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IN THIS ISSUE

The role of missionaries evolves continuously in a changing church and a changing world. The Church develops and advances considerably, there are new initiatives and new pastoral methods. ETIENNE RENAUD writes to the members of his Society calling their attention to the need for on-going formation to keep up-to-date with these changes. The final aim of on-going formation is not to deepen our knowledge **about** Christ but to

penetrate ever more into the mystery of Christ.

We believe his letter has many valuable suggestions for today's missionaries.

There is also a short letter from FR. HAAS to the members of his Congregation inviting them to a careful discernment of the Holy Spirit concerning the changes in mission

today. It too, we believe, has a message for a wider readership.

The introduction to HANS KUNG'S and JULIA CHING'S book draws attention to the three great "religious river systems": Semitic-Prophetic; Indian-Mystic, and Chinese-Wisdom. These systems have developed numerous tributaries over the millennia and have also mingled anew with popular piety and cults as well as flowing into one another. The signs of the times for a dialogue with China are more propitious than before. It is important in this dialogue to have some knowledge of the wisdom quality of the Chinese religion and the important place of the sages in it. It may be inappropriate for the West to want to approach the Chinese phenomenon strictly from the scientific-technological or politico-economic point of view.

African missionaries appear in ever increasing numbers. Nigerians are in the U.S.A., Zimbabwe and Germany; Zaireans are in France; Ghanaians are coming to Europe on mission. But what mission? FRANK NEBUASAH, SVD, at a meeting of African missionaries held in Zambia spoke of the opportunities and problems special to African missionaries and the need to begin mission animation and awareness in their home churches without delay.

CLODOVIS BOFF calls his book **Feet-on-the-Ground Theology** because this theology is worked out first with the feet. This sort of theological thinking starts with the feet, moves through the whole body and rises to the head. There are some things you can grasp only by going there and seeing for yourself. This theology says what it has seen and heard as it moved about in the midst of the people. It takes into account the life of those who keep their feet on the ground; those who live on the rock bottom of history, the poor and the oppressed; those who have been knocked to the ground but who keep getting up. It is a theology of the poor, worked out with them, one that

is theirs.

In the same week that we received JAMES KROEGER'S piece on recruiting vocations we also received a copy of a document from the office of the Directors of Vocations in the Philippines protesting against the "recruiting" activities of a Congregation based in Italy. An interview with Cardinal Sin on the same topic is reported in this week's London TABLET. The case commented on by Fr. Kroeger concerns another country in Asia - not the Philippines. Clearly there is cause for concern.

NEWS

THE RUSHDIE AFFAIR

Fr. Justo Lacunza, M.AFr. of the Missionaries of Africa gave an extremely well-informed account of the genesis of this book. His talk was well balanced and full of insights to the hidden meanings and deliberately chosen terminology of the author - understandable only to Muslim readers and the initiated. In the discussion period participants had a rare experience of the personal motivation which inspired the speaker in his life dedication to a deep understanding and appreciation of Islam as a prerequisite for Christian - Muslim dialogue.

COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, July 18, 1990
SEDOS Office

UPDATE ON HAITI

September 5 - 8, 1990
Leuven, Belgium (details on page 187)

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA

ON-GOING FORMATION

Etienne Renaud, M.AFr.
Rome, 10 January 1990

A Letter from the Superior General to the Members of his Society

I have put this title «on-going formation», but I have to confess right from the beginning that I will not speak about that, at least not in the sense that one usually understands the expression. The word calls to mind sessions, up-dating, even a return to school, or a sabbatical year... things all good in themselves and which we might mention occasionally.

I would like to take this expression «on-going formation» in its more original meaning, perhaps going to the «origin» of the term which conjures up the idea of continuity: it concerns our habits day after day, year after year. It is like when we speak about servicing a car: we think of services after each 10,000 or 20,000 kilometers, and we are right in doing so. But there are more important things: checking the oil, driving habits, etc... And to stay with the same comparison, one speaks about recharging the battery. We would speak here about the constant recharging while driving.

A Changing Church in a Changing World

The Lord has called us to mission in a world that is in perpetual change and at an accelerating rhythm. In this context, the Church develops and advances considerably. There are new initiatives, new pastoral methods. Quite naturally bishops and local clergy take over control in mission and we can but rejoice. But by the same token our role evolves and will have to evolve even more in

the future. Our action is situated in a context that changes quickly.

VERTEBRAE OR CRUSTACEA

Besides this global context that surrounds us and the Church context in which we work, there is also the issue of our own evolution, our own life trajectory.

The letter to the Hebrews reminds us that we are essentially nomads and that we don't have a «permanent city» in this world (Hebr. 13, 14). But we always have that tendency to fix ourselves, to install ourselves into an established situation.

I have always been struck by the difference in growth between crustacea and vertebrae. Crustacea make for themselves successive shells from which they emigrate after a certain length of time only to secrete a new one. On the contrary vertebrae, thanks to the skeleton form, can live a continuous growth. Our spiritual and intellectual lives, which should be of the more developed vertebrae type, often proceed according to the crustacea method, with all its inherent discontinuities.

Obstacles

In our daily life certain risks may prevent our growth. First there is overwork, sometimes bordering on activism - the English expression «workaholism» seems to me to be stronger! And after a while our apostolic activity does not receive any

more a sufficient amount of red corpuscles that only an authentic going-back to our roots can give us. An excessive rhythm can lead us to overwork and depression.

Close to activism and in direct relation to it we find the risk of superficiality. Our hasty readings aim at preparing tomorrow's sermon or talk. We don't have the time any more to pause or to guarantee a certain continuity. Too many things cry out for our attention and maintain us in a permanent state of dispersion in the hustle and bustle of each day.

Tiredness can crop up, or simply «the weight of the day and the heat» which leaves us day after day with a feeling of fatigue, without mentioning the price paid to our health or to the voracity of mosquitoes!

EACH AGE HAS ITS NEEDS

All this should be understood according to one's stage in the apostolic life because fundamentally needs are different.

- There are the few years following initial formation. Attention is paid to adapting to conditions of missionary life, to inculturation, to learning to be autonomous after the closely-structured life of a formation house.

- There come the critical mid-life years when one is invited to make once more one's fundamental choice but with more lucidity.

- There follows the age of full maturity when, in general, the danger to settle down becomes greater if a second breath is not found to relay one's natural enthusiasm. There is the physical need to take some exercise to fight overweight. Isn't it the same on the spiritual level?

- Then there is the «third age» when a new style has to be found together with a less constraining activity lived with heartfelt peace but at the

same time with an effort to resist the pensioner's virus.

- Finally for others - more and more numerous - there is a «fourth age» more contemplative, when one must learn to commit oneself entirely into God's hands.

RULE AND FREEDOM

In the past, in order to meet the needs of on-going formation throughout the days and seasons of life, we used to have a set of rules and exercises: common spiritual reading, theological lectures and even examinations during the first years of mission... Our former directories speak abundantly of those exercises.

But our spiritual life, formerly guided by a strict, precise and abundant legislation, is now left essentially to our own conscience and freedom. It would therefore not be useless to take stock and to ask ourselves how we use this liberty. Have we looked for, and found, other methods better adapted to circumstances and in the line of our vocation?

OUR LIFE'S RHYTHMS

Our life's rhythms is a theme which I consider fundamental to our missionary dynamism. All on-going formation is based on the good use of those rhythms: daily rhythm of prayer and reading; weekly rhythm that gives us time for renewal; monthly recollection; eight-day annual retreat with an eventual session; time for updating at longer intervals... These rhythms are interconnected and complementary.

Daily Prayer

We read in our Rule of Life «One hour a day is given over to personal prayer and reading and one day per week to relaxation and renewal.» This article might seem general; in fact

it is very precise. It could appear to be very broad, but it is exacting if we try to implement it. We must take it seriously. Our «professional conscience» is at stake.

It will be good for each community to exchange seriously on this subject: How does each one manage to organize his or her own daily rhythm of prayer and reading? What day is chosen by each one to «disappear» and find some breathing space for rest and renewal? The community must help each one to build or to protect his or her «habits» in the good sense of the word. Indeed it is effectively habits that one has to set down. Let us not say too quickly that it is impossible, that people would not understand, that the organization of the mission station does not allow for it... It is a question of conviction, of personal and community discipline.

NEAR THE GREAT SOURCES

What could be the content of this daily and weekly renewal-time that we are trying to offer ourselves?

There is no doubt that the Bible has to have an important place. We often have too utilitarian an approach to Holy Scripture, drawing from it already known verses destined to embellish with quotations our next talk or homily. We should have a freer approach to the Bible, the manner of *Lectio Divina*, really letting the Word of God germinate in an attentive soil.

Furthermore a good exegesis book, accessible and not too technical, can help us to renew our understanding of already familiar passages.

The texts from Vatican II are a mine to nourish our theology. After all we have here a fundamental landmark in the life of the contemporary Church which can and will have to exploit these texts for decades to come.

Missionary theology is in constant evolution and we always need

some up-dating. Missiology, information on new pastoral experiences, the knowledge of the country and the culture are evidently very useful.

As for spirituality, let everyone have a look at his or her book-shelf. I often ask «Who are your authors?» Indeed, I believe that everybody must find the authors who suit them, who are familiar to them and who become their companions. One must know how to re-read in order to assimilate well. It is not for nothing that God created ruminants! we need to re-read. And I would add: take notes... To grow, one must live close to the great sources.

Formation, even if it is on-going in the sense that I put forward in this letter, is always an investment of time and energy. We must learn to step back, not to stick to an immediate usefulness, to go beyond the urgent pastoral need and look for what is truly nourishing.

Pastoral Needs

This being said, I am convinced that well-understood pastoral needs can be a permanent invitation to open our Bible and to deepen our theology. In fact, there is nothing like having to teach in order to learn. That is precisely one of the reasons why everybody should have in his or her life at least a little pastoral sector, even in the midst of rather temporal or intellectual professional activities. It may be a youth group, a gospel sharing team... Those among us who have duties not directly aimed at pastoral activities have to be specially attentive to the importance of spiritual renewal.

In this labour of on-going formation - I use the word «labour» because one must invest a good deal of energy. A General Council can give some help, but this help is mainly at the level of on-going formation in the traditional sense - sessions, courses, retreats, up-dating....

For daily work which is mainly

dealt with in this letter, Provincials and Regionals are already in a better position. They can stimulate with «flashes», by animating the communities, recommending and sometimes offering such and such a book for reading and discussion, giving special care to the regional library...

Communities

But it is first and foremost the communities themselves which must feel involved. I have already mentioned the knowledge and the safeguard of everybody's rhythms. The community atmosphere, the quality in the exchanges mean much. For example subscriptions to well-chosen magazines can be shared and worthwhile articles can be studied more thoroughly together. Recorded cassettes of all sorts seem to be getting popular. There are possibilities for exchange and mutual help in communities. But in the last resort it must be agreed that it is up to everyone to take charge of himself and herself and to keep up their own rhythm of spiritual intake. In his first letter to priests in 1979 John Paul II speaks about «work on oneself». It is applicable to us all. This requires constancy and perseverance, to take up words used often enough in the New Testament (see among others: Lk. 8, 15 and its very meaningful context; Col 1, 10-11; Heb. 6, 12 and the whole spirit of the letter; and especially Apoc. 1, 9; 2, 2; 2, 19; 3, 10; 13, 10; 12, 12).

ON-GOING CONVERSION

I would even go further. It is primarily a question of a true conversion always to be renewed. To speak of on-going formation is to speak of on-going conversion. We can have moments of grace that mark our

lives. But conversion is also a long-term process which covers the whole life, not in the manner of an ascending straight line, but rather like a spiral with its ups and downs, its moments of glory and its weaknesses. It is through all that that our commitment towards the Lord is developing.

In the end, on-going formation is not mainly to have a wider knowledge about Christ, about the Bible or about theology and diverse sciences. It is rather to grow in intimacy with the Lord and to follow Him a little more closely. «Everyone doing the building must work carefully. For the foundation, nobody can lay any other than the one which has already been laid, that is Jesus Christ» (1 Cor. 3, 10). All permanent formation must be built on him. It is the meaning of St. Paul's prayer:

«Out of his infinite glory may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith and that you may have your roots and foundations in love» (Eph. 3, 14-17).

There is a certain intellectual curiosity that unceasingly invites us to deepen our knowledge - not so much about Christ as, of Christ. It is a desire to penetrate ever more into the mystery of God. The motor of on-going formation is the quest for God, the God always new, always greater, always ahead. It is the thirst to know Him that makes us go forward, anxious to «capture» him who «captured us» (Phil. 3, 12).

- end -

(This letter of Fr. Renaud has been slightly edited to make it applicable to a wider readership. Eds.).

CHRISTIANITY AND CHINESE RELIGIONS

Hans Küng and Julia Ching

According to the calculations of the World Christian Encyclopedia, there are 1.4 billion nominal Christians in the world. By comparison, the Chinese alone number 1 billion. Does this fact alone not show what a challenge China presents for Christianity and that it is high time Western theology (which we should call "Western" and not just "theology") recognized this challenge?

For thousands of years, Europe and China have both thought of themselves as the center of the world. The small world around the Mediterranean proudly called itself *oikoumene*, the whole of the inhabited world. China saw itself as the "middle kingdom." For both, other regions and religions counted as mere peripheral zones. This was even easier for China, since the massive Himalayan barrier and the broad desert and vast steppes of the Central Asian plateau isolated it, allowing it to leave but a narrow passage for the entry of external cultural influences. Small wonder that Christianity and the Chinese religions were strangers until after the Jesuit mission of the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, when they became more familiar with each other during the European Enlightenment.

When one compares Christianity with the religions of Indian origin, above all Hinduism and Buddhism, they all seem at least to share various words, usages, myths, and ideas of the Indo-European language group between the Ganges and the Mediterranean. But what about a comparison between Christianity and the Chinese religions, the third great world religious "river system" besides the Semitic-prophetic and the Indian-

mystic? The Chinese religions are not some kind of Far Eastern and exotic appendage of general religious history, to be treated as marginal or as an afterthought as the textbooks usually do. No, the Chinese religions must be taken seriously as a third independent religious river system, equal in value to the others. It is not without reason that it has gained world significance beyond its land of origin, in Japan and Korea, in Vietnam and Taiwan. But how is this to be understood, a third river system? As with the geological surface whose mountain ranges and river systems change completely over the millennia, so it is with the spiritual-religious landscape.

Three Religious River Systems

If we take as our vantage point the *origins* of human history more precisely, the prehistoric Stone Age beginnings of humanity, with its primitive, preliterate religions - then at least four original historical high religions can be seen to have developed subsequently. These arose in the context of the sedentary high cultures of the great fertile river valleys: along the Nile, in Mesopotamia, in the Indus Valley, and in the North Chinese lowlands of the Huang Ho, the Yellow River. The earliest written documents on religious institutions, ideas, and practices, dating from as far back as three thousand years before Christ, come from Mesopotamian Sumeria. The religions of the Mesopotamians, the Sumerians, the Babylonians, and the Assyrians, however, have disappeared like those of the ancient Egyptians and the much later Greeks and Romans.

Therefore, if instead of looking forward from the origins of human

history, we look back from the present, then, taking into account various transitions and hybrid forms, we can distinguish three existing great religious river systems. What we are after is not a superficial and static "geography of religion" (for example, European-Indian-Chinese "worldview"), but rather a historically grounded and phenomenologically *dynamic typology of religion* that goes beyond specific countries and continents.

1. SEMITIC/PROPHETIC

In the Near East, the *first great river system, of Semitic origin and prophetic character*, developed out of the primitive religion of nomadic tribes. Today, after much conflict and suffering, we have a renewed awareness of the internal coherence of this system as "the three Abrahamic religions." These, however, do not represent parallel developments but rather divergent ones. Their common distinguishing feature is a "piety of belief" (R. Otto). There is, first of all, Judaism as the religion of the Israelite patriarchs, the law, and the prophets. Out of it emerged Christianity, the religion characterized by faith in Jesus, the Christ or Messiah. Finally, there is Islam, the religion of the prophet Mohammad, whose holy book, the Qur'an, refers to the prophets of Israel, and to Jesus of Nazareth as a prophet.

2. INDIAN/MYSTIC

To the east of these Semitic-prophetic religions, and clearly distinguishable from them, is the no less intricate *second great river system, of Indian origin and mystical character*. There, in reaction to the overdeveloped cultic religion of the late Vedic priesthood, the mystical and often ascetic religion came to be. It was centered on the experience that everything is one. An immediate experience of unity achieved through

meditative practices, as well as a doctrine of unity first delineated in the Upanishads, formed the basis for the high religions of India that developed later. There was the reform movement of Mahavira, called Jina, the "victor," founder of Jainism. There was the reform movement of Gautama Buddha which spread all the way to China and Japan, albeit with several changes of paradigm. Finally, there are also the more recent Hindu religions, whether monotheistic or henotheistic.

What will become clear in this book is that a *third great river system* in the Far East is to be distinguished from both these. This one had its origin in China. The central figure here is neither the prophet nor the mystic, but rather the sage: this is a religion of wisdom.

3. CHINESE CULTURE AND RELIGION

Of course, Chinese culture and religion did not develop in complete isolation from all others, something that nationalist ideologies in China and, in a different version, Japan like to assert. The Chinese high culture of the Yellow River Basin did, after all, emerge relatively late, and it is by far the youngest of the early high cultures. Although Chinese sources are silent on the matter ever since Wolfram Eberhard, some scholars have therefore assumed that decisive cultural developments after the Stone Age, such as bronze casting and even writing, were triggered by contact with the older Near Eastern cultural centers, notably Sumeria and Egypt. The domestication of horses and use of war chariots in China would also have been taken over from neighboring Indo-European peoples. Such external cultural impulses were the more likely source of writing, bronze, domestication of horses, and chariots than their totally independent "new invention" in China as late as the second millennium before Christ. (To take but one of numerous indicators, the domestication of horses is today

no longer attributed to one of the legendary Three Sovereigns or Five Emperors [culture-heroes], but rather only to the historical Shang dynasty.) Given that archaeology in China has barely begun to plow an infinitely vast and virgin field, a bit of light may gradually be shed on some of these questions; and new discoveries in Inner Mongolia should change our understanding of ancient China decisively.

Yet no matter which influences will eventually be demonstrated, what is important for us is that the early bronze objects, the writing, and also the religion showed typically Chinese forms and motifs from the very beginning, although ethnology and the study of religion have thus far had difficulty in specifying what "typically Chinese" is. In any case, in spite of similarities with, for instance, Indian developments, Chinese culture and religion are on close examination entirely different from what Europeans for the longest time have considered to be typically "oriental." The amazingly early beginnings of Chinese historiography soon gave way to complete monopolization by the court and by a state bureaucracy for historiography that led to an emphasis on tradition and stereotypical conformity. Even so, this in no way justifies the European view that became particularly widespread after Hegel, holding that we are faced with a static, "eternal China," almost without history.

To be sure, in the slowly flowing course of Chinese history, the Western observer will hardly be able to find the same kind of drastic discontinuities in architecture, sculpture, and painting, in dress and furniture as can be found in Western history. And yet, epochal upheavals are clearly evident, not least in the history of religion. One thing is of course undeniable: the *great value set on age and its wisdom* is a constant of Chinese history. This was reinforced by the absence of the Western dualism of state and church,

nobility and clergy, a split which generated a great deal of conflict, to be sure, but which was also productive. In addition to this absence, China also lacked a developed theory of the state, the concept of the supremacy of law, and an independent judiciary.

CHINESE WISDOM RELIGIONS

Still, does such a historico-phenomenological characterization of Chinese religions as wisdom religions not encourage an oversimplified classification and schematization? Hardly, since we obviously have no intention of ignoring the way that religions have historically influenced each other and created hybrid forms. On the other hand, the fundamental differences must also be emphasized and their terminology clarified. For if we expand concepts such as prophet, mystic, and sage so that they lose all contours and even come to encompass their opposites, they become useless. (According to Aristotelian logic, the broadest concepts have the least content.) Let us demonstrate this with three particularly striking historical overlappings and mixtures.

1. Even among *Semitic* religions, there are of course mystical tendencies. It is possible that the mystical current of Greece and Asia Minor, which began its broad diffusion into Western piety through Plotinus' disciple, Dionysius the Areopagite (fifth or sixth century), had its source in India. Mysticism is grounded in the immediate and intuitive experience of unity. As such, while it is central for the Indian religions, for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam it remains an often suspect and even persecuted marginal phenomenon, notwithstanding Jewish Kabbalistic mysticism, the Christian mysticism of Germany, the Netherlands and Spain, and Islamic Sufi mysticism. The great Israelite prophets always saw themselves as distinct from God. They were no more

inwardlooking mystics in search of cosmic union than was the Jesus of the synoptic Gospels (in spite of certain mystical traces in John's Gospel) or even the Prophet of the Qur'an.

2. Even among *Semitic* religions, there is a wisdom literature, as there was everywhere in the ancient Near East. And yet this also remained a marginal phenomenon for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. By contrast, the religious history of China is fundamentally and centrally characterized by wisdom literature.

3. Conversely, as we shall see, Chinese tradition also has something akin to prophetic or at least "enthusiastic" (originally shamanic) figures. The differences between the great prophets of Israel and the Chinese shamans are nevertheless as clear as those between Jesus of Nazareth and Confucius (K'ung Fu-tzu) or Laotzu. These latter became and remain the important sages of Confucianism and Taoism, two religions that, unlike Buddhism, are of Chinese origin.

The three great religious river systems not only have developed numerous tributaries over the millennia, but have also mingled anew with primitive popular piety and cults as well as flowing into one another.

It is nevertheless worth repeating that, in spite of all the admixtures, the fundamental differences remain! Moreover, the other types of religion should not be seen as mere precursors or deviations from one's own, something that especially Christian dogmatists have tended to do. Nor should one follow those historians and philosophers of religion who want to see mystical religion as the "authentic" religion from which prophetic religion then derives, or, conversely, who regard prophetic religion as superior to mystical religion. All the more should one guard against that tendency to which areas under Chinese influence are

prone: amalgamating everything and then availing oneself of one or another religion as the need arises.

DIALOGUE WITH CHINESE RELIGIONS

It is impossible to understand the Chinese people and, indeed, the entire vast Sinicized territory from Pyongyang to Taipei, from Turfan to Tokyo, without some knowledge of Chinese religion: above all Confucianism and Taoism, but also Buddhism and Chinese folk religion. This is admittedly a daunting undertaking and therefore it is of primary importance that we first gain some acquaintance with this continent with its religion which is so unfamiliar to us.

We are seeking a serious exchange of information, reciprocal challenge, and mutual transformation. The end result will be to avoid all false exclusivities, rejecting uncritical syncretism and cheap harmonization in favour of gradual, all-around critical elucidation, stimulation, interpenetration, and enrichment of the various religious traditions. Granted, such a process cannot be carried out exclusively by any religious or political authority, but must and will grow slowly "from below."

The signs of the times for a dialogue with China today are more propitious than before. Since the 1960s there has been an unexpected revival of the scholarly study of Chinese religions in Europe, north America, Japan, and finally also in China. The dynamic role and function of Chinese religion in all periods and in all social strata of Chinese cultural life have been made clear in a very concrete fashion. At the same time, despite all the barriers that still exist, it cannot be denied that greater religious tolerance in China is currently leading to a revival of China's own hitherto suppressed religiosity. Not only are Confucians, Taoists, Buddhists, and Muslims

increasingly beginning to profit from this atmosphere, but so are the Christian churches of China: three million Catholics (naturally, divided) and perhaps likewise three million Protestants (united by the regime). These churches are in the process of accepting the Communist Revolution as a historical fact, and of living their faith in a new way within a socialist Chinese society that is itself changing. Along the way, they are finding new, creative ways of inculturating their theology into Chinese life.

If there is indeed a renewal of the religiosity that was suppressed in the first phases of the Chinese Communist regime, then it would be particularly inappropriate on the part of the West to want to approach the Chinese phenomenon strictly from

the scientific-technological or politico-economic point of view. In this case, economists, sociologists, development strategists, and above all, politicians must be encouraged to take China and its people seriously not only from an economic, technological, and political point of view, but also from the cultural (that is, from a philosophical, ethical, and religious) point of view. In China as elsewhere, economics and sociology without knowledge of philosophy and theology easily lead to that myopia characteristic of specialists. Dialogue can expand the horizons of both sides.

Ref. Küng, Hans and Julia Ching.
Christianity and Chinese Religions, Doubleday, New York, 1989.

"BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW"

Pierre Haas, CSSp
Pentecost, 1990

A Call to Discernment To the Members of his Congregation

The experience of my visits to the different circumscriptions helps me discover the very varied ways in which the Holy Spirit challenges our Congregation to "respond creatively to the needs of evangelization of our time".

It is usually events themselves that become a "sign" to us.

In the older Provinces in Europe and North America the decrease of personnel is one of the factors that lead us to make choices among existing commitments.

In the mission districts, this decrease (most have dropped by half in the past 25 years) is largely compensated for by the increase in local priestly and religious vocations. But this new situation raises the following question: "What is our place, our mission, in a particular local Church?"

The groups and young Provinces in mission areas also have choices to make, for the opposite reason of their own rapid growth, and ask themselves: "What is our mission in our Church of origin and in the Churches that ask for our missionary collaboration"

All these choices, and many others, require from us a careful discernment in the Holy Spirit. This is not always easy, and we have no guarantee of infallibility! But we can at least avoid certain dangers:

- The danger that would result from lack of adaptability in the face of events, allowing ourselves to be

dominated by them. We could, for example, give up or undertake works, not as a result of a mature choice, but with our backs to the wall - or in a forward flight - through the force of circumstances or lack of personnel... It could happen then that fallback positions that were badly thought out and badly prepared for create discontent or put a strain on confreres who have to take on too much work (some confreres end up doing the work of two or three).

- The danger of remaining in the past and refusing to move forward (our founder reproached the clergy of his time with this, and it would be a pity if today's missionaries "held on too tenaciously to what has served its time"). Let us avoid closing ourselves into forms of Mission that are ending, taking as criteria for our action the past choices of a Province, "Home" or "Mission" District, even if we have historical responsibilities to a particular local Church or work.

- The danger, finally, of thinking that we are the only ones who can continue or begin works entrusted to us. More and more we are called upon to share our work with others: priest, religious or laity. It is in fact a great grace of our time to be able to count on the participation of laity, many of whom are happy to take on responsibilities and to cooperate with us in the same missionary spirit. Perhaps, while insisting too much on the vocations' crisis that we are well aware of in certain countries, we neglect to read the positive calls and signs that are hidden behind this reality.

To help us in our discernment, our Rule proposes quite a wide range of activities; it makes room for the diversity of situations in the different circumscriptions that make up the Congregation. It is clear that the choice is not always easy and that one cannot always have unanimity when certain decisions have to be taken in the Districts, Provinces, and new groups or foundations.

However, the fundamental criteria for our choices are well indicated. These are:

- Situations of first evangelization, to be discerned in consultation with the local Church, which implies a recognition both of its missionary priorities and of our own charism, guiding us to choose one priority rather than another;

- Those whose needs are the greatest, and the oppressed. It is through our

commitment in situations of oppression and injustice that the Lord can reveal himself more truly as a Saviour;

- Where the Church has difficulty in finding workers.

It seems to me that respect for the above criteria implies a certain preference for structures that are light rather than heavy; preference also for poorer means, a poorer and simpler lifestyle; and willingness to accept posts that may not be easy.

In discerning the signs of the times, we have to "re-examine periodically the reasons that underlie our present commitment and our present apostolate". On this feast of Pentecost, I would like to invite each circumscription to continue this discernment in a spirit of great openness to the Holy Spirit who makes all things new.

- end -

THE AFRICAN MISSIONARY TO AFRICA

Frank Nubuasah, SVD

(An SVD missionary from Ghana, missioned to Botswana shares his thoughts on "African missionaries to Africa").

We have gathered here at St. Kizito's Pastoral Center in the Monze Diocese of Zambia as sisters and brothers to look at ourselves, who we are, what we are doing and maybe how we shall be doing it in the future.

"African" is one who is born in an African country or has adopted this continent as his/her home and who behaves as one. By "Missionary" we mean one who has been born in or adopted Africa as his/her home and who having become Christian has been called and sent to his/her brothers and sisters in another country.

What is our mission land? It is in poor countries, at times in very remote inaccessible areas with very bad roads or bush-tracks. The severe economic stagnation of the African continent affects all of us. We have been sent to our peoples, christians, animists, followers of the traditional African religions and moslems.

Aim of Mission

The aim and fulfillment of mission is to share faith. Missionaries share their faith in Jesus Christ with the people to whom they have been sent. This way they become a living faith for others. This faith and its experience is to be proclaimed more and more by actions than by words.

In the past Western missionaries came to give and not to share anything with us. Sharing is

reciprocal: you give and receive. They came to give us faith, education, health, social amenities and even God. To a lesser extent culture. In Western culture, for example, dancing and processions were good but the African ones were pagan. With all the good will they had, they could not receive anything from us Africans. Instead of being enriched by us they were impoverished and remained innocent. We must try to be sharers, givers but also receivers in humility of what other peoples have to offer. We can learn from one another.

As African missionaries, people will take from us our money, our energy, our knowledge, our love and even our very lives, but if we do not give a personal witness to our faith they will not take the message we want to share with them. The Christian message has to become flesh in us, take shape in us.

Colour - Africanness

Being African among other Africans is a good thing and should be encouraged. Pope Paul IV said in Kampala in 1969 that we Africans are to be missionaries to ourselves. It is true that our colour, no matter the shade of it, prevents our being "different" from those to whom we have been sent. People seeing white missionaries know that they are strangers. They should take us for granted; we are part of them. Good. Yet the opposite is our experience. People are surprised when we cannot speak the local language well, when we do not know their culture or when we make some terrible but basic mistakes. At the back of their heads, they have a question mark about us.

"Who is this who does not really know our language, our culture even though he or she is the same colour?" - they ask.

Language and Culture

To preach, to witness, to share Christ and our faith with others, we need to know who these people are. The language and culture of a people tell us who they are. It cannot be stressed sufficiently that the African missionary needs to make a greater effort to know and be able to speak the language of those to whom they have been sent. We will never be able to speak these new and adopted languages like our mother tongue but let that be our aim.

Our knowledge of the culture and the way of life of the people will enhance the possibility our being adopted by them. A sort of bonding takes place between us and the people whom we too wish to adopt as our people.

Comparisons: Western - African

We see Western missionaries as always busy, functioning, performing and achieving. They seem to try to reproduce "life" in functionality, for example in buildings! Is that the curse of celibacy? Since one cannot reproduce human life one tries to do so in structures. Are not some of us falling victim to the same attitudes? Build something so people can say, Father So-and-so or Sister So-and-so built this!

The African is one who is constant in being and in experiencing self and others. Western missionaries are people oriented through things; Africans are oriented through people. Because we are basically inclined "to be" rather than "to do" and achieve, many Western missionaries think that African missionaries are lazy. Is that a fair assessment?

Community

Our missionaries, due to pressure

of work and the acute shortage of personnel, are forced to live in small communities of one or two persons. The result is loneliness and isolation. Some have to live very far from their brothers or sisters. Time and distance and the nature of our roads in Africa, coupled with the cost of travel, prevent constant contact with one's religious siblings.

How does one deal with loneliness and isolation? How does one deal with it in view of our celibate commitment? What about the need for intimacy? Celibacy is essentially behaviour. We choose our behaviour according to our commitments. I have lived alone for some time. I know the feelings and ideas one can have. Now I live in a community of two. I also know the loneliness of not being visited by superiors and brothers. We are men and women of faith who should not betray our religious calling - otherwise we expose other Africans to ridicule due to our behaviour.

At the last Vatican Council, some spoke "for" Africans by saying the celibacy law should be relaxed. In a way they were saying Africans should be made second class religious and missionaries. They cannot be celibate so give them concessions. Cardinal Zongrana of Burkina Faso said on our behalf that celibacy is not an African problem. How can we live this truth in our lives?

What We Can Do

The whole concept of mission is new to the African continent. People sometimes see us as leaving home to seek greener pastures. Sending our women and men of faith to other cultures is alien to our "chemistry". Have you received letters requesting help in securing jobs or for financial assistance? A young priest whom I have never met wrote to me at Christmas asking for help in securing a benefactor or two from Botswana. Is it lack of information or wrong ideas that make them see us as sent to greener pastures? We need to educate

our people in our home-churches to support their missionaries materially and we need to make them aware of the state of the churches we have been sent to. Our people need to know about the African Church. Perhaps we need a brochure or a hand-out which would help us to claim their social/moral interest and support. People have a right to know where their ambassadors are going or being sent to.

Can we share ideas? I am in vocation promotion. Can I not share what I am doing with someone else, say in Zambia or Tanzania? Why should I keep what is good to myself? Those in formation could also exchange personnel in terms of courses and talks. Those who like to write and have the talent for doing so, can write on topics of interest to us and circulate their research in specialized areas of church life in Africa such as inculturation, adaptation, mission, support of mission churches and missionaries, ministries for Africa, marriage, funeral, and initiation rites etc.

The Future

The future of mission work in Africa is the responsibility of Africans. We are just beginners; others will come after us to continue and perfect the work. We are the foundation of the African missionary venture. If we are strong those after us will be strong. If we are a failure, they would be haunted by our failure. There can be only one foundation, the one we are laying. The building collapses when the foundation is not good. We must take steps to be strong and set good standards.

There is a need for a medium in which African missionaries can share their experiences and sense of mission. We can thus inform ourselves

and our people about the African Church - its growth and achievements, its failures or weaknesses. This sort of publication in English would be the work of African missionaries - of US. For a start, perhaps a newsletter with a suitable name and logo which could be published four times a year. Later perhaps, a magazine.

Reverse Mission

We each have another mission - from the churches to whom we are sent to our home/mother churches. Our respective religious congregations have to be educated too. We need to give a clear picture of what life in the missions is all about - the problems and blessings. We need to influence the formation programmes of our congregations to be in line with real life situations in the missions, to indicate the good points and also the weaknesses.

Above all, we need to start a vigorous programme of mission animation and awareness in our mother churches. To be successful, we need the support and blessing of our bishops. We are to make conscious efforts to inform and involve them. It is important that they do not see us as a threat to their positions.

Conclusion

It is not easy for an African missionary today because of the newness of the concept but by our efforts and our presence, African churches will rightly take their place in the life and mission of the universal church. Jesus came on a mission from the Father. We are on a mission too as Africans to our fellow Africans.

Ref. *Sharing Our Mission* No. 10,
April 1990, SVD Generalate.

FEET-ON-THE-GROUND THEOLOGY

Clodovis Boff

*(In his book entitled **Feet-on-the-Ground Theology**, Clodovis Boff shares his experiences and reflections as he works with lay leaders in the diocese in Brasília. His reflections written in a diary format, focus on such topics as the role of the BCC Coordinators, the use of parables and how to respond to Evangelicals proselytising in their communities).*

Introduction

I call this "Feet-on-the-ground theology," in the first place, because this is a theology moving along over the fertile earth. An earthy theology, like a stretch of land pregnant with the seeds of future life.

"Feet-on-the-ground," secondly, because this theology is worked out first with the feet. This sort of theological thinking starts with the feet, moves through the whole body, and rises to the head. There are some things you can grasp only by going there and seeing for yourself. This theology says what it has seen and heard as it moved about in the midst of the people.

Finally, "feet-on-the-ground" means that it takes into account the life of those who go around with their feet on the ground. Of those who live on the rock bottom of history, the poor and the oppressed. Those who have been knocked down on the ground, but who keep getting up. A theology of the poor, worked out with them, one that is theirs.

This theology is based on the journey a people is making, and seeks

to serve that people. But it sheds light only on the next steps, not on the whole course of the journey.

LAY LEADERS - NARRATORS OF THE GOSPEL

One of the things that has my curiosity aroused, given the very high level of illiteracy in this area, is the question of why a lay leader has to be able to read. Does it mean that the Brazilian Literacy Movement is a prerequisite for access to the word of salvation? When did Jesus demand that an apostle had to have a certificate in reading and writing? Yet our pastoral practice seems to demand it. Are the supposed cultural demands of our age so fastidious?

Max Weber says that it was their conviction that salvation came through faith in the Bible that led the English colonists to learn to read, which made a great contribution to the advance of the United States. Among us here in Brasília there are individuals who have taught themselves how to read in order to be lay leaders. But are reading and writing really an indispensable precondition for announcing the faith? If so, where does that leave those who can't? And what about communities like the ones in this area that don't have anyone who can read and write, or have a hard time getting such a person? Must they be content with a lower level of community, with praying novenas or the rosary? Can you have access to the word of the gospel without going by way of reading the gospel? Jesus did not leave anything written and did not even give express

orders to put things in writing. Nor did the early church, the church of the apostles, which spent decades without writing anything of its own. It was content to transmit the gospel word orally so it could be heard directly. (It is true that they had the Old Testament, and they were looking at it in a new way).

Wouldn't it be possible to conceive of a kind of training where, instead of giving a privileged place to the printed word and to reading, you could think of other ways of learning and listening to the word of God - ways that would be closer to the people? For example, why not narrate the gospel accounts? Persons could memorize a whole series of biblical accounts and then recount them in their own community.

Lay leaders would then be "narrators of the history of salvation". They would have it all in their heads, in their own style - that is, not mechanically, but in the creative way it was done in Hebrew culture: in the form of the *midrashim* - those lively extensions of the basic and original word of revelation in the form of stories or commentaries.

Besides, a good deal of the Bible is the result of oral tradition. Why not continue it?

You wouldn't have to be limited to simply narrating the biblical stories. They could be sung, and in fact, that's already happening. It could also be done in drawings or cartoons. Weren't the cathedral windows in the Middle Ages the *biblia pauperum* - the bible of the poor?

And of course these means (stories, songs, pictures) aren't just for the use of the illiterate. They are useful for everyone, including educated persons and intellectuals. Some occur to me....

PARABOLIC SCENE I: OPTION FOR THE POOR

In Sao Pedro I was watching little Iliaco ("a name from the Bible," his Protestant mother explained to me) chasing away the chickens, pigs, and dogs that were trying to come up and take the food away from a puppy a few months old.

That reminded me of the role played by the church which must defend the poor from the assaults of the powerful. One could say that when it does that, it deals with the powerful, and so what you can see there is still a church for the poor, a church that protects the humble, but not yet a church of the poor - and still less a poor church.

But the fact remains that the church really does have power in history and society, and that force can be brought to bear on one side or on the other. It should be exercised on behalf of the poor. Anything else is unrealistic or hopelessly idealistic. The church's function as a tribunal is very important today.

Now the whole point is to see if this "for-the-poor" is heading toward becoming a "with-the-poor" so that it will eventually become an "of-the-poor". This is a historical process that advances by a twofold movement: the church coming closer to the poor and becoming identified with them, and the poor emerging within the church as ecclesial agents. This is the option for the poor and for the poor as leaders - at first potentially and then in reality. "Church of the poor" is both an ideal and an emerging process.

PARABOLIC SCENE II: UNITY WITHOUT SELF-DEFENSE

I went down to the lake for a swim at noontime and I saw large swarms of tadpoles swimming together and trying to defend themselves

against the fish that were trying to eat them. Sometimes you could hear the splash of a fish coming out of the water and eating one of those poor creatures. I felt sorry for them, swimming together to flee from voracious fish.

They really were defenseless. Even together they remained vulnerable. They were united, but not organized. There certainly was a bonding among them, but they had no means of self-defense. That's how it is with the oppressed: unless they have their own independent organizations, how are they going to defend themselves? Solidarity is not just a feeling or a summons. It is a soul seeking a body....

Perhaps the prophets, and Jesus even more, grasped the Mystery of God on the basis of what they saw in nature and in human life. For them the world and history were both a font of revelation and a pedagogical resource.

I'm also learning that parabolic language (Hebrew, mashal) is the essence of the people's language. I notice that when I use comparisons taken from life in order to explain God's word and the things of faith, the people react with the kind of spontaneity that shows that the point has gotten through, that something new has been seen. They say "That's just the way it is," "That's it," and "That's true" - just as they do when you're talking with them. And you can see on their faces the kind of expression you see when someone has made a discovery or has been touched in the heart.

In Santa Maria I said to the community that to baptize children and then leave them alone at that point, growing up like pagans, was the same as making a clearing in the forest and then letting the vegetation grow back. I saw them nodding their heads in agreement. On another occasion, in Porongaba, I grabbed a lantern that was on the ground and held it up in front of the community

and said, "This flame is the light of faith. But the light of faith needs kerosene: that's the word of God. And the kerosene needs a container: that's the community." I went on from there. They stayed with me, paying attention, showing approval in their eyes and faces, and nodding their heads.

Unfortunately, from Aristotle onward, rationalism has looked down on parabolic speech, in the broad sense of mashal (proverb, comparison, maxim, riddle, colorful sayings, allegory, parable, and so forth - in fact, any kind of figurative language), considering it to be a detour around the truth.

Theology and pastoral work have still not taken seriously enough the fact that the rabbi Jesus of Nazareth transmitted his message - the good news of the kingdom - in parables, something that astonished those who first heard him. "To them he spoke only by way of parable" (Mark 4:34). We have to go back to the gospel, even for language and methodology....

BCC COORDINATORS

Friday, November 4: Brasília

There is no priest in the parish of Brasília. A community of sisters is leading it. Hence the parish has to live more on its own, and walk on its own two feet.

Today we spend the day in discussion with more than twenty coordinators, going over their functions within the local church. Evangelization groups link up to form small local communities. Four, five, or more of these small communities form a base community. It is led by a team of coordinators, and develops a programme of activities in common.

The whole day was devoted to analyzing the function of coordinators. As always, the first step was to bring out the problems. Here

are some that emerged as coordinators made their presentations:

1) Individualism: the coordinating team does not work together. Everything falls on the shoulders of just one coordinator.

2) Many are coordinators in name only: they do not assume responsibility for their function.

3) Some coordinators are overburdened with work and do not have time to keep an eye on the different groups as they go in their own particular directions.

4) There are groups that do not accept the coordinators and do not value the work they do, etc.

From that point we went on to discuss what the role of the coordinator should be. That role is really to coordinate - that is, bring together, unite persons and groups. In a word, to encourage community members and link them together.

The discussion group came up with the following comparison. The groups are like wheels: they can roll. But if they are to move a cart, there has to be an axle connecting them to each other. Now that is what a coordinator is supposed to be: an axle between the different groups. An axle to articulate the movement of each individual into unified forward movement.

Participatory Church

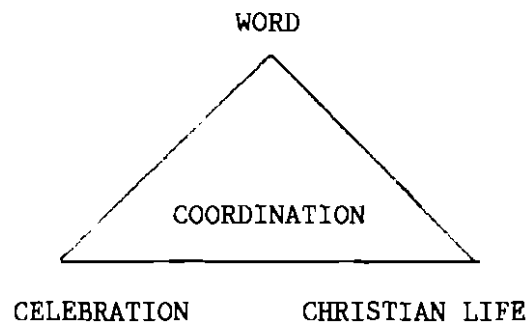
They asked me to make a presentation on how a community should be organized in order to work well.

I laid out the new model of church: participatory church and liberating church (transformative, prophetic).

I took Ephesians 4:1-6 as my starting point. There Paul speaks of the basic charism of all Christians - baptism, the gift of faith. That is the common foundation of the church, grounding its basic unity.

Other charisms arise over this foundation: the gifts and graces of the Spirit who gives rise to different ministries within the community.

These charisms, the basis for all ministries, are distributed in different areas: the area of the word, the area of celebration, the area of Christian life, and in the center of it all, the area of coordination, as depicted in this diagram.



It is clear where the function of coordination fits in. There are many levels of it: on the level of the universal church the coordinator is the pope, with his advisory bodies (synod of bishops, Roman Curia, etc.); on the level of the diocese the coordinator is the bishop, with his advisors (presbytery, pastoral council, chancery, etc.); at the parish level the coordinator is the pastor, aided by the parish council, etc.; and at the community level coordination is done by a team of coordinators.

The main task of coordination is not to replace other functions but to unify, encourage, and stimulate those who perform them. Unification and encouragement are two main functions in all coordination.

But it should never be forgotten that all this organization is meant for the service of the church and its mission to all humankind: salvation and liberation. In other words, a participatory church exists for the

sake of a liberating church - and that always means the whole range of liberation.

Guidelines for Good Coordination

The coordinators met in groups to draw up some rules to guide them in their work of being the "axle between the groups."

These were the rules that resulted, practical guidelines for good coordination:

1) Coordinators should work together with the other coordinators. After all, if they don't themselves work in coordination, how are they going to coordinate others?

2) Coordinators should prepare a programme of activities, something that will distribute the tasks to be done and set out times for meetings to evaluate work already done and prepare for what has yet to be done.

3) Coordinators should not in any way replace the community leaders or other ministers in their own work, but should show respect and appreciation for each one's work.

4) Coordinators should pay particular attention to weaker groups or those that fall apart, striving to give them more life or to bring them back to life.

5) Coordinators should bring together different groups in the community from time to time: feast days, meetings for prayer, meetings to discuss common problems (such as threats made on their land), etc.

6) Coordinators should especially bring together local community leaders in order to discuss difficult or tricky situations (quarreling in groups, etc.).

7) Coordinators should warn of dangers threatening the community, such as proselytizing Evangelicals or the threat of expulsion from land holdings. They can't be like "dumb dogs" - the term Isaiah used to criticize fearful leaders who see

danger but remain silent (Isa. 56:10)

8) Coordinators should communicate to the groups anything important that happens on the level of the parish or of the universal church (persecutions, positive developments, etc.).

9) Coordinators should help local lay leaders awaken groups to social questions.

10) Finally, coordinators deserve to be recognized and respected by the various groups.

This all had to be written on sheets of paper and arranged on the floor because it wouldn't fit on the blackboard. It took a lot of effort to come up with this sort of "decatalogue." There was writing all over the floor. Then I put it all together and wrote up a clean version. So we got done what we had set out to do. The coordinators could view their situation in these guidelines, which they carried back home on a sheet of paper.

LEADERS OF LITURGICAL CELEBRATION

Sunday, November 6

We have spent this whole Sunday training fourteen persons - the liturgical team - for leading Sunday worship.

The priest comes here once a month. On Sundays it is the sisters who lead the celebration with the people. But now there is a good liturgical team in place, and the idea is to put this pastoral task in the hands of the community as well.

It was a day of intensive work. In the morning there was reflection on the meaning of the liturgy and the Sunday celebration. That was so that a theological sense of the liturgy would underlie the team's practical work.

In the afternoon there was a rehearsal of how to lead Sunday worship

with the people. Evaluation and suggestions came from the team itself....

MODEL FOR BCCs: THE CHURCH OF THE APOSTLES

After supper, around 7 p.m., we all went over to the training center. It was too small to hold all those who came pouring out of their houses. That is why they are putting up a new church right alongside it. The whole community has been involved in the work, and the walls and roof are up. That is the main thing.

The old center was filled for my talk - more than a hundred persons. Nilza and Eleutério suggested I talk to them about how the first Christians lived. There is a lot of interest in that topic in these communities, perhaps because they feel very closely identified with the early church, in their simplicity, poverty, equality, persecutions, etc.

So I reached for the Acts of the Apostles and developed these points:

1) The first Christians remained steadfast in these things: listening to the word of God, celebrating the Lord's Supper, meeting for prayer and worship (cf. Acts 2:42). I emphasized how important their meetings were and illustrated the point by referring to the meeting of the community at Troas, where they all heard and deepened their awareness of the word of God and then celebrated the Lord's Supper. That was one of the Apostle Paul's BCCs. Our situation was so similar to that of Acts, with the simplicity and poverty of the people, the plain, newly-born faith (and even some pointed details: persons sitting on windowsills ...), that I felt I had been swept back to the time of the Apostles.

2) Among the first Christians "everything was held in common" (cf. Acts 4:32f.). Here I stressed our overall aim of creating a society of

brothers and sisters, the need for us to put what we have in common even now - especially putting our energy into social struggle. "Having our goods in common" is part of our faith now and in the future.

3) The first Christians also had their failings: there is the case of Ananias and Sapphira who wanted to deceive the community (Acts 5:1ff.); the disagreement over the way different groups of widows were cared for (cf. Acts 6:1ff.); and the conflict over Christians converted from Judaism who were still attached to their old ways (cf. Acts 15:1f); the fight between Paul and Barnabas over Mark, whom one wanted to take with him on his journey and the other didn't (cf. Acts 15:36), etc.

4) The first Christians suffered persecutions (cf. Acts 4:1ff.; 5:17ff.; 6:8ff.; 8:1ff.; 9:1ff.; 11:12, etc..).

I made comparisons with the situation of the church today, especially with the BCC movement. This "new way of being church" is really not so new. It is not something that bishops and priests have invented out of their own heads. It is like the BCCs the first Christians had. It is turning back to the Acts of the Apostles. It means being an apostolic church.

At the end of the meeting we stood up to pray. In the spontaneous intentions that came out in great profusion, the group especially thanked God for the "kind of church" that was arising, one so close to that of the apostles, and prayed that the local community would follow the example of the first Christian community, especially with regard to "putting their goods and energies in common," and with regard to courage in the face of persecutions.

After the meeting Seu Caboclo came up to me and said, "We were ready to keep going on all night, the way they did with St. Paul in the

story you read us!"....

A WEAKNESS IN THE BCCs

Thursday, November 10

I am overwhelmed by a sensation of weakness whenever I am around BCCs. They are always poised between "making it" and "not making it," as someone here put it. And as far as I have been able to find out, that same feeling of weakness affects all BCCs in Brazil, and probably elsewhere.

Is this a temporary situation, one that is yet to be overcome? Will this turn out to be an indication that they are still in their infancy, a sign of immaturity - and thus a stage to be gone beyond?

Or is this not rather part of the makeup of the true church of Christ: the truer it is, the poorer it is, and of course, the poorer it is, the weaker it is? "God...singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong" (1 Cor. 1:27). The ideal of strength, and that there should be "strong communities" - is that a gospel ideal?

In any case, there's matter for reflection and discernment here. This weakness, fragility, the almost ephemeral quality of BCCs, is something ambiguous. Perhaps their weakness derives from the fact that BCCs are new, and that leaders are not trained and experienced. That kind of weakness should be regarded as a passing phase and should be overcome and surpassed as we all make progress. But there is a gospel weakness that comes from the fact that BCCs are made up of persons who are poor, semi-illiterate, oppressed, and alienated, and yet, despite all that - even because of it - they are the bearers of the church's mission and of the promises of the kingdom. "Do not live in fear, little flock" (Luke 12:32).

BCCs must find their center of

gravity in faith, never in fear; in a clear consciousness, never in alienation; in courage, never in cowardice.

HOW TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Tuesday, March 8

Today we had a visit from Sister Luisa, who is on the prelature team for pastoral coordination, and Francisca Marinheiro, a lay woman who works full-time in pastoral work and is part of the same team.

Sister explained the conclusions of the last pastoral council meeting. She is a competent woman: calm, mature, and even-tempered. When things get stirred up in these council meetings with a hundred or more persons involved, she keeps a firm hand on the rudder so the boat will head straight. And gradually she steers it toward calmer waters. She does that even when all the priests and sisters get worked up, and struggling with them is not easy at all.

Next, Francisca led a discussion on how to improve the work of the BCCs.

Group discussion among the leaders led to a series of proposals - more like suggestions than directions which emphasized the following points:

- 1) There should be visits between groups, especially on feast days, commemorations, and at outdoor celebrations. That way one group encourages the other, greater unity is created, members come closer together, and they overcome the dispersion that hampers groups in the jungle.
- 2) The parish coordinating team should visit the groups as often as possible.
- 3) In each community there should be a coordinating group to lead

meetings and the whole community process. Instead of having the lay leader do all the leading, more members should be involved. And so between now and the end of the year, the leader should find and appoint new ministers; among whom there could be a prayer leader, someone to lead music, a minister for the sick, someone to handle collecting the money, a catechist, someone to visit other groups, an auxiliary leader, etc.

4) They should improve the way they treat others, especially those who are more shy. They should strive to be more receptive and sensitive to everyone in the community.

5) Each community should create its own community center, choosing a site for it by consensus. It will be the "House of the Community."

6) The lay leaders should meet once a month in the parish. Those who miss three months without an excuse should be relieved of their responsibility.

Their conclusions emerged from group discussion and then a plenary session. But it took a lot of struggle to get to something that clear. Francisca led the discussion and moved the proposals along with the firmness of a schoolteacher. Always objective, she did not let the trainees get bogged down in pettiness or personal problems. She brought the group along firmly to a conclusion or decision that everyone was satisfied with.

On the other hand, she did not let things roll on forever, letting the trainees get tired. Her way of conducting a vote was novel: "Anyone in agreement, stand up," or "Clap your hands," or "Anyone opposed, raise your foot," and the like....

LAY LEADERS AND EVANGELICALS

Monday, December 5

Four of us have come here to help with a training session for lay

leaders in the area of Brasília.

The people of the area had asked that the topic be the Evangelicals. They are everywhere and they proselytize very actively. The relationship between lay leaders and Evangelicals is always quite problematic. And that is why there is a need for a training session devoted to this topic.

Naturally, the meeting, which will last five days, began with a moment of prayer. When you see these fifty, sixty, or seventy lay leaders, raising their hands up to heavens and praying the Our Father, you get to imagining how God must react, listening to them. Present in their voices is the very reality of life itself.

BCC methodology is inductive: its starting point is always an observation stage, carried out by the people. So Father Asfury put together the results of a brainstorming session focused on what is commonly believed about Evangelicals. Here are some of the observations:

1) Evangelicals go to houses of the poor and first try to win over the women in order to then bring the whole family over to Evangelicalism. Sometimes they even break up a Catholic evangelization group.

2) They talk a lot about the Holy Spirit, and think they are the only ones who have received the Holy Spirit.

3) They say things would be better if there were not any sisters or priests.

4) For them a procession is idolatry.

5) They say the church's work of conscientization is really the work of the world, and that all these matters of liberation do not have anything to do with religion.

6) They think sickness is like a current that seizes persons because they are not Evangelicals.

7) When Catholics have processions, they pass out leaflets with titles

like, "The Crowd is Wrong."

8) They criticize lay leaders for not reading the whole Bible, only the New Testament.

9) They do not believe in Mary as Our Lady, the Virgin Mother of God, and say she had other children besides Jesus Christ.

10) They say lay leaders are the blind leading the blind.

11) They do not believe in infant baptism.

12) They believe only in baptism by immersion.

13) They say they are the only ones who are saved, because only they have accepted Jesus Christ and entrusted themselves to him.

14) They despise reverence for the cross and the way Catholics bless themselves, make the sign of the cross, and also light candles. For them the sign of the cross is the sign of the Wild Beast.

15) They come up to the bedside of dying Catholics and try to convince them, telling them they will be condemned unless they become Evangelicals.

16) They try to intimidate Catholics, instilling fear, by saying that the Wild Beast is coming to put a mark on the foreheads of those who do not have the sign of Evangelicals on them. (A lay leader tells how he calmed down a woman who had been tormented by this kind of fear, explaining to her the true meaning of the number 666, using the mimeographed sheet from a training session on Revelation.)

17) They say priests and sisters should be married.

18) For them the pope is the Wild Beast, and priests and bishops have the number 666 written on their cassocks.

19) They say the Catholic Church is a religion that accepts any and all kinds of persons.

20) They think only they have the power to cure the sick, cast out demons, and speak in tongues.

21) They use magnetism to impress the people.

22) They do cures, or say they do, but they can not prevent death, and those who go to them crippled leave the same way.

23) What they are interested in is money.

Observations

1) **Confrontation between Catholics and Evangelicals has reached down to the local level.** Lay leaders experience confrontation with Evangelicals as a serious problem because they are rivals competing for the same religious space. Not long ago it was the priest who had to face the minister, but today it is the lay leader. Lay leaders feel they are responsible for their communities, and so they feel they are up against it when Evangelicals try to convert their members. The conflict does not prove that Evangelicals are any more aggressive, but simply that they are finding more Catholic resistance at the grassroots level. Bourdieu would reduce all this to simply a "fight over the religious market," but a theologian has to inquire about the quality of both "products."

2) **A strategy that is meant to counter an ideology.** A good deal of the Evangelical missionary methodology - not to simply call it proselytizing - is really the same kind of strategy used by any counter-ideology. The aim is to demoralize one's competition or adversary so as to come out on top oneself. That is the way it is with ideologies, political parties, governments, companies, soccer teams, etc.

3) **The main issue is theological.** Do these sects function as means of salvation as mentioned in paragraph 3 of the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism? Despite the faults we see there, are there ways of coming to Christ? Is what Paul said of Judeo-Christians perhaps valid for them: "Some preach Christ from motives of envy and

rivalry.... What of it? All that matters is that... Christ is being proclaimed!" (Phil. 1:15018).

Are the Evangelicals a means God uses to console, draw together, encourage, and save the people, dispersed and confused, like sheep without enough shepherds (cf. Matt. 9:36)? Are Evangelicals our companions in the harvest of the Lord, or are they our rivals, or perhaps worse, our adversaries? Are they gathering with us or scattering what we gather?

Perhaps there is something of both, the proportions varying from case to case.

Yet, there is no denying that at the theological level the Christ of the Evangelicals is not the one who fully liberates the human condition. Paul's Christ, yes, but not the Jesus of the synoptics, the poor man, the worker, the friend of the oppressed, the prophet who denounces oppressors and defends the weak, who is persecuted by the powerful and murdered by the leaders of his time. The Evangelical churches are resurrection without incarnation.

In this regard, it is better to be silent about Christ than to preach him in a distorted way (cf. 2 Cor. 2:17 and 4:2). Ultimately, however, it is better to preach a partial Christ than no Christ - and this is to the credit of the Evangelicals.

Catholics and Evangelicals: Three Rules

I've never seen a more slippery topic to discuss with the people than this one of the Evangelicals. It's like trying to catch fish with your

hands. All the more so because Evangelicals can seem to be a bazaar of different doctrines, rites, and customs.

Besides that, all lay leaders have their own questions and experiences to relate. There is no doubt that they all feel the Evangelical issue very strongly and that they feel a certain attraction toward Evangelicalism.

Brazilians have an enormous interest in this issue. They could spend days and days hearing about Evangelicalism. It is about religion, and the people, and especially these leaders, are always interested in religion.

In order to wind up this troublesome topic, I laid out three little general rules that had emerged out of the discussions and might serve as guidelines for the lay leaders in their relationship with Evangelicals.

- 1) Be well mannered toward everybody, including Evangelicals.
- 2) Remain firm and serene in your own faith.
- 3) Do not discuss religion with any Evangelical who is a fanatic.

That is not especially brilliant. But that is as far as we could get. The rules are simple and practical.

The trainees seem to appreciate them. "That is what we needed," said one of them with relief.

Ref. Clodovis Boff
Feet-on-the-Ground Theology,
Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990.

VOCATION RECRUITMENT IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

James H. Kroeger, MM

An alternate title of this article could be, **Missionaries and Vocation Piracy**. Certainly, it would prove to be provocative and intentionally so. It springs from a reaction against a practice that, unfortunately, continues within some sectors of the church. One short, true example will illustrate the point clearly.

Early in 1990 an American religious, whose society is of Italian origin, arrives in an Asian country. The individual has never before been on a mission assignment. A location is established in an affluent section of the capital city; vocation recruitment and acceptance begin.

Other missionaries with many decades of service to the local church, as well as many of the diocesan/indigenous clergy and religious, react with distaste. Some of their vocation prospects and sincere youth are being siphoned off by this latest arrival. Everyone would agree that the tension and competition created in this situation are unfortunate. What can be done?

There is no "magic formula" for settling this sticky problem. Who should take the initiative? How can the misguided enthusiasm of the new recruiter be contained? Is it responsible just to let the problem simmer and hope for the best? Is it in the sincere interest of mission, the local church and mission societies to speak openly of the problem? The list of unanswered questions is lengthy.

This author, a veteran missionary, believes that the problem should be aired frankly and directly. My ap-

proach is not accusatory, not filled with rivalry, not seeking self-justification. The sincere promotion of "professional approaches to mission and vocation recruitment" motivates this brief piece.

This article is short; it is mainly comprised of guidelines or points for reflection to assist missionaries, local clergy and religious recruiters as they approach mission and vocations. Although focused on a sensitive topic, it is hoped that these guidelines would receive wide dissemination so as to reduce conflicts within the local church and among religious. Healthy mission activity, with the goal of building up a truly local church, remains the focus for presenting the following guidelines.

GUIDELINES

(1) It must be the primary focus of missionaries to serve in, through and with the local church; this statement reflects solid current missiological thinking.

(2) Upon first arrival, missionaries should normally undertake an extended period of "apostolic inactivity" (8-24 months) to learn the language and begin their life-long acculturation process.

(3) Newly arrived missionaries should seek the advice and wisdom of church personnel who have experience and lengthy service in the country; they need a "cultural advisor" to continually guide them.

(4) International societies should serve within the local church for a

minimum of 7-10 years before accepting local candidates into their religious families. In short, they should give service and till the soil before picking fruit.

(5) Preservation of a religious society that is aging or dying in the West must never be the motivation for opening houses in countries where "vocations are plentiful."

(6) Missionaries would do well to train some of their own expatriate personnel in the countries where they work; these people could, in turn, be "inculturated" formation personnel - if and when the society decides to accept local applicants.

(7) Promises of training and education abroad should never be offered or used as enticements to attract prospective applicants; such hopes become nearly irresistible temptations for young people in developing countries. This confuses the true vocational calling and can result in the "cultural alienation" of a candidate.

(8) Societies should consider whether it is better to encourage prospective applicants to enter groups (diocesan or religious) already established in the country, to found a separate society particularly fitted to the local needs, or to accept applicants into their own society. This decision should not be made outside the local church (e.g. in a generalate in Rome or the U.S.A.).

(9) Newly arrived religious societies must sensitively avoid wooing or even "stealing" prospective applicants from other religious/diocesan groups who have cultivated vocations through extended witness and service in the country.

(10) Religious and missionaries must be extremely alert and cognizant of the situation and sensibilities of the local church; otherwise, all missionaries (mission itself) can be

placed in a bad light because of the attitude and mistakes of a few foreign missionaries.

These ten points, expressing the convictions and experience of many missionaries, can be complemented by suggestions of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC). Nearly a decade ago, they composed a 25-point list of the qualities of personnel needed by the local churches of Asia. Again, it goes without saying, missionaries must heed with intent sensitivity the expressed wishes of the local church they come to accompany through service.

QUALITIES OF CHURCH WORKERS

As noted by the FABC, the churches of Asia (Africa/Latin America) need workers who:

(1) Are up-to-date with post-Vatican II theology.

(2) Are able to engage in inter-religious dialogue.

(3) Know and appreciate Asian philosophies, religions, traditions, and ideological currents.

(4) Are convinced of the need for the Church to go out to evangelize but understand what this means today in diverse circumstances.

(5) Are able to contribute to the inculturation of doctrine, practice, etc., of the Church.

(6) Are in favour of dialogue within the Church and will exercise leadership as service and foster co-responsibility, dialogue and participation in the Church.

(7) Know how to foster Christian community growth in small communities, parishes, churches.

(8) Can function well in Christian ecumenical collaboration and

dialogue.

(9) Are men and women of prayer and contemplation who seek the meaning in the signs of the times.

(10) Can teach prayer and spiritual growth to individuals and communities - prayer which is inculturated.

(11) Can aid the vital celebration of the sacraments.

(12) Are capable of prayerful contextualized theological reflection at different levels.

(13) Will incorporate the social teaching of the Church at all levels of Christian instruction.

(14) Wish to live a life not distant from the poor but in on-going dialogue with the poor.

(15) Wish to and can engage in work with the people for justice, development and liberation through conscientization and by accompanying them with the gospel in their action on behalf of justice, all the time avoiding clericalism.

(16) As teachers will involve students in social orientation and spiritual leadership.

(17) Have grasped to a useful extent the contribution of behavioral and social sciences to personal, group, and social development.

(18) Are able to understand the situation of youth and work effectively with or for the mass of young people in this part of the world.

(19) Are able to help people in the current confusions of cultural

change, secularization, industrialization, urbanization, etc.

(20) Appreciate the role of women in the Church.

(21) Will be clearly aware of the stresses on family life and know some approaches towards helping family life.

(22) Appreciate the role of mass and group media in evangelization, education, and development together with media's sometimes more negative effects and the ways of reducing these effects.

(23) Have at least fundamental skills in the use of media.

(24) Will be concerned to build up creatively new ministries in the Church and give proper place to the growth of lay responsibility.

(25) Are desirous of learning from the other Catholic Churches of Asia and to cooperate with them.

May the Lord of the Harvest and the Owner to the Vineyard enrich the local churches of Asia, Africa, and Latin America with both indigenous and missionary personnel possessing these needed qualities for authentic service.

(Fr. James H. Kroeger, MM., a missionary for two decades in Asia, is currently professor of mission and dogmatic theology at the Loyola School of Theology in Manila. In recent months he has also lectured in Japan, Bangladesh, Taiwan, and Hong Kong).

BOOK NOTES

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CHINA

Jeroom Heyndrickx, CICM

Writing the historiography of the Catholic Church in China is important, urgent and useful today. '*Historia docet*' history is our teacher. A scientific study of the history of the Catholic Church in China will be helpful for this Church.

However this can only be realized by a close cooperation between Chinese and non-Chinese scholars. Part of the archives are in China; a great deal however is with the respective congregations which have worked in China.

We therefore invite you hereby to send a representative of your congregation to attend this international conference and if you wish to report on the history study your congregation has done so far. But even if your congregation is not involved yet in any history study we would appreciate you sending a representative. This could indeed be for all of us an opportunity to plan more history study for the future.

The conference will take place in Leuven from **September 5 (p.m.) till September 8, 1990**. It is expected to be an occasion for historians who do research in this field to exchange views on basic principles and methodology of modern historical study which should guide our research in the future. At the same time it is also an occasion for the various religious congregations which have worked in China to report to one another about the historical research which they have done so far in their

own congregation. Those congregations who have not started their research yet can find in this conference the encouragement and help which they need.

A good number of historians and delegates of congregations have already assured us of their participation. The Catholic Fugen University of Taipei has decided to make special contributions not only to the preparation of this international conference, but also to assure the continuation of scientific research in this field in the future. Archbishop Lo Kuang will attend the conference personally. We hope that the Church in Mainland China will also join this research work through one of its institutions.

Participants are invited to join the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the death of Fr. Lebbe. This will be held in Ypres, where Fr. Lebbe went to school. On that day we will also visit the archives of Dom Celestin Lou Tseng Tsiang in the Benedictine Monastery of Zevekerke, near Bruges.

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