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# **Partnership in Mission**

## **WOMEN AND MEN**

### **SEDOS General Assembly**

### **December '88**

SEDOS - VIA DEI VERBITI, 1 - 00154 ROMA - TEL:5471350

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## IN THIS ISSUE

There are two main sections. First - the texts of the presentations made at the morning session of the Annual General Assembly on the theme: PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION, WOMEN AND MEN.

Second - the Annual Report to the members of the General Assembly presented by the Executive Secretary and the Associate Executive Secretary at the afternoon session of the General Assembly.

There is also an edited version of an article by Felix Wilfred. It emphasizes the importance of symbols, signs, and thought patterns of a people's religious heritage - important as background for the SEDOS Seminar on EVANGELIZATION AND POPULAR RELIGIOSITY in April 1989. We call your attention also to the request for information on Videos on Basic Christian Communities. SEDOS Bulletin Indexes for 1988 are also included.

## NEWS

### NEW MEMBERS OF SEDOS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

At the SEDOS General Assembly on December 10, 1988 the following were elected to the Executive Committee on the first ballot:

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <u>PRESIDENT</u>      | - FRANCESCO PIERLI, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries.              |
| <u>VICE PRESIDENT</u> | - MARY SLAVEN, Superior General of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux. |
| <u>TREASURER</u>      | - SEAN FAGAN, Secretary General of the Society of Mary.                        |
| <u>MEMBER</u>         | - PATRICIA STOWERS - Superior General of the Marist Missionary Sisters.        |

The Assembly passed a vote of sincere thanks to the outgoing President, Helen McLaughlin, RSCJ, Giuseppina Tresoldi, SMC, Committee Member and Leonora di Stefano, MFIC, Treasurer.

### SEDOS NEW MEMBERS

The Executive Committee of SEDOS at its meeting on January 10, 1989 approved applications for membership from the following Institutes:

1. SUORE MISSIONARIE DELLA CONSOLATA, Corso G, Allamano, 137, 10095 Grugliasco (TO). Tel. 703.703
2. MISSIONARIES OF OUR LADY OF LA SALETTE (La Salette Brothers), Piazza Madonna delle Salette, 3, 00152 Roma.
3. INSTITUTUM BEATAE MARIAE VIRGINIS, (Loreto Sisters) Via Nomentana, 250, 00162 Roma. Tel. 81.80.712

### HAITI

An updating meeting took place on January 5, 1989 at SEDOS Secretariate at which there was an exchange of information on the latest developments in Haiti. The next meeting will take place on Monday February 17, at 3.30 p.m. in SEDOS Secretariate.

## COMING EVENTS

### CATHOLIC WOMEN IN TODAY'S CHURCH: COLLABORATION BETWEEN RELIGIOUS AND LAITY:

Organised by the LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS (MAJOR SUPERIORS, U.S.A.) and the THEOLOGY AND LIFE INSTITUTE. At the Jesuit Curia, Borgo S. Spirito on Thursday, January 26, 1989. 10.00 - 12.00 and 16.00 - 18.00 hrs.

## FOREWORD

Two things stand out in our memories of the Seminar session; PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION, WOMEN AND MEN.

- Sister Matilda's striking visual aids, - a colourful embroidered cushion (pillow), and a three foot high stand (pillar), purloined, no doubt, from her chapel!, both of which she moved about deftly on the speakers' rostrum as she made her presentations;

- the way in which Sister Matilda and Father Paul dovetailed their contributions, presenting us with an example of the partnership about which they were speaking to us.

There were profoundly touching moments throughout the morning, specially as the speakers explored the Old and New Testament basis for, and experience of, partnership between women and men.

The topic was so stimulating that a morning session was found to be all too short to allow the participants to join in the discussions sharing their own experiences and questions. So it was that at the afternoon business meeting the Assembly recommended that SEDOS should continue the consideration of this theme as a priority in further sessions.

This was one of the best attended General Assemblies of SEDOS. Details of the two speakers at the Seminar follow.

MATILDA HANDL, OSB, was born in Czechoslovakia and her family was deported to Germany in 1946. Matilda entered the Missionary Benedictines in 1952 in Tützing. She was sent to the U.S. to complete her formation and prepare for mission in Japan. Matilda stayed in the States and received her Masters degree in History and Education and has taught elementary through college level. She has worked in the Winnebago Indian Reservation in Northeastern Nebraska and was elected Prioress in Norfolk, Nebraska and re-elected in 1987. For six years just prior to being elected to the General Council of her congregation here in Rome she served on the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council as an Executive Member.

PAUL VAN PARIJS, CICM, was born in Belgium in 1937 and joined CICM in 1956. He studied philosophy and classical philology, theology and bible at Louvain, Lyons and Rome and then taught for two years at the major seminary of Namur, Belgium before leaving for the Philippines in 1970. Paul has been Dean and Old Testament professor at Maryhill School of Theology and also taught at the Sisters' Formation Institute and the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila until 1987. He is presently Vicar General of CICM.

## SEDOS SILVER JUBILEE

As we present this account of the final 1988 SEDOS Seminar and the ANNUAL REPORT to the SEDOS 1988 GENERAL ASSEMBLY we are happy to recall to our members and readers that 1989 marks the SILVER JUBILEE of SEDOS. (see Annual Report - Page 33).

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## PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION WOMEN AND MEN

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### I INTRODUCTION

Leading women of our day, such as Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Cory Aquino in the Philippines, Britain's "Iron Lady," Margaret Thatcher, are proving Pope John XXIII a credible prophet. Already in 1963 he listed the rise of women in society among the signs of his time.

Exploring the topic PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION, WOMEN AND MEN, I invite you to use the imagery of PILLOWS AND PILLARS OF THE CHURCH, unlikely partners as they may seem. And because the poets have not developed this image, let me share with you a few thoughts and experiences that led me to this imagery.

Some years ago an exhibit of women's art in New York City featuring lovely blankets, pillows, and other beautiful and functional items, bore the title PILLOWS OF THE CHURCH. In my few weeks in Rome I have seen many Pillars, - ancient and more recent, graceful and sturdy, intact and broken columns, reminding me that even hard and durable things can crumble. Both pillows and pillars can be either functional or ornamental, both provide support and connect, but in different ways - pillars by separating top from bottom, pillows by softening edges to allow for contact and ease; pillars more durable, pillows more flexible; pillars more visible when they function, pillows hardly visible when they function providing support...

The unique gifts of women and men, serving both as pillows and pillars as the needs of people require, are called for if the people of God is to be at home in the Church, the dwelling place and temple of the Lord among us. Women and men are needed to serve as partners and equals in the mission given us by Jesus - to go out and make disciples of all nations, uniting them in the conviction that God loves and saves and calls us; that History is alive with the presence and action of God who delights in diversity and loves what he has made; that God can heal and make whole what human sin has broken and separated.

The triune God whom Jesus made known to us and in whose image we are made wants us to work with Jesus in partnership. In the "O-Antiphon" of December 22 during this advent time, we call on Jesus as the cornerstone who makes the two into one. Father Paul and I will try to model partnership in mission as we integrate our presentations using the pillars of our expertise and the pillows of our experiences today. Father Paul will begin by sharing the fruits of his Old Testament Scripture background, the partnership of Israel with God.

(Presented by Matilda Handl).

## II. THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION

### A. OLD TESTAMENT

In presenting the topic "Partnership in Mission - Women and Men" Sister Matilda and I have chosen to start from a brief look at the contemporary scene in the Church (Pillows and Pillars) before turning to an analysis of the biblical basis for partnership in mission. In searching to establish a biblical basis for the topic "Partnership in Mission - Women and Men" there is a certain temptation in Christian circles to highlight the impressively positive attitude of Jesus towards women in the gospels by contrasting it with some of the more negative attitudes in Judaism. An example of such a negative attitude is the prayer composed by a man of the Talmudic tradition:

"Praised be God that he did not make me a Gentile. Praised be God that he did not make me a woman. Praised be God that he did not make me a fool."

It would be just as easy to turn the tables on the Christian tradition and show the superiority of the Jewish tradition here by a selective quoting of texts from the New Testament. However, I prefer to start from the positive elements in both traditions keeping in mind that Jesus, a Jew, in proclaiming His message and in living His mission brings out the best both in the Jewish tradition as well as in the Christian tradition He founded.

The Jewish Tradition: The Jewish tradition and more specifically , the Old Testament tradition, finds its roots and basic religious impulse in the Exodus experience of the people of Israel - liberation from Egypt, wanderings in the desert, Covenant as a lived reality. The Exodus shaped the destiny of the Chosen People and for us Christians, it continues in our walking with Jesus of Nazareth, in our discipleship and partnership in His mission.

Any human language or experience used to express our relationship with the living God is inadequate; so also is the Covenant language. But the Covenant language is part of our Jewish-Christian heritage and it may still be, all things considered, one of the most felicitous ways of reflecting on our call to partnership of women and men in mission.

We find the Covenant language prominently used in the book of Torah and in the prophetic literature while less overtly used in the wisdom books. The Covenant language is a central theme of the Torah: "I am your God, you are my people". The prophets are the watchdogs of this Covenant relationship in times of stress. The wisdom literature tries to implement it in everyday living.

The time allotted to our reflection today does not permit a survey of the history of the relationship between God and the people of Israel from Moses to Jesus. We must focus therefore on a limited part of the rich Old Testament tradition.



## GENESIS: THE CREATION STORY

I chose the opening chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1 to 3 to illustrate the ideas, convictions, expectations and visions that were alive among the people of Israel during the major part of their Old Testament history. A double reason has guided my choice. In the first place, Genesis 1, the Creation story, and especially Genesis 2 and Genesis 3, the Paradise story, can only be properly understood against a background of Covenant thinking, a thinking in terms of partnership between God and the people of Israel. Secondly, these chapters figure prominently in the reflection on the dignity and vocation of woman in the recently published apostolic letter of the Holy Father.

Still, it may surprise you that for our reflection on partnership in mission, women and men, we have opted to go back to the Old Testament society. It was rather notoriously patriarchal and male dominated notwithstanding some shining examples of female figures playing important roles in Israel's history. We have made our choice aware that the road is made by walking, and that the Old Testament is a great teacher showing the gradual growth of new ideas into established values and eventually into societal structures. Often the road is rough, at times even interrupted, but somehow the seed of an idea or insight develops and grows and establishes itself. Such a basic insight is the fundamental equality and dignity of human persons, male and female, covenanted in freedom and responsibility to the living God, Ruler of the universe, Father and Mother of us all. Genesis 1-3 speaks about this with an amazing force and conviction.

Empowering the Other: Genesis 1 is the younger Priestly account of Creation, well structured, systematic and clear. Its major statement about humankind is: we are created in the image and likeness of God, female and male, willed for our own sakes and called to be like God, called to act like God. Moses, the great figure in the history of Israel, was called to be like God to his brother Aaron in the Burning Bush episode; in other words he was called to empower his brother to speak responsibly and courageously for the liberation of his people. "In the image and likeness of God" has therefore to do with "empowering the other", with "gift of self" for true self-realization.

The gift and the call are addressed to men and women with equal force. It is difficult to misunderstand Genesis 1 on this point and to use it to defend a position of dominance of men over women or vice versa. Both women and men are created in the image and likeness of God and both are invited to a responsible stewardship of the earth: Partnership in a Mission.

## GENESIS: THE PARADISE STORY

The trouble starts with the paradise story, Genesis 2 and 3. It is an older and more colorful presentation of basically similar insights. Actually the Genesis 2 and 3 story deepens and clarifies Genesis 1 by going beyond the vision and by sharing insights based on the historical experience of success and failure in the pursuit of the grand vision of the opening chapter. The Genesis 2 and 3 story enriches the reflection

of Genesis 1 by stressing the steadfast love and mercy of the living God who patiently walks with humankind in their pursuit of Covenant harmony. This Covenant harmony, after much struggle with the forces of evil (represented by the serpent) must ultimately lead to equality and dignity for all and to a new heaven and a new earth where the wolf and the lamb shall graze alike and none shall hurt or destroy.

Unfortunately, the underlying historical background and the Covenant theology of an author living in the early kingdom period have been lost sight of in the course of Jewish and Christian reflection on the colorful story and this has led to interpretations that come close to contradicting the fundamental insight we started from: the equality and dignity of human persons, female and male, covenanted in freedom and responsibility to the living God, Ruler of the universe, Mother and Father of us all.

The Image of Eve: Pamela Milne in "Bible Review", Vol.IV, No.3,

June, 1988, states that there is no biblical story that has had a more profoundly negative impact on women throughout history than the story of Eve in Genesis 2 and 3. Eve is usually depicted as secondary and inferior to Adam because she was created after Adam and from Adam. She is also regularly portrayed as weak, seductive and evil - the one who causes Adam to disobey God's command.

At the same time, Eve came to be regarded not only as the mother of all living things, but as a paradigm for all women. A unique exception would be Mary, the mother of Jesus, who later became, to Christians, a paradigm in her own right for idealized womanhood. This combination of the negative image of Eve with the idea that she is the model of what it is to be a woman provided an important basis for the development of depreciatory patriarchal theologies of woman. Pamela Milne asks the question: can this story be reclaimed for women? Can feminist analysis recover it from centuries of patriarchal interpretation and make it a spiritual source for women?

My answer is: it is already done, not by feminist analysis but by contemporary exegesis and as a result it can be used as a spiritual source for both women and men. Contemporary exegesis, by a keener awareness of the historical context (early kingdom period), by a clearer insight into the underlying Covenant thinking, and by a greater sensitivity to the figurative language used as building material for the whole story, has recovered the Paradise story as a vivid illustration of the profound conviction of the author regarding the equality and dignity of human persons, male and female, covenanted in freedom and responsibility to the living God.

The Covenant Lived or the Covenant Broken: The first part of the

paradise story, Genesis 2, is the vision of what happens whenever and wherever a man and a woman live the Covenant with the living God, whenever and wherever they walk before God, naked and not ashamed, accepting the "givenness" of their lives and responding to the call of responsible stewardship. What happens is that they live in Paradise: The garden, the river, the abundant fruits are all images of blessing and happiness and this picture is crowned by the ultimate image of human blessedness and happiness: the partnership of a



woman and a man, accepting to walk before God, naked yet not ashamed. Their relationship with the living God is the source of their strength and their joy.

The second part of the story, Genesis 3, is the reversal, the other side of the coin. It is the vision of what happens whenever and wherever the Covenant relationship with the living God is broken. What happens is that man and woman live in Hell. And hell is most visible and most deeply felt in what used to be the foremost image of blessing and happiness: man and a woman walking together before the living God. Broken partnership with the living God leads to hell on earth and it makes mission difficult. Hence, the images of bringing forth new life in pain and cultivating the soil in sweat. What used to be a joy and a glory becomes a painful burden.

Genesis 2 is all positive, Genesis 3 is all negative. The stories are premised on fidelity to the Covenant with the living God or on a broken Covenant. The relationship, the partnership between a woman and a man has potential for heaven and for hell. We can choose. But in none of the images used is there any statement about the superiority or the inferiority of one of the human partners. They are either equally good or equally bad. And when they walk together "in the fear of the Lord", they are irresistible.

Doing Theology Together: How is it that such a positive and rich statement about the human partners has been so often interpreted both by Jews and Christians in such a depreciatory way for the woman? I think that one fundamental reason for such a development has to be sought in the fact that in the course of our Jewish, and our Christian tradition too, we, men and women, have not done theology together, we have not walked together, we have not ministered together. Or maybe it is fairer to say that men theologians and men Church leaders have lived too much of their daily lives separated from half of the human family and of the community of people at large. A Jewish rabbi wrote: "The Shekinah (the presence or glory of God) cannot dwell where male and female do not dwell together". We may have forgotten for too long the wisdom of partnership in mission.

(Presented by Paul Van Parijs)

## B. NEW TESTAMENT

I agree with Paul. We may have forgotten the wisdom and the importance of partnership in mission even while we were working well as partners. This was brought home to me forcibly last week as I checked out some articles on our East African missions in the Dizionario degli istituti di perfezione (1973). They were written by brethren and friends of our Congregation with whom we sisters have served for over a century. Hundreds of our sisters worked in partnership with the Benedictines of St. Ottilien. Pillars and pillows of the mission we co-operated in trying to build up the now flourishing churches of Tanzania. Together we braved the unknown, the dangers, tropical illnesses, early and sudden death. Even to this day we are spreading the Gospel as partners. But as I read those articles I was shocked to discover that they did not even

mention the Missionary Benedictine Sisters! The Germans have a descriptive word for it: "totgeschwiegen," - killed, obliterated, by silence... Innocent readers of later ages would never guess from their writings that women and men had worked as partners in that mission.

### JESUS' EXAMPLE

How remarkable then, that accounts of women's role in the life of Jesus and in the early Church have survived at all in the New Testament! Considering that the Gospels were recorded, collected, edited, decades after Jesus' time, by men in a patriarchal culture, how profoundly Jesus must have affected his partners and disciples, even shocked them by his utter freedom from the patriarchal taboos of his time against women and by his valuing women and men alike, treating them as equals. Let us take a brief look at some Gospel passages.

#### Jesus accepted both women and men as disciples and apostles:

- Mary of Bethany "sitting at Jesus' feet", "having chosen the better part" -- the terms used for enrolling as disciples of a rabbi and for becoming an adult Jew;
- all four Gospels relating that the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee stood by the cross;
- Mary Magdalen as the witness of his resurrection to the male apostles who were in hiding on Easter morning.

#### Jesus enjoyed the company of both women and men:

- he engaged both in theological dialogue (Nicodemus; the unnamed Samaritan woman at the well who was told of Jesus' messiahship and became an apostle to her townspeople);
- he spoke with women in public, obviously enjoying the quick-witted Phoenician mother and conceding she had made her point by healing her daughter.

#### Jesus related with freedom and compassion to the women he met:

- even to those who were ritually or morally "unclean";
- those oppressed by illness and social injustice;
- he accepted service from women, material support, loyalty to death, and messianic anointing (Mark 14:9).

#### Jesus freely used feminine imagery in his teaching:

- comparing God to a homemaker, himself to a mother-hen;
- he manifested a sensitivity and gentleness but also a fearlessness that his disciples could neither forget nor neglect to record;
- he lived the new relationship of equals in the new family of God which he himself proclaimed in Mark 3:31-35;
- he looked around at those sitting in a circle about him (no hierarchy, but equals) and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother";
- there is not one word or action of Jesus recorded in the Gospels,

which hints at inferiority of women in relation to men, evidently because there were not any to record.

Jesus' integral personality:

- this freedom of Jesus to embody in himself the full human response of an integral personality in God's image served also as the pattern of relating among his first disciples. All of them received his Spirit and went out in pairs as Jesus himself had sent them, to bear witness to him and to continue his ministry of bringing the good news of God's love for all people to all people. Jesus' life and example were the pillars of the early Church.

EARLY MISSIONARY CHURCH PARTNERS

Jesus wrote nothing but entrusted his disciples with the message to be spoken: they went out, pillars and pillows to fit the situations they encountered. They went out in pairs and they supported and encouraged each other in building up the Church. Few, but eloquent indications of these early missionary partners are preserved in the New Testament. They are lovingly studied by Scripture scholars but we can only guess at the thousands of others who, traveling together and afire with Jesus' love and spirit, spread the Good News to amazing distances.

a) PRISCA or (PRISCILLA) and her husband Aquila are mentioned three times in the greeting sections of the epistles (Rom. 16:3-5, 1 Cor. 16:19, 2 Timothy 4:19) and three times in Acts 18. In four of the six passages, Priscilla is named first, which is unusual for the times and shows her as possibly the more prominent or zealous of the pair. Perhaps Aquila made the tents and Priscilla did the teaching. This couple may have been among the Jews from Pontus mentioned in Acts 2, since Aquila hailed from there, and was therefore Christian since Pentecost. They preceded Paul as missionaries and gathered believers in their home at Rome, and at Corinth and Ephesus. They were mobile, but also more stable than Paul, risking their lives for him, and his life-long friends, yet quite independent of him. Priscilla instructed the famous preacher Apollos, - a full-time apostle and well-known among the believers of different churches.

b) ANDRONICUS and JUNIA are mentioned only once, in Romans 16:7, where Paul greets so many other missionary pairs. They are called Jews and fellow prisoners of Paul, "outstanding apostles", who became Christians before him. They were possibly among the 500 disciples who had seen the risen Jesus in Galilee as Paul carefully guarded the title of apostle for those who had seen the risen Jesus. Junia is the only woman in the New Testament who is explicitly called an apostle. (Rhabanus Maurus termed Mary Magdalen "apostola apostolorum" for proclaiming Jesus risen). Since about the year 1300 her name has been rendered masculine in translations (also by Luther), though Junia was a common woman's name and not a man's. We know nothing about the imprisonment of Andronicus and Junia with Paul and nothing of their work. We can only guess from Paul's tone of love and admiration what "outstanding apostles" they must have been.

c) PHOEBE is commended to the community in Romans 16:1-3 as "our sister, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae," the port city of Corinth, (the masculine "diakonos" denoting the office). Paul asks the Roman community to "give her, in the Lord, a welcome worthy of saints, and to help her with anything she needs, for she has helped a great many people, including myself". When Paul wrote to the Romans, church offices were fluid, still evolving, and obviously held by women as well as by men.

Paul knew an amazing number of Christians in Rome by name, 8 of the 25 being women. We can surmise that Phoebe, not of Jewish origin to judge by her name, was an influential lady, prominent for her service to the faith. She was not an assistant to Paul, but a missionary and leader (perhaps single or widowed) who used her means and influence for the church, helping itinerant missionaries like Paul, (anyone obtaining visas for missionaries today would appreciate her!) - a true pillar and pillow of the early Church. We will remember her in our final prayer at the end of today's session as we contemplate the picture of the woman supporting the pillar of the Church.

d) LYDIA, an independent businesswoman, was a cloth merchant from Asia Minor (probably having a different name, as Lydia indicates her origin), who was converted by Paul's preaching in Philippi. She was a prominent "god-fearer", not yet a convert to Judaism, (perhaps not ready yet for keeping the details of the Law?), but familiar with the Lord and open to the Gospel. She provided support for him and the other believers. Exegetes wonder whether she might have been either Evodia or Syntyche, the two women with whom Paul in Philippians 4 pleaded so earnestly "to be of one mind in the Lord", and who with Paul had "fought for the Gospel", possibly by speaking. The disagreement of the two women, if over issues in ministry, must have been hurting the Church to make Paul so concerned.

Other Missionary Partners too "toiled for the Lord" or who gathered the believers in their house churches: MARY, TRYPHAENA and TRYPHOSA, PERSIS, NYMPHA, APPHIA, PHILOLOGUS and JULIA, NEREUS and his sister CHLOE, and MARY the mother of JOHN MARK... Their very listing occurs in relation to others, -, pillows and also pillars of the faith!

### III SOME HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION

#### SUPPRESSION AND BETRAYAL OF PARTNERSHIP

What happened since the first generation of missionary partners lived as equals proclaiming that for all those baptized in Christ, "there are no more barriers between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27-29)?

Women and slaves claiming their new freedom and their equality in Christ was a revolutionary development in the patriarchal culture of the first Christian century. There must have been considerable tension and strain for the new Christians in non-Christian households. Church

leaders would have begun to urge loving accommodation to the patriarchal culture for the sake of peace and order, perhaps also to lessen persecutions. First Paul, then the writers of the later pastoral epistles, and finally Luke in the Gospel and in Acts, tried to defend the Christians and to show them as law-abiding and submissive citizens. Good order and propriety were valued more highly than freedom and equality as the Church grew and developed the structures of government. The Christian communities became both victims and carriers of a patriarchy whose fundamental organizing values were separation and division. To create and maintain order, there was ranking, judgment as to comparative worth, separation, exclusion, even domination and suppression of values that are different - thus the devaluing of women and nature.

Men and women prophets spoke in the spirit of Jesus in the first generation and spread the Gospel in partnership. Then revelation was declared to have ceased with the death of the apostles. The written words and teachings of Jesus were codified and fixed in the canon of Scripture. Teaching authority, in the Spirit, was institutionalized in the bishops. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, Christ's rule over the earth became identified with the new Christian emperor and society. God came to be seen as male, and male as normative. Would Jesus recognise his now hierarchical, patriarchal Church?

Twenty-five years ago, Cardinal Suenens looked around at the 2600 Catholic bishops gathered for the Second Vatican Council and asked, "Where is the other half of humanity?" Where indeed?

The bishops of the United States, witnessing a quiet, but massive exodus of women from the Church published the first draft of their pastoral letter, Partners in the Mystery of Redemption, earlier this year. The pastoral names sexism as a sin. In the section Our (American) Heritage it seeks solutions for the oppression of women in society and the church. But many women consider our heritage to be a part of the problem.

Fr. Paul mentioned earlier, and the U.S. bishops' pastoral admits in the understatement of the document:

"over the centuries, even leading theologians and influential pastors (pillars such as Jerome, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas who shaped the future thinkers and pastors) have interpreted the Scriptures as teaching that women in some respects are naturally inferior to men, weaker in the face of temptation, and as such subject to male domination".

For all their merits in other respects, such pillars of the Catholic tradition have forsaken our Gospel heritage of freedom and equality in Christ and have patriarchalized both the Gospel and Christology.

#### FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Monastic Experiences. There have been feminist movements which aimed at equality in Christ throughout Church history.

Though women came to be considered inferior, no longer equal partners, and though they were marginalized and deprived of a share in the

official ministries, there are still glimpses of partnership realized.

Monastic women, for example, enjoyed considerable personal freedom and a measure of equality. Saints like LIOBA, THEKLA, and WALBURGA and other Anglo-Saxon missionary Benedictines of the eighth century were renowned for their learning of the Scripture and their prudence in counsel which was sought by both bishops and emperors. They worked as partners of St. Boniface in consolidating the faith in Germany. Abbesses governed double monasteries of men and women in England, Germany, and other European countries. St. Walburga was the abbess of such a monastery in Heidenheim (home of the heathens) in the diocese of Eichstätt, where I grew up.

Benedictine Experiences. Missionary Benedictine partners of the early Middle Ages inspired Fr. Andreas Amrhein when he founded the St. Ottilien and Tützing Missionary Benedictines in the last century. Requesting approval for his plans from Pope Leo XIII, Fr. Amrhein listed the need for women missionaries to win souls by works of mercy and healing. He envisaged priests, brothers, and sisters working together as partners, heeding one another's views and respecting each other in the spirit of St. Benedict. Since the first team of priests, sisters and brothers went out to East Africa in 1887, they have been together, pillows and pillars of the local church in Africa and other continents.

Benedictine women pioneers in the United States experienced domination rather than true partnership from zealous, but heavy-handed leaders who oppressed the sisters and interfered in the sisters' community affairs.

Women and also men called to the different charism of apostolic forms of life, often fared much worse. Many were coerced into a monastic mold when seeking Church approbation for their communities. Vatican II brought new respect and freedom for religious communities enabling them to recover the charism of their founders. Contemporary feminism has been an impetus to such renewal.

### CONTEMPORARY FEMINISM

Rosemary Ruether in her book Sexism and God-Talk, describes three basic forms of feminism:

Eschatological feminism was a counter-cultural movement of the first two Christian centuries. Strongly mystical and ascetical, it saw in Jesus the new androgynous Adam. It aimed at equality in the final age (and therefore, in the Church), without attempting to change the patriarchal structures of society.

Liberal feminism rejected the equating of nature and creation with patriarchal structures; it holds that men and women were created equal and that the fall into injustice distorted society. This situation needs to be changed by revolution; Marxist feminism is derived from this thinking.

Romantic feminism sees women and men as complementary opposites and ascribes to women deeper spirituality, intuition, altruism, refinement of feelings and moral (sexual) purity. This is developed in Mariology. It nearly inverts the patriarchal mindframe and holds that men need a pure and good home and the wife and mother who provide it as a counter balance to dealing with a sinful world of power and selfishness. It extols the virtue of self-sacrifice but blocks women from true equality and participation in improving the structures of society. You may recognize this language of "women's nature" (is it really different from men's?) in official church documents.

Contemporary feminism is heir to both the liberal and romantic types of feminism, seeking the truth in a synthesis of thought. The goals of wholeness for both men and women, of bonding and strengthening society by accepting and treasuring diversity, of creating a just and peaceful world by alternative structures, seem remarkably Gospel-like. They are akin to Pope Paul VI's ... "to affect, and as it were, upset, through the power of the Gospel, humankind's criteria of judgment and determining values." (Evangelization in the Modern World). The Catholic Church itself needs the power of the Gospel to renew its traditions and structures, for true partnership in mission is not yet a reality and the effectiveness of evangelists is diminished by it.

(Presented by Matilda Handl).

#### IV. EXPERIENCES OF FAILURE IN PARTNERSHIP

I would like to share with you now some failures in partnership. Later I will share the experience of successes - the signs of hope in many of our lives today.

My first experience of our Church denying partnership came early in my life. I knew by heart the Latin Mass responses for altar servers, and I helped my own boy friends master such intricacies as the SUSCIPIAT in order to pass their tests as acolytes! But then I was excluded from serving because I was a girl. I was serviceable as a pillow to others, discarded when the end was gained! I have felt a similar sadness and disappointment when women and laymen who serve as ministers of Holy Communion are not considered "equal enough", and are excluded even from well-planned liturgies for hundreds of women religious, if ordained male clergy are present, after these same men and women had been asked to help give Communion!

New Forms of Ministry? Being prioress for the past six years, I "heard many confessions," as one sister put it with a tear on her cheek and a twinkle in her eye. I longed to give not only my personal and communal sign of forgiveness and healing, but sacramental absolution as well, wishing I could spare the penitent the repeating of her "story" to a male stranger who was also an ordained priest. In 1978 about 1600 Benedictine women of the United States and Mexico were surveyed. Though only about 15% of them felt a strong personal desire for priestly ordination (as it was ten years ago...), more than half indicated they hoped women, in the healing and pastoral services of the



Church, could receive authorization for sacramental forgiveness and anointing.

An "Extreme" Example? Sisters of my community experienced an extreme, though by no means unique, form of denial, even betrayal of partnership in mission. The sisters had served the Indian people of two adjoining reservations in the central United States for twenty-five years, - teaching young and old, providing 24-hour care for homeless children, visiting families (which "The MISSIONARY", as the priest-director of the Mission styled himself, never did), ministering to the sick, encouraging, in the people, self-respect and love for their Indian heritage, promoting bonding within the parish which included two Indian tribes and also white people. "The MISSIONARY" was a pillar of the Church in more ways than one, a great builder of brick and mortar and a fund-raiser.

Parishioners and staff noted his progressive withdrawal from personal ministry and other signs of the illness which many members of his flock themselves knew so well--alcoholism. He failed to renew the agreement with the sisters community, heaped more and more work on them and reduced their authority to make decisions. Conditions finally became so unhealthy and intolerable that the young assistant pastor and the six sisters found their very lives threatened and were forced to leave. The bishops of the diocese had been kept informed of what was happening but failed to intervene.

Immediately following their departure the "faithless and disobedient sisters" were featured in each monthly issue of the mission publication and liberally blamed for the virtual collapse of the mission. The "MISSIONARY" was allowed to stay on another three years, fragmenting and dispersing the people before he retired to another State. His successor softened my heart by pleading for the sisters' return, as did the Indian people and the pastors of the other Christian churches of the area. The sisters did so gladly, realizing that mission work was possible in partnership.

Doctors and Mystics Only two great women mystics and teachers of the spiritual life have been declared doctors, official teachers and pillars, of the Church, and only since Vatican II. The Church is poorer as the lives and teaching of so many other great women are only gradually becoming known. They are the missing pillars of the Church, and also missing pillows, for their different ways of walking with God might have eased and gentled the development of the Church's present structures and ways of dealing with the faithful.

Invisible "Pillows." Lay women and sisters were and are readily accepted as generous and cheap workers in the Church, but they are not often welcome to give their views or to participate in decision-making. The traditional advice to the laity of the United States to "pray, pay, and obey" was doubly applicable to women. Their selfless service was often taken for granted, even exploited, until disagreements arose. Sisters and capable laity working with pastors are still likely to be "fired" when tensions occur. They are the nearly invisible pillows of the Church, sat upon, even stepped or stomped on.

Sisters directing schools, teaching in seminaries (when permitted!), healing as doctors, administering hospitals, initiating native religious communities, bear heavy responsibility as pillars of the

local churches. Yet they are often (inadvertently perhaps?) omitted from newsletters, official reports, publications. The bishop who signs the request to Propaganda Fide or another agency for a project is likely to be listed as the manager, leader, founder, while the partners who did the planning, who accompanied the new venture and consolidated it, are forgotten.

Money, Property and Power Patriarchal structures in the Catholic Church seem to inculcate an attitude of feudal overlordship rather than a spirit of Christ-like service in some members of the hierarchy. One of our sister administrators in a missionary situation in Africa, faced with interruption of the construction of a much-needed hospital wing because the local bishop insisted that his palace be built first, was actually told, "Now it is our turn to be the lords!" No pillows for the suffering People of God until the new pillars of the Church were built to ensure separation from the lowly...!

Ownership of property and the financial power of the hierarchy or the male branches of missionary Congregations can indeed provide security for women religious and may work out well. But when personalities or views of ministry differ, or when sisters are no longer able to work after 50 or more years on mission, needed projects may not be funded, and sisters may be told that they are now a burden. The bottom line is that partnership in mission is still unequal in many places and the People of God are the poorer for it.

Partnership and Presence. Despite lively new missionary impulses and an impressive numerical growth of the Catholic Church during the past century, Walter Bühlmann in his 1977 book 'The Coming of the Third Church' projected that by the year 2000, if the demographers' figures remain constant, Catholics will constitute only about 8% of the world's population. Perhaps Jesus used the parable of the mustard seed and of the leaven to call us ever again to empowering relations, - the gentle, often hidden influence of the Gospel from within, and to being servants and catalysts rather than the dominant religion or a power in society. The signs of our time remind us to be credible witnesses, integral persons, and equal partners in mission if we want to be faithful to Jesus' mandate to make disciples of all nations.

Faithfulness to Jesus' life and mission will require the gifts of both women and men, working together, to bring together what sinful patriarchal structures have divided and broken. The women of the Church have gifts of bonding to contribute. They desire neither to be patronized nor pedestaled - pillows look silly on pillars! - neither to dominate nor to be oppressed, but to be treated as equal partners, as the image of God together with men. As a result of centuries of viewing situations from the margin, from the periphery where they have been kept for so long, they now have a fresh, prophetic outlook to offer.

Solidarity. Pope John Paul II in Sollicitudo Rei Socialis calls for the collaboration of all, men and women, Catholics and other Christians, for the integral development of humanity. He extols SOLIDARITY as a Christian virtue, a path to peace and development; it helps us to regard others as persons, not as means to be used and then abandoned, but as equals sharing in the feast of life in God's house.

(32, 39). I will share some positive personal examples of how this is being done and what new ways of ministry will develop as we try to be faithful to Jesus' mission.

But first we will consider what type of formation future pillars and pillars of the Church will need to serve as true partners in mission. Father Paul will speak of his experience and vision of this formation process.

(Presented by Matilda Handl).

## V. FORMATION FOR PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION

In my first intervention I proposed the biblical Covenant idea as a useful vehicle for reflection on Partnership in Mission. In March 1985, Pope John Paul II made the following statement in a discourse in the Netherlands:

"For Christians and for all who believe in a Covenant, that is, in an unbreakable bond between God and all human beings, no form of discrimination - in law or in fact - on the basis of race, origins, sex, or religion can ever be acceptable."

Forms of discrimination have to be challenged therefore in the matter of Partnership of women and men in Mission. Ways have to be explored to bring the lived reality closer to the vision of the Scriptures.

Most of my life, I have worked in formation work and training. I have been engaged in seminary teaching, sisters' formation work, the training of catechists and lay leaders, and ongoing formation of priests and religious. I have been a Scripture professor but also an organizer and administrator of a theological school. My experience has been mainly in the Philippines.

### TWO OBSERVATIONS

1. Upon my arrival in the Philippines in 1970 I was struck by the rich potential of the women for ministry. I noticed plenty of talent and willingness to participate. Most of the lay leaders, catechists and teachers, were and still are women. There is a large and growing number of women religious in these roles as well.

2. However, I found that very few theologians or scripture professors were women. Not many superiors of women religious were eager to give talented sisters a prolonged training in theology to a Master or Doctorate level. Short courses and week-end seminars were eagerly followed for immediate short-range purposes but rarely anything beyond that.

I also found many Sisters were servants of the priests and also working in seminaries (kitchen, laundry, reception, secretarial work). This is not something negative in itself but it often creates a distorted picture of the potential role of women religious in a common mission. As a reaction to this, I often noticed that more progressive groups of women would step into leadership roles and even into training

tasks without proper theological preparation and with a kind of vengeance, producing instant and very vocal "specialists".

### PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND A VISION OF THE FUTURE

Elaborating on the Jewish prayer I quoted during my first intervention I would like to add: "Praised be God that God did not make me an only child but put me in a family with 6 brothers and 6 sisters!" I received a lot from all of them both male and female. And I am convinced that the large family context with its give and take and its intimate relationships is a good preparation for partnership in mission in an atmosphere of mutual respect and healthy non-exclusive friendship. Much can be said in favor of an open co-educational school system to prepare for a common mission later in life.

I also consider myself fortunate that as a young religious, after a traditional novitiate in holy isolation from the world, I was able to continue my formation in the co-educational environment of a university. I learned that, in as much as my own life option was clear and publically acknowledged, relating to my female co-students was easy, pleasant and enriching. I share these more personal experiences because somehow they must have influenced my later convictions as a formator.

An Open Environment: I believe that, in seminary training, an open environment with the presence of women both on the staff and as fellow-students is a very positive asset in the maturation process of men religious and seminarians. It prepares them for workable and meaningful partnerships in pastoral work. Whether the same experience is true for women religious is for them to say.

Structural Changes: In order to give structural expression to such a conviction, a number of obstacles had to be overcome in the Philippine setting. Introducing women staff members into the theology faculty of the diocesan seminary was, and still remains difficult. It is frowned upon by some members of the hierarchy. The same problem exists in having sisters or lay people, especially lay women, join as students. It also remains difficult to convince some superiors of women religious that serious theological studies are not dangerous for their sisters.

Training Pastoral Workers: As a rule, the training of pastoral workers on the parish level in the Philippines involves problems different from those in the seminaries. The problem at the parish level would be insufficient participation of men or the overwhelming number of women. I know of several of my confreres in parish work who, in principle, always start their leadership training with men to avoid being supported exclusively by women in all their major activities. The point at issue therefore, is leadership in ministry as true partnership - and not the role or function of a helper in ministry.

A School of Theology: From 1970 to 1987 I participated in the gradual development of a training programme for the ministry offered to both women and men. The religious groups took the lead. A major step forward was the setting up of a school of theology recognized

by the government. It had no board-and-lodging facilities as in the traditional seminary. This school functions as an academic training centre for a wide variety of religious houses of women as well as of men.

My own experience at Maryhill School of Theology has taught me that this formula eases the way for more participation by lay persons, especially women at all levels, staff, students and other personnel. The addition of an evening programme and a summer programme intensified the presence of women. There are now two women religious having doctorates on the staff. There is also a good and steady number of Sisters and lay people who teach religion who are attending the M.A. programme.

### CONCLUSION

In my experience the women staff members and students have a positive influence on the seminarians and young men religious who attend the school. At the Sisters Formation Institute a similar effort to bring women and men together at the formation stage is being tried. The problem of finding qualified women for the staff is gradually being overcome but it remains difficult to convince religious superiors of women to send candidates for a protracted Ph.D education. Many superiors find the M.A. level more than enough.

(Presented by Paul Van Parijs).

## **VI. POSITIVE EXPERIENCES OF PARTNERSHIP**

### **NEW WAYS IN MINISTRY.**

The recent pastoral letter of the U.S. Bishops, Partners in the Mystery of Redemption, acknowledges that sexism is sinful, just as are racism, militarism, and economic oppression. Conversion of the heart is required but also, change of sinful patriarchal structures. The document calls men to be partners with women in the responsibilities of sexuality, procreation, and parenting; it invites insights of women theologians, spiritual directors and experts in human sexuality (though the writers of the document failed to use available works by women!). It recommends that the admission of women to the order of deacon be studied, acknowledging that Inter Insigniores, the 1976 declaration on the ordination of women priests, does not contain arguments that convince many people.

Patriarchy as a way of life is losing ground but it will not be overcome by words. I wish to add now some experiences and examples of partnership in mission - signs of hope.

Major U.S. Bishops' Pastorals. The very process by which the last three major pastorals of the U.S. bishops were written - on peace, a just economy, and women, is inclusive and relational, with grassroots input during the drafting stages. It demonstrates a growing respect for the views of the laity, women

included, and a sense of partnership and servanthood in the official pillars of today's Church.

Number 212 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law may not be universally familiar, but it is being implemented:

"The faithful, according to their knowledge, competence and exalted position as baptized persons have the right and sometimes the duty to give their views regarding the Church's welfare to their pastors and to the other faithful..."

This might mean the pillows of sincere and respectful dialogue will replace harsh silencing of the faithful, theologians and others. Catholics who addressed Pope John Paul II during his 1987 visit in the U.S. received a readier hearing than Sr. Theresa Kane got some years ago when she dared to speak her concerns openly and respectfully. Perhaps it will be less common for the Holy Spirit to breathe new life and ideas into the Church through the anomaly of people avidly reading the works of theologians whose writings are being questioned.

A Pastoral Council. The People of God in the Archdiocese of Omaha, Nebraska, in the midwestern USA have been listened to for the past 15 years to by their leaders and have participated in setting directions for the Church's course. The Omaha Archdiocesan Pastoral Council comprises over 400 Catholics coming from every parish and ministry. They gather on the parish, deanery, and diocesan level. People said that a group of this size would be unwieldy, that it could not be done, but the creativity and skill of persons working as partners, and being supported by the Archbishop resulted in an inclusive process. Joyful faith celebrations have marked the biennial assemblies. The ongoing programmes initiated by the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council are monitored by the executive committee. Priorities for action were the renewal of family life, social justice, the pastoral care of Hispanics, youth ministry, rural life, and others.

When evangelization was first chosen as a priority many Catholics had to learn how to say and understand the word! Then they began to seek out their unchurched neighbours and people alienated from the Church and to invite their participation. The Pillows and Pillars of the Church are functioning well together in Omaha.

Deacons. During the past six years, the number of permanent deacons in the U.S.A. has doubled to about 8000. They are developing new forms of partnership since their spouses receive spiritual training. Thus they can support each other. Are they not like the pairs greeted in Paul's letters? Perhaps not yet, but they are moving in that direction.

Team Work in Pastoral Ministry is increasing and involving women and men, laity and clergy. My sisters serve as teams in small communities with pastors in the U.S.A., Korea, Brazil, the Philippines, and in several African countries. They instruct converts for baptism, consolidate the faith of the people by Bible studies, encourage consciousness-raising among oppressed workers, women, the imprisoned. They also minister to people in priestless parishes and they foster basic Christian communities in which men and women freely share their gifts of the Spirit and their living of the Gospel in love.

One pastor in the Appalachian Mountains of eastern Kentucky requires as a qualification for Sisters on his pastoral teams that they are both able and willing to challenge their pastor! It is a new spirit of partnership and it is transforming the priestly ministry itself.

Impact of Women on Ministries. Sandra Schneiders in her book New Wineskins describes the impact of women on ministries because of their being unfettered by official 'ordained' administration. I have seen it happen. Sisters who staffed hospitals and nursing homes and who are no longer sufficiently numerous to serve as a labor force, have initiated comprehensive pastoral-care programmes, working as partners with priest chaplains. Perfunctory sacramentalizing of the faithful gave way gradually to gentle, considerate conveying of Jesus' love. The families of patients, especially receptive during times of crisis, have experienced new Gospel awareness. Employees, who may at first have applied for work because of the salary alone, are oriented to Christ-like service. I see such ministry as the leavening of society by men and women being both the pillows and pillars of the Church, true partners in mission.

Funding Formation of Women. Two months ago a Catholic service organisation offered to fund formation of young women in my community. Traditionally the Knights of Columbus had provided stipends for seminarians. Now they seem ready to support women as partners in mission for a fuller service to the Church of the future. This practical help was timely as several of our novices had student loans before they joined us and had to repay these before they could enter the novitiate. Perhaps one day the Catholic Church might even pioneer equal pay for equal work? There is much harshness and hurt in the world and it will always cry for the pillows of volunteer service to the broken-hearted. But this does not free us from the duty of striving for just salaries when the resources are at hand, - setting up the pillars of just structures.

Retreats/Renewal Sessions: Other areas in which women and men fulfill Jesus' mission as partners are the spiritual renewal and retreat movements; marriage preparation by teams that include couples, clergy and religious; liturgy planning and celebrations; youth and social influence ministries.

### CONCLUSION

The urgent needs and problems of humanity in our day are interrelated and cry out for the living of the full Gospel:

- working for change from within;
- supporting one another, women and men, to provide the pillars of loving relationships and practical charity;
- reshaping the pillars and structures of our society for universal justice, freedom, and peace;
- working, not only with one another, but with our environment;
- becoming like Jesus, who "did not cling to equality with God, but became our servant, obediently accepting even death on the cross" (Phil. 2:6-8).

(Presented by Matilda Handl).



## SOURCES

(Note: Preparing my presentation has been a true collaborative effort in partnership with many persons whose expertise and experience were available to me these past few weeks. Credit is due to far more persons than are listed below, for ideas I have read and heard and have used as freely as St. Benedict used Scripture in his Rule, much from memory, as not all sources were available to me for precise quotes and citation.)

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## THE PILLAR-BEARER

Look at the picture in silence --

1. I hope you all recognize what this picture shows:

A woman who carries a pillar;  
 a woman who carries a pillar on her back;  
 a pillar on which the vault of the cathedral rests.  
 A woman who carries the vault of the cathedral,  
 a woman who carries the Church!

The burden is heavy.

Deeply bent, the woman carries the mighty burden  
 on her back and on the nape of her neck.

She must support her arms on her hips.

But in spite of the almost crushing weight on her back  
 we see a gentle smile on the face of the woman.

Her eyes are turned inward.

She does not see the magnificent capital high up in the vault-net.

But she knows of the deeper connections.

She knows of the connections of below and above,  
 of having-to-start and being-able-to-wait.

Very carefully she places one foot before the other.

2. What way does this woman walk?

She goes the way which, as Paul says,  
 surpasses all other ways:

the way of selfless love,

the way which Paul describes in the 13th chapter of the First Letter  
 to the Corinthians:

"Love is patient,

love is kind.

Love is never envious,

love is not pretentious,

and is not puffed up.

Love is never rude

and does not seek its own advantage,

is not provoked to anger,

and is not resentful.

Love bears with all things,

believes all things,

hopes all things,

endures all things." (1 Cor. 13, 4-5.7)

3. Who is this woman?

One who has understood the way of Jesus.

"The Son of Man did not come

to be served, but to serve." (Mk. 10, 45)

She does not aspire to the places to the right and to the left  
 in the Kingdom of God.

With Jesus, she stands in the lowest, the last place.

Fully "diákonos", fully servant, handmaid!

- the first official title handed down to us in the New Testament.

Who is this woman?

Phoebe! Phoebe - deacon of Cenchreae.

Phoebe - who bears up the church of Cenchreae.

Who is this woman?

One of the many, numberless, nameless ones

who carry the burden of the Church - unseen - through the centuries.

"One should bear the other's burden,  
so you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Who is this woman?

You and I!

We all carry the Church part of the way,  
in the place where we stand.

The Church depends on us, each one counts,  
otherwise the vault breaks down.

4. Why does the woman not break down under her burden?

Why can she still smile under this burden?

Whence does she derive her strength?

The woman's strength-to-carry does not rest  
in the biological factors of her body.

The woman does not get her strength from herself,

She derives her strength from a deeper source:

"Come to me, all you who labor  
and carry heavy burdens.

I shall give you rest.

Take my yoke upon yourselves and learn from me;

for my yoke is not hard and my burden is light." (Mt. 11, 28-30)

"Our strength lies in keeping still and in trust!"

(Meditation developed by Sr. Maria Leo Susenburger, OSB, for International Encounter and Renewal programme of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing in Rome).

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**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**to the**  
**1988 SEDOS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**  
**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13TH.**

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This Report is for the period, December 1, 1987 to November 2, 1988. It begins with the people who represent you on the Executive Committee, the people who staff the Secretariate and the new members of SEDOS.

MEMBERS OF YOUR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE for the past year were the following:

HELEN MCLAUGHLIN, President, Religious of the Sacred Heart;  
 FRANCESCO PIERLI, Vice President, Comboni Missionaries;  
 LEONORA DI STEFANO, Treasurer, Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception;  
 MICHAEL AMALADOSS, Jesuit; MARGARET LOFTUS, Sisters of Notre Dame;  
 CARLOS PAPE, Society of the Divine Word; GIUSEPPINA TRESOLDI, Comboni Missionary Sisters.

Your Executive Secretary, WILLIE JENKINSON, Congregation of the Holy Ghost, and Associate Executive Secretary, HELENE O'SULLIVAN, Maryknoll Sisters, are also members of the Executive Committee.

SECRETARIATE STAFF. PATRICIA COSGRAVE is Secretary in the office of the Secretariate. ANTIGONE LLOYD divides her responsibilities between the SEDOS Bulletin and the Documentation Centre. PHILIPPA WOOLDRIDGE comes in occasionally to help.

VOLUNTARY HELPERS. Two voluntary helpers during the year deserve our special thanks: AGNES HOORMANN, Religious of the Sacred Heart, and CONSUELO M. TAVARES of the Daughters of St. Paul. Both are leaving Rome for new appointments in 1989, Agnes to the USA and Consuelo to Hong Kong. We deeply appreciate their contribution to the work of the Secretariate and their cheerful presence among us. We wish them well in their new appointments. Our volunteers tell us it is a pleasant break from the work at home and widens the horizons of their missionary interests! We look forward with confidence to new volunteers.

MEMBERSHIP OF SEDOS has increased again in 1988. Your Executive Committee approved applications for Membership from the following Societies:

MISSIONS ETRANGERES, (P.M.E.), 180, Place Juge-Desnoyers, (Pont Viau), Ville de Laval, Quebec, Canada H7G 1A4. (Tel. (514) 667-419).

FIGLIE DI NOSTRA SIGNORA DI SACRO CUORE (FDNSC), Via del Casale de S. Pio V, 37, 00165 ROMA. (Tel. 62.22.027)

PETITES SOEURS DE L'ASSOMPTION (P.S.A.) 57, rue Violet, 75015, PARIS (Tel. 45.79.29.90)

RELIGIOUS OF THE SACRED HEART OF MARY (R.S.C.M.) Via Adelaide Ristori, 26, 00197 ROMA. (Tel. 811.96.98) who have rejoined.

This gradual growth in membership is perhaps one of the surest signs that SEDOS fulfills a felt need in the missionary outreach of many religious societies in these days. There are 66 members as of December 1988, 28 institutes of women and 38 of men.

The General Assembly will elect a new President and Vice-President as both Helen McLaughlin and Francesco Pierli are completing three years in office. The Assembly will also need to elect a member of the Executive Committee to replace Giuseppina Tresoldi who is completing six years of membership on the Committee. Due to increasing and unforeseen responsibilities Leonora di Stefano has to relinquish her position as Treasurer. The Executive is searching for a new Treasurer.

## SEMINARS DURING 1987 - 88

BUILDING INTER CULTURAL COMMUNITIES. This Seminar was held in conjunction with the 1987 General Assembly and dealt with the challenges facing inter-cultural communities across boundaries of race, colour, culture and nationality. Daphne Bronkhurst, a Franciscan Missionary of Mary Sister from India, spoke from her experience as a member of a community in the English Midlands; Edward Van Merrienboer from his experience as a member of his Generalate in Rome visiting Dominican communities throughout the world. Both speakers had much practical advice to offer. Edward's comment is worth recalling.

"The most familiar method of sharing a common vision is to stress those things which are alike within the Institute but I would like to suggest that my experience has shown me that it is far more effective to stress what is unique and special in each member in multi-cultural situations".

He had practical suggestions to make about the executive decisions which need to be made by Generalate administrations. (see SEDOS Bulletin 88/No.1,16). His conclusion:

"It is critical at this moment in history to have a deep sensitivity that we are in a new moment of consciousness in ecclesial history. Some old answers will work but others must be evaluated in new situations. The core question for us as leaders is: Do we welcome this new moment or is it a burden to be suffered?... the force of Paul's vision of neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, slave nor free, seems a little closer to reality in our mission locations today "(SEDOS Bulletin 88/No.1, 16-17).

Daphne concluded her reflections about the people in these new inter-cultural communities by quoting from Vincent Donovan's Christianity Rediscovered: "Do not try to call them back to where they were, do not try to call them to where you are - as beautiful as that place might seem to you; you must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever seen before" (SEDOS Bulletin 88/No.1, 9).

THE CHALLENGE OF MODERNITY to Evangelization proved to be a popular topic for the residential Seminar at Villa

Cavalletti in March 1987. The SEDOS Bulletin Report of this Seminar was sold out and for the first time we made an additional printing of this issue of the Bulletin. The varied cultural backgrounds of the resource persons was reflected in their approach to the challenge of Modernity and led to a lively exchange among the participants. This was highlighted in Ngindu Mushete's response: "You ask me questions in an abstract, western way and I refuse to answer in an abstract way! I am, an African". It made us aware of the need to respect pluralism of cultures even within the confines of the Seminar.

Marcello Azevedo outlined seven characteristics of Modernity and the challenges arising from these to "inculturated evangelization". This, together with Des O'Donnell's introduction to the process called Modernity and the challenges put to evangelization stimulated much reflection and questioning. A high point of the Seminar was Des O'Donnell's concluding talk on the "Spirituality of Modernity". The modern believer has to be deeply convinced that she or he has nothing to fear from the basic thrust of technological discoveries. The modern mystic will see that not only is "earth crammed with heaven" and "every bush afire with God " - but every computer too. (See SEDOS Bulletin 88/No.5, 157).

THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION: A MISSION IMPERATIVE was the subject of the third SEDOS Seminar.

Signs of alarm at the degrading treatment of the earth began long ago. In 1906 attention was first drawn to the damaged ozone layer protecting the earth. The Second Vatican Council already drew attention to misuse of earth's riches. More recently the devastation caused by misplaced so-called development plans and ever increasing uncontrolled profit-making ventures has led to an atmosphere of crisis.

Fr. Bernard Przewozny's well balanced address at this seminar sharpened our awareness of the situation and offered some modest proposals for action by missionaries. Fr. John Mutiso commented on the film "The Politics of Hunger in Kenya." He is a Kenyan and knew personally situations described and the people interviewed in the film. It had to be censored before being released. Multinational corporations appear to be ruthless in pursuit of profits regardless of the harm done to land and people. The "Story of Kamau" will be long remembered by participants.

Milicent Francis gave a short account of just one ill-conceived development project in Rondonia, Brazil.

Fr. Mutiso also brought us up to date on the co-operation between the Secretariate for Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches in preparation for the WCC Conference on JUSTICE, PEACE AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION which will take place in 1990.

## SPECIAL CONFERENCES

### SOUTH AFRICA

DESMOND D. TUTU, Anglican Archbishop of Cape town, GEORGE F. DANIEL, Catholic Archbishop of Pretoria, and MRS. VIRGINIA GCABASHE of the South African Council of Churches were among the nine



Church leaders from South Africa who addressed a large SEDOS Meeting at the Agustinianum in June, 1988 on the situation in their country. The state of emergency in South Africa and the increasingly repressive legislation against all forms of non-violent protest leave very little hope for a negotiated end to apartheid. Yet they showed signs of hope and deep faith.

ALBERT NOLAN, O.P. spoke to an overflow audience in October, 1988 on 'Apartheid in South Africa Today'. His address clarified the background to some prominent news items currently coming out of South Africa: black on black violence; the bombing campaign; "peace" talks between South Africa and Angola and Namibia; the so-called 'reforms', sanctions; and the recent visit of the Pope to South Africa.

### LATIN AMERICA

BRAZIL PASTORAL COMMISSION OF THE LAND representatives, DR. DANIEL RECH, a lawyer from the Institute of Legal Aid for Rural People and REV. MARCELO BARROS, a Benedictine theologian, both from Brazil gave an informed account of the commitment of the Church in Brazil to the Pastoral of the Land. They left us in no doubt about the risks and difficulties that pastoral workers, clerical and lay, have to contend with when they are engaged in this ministry. The reactions of two or three in an audience of over 150 illustrated further still the deep seated opposition with which pastoral workers in this apostolate of the land have to contend. This meeting was jointly organised by SEDOS and the UISG/USG Justice and Peace Commission.

BISHOP CASALDALIGA addressed a group of SEDOS members and guests on June 23, 1988. The Bishop has been a member of the Commission on the Land of the Brazilian Bishops. He spoke on the OPTION FOR THE POOR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS. He challenged the Religious and Missionary Institutes. Many of them speak about their preferential option for the poor and have incorporated this in their constitutions and Chapter proceedings. "But are you serious?" he asked. "Do you live among the poor? Look at where your houses are situated. Are they among the poor? Do they have easy access to them?" The Bishop's talk and the lively dialogue that took place at it was very well received by the over one hundred participants.

### HAITI

JAN HANSSEN, a Scheut Missionary, who had worked in Haiti for many years and had newly arrived in Rome to assume his responsibilities as the Justice and Peace Coordinator of his Congregation presented an analysis of the current situation in the country to SEDOS members with personnel in Haiti.

### SUDAN

COMBONI MISSIONARIES made a strong appeal for cooperation from SEDOS Institutes of men or women at a meeting on the

serious situation in the Sudan held in SEDOS in December, 1987.

### THREE SESSION STUDY ON INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

SEDOS members met for a series of three sessions during the spring of 1988 to examine together MY NEIGHBOUR'S FAITH AND MINE: THEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES THROUGH INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE. This was a fruitful series of group discussions based on the Study Guide prepared by the Dialogue Sub Unit of the World Council of Churches. The sessions dealt with what it means to be a Christian in a culturally religiously and ideologically plural world. The meetings were facilitated by Michael Amaladoss, S.J.

### DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

THE COMPUTER AIDED DOCUMENTATION Centre is running smoothly. The Centre is increasingly being used by Councilors of Generalates before they go to visit their members in various countries. We have not reached our target of entering the contents of the existing card catalogue going back to 1978, but we hope to achieve this in the coming year. Telephone calls beforehand greatly facilitate the search for relevant material and save time for busy members of Generalates. We can at least tell you quickly whether or not we have useful material!

### SEDOS BULLETIN

The SEDOS Bulletin is now in its 20th year of publication. It was first published in January 1969 as DOCUMENTATION SEDOS. It was renamed SEDOS BULLETIN in January 1978. The January issue 1989 will mark the beginning of Volume XXI.

FR. JOHN TRA, SVD. has compiled an AUTHOR and SUBJECT INDEX of the Bulletin for the five year period 1981-85. This is a detailed index running to 114 pages and is a very useful tool for research. John is working on an INDEX for the 1986, 1987 and 1988 issues of SEDOS Bulletin. It will be ready early in 1989. We are very grateful to him for this Index. We have found it invaluable for quick reference to SEDOS Bulletin material. Copies will be available on request at the SEDOS Secretariate. Details of cost and postage will be made available in a future issue of the Bulletin.

The Bulletin is being mailed to the Regional/Provincial Superiors or Mission Secretaries of a number of SEDOS member Societies. These are the Jesuits, Columbans, Maryknoll Priests, Brothers and Sisters, Divine Word Missionaries, Marists and Scheutists.

The Sierra Leone Conference of Major Superiors has ordered copies of the Bulletin for each of the missionaries working in that country.

Requests for the Bulletin from individuals and organisations continue to arrive. We are now printing over one thousand copies of each issue of the Bulletin.

## ECUMENICAL INITIATIVES

CWME WORLD CONFERENCE: SEDOS is collaborating with the Secretariate for Promoting Christian Unity in the preparations for the World Council of Churches WORLD CONFERENCE ON MISSION AND EVANGELISATION which will be held from May 22, to June 1, 1989, at San Antonio, Texas, USA. The theme of this Conference is YOUR WILL BE DONE: MISSION IN CHRIST'S WAY.

We are also collaborating with the Secretariate in preparation for the CWME sponsored meeting on JUSTICE, PEACE AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION which will be held in Seoul in 1990.

The Secretariate also prepared a submission on dialogue in reply to a request from the Secretariate for Non Christian Religions.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MISSION STUDIES (IAMS): The Association held its triennial meeting in Rome from June 26, to July 1, this year. SEDOS Secretariate staff together with Fr. Willi Henkel, OMI., made up the local organising committee for this important meeting. Over two hundred missiologists from various churches shared their vision of CHRISTIAN MISSION TOWARDS THE THIRD MILLENIUM. (See SEDOS Bulletin 88/268,269). Highlights of this Conference were the addresses given by Cardinal Paul Poupard, Joan Chatfield, M.M. the outgoing President, John Pobee the new President and Enrique Dussel. The moving celebration held in the Catacomb of St. Domitilla at the conclusion of the Conference brought the week long conference to a very prayerful conclusion. Fr. Michael Amaladoss, SJ., of our Executive Committee was elected Vice President of the Association for the next three years. We offer him our sincere congratulations.

## JUSTICE AND PEACE

THE DEBT CRISIS. In accordance with the mandate of the 1986 General Assembly SEDOS took a special interest in the two meetings on the Debt Crisis organised by the Justice and Peace Commission (UISG/USG) and ensured attendance by SEDOS Members at these meetings.

### AFRICA FAITH AND JUSTICE NETWORK:

Members will know by now of the successful setting up of this network. Helene O'Sullivan, M.M., Associate Director of SEDOS was a member of the Steering Committee that launched it. The Africa Faith and Justice Network is an organization composed of religious congregations which are based in Europe and work in Africa, or have a special concern for Africa. It is a faith-based organization which exists for the promotion of a more just and equitable relationship between the peoples of Africa and the peoples of Europe. If Christian organizations are to remain credible with the people of Africa, they must begin to work in their home countries to change policies which are unjust in relation to African peoples. Up to this point such a coordinated effort has not existed among European religious communities. The Network has established a Secretariate in Brussels with a full-time Executive Secretary who will be responsible to the Network through an Executive Committee.

SOLIDARITY IN CRISIS NETWORK: A small number of alerts were circulated during the year. On each occasion members' responses were a source of support and encouragement to those who requested action by the Network.

### LAY MISSIONARIES

Following the Synod on the Laity SEDOS considered its relationship with Lay missionary associations and appointed a small committee to study this. One of the outcomes of their deliberations was the decision by the Executive to co-operate more closely with these Lay associations. SEDOS invited representatives from three Lay associations to attend the 1988 Villa Cavalletti Seminar on Modernity and covered their expenses while here in Rome. The Executive decided to continue this co-operation at future SEDOS Seminars and to study ways and means of further co-operation.

### INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS

We continue to co-operate with many dicasteries and other organisations in Rome involved in mission:

- The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples;
- The Pontifical Secretariate for Non Christian, for Promoting Christian Unity, for Social Communications, for Culture, and for Justice and Peace.
- The "Council of Eighteen" - the combined Council of Representatives from the Congregation for the Evangelization of People and the Unions of Superiors General of Women and Men;
- The Sixth Commission" - the mission Commission of the Unions of Superiors General;
- Multi Media;
- Agrimissio;
- The Association of Italian Mission Animators (SUAM);
- The Association of Italian Missionary Editors (EMI);

And with International Organisations:

- Pro Mundi Vita (PMV); Brussels.
- The United States Catholic Mission Association (USCMA);
- The World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (WCFBA);
- Selly Oak Colleges, and the Multi Faith Project - Birmingham England;
- Various Lay Missionary Societies: Volunteer Missionary Movement (VMM) England;
- Viatores Christi, Ireland, Volunteer International Christian Service (VICS) CANADA.

### LOOKING TO THE PAST

1989 is the 25th Anniversary of the founding of SEDOS. Perhaps we should begin with a brief look back at our origins. During the Vatican

Council many meetings of missionaries took place here in Rome but it was in 1964 that seven missionary institutes came to the conclusion that they needed a permanent secretariate to facilitate their meetings and to share their many insights on mission. The "seven" were the Schuwtsists, Priests of the Sacred Heart, the Capuchins, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the African Mission Society, the Divine Word missionaries and the White Fathers (Missionaries of Africa).

It was Father Henri Mondé - Superior General of the African Mission Society who took the initiative in calling the seven together. They elected Fr. Leo Volker, Superior General of the White Fathers as their first President and the Secretariate was lodged in the gate house of his Society's headquarters on Rome's Via Aurelia. So SEDOS was born.

Two or three other Societies soon joined the group - the records are not too accurate at this point but it appears that within a few years (1969) the members had increased to 36. The most noteworthy leap forward was taken at the General Assembly meeting on June 20, 1967 when twelve religious institutes for women were welcomed as full members. These were: the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Spirit, of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Hiltrup), of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; the Sisters of Charity of the Divine Savior, of St. Paul of Chartres, of Our Lady of Africa (White Sisters), the Medical Mission Sisters; the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary; the Carmelites of Charity, the Canonesses of St. Augustine, and the Ursulines of the Roman Union.

SEDOS has continued to grow steadily without fanfare over the years. Two further inquiries for possible membership have been received in the last month.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Your Executive has been considering SEDOS activities for the coming year and the General Assembly will make its proposals at its Annual Meeting on December 13th, 1988.

Proposals for research and action from your Executive Committee are these:

1. DECISION MAKING. Study new methods of decision making in inter-cultural international missionary institutes. (See SEDOS Bulletin Report on the Seminar BUILDING INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNITIES. 88/No.1 Pp. 5ff).
2. PLACEMENT OF PERSONNEL. On February 24, 1969 the "IUS COMMISSIONIS" was abolished. Since then specific areas are no longer entrusted for evangelization to particular religious communities. In practice many such communities still provide almost all the missionary personnel in given areas and dioceses, a situation which most regard as less than good both for the diocese and the institute. Can SEDOS members help to solve this by collaboration in placing personnel?
3. ECUMENISM - EVANGELIZATION AND MEDIA: (See SEDOS General Assembly 1987, Minute 87/3 (iii)). This topic will be treated by Commission VI during the current year. It is

also on the agenda of M.A.C. in 1988. The Executive Committee considered the value of an ecumenical approach in the use of mass media.

4. INCULTURATION. There is no aspect of mission which is not affected by the demands of inculturation. Every SEDOS Seminar since 1981 deepens this realisation. During the coming years it may be necessary to give explicit attention to the increasing awareness of the importance of this to evangelization.

5. THE PEACE PROCESS and MISSION TODAY IN SUB. SAHARAN AFRICA are two other topics arising from suggestions made at Villa Cavalletti in 1987.

6. HEALTH CARE for the poor. Consultations are taking place regarding the nature and effectiveness of this seminar which we had hoped to facilitate in 1988.

#### CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF SEDOS

The Executive suggests that to mark the Silver Jubilee of SEDOS we publish a volume of significant contributions to SEDOS Bulletin over the last 25 years edited to show the evolution of thinking on MISSION during these years. The volume would be 400 to 450 pages and include a serious introductory Chapter or section on the CHANGING PATTERNS OF MISSION.

The Executive asks for further proposals for an appropriate celebration of this ANNIVERSARY.

#### FINANCIAL REPORT

An abbreviated version of our Financial Report follows. The full report is included with the preparatory papers for the General Assembly on December 13th, 1988 forwarded to all SEDOS members.

Fees	102,965.200	Operating Exp.	22,605.054
Bank Interest	5,802.198	Bulletin	19,012.774
Royalties	97.660	Personnel	61,624.960
Bulletin	11,756.240	Exchange Rate	3,252.286
Refunds	<u>412.400</u>		
	121,033.698		<u>106,495.074</u>
	<u>14,538.624</u>		

There are one or two outstanding expenditures amounting to approximately ITL. 1.500.000, which leaves a modest credit working balance. This is due to the prompt payment of the annual fees by our members. For this support we are very grateful.

#### CONCLUSION

SEDOS is an organisation in which Religious and Missionary Societies of men and women combine their resources in order to serve the Church

more effectively in its missionary activity. The SEDOS AGENDA FOR FUTURE PLANNING, STUDY AND RESEARCH IN MISSION drawn up at the conclusion of the SEDOS RESEARCH SEMINAR in March 1981 understood this as - proclamation of the Gospel message, inculturation, dialogue and liberation. Is this fourfold division problematic? More and more it appears that no proclamation of the Gospel is possible which ignores the demands of inculturation, dialogue and liberation. This is already evident in our preparations for the 1989 Seminar on EVANGELIZATION AND POPULAR RELIGIOSITY where we are faced with the importance of these three realities to the whole theme.

And so we continue to combine our resources and our efforts working together in announcing Christ and his reign to the best of our ability sharing with one another and supporting one another in this task.

We in the Secretariate express our deep appreciation to you SEDOS members and especially to your Executive Committee for your constant trust, support and cooperation.

Helene O'Sullivan, MM  
ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
SEDOS

Willie Jenkinson, CSSp.  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
SEDOS



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## CHRISTIAN INCULTURATION AND WORLD RELIGIONS

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Felix Wilfred

There can be a simplistic understanding of inculturation as the process by which we relate the Christian faith and Gospel with the elements of the culture of a people as separate from their religion. This is to ignore the truth that religion is the core-element, the soul of a cultural tradition. Since religion is interwoven into the fabric of culture and its various forms, the culture reflects the world-vision of the religion that is its matrix. Adopting only cultural elements without coming to grips with religion would be tantamount to relating to the body without the soul. This should lead us to realise how truly complex and intricate the process of inculturation is.

That religion and culture are indissolubly linked is also evidenced from the reaction of people of other faiths to Christian efforts to adopt the obvious symbols, signs and thought-patterns of the culture, but which are claimed by them as belonging to their religious heritage. If we recognise good and noble elements in a culture, it forces us also to recognise by implication the religions which gave birth to them. When inculturation is pursued by Christians without addressing the religions and outside an atmosphere of living dialogue, the whole process turns out to be counterproductive. This effort at inculturation is interpreted by followers of other religions as a subtle strategy for conversion or as an effort to undermine their religions by co-opting their cultural expressions into Christianity. This is an additional reason that should dissuade us from following an instrumental or utilization model vis-a-vis other religions and cultures. The understanding and practice of inculturation in the context of world religions will have several implications. It calls for:

1. recognition of cultural conditionings
2. interpreting the past
3. shedding of prejudices and adopting a correct approach
4. positive approach to other religions and living dialogue
5. cross-cultural hermeneutics.

Let us examine each of these points briefly.

### RECOGNITION OF CULTURAL CONDITIONINGS

The starting point for inculturation cannot be a well-defined essence of Christianity independent of all cultural expressions which could then be inculturated into this or that particular culture and religious milieu. The Christian faith has existed only and always in the concrete and in definite cultural and religious environments. What is often presented as the universal essence of Christianity is but a conditioned and particularized expression of Christian faith and experience. In this sense Christian tradition can be viewed as a complex of particular and local traditions resulting from the encounters of

Christianity with a wide variety of peoples, cultures, philosophies and thought patterns. What is important, however, is that one is aware of this inescapable limitation which, at the same time, is a recognition of the transcendence of the Christian message above all particular traditions, forms etc. The universality of Christian faith is affirmed not by denying or transcending particularities but by experiencing the universal and transcendent in the particular or in the concretum of a determined cultural context.

The fact that Christian faith is always found only as embodied in a particular culture should put us on guard against a false expectation and a presumption: a) On the one hand, young Christian communities in the developing world cannot expect to have Christian faith devoid as it were of all forms and cultural expressions. This would be utopian. b) On the other hand, Churches of older origin cannot claim that what they possess is the universal essence of faith while in reality, it is a faith conditioned and circumscribed by their own cultural historical contexts with its limitations. This claim would be presumption since **Universality is not the extension or generalization of one determined particularity.**

What we said above will be further clarified if we examine and interpret Biblical data and the situation of the Early Church.

#### INTERPRETING THE PAST

The Old Testament: It must be borne in mind that the relationship of Israel to the neighbouring peoples was not a relationship of a developed culture versus a less developed. The reverse was true. Israel was surrounded by rich and ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures, in the face of which Israel was conscious of its poverty. Therefore, Israel naturally tended to enrich itself by assimilating from them various elements including the religious. For example, the psalmody was of Canaanite origin, the temple of Solomon was modeled after Phoenician temples, and the covenant itself was an institution of the surrounding peoples. Elements from Canaanite religions too became part of Israel's liturgy.

The openness to other religions and cultures shrinks in a way during the prophetic period, but in another sense it opens up to universalism as we find in Deutero-Isaiah. The experience of exile produced a mixed and ambiguous reaction towards other nations. The bitterness of slavery let Israel to reject and condemn the cultures and religions of their masters, and instilled a feeling of hatred towards them and a fear of losing its identity. On the other hand, the richness of the cultures encountered overwhelmed them and led them to an attitude of openness. Attempts were made to relate Israel's particularism with the universalism of peoples and nations. The universalism becomes markedly evident in the Wisdom tradition.

Thus the history of Israel manifests a certain dialectic between a centripetal movement of preoccupation with its identity and a centrifugal movement vis-a-vis other nations and cultures, depending upon its shifting political situations.

The New Testament: In the New Testament too, different attitudes towards other nations can be observed in both Jewish Christian circles and in the Hellenist Christian tradition. Jewish-Hellenists because of their knowledge and closer contact with other peoples, cultures and religions manifested a much broader outlook, openness and universalism. They were a group that was discriminated against (Acts 6:1) and persecuted (Acts 7:54; 8:3) but they were the ones who challenged the Jewish exclusivism and played a decisive role in widening the horizons of a Jewish Christianity turned in on itself and concerned with the preservation of its narrow identity.

In fact, the conception of the Church in the early period implied a restriction of mission exclusively to the Jews. A new self-understanding emerged precisely when the Church, stirred and provoked by a new experience (Acts 10; 15:23-29; Gal. 2:11-14), reached out to the Gentiles and theologically clarifies anew their place in the economy of salvation.

What is to be particularly noted is the fact that the transition from Jewish ethnic religio-cultural exclusivism and narrowness to universalism came about as a result of crisis and struggle which saw the apostles themselves divided in opposite camps. Finally a traditional barrier was broken through. As a result, a Church which until then understood itself within the parametres of Jewish culture and tradition turns out to be critical of many aspects of Judaism, its law and tradition.

The new vision recognised some of the things which the Jews held as belonging to their faith, for example, circumcision and the law, as matters of culture and way of life. It also brought about the recognition of a cultural pluralism. The validity and legitimacy of the cultures of Non-Jews was affirmed by deciding not to impose on other peoples and ethnic groups the Jewish cultural elements. (Acts 15:7-10) A similar recognition of the religiosity and wisdom of the non-Jews is to be found in the speech to the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-31) by Paul, the foremost advocate of the equality of all, whether Jews or non-Jews, before God, (Rom 3:29-30; 2:9-11).

The Greek Fathers: As for the Fathers - along with negative attitudes towards other religions and Philosophies of the time we also have positive witnesses, especially the Greek Fathers. They not only spoke of the values of non-Christian religions and cultures and of the "seeds of God's work" in them; they also entered into a deeper dialogue with them. What is particularly remarkable is that Christianity in its concretized expression and shape was the result of a symbiosis or harmonious blending of Jewish culture with the Greco-Roman culture, religion, philosophy etc. The Greco-Roman culture, traditions, thoughts and categories were not simply utilised as external forms or as pedagogical devices for making oneself understood; they were interpreted in a Christian way and integrated to form part of Christian tradition. This process could be traced right back to the New Testament. **When St. John presents Jesus as logos this was not an attempt to translate into a category familiar to the Hellenistic world, an already formulated mystery of Christ. Rather the mystery of Christ itself is given expression in presenting him as logos.** This was a language of encounter between

Judaism and Hellenism and the approach here is dialogical which is not the same as adaptation.

#### SHEDDING PREJUDICES AND ADOPTING A CORRECT APPROACH

Inculturation of a deeper nature as enjoined by Vatican II (G.S. 44, 58; A.G. 19-22; S.C. 38) would presuppose a closer understanding of and respect for other religions and cultures. The first step is to cast off prejudices.

In this regard, we should take into account the fact that certain attitudes and positions against non-Christian religions were formed in a polemical and apologetic climate. We could name some of the factors responsible, in varying degrees of course: the relationship of Christians to Jews and Muslims in the Middle Ages with its repercussions reaching as far as the twentieth century, the political and cultural threat to Europe represented by Islam after it swept through the whole of the Middle East and Asia Minor once flourishing with Christian communities etc.

Meaningful and fruitful inculturation and dialogue can take place only if there is freedom from prejudices. This freedom is two-fold:

- a) freedom from the reactionary attitude towards other religions and cultures stemming from the above indicated political, historical and theological situations as well as from ethnocentrism;
- b) freedom from a kind of cultural romanticism and exaggerated reactions to neo-colonial experience and the negative side of Mission history. To speak only of the freedom from cultural romanticism and nationalism without at the same time referring to the other prejudices harboured through the centuries against people, races, cultures and religions would be to voice half-truth.

Respecting the Self-understanding of Other Religions. Reducing other religions (without attempting to enter into the world of their experience) into our theological categories and condemning them (without giving them an opportunity to explain themselves) would reflect epistemological naiveté and ethical impropriety. Our cognitive efforts should be such that they respect the self-understanding of these religions and cultures. By forcing other religions into our mould we would, apart from missing what is valuable in them, fail, more basically, in fidelity to the truth.

One could rightly speak about religions and cultures as mixed with elements of sin, ambiguity, falsity, etc. However, this assertion should be placed in a correct perspective by taking into consideration the following two elements.

- a) We should not compare the best elements of Christianity with the worst elements of other religions, nor speak of Christianity in ideal terms and of non-Christian religions, in their empirical and historical forms.
- b) It is true, as *Gaudium et Spes* says, that "the good news of Christ constantly renews the life and culture of fallen humanity. It combats and removes the errors and evils resulting from sinful elements which

are a perpetual threat". These words apply to all cultures-ancient and modern and to all the peoples of the Globe-East and West, North and South. Besides, these words of the Council should be read in conjunction with the truth that the Church of Christ too is "always in need of being purified". The pilgrim nature of the Church, moving ahead towards the eschatological encounter with the Lord is a potent call to rid ourselves of all self-complacency.

The universal saving will of God in relation to humankind, the presence of the resurrected Lord and the action of the Spirit are not exhausted within the confines of the Church. Discerning God's ways and the working of the Spirit beyond the borders of the Church is a duty incumbent on us. We should not trample upon what God has planted and nurtured. The saints, mystiques and sages embody in themselves the noble values, ideals and God-experience a religion stands for. In their lives we could concretely discern the effective presence of the Spirit. So too in the fellowship and unity among the followers of other religions, in their life and growth, the order and truth they manifest, we can contemplate the wondrous ways of the Spirit who "blows where it pleases" (Jn 3:8).

In the task of relating to our neighbours of other faiths, the Church is challenged to follow Jesus who emptied himself (kenosis), and free itself from all kinds of triumphalisms vis-a-vis other cultures and religions. The acknowledgment of the place of other religions and the spiritual and moral truths they enshrine should naturally express itself in a living experiential and existential dialogue. In its turn it is the living dialogue which will lead to progressive discovery of other religions and the appreciation of their values. Encounter with other religions cannot be a mere debate or comparison of concepts, but a living dialogue of life with followers of other religions "in brotherly and sisterly fashion" (N.A. 5). In the thought of Vatican II on religions a certain evolution is observable, as it progresses from Lumen Gentium through Nostra Aetate and Ad Gentes to the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes. While Lumen Gentium re-affirms the traditional doctrine on the possibility of salvation of those who have not heard the Gospel and yet sincerely seek God, and recognizes the truth and goodness in other religions, Gaudium et Spes follows an experiential approach and points the way for an encounter with them.

It is of crucial importance to realize that only in an atmosphere of respect, appreciation and living dialogue can genuine inculturation take place. **The very process of seeking ever new and deeper relationships with our neighbours of other faiths with whom we live itself is part of the process of inculturation.** The living dialogue could assume different forms and take place at different levels.

Collaboration for the Advancement of Peoples: People of different faiths meet to share their experience of God, to listen to each other, to pray and to be silent before the unfathomable divine mystery which surpasses all forms and names. It can also come to expression when followers of different religions jointly animate the temporal order and collaborate in facing issues of justice and peace. The collaboration among religions for the advancement of peoples is all the more urgent today since the world

religions are playing an important role in shaping the social life and determining the political destinies of nations. It would be a bad state of affairs if the religions are in conflict with each other and function as a source of division rather than builders of community. The religions are called upon to collaborate together "to provide a common and complementary moral and religious foundation" to the social and political life. Addressing a group of religious leaders in Madras, India, the Holy Father said:

"Dialogue between members of different religions increases and deepens mutual respect and paves the way for relationships that are crucial in solving the problems of human suffering. Dialogue is a powerful means of collaboration between peoples in eradicating evil from human life and from the life of the community, in establishing right order in human society, and thus contribute to the common good of all people in every walk of life".

**Christian participation in such common tasks with neighbours of other faiths is an important and much needed form of inculturation.** The greater and more intensive the participation of the Church, the deeper will the Gospel sink its roots in the soil.

The Link between Inculturation and Dialogue: To be able to enter into dialogue, it is not required that a follower of a religion compromises his or her religious convictions or suspends them or surrenders them for the time being. But the process of a sincere dialogue may lead to a change of perspectives, renewal and enrichment. It is at this experiential level of encounter that a particular religion will be able to find positive elements in another religion and discover itself better in its strength and limitations. In this regard, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference in its First General Assembly held in Taipei in 1974 stated:

"Only in dialogue with these religions can we discover in them the seeds of the Word (A.G.9). This dialogue will allow us to touch the expression and the reality of our peoples' deepest selves, and enable us to find authentic ways of living and expressing our own Christian faith. It will reveal to us also many riches of our own faith which we perhaps would not have perceived. Thus it can become a sharing in friendship of our quest for God and for brotherhood and sisterhood among God's children.

This statement of the Asian Bishops reflects the understanding of the intimate link between inculturation and dialogue.

The relationship of the Church to other religions today should move more to experiential encounter. In this context, the initiative of the Holy Father to bring together at Assisi (October 27, 1987) leaders of various religious tradition to pray is very significant, heralding the future direction.

### CROSS-CULTURAL HERMENEUTICS

Living dialogue among religions which is the milieu for inculturation must be accompanied by a continuous practice of cross-cultural hermeneutics in a bid to penetrate into the world of one another. This will help us to avoid superficial forms of inculturation.

Religions and cultures are organic wholes and therefore particular doctrines, rites, symbols etc. yield meaning only with reference to the whole. Any forcible severing of a particular element from the horizon of the whole will only distort its meaning and make our inculturation efforts nothing more than a window-dressing. The utilization model vis-à-vis other religions - the approach by which we cull out from the culture of peoples elements which suits us - does not respect the organic character of either religion or culture or their interrelationship.

In this context it may be pointed out that some of the laudable missionary efforts at inculturation in the past like those of Roberto De Nobili (1577-1656) did not turn out to be successful precisely because one attempted to take out cultural elements while being negatively disposed towards other religions. One was guided by the example of the Fathers who were open to the cultures and philosophies of Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Syrian worlds but were in general averse to the religions of these milieux. This shows that today, in our inculturation in areas of major world religions, we cannot hold the relationship of Gospel to the Greek, Roman etc. worlds as a general paradigm applicable to all situations and among all peoples. The new situation today would demand that fresh and creative efforts are made and new cross-cultural and cross-religious methods evolved for relating Christian faith and Gospel to the cultures and religions of peoples.

The Use of Symbols: We should not too hastily find similarities of concepts, symbols etc. in other religions and cultures and consider them as points of linkage with Christianity. Given the fact that symbols, signs etc. are part of a cultural or religious system or sacred text, cross-cultural and cross-religions hermeneutics would engage itself in finding out homeomorphic symbols or concepts, namely symbol or concepts playing an **equivalent role and function** in another religious or cultural system. This is very essential for a deeper inculturation and mutual understanding and dialogue among the religions.

Conclusion: Though the word inculturation suggests an action, it belongs in reality to the order of being of the Church. **Inculturation is not one among many activities of the Church, but the very mode of its presence as rooted in the soil among a people, sharing their life, experience, "joy and hope, grief and anguish" (G.S.1). and growing in constant response and interaction with the milieu.**

When the life and experience of a people is animated by a religious and spiritual vision, if the Church is to be incarnate, it is imperative that it meets the religion and all that it has given birth to in terms of culture, tradition, values and institutions.

It is evident that the process of inculturation cannot be induced from without. It has to be lived. Therefore, it is the community of believers living in a determined socio-cultural milieu and in the

context of a religiously pluralistic situation, who should be the active agents of inculturation. The local Church has the duty and responsibility to incarnate the Gospel in the soil (A.G. 19-22), and this responsibility can neither be delegated nor substituted. This task of the Church needs to be supported by proper theological reflection from within the situation of experiential encounter and dialogue with cultures and religions. This is also the appropriate milieu for the emergence of a meaningful theology of inculturation and theology of religions.

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Ref. Indian Theological Studies, 25 (1), March 1988, pp. 5-26.



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**ANNOTATED LIST OF VIDEOS  
ON BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES:  
A IAMS/SEDOS PROJECT**

**A REQUEST FOR TITLES**

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The IAMS (International Association for Mission Studies) Conference took place in Rome from 29 June to 5 July, 1988. Workshop No. 3 on "The Place and Role of Basic Christian Communities in Mission" made the following recommendation:

"Ask SEDOS (Via dei Verbiti, 1, 00154 Rome, Italy) on behalf of IAMS to make an Annotated List of Videotapes on Basic Christian Communities Throughout the World. This can be published in Communicatio Socialis Yearbook (Journal of Christian Communication in the Third World), Mission Studies and other publications".

SEDOS members and friends are asked to send details on any videotapes on "Basic Christian Communities" (also called "Small Christian Communities") to the SEDOS Secretariate by 1st March, 1989. Please include the following information on each video production:

1. Title of the Production (include the English translation if the original is not in English).
2. Name of the Series.
3. Language.
4. Catalogue number of the video cassette.
5. Short Description of Content.
6. Director.
7. Producer.
8. Year of Production.
9. Length (time).
10. System of Distribution e.g. NTSC, PAL, SECAM.
11. Format e.g. VHS, BETA.
12. Distributor.
13. Cost.

NOTE: An important book published in March, 1988 is 600 Videos on Religious Themes - In French, English and Spanish. This is the first international video catalogue on religious themes. This volume of 248 pages costs \$25 and can be ordered from:

OCIC (International Catholic Organization for Cinema and Audio-Visual)  
8, Rue del'Orme,  
1040 Bruxelles, Belgium,

or

OCIC Missionary Service,  
Palazzo San Calisto,  
00120 Vatican City. Tel. (6) 698-7255.