman Observed. It has many insights on growing and changing, giving and receiving, partnership and lack of it, relationships and friendship, joy and pain. And there is much wisdom. Read it.

A RELIGIOUS PRESENCE WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA'S STRUGGLE is taken from a talk given to the Conference of religious major superiors of South Africa meeting at Marianhill during 1987. It brings out how necessary it is to be aware of the people, their hopes, struggles and fears, but at the same time and even through that to be grounded in Christ. The demands of living out the incarnation in South Africa today are spelt out.

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In WOMEN AND THE CHURCH Ben Kimmerling offers a woman's picture of two cultures - that of Church leaders in Ireland to-day and the culture of intimacy in which women live. She supports ways in which these two cultures can recognise their differences and work towards overcoming them. If Church leaders can bring themselves to trust women and above all to have faith in them - then mountains of division will indeed move. Her talk was given to an Irish audience but readers may find it applicable in a much wider context. The text has been considerably abridged due to demands of space.

The return of Hong Kong to China in 1997 continues to evoke various responses from different sectors of Hong Kong Society. Fears and anxieties mix with optimism and hope and the Catholic Church is not exempt from this atmosphere. How can it respond to new challenges? Is there a need for a more creative pastoral response on the part of the church in Hong Kong, especially the laity and the parish? Peter Chung Ka-hing poses some interesting considerations. We give here the final section of his reflection.

There is a meditation by Maria Riley on WOMAN'S ROLE, The introduction alone to this meditation, taken from "A Chance to Change" is worth publishing.

We are grateful to the Irish Missionary Union for John O'Brien's conference on FACING THE CHALLENGE OF MISSION TOGETHER. This is the first of a two part series. We recommend you read it.

And finally there is A WOMAN'S HANDS - food for meditation.

### COMING EVENTS :

#### SEDOS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS; 476 Via Aurelia; Dec. 13th, 1988.

MORNING SESSION: 9.30 - 13.00 hrs.

### WOMEN AND MEN/PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION

#### SPEAKERS:

Irene Debalus, (Vicar General of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters).

Paul Parijs, (General Councillor of the Scheut Missionaries).

Lunch 13.00 - 14.00 (Facilities available for picnic lunch)

AFTERNOON SESSION 14.00 - 16.00 hrs.

#### SEDOS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

PLEASE NOTE: All members of SEDOS Societies and Congregations are welcome at this afternoon session.

NEWSMISSIONARY PANORAMA - 1987 - 1988WORLD RELIGIONS (Necessarily approximate)

Christians	1,619,100,000	Buddhists	309,000,000
(Catholics	846,379,000)	Jews	18,000,000
Muslims	858,000,000	Sikhs	16,500,000
Hindus	676,000,000	Others	820,000,000
Confucianists	317,000,000		

Over two thirds of the world population is non-Christian. Catholics are the most numerous and increasing but are declining as percentages of total populations. Statistics are not available from China, North Korea, Vietnam, Kampuchea, Laos, Albania, Bulgaria, Urss, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Estonia, and some other countries.

<u>BY CONTINENT</u>	<u>INHABITANTS</u>	<u>CATHOLICS</u>	<u>% CATHOLIC</u>
ASIA	2,924,557,000	73,428,000	2.51 =-
EUROPE	700,085,000	287,935,000	39'84 - 0'04
AMERICA	677,745,000	430,478,000	63'52 + 0'16
AFRICA	571,946,000	74,988,000	13'11 + 0'02
OCEANIA	24,784,000	6,550,000	26'47 + 0'06
<u>Total</u>	<u>4,899,117,000</u>	<u>864,379,000</u>	<u>17'64 - 0'04</u>

PERSONNEL BY CONTINENT

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>Priests</u> <u>Dioc.</u>	<u>Priests</u> <u>Relig.</u>	<u>Bros.</u>	<u>Sisters</u>	<u>Catechists</u>
EUROPE	230,487	(159,682 -	70,805)	30,929	483,563	277
AMERICA	119,289	( 67,573 -	51,716)	20,245	275,784	24,400
ASIA	29,324	( 15,591 -	13,733)	5,548	95,877	68,776
AFRICA	18,353	( 8,070 -	10,283)	5,214	38,579	216,026
OCEANIA	5,433	( 2,794 -	2,639)	2,805	14,355	6,596
<u>Total</u>	<u>402,886</u>	<u>(253,710 -</u>	<u>149,176)</u>	<u>64,741</u>	<u>908,158</u>	<u>316,075</u>

Increase with respect to preceeding year:

EUROPE	- 1,885	(- 1,048 -	- 837)	- 190	- 9,482	-----
AMERICA	+ 391	(+ 526 -	- 135)	- 135	- 2,915	+ 431
ASIA	+ 686	(+ 521 -	+ 165)	- 9	+ 2,903	+ 5,020
AFRICA	+ 295	(+ 431 -	- 136)	+ 6	+ 493	+15,566
OCEANIA	- 81	(- 39 -	- 42)	+ 4	- 273	+ 571
<u>Total</u>	<u>- 594</u>	<u>(+ 391 -</u>	<u>- 985)</u>	<u>- 467</u>	<u>- 9,274</u>	<u>+21,588</u>

Ref. Fides International Service, September 24th, 1988 and following issues).

## SUDAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE.

An unusually strong statement by the administrative Board of the Bishops' Conference which met in Khartoum from 15th to 17th September 1988 blames both the Government and the rebel Sudan People Liberation Army (SPLA) for their uncompromising attitude and rigid position on the issue of allowing relief food to reach the millions of hungry people. They are desperately begging for even a handful of grain after having seen their villages raided and destroyed their cattle stolen, their crops burnt. They have been compelled to abandon their land in search of security and peace.

For many of them, this meant crowding into besieged towns to rot in hunger and disease. But the most unfortunate are those, women and old people who, burdened with children, have undertaken to walk the hundreds of miles to the North just to meet more starvation and disease, if not death or life as "hostages", at the hands of the same unfriendly tribes that have created havoc in their homeland. These are armed, supported and inflamed to religious fanaticism by the same people who claim to be protectors of the law, people who have been entrusted with the highest Government positions to apply the law justly and to take care of all citizens, whatever their colour or belief.

The plight of these millions, already dramatic, was greatly worsened by the recent heavy rains and floods that hit the whole country, in many places adding more destruction and chaos to the already existing ones. (Ref. News Bulletin, Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference, September, 1988)

## SOUTH AFRICA

Albert Nolan, O.P. addressed a packed meeting on the present situation in South Africa at a meeting held in the S.V.D. Generalate on 5th October, 1988. A Report of his Conference will be sent to all members of SEDOS.

## THE GIFT OF LIFE IN UGANDA

'I have lived in Uganda for the past 25 years. It is a most beautiful and fertile land, and the people are loving, charming, and full of concern for their families. At present, I am involved in a Primary Health Care Project. We work as a team. One Sister is involved with the education of community health workers and another gives her attention to the training of traditional birth attendants.

The traditional birth attendants are women who give generously of the little time they have. They believe that life and the quality of that life is the most important thing we have been given. These women invest their time in helping each other, particularly by being supportive during pregnancy, delivery, and afterwards. A small group of them are also, at present, preparing to become trainers of traditional birth attendants.

The community health workers are both men and women chosen by the

community to be their helpers to a healthier and happier life. They give instruction and share ideas with their neighbors in order to achieve this. Both the community health workers and the traditional birth attendants also volunteer their time and energy -- which seems to be endless sometimes -- to help at our monthly child welfare and ante-natal clinics in their areas....

I know many AIDS patients. Michelina is a beautiful young woman whom we have known for nine years. While being examined, to rule out anything curable, I asked her, "What do you think is making you sick?" A tear rolled down her cheek and she said, "Sister, I have AIDS. What will happen to me? What will happen to my child?" She is receiving the only help possible -- kindness and concern from her mother, father, sisters and brothers. Her husband is in Kampala and doesn't care. Perhaps he is sick and cannot care. Who knows? But one thing we both know, she and I, that her life span will indeed be short. Her days are numbered. But we also know that she will experience the love of her family until the last day.

As far as we are concerned, there is danger for us, too. We try to protect ourselves with gloves that are kindly donated whenever we think there is danger present. But we realize that many patients, in the early stages whom we don't suspect, are also contagious. However, we have to run that risk. As one of my Ugandan friends says, "We can die from anything, even a mosquito bite."

Uganda, as a country, is like a beautiful, faith filled woman who has known sorrow for many years, but, through her inner strength, has managed not to be overcome. At present, we have a government that is trying to bring the country together and rebuild the economy. I do believe that it can happen if the opposing forces in the world will lay back and let the Ugandans do it their way. At present, people want peace and they have hope. May they succeed in their efforts to work together to build a just and understanding society. Ref. Intercontinent, March-April 1988, No.184.)

## RECOMMENDED READING

### LETTRES DE NOS MISSIONNAIRES

DES MISSIONNAIRES ZAIROIS : il y en a déjà plus que cent! En vue de la célébration de la Journée Missionnaire Mondiale, nous leur avons écrit, en leur demandant de nous parler de leur vie et de leur travail missionnaires. En rapport avec le thème de cette année ci, nous leur avons posé deux questions:

1. Comment êtes-vous témoins libres et vrais de Jésus Christ parmi vos gens?

2. Que faites-vous avec eux pour être libres dans la vérité?

Plusieurs parmi eux ont répondu; nous leur remercions de tout coeur.

La mission est une, celle que Jésus Christ a confiée à chaque chrétien. Mais la lecture des témoignages de nos missionnaires nous fait découvrir que c'est une mission à mille visages: allant de la prédication de l'Evangile, catéchèse, animation rurale, soins médicaux

et éducation sanitaire, ... jusqu' à la simple présence chrétienne et au témoignage de charité. Vraiment, le Seigneur fait des merveilles...

Nos missionnaires nous interpellent. Chacun et chacune témoigne à sa façon de cette mission du Christ comme chaque oiseau chante son chant: plein de joie et e'enthousiasme, heureux d' être appelé et d'être envoyé par le Seigneur, aimant son peuple... Mais, lisez vous-mêmes... et vous verrez.

Nos missionnaires nous parlent... Encoutons-les!

This brochure contains letters from some of the more than 100 Zairean missionaries working in the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Antigua, Jamaica, Bengal, Ivory Coast, Dominican Republic, Mali and Japan.

Diffusion: Ed. L. Epiphanie, B.P. 724, Limete - Kinshasa).

#### DIALOGUE OF LIFE AND FAITH

Bishop Bienvenido Tuddud's book \* has just arrived at our Documentation Centre. Those who knew 'Bishop Ben', - and seemingly all who did loved him, were surprised at this book. Not for the content - for he lived what is here revealed - but at his copious writings which were put together after his tragic death in an air crash on Friday, June 26, 1987. There are many gems to be found in this small book which is a collection of his notes, letters, homilies, retreat talks, poems and prayers dealing with dialogue and arranged chronologically from 1971 to 1987. We heartily recommend it.

The day before his death he was asked at a reception whether all his efforts at dialogue with Muslims in his Prelature of Marawi was not hopeless. He retorted "if you believe in what you are doing, you'll do it because you believe in it, not because you are expecting results... even to the point of death". They were his last words on dialogue.

\* Bishop Tuddud, Bienvenido, S., DIALOGUE OF LIFE AND FAITH, Quezon City, Philippines, Claretian Publications, 1988, Pp. 189.  
(See also SEDOS Bulletin, 88/No 3, (March 15th, 1988) 101-102)

#### TRAINING FOR TRANSFORMATION: MOBILIZING THE GRASSROOTS.

There is a particular problem in our churches nowadays. Church practices have been limited to the more individual aspects of the Christian life, even though evidence of the need to break through that restrictive framework is present everywhere. The ways to break through - the motivation, justification, and methods - are still very underdeveloped. The beginning structures - justice and peace networks - are developing all over the world, but one wonders how to fill in those structures.

In this context the book TRAINING FOR TRANSFORMATION, by Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, comes as a godsend. The book is divided into three large volumes. Volume I explores the theory of Paulo Freire on developing critical awareness and how to put this theory into practice. Volume II focuses on the development of skills in participatory education. To break the 'culture of silence', people need to gain a sense of self-

confidence, understanding that what they think is important. Volume III deals with social analysis, indicating the steps needed for developing solidarity in a people's movement.

All this is done in a theoretical way but in very practical terms. The volumes are filled with exercises, plays, games, and other techniques and skills, which are all presented in an authentic Christian faith context. The books were developed out of the practical experience of numerous sessions and workshops, mainly in Kenya where by the year 1980 more than 5,000 people - priests, pastoral workers and laypeople - had participated in this training for transformation.

The programme was considered by many experts to be the best conscientization programme in the so-called Third World.

Hope, Anne and Timmel, Sally, TRAINING FOR TRANSFORMATION: MOBILIZING THE GRASSROOTS, Mambo Press, Gweru, Zimbabwe, 1984. (Available from Grailville Bookstore, O'Bannonville Road, Loveland, OH 45140). \$21 for three volumes (including postage). Ref. Petit Echo. No. 791, 1988/6, Missionaries of Africa, Via Aurelia, 269, Rome.

#### MARYKNOLL IN CHINA

We have just received also an authoritative volume on mission in China. It is a fascinating study of Maryknoll priests, sisters and brothers in China. Their respect for Chinese culture enabled them to develop an indigenised and inculturated approach to the Christian gospel. An interesting aspect of this study for us, in view of the theme for the SEDOS 1988 General Assembly, is its insight into the changing role of women in the American Church. Ten thousand pages of oral testimony went into the research for this volume which has almost one hundred pages of notes. There is also an excellent bibliography and index.

Wiest, Jean Paul, MARYKNOLL IN CHINA: A History, 1918 - 1955. New York/London, M.E. Sharpe, inc., 1988, Pp.591.

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## A WOMAN OBSERVED

Marija Sres Mishkaben

"... most of all, women observe themselves. Therefore, there is no such thing as a woman alone, that is, a woman unobserved,"

Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex.

(Nous avons pensé transformer le titre de ce bel article et mettre: "Association dans la Mission". afin de l'accorder avec le sujet de la session du matin de notre future Assemblée Générale, PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION. On nous a suggéré alors que "Manque d'association dans la Mission" serait peut-être plus indiqué! Nous avons décidé de laisser le titre tel quel: "A Woman Observed" (Réflexions d'une femme). On y trouve pas mal d'aperçus sur la croissance et le changement, sur le donner et le recevoir, sur l'association ou le manque de coopération, sur les relations et l'amitié, sur la joie et sur la peine. Un article plein de sagesse qui mérite d'être lu.)

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I have lived in this country for 16 years, and yet the memory of my first arrival in Bombay is indelible. I was astonished at the vast crowds on the road from the airport, and the air had a salt and humid taste. The sun beat down mercilessly, a bright tropical sun, not the mellow light I had been so used to in my native Yugoslavia. First impressions, yes; but I still recall them.

The poverty and the misery one encounters has been written about enough. Need I add that it shocked me too, except that I had come here with great ideals; so if I perceived great need, why then I could achieve great things, and the thought made me happy. When one is 27 years old and filled with love, everything is easy and one is filled with a boundless energy....

Today I am over forty. I have lived largely in the state of Gujarat, on the fringes of the desert. I'm a woman who has accomplished something and experienced the satisfaction of achieving. I have not just given, I have also received. Yes, India has shaped me like a river shapes its stones, like the sea shapes its shoreline, its sands and its shells. That is why I liken my stay in this country to a gift. All gifts imply a relationship of giving and receiving, and all my years here have been a series of choices deliberate and decisions imposed, conscious designs and unconscious movements, big issues and petty trifles, all of it implying something given and received. Like the river I just mentioned, I have the sense that I control small things, but in a larger way I am carried along. I am happy that this is so. Who was it who said, "Life is what happens to us while we wait for the big events to take place"? I however prefer that line from Dante: "In his will is our peace."

What then, have I observed as a woman, these last 16 years? A few months ago the papers were full of the 'sati' episode in Deorala, Rajasthan, which is just over the border from where I work. Though giving us different details, most of the local dailies glorified Roop Kanwar: through



accepting 'sati' she became a 'devi', and Deorala suddenly became a place of pilgrimage, with people flocking to that dusty village by the hundreds and thousands.

I broke the news of Roop Kanwar to our women at one of our meetings. Our women are all tribal - Garasiya Dungri Adivase, with a sprinkling of Thakurda (Rajput) groups - and over all of them hangs the anxiety of survival. This has been the third year of drought, and even the relief work sponsored by the Government has not brought much respite. So it was curious to see the strange light of interest on their faces as I told them the 'sati' story. In fact, they relished it and begged me repeat it again and savoured every little detail.

"How do you feel about Roop Kanwar?" I asked after a time. "Eno Kismat Kahevay. Eno Kismay, ben," came their firm and serene answer. Oh how fortunate she was! What a lucky destiny! I was irritated with the answer.

"Lucky? To be burned to death when one is young and alive? And with a thousand people watching around and doing nothing?"

They kept silent, but their eyes, fixed squarely upon me, said, "You are wrong, ben. You just don't know anything!" Fuliben spoke for them all. "Her fate, ben. What could she do otherwise? She cannot remarry. She has no life to look forward to..."

"But she had passed her SSC and could have got a job..." I persisted. They kept silent again, and I realised that all my questions were vain and irrelevant. All our women felt that it was good for Roop to have died the way she did. They would've done the same. There is no other way. Social customs are stronger than death, and our women have been brought up to carry them out.

The ignorance of our women here - not one in a hundred can even sign her name - and the tradition that binds them down to the status of a thing, not a person - it is these two realities which created the "magic" of 'sati', and the reactions I have just described. Women can be goddesses (devi) in India, or they can be mere chattels - a highly placed public figure once contemptuously referred to women as "bhog ki cheez" (a thing to be enjoyed) - but they are not persons in their own right, equal to men. What is worse, because of the long tradition which they have internalised, women feel this way about themselves too.

It is not easy to be a woman with joy in this country. First of all,

there is no celebration when a girl is born. She has only to work and work hard in her father's house until she gets married; and then she must do the same in her husband's house. It is heavy physical work done by women, not light house-work. She carries firewood and fodder, hauls water from a deep well and carries it home from miles away, minds livestock, cooks, cleans, bears children and nurtures them. No respite is given. She may not ask any. She rises early and goes to bed late, and even her rest is broken by the importunate sexual demands of her drunken husband.

I am a foreign woman in this country, and the cultural difference creates its own tensions. I am a religious sister and therefore unmarried, and this too is cause for puzzlement and curiosity, among both men and women. "How do you manage?" is the unspoken question often writ large on their faces. Being white and not unattractive, I was admired by most Indian men, but rarely did I feel accepted in my own right as a woman. In my work men tend to boss me, and I resent this. I am used to speaking out my mind frankly, but here culture imposes its own kind of

silence, and I am told I am too outspoken and must speak more tactfully. I must allow men to have their way, even priests in the Church, for they are the ones with power and responsibility and the plans are made by them.

I suppose Indian men are like men anywhere else in the world, give or take a little. Few men like women of a strong and independent character, or of a perceptive mind. They like their women pliant, vulnerable, pretty and externally charming, women who want to be protected and helped. A line from a feminist poem comes to mind:

Women who work have strong faces  
Women who love have strong faces

I think of the tribal women I know and their faces have been burned by the sun and chipped by the wind (and I realise with a smile that my face is turning that way too), but these very women have shaped their men and children and held to whatever little they have.

There is another aspect to being a woman from a different culture. It is the loneliness. This wasn't so at the beginning, because perhaps the exuberance of a new kind of place and the challenges of a new work make me spend myself unremittingly. But today, in my forties, the need for companionship is much stronger. The need is probably more emotional than physical, by which I mean I want someone to talk to much more than I want someone to sleep with. It isn't easy, because no one talks to women as equals in this country. Is this part of what it means to be a woman in a traditional society today?

In this respect communities of sisters alone have not helped much. Sometimes we have our own cultural differences and temperamental blocks. Perhaps because all of us go through the same tensions, we have learned to be unfeeling to one another. People want the work done, and not lengthy excuses. They are hurt if I am snappish with them. I wish I could go away sometimes and spend time alone with one or two of the men friends I have, but this is frowned upon in Indian society, and brings other kinds of problems in its wake. Those words of the novelist Paul Scott are, oh, so true: "In India we could meet as lovers or as strangers or as enemies; but never as friends, because our friendship would always be publicly scrutinised."

This is one of the prices I pay for being a foreign religious sister in India. It is a high price because persons are important to me, and I miss the presence of friends. The women I work with are different, naturally, I am not their friend in the sense that this western idea is used; I am their 'didi', their elder sister. They look up to me. They cluster around me for advice and support. When we talk, it is about work and family and health and getting governmental support. And of course we talk about men and their oppressive ways, always with a kind of endurance, however. But theirs is not the kind of interiority which I can respond to on equal terms.

"YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY OUR DIGNITY"

It is unequal also in that these people have given me something I

can never repay. Let me try to put this in words.

Sometimes I find it very difficult to accept the way our people act. Poverty has a way of making them crooked and calculating, and not a few of them play on our feelings of guilt. They seek our eyes beseechingly, and touch us with a plaintive cry. I resent this, and it often provokes me to anger. It has taken patience for me to respond, not in irritation, nor in superficial almsgiving, but through speaking to them straight in the face: "Get up. You are no less than I. You will manage, and I will show you how, if you wish. Be aware of your dignity."

This was brought home to me years ago in a striking fashion. I was sitting in the house of one of our farmers, a poor man, by most standards, and he said to me, "Ben, you, missionaries, have done many things for us, but one thing you have done which has been very very bad, and for which I find it hard to forgive you. You, missionaries, have taken away our dignity. I will tell you how: you give us more than we can return. That means you don't respect us."

I have often reflected on my friend's words of wisdom. More and more they make sense to me, and I am grateful that he spoke them. From time to time I visit him to eat makai and chat, and this year in spite of the drought which almost destroyed the makai crop, he sent one corn for me with the message: "For my sister."

Yes, this is something I can never repay the poor. They have given me a sense of the simplicity and richness of life. They have taught me how to receive from life, instead of always fighting it, resisting it, wanting to improve it. Back home in Europe people would consider such a mentality stupid, for poverty is a matter of shame, something to be fought against even if one breaks. Here I have found that material circumstances need not dim the intrinsic value of the human spirit, and someone is not less a person for living in a poor hut on a barren hill in north Gujarat. "Now we can understand you," said another peasant to me the other day, "When you first came to this area, you couldn't even speak." I smiled at his observation. True, I had studied Gujarati as a language in college in Ahmedabad and have a degree in it; still, as I replied, "at that time, Jivabbai, I knew scholar-Gujarati. But to speak this language I needed to be among you."

Yes, I lived for two whole years with an adivasi family, learning how to speak their language, and learning to accept life as a gift, be it ever so hard. "It is only with the heart that one can truly see," says the Little Prince in that classic fairy tale for adults.

### RELATIONSHIPS

The religious inspiration which brought me here 16 years ago has also changed. Convent walls and structures say less and less to me today. In fact, honestly, sometimes they are a hindrance. They've made me rigid when I should have been more flexible, more adapting to circumstance and to people.

Instead I feel more and more shaped by my relationships. This is something intangible, but very real. First of all, my relationship to God. I turn to him or her - I often use the feminine pronoun, because sometimes only a Woman can understand the woman I am! - to share the intense joys I feel, and to unburden myself of the struggles and sorrow I

experience. Many of these feelings cannot be shared whether by the women I work with or by my community. I want to be loved unconditionally. I need to be loved unconditionally. And it is only in prayer that I get this realisation, which keeps me where I am.

Then my relationship with the women I work with is very important. My work is built on the principle of working with my women, and of working for them only as much as they can take. I never give more than they can accept. Never more than they can return. My women and I, we work together, it is our work. Sometimes when I see the glaring injustice wreaked upon women I get so furious, I would like to revolt, to scream out the pain that fills our lives. It takes me time to realise that as a human being with limitations of strength I cannot do all I want. I cannot overwork and exhaust myself, the dignity of our presence consists in being, more than in doing.

Relating to men is also very vital for me. Their presence is different from that of women, and sometimes I do feel, in a tired moment, that I have just enough of women in my life! And yet, for the reasons I mentioned above, it is not easy to have good friends who are men. Partly because of the social circumstances in our society, but partly also because most men like dolls - women to amuse them, women whom they do not take seriously. And I want to be taken seriously. I like to be cared for, but I also want to be spoken to. I want to give my opinion, to have things explained to me, to make my own decisions. I'm not the kind of woman who will spend hours in the kitchen preparing meals for our male visitors. I'd rather talk to them for hours, discussing our work, the spiritual life, the ways in which men and women relate. Still, though friendship with men is hard to find, I must add that here too I have been singularly blessed.

To be alone, to live in companionship with. These are the two poles of my being today. I am a religious woman, and yet never have the trappings of religion meant less to me. I do not put ashes on my head, nor do I wear any special habit, or cover my head in the temple, or in front of any official. Fulfilling rituals brings no satisfaction, only living out one's responsibility does.

Open your eyes and see.

Your God is not here in the temple.

He is there where the farmer ploughs his field.

He is the labourer, digging stones, tired hot and dirty.

Those words of Tagore mean more and more to me. God dwelling in his people, specially the lowliest of the land. And I realise too that it is only I who can live out my vocation, only I can be myself. Perhaps we women spend so much time imitating - men, our religious superiors, the saints - that we have no time left just to be ourselves, to accept ourselves. I did this once and wasted many years on it. But I do so no longer. Today I know that I am alone before my God.

Alone, yes; and also in companionship. I need to get nourished by my women. They offer me a warmth and attention that I need, and I in my turn do the same to them. Our sharing enriches us. This is one way to bring about God's reign on earth - I do believe it. And perhaps only women can bring it about for themselves and their families. When I

reflect upon my own tribal women I am amazed at the endurance and the resilience of their lives. They inspire me when I am depressed at my own failures.

Companionship with men is of a different kind. Perhaps both the sexes must stop fearing and threatening the other, and learn to complete each other instead. It's not easy, and I'm only beginning to find my way.

Winter edges into spring, and a slow breeze moves the landscape. I shield myself from the sun at day, and gaze upon the moon at night in this vast hilly country of Sabarkantha, whose barren hills open to the sky. Yes, India helped me return to nature, return to myself. Every night I count the silent stars, and when morning comes with its cheerful birdsong, I greet the sun with joy and open the door so that our women may come in.

They fill the corridor and come into my room. They are old and young, gaunt and strapping, sunburned and windblown. They talk incessantly, and all together. We converse, discuss, plan, act. We laugh and fight and tease and joke.

The days pass, the months go by, and the years fly. It seems I have come to India only yesterday, and so many years have passed since then. I have changed. I have become a woman of middle age, a happy woman who knows what life is. A woman who has wept a lot because she has also been scarred by life. Still, a woman who trusts life, and who wants to make this world a little better place for everyone. She knows the struggle, the odds, and also the advantages.

And she wants to be here.

Marija Sres Mishkaben

- end -

Ref. Vidyjoti, June, 1988,  
Raj Nivas Marg, Delhi, 110054.

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## A RELIGIOUS PRESENCE WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA'S STRUGGLE

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Little Sister Brigid

(Cet article est un extrait d'une conférence donnée à la conférence des supérieurs majeurs d'Afrique du Sud, à Marianhill, en 1987. Il fait ressortir la nécessité d'être à l'écoute du peuple, de ses attentes, de ses luttes et de ses craintes, mais en même temps et même à travers cela, la nécessité de fonder tout cela sur le Christ. La nécessité de vivre l'incarnation en Afrique du Sud est affirmée.)

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Maybe it should not be I speaking to you here on this topic; I feel inadequate as I am not what we call "a superior", nor a 'major' one. I live in a small community of four Little Sisters where no one is in charge. Also I was not born in this country, nor have I even taken its nationality yet. Though I have been living here for thirty-two years, I am still growing up in South Africa. We all feel strongly that the building of the New South Africa has already started. It is fermenting now and will bear fruit - sound or rotten - tomorrow.

Each one of us has to know clearly our religious identity and charism. We are men and women who are consecrated by vows to God, the God of the Incarnation. We are called to a deep union with this GOD in view of his Kingdom taking root in our human hearts and through the witness of our lives in a given human community. This religious identity goes beyond the 'works' that we do at the service of the people. Works can disappear; the 'needs of the people' can change, but our identity does not depend on them.

Solidarity with the People. As sisters of Jesus we see our vocation grounded in the mystery of the Incarnation. There I cannot separate the deepest abyss of human reality from the revelation within it of the tenderness of God's love. God so loved the world he gave us his own Son, who is the witness of His father. He is not a witness in a vacuum, but in a given milieu, at a given time, in a certain place. Following Jesus of Nazareth I will discover in Him through contemplation and solidarity the revelation of God who loves each human person with a passionate love. I cannot understand Him except in relation to the human person.

He, the new Man Jesus, will configure us to Himself; then our presence among people will also become a revelation and transform all that surrounds us. Because of our vocation to insert ourselves, 'to put on the people's skin' like Jesus did, we must live their reality. This must be done in a way which is both critical and prophetic, yet without 'playing a role'. We have at the same time to be a sign of contradiction and a sign of hope.

Called as a Little Sister to follow Jesus of Nazareth in the concrete living and working conditions of ordinary poor people, means that I share their social position, their ordinary work, wage-earning or not,

or their unemployment, their daily struggle to earn a living to survive. But I will also share their legitimate hopes, aspirations and efforts to be respected in their dignity as persons, with inalienable rights. In the work situation or wherever, I am called not only to earn a living, but to give witness to the Gospel values of the Kingdom: life, respect, dignity, justice.

Living amid the marginalised and poor, amid those discriminated against because of their colour or beliefs, we are called from the beginning of our religious life to live in a small community with different nationalities. As a sign of unity this shows it is possible for people of different nationalities, races and classes to live together. Our solidarity here is not an option, but our expression of faith. We believe Christ is brother and sister to us all and makes us sisters and brothers of one another. The Holy Spirit is present among people transforming the world in mysterious ways.

I am living this Vocation in the South Africa of today, and facing human misery which

gets worse. I am living in a situation contrary to human nature: the international system chokes the third world. The Western system established in Africa, functions badly. The problems of development, human rights, tensions between ethnic groups cannot be forgotten. In the name of the gospel, in the name of Jesus Christ, I have to respond. If I am a religious it is because I have something to announce. Human rights must question me, must have a bearing on my attitude to people; so must their demands for justice affect my lifestyle and insertion in their midst, and bear on my involvement in the struggle for liberation from oppression.

Something new is happening in our world today: the poor and oppressed have broken into history with a new self-consciousness; they recognize more deeply the ways in which they are bound by injustice, oppression, fear, manipulation. They have discovered that the God whom they have worshipped for centuries is not a God who wants their oppression and poverty. He is a God wanting to liberate them and those who oppress them from these forces of death and offer them life in the fullest sense. This struggle to which the God of the Exodus calls his People is much larger than the struggle for political and economic rights but it includes that as well.

Thus my contemplation of Jesus who is Truth, will be the patient, constant effort of listening to reality, letting reality take hold of me, to put me in relation with the Father. It will be a way of looking that lets us see in this reality, however crucifying it may be, the presence of the Father and his face turned tenderly toward humankind.

So the Nazareth which challenges me today as a christian, a religious woman, a Little Sister in South Africa, is the reality of life under the State of Emergency with all that this means for people. I cannot escape from this reality in which I live and before which I have no right to remain passive. My vocation to contemplation and solidarity, of friendship with people cannot leave me in a false 'peacefulness'. If my vocation links me in solidarity to poor, marginalised, and oppressed people and if I have accepted to live in a mixed community as a sign of unity I believe that this is the path of conversion God calls me along.

Respect, Understanding, Empathy. Our being with people means paying attention to the person before thinking of what I can do for him or her. Attention means respect, understanding, empathy, concern, 'ubudlelwane'; it requires taking time to listen, come to know, to discover and accept the otherness of each other. For me, the New South Africa we are praying and working for starts here. I feel challenged to find ways and means to break out of individualism and elitism, with their privileges; to find ways of living and coping together with those who struggle against oppression and continual dependency on others. The New South Africa asks of me a total conversion.

### THE APARTHEID SYSTEM

It has made people different, has created and upheld divisions, has educated people differently. Am I even aware of all those realities? How do they affect me? Where, in me, is the oppressing or oppressed person? What about feelings of superiority or inferiority? How do I recognise them in myself and try to get rid of them? Am I ready for that conversion in myself?

When people are in need, when their rights are infringed, when they flee from the police, when they are harrassed, do I know where to send them, where to go for help? Do I know the organisations that exist to assist them? As we prepare for a New South Africa, how do I feel about a black Government, something that is sure to come? Or do I wish reality away?

When I am convinced that working for a New South Africa begins with my conversion, my rejecting all that divides people - ways of being, thinking, speaking, acting - then I will live this out in my community, in my work situation, in my neighbourhood. I will listen to others and be able to hear their cry; I will know how to answer and to break down barriers of inferiority/superiority, fruits of a system which has taken root subtly in my being.

In knowing ourselves we need to accept our responsibility in this situation. Can I still speak of 'my' people or 'our' people, referring to others as 'they' and mean exclusively "whites", "coloured" people or "Zulus"? We must acknowledge our wrongs and ask forgiveness from others. Like Jesus we must become one with people in order to announce the Good News in a language they understand - a message that means something and is able to change hearts.

Jesus Called to Himself All Kinds of People and made no distinctions. He challenges us to accept each person in his/her own right, as an equal, where they are. We have to learn to listen to those who join our religious families and to walk with them from where they are. Those who join us or look at us, or inquire about us, are often concerned or involved in the struggle. They question our relevance, the way we live our vows, especially poverty. We tend to excuse ourselves rather than listen. Do we let people be themselves and accept that they have a duty to make us understand who they are? Or do we expect people to 'conform'? If we do, then we miss letting our religious life 'take root' in the African reality.

We so easily term people who express their anger 'radical', 'political' 'bitter.' But do we allow them to express their views, their



conflicting options? Do we invite people to share with us their vision, their aims for a New South Africa, can people of the UDF, COSATU, AZAPO, ANC speak for themselves about a free democratic, non-racial South Africa? Or do we just accept Government explanations about 'them' again?.

Do we listen enough to people who have grown up in this situation? Do we realise what it means for people to have had their very selves stunted by centuries of oppression and Euro-centric value systems? What about a whole people who grew up being told that their values were nothing, that there was something better, and as they aspired to adopt these "better" values found that they were and are rejected? What about a certain missionary spirit in our church that still wants to 'up-root'? What is dialogue like in our own religious communities? Don't we say too easily - "We also went through that!" Or "It was the same in this or that country!?"

### FORMATION

We need a lot of formation, above all, a true biblical formation. We need the Living Word to be our Rock, on which we build our life; we have to learn to be rooted in Scripture to be challenged by the Word. Our union with God needs to be strong so we recognise his action and dealing with people as they are living today. Only in this way can we support them in the face of oppression, injustice and suffering; only then will we in our efforts of liberation let ourselves be led by His Spirit. This formation, it seems to me, never ends. It touches on what we as church could do in joining the Liberation struggle of people. Instead of wanting to do our own thing, we should work side by side with the people, bringing what we have as Christians and as religious without wanting to take over, to be those who lead or who are in control.

Formation for Community Building. We are human like other people and we grow; we must come to know both ourselves and others in the different stages of life. I have to accept myself, white or black, with my own temperament and loaded past, and accept others with their right to otherness. In order to be at ease with people of other cultures, to grow through this acceptance, and live in a true 'religious' community with them, I should be able to cope fully with myself. Our formation should foster this interculturality, where we live our calling to be sister and brother to one another.

This includes accepting the inculturation that has to come in the life of the church and religious communities. Can we follow Jesus radically without following his way of meeting the other? It was his concern to 'take on' the cultural reality of those with whom he was in contact. Can we do less? Often the culture of the person bringing the Gospel is a major obstacle.

To suffer together, to share powerlessness and failure, without losing hope is to become a sign of hope to the people.

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## WOMEN AND THE CHURCH

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Ben Kimmerling

When sleeping women awake, mountains will move  
(Ancient Chinese proverb).

(Ben Kimmerling nous présente un portrait de deux cultures - celle des dirigeants de l'Angleterre en Irlande (et sans doute aussi ailleurs, aujourd'hui) et la culture de l'intimité où vivent les femmes. Elle soutient des voies et des moyens qui permettraient à ces cultures de reconnaître leurs différences et de travailler à les surmonter. Si les chefs de l'Eglise en arrivaient à se fier aux femmes et surtout à avoir confiance en elles, des montagnes de divisions finiraient par se mouvoir. La conférence a été donnée devant un auditoire irlandais, mais peut s'appliquer à un contexte plus large. Le texte a dû être considérablement abrégé, par manque de place.)

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To some people I am sure this proverb sounds like a threat. Whatever about sleeping women, moving mountains are certainly not the most pleasant of nature's phenomena. Whether they erupt in volcanic fireworks or lurch to the seismic rhythms of the earth, they usually leave a trail of destruction behind them. Nobody, I think, wants that kind of violent change - particularly not in the Church. But the proverb can be heard in another way too - not as a threat but as a promise, and that is how I like to hear it. Because a mountain, as well as being a boundary can be a barrier too - dividing countries and customs and cultures, creating a block between neighbours, making them strangers to one another. When mountains do this it is desirable that they should move. And when nature does not oblige, it may even be necessary to set about moving them ourselves. I believe that at the present time in the Church there is a whole mountain range between Christian women and Church leaders.

In this paper I want to survey these mountains and the landscape on either side. I want to suggest that, with the goodwill and effort of the people on both sides, these mountains which make us strangers to one another can be moved.

### I EQUALITY

#### VISION OF EQUALITY

1. The first question I want to ask is: what is the nature of the barrier that prevents a Christian community moving towards equality? The notion of relationship is implicit in the use of the term equality. The relationship which I am going to focus on is that between, on the one hand, Church leaders (i.e. those who by virtue of their sex can be

ordained and who by virtue of their ordination can become leaders and hence decision-makers in our Church) and, on the other hand, Christian women, lay and religious (i.e. those who by virtue of their sex are excluded from ordination and who consequently are excluded from leadership and from decision-making within their own Church).

2. The second question I want to ask is: who has ordained that women shall never be decision-makers in the Church? Is it ordained by God or ordained by men? Have we perhaps slipped from one meaning of the word 'ordained' (i.e. ordained by a community to be eucharistic leaders of that community) into another meaning (i.e. ordained by God to be the sole leaders and decision makers in all spheres of Church life). To women these questions are pertinent. To some Church leaders they may sound impertinent.

#### DISCREPANCIES OF BACKGROUND

When it comes to the issue of equality, these two groups (i.e. Church leaders and Christian women) are like two travellers who meet for the first time in a railway carriage. Both agree that they would like to be warm for the journey. But when it comes to implementing this mutually agreed objective, one feels it can best be achieved by turning up the heat, the other thinks the heat should be turned down. So there is conflict. In the course of their dialogue, it emerges that one of them comes from the tropics and loves heat. The other comes from the Arctic and loves the cold. It becomes obvious that each one's concept of warmth has been shaped by the place she has come from. Neither was to blame for the conflict. It was a genuine misunderstanding. Therefore their feelings of suspicion, distrust and hostility dissolve. While their objective is not yet achieved, the block arising from their mutual hostility has disappeared, leaving the way open for further development.

In the Church, the backgrounds of our leaders and of women are very different indeed. Dialogue, storytelling, is necessary in order that each side may understand where the other side has come from. It is necessary in order to see how our respective backgrounds have shaped our visions of equality, and also in order to discover the discrepancies between these visions.

#### DISCREPANCIES OF DEPTH

If a discrepancy does exist between the vision of equality of Church leaders and of women I wonder if this discrepancy is not one of depth. Let me use another analogy to explain this. Suppose two people, John and Michael, are talking about the concept of 'being understood' by another person. On exploring it emerges that Michael who has a fairly solitary life style, is thinking, when he talks about 'being understood', of the time he explained a mathematical problem to someone else who understood his explanation. He visualises 'being understood' as a simple, straightforward, measurable, intellectual, and not very important, event.

John, too, speaks out of his own experience - but experience of a very different kind. Having had a very emotionally deprived childhood, he was eventually adopted by a very caring family who understood him and all that he had suffered. Through this experience of 'being understood', the quality of his life was completely changed.

Because Michael's experience was simple, measurable, confined to one area, i.e. the intellectual area, and not very important in terms of his life in general, he finds it almost impossible to grasp John's notion of 'being understood' as something deep, all pervasive, multi-faceted, profoundly important, which touched and transformed every aspect of his life.

Let me summarise the three points I have been making:

1. Our visions of equality may not coincide.
2. This discrepancy in vision may exist because the background and life style of Church leaders and of women is very different.
3. If a discrepancy does exist it may be a discrepancy of depth.

A closer look at the background and life styles of both groups may reveal evidence to support these three statements.

## II BACKGROUND AND LIFE-STYLES OF THE CHURCH LEADERS

To begin with I will discuss the background and life-style of secular priests in general, focusing in particular on those who are in their fifties and upwards as this is the age group from which our leaders are usually selected. Then I will look at those who are likely to be chosen, from among this group, for positions of leadership in the Church.

### BACKGROUND

Most of these priests probably entered an enclosed seminary at the age of eighteen ( in pre-Vatican II times), and from then on have lived and worked within an all-male, hierarchical, celibate institution. Such a person placed himself under the authority of his bishop to whom he promised obedience. He will have spent all his working life within this hierarchical structure, relating 'up' or 'down' to many of his fellow priests e.g. as curate, parish priest, and perhaps eventually as bishop. Many of his important working relationships will therefore be vertical rather than horizontal. They will be unequal rather than equal. So relationships of inequality are an accepted and tolerated part of his life. They are in fact a condition of his priesthood. The background against which he works is hierarchical, authoritarian.

### LIFE-STYLE

Friendship is today seen to play an important part in growth towards self knowledge and maturity, and some priests now cultivate deep relationships of this kind. However, if women are to arrive at any understanding of the ordained, it is essential to remember that this tentative move towards relationships of deep friendship, i.e. towards relationships of equality, is a relatively new development for priests - one which may still be problematic for some of them. It is a move being made by some (and only some) members of an institution, the older half of whom were trained not to relate closely or intimately, even with their fellow priests; an institution which for generations forbade particular friendships as sinful and whose policies and rules were specifi-

cally designed to prevent such friendships; an institution which not only frowned on particular friendships with the same sex but issued dire warnings about the dangers of any kind of close relationship with the opposite sex, whom it regarded as objects of temptation; an institution whose understanding of celibacy was that of a renunciation of all loving friendships. So they were cautious and sometimes distrustful when it came to relationships, particularly relationships with women.

The move towards deeper intimacy with others is a move from control to trust, from independence to interdependence, from caution to risk. Relationship is one area where control is not always possible. One cannot control another person's thoughts, emotions or physical reactions - or indeed not always even one's own. Relationship is a place where expertise has to be slowly, painfully and humiliatingly learned. It is the kind of learning that is called experiential learning, and it involves some element of trial and error. In order to relate, one must learn to trust the intuitive and spontaneous part of oneself.

It is particularly important to recognise that a life-style which precludes close friendships with women produces priests who know little about the humanity of women. Therefore, for such people there are issues, equality issues, which have never even surfaced in their lives. They do not even know that these issues exist!

#### SEARCH FOR CONTROL

In friendships with women a priest is challenged to accept that women's way of experiencing things, their way of naming reality, their approach to, and perspectives on moral questions, their insights into the meaning of sexuality, their emotional and physical reactions, their intellectual insights, their ways of relating, are as valid and close to the truth as those of men. When a priest takes the risk of relating in the equality of friendship with women, he is challenged to give up the search for control, to broaden his perspectives, to grow in new and surprising directions.

However, I strongly suspect that these are not the priests who are most likely to be chosen for positions of leadership in the institutional Church just now. The shift from control to trust in a priest's private life radically alters his way of being a priest. He no longer tries to control on the public level. Consequently such people may be seen by the authorities as having relinquished the very values upon which the institutional Church depends.

#### CULTURE OF CONTROL

In talking about the background and the life-style of priests I have actually been describing a culture - the culture of control. I am not suggesting that all our leaders are still totally under the influence of this culture. But I am asking whether it is possible that some of our Church leaders were so steeped in it during their formative years as priests that it still exerts a major influence on them?

#### MARKS OF THE CULTURE OF CONTROL

Relationships are hierarchical, vertical, single-sex, male,

unequal, sufficient. People tend to relate via roles rather than as persons. Celibacy is practised; but it is lived as a way of avoiding relationship, especially with women.

Behaviour is obedient, docile, (sometimes even subservient). Alternatively it is dogmatic and authoritarian. Secrecy is the norm, e.g., closed doors at synods and at bishops' conferences. Suspicion, distrust and defensiveness are common. It can appear remote, impersonal, inaccessible, insensitive. It is highly political but not publicly acknowledged as such. Promotions are attributed to the will of God or the Holy Father, - rarely refused.

Morality is a 'head' morality, centred on abstract principles, but these are sometimes used to dominate people rather than to serve them. In the search for truth the language of the body and of the emotions is not taken into account, i.e. experiential data are ignored.

Its values are duty, obedience, conformity - advancement within the system depends on these. Certainty is important; mistakes, doubts, ambiguity are rarely acknowledged publicly. Caution, conservation and uniformity of response are considered desirable (all must speak with one voice on all issues, i.e. by pronouncement).

### III THE BACKGROUNDS AND LIFE-STYLES OF WOMEN

#### BACKGROUND

There are factors present in the working lives of women which are absent in the lives of Church leaders. As part of the work force, women seek equal treatment, equal pay, equal conditions. Trade Unions (unknown in the culture of control) exist to protect equality already achieved, and to fight for ever newer levels of it. Women's consciousness groups and pressure groups bring to light areas of hidden inequality and support women in their drive to eradicate it. Civil law offers them some means of redress in situations of inequality. In the working lives of women the demand for equality is now seen as normal. To the ears of Church leaders the demands for equality may sound like hysteria, but they ring in the ears of women like a cry for justice. If the expectations and tolerations of each group are so completely different, is it any wonder that their visions of equality do not coincide!

#### THE LIFE-STYLE OF WOMEN

The most glaring difference between the two groups - and perhaps the most significant in terms of their respective visions of equality - is the fact that women generally live in greater physical and emotional proximity to others than do Church leaders. Close relationships with others are a significant and normal part of their lives. These relationships cross the sexual divide, span all ages from conception to death, embrace all levels of the personality and frequently involve cohabitation with others, e.g. with husband, with other members of a religious community, with close relatives who share a home, with young or grown-up children, etc.

If a celibate leader wishes to ignore equality issues in his relationships with others, he can retreat into the solitude of his home and shut out the disharmony and anger which his behaviour causes. Thus he can use his celibacy, if he so chooses, as a way of avoiding the

demand for equality. Most women on the other hand rarely have this option.

Those who live in intimate relationships (and I am not excluding men although I am discussing women here), are exposed to a whole range of interpersonal situations to which celibate Church leaders, especially those who hold the values of the culture of control, are not normally exposed. Such intimacy challenges women to understand and accept the hidden dimensions (physical, affective, intellectual) of themselves and of others. Those who do accept these dimensions, come to a profound experiential awareness of the humanity they share with others and thus of the basic equality of all. I believe that it is this type of woman who is now to the fore in the search for equality within the Church.

It is obviously impossible in one talk to discuss the whole range of women's experience. Instead I will discuss one everyday example of it - that of touch.

#### TOUCHING THE PHYSICAL REALITY OF OTHERS.

The close relationships in which many women live provide opportunities for intimate physical contact with the bodies of others of both sexes and of all ages. For example, in giving birth, in parent/infant relationship (breast-feeding, holding, etc.) parent/child relationships (in toilet training, bathing), sexual contact of all degrees, demonstrations of affection for men and women, nursing contact with both sexes of all ages (feeding, washing, attending to baby functions, wounds, disabilities), contact with the bodies of the dying and the dead. All of this intimate contact confronts women with every aspect of the physical humanity of men and women from birth to death.

Sometimes as we touch and are touched, we are so caught up in the intensity of the moment, so totally immersed in it, that we seem to become the emotion. We are the joy or beauty or wonder or awe. We are fleetingly integrated, in harmony, all one with creation. It is 'music heard so deeply that it is not heard at all but you are the music while the music lasts'. And as we women reflect on these experiences of touch, we grasp, as Eliot did, 'the hint half guessed, the gift half understood is Incarnation'.

#### DEVELOPS A DEEP FAITH

Thus through touch women begin to discover meaning - and to discover equality too. We learn that at the deepest level there are no divisions within people or between people. We begin to realise that the visible is an entry point to the invisible, the seen an entry to the unseen. We become aware of a new language and delight in its delicate nuances as we receive and transmit equality through our fingertips. So the closer we come to the surface reality, the deeper becomes our faith in the hidden depths. By touching we acquire a deep experiential awareness of our equality with others. In the moments when this happens we know that we have been touched by God.

But there are other moments too - tougher, less meaningful ones, which are almost exclusively the domain of women in our society, and sadly even more so, their domain within our Church. This is where the gap between Church leaders' experience and that of women really opens up. These are the intimate moments, often painfully protracted - when, as carer or as nurse, we women touch the other side of human reality, -

when we attend to the physical needs of human beings. Here we must deal not with what attracts us but with those things which are more likely to repel. Such things as sweat and urine and vomit and excrement.

It sounds shocking to put it like that - probably, most shocking of all to those whose life style insulates them from physical contact with this aspect of other people. And it is shocking too, deeply, profoundly shocking, when a woman for the first time in her life attends to the bodily needs of an old or hopelessly incapacitated human being. And more specially a parent or a relative. To have in one's hands the fate of another - that is real power. And in our society it is very often women's power.

#### THE STRUGGLE TO STAY AND TO RELATE

And it is intimacy too, but intimacy of a most excruciating and disturbing kind. Everything in a woman shrinks from it, closes up and wants to run away. Because to look is to see as in a mirror her own fading sexuality, her own ageing and dying and death.

If she touches she must face not only the unpalatable aspects of her own physical reality but her own turbulent and seemingly unchristian emotions as well. These too are a part of her and she has to decide what to do with them. Disgust and pity, anger and gentleness, cruelty and compassion, hatred and tenderness, and on and on, for every one its opposite.

And so this struggle of women to stay and to relate, is a struggle about equality - as indeed so many of our human struggles are. And if it is to succeed it must be fought not just in our heads but in our bodies and our hearts as well. Words are hollow if we shrink in fear or distaste from the touch of another or shut off from them emotionally. Women who have lived through this struggle realise that it is essentially no different to the struggle that confronts Church leaders if they are to recognise the equality of women within the life of the Church. And they know too that their battle must be fought on the same battlefields, not only in the heads of leaders but in their bodies and their hearts as well.

#### AN INVITATION TO CHURCH LEADERS

The physical proximity of others does not automatically generate intimacy. Rather it is an invitation to create it, and an opportunity to learn about it. Proximity challenges us to adopt an ever more authentic stance, an ever more truthful attitude in our relationships with others. The call into intimacy is then a call to conversion, a call to a new life. It is an invitation to a new and more equal way of being with others. It is an invitation which I believe women can quite appropriately issue to Church leaders. Because if genuine intimacy is a stance one adopts, an attitude of truth and authenticity, it can exist not only in our private relationships, but in our public and institutional relationships as well.

Many women, because of the culture in which they live, learn this experientially, they know it in their bones. Perhaps if we look at the marks of their culture we may see why I am suggesting that intimacy is the most appropriate stance for Church leaders to adopt in their relationships with women and indeed with the whole people of God in this post Vatican II age. I call the culture in which women live the culture



of intimacy.

#### THE MARKS OF THE CULTURE OF INTIMACY

Relationships are horizontal, are equal, including both sexes. Interdependence and mutuality are recognised.

Behaviour is open, vulnerable, trusting. The need to take risks is recognised. Challenges are seen as necessary and good.

Morality is person-centred, i.e. principles serve people. Insights achieved experientially are taken into account. The languages of the body and of the emotions are listened to. Affectivity is integrated into morality. Women's perspective on moral issues is acknowledged. Nuances are recognised, so is the complexity of human behaviour. Ambiguity, contradiction, conflict are tolerated as they are part of what it is to be human. Grey areas are recognised. Time as an element in moral decision-making is accepted i.e. the law of gradualness. It is a morality of the heart, based on a 'conviction of things unseen'. It respects the supremacy of conscience.

Its values are love, tenderness, understanding, personal freedom, sensitivity to, and acceptance of others, compassion, two-way communication, i.e. dialogue is important. Equality of others is respected. Creativity is welcomed. Intuition is respected.

Reproduction occurs by cross-fertilization (of ideas, etc.). Mutations are judged on their merits. New strains are accepted when necessary. Uniqueness is not seen as a threat. Individuality and originality have their place.

Its evolution is dynamic and surprising. It develops sometimes by intuitive spurts and breakthroughs.

I am offering you a women's picture of two cultures. I know it is inadequate because too much closeness or too much distance distort a view. But while women, through no choice of their own, are excluded from the culture of their leaders, it is the only perspective open to us and therefore it needs to be taken into account. However, I am convinced that if Church leaders decide to be hospitable to us, if they are prepared to chip away at their side of the mountain, if they can bring themselves to trust women and above all to have faith in them - then when sleeping women awake, mountains indeed will move.

- end -

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Ref. *Doctrine and Life*. Vol. 37, May/June 1987.

Dominican Publications, St. Saviours, Dublin, 1, Ireland.

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## A REFLECTION ON SOCIETY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN HONG KONG 1950'S to 1980'S

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Peter Cheung Ka-hing

(Le retour de Hong Kong à la Chine, en 1997, continue à soulever une variété de réponses de la part de plusieurs secteurs de la société de Hong Kong. La peur et l'anxiété se partagent avec l'optimisme et l'espoir et l'Eglise Catholique n'échappe pas à cette atmosphère. Comment peut-elle répondre à ce nouveau défi? Faut-il une réponse pastorale plus créative de la part de l'Eglise de Hong-Kong? Peter Cheung Ka-hing propose certaines considérations intéressantes. Nous reproduisons ici la dernière section de ses réflexions. Les réponses pastorales en tant qu'elles affectent le laïcat et les paroisses sont significatives. même au-delà de la situation à Hong Kong).

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### PASTORAL RESPONSE

I think we are only beginning to, and have still not yet fully understood the significance of the political changes that are taking place, mainly because we have been brought up totally ignorant in political matters, and because we have for too long ignored China as an important and imminent reality to be reckoned with.

I would like to make two points here:

1. The fact that our Hong Kong church has been able to develop the way it has over the past years is due to several factors. One of these is its relationship with the Hong Kong government. The kind of church-state relationship that has existed provided a framework for church development, for its expansion in educational and social welfare enterprises, and for its being able to link up its pastoral ministries with such enterprises.

Now with 1997 in view, the fundamental nature of the government will change. It will no longer be accountable to a United Kingdom government in England that is basically sympathetic to and supportive of Christianity. It will be directly responsible to the Central Chinese government in Beijing which is atheistic and socialist, and which harbours an historical suspicion of Christianity.

With the British colonial government, the Church is considered somewhat a partner, an institution that can be used as an extension of government control and services. With the new government, this partner relationship may change.

2. This directly follows from the first point. We may have to re-examine some existing areas of church life that have a direct relationship to government links. These include:

- visas for missionaries
  - aids and subsidies to schools and welfare institutions
  - curriculum and activities of the institutions mentioned above
  - pastoral activities linked to the above-mentioned institutions,
- including mass centres, christian assemblies, religious instructions, and administering sacraments.

The above considerations are made in view of the political changes that may take place. In facing the future, we should also look at the internal experiences of the universal church as well as that of the local church, and the new direction and model of Christian community that is in the process of gestation. In my own view recent political changes in Hong Kong have made the actualization of this new direction more relevant and urgent. From my own reading, this new model of the church will have the following characteristics:

A. As Church it has a commitment to Hong Kong, and to the people here.

It stays with the people, and accompanies them as they take this journey towards the future. Over the years, it has developed with the people. It will not take what it has gathered from the society here and move off to another country. The bond with the people becomes ever more intimate and strong in face of difficulties ahead.

B. Basis of Hope. Unlike previous stages, the manifestation of faith during this period is hope. The basis of hope is not just the promise of the Chinese leadership for maintaining the capitalist system for another fifty years after 1997, not just the organization of the people for a more democratic structure, nor the satisfactory wording of the Basic Law drafts. Hope rests centrally on her belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By journeying with the people, and unfailingly remembering the Kingdom, the Church becomes for them a tangible sign of hope.

C. Christian Communities. The basic structure of the church will not be the parish, but small christian communities (in communion with the parish and the diocese) - communities in which the laity, along with the clergy, have a way of owning and becoming the church, of living the christian life not as isolated individuals, but as a people of God.

D. The leadership of the communities will be centred on the laity in co-operation with the clergy. The laity will assume responsible roles in ministry, liturgy, and christian formation.

E. The laity will be the principal agents of mission. The family, place of work, society and politics will be declared mission territories, in which our church, through the living witness of the laity, will be extending her frontiers.

F. The People. The Church's principal ally will not be the government, but the people, particularly the poor and the weak. The Church divorces its evangelization efforts from the dominant power structures. She makes allies with, and trusts the resources of the ordinary people.

G. The Spirituality of the church will be charismatic, small group oriented and biblical. The spirit will be the guiding force. Christian communities, while remaining in communion with one another, will respond in a pluralistic manner to the actual needs as experienced, each within a concrete situation, according to its strengths and resources.

#### A NEW PASTORAL STRATEGY

These are some of the major elements of a model of the church still to be realized. In the gestation period of this new church, the clergy and religious have a very important role to play, at this time, when we are still very much at the starting point. In order to build a new dynamic forward-looking church centred on the laity and christian communities, there is a need to devise a new pastoral strategy.

A. We Have to Re-examine our priorities and investment strategies. The principal area of investment should be formation, particularly formation of lay leaders.

B. Formation should be holistic, integrating the spiritual and theological, personal and social, conceptual and experiential dimensions. Particular emphasis will be given to christian social responsibility and community building.

C. New Structures will be created to allow the re-appropriation of the church by the majority of the laity. Small communities should be established, led by lay leaders. The permanent diaconate, lay ministries, and family liturgies should all be seriously studied and formally inaugurated in the life of the church.

All this calls for a profound shift from our present strategy of heavy undertakings in educational and welfare institutions. I am not asking that these undertakings should be abandoned. In view of our new theological thinking, and in view of what is happening related to 1997, I am asking for a re-examination of our existing strategies and the exploration of a new strategy which will help us face the future more confidently. I also believe that if we are to be consistent with our christian faith, in adopting a new strategy, we will also have to be ready to pay a price.

Peter Cheung Ka-hing, is Executive Director,  
Catholic Institute for Religion and Society, Hong Kong.

Ref. Tripod 40, December, 1987,  
6, Welfare Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong.

# WOMAN'S ROLE

There is a woman who is tired of acting weak when she knows she is strong, and there is a man who is tired of appearing strong when he feels vulnerable.

There is a woman who is tired of acting dumb, and there is a man who is burdened with the constant expectation of knowing everything.

There is a woman who is tired of being called "an emotional female," and there is a man who is denied the right to weep and to be gentle.

There is a woman who is called unfeminine, when she competes and there is a man for whom competition is the only way to prove his masculinity.

There is a woman who is tired of being a sex

object and there is a man who must worry about his potency.

There is a woman who feels "tied down" by her children and there is a man who is denied the full pleasure of shared parenthood.

There is a woman who is denied meaningful employment or equal pay, and there is a man who must bear full financial responsibility for another human being.

Bringing the promise of New Community, there is a woman who takes a step toward her own liberation, and there is a man who finds the way to freedom is made a little easier.

Reflections of a man  
taken from *A Chance to Change*

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## Opening Prayer

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Take a few moments to center yourselves personally and as a group.

Open with a song you all know and enjoy.

Together recite:

### A PSALM OF NEW BIRTH

O Gracious God of life and birth,  
How you labor, how you suffer, to bring forth  
the new creation!

Indeed, you cry out like a woman in  
childbirth.

And the Spirit groans with you.

But your cries become cries of joy,  
As you behold fragile new life there before  
you.

All creation waits on tiptoe for the revealing  
of your daughters and  
your sons;

We ourselves long to take part in the glorious  
liberty of your  
children.

Who can separate us from the love of God?  
Even a mother might forget us,  
Yet you will not forsake us!

O God, our God how wonderful is your name  
in all the earth.

Ruth C. Duck, USA

taken from *No Longer Strangers*

Conclude with shared petitions.

Response: Loving God, hear our prayer.

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## Focus

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The words "woman's role" can ignite lively and heated discussion. It doesn't seem to matter whether we are talking about "woman's role" in the family, in the society or in the church. A generally hidden part of the discussion is the fact that in talking about woman's role, we are also examining man's role. Because women and men are woven into the fabric of human life and society, one cannot change without the other being changed, and a new design being woven.

Our sense of woman's, and also man's, role has been shaped by human biology. Women are the childbearers. Men are considered the workers. Historically, this has proven to be a privilege and a burden for women. It has placed

limitations on women that men have not experienced. Men experience different privileges and restraints. Are these privileges, burdens and restraints still valid in our time?

Childbearing has also placed certain expectations on women; expectations not projected on men. For example we assume the mother is more responsible for childrearing and the quality of family life than the father. Pointing this out does not mean one is saying that women should not choose motherhood and homemaking. It simply means that women should not be primarily defined by those roles. Nor should women's opportunities to develop other talents be limited because of the expectations placed upon them.

Historically, women have been less mobile than men because of the demands of childbearing and nurturing. This limitation is as old as the beginning of the agrarian period of human history. Women were the first farmers because when they were pregnant or nursing, they could not keep up with the men who were the hunters. The women settled, farmed the land and created a stable place to which the men could return after the hunt or the battle.

This restraint on mobility continues to limit women. If they work outside the home, their work is subject to interruption by the needs of children. As a society and as a church, we still assume the mother is more responsible than the father for the day-to-day care of children. This expectation puts women — and men as well — at a disadvantage. The structures of our work world allows parents — mothers and fathers — little time to attend to the demands of parenting. (Maternity leave is considered a "disability" in most company policies.) The movie *Kramer vs. Kramer*, illustrated the problem well when it portrayed the father losing job opportunities and the chance of a promotion because he had to attend to the needs of his son.

However, as a society, we also have certain expectations of men's roles. We expect them to be mobile, to be able to leave their families, to go fight a war, or to be traveling salesmen. In the corporate world, we expect men to be able to uproot their families in pursuit of their careers. We expect, and even demand, a level of independence and autonomy of men that we cannot even imagine for women. One strange result of these differing expectations is to discover we are more outraged when a mother abandons her children than when a father does. Why?

Most women's lives are defined by relationships. More often than not, women are first identified as daughter of, sister to, wife of, mother of, widow of. Secondly, women are identified by what they do: homemaker, secretary, clerk, lawyer, etc. On the other hand, men are primarily defined by what they do: bricklayer, auto worker, painter, musician, doctor, etc. Secondly, men are identified by their relationships: father, husband, son. Neither of these approaches is adequate to express the fullness of a person's life. Women are workers as well as relational beings. Men are too. The various dimensions of both women's and men's lives need to be nurtured and supported.

In his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, Pope John Paul II speaks of the need to revalue the social role of motherhood. Do we not also need to revalue the social role of fatherhood? Is it healthy for the human family, for human society and for women and men to continue to define woman primarily through her role as wife and mother (a definition that does not fit all women) and man primarily through his work (a definition which does capture the fullness of men's lives)?

The challenge is complex. It calls us beyond our traditional categories and role expectations. It asks us to discover ways to reverence and support motherhood and fatherhood without defining a human person through those categories. It asks a full and conscious reverence for the whole life of the worker. We are not accustomed to thinking in these ways.

The question before us is: How do we construct social, political, economic systems that honor and support the relationships and the productivity of our lives? How do we ensure the relationships that are central to all human life as well as the opportunities for all persons to exercise their God-given gifts to shape a human world? How do we find ways for women and men alike to best use the variety of their gifts?

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Ref. Riley, Maria, O.P., IN GOD'S IMAGE.  
Leaven Press, P.O. Box 40292,  
Kansas City, MO 64141. Pp.31.

This is the second in a series of meditations for group study of woman's role in shaping the future of the world and the Church. Maria Riley is a staff member of the Centre of Concern.  
Washington D.C. USA.

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# FACING THE CHALLENGE OF MISSION TOGETHER

*At the 1988 Annual General Meeting of the IMU, the Keynote Address was delivered by Fr. John O'Brien CSSp. The following is part one of a two-part edited text of the paper. As well as missionary service in Sierra Leone and Pakistan, John has worked, more recently, as part of a team of priests from his Congregation, who live among and minister to lower-income families in Dublin's Fatima Mansions. Last year, he completed his doctorate in theology at the Gregorian University.*

Mission is an outflow of the love of God himself, prior to any activity of ours. Jesus is THE mission of God in the Holy Spirit. Our mission is the mission of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in us.

The Church is not something apart from mission: the Church is mission. It is not as if there is a Church, subsisting in itself, which may subsequently become involved in mission - it is because there is a mission to be accomplished, that there is a Church.

There have been different eras and epochs in the missionary tradition. The last of these is not necessarily the norm for the future. But we do need a depth of resources and of generosity in order to do a new thing as resourcefully, as generously and as faithfully as possible.

## Challenge

This provides us with a challenge. It is a challenge to leave something behind and to construct something new. It represents a Copernican revolution in our understanding of the meaning of salvation. It leads us to reflect upon the salvific significance of other world religions, to dialogue as a constituent of mission, to deepen our insertion in history and become more aware of our historical responsibility, and it calls us to carry out of task of evangelization within the great issues of today, which include poverty, AIDS, the arms race etc.

We see justice as constitutive of the preaching of the Gospel. There simply cannot be evangelization which is not constitutively a participation in the struggle for justice. This leads us to make a social analysis, a class option, and to examine the question of justice as practised within our own institutions.

What has been called "the coming of the Third Church" has arrived. We are now witnessing an end of Eurocentricity in mission, and many are engaged in reverse mission. Wherever we are, in our mission to the local church we go as equals, even as servants, and we see mission as service not as control.

This spirit of mutuality and interdependence of mission leads us to discover and value the local genius and expression of Church, not just adapting the Gospel to a culture but seeing in inculturation the task of creating the seedbed of a new expression of Church.

With the emergence of feminist consciousness within the Church, we re-examine the notion of a patriarchal God, and examine ourselves to see if we are a sign of the truth we preach.

Understanding the Church as the People of God, we recognise that the missionary vocation as such derives from Baptism, not Orders.

## Results

The result of all of this has led to a certain lessening of the missionary's identity. This is compounded by the secularization process at home. The missionary is no longer the hero or heroine in the home community, and there are fewer vocations in the traditional sense.

Added to this, we experience a degree of exhaustion and burn-out in individuals, in groups, in congregations and in the missionary movement itself. Today we have many more questions than answers. We experience the effects of wear and tear, and we suffer a sort of spiritual entropy - the energy is there, somewhere, but it seems to be unusable.

It is a time of change, of crisis, of reorientation. But, if God is God, the faithful God, then it is also a time of

hope, or conversion and of regeneration.

## Parabola

Virtually every movement - after an initial period of implementing the originating vision - reaches a period of consolidation and fruitful operation before entering a period of decline. The same is true of the modern Irish missionary movement. Crucial to arresting the decline and creating conditions for a new period of growth and expansion is a correct analysis of the nature of the decline and consequently of the required level of reorientation.

But, first, we may need to briefly remind ourselves why this situation has arisen.

One of the most striking features of Church history is that all the great missionary and spiritual renewal movements represented in a very substantial way, a response to a new socio-cultural situation. Look at the Benedictine, the Mendicant, or the Jesuit movements, and you see that each in a different way, represented a new theology, a new spirituality, and a new method of evangelization. Each was necessary because of a radically changed socio-cultural situation. Each was fruitful because it addressed that new situation in a creative evangelical way. The spiritual and missionary movement of which we, here today, are the inheritors, was once a new way of doing a new thing.

Virtually every society represented here today had as founder/founder or its significant founding group, people who saw that spirituality and missionary methods, as they existed in their day, were inadequate to a newly emerging situation. We honour their spirit less by repeating what they did than by acting in the same innovative creative risk-taking spirit.

## Different Society

One hardly needs to spell out how and why contemporary society - globally and nationally - is so fundamentally different to the shape society had

Ref. IRISH MISSIONARY  
UNION REPORT;  
Aug-Sep. 1988.  
Orwell Park,  
Dublin, 6,  
IRELAND.

when most of our societies took on the dominant structures and ethos which continue to shape their priorities and mentality.

We have experienced the post-colonial and neo-colonial trend towards a massive increase in poverty and marginalization, the control of individuals and even whole cultures by faceless structural forces, including monetary institutions.

We are aware of the loss of credibility - spiritually speaking - in western culture, which, although the most "Christian", socially speaking, is the one which benefits most from the dehumanizing structures of the world situation.

Accompanying this profound change, is an equally profound change in human consciousness. In the oppressed countries of the world, this is expressed as a desire to throw off shackles of oppression and dependency and inferiority. In this part of the world, it is expressed as a desire for the replacement of the authority of traditions and religious institutions with the authority of experience - whereby something is perceived as good only if it can be experienced as practically valuable and liberating.

It is in this context that we must analyse the level of the decline of our missionary movement.

## Doubt

Analysts distinguish technical doubt, priority doubt and ideological doubt.

At the first level, the issue is: are we doing things the right way? The second asks: are we doing things in the right situation? And the third asks: are we doing the right thing at all?

The first seeks technical solutions: more missionaries; vocations workshops; professional training; a different habit, or none; language learning; linking with other agencies - developmental, incultural, etc.

The second stresses priorities. Shall we do this or that? Where shall we send our missionaries? Will we use education or development as the medium of evangelization.

The third level is one of ethical or ideological doubt and questions our very *raison d'être*. The challenge of mis-

sion that we must face together is the challenge of this question. It is not so much a question of "how can we continue to exist?" but precisely "what is it that we wish to continue?"

## Our Response

There are at present a host of partial responses. They seem to me to reside at the technical level and avoid this fundamental ethical/ideological question. They are responses concerning development work, conscientization, literacy, the promotion of dialogue and intercultural exchange, settling to become an "expert" and working with missionaries - a new missiological variation on Shaw's "those who can do..."

The other kind of response is a retreat, with one's back turned to the future - to a new sort of neo-fundamentalism: organize the seminary, build the Church, teach the true doctrine, found our Congregation and attract new novices.

What both approaches seem to have in common is a combination of activism with an avoidance of some fundamental questions: the missionary may be involved in teaching doctrine and Church building, but if it does not lead to human liberation it is not mission. The missionary may be involved in a successful project (acceptable even to the contemporary ideology of development), but if it does not include at least implicitly or by anticipation the proclamation of the event of God in Jesus Christ, then neither is this mission.

In facing the challenge of this situation, I would like to look at seven different aspects of what this call involves: intellectual conversion, humility, weakness, a return to the Centre, option for the poor, consistency and mutuality.

## Intellectual Conversion

The first is an intellectual conversion that involves freeing our minds, that implies a genuine acceptance that mission has a different aim today, and a willingness to organise ourselves on that basis - new wine, new wineskins!

We are talking about real conversion here - not fitting new concepts or ideas into an old framework, and carrying on with a little modification. That would be a notional commitment to the new, but maintaining a real (i.e. financial, institutional and organizational) commitment to the old.

Do we, in the missionary movement, ever find ourselves paying a sort of lip service to concepts like liberation, feminism, inculturation, reverse mission? Do we even include in our Constitutions terms like "option for the poor", even developing a familiarity with this vocabulary, while all the time the real power and the real priorities remain largely unchanged, and our missiology remains unreconstructed?

## Humility

There was once a period, now long gone, when mission was popular. It had a predictable style: the missionary was a respected person both at home and abroad; there were clear goals, proven methods; there was an accompanying ideology and spirituality based on a myth-making process (I use the term in the positive sense) that had constructed the missionary in heroic proportions; most of all there was the sense of belonging to something big, powerful, respected, accepted and successful.

All things pass. How things change! Can we *welcome* the change and see it as the hand of God creating conditions for an even more authentic witness to the values of his Kingdom?

In a theological era which resists the temptation to identify the visible church with the Reign of God but sees it as the servant and the sacrament of something that is coming into reality wherever human beings are being empowered by the Spirit of God to act authentically, we are invited to be happy to be part of something vaster: the Spirit breathes where she wills - within our efforts certainly, but outside of them too!

Can we be content to play our part, knowing that in God's design, it has an irreplaceable significance in relation to the whole, but knowing too that it is not the whole and never can be? Can we accept the liberating grace that follows from this? The love of God calls forth a generous love, even a self-sacrificing love from us, but God is not limited to our efforts for He has other servants too.

If we glimpse this ultimately we may be freed from judging our own worth primarily in function of our own achievements - as if we knew by what criterion we should judge them - anyway knowing that the world is governed by a sovereign compassion more gentle and all-encompassing than our own evaluation.



EVANGELIZATION  
AND  
POPULAR RELIGIOSITY

SEDOS SEMINAR  
VILLA CAVALLETTI  
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The Seminar will focus on three areas; a right understanding of popular religiosity, a socio-cultural and religious analysis of the same, and a reflection on its place in the project of evangelization as inculturation, dialogue and liberation.

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FOR  
DIGNITY

A WOMAN'S HANDS

I sit in a pew  
Waiting.  
The Human  
Becomes Divine.  
The bread...  
Perhaps kneaded by a woman's hands.  
The wine...  
Perhaps women worked in the vinery.

But when the Human  
becomes Divine  
a woman's hands are taboo!  
"You shall not touch  
the Divine!"

The Divine became human,  
Penetrated a woman's womb.  
(Patriarchy had no place!)  
Like soft petals enfolding  
a crystal dewdrop,  
The seed nestled  
in a female form.

"You shall not touch  
the Divine!"

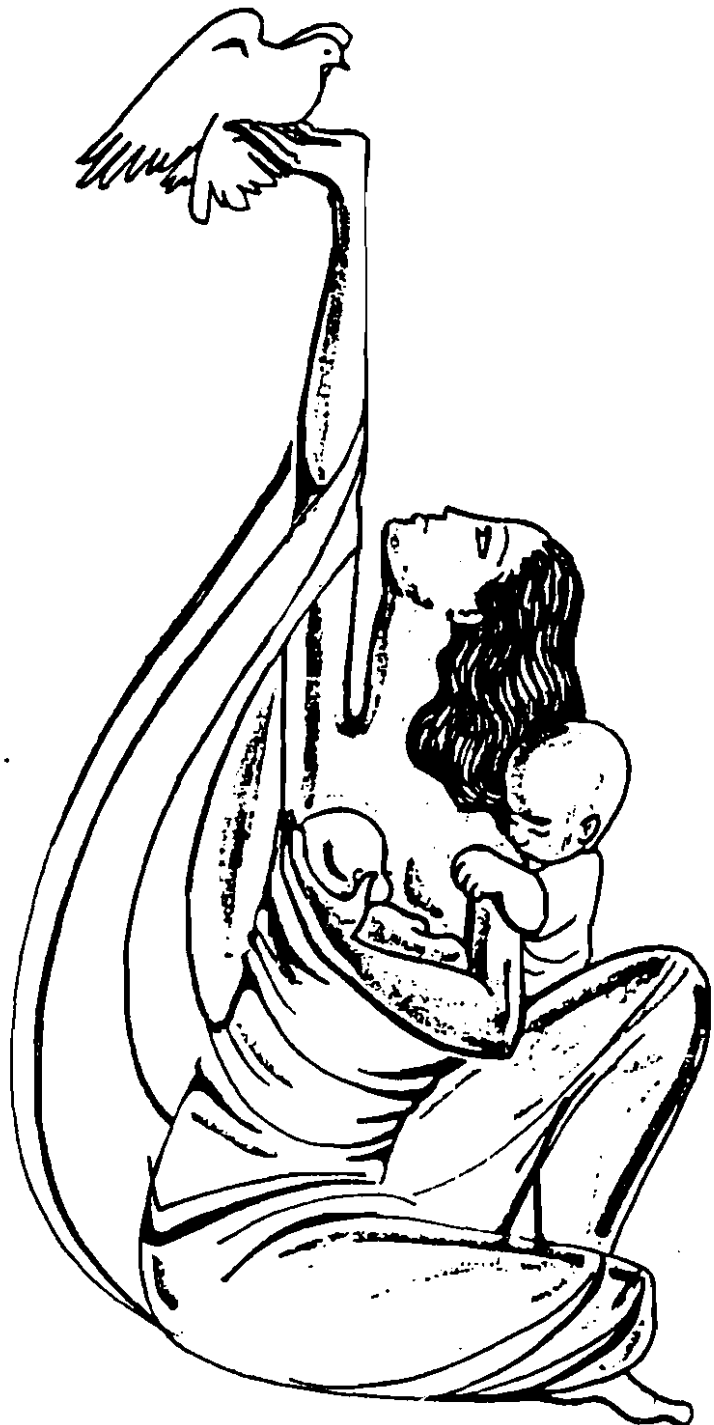
The mother's hands held the child.  
They soothed, they comforted,  
they created security.  
The hands were always there  
as surely as the setting sun  
reveals itself with every dawn.

"You shall not touch  
the Divine!"

The battered body  
taken off the cross...  
Women's hands gently  
perform burial rites.  
The crimson blood  
must surely stain those hands.  
Women's hands -  
caring hands.

"You shall not touch  
the Divine!"

I sit in a pew.  
Waiting.



By Ranjini Rebera, reprinted from In God's Image

SOUTH AFRICAN OUTLOOK, October, 1987.