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IN THIS ISSUE

Felix Wilfred's Reflection on INCULTURATION IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT will interest all readers of the SEDOS Bulletin not just those who have worked in Asia. He develops criteria that respond to such questions as, "How are we to know that the process of inculturation pursued in a local church is authentic?"

"Are we making the Gospel suit the culture rather than judging the culture in the light of the Gospel?"

He discusses the Eucharist as the Sacrament of initiation; ministries in the local church; inculturation and social transformation. In his address, delivered to the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences, he presents the Asian emphasis on the community of disciples of Jesus rather than on the Church as institution; on ecclesiology within the context of a theology of creation; on the decisive turning of local churches in Asia towards inculturation within the "little" traditions of the weak and marginalized rather than in the "great" traditions of the dominant group.

The short piece from René Brossard exemplifies an African application of the challenges raised in the Asian context.

From her experience in a barrio in Venezuela, Anastasia Lott reflects on both joys and challenges of doing biblical reflection in small groups of poor, marginalised and oppressed peoples. Some ideological and methodological errors may occur in popular interpretation but also many wonderful experiences as the community responds to authentic biblical challenges to Christian action. In RECOVERING THE WORD OF GOD WITH AND AMONG THE POOR she was challenged to put her expertise precisely at their service.

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SEDOS Secretariate receives an increasing number of queries about the identity of the missionary vocation today. Hugh MacMahon's CLARIFYING MISSIONARY IDENTITY is a helpful attempt to isolate the special purpose or goal characteristic of mission.

Reports of the SAN ANTONIO Conference on MISSION AND EVANGELISM will be presented at a special SEDOS meeting at the Generalate of the Fratelli Cristiani, Rome on June 23, 1989. Margaret Loftus spoke at the Ecumenical Seminar and Prayer Service in preparation for the Conference. Her theme was respect for the integrity of God's creation - THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S.

There are NEWS items and important announcements of events to come.

NEWS

SEDOS BULLETIN INDEX 1979 - 1988

This ten-year INDEX has been compiled by John Tra, SVD and is published by the SEDOS Secretariate on the occasion of SEDOS SILVER JUBILEE 1989. The computer print-out was done by Friedrich Foerster, SVD; the text was printed and bound by Hugo Kipp, SVD. The original cover design is by Phillippa Woolridge, associated for many years with SEDOS Secretariate. Cover printing and final binding is by the Salesian Press. This is an attractive volume, indispensable for regular readers of the SEDOS Bulletin.

We express our deep gratitude to the Society of the Divine Word for their generous and voluntary collaboration in producing this INDEX. Full details attached to this issue of the Bulletin.

PLOWSHARES INSTITUTE Twenty seven members of the PLOWSHARES INSTITUTE spent a day in ROME on their way to a three week insertion experience in South Africa and Zimbabwe. The group was received by Cardinal Etchegaray during the morning. In the afternoon they were met by a group of representatives of SEDOS in the Generalate of the Missionaries of La Sallette now members of SEDOS. PLOWSHARES organizes a programme for Deans, Professors and Boards of Governors of Protestant and Catholic Schools of Theology in the USA with the aim of transforming seminary training to integrate the dimension of justice and global awareness. The programme takes a long range view in the hope that over the next twenty years a significant change would be achieved in the attitude and practices of Christian clerics to global issues - and thus impact the awareness of parishes in which they serve.

PERU UP-DATE Bob Plasker, CSC, facilitated a meeting of eighteen SEDOS members on June, 6 at SEDOS Secretariate. The participants exchanged information and shared views on the problems confronting missionaries in Peru at present.

HAITI UP-DATE The fourth in the series on Haiti took place at SEDOS Secretariate on June, 7. Jan Hannsens, CICM, facilitated the meeting at which an analysis of the situation in Haiti was presented by Francois Nicolas, CSSp.

Continued on p. 213.

INCULTURATION: REFLECTIONS IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT

Felix Wilfred

The staggering millions of the Asian continent immersed in the various religious traditions feel a deep spiritual affinity for the fascinating person of Jesus and his message. And yet, Asia is the continent where Christians are least represented - a bare 5% of the total population. This, in spite of long centuries of Christian mission and preaching by so many admirable, zealous and dedicated persons like Matteo Ricci in China, Roberto de Nobili in India and the pan-Asian apostle, St. Francis Xavier - only to name a few exceptional ones. How are we to account for the fact that, by and large, Christianity and Asia have remained strangers to each other?

Historically the Gospel was introduced into Asia - excepting some parts of it - from the West, in Western understanding, interpretation and cultural forms. Colonialism, economic superiority, language, cultural barriers, etc., are in great measure responsible for Asia's refusal to embrace the Christian faith. Asians did not engage themselves in apologetics vis-a-vis Christianity, as their cultures and religions have fostered tolerance and pluralism. But Western Christianity could not make any dent on the Asian masses partly because the questions it claimed to answer were not their questions. It did not vibrate with their spirit nor could it capture their soul.

A new era of significant presence and involvement of Christianity in Asia is possible only if it is integrated into the Asian cultural universe. The efforts at inculturation made since Vatican II have been, however, largely of a pastoral nature. The theology animating these efforts has been mostly a theology of incarnation which is quite valid but, in my view, inadequate.

METHOD AND APPROACH TO INCULTURATION

Instrumentalization of Culture: A change in our method and approach to inculturation is of crucial importance. The prevalent model has been one of instrumentalization of culture. The cultures of peoples have been considered as a means through which Christianity, the faith, the Church, etc., can be made indigenous and local. Here, the focus of attention has been the universality of the Christian faith and Church by which is meant that they are above every particular culture. Precisely because of this, they are said to be capable of being at home in every culture and people of the earth. The chief defect in this approach, it seems to me, is that culture has not been sufficiently valued in itself. The culture of any people has its own autonomy and inner consistency; it is an organic whole. Culture and its multifarious expressions are the result of God's action in history and of the presence of the Spirit among the people, right in the midst of their individual and collective existence. In brief, in this approach, culture

has not been considered in the broader perspective of a theology of creation. This is at the root of the tendency to utilize culture.

Culture Confined to External Forms: To this instrumentalization of culture corresponds another widespread model which distinguishes between the core or substance and the external expressions, accidental or peripheral elements. The importance of culture is readily admitted, but its place is confined to the exterior forms which envelop, as husk, the essence of faith, the nature of the Church, its structures, organizations, etc. Here culture, like a container, is viewed as variable and relative while the essence of faith and Church is immutable and perennially valid.

A Shift in Methodology: Both these mutually related models do not really touch the heart of the inculturation question. The inadequacy stems, in my view, from a deeper root. It is a question of method. The methodology employed in these models is one which lets the theological precede the anthropological. As long as this method is operative, there will not be any meaningful inculturation nor any local Church in the true sense. With these models we have to employ a useful distinction, local Churches in Asia and not really local Church of Asia. There is true inculturation only when the anthropological (cultural forms and expressions, patterns of thought and social relationship) precedes the theological (faith, mystery of the Church, grace), and not the other way round. In other words, inculturation in Asia requires that we make a shift in methodology.

The suggestion here is that we learn the Gospel and Christianity through our cultural language. Instead of trying to make the Church and the faith local and indigenous by relating them to Asian cultural forms, we should perceive and understand the what of the Church and the faith in terms of Asian culture and way of life, social organizations, and religious experience. For, the way of thinking, eating, worshipping, contracting marriages, relating to each other in family, in society...all of which form part of the culture of a people are not simply matters of daily life, but they are blessings of God. They are the language through which a people encounters and communes with reality. Inculturation concerns the interpretation of Christianity and the Church starting from the culture which embodies our experience and forms the basis for absorbing any new experience and knowledge.

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES OF INCULTURATION IN ASIA

Having indicated the necessity of a shift in method, let me now try to present some principles and reflect upon their implications.

1. CULTURE-BOUND EXPERIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING

Culture is the medium through which the very reality of faith, Church, etc., can be perceived, experienced, lived and expressed. Given the historicity of human existence in a determined context and tradition, it is inescapable that our perception of truth, understanding and experience of reality be bound up with a particular culture. A few examples may illustrate what is meant by this.

1. The Community of the Disciples of Jesus: Asia is not attuned to an objectification of religion into institutions, organizations or systems. In any case, these cannot assume a major role as they are subservient to experience, with reference to which their validity is tested. In Asia, religion is viewed mainly as **anubhava**. It is the inner experience in which the dichotomy between subject and object is overcome, and a deep communion with the entire reality cosmic, divine and human - is maintained.

This explains why the corporate reality ensuing from the person and message of Jesus - the Church - could be perceived meaningfully from the Asian perspective only as a community of those who have made the experience of Jesus their own and are on the path of enlightenment and wisdom. (Interestingly, baptism has been called in Christian tradition **photismos** - illumination.) It is those who have made the experience of Jesus their own who constitute the **samgha** - the community of the disciples of Jesus. The samgha of Buddhist origin is a community in which all are equal and all are admitted into it without distinction - male and female, high and low caste. The reality of samgha as a communion and fellowship of equals is a powerful social affirmation of the equal dignity of all human beings. Its import is best understood against the background of the hierarchically ordered caste-ridden society of the time of Buddha under the hegemony of Brahmins. The samgha is a cultural reality in most Asian traditions through the experience of which one can understand what it is to be the community of disciples around Jesus.

2. Trans-Historical: A second example could be the Asian search for the realness of reality (in contrast to illusion and ignorance-**māyā**, **avidyā**) in the trans-historical which is not the same as a-historical. Even in the historical, it is the ultimate. the **Tao**, the **Sūnyatā**, **Brahman**, which is sought, contemplated and meditated upon. This Asian approach, while recognizing a role for the historical, relativizes all historical expressions in relation to the ultimate mystery. Inculturation or the interpretation of Christian faith from this perspective has a lot of consequences. The more deeply we are in touch with the ultimate reality through **inner experience (anubhava)** the less important the many historically transmitted forms, structures, formulae relating to the ultimate would appear to us.

The Asian approach contrasts with the over-evaluation of history as we find it in the Western tradition, particularly in interpreting the mystery of Christ and the Church. On the other hand, we know that this stress on history in the West is not very old. The irruption of historical consciousness is a phenomenon of nineteenth century Europe, and it is within this context that Christian faith and the Bible were read, partly to legitimize the developing sciences and the technological society characterized by an affirmation of humankind involved in history as well as history-making.

3. Rooted in the Real: The third example relates to the difference in the approach to truth with implications for the self-understanding of the Church and its mission. In Asian traditions, the conception of truth as conformity of mind to reality or as representation of reality does not make much sense. Truth, in the Asian view, is more an ontic than a mental reality. In fact, the Sanskrit word **Satyam** meaning truth derives from **sat** which means real. Truth means to be firmly rooted in the real in contrast to the illusory. It is a

realization of the reality of sadhana. The opposite of truth is not falsehood, meaning something conceptually wrong or a mis-representation, but unreal. The rootedness of truth in the real in opposition to the illusory explains why it needs to be approached by meditation and contemplation. Hence *dhyána* and *zen* as ways to experience truth assume great importance in Asian traditions. The truth-claim is not in the persuasiveness of the arguments used, but in the experience undergone.

Given this approach to truth, it turns out to be difficult for most Asians to understand the Church as an institution proclaiming truth in the form of concepts and claiming allegiance to the truth it proclaims. Seen from the Asian perspective, the Western form of Christianity may appear to be a wordy religion. There is abundance of words in the form of proclamation, preaching, reading (for example in liturgy, evangelization, etc.). Asians would understand and interpret the Church as a locus where as a community of the disciples of Jesus they identify themselves with the experience of Jesus by contemplating and meditating in silence. Silence is the most powerful language and the originating ground of all words.

Similarly, according to the Asian cultural traditions, any understanding of the Church as an institution which imposes itself and its truth claims would appear very alien. Truth does not impose itself, but rather attracts everyone and everything to itself by its beauty, splendour and fascination. It is like Krishna who plays the flute and all beings - men and women, animals and birds, and even clouds - are drawn and converge towards the place from where the melody flows. The disciples of Jesus are a community drawn together by the spell of the truth and beauty resplendent in his person and message, rather than by a desire to be members of an institution. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself" (Jn 12:32).

Deep Spiritual Experience: The foregoing reflections on culture as the medium through which we can perceive the realities of faith have a lot of implications for the shape of the Church in Asia, its organizations, structures, ministries. Let me briefly indicate one such implication. The ministry as developed in the history of the Church would be understood differently in Asia. Ministers of the Church would deserve respect not so much because of the juridical title they have or the formal authority they possess but because they are persons who are truly enlightened as the *arhat* or *guru* and have a deep experience of the mystery at the heart of the Church. A claim to authority without deep spiritual experience has, in the Asian view, little to do with religion and religiosity.

2. AT THE LEVEL OF WORLD-VIEW

Underlying every culture is a particular world-view. It is the matrix for the configuration of various cultural forms and the emergence of values. It is articulated in the social organization of the cultural group, its institutions, structures, etc. True inculturation takes place only when there is an encounter and dialogue at the level of the world-view. In most cases, this world-view is constituted by the religion of a people which is the heart of their culture. In Asia where Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, have animated the cultural traditions of the people, inculturation needs to be approached from the situation of religious pluralism. Dialogue with brothers and sisters of

other religions is not an activity of the Christians in Asia; it enters into the very definition of what it is to be a Christian in Asia. To be Christian is not an abstraction, but a contextual reality. Let me mention here some of the many implications of what I have stated.

Devotees of Jesus: Traditionally, one has been accustomed to view people either as belonging or not-belonging to the Church. But we have in Asia the phenomenon of a lot of men and women who are gripped by Jesus, his life and teachings. They are his devotees while they continue to be Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists. What is particularly remarkable is that they can be Hindus or Buddhists, etc., and devotees of Christ without being syncretistic. Syncretism, they feel, is something which is attributed to them from outside, while from within, at the level of their consciousness, they experience unity and harmony, and are not assailed by those contradictions and conflicts which may appear to those who look at them from without.

In the general understanding of the Church, there is no real place for this category of people who see themselves as disciples of Christ and his followers. If the Church is the communion and fellowship of the disciples of Christ, it cannot be reduced to merely an either/or situation - either belonging to the Church or not belonging. The Asian situation calls for a fresh and creative interpretation of the ecclesial reality. This may be possible only when the Asian local churches are stimulated through a deep encounter with the world-view and religions of the millions of followers of Christ who are Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, etc.

Among most Asian peoples, the world-view supplied by religion is also the basis of human interpersonal relationships and the sense of community. The communitarian reality which they experience and live as part of their culture cannot be set aside in any consideration of the Church since the Church itself is essentially a communitarian reality. The Church does not thrive on the destruction of already existing patterns of human relationships, love and unity, and their spontaneous and structured expressions in daily life. Rather, the Church derives the fibres of its body from the already existing anthropological and social realities. It is in the soil of human relationships and in the sense of community among people (which are gifts of God) that the Church community should blossom. This soil also confers the specific identity of a local church.

Ecclesiology Within Theology of Creation: This perspective of inculturation calls for an ecclesiology not simply centered on redemption and salvation, but integrated within the larger frame of a theology of creation. In this way, the already existing communitarian experience and expressions of a people will find a place within the ecclesial reality. One of the serious lacunae in our ecclesiology is that it is too narrowly conceived in terms of salvation and redemption, and leaves little room for a theology of creation.

Eucharist as Sacrament of Initiation: What has been said opens up possibilities not simply for peripheral but quite profound changes in the understanding of the Church and its relationship with the larger community of people. For example, people of other faiths living together with Christians are ready to live

and share many dimensions of Christian living and celebration in deep spiritual communion. The celebration of the life and death of Jesus in the Eucharist and its meaning is much more easily perceived and lived by them than is baptism. In these circumstances, it is being asked whether the Eucharist could be in Asia the first sacrament which initiates brothers and sisters of other faiths into a deeper following of Christ, to be followed, if and when they so wish, by baptism at a later stage. If so, how are we to reconcile this with the understanding of the sacrament of baptism as the door to the Church and Christian living? Many such questions could be raised for further study and theological reflection.

3. INCULTURATION AND SOCIO-POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

We should understand culture and the Church not as static but as dynamic realities. In order to live and survive, a culture has to continuously undergo changes and transformation. Growth and evolution takes place by absorption of new elements resulting from the change of situations and contexts in which individual and collective existence is carried on. Now, change in culture and its expressions is intimately related to the socio-political realities. Change in the socio-political situation leads to change in the culture of the people, their customs and social relationship. At the same time, culture, especially in so far as it embodies meaning and values in its symbols, can act as a powerful force for the transformation of the socio-political realities. Inculturation has to be seen in this dynamic context and not as an adoption of some archaic forms and symbols which could well be deadwood in an evolving culture.

Inculturation in Asia should be a process through which the Church is born ever anew from out of its interaction with the socio-political realities of the context. In concrete, inculturation of the local churches has to be seen in conjunction with the situation of massive poverty, oppression and injustice characterizing most parts of this continent. These socio-political realities throw up challenges the facing of which shapes continuously the local churches, and makes them ever more deeply rooted in the soil. The process of inculturation so understood and lived will link up the local church with the larger community of the people with their social, economic and political questions and problems. It thus prevents the Church from getting isolated from the rest of the people with whom it shares the same socio-political realities.

4. 'GREAT' AND 'LITTLE' TRADITIONS

The process of inculturation will be affected by the various cultural streams among the people living in a particular area, region or nation. The Church should not allow itself to be dominated by the culture of the socially, economically and politically dominant group or groups, but should be sensitive to the culture and tradition of the weaker sections of the population.

Anthropologist Robert Redfield has made a well known distinction between the 'great tradition' and the 'little tradition' to be found in every civilization, group or nation. A typical example would be the difference between Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic tradition in India. A community or a nation is generally governed by the culture of the great

tradition which belongs to the elite, the well-to-do class or the race claiming superiority, while the culture and tradition of the weaker group is looked down upon. At the global level with the still prevailing evolutionary view of culture and the political and economic dominance of the West, the cultures of the peoples of developing nations are being looked at as 'little traditions' and as having no other destiny than to be absorbed into the orbit of the superculture generated and maintained by the industrially advanced Western nations.

Some of the attempts at inculturation made in the past, e.g., by Roberto de Nobili and Matteo Ricci, related to the higher strata of society. Underlying these attempts was the 'filter-down theory', namely the idea that by associating with the culture of those at the higher echelons of the society the masses at the base will automatically be influenced. Even the new spurt of enthusiasm for inculturation in the wake of Vatican II has been directed along the lines of absorbing into the Church the 'classical' culture fostered and cultivated mostly by the elitist groups.

Culture Means Identity and Power: Today the local churches in Asia turn decisively towards the culture of the weak and the marginalized. Culture is not simply a question of customs, manners or traditions. It is a question of the identity of a people, the affirmation of their legitimate selfhood deserving attention and respect. Culture also means power. To negate culture is to deny power and a legitimate place to people. The valuing of the culture of the lowly and the least and the attempt to understand the reality of the Church itself from the aspirations, questions and anxieties of those of the little tradition would make inculturation a process of liberation.

A Correct Reading of History: True inculturation would presuppose also a correct reading of history. It must be noted in this connection that there is a general trend to interpret history from the perspective of the dominant or majority group, and the traditions and cultures of the lower strata and of the minorities are passed over in silence or presented in a distorted way. A true history of culture must be comprehensive with due place given to the culture and tradition of every sector of the population. Failure to do this can have a lot of practical consequences in the relationships of various groups of peoples making up a nation. For example, the history and culture of Malaysia is a history of Malays, Chinese and Indians, and not of Malays alone. Similarly one should be careful in the periodization of history. The dividing of Indian history, for example, into successive Hindu, Muslim and Christian periods, is not desirable. For it often implies that the Hindu is the true Indian culture while Muslim and Christian traditions are its crust, while in reality India is made up of the traditions of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, tribals, etc.

THE QUESTION OF CRITERIA

The shift of method I have suggested and the principles I have proposed may leave the readers, understandably, with a lot of questions, especially concerning the normative criteria in the task of inculturation. One may well ask questions like these: If we are to follow this approach and these principles, how are we to know that the process of inculturation pursued in a local church is authentic? Are we not making

the Gospel suit the culture rather than judge the culture in light of the Gospel? How are we to know that the local church is in continuity with the tradition of the universal Church and its heritage?

1. DIALECTICS OF NORMATIVITY AND INTEGRATION

That an inculturation process be authentic, it is, of course, essential to recognize the normative role of the Gospel. What is equally important, but often not taken in sufficient account, is the fact that the Gospel, faith and the Church, can be meaningfully understood and lived only when they are integrated into the cultural horizon of a people. There is a dialectical relationship between the normativity of the Gospel and the necessity of integration. The process of inculturation has to maintain the two poles, if it is to be authentic.

Admittedly, there is the mystery of evil operating in the human history and culture. Cultures can and do contain elements of evil, sin, enslavement and values that go counter to the dignity of human beings and the well-being of society. However, no judgement on these can be pronounced a priori according to prefabricated criteria, independent of a knowledge of the culture from within.

External and Internal Understanding of a Culture: Anthropologists distinguish between etic and emic understanding of culture. Etic relates to the study and understanding of a culture from without on the basis of data, information, etc. The emic approach to culture is an understanding from within. It is the knowledge that springs from concrete experience and living in the culture. The Gospel is and ought to be a challenging force and a normative point of reference by which sin, evil and the negative side of culture is to be judged. This, however, can happen only at the level of the encounter between Gospel and culture in the concrete living of the people belonging to that culture, and only when there is an emic understanding and knowledge of that culture. Further, this makes us realize how difficult it is today to exercise meaningfully the magisterium of the Church in matters of inculturation from only a knowledge of the culture from without, and not from within.

Inculturation and the Prophetic: The fact that a people belonging to a culture interpret the Gospel and understand the Church from within their world need not render them incapable of seeing the defects, limitations and shortcomings present in their culture. Otherwise, the emergence of prophets in every tradition and culture who are able to judge and critically evaluate the very culture to which they belong would remain unexplainable. Inculturation does not blunt the prophetic edge of the Gospel.

The point I am arguing is that normativity and judging prophetism can proceed only from within the cultural world of a local church. It is, therefore, impossible to employ common criteria to judge the validity of what is formulated, shaped and lived in wide varieties of cultural situations and different frameworks of thought and action. Further, granting that objective norms and criteria do exist, even these would depend on a particular language, system of thought and frame of reference. An exaggerated preoccupation with norms and criteria is indicative of an objectified view of religion. The authenticity of inculturation has to be sought in the concrete living out of the Gospel by a

community of people in a determined cultural context. A believing local community is in the best position to discern and judge the genuineness of inculturation in its context.

2. HISTORY, TRADITION AND IDENTITY

It is beyond doubt that the local church and its inculturation, should be in continuity with tradition. But the real question is to what degree and to what extent should this link be with the past.

It would be too simplistic and naive to imagine that tradition could be transported whole and entire from the past into the present of a local church. History and tradition can be apprehended only from the present, and this is inevitable. But by approaching the past tradition from the present we do not simply have tradition, but tradition-as-reinterpreted-by-the-present.

Apart from this unavoidable situation in our relation to the past, there is a deeper reason why in inculturating we should positively and consciously re-interpret the past heritage. Inculturation cannot be reduced to simply reproducing in the local church a copy of a past formation with its successive interpretations, formulations, structures and ways of life that were generated in the course of centuries. Christianity is not only a fact of history but is a powerful affirmation of the historicity of human existence, of human beings with their cultures and tradition, since God has become part of history in the person and life of Jesus. The historicity of the event of Jesus does not replace the history of peoples, their cultures and traditions, but rather affirms and values them.

Anthropology Precedes Theology: The approach to the historical event of Jesus and Church tradition, therefore, has to start from the history of peoples, their traditions and cultures, all of which have their own value and legitimacy. This is consistent with the rule that the anthropological precedes the theological. By following this direction we will be able to discern and discover the degree and extent of the import of past Christian traditions for the local church today in a particular cultural context.

Identity of the Local Church: In the light of what has been said, we can reflect also on the question of the identity of the local church with other churches and specially with the church of the past. Here again, there can be different ways of considering the common identity. Among the local churches, the identity which is common is similar to that which exists between the various portrayals of one reality by different artists. The true artist does not simply reproduce but interprets, and yet all the pictures have a common identity in so far as they are attempts to represent one and the same reality. Or, to use another image, it is like the resemblance of the individuals in the same family. They all form one family, one identity, and yet they are different with different characteristic traits, temperaments, potentialities, etc.

Structures and Ministries in the Local Church: The particular culture in which a local church lives would suggest that the structures, ministries, etc., developed in the past in different cultural milieux and historical settings need not

be reproduced uniformly in all the local churches. These ministerial and organizational structures were themselves the fruit of an encounter of the Gospel with the culture and social organizations of the past among determined groups of people. It is true that the maintenance of uniformity in local churches regarding ministerial and other structures is often based on *ius divinum* or on the basis of divine institution. It must nevertheless be remarked that, in the context of inculturation today, these very concepts, namely *ius divinum* and divine institution need to be re-thought and further reflected upon. It is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into this question.

CONCLUSION

The Asian local churches should have their own form and shape. Christianity in this continent can no longer live on borrowed identity. Echoing the words of Pope Paul VI in Kampala, Uganda, "You can and should have an African Christianity", we can say that the churches here should be truly Asian churches. This would call for much deeper change than the current understanding of inculturation seems to allow. Inculturation would open up a vast field of possibilities when the anthropological and the cultural become the way through which the theological is approached, perceived, appropriated, integrated and lived. The criteria for authentic inculturation and the extent of the relationship with the heritage of the past should flow from the believing community where the Word of God is present and the Spirit actively at work. It is ultimately the local church, i.e., the believing community in a cultural context, aided by the Spirit who leads into all truth (Jn 16:13), which is the active subject and agent of inculturation and this responsibility can neither be delegated nor substituted.

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Ref. Vidyajyoti Journal, Sept. 1988, Pp. 422-436.
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MARRIAGE IN SUCCESSIVE STEPS AMONG THE KARIMOJONG OF UGANDA

René Brossard, MA

(Fr. René Brossard, of the Society of Missionaries of Africa has been working in Moroto Diocese, Uganda among the nomadic Karimojong people. The following is a summary of the salient points of his article which appeared in the Bulletin APOSTOLATE TO THE NOMADS published by the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA) in Nairobi).

Our Church consists mainly of children and old people... Why are adult Catholics nearly absent from the Karimojong Church and its sacramental life? A major reason is that many young boys and girls are in a situation officially defined by the Church as «irregular» when they embark on the long process of getting married according to the customary law of the Karimojong who are pastoral nomads in N.E. Uganda. They are refused the sacraments; gradually they lose interest in their religion, they grow out of it....

Recent statistics are revealing: in 1987 the Diocese of Moroto had 170,161 Catholics with 3,305 baptisms administered during that year and only 33 marriages celebrated in church in the same year, of which 27 had been celebrated in a non-Karimojong parish where customs are different.

THE DISCUSSION IN THE EAST AFRICAN CHURCH

The AMECEA Ninth Plenary Conference was devoted to the discussion of the issue. Bishop John Njenga of Eldoret addressed the participants; he explained the two ways of getting married, i.e. according to canon law and according to customary law or in successive stages. In an attempt to reconcile the two approaches, he suggested that "we should not aim at destroying these stages as long as they can be christianized...."

Bishop Njenga's proposed solution, however, failed to generate the necessary consensus among the participants and the Conference just recommended that «each episcopal conference undertake research into traditional customary marriage in order to determine how the church should be involved» in it. In his letter to the Conference, Pope John Paul II had noted that marriage in successive stages cannot be accepted because "marriage between two baptized persons is a symbol of the union of Christ and the Church, which is not a temporary or «trial» union...."

Reconciling Canonical and Customary Marriage: In Moroto Diocese, Fr. Clement Othim (1) in his doctoral dissertation analyzes the Karimojong customary marriage and proposes a pastoral approach that might reconcile the canonical form of marriage with the successive stages of customary marriage.

Traditionally, Karimojong marry by stages and have to follow a long process. There are five stages, each of which can take years to complete

'Akiting': courtship; 'Apudokin': declaration; 'Akicul': payment for the first child; 'Aropar': partial bride wealth; 'Ekitanu': completion of bride-wealth payment and marriage celebrations.

The decisive stage for the Karimojong is the 'apudokin' or declaration time. They can stay together and have sexual intercourse. They belong to each other and are considered by the village as a married couple. The girl thus betrothed is respected like a married woman and she is happy if she expects a child. Another man cannot court her. She stays in her village and is still called 'apese' (girl). After 'akicul' (payment for the first child) the man will take his wife in his house. The marriage will be definitely concluded after completion of the bride-wealth payment.

AN INNOVATIVE AND PROMISING PASTORAL

Besides analyzing the Karimojong customary marriage, Fr. Othim also proposes five tentative pastoral remedies aimed at healing the rift between the canonical form of marriage and the successive stages of Karimojong customary marriage.

Here is the most innovative and promising pastoral remedy: 'the catechumenate'. There is an analogy between the status of a catechumen (not yet baptized but already joined to the Church) and that of two Karimojong youngsters in the process of getting married. They are not yet fully married, but are already considered in a certain sense married by their communities. "Cohabitation (prior to the completion of marriage) is considered commonly as a marriage...."

Actually, the difficulty does not lie in the long time that the whole process takes, but in the fact that sexual intercourse and production of children are sanctioned by the Karimojong community prior to the conclusion of the marriage process....

'A Marriage Catechumenate': I dream of a marriage catechumenate along the following lines:

- a) After their Confirmation, follow the youngsters closely. Continue teaching them, especially about what constitutes now their main concern - starting a family.
- b) The principles of Christian marriage should be particularly emphasized: its unity; its indissolubility; the love which should preside as the foundation of their new family; the necessity of a free choice...
- c) They should be encouraged to receive the sacraments regularly (Reconciliation, Eucharist) and involve themselves in church activities and prayer groups.
- d) When the time comes to start cohabitation, have a special ceremony for the new 'couple', instead of condemning them as public sinners. They should manifest clearly their intention of seriously starting a new family, to remain together in love. The couple will have to be followed closely and invited, when the time comes, to proceed to the next step...

e) The last step would be the Church wedding. Here in Karamoja, there is no way for young people to receive from their families the permission to have a church wedding after the 'apudokin'. The earliest stage at which parents will allow their children to receive the sacrament of marriage is after the 'akicul', the time which follows the arrival of the first child and the payment for it....

- end -

- (1) Othim, Clement.
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RECOVERING THE WORD OF GOD TODAY WITH AND AMONG THE POOR

Anastasia Lott, MM

(This reflection is based on four years of work in a margined neighbourhood (barrio) in the western plains region of the interior of Venezuela and on support work with apostolic groups throughout the diocese where the same barrio is located (diocese of Barinas). The reflections are enriched by opportunities for interchange with other pastoral experiences in Venezuela, South America, and the United States, as well as certain other third-world mission experiences. Some elements are lived experiences/realities; others, intuitions based on study and reflection. And the final good news is this: it can work!)

THE JOY OF SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH THE POOR

Reading the Scriptures with the poor is a very different experience from the reading of the Bible with well-educated, middle or upper-class folks. The community of the poor is a privileged place for knowing/hearing the Word of God. "Blessed are the poor for the Reign of God is theirs". And for the person whose eyes are opened by the experience of walking with the poor, being evangelized with and by the poor, the concepts and images of the Reign are irreversibly changed. The poor do not have the same sophisticated techniques for disarming the knife-edge of the Word precisely because often their intellectual formation is less. From their perspective, they are able to hear very differently such messages as the Exodus experience or the polemics about the rich entering the Reign of God.

The Context of Prayer In my experience with poor people and with farm workers in abandoned areas, the Bible is always read within the context of prayer. This element has also been noted by Carlos Mesters about similar types of groups in Brazil. They certainly do not approach the Scriptures in a way that would be called "scientific" but do grow in their efforts to understand the Word at deeper and more complicated levels, and also little by little grow in their capacity to capture the Bible message in a more integrated way. The experience of the heart interpretation of the biblical message by poor people does not devalue scientific research, but does in some sense relativize it.

In Venezuela there is a very common expression, "Si Dios quiere..." and the response, "y la Virgen" - if God wants... and the Virgin. One of my first and most striking moments in a biblical reflection group in my little neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city had to do with a reflection on this expression and the difference between the rich and the poor. The comment was made that only the poor use this expression - that the rich do not have to depend on God (in the way that the poor do) as they can make their plans and have hopes of being able to fulfill them with their own resources. Because of the multiple problems of health, lack of work, financial resources... and all the little things that can very easily go wrong for the poor in a given day, they deeply

live the idea of "si Dios quiere," for they have no security of being able to accomplish anything from one day to the next. Their sense of reliance on God is challenging to those of us who have more. Though they live in an inhuman situation, that dependence leads to a deep experience of the true gratuitousness of the experience of God, and this is constantly echoed in their sharing of the Word.

The joy of sharing the Bible with the poor often comes about in particular moments, when suddenly there is a beautiful faith connection between Word and some aspect of the lived daily reality and struggle. Suddenly members of a group realize in a special, deep way the message of challenge or consolation that is in the Scriptures. Typical examples have to do with the parable of the prodigal son or other moments having to do with a family situation.

Wisdom and Prophetic Literature Another area of great challenge in the barrio communities is that of the wisdom and prophetic literature, each of which in its own way denounces injustices and oppression and calls upon the believer to assume a Christian, prophetic mysticism. Living as victims of personal and institutional sin, the prophetic role seems to come naturally to small neighborhood Christian groups. The experience of an Exodus people is also very much felt by many Venezuelan (and other poor) urban dwellers because so many are migrants to the cities from a very difficult and oppressive country life: low wages, no or poor services, despair in rural agricultural areas.

These moments of first encounter with the Scriptures in such a way that the gospel message can be understood and placed in dialogue with life are joyful and exciting moments. The Bible grows as a true book of the community, one that nourishes, orients, and challenges. Their joy is shared by the accompanying pastoral agents. The challenges are often a thousand times multiplied as the sharing role grows and the confrontation with the growing authentic faith commitment among the poor and illiterate causes the pastoral agent to reconsider and revise his or her own expressions of faith.

POTENTIAL DANGERS AND SOME EARLY WARNINGS

Working with poor people with the Scriptures today in Latin America (and other places) is not without its potential danger or problem areas. (Unfortunately, these dangers and potential problems have generally been both exaggerated and isolated from the wider context by some critics of Liberation Theology, often hindering the possibilities of confronting them more constructively.) As often happens, in situations of joy and great zeal, there are occasional errors, extremes, reductionisms, partializations, and gross generalizations that result in misleading conclusions.

Manipulating the Texts. One of the most common tendencies is to replace the old limiting dogmatic use of the Bible with a new, limited ideological use. Especially among newly "converted" pastoral agents lacking a more solid formation in Scripture and its historical context, there are strong tendencies to "pick and choose" texts that complement the popular ideology of the moment, especially today the option for the poor and the concept of liberation. It is not, however,

typical only of Latin-American pastoral agents to choose readings that help a group make the "right decision" about some problem - the right decision being the one that the pastoral agent has already decided upon. The danger is the tendency, usually due to an inability to integrate effectively with the wider context of the Bible, to use texts that capture only parts of the Reign of God message - condemning the rich, for example, but failing also to effectively and appropriately reflect on, preach, and challenge the passivity and resistances of the poor in assuming and sharing the gospel good news.

Part of this danger is related to an ongoing methodological dilemma: which comes first, - the Word of God or our lived experience? It is usually easier and far more immediately satisfying to begin with a sharing of experiences and/or contemporary issues followed by a spontaneous selection of texts that appear to illuminate the situations, circumstances, causes, and consequences. However, this order is also much more vulnerable to at least a subconsciously manipulative selection. The ultimate criterion must be that the Word challenge our lives.

Need for Critical Consciousness Another potential danger has to do with a methodological language currently in style in Latin America and many other parts of the world as a product of the revision of life ("revisión de vida") method of the young Christian workers and students movements. The idea of "see-judge-act" (ver, juzgar, y actuar) can be a subtle trap, adopting revision of life language without a deeper questioning of ideologies implicit in certain attitudes, language, and options. Unfortunately, this language is often used to justify most pastoral practices currently in use in Latin America, regardless of how well based (or not) the element of critical consciousness in the judge/reflect stage may be.

Alienation A danger also exists of going from one extreme (Father knows all and teaches the people) to another (everything the poor say and do is good and right). In the efforts to assume a new option for and with the poor in their struggles toward conversion and the faithful assumption of a Christian commitment, some pastoral agents become blinded to the rationalizations that the poor also have for justifying some of their less-than-gospel choices. We are all alienated (after all, we are all products of a certain problematic social structure). It is only by mutual, communal support and challenge that we can begin to overcome our alienation and begin to live more humanly. The gospel is a moment of challenge for all of us.

Extremes of Interpretation Sharp, extremes regarding the ways of understanding Bible interpretation can be another danger area, also not limited to the Latin-American reality. On one side, exegesis is seen only as a science, and on the other, biblical reflection as only the interpretation by the heart of the poor. Neither extreme arrives at a true understanding of the Word of God, for neither takes into consideration the constant work of grace in the historical process of all creation - as much in the contexts in which the original texts were developed as in the contexts today in which Christians encounter anew these texts. Scientific data are neither absolute nor alien to the interpretation process.

Typically, these dangers or problems are the result of the failure to achieve a true, critical, community reading of Scripture that is at

once a heralding of the good news of the Reign for those who are poor and left behind by societies and a challenge to be truly and faithfully at the service of that Reign. They result from failing to see that the gospel message is both good news and bad news, that God relates differently to different persons and that such differences are not accidental but products of the logic of the Reign of love. The good news is that the poor and struggling people of our world are the seeds and heirs of the home of love. The bad news is for those who attempt to promote or who are accomplices in justifying oppressive practices and structures, or false words (of false gods). And the most challenging news is for those who claim to want to follow Jesus and share in building God's home of love. Losing sight of the conflict of the message reduces our capacity to penetrate the message.

CRITERIA OF POPULAR EXEGESIS

In spite of the potential dangers and pitfalls, there have been some very fine experiences with popular exegesis, moments in which the biblical reflection begins to penetrate to the more authentic Christian challenges. What are the criteria for popular exegesis?

- 1) Book of the Community. Even when read individually, the Bible is understood more and more as a community book, one which only makes sense read from the perspective of the community struggle for transformation; and only interpreted for action in a community context of criticism, challenge, and commitment.
- 2) Conversion-oriented. Although the progressive sector of the Latin American church carefully analyzes structural oppression and institutional sin, and has been criticized for failing to take into sufficient consideration the aspect of personal sin and conversion, there is a growing consciousness at the level of the small groups of the importance of the element of personal conversion.
- 3) Response-oriented. The gospel is very good news for the poor, but the communities of the margined and poor are not content to sit back and glory in their "status". Instead there is growing emphasis on fidelity in the community action-response to the lived situation and the announced Word. Praxis calls us to a communion of reflection and action. Part of the good news is in the response.
- 4) Telling/Retelling Forms. There is a growing capacity, although still limited, to tell the gospel story; not only read it, but really assume it as part of our felt/lived tradition. This leads to a discovery of the ongoing revelation and the divine presence right now. The good news is not yet finished, has not yet been completely revealed, but it is still to be woven in the lives of those who are seekers and builders of God's home of love.
- 5) Political. The Bible message is understood as a political challenge, one which has political implications and consequences. The alliances of God, the political divisions and Christian responses to them, and the biblical political struggles all take on new importance. We read and live Scripture today with eyes on race, sex, and class.

SOME OF THE SUCCESSES:

- 1) Exodus Reflection. The little reflection groups in Latin America have discovered in the Exodus account a key Scripture theme that truly resonates with their own experiences of enslavement, struggle, journey, organization, covenant relationship, and hope. It is a portion of the biblical tradition that offers both promise and many challenges for fidelity. It seems to have become an archetype for the ongoing struggle for survival.
- 2) Creation Reflection. More and more Latin Americans are rediscovering in the creation theme an affirmation of their own beings as co-creators in the Lord's ongoing creation process. This was an important theme before and after John Paul II's January 1985 visit to Venezuela.
- 3) Prophets. Many poor people relate easily to the prophetic themes in the Bible. In the formation work done in support of the basic ecclesial communities, work is done with groups on the books of the prophets. Participants naturally see the parallel challenges of announcing God present, denouncing injustice and oppression, and calling for conversion. And the prophetic message and lives of pastoral agents converted by their work with and among poor struggling communities also yields an effective prophetic message to the church institution and its hierarchy.
- 4) Wisdom Literature. Among the small Christian communities and neighbourhood reflection groups, there is, little by little, a discovery of the value and place of the Wisdom literature in the overall Scripture integration. Although initially many groups and communities sometimes find this part of the Scripture difficult to manage because of the kinds of images used, with wider experiences in biblical themes, poor people readily discover resonances which enable them to "translate" into meaningful poetry and images of today.
- 5) Early Christian Communities. Similar to the reflections on the prophetic role of the church, the communities of poor and struggling people respond immediately to the struggles of the early Christian communities. They relate strongly to the efforts of those first communities to seek shared solutions to their situations and to learn new ways to celebrate together the sacred mysteries of passionate service and resurrection hope.
- 6) Jesus of the Poor. The small reflection groups in marginated areas also discover a radical spirituality that both consoles and challenges when they study Jesus' tender relationship with poor people. They are consoled by the Word of good news for those fellow poor people. They make their own the challenge of Jesus' invitation to discipleship. The Jesus who preaches the Beatitudes, who invites the rich young man to sell all and give to the poor, who is lovingly and gently at home with Mary Magdalene, who pitches his tent among the homeless, is a special force of love for the small, poor communities, struggling to survive, to grow, and to nurture God's home of love among us.

CHALLENGES TO PASTORAL AGENTS

These experiences of different communities, struggling along the path of Christian journeying and Christian commitment, present both the communities and the professional willing to work with them with new challenges.

1) Access to the Word One of the most difficult aspects of biblical reflection among the poorest and most marginated people is the common problem of illiteracy. This presents the challenge of making the Word of God available to communities in such a way that it can be shared, reflected on, and assumed. This is a matter both of method and of media. The pastoral agent, the exegete, and the community, can work together to create media that are faithful at once to the original text, the context of today, and the aptitude of the group. It is not simply a question of theater or audio-visual resources, but of appropriate and imaginative translation and interpretation within the real lived situation of the community.

2) Text/Context - Context/New Texts (Integrating Faith and Life) One of the most important potential areas of service of the exegete to the small community is that of helping people to understand the original historical context in which the Scripture texts were developed. The professional plays an important service role in helping a community to understand the messages that are hidden in the historical context.

3) Weave/Integrate (Creation-Exodus-Incarnation-Eschatology) As a person with a more broadly integrated understanding of the gospel message, the exegete or pastoral agent can assume the task of enabling the novice community to weave together in the reflection fabric of its common life the key theological concepts that form a solid base for an integrated biblical and theological reflection and which are thus necessary for faithful interpretation. Without this support service, it is difficult to avoid the common dangers and problems of departmentalizing or partializing the Word into little pieces that serve individual interests.

4) The Bible as the Historic Memory of the Poor It is beneficial to the action-reflection response of the marginated communities to be able to perceive creatively and constructively the lines in the Scriptures concerning the historic memory of the poor as the chosen of God. The exegete can help the communities to understand the historical development of the Bible and the relationships of the favoured groups of God in each moment. Venezuelans in the barrios feel the agonizing pinch of a runaway economy and the clamor goes up from the base begging the hierarchy to place itself clearly with the struggling poor people. More and more pastoral agents and even bishops are responding gracefully and courageously with and for the oppressed.

5) Poor People as Exegetes The professional exegete can be a facilitator with the poor communities, of the process in which there is a deeper interpretation of the Bible. This facilitation means criticizing, as well as affirming, the communal reflection and interpretation process. It means recognizing the community of the poor as a privileged moment for exegesis, as the best place (locus) for

authentic exegesis. It also means recognizing the mutual limitations between exegete and community in terms of arriving at a faithful interpretation of the Word of God. Indeed, some exegetes in Latin America would argue that it is impossible to interpret the Biblical revelation outside of a real experience of struggle for social transformation, that it is only within the context of actual service to transformation that the Word of God can be properly understood. Thus the challenge here to the exegete is mutual accompaniment - supporting, affirming, questioning, challenging, and clarifying.

6) Exegesis as a Service to the Community This last part might be best articulated as a summary of the challenges to the professional exegete: have the courage to place your knowledge at the humble service of poor people who are seeking to be faithful to the gospel promise and challenge. Be willing to enter into a covenant of faithful and courageous interpretation.

CONCLUSION

The process of biblical reflection and deepening commitment with poor people really happens in an exciting and challenging way. When communities of struggling poor people assume a biblically based Christian commitment, they are fortified and shape their own future commitment. In 1987 in Barrio Las Colinas, a year after missionaries left the community, committed youth and adults continue to meet frequently for prayer and Scripture sharing. They have further shaped their communal commitment to justice and transformation to include new projects and activities, and have managed to gently work a conversion process even in the life of the Venezuelan priest who now celebrates liturgy with them occasionally. They become new life for others - challenging their own community, the local church, and local leadership of all kinds, toward transformation in love and justice.

The reflection is meant to be a challenge and an invitation to those privileged to have been able to study the Scriptures in greater depth. It is an invitation to service with the communities throughout the world who are hungry and thirsty for the Word of God. The challenges to one who chooses this way will be endless and will demand both tremendous humility and great creativity. But the graces will also abound - overflowing, a full measure, pressed down, a sign of the Reign of God groaning to be born among the little, humble reflection groups, among God's poor, struggling, yearning "little ones".

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An International Review, Vol. XVI, No.3, July 1988,
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(See also Verteuil, Michael de. "Bible Study in the Caribbean Today"
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CLARIFYING MISSIONARY IDENTITY

Hugh MacMahon, SSC

If Missionary Societies do not articulate a clear vision of mission today they will have trouble bringing their members together in solidarity, discovering and facing up to the most urgent needs of present day mission, convincing prospective candidates and supporters of the urgency of joining them and then training their personnel for the new situation.

The Right Questions The task of clarification can be simplified by beginning with the right questions. For example, missionary identity does not depend on where a person works. One can be equally missionary, if one wishes, in Africa, Asia, Latin America or elsewhere. Nor is what one does there that important. Building up Christian communities, outreach to non-Christians, dialogue with other religions, labour or youth apostolates and social service can all be seen as missionary work. Nor is the aspect of the message which one proclaims necessarily distinctive. Liberation, the Kingdom, the Church, the Cosmic God or the task of awakening to one's inner nature could all be starting points depending on the people's circumstances.

What can be seen as characteristic of mission is above and beyond all these. It lies in an awareness of a special purpose or goal. What is this and how is it to be discovered?

RESOURCES

First of all, we can no longer expect to find the definitive answer to our problems in Church documents which do not specifically deal with the questions we are asking.

Ad Gentes addressed mission from the aspect of the responsibility for evangelization on the part of the local churches. Its references to Missionary Societies, while important, were subordinated to the main topic (eg. A.G. 27, 32). Evangelii Nuntiandi was concerned with emphasizing the duty of all Christians to be evangelizers. Again, its mention of Missionary Societies was incidental (cf. E.V. 69).

However these documents, as well as the Missionary encyclicals of the past seventy years and recent statements of the Popes, the Congregation for Evangelization and the Council for Non-Christians, are not without their value. Along with an awareness of the reasons for which each Missionary Society was founded, and its particular experience of mission, they provide part of the general background out of which an agreed vision of mission today can emerge.

Ad Gentes, for instance, states that the goal of mission is to 'preach the Gospel and plant the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ' (A.G. 6). While preaching the Gospel and planting the Church can equally be the task of non-missionaries, what

helps to distinguish the specific missionary concern is the phrase 'among peoples or groups who do not believe in Christ'.

First Proclamation: In March, 1988, Cardinal Tomko of the Congregation for Evangelization in an address to the Superiors General of Missionary Societies, said that first proclamation of the Gospel should be their special aim "It is this that should give specificity and unity to your formation and to your spiritual and apostolic life'.

This understanding of mission echoes the original concern which brought Missionary Societies into being. Most missionaries draw their basic inspiration from the fact that there are people whose cultural circumstances allow no opportunity for their hearing the Good News. The missionaries' own relationship with Christ leads them to believe that the most valuable service they can offer those people is to share their experience of him with them.

PLURALITY OF SITUATIONS

In practice the task of first proclamation normally includes setting up local communities to witness to the new-found faith of the people and to celebrate Christ's presence among them. It calls for the training of local leaders to whom responsibility for running the new Church can be transferred. It can mean staying on for a period with the new Church in order to help it meet new needs that emerge in the course of its development. It can also require a return to certain Churches for a 'second proclamation' because the first failed to take root and bear fruit.

In each of these situations the only danger for missionaries is to forget the original intention and how it all began - the desire to reach out to the unevangelized.

No one stage - first proclamation, building up the new Church, or second proclamation - can be said to be more urgent or important than another. However, for the health of world mission and the various missionary societies, the key-concept of going out to those who have not heard the Word should not be forgotten or allowed to drop out of sight.

A Significant Number in First Proclamation: As a result, each Missionary Society needs to have a significant number of its members engaged in first proclamation. Such pioneers would be active examples of what the Society stands for and an inspiration for new candidates and those in formation. The problems they encounter in first evangelization should be shared with all the membership so that they become the topic of reflection, study and prayer for the whole Society.

Those on the frontiers would be a constant reminder to all of the direction in which their efforts should be orientated. They would help prevent missionaries from becoming the permanent solution to a local church's problem and a reminder that the missionary task is rather to help the local church find the permanent solution to its leadership, financial or evangelical needs.

Such an orientation would also help to keep Missionary Societies at the edge of world mission, continually seeking ways of making contact with peoples who now seem out of reach and helping the Churches with whom they are working to become more aware of their own missionary responsibilities.

SOCIETY IDENTITY

Beyond this, individual Missionary Societies further specify their identity by making their own key decisions. For instance, our Society (of St. Columban) chose to work first in China, then in other parts of Asia and later in Latin America, Pakistan and the Caribbean. We could have decided to go to Africa and the Arctic but did not do so.

We have also put the unevangelized and the young Churches as our priority. We did not opt to follow in the steps of St. Columban by going to the de-Christianised peoples of France, Italy or elsewhere as he did. We further added to our identity by now seeking candidates from all the countries in which we work. And in helping to promote lay mission we have worked out our own policy; it could have been more positive or less positive if we had wished. All these helped to add a Columban distinctiveness to our basic identity as 'missionaries'.

CONSEQUENCES

Emphasizing the fundamental orientation of mission along the lines presented above should not prove to be divisive or restrictive for us or any other similar group. Rather it should give a new lease of life and unity. Being faithful to it would, however, call for a communal as well as an individual response. The implications are such that it would be almost impossible for an individual to live them out without the involvement and support of other members.

Hopefully, when each Region and Mission Unit (of the Columban Society) comes to assess its commitments within the next few years the basic function of a Missionary Society will not be forgotten. It has become obvious that today mission is entering a new era with new challenges calling for new responses. It will take some time to adjust fully to this situation - and not a little pain in accepting the need for some change - but the sooner we begin the better it will be for us as individuals and as a Society, called to meet the missionary needs of this generation.

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Vol 11, No.5, Pp. 10-11

"THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S"

REFLECTIONS ON A SUB-THEME OF THE 1989 WCC CONFERENCE ON:

MISSION AND EVANGELISM

Margaret F. Loftus, SND

(This address was delivered by Sister Loftus at the Seminar and Ecumenical Prayer Service held at the Anglican - Episcopal Church of St. Paul's Within the Walls, via Nazionale, Rome on May, 16, 1989, in preparation for the W.C.C. World Conference, Mission and Evangelism "YOUR WILL BE DONE: MISSION IN CHRIST'S WAY" held at San Antonio, Texas, USA from May 22 - June 1, 1989).

The voice of a Chuj Indian of Guatamala introduces the section of the preparatory study material for the San Antonio Conference, which I have been asked to address. It is entitled THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S. Let us listen again to his voice:

"In the 1960s, when the church started to set up rural cooperatives in isolated areas in Ixcán and across the Northern Transversal Strip, many of us, families from the poorest sectors of our country, went up to join the cooperatives after years of migrating to the coast...

But when the government and the army realized the kind of development we were carrying out they started to crack down. In January of 1982 the army began to raze our crops, burn down our houses, kill our animals, and massacre women, children, and old people completely without mercy. In the end they did away with everything, shops, storehouses, schools, markets, clinics, everything in the community, even the animals. So we had to take refuge in the mountains, even though we had no experience of living in the rough...

Throughout 1983 they followed us into the mountains. Again they destroyed our crops, the little that we had been able to build, our straw huts, and the few things we had been able to rescue out of the villages and communities. In that year we suffered terribly. We were without food, without clothes, without shelter. Out of pure need we had to eat the berries off the trees; out of sheer hunger we discovered plants that helped us survive...

We learned what kinds of root vegetables to plant - malanga, for example, whose stem and leaf are both edible. It keeps us alive when the army cuts down our cornfields or our rice and beans. Another way of protecting ourselves - we learned not to stay too long in any one place. So we began to grow again... Out of the years of suffering and persecution by the army we have created new forms of self-defence... Women play an important role in our assemblies. Women participate too in the local committees in each community. We believe women's participation is a seed of the new society..."

We hear again in his accents a story that has become horrifyingly familiar throughout this decade of the eighties, the story of a peasant people hounded and destroyed in their own country. But we hear, too, another part of that story which, thank God, has also become familiar. The story of a people, pushed to the limits of endurance, who learn anew the meaning of solidarity and community, and who, through the gifts of the earth and of one another, experience the goodness of God with an immediacy hitherto unknown.

This witness serves as a powerful introduction to our reflections, focused on the simple truth that "THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S." We who are of the earth, we human beings who have been described as "that part of creation uniquely capable of being conscious of itself," are called to maintain the integrity of creation, and to exercise our trusteeship in a more responsible way. There is a particular imperative in this call today, an imperative for all members of the human family, but in particular for every disciple of Jesus, the Christ, who chose to become incarnate in this very real world of ours.

Infidelity in Our Stewardship We need not look far to find examples of infidelity in our stewardship. Our Study Guide speaks of dead rivers and dying forests, "danger signals of an irresponsible exploitation of the earth's resources"; it points up how cruelly we have wrested the land from one another and unequally shared it; how we have developed a concept of ownership that justifies our placing "No Entry" signs at national frontiers, one that countenances every kind of defensive and offensive military buildup.

Will it or not, we cannot help but become more earth conscious, and indeed, more universe-conscious today. Few secular and religious journals do not carry some relevant, and often frightening, ecological article today. It is increasingly brought home to us that not only the beauty of this earth, but our own very survival is at stake. The discovery of holes in the ozone layer fills us with fear. The Exxon oil spill and the subsequent destruction of such beauty of sea and land and the marvelous life contained there fills us with shame.

We are not Ignorant about It Given the situation we have created, such emotions are healthy. They can stir us to action. But there is another aspect to consider. We have unprecedented access to information regarding the havoc our irresponsible stewardship of the earth and its resources is wreaking on the entire earth community, but we are also beneficiaries of amazing new learnings regarding this planet of ours. We are the first generation of human beings who have been able to view this lovely blue planet from outer space, and we have not been able to think of the earth in the same way since. Even as I am talking a rocket is on its way, for the first time in human history, to the planet Venus. Who knows what new knowledge is in store for us about Venus, which too, is the Lord's, about the earth, and about the universe itself, which are also the Lord's?

God's Covenant: Our Responsibility Yes, there is much to amaze us and to dismay us about being earth people today, much to call us to a new sense of responsibility, much to challenge us to penetrate yet more deeply into the mystery that is God, and God's will for all that has been created. God has made a covenant with this earth, and our moment in history, our very christianity,

demands a new willingness to explore more deeply the implications contained there.

Behold [God said to Noah], I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle and every beast of the earth with you, as many as come out of the ark....This is the sign of the covenant which I made between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

What does it really mean to live as part of that covenant? We who call ourselves 'christian' need to ask that question seriously. It is a question that crosses denominational lines, as indeed do all the pressing questions in this part of the San Antonio study. Have not we christians for too long regarded this covenant as something between God and ourselves, exclusive of the rest of creation? Have we unilaterally placed parts of creation outside that covenant, in practice if not in belief? If so, it is understandable how easily we, too, have been part of its violation and destruction.

Diversity of Cultures: Perhaps we need to ask another question as well.

In our evangelizing activities have we been sufficiently sensitive to how different peoples relate to the earth, and sufficiently perceptive in discerning what is of God here? The 1982 official statement of the WCC: "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," calls our attention to the force of culture in determining relationships between human beings and the rest of creation, to the diversity of these cultures, and to the need for cross-cultural fertilization. It says:

We have found this confession of Christ out of our various cultural contexts to be not only a mutually inspiring but also a mutually corrective exchange. Without this sharing our individual affirmations would gradually become poorer and narrower. We need each other to regain the lost dimensions of confessing Christ and to discover dimensions unknown to us before. Sharing in this way, we are all changed and our cultures are transformed.

There is sin and grace in every culture, as there is in all things created by us, for to be human is to be limited. There is always much for people of one culture to learn from another, of both an instructive and corrective nature. We find we are continually evangelized as we ourselves seek to evangelize. In the East, for example, people have lived more consciously and instinctively as part of the earth whereas in the West we have usually seen ourselves as being on the earth.

I think of the Native Americans in my own country, the United States, a people still crushed and humiliated. How conscious they have been of the presence of the Great Spirit in the land and the rivers, and how differently they have walked that earth and fished in those rivers. They, along with other peoples from so-called 'primitive' cultures, have revered the land as 'mother', the giver of life, and their whole way of being has reflected this reverence. A grave challenge today for cultures that have radiated a firmer belief in the natural order as a locus of divine presence is to modernize without short-sightedly sacrificing

not only their rich cultural heritage, but indeed without rupturing divine/human relationships.

A 'Feminine' Way: It is good to note how so many writing and speaking on the theme of the integrity of creation, even though not ordinarily caught up in what is often referred to as "the woman's issue", make a strong link between the two. Woman's role in the human community has been from the dawn of creation, that of giver and nurturer of life. Paradoxically, women today are those who suffer most from environmental degradation and genetic engineering. But women today are also among the strongest opponents to what pollutes the air and the waters, to what brings war and death. It would be helpful in the environmental crises we face today that all, men and women, opt for a 'feminine way' of being in tune with creation - a way focused on the passing on of life, and the nurturing of that life to maturity.

Thomas Berry, one of the strong Catholic voices raised in concern for many years now at our casual approach to the integrity of creation, has long insisted that not only is our future as a species in danger, but also our very relationship with God. He insists that every person's way to God has been, and continues to be, rooted in the earth. The earth has nourished us; it has framed our intelligence, our sensibility, our imagination; it has determined the way we grasp concepts of truth, beauty, goodness - the absoluteness of which we name God.

Teilhard de Chardin, an even older universe-conscious Catholic voice, asks a question that no true seeker of God can ignore. "What change is there," he asks, "in the person who has allowed the cares and consciousness of the cosmos to form part of his interior life?" And he responds, "Quite literally we shift the axis of our life outside ourselves, and develop an eager concern for the earth and for the true progress of humankind." Thomas Berry would call the type of spirituality born from such concern "a global spirituality with ecological roots."

An Earth Spirituality: The development of this type of spirituality is beyond a naive romanticism. It is beyond limiting the cosmos to the role of reflector of God's beauty and power. Our God has entered into a covenant with creation. We are part of it - that part which is able to understand, to an increasingly remarkable degree, what is happening around us. We are also that part being invited, I firmly believe, to penetrate ever more deeply into the mystery of God. To refuse this invitation would be to miss THE contemplative experience of our age.

There are all kinds of implications involved in the development of an earth spirituality because this is a view of the God-world relationship that takes history seriously; that believes that God places a value on this world; that refuses to divorce salvation history from human history. It is a view born from the belief that we in the present hold the development of the past in trust for the generations of the future. There are as well, political implications to an earth spirituality if we understand politics as people accepting the God-given task of building their own society.

No christian can stand at a distance and remain uninvolved in corporate human action to maintain the integrity of creation. We need to

effect what we pray for so many times every day: that God's will may be done on earth - as it is in heaven.

Perhaps one of the San Antonio resolutions for those who pray the Lord's Prayer in English or French could be this, to insist that the breath pause in this prayer, so holy to all of us, will always come after the word, earth - the earth of which we are a part, and with which our God has entered into solemn covenant.

- end -

BOOK NOTES

Espinoza, Jose Armando, MG.
GRAMATICA COREANA. Rome, Centro Internazionale Animazione Missionaria, 1988. Pp. 236. ITL. 15,000.

This excellent Korean grammar is written with Spanish speaking people in mind but can be used also by Italian, French and Portuguese speakers - and by Koreans learning Spanish.

The 209 pages of grammar and 27 pages of conversation are available also on two cassettes, one of 90 minutes and one of 60 minutes. The tapes can be borrowed, free, from Fr. Silvino Gonzalez, Pontificio Collegio Mexicano, Rome, Tel. 53 02 05.

Kroeger, James H, MM.
CHURCH TRULY ALIVE. Journey to the Filipino Revolution. Davao City, Mission Studies Institute, P.O. Box 143, 8000 Davao City, Philippines, 1988, Pp. 68.

Designed for the Philippines this booklet is of interest also to an international readership in view of developments in the wake of what appeared to be a successful revolution.

COMING EVENTS

REPORT ON SAN ANTONIO CONFERENCE

SPEAKERS:

JOHN MUTISO-MBINDA, of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; PATRICIA STOWERS, Superior General of the Marist Missionary Sisters; JAN LENSSEN, General Councilor of the Missionaries of Africa; All were Official Catholic Representatives at the Conference in San Antonio.

FRATELLI CRISTIANI

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Simultaneous Translation - English, Italian, French.

PEDAGOGIES FOR THE NON-POOR -
A WORKSHOP

PRESENTORS: BOB EVANS and ALICE FRAZER EVANS of PLOWSHARES INSTITUTE

SVD GENERALATE

MONDAY, JUNE 26 - 8.30 - 12.30 pm. - 2.30 - 6.00 pm.

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**DECISION MAKING IN INTER-CULTURAL
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AT

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**MISSION - FROM VATICAN II
INTO THE COMING DECADE**

GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND
CELEBRATION OF SEDOS SILVER JUBILEE

SPEAKER MICHAEL AMALADOSS, SJ

AT

FRATELLI CRISTIANI, December, 12, 1989

**THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF
LOCAL CHURCH**

ANNUAL RESIDENTIAL SEMINAR

AT

VILLA CAVALLETTI, MARCH 20 - 24, 1990

BOOK NOTES

Books received at our Documentation Centre:

Kraft, Charles H.

CHRISTIANITY IN CULTURE A study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective. New York, Orbis Books, 1988. Pp. 445

Kwan, Thomas

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF CHANGES Its influence on Chinese Morality and its Possible Convergence with Christian thinking. Rome, Academia Alfonsiana, 1987. Pp. 208 (A Doctoral Thesis)

Richard, Pablo

DEATH OF CHRISTENDOMS, BIRTH OF THE CHURCH. New York, Orbis Books, 1987. Pp. 213 (Translated from, Mort des Chrétientés et Naissance del'Eglise, Centre Lebre, Paris, 1978)

Kita, Bernice

WHAT PRIZE AWAITS US Letters from Guatemala. New York, Orbis Books, 1988. Pp. 231

Azevedo, Marcello, SJ.

VOCATION FOR MISSION The Challenge of Religious Life Today. New York, Paulist Press, 1988. Pp. 188

Obach, Robert E. & Kirk, Albert

A COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE. New York, Paulist Press, 1986. Pp. 266

Krieg, Robert A.

STORY SHAPED CHRISTOLOGY The Role of Narratives in Identifying Jesus Christ. New York, Paulist Press, 1988. Pp. 169

Lawler, Michael G.

SYMBOL AND SACRAMENT A Contemporary Sacramental Theology. New York, Paulist Press, 1987. Pp. 285

Evans, Alice; Evans Robert; Kennedy, William

PEDAGOGIES FOR THE NON-POOR. New York, Orbis Books, 1987. Pp. 286

Stivers, Robert; Gudorf, Christine; Evans, Alice; Evans, Robert

CHRISTIAN ETHICS A Case Method Approach. New York, Orbis Books, 1989. Pp. 294

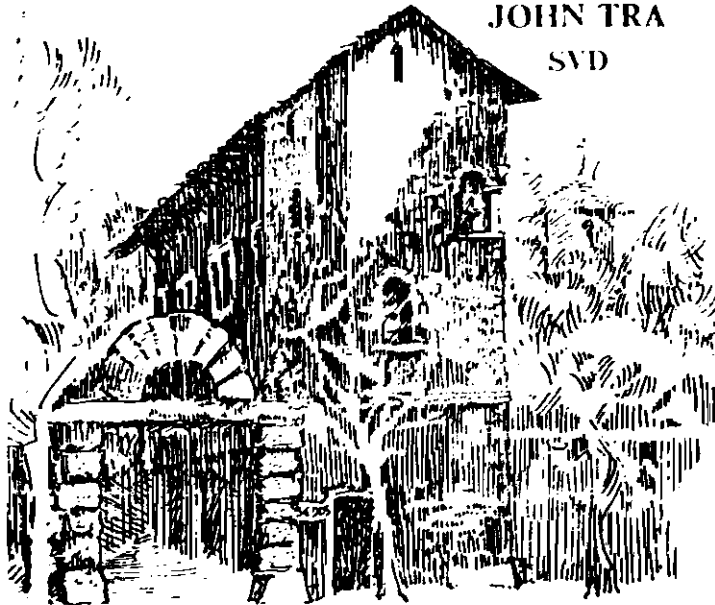
Luzbetak, Louis J. SVD.

THE CHURCH AND CULTURES New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology. New York, Orbis Books, 1988. Pp. 464. The 1963 edition of this book was a landmark in the application of anthropology to mission. This 1988 edition has been greatly expanded and brought up to date. In addition to being completely rewritten, it contains a superb bibliography.

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Tra, John A. SEDOS Bulletin Index 1979-1988. Rome: SEDOS Secretariate,
1989. xxv, 371p. 20cm.
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ITL. 10.000 (\$7.50)
Postage: Europe, ITL. 3000 (\$2.50).
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