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What is the relation between mission and identity in religious life? In *Religious And Mission*, MICHAEL AMALADOSS explores the question within the framework of the prophetic proclamation of the Reign of God. The challenge - a call to conversion, commitment and creative action.

Women Bearing Witness To The Ever-New And Life-Giving Gospel focuses on Jesus' encounters with women in John's Gospel. Columbian theologian, MARIA TERESA PORCILE SANTISO'S scriptural analysis puts before us women's experience of the body as a unique reading of the Word made flesh.

A welcomed addition to the on-going analysis of the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Africa - is HERMAN WIJTEN'S article, *The Synod on Africa: Justice, Peace, And Integrity of Creation*. His observations are a thought-provoking contribution to Synod preparation.

ALOYSIUS PIERIS' approach to inter-religious dialogue in *An Asian Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions* is grounded in three over-lapping concerns: the poor, a liberational thrust and basic human communities. Although the words have a universal ring to them, the dialogic context is decidedly East not West.

Brazil, Togo, Zaire, Croatia and Uganda call our attention to people and places in *Mission Moments*. The homeless in São Paulo, 100 years of Christianity in Lomè, the Old Testament broken open in New Testament, Kinshasha, refugees from civil war in Croatia, and new life for an AIDS patient - all reflect the present faces of mission.

This issue of the Bulletin concludes with Coming Events.



NEWS

The SEDOS family offers best wishes and prayers to the new Superior General of the *Sisters of the Holy Union* - Pauline Cowie, SUSC.

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RELIGIOUS AND MISSION

Michael Amaladoss, SJ

(Michael Amaladoss, SJ is Assistant to the Superior General of the Jesuits, in Rome. He is President of the International Association of Mission Studies (IAMS), a member of the editorial board of Spiritus, Paris, and a former member of the Executive Committee of SEDOS).

What is the relation between mission and identity in religious life? Religious charism is a gift to the Church. Charisms are given for the service of the Church and the world. Religious families are born in response to a particular situation, at a particular time. There are always efforts to fit them into a known, pre-existent structure, though some charisms manage to break out of it. Because of their charism, religious have a particular role in the Church. The specificity of this role is found in the particular perspective and way in which religious do it. Therefore one could say that it is by looking at how a particular group of religious live and work that one can say who they are. **Identity follows mission.** Mission is not merely apostolic action, but witness, a way of being and working. Not only religious charisms, but also religious life itself takes newer forms in new cultures and historical contexts. Inculturation of a charism is an ever present need.

The *Lineamenta* for the 1994 synod on religious life states that consecration and mission are related. But it does not say how. It distinguishes among religious, clergy and laity, but without being specific. I suggest that one way of trying to understand the identity of religious is to look at their role in the Church in mission in the world. Underlying the diversification of charisms that determine their way of life and service, religious have a particular role in the Church and in the world that sets them apart from the laity and the clergy. This is a prophetic and therefore a missionary function, because it is related to the prophetic reality of the Reign of God (cf. Matt 19:12) in the Church and in the world.

When we speak about religious life, the traditional approach is to define it - that is, talk

about its identity - and then discuss its role in the Church and finally consider what it does. This is the plan followed by the *Lineamenta*. But I suggest that in talking about religious we should move from what they do to what they are. An alternative approach starting with experience, lived in faith as commitment and vision, moves away from abstract and *a priori* discussions about states of perfection or the specific way in which religious follow the evangelical counsels.

A contemplative look at the Reign of God and the mystery of God's mission in history can liberate us from anxiety and aggressivity in our proclamation. Otherwise, mission without mystery can become oppressive.

The Church is a people on mission. In the words of the Second Vatican Council:

The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This plan flows from "fountain-like love", the love of God the Father (*Ad Genes*, 2).

Mission is not merely an activity of the Church; it is its very being. The sacrament of Baptism is not merely a gift of salvation; it is a call to mission. All the members of the Church, with the variety of their charisms and responsibilities, share this mission. Religious

who live their baptismal commitment in a radical manner also share this mission in a radical way. That is why an acquaintance with con-

temporary reflection on mission is helpful to our understanding of the identity and role of religious in the Church and in the world.

WHAT IS MISSION?

The mission of Jesus was the proclamation of the Reign of God and a call to conversion. Mark provides the best summary: "This is the time of fulfilment. The Reign of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel (Mark 1:15). When Jesus announces that the Reign of God has come, he is drawing on his own experience of God as *Abba*, who has declared God's unconditional love for people. The proclamation of the Reign is the revelation of this love. It is both a gift and a challenge, because it calls for a response. The repentance one is invited to is a turning to God, by accepting God's love and allowing it to transform, becoming a being lead to love God in one's neighbour.

When the revelation of God's love meets its appropriate response in people's trusting acceptance of this love, there begins a mighty movement of personal and societal liberation which sweeps through human history. The movement brings **freedom** inasmuch as it liberates each individual from inadequacies and obsessions that shackle. It fosters **fellowship**, because it empowers free individuals to exercise their concern for each other in genuine community. And it leads on to **justice**, because it impels every true community to adopt the just societal structures which alone make freedom and fellowship possible (George Soares - Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Vision of a New Society" in D.S. Amalordavadass (ed). **The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society** (Bangalore, NBCLC, 1981), pp. 578-608.

The proclamation of the Reign of God is therefore prophetic: it not only calls to conversion, but also indicates an alternative way of building up and living in community (*Lumen Gentium*). It inaugurates a new movement of people committed to build up this community in history. The Church is the new people of God missioned to be the symbol and servant (sacrament) of this new community.

Mission as Prophecy

This one mission may be realised in various ways, in various areas and at various levels. But what makes these various activities mission is the focus on the prophetic proclamation of the Good News of Jesus (*Lumen Gentium*, 12-20).

For example, promotion of justice is a dimension of mission. It is not enough to opt for the poor and meet their needs. We have to struggle with them to transform the structures that make them poor, because our aim is to build a new community of freedom, fellowship and justice. This means that though we opt for the poor, our prophetic challenge has to be directed to the non-poor. Secondly, the Gospel does not offer economic or political blue-prints. Rather it suggests new ways of looking at God, people and the world, new attitudes, a new system of values and inspiration and motivation for personal and community change and commitment to action. John Paul II has spelt this out as promoting moral and cultural change.

The main obstacles to development will be overcome only by means of essentially moral decisions. For believers, and especially for Christians, these decisions will take their inspiration from the principles of faith, with the help of divine grace (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 35).

These criticisms are directed not so much against an economic system as against an ethical and cultural system. Evangelisation plays a role in the culture of the various nations, sustaining culture in its progress towards the truth, and assisting in the work of its purification and enrichment (*Centesimus Annus*, 39, 50).

Mission in a situation of injustice focuses on a moral and cultural transformation in the name of the Gospel, both at the level of persons and of communities, and in this way hopes to transform economic and political structures, leading

to the emergence of a new people among whom God reigns.

Perspective and Criteria

This reflection on mission helps us to spell out a perspective and criteria when we look at the world and seek to discern its challenges.

1. The horizon in which the discernment takes place is the building up of the Reign of God and, at its service, of the Church as witness and servant.

2. When we look at the world, it is not enough to make a list of needs and problems or to describe situations; we have to subject the world to an analysis and discern, in the light of the Gospel, the moral and cultural elements that call for a prophetic Word.

3. The Good News is not addressed to problems and situations: these only provide the context. It is proclaimed to people, who are called to conversion, commitment and creative action. They are challenged to become agents of transformation. John Paul II has frequently insisted on this: "Man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 13).

4. Though our proclamation of the Good News must reach out to all peoples, we make a preferential option for the poor, following in the footsteps of Jesus (Lk 4:18). This is not an exclusive option, but an effort to look at the world from the point of view of its victims and a conviction that real transformation will come from below (Lk 1:46-55).

5. It is in the light of this that we should look at ourselves as witnesses and servants and question our authenticity and commitment as well as discern the challenges for our mission.

Let me comment briefly on each of these themes.

The Horizon: The Reign of God

I have already indicated the image of the Reign of God which we proclaim. It is a community of freedom, fellowship and justice. The Reign of God and the Church are intimately related. They should neither be confused, nor separated (*Redemptoris Missio*, 17-20). When speaking about mission one still sees a tendency to unconsciously identify it with the building up of the Church. Both in mission *ad gentes* and in re-evangelisation there are situations where the focus of mission had to limit itself to the promotion of Gospel values in society (*Redemptoris Missio*, 35, 42-43, 47). Besides, in a multi-religious society, it is possible for Christians to bring about a certain transformation of a culture without making it denominationally Christian. Christ and his Spirit are active among people in ways unknown to us and through people whom we do not recognise as our own (cf. Lk 9:50; Acts 10). Some of the difficulties that we face as Church may be due to our own past and present faults and inadequacies. A contemplative look at the Reign of God and the mystery of God's mission in history can liberate us from anxiety and aggressivity in our proclamation. Otherwise, mission without mystery can become oppressive.

The distinction, not separation, between the Church and the Reign of God makes it possible that we can engage in inter-religious dialogue, transformation of culture and liberation as integral dimensions of mission, without instrumentalising them. One can also think of a certain mutuality in dialogue with peoples of other religions and cultures, so that we are ready to receive as well as to give.

DISCERNING CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

The focus of our mission is on persons and communities and the cultural and spiritual structures that they inhabit. Therefore our impact on economic and political structures can only be indirect. I am specifying here, not what we should be doing in the economic, social and political levels, but the particular role of reli-

gion and religious in society. Talking globally is not helpful since one of the consequences of secularisation is the diversification of social institutions. An analysis of society will point to the linkages between its various constitutive elements. The person in community is the agent of action and transformation. Economical and

political structures provide the context of life. Culture and religion offer the symbolic world of meaning that provide models, motivation and inspiration. These factors influence each other in various ways.

The Gospel condemns injustice and oppression, even if it does not offer an alternative economic or political blue-print. The Gospel calls people to moral and cultural conversion: that is, it asks people not only to become good, but also to change their way of looking at things, their value system and their attitudes. The Gospel challenges culture directly and seeks to transform it. It is through personal-group and cultural change that it has an impact on economic and political structures. Culture mediates not only the proclamation of the Gospel, but also the response of conversion.

Culture can be understood as a complex of world-view, system of values and attitudes. Culture is not a personal possession. It is communitarian. There is an adage which says: "People make culture, culture makes people". People are socialised into a culture as they grow up in a community. Correspondingly, it is only the community that can transform a culture, though individuals and groups may play a leadership role.

We are familiar with economic and political analysis. We are also accustomed to spiritual (religious) and increasingly psychological, both individual and social, analysis. We need to use analytical tools to understand cultural structures too.

We are living in a culturally pluralistic world. Each culture will have to be analyzed in its own historical situation. However, thanks to science, technology, industrialisation and the media of communication, the cultural elements of modernity have had an impact everywhere, even if it interacts in different ways, with different results, with various local cultures.

Challenges of Modernity to Mission

At the root of modernity there is a twofold development. There is an affirmation of the human: its identity, richness and creativity. One speaks of the human come of age. Secondly a systematic use of practical reason develops science and technology, which in turn leads to industrialisation. The joint impact of both factors result in secularisation and in the breakdown of the traditional social order. Secularisa-

tion leads to the differentiation and autonomy of the various elements that constitute society: economics, politics, the sciences. Each one provides meaning at its own level to social processes. Religion is not longer an overarching meaning system, but limits itself to the ultimate questions. On the other hand, science and secularisation purify religion from magic and question its legitimising aspects. Science and technology also lead to increased production and even abundance. The individual feels liberated from social constraints and sees many possibilities before him/her.

How people use these developments to shape a way of life for themselves depends upon a choice. Secularisation can become secularism, which denies transcendence both human and divine. It can also lead to a holistic world-view, which recognises the autonomy of the human, but integrates it with the divine as the depth of reality.

An egoistic attitude can indulge its pleasure and power instincts in a consumeristic and exploitative way of life. One dominates and exploits not only nature, but also others. Selfishness can also be collective and factors like religion, ethnicity, caste and sex can be used to cement such collectivity. Such domination can lead to injustice, violence and oppression. On the contrary, an altruistic attitude of love and service can share abundance and build community in a spirit of solidarity and participation.

The choice one makes depends on one's value system which is based on what one sees as life's goal. One can aim at building an earthly city, believing in a myth of progress. One can, on the contrary, be guided by the values of the Reign of God, integrating oneself into God's plan for the world, both natural and human.

The challenge of mission is to help people to use their freedom to make the right choices in view of the Reign of God. But people are not standing on neutral ground. They are in the context of a history in which wrong, sinful choices have been made and have been built into cultural and other structures. So people have to be freed first before they can use their freedom. They will have to transform, not only themselves, but also cultural and other structures. I think that we are living in a moment of crisis, in which the exploitative pursuit of consumerism in a context of immanence has led to an experience of its limits and to inner empti-

ness and violence. Such a moment of crisis is also a moment of opportunity.

Faced with these challenges, the Church seeks to promote a transcendence that respects the autonomy of the human and of social institutions; a world view that integrates the human and the divine, body and spirit, the human and the natural world, the masculine and the feminine in a harmonious way; an attitude of openness, respect and love towards the other; a sense of solidarity; attention to God's plan and collaboration with it. These are the values of the Reign of God.

Evangelising Peoples and Cultures

But the real challenge is how we can help people, individuals and communities, to interiorise and live these values. I think of evangelising action at three inter-connecting levels. **First** of all we have to free people from conscious and unconscious burdens that enslave them and help them to integrate themselves as persons. Young people today are individualistic, assertive of their personality and freedom. They are also fragile, uncertain of themselves, not socialised into any clear culture or community structure, hesitant of long or firm commitments, exposed to various ideological currents and to temptations of consumerism, carrying psychological burdens arising out of unhappy family or social situations in which they have grown up, unable to give oneself in love. On the one hand they search for meaning in life; but on the other they are wary of easy certainties. In helping them, though psychological and spiritual techniques are useful, they will not be effective unless the people are enabled to get out of themselves and get involved in some community action, because the obstacles are as much cultural and communitarian as personal.

Secondly, we have to bring people into communities. They could be basic Christian or basic human communities. Here there is a possibility of sharing, of challenge, of mutual support and affirmation, of relationship, of common commitment to the Reign of God. It is in confronting the other that one discovers one's own identity and freedom.

Thirdly, community is best built around a common project that affirms and promotes justice and solidarity. One not only talks about the values that one wishes to promote, but one acts to realise them in the context of life in com-

munity. Action, reflection and discussion, personal and social commitment and liberation - all happen together. In a Christian context this will be celebrated in the community, in the symbolic action of the Eucharist, which will acquire a deeper meaning and relevance in the context, while bringing a dimension of mystery and transcendence to life and action. In a multi-religious community it is possible to assure this spiritual dimension through common prayer. Here we see the realisation of the values of the Reign of God proclaimed by Jesus, namely freedom, fellowship and justice. One sees that in this process personal change and cultural transformation happen together and lead to economic and socio-political change. Action in community is essential for cultural transformation.

Dialogue is a new experience in the Church and one has the impression that we are still busy trying to justify it to ourselves.

What I have tried to outline here is a way of doing mission, in the context of modernity, that focuses on personal-religious and socio-cultural transformation, oriented to liberating economic and political change.

An Option for the Poor

In a community that is divided between the rich and the poor, the oppressors and the oppressed - the evangelising action of the Gospel calls for a preferential option for the poor. This is not just a tactical choice based on compassion, nor dictated by ideological considerations of the class struggle. It is a spiritual choice that is also counter-cultural. It is not only a choice **for** the poor, but also to **be** poor and to struggle **with** the poor. It is the choice of Jesus who emptied himself (Phil 2:5-8). It is the experience of Mary who felt that in her lowliness she was chosen to confound the strong (Lk 1:46-55). It is the wisdom of God of which Paul became aware in his ministry (1 Cor. 1:27). It is the basic principle that violence is not overcome by counter violence, but by the force of truth and love. The power of love will transform every one, the poor as well as the rich. But it is most effective when it emerges out of the

the oppressed, committing them to struggle for their liberation in truth and love.

It liberates them from fear and hatred, giving them a sense of dignity and vision and enabling them to experience the transforming power of the Spirit active in history. Material and spiritual poverty here merge in a prophetic force. It seeks to transform the non-poor by first transforming the poor. But the real focus of mission in such a situation are the non-poor. The option for the poor is not against the non-poor, but a challenge to them. To be with the poor and to care for their needs is necessary, but may become an easy way out of a challenging mission situation. If the goal of mission is transformation of society into the Reign of God, then chal-

lenging the non-poor is a priority. From this point of view, in a global context, one can wonder whether mission to the 'Christian' North - that is, re-evangelisation - is not a priority today!

Missions in the past had used, if not sought, the support of political and economic power. They employed and still employ cultural power. Some believe in the power of the media or of numbers. Some may be even tempted to depend on the spiritual power of the ascetic. All these are not the power of the Spirit. I think that today, mission must rediscover the power of the poor, the way of Jesus, the mystery of the Cross. This discovery can happen only in deep faith in the mystery of God's mission in the world.

THE CHURCH IN MISSION

The Church is the sacrament, that is symbol and servant, of the Reign of God. It must witness to the Reign as a community that embodies and lives its values. It must also actively involve itself with the people, especially with the poor, and be at the service of a movement of people engaged in building up the Reign. It has to be both light and salt (Matt 5:15-16). There may be a tension between those who wish to be one or the other. Jesus not only proclaimed the Reign of God, but was himself the personal presence of this Reign in the world. We are often tempted to answer the question of whether the Church today is an authentic witness of the Reign by looking to its structural and sacramental characteristics rather than to its visibility as an institution and community. Since we, too, are the children of our culture and history it is not easy to be counter-cultural or prophetic. We also tend to forget the history of the Church's presence and action in the world. Our witness has to be humble and contrite on the one hand and on the other we should point to the vision of the new world that we wish to create in the power of the Spirit rather than merely condemn the present, especially if we are not the ideal embodiments of that vision.

Another element of such humility is the recognition that the Spirit is active also in believers of other religions and other people of good will and therefore we must develop a

readiness to collaborate with them in the interests of building up the Reign. The capacity to dialogue is an essential element of witnessing to a mystery. Dialogue supposes mutual respect and openness to give as well as to receive. It is the acknowledgment of the other person's dignity and freedom as different and yet called to the fellowship of sharing a common origin and goal. Dialogue is a new experience in the Church and one has the impression that we are still busy trying to justify it to ourselves. Dialogue is a reversal of a power-relationship that one may often be unaware of. One may be unready for it unconsciously. It is easier to be for the poor, the unbeliever and be on mission to them, than to be with them in a common project.

Being present to the world in a relevant manner supposes a constant dialogue with a fast changing social and cultural situation. Authentic change must of course be rooted in tradition. But roots are meant to produce blossoms. The mediation of the process is the ongoing cultural hermeneutics of tradition. The rift between Gospel and culture is a universal phenomenon and part of the problem may be that the bearers of the Gospel are afraid of becoming inculturated. To an outside observer, it would look as if the Church is always one step behind developments in the modern world.

To be counter-cultural is not to be negative,

but to propose an alternative. But the alternative must not be seen as alienating. We must respect the tradition, not only of the Church but also of history while reaching out to the future.

Religious in Mission

If to be a religious is to be a disciple of Christ, then it is to be, like Christ, in mission in the world. It is a sharing in the mission which is the Church. Mission then is an element of the identity of religious. Their consecration can be seen as a missioning, because the Spirit calls and anoints them or sets them apart with a charism for a particular task or function in the Church and in the world.

The way of this mission will have to be specified in a two-fold context. Within the Church, religious have a special role. Each religious family has a particular charism, which specifies their mode of life and work.

In the dialectical continuum of mission as movement between symbol and serving, each religious family finds its own particular point. It is a dialectic. It is a continuum, because the two poles can interact in various ways in various charisms. Even contemplative religious are witnesses of an alternate way of life in this world, at least in a symbolic manner.

Within the Church, religious are the radicalisation of the Church as mission or movement towards the Reign of God. In a Church that has become a mass institution, they are among those who commit themselves to embody the values of the Gospel and build up communities that are symbols and beginnings of this Reign. Thus within the Church, they are a prophetic pole, not only counter-cultural, but creatively prospective. In an ongoing dialectic of structure and *communitas* as described by anthropologists, they represent *communitas*. Theirs is an ongoing liminal function. Here we are talking in terms of functional differentiations within a group with a common mission. So there is no question of seeing this differentiation in terms of more or less, superior or inferior. Such values depend on the depth of life and commitment and not on structural function. But what I would like to stress is that the differences between functions in the Church - clerical, lay, religious - should be seen in relation to the mission of the Church.

The whole community, the People of God, are the bearers of mission. Clergy have a role

of leadership that is service. Religious are the symbolic, prophetic pole in the Church and in the world in view of the Reign. They respond to a special call of the Spirit. The term prophecy may be confusing. The prophetic charism of the royal priesthood of the People of God, concertized in their ordained leaders, is related to proclamation and teaching in view of the world. (Church - World) The special prophetic charism of religious is related to witness in view of the Reign of God, both in the Church and in the world. (Reign - Church - World) They are at mission. They share the mission of the Church. They are also in mission to the Church as liminal groups that keep challenging the Church in mission in the name of the Reign of God. In the dialectic of the 'already' and the 'not yet' of the Reign, they are nearer to the 'not yet' pole.

In the global project of the mission of God in the world, they are in fellowship with similar liminal groups or persons in other religions. Buddhists have their monks; Hindus their *sanyasis* and the Muslims their *Sufi* holy men. In relation to the world as a whole, these groups have a prophetic fellowship that has not yet been sufficiently exploited in the service of the Reign of God, though there have been occasional dialogues between such groups. Their coming together can not only be an antidote to a certain divisive fundamentalism in religion, but also make present the transcendent in life in creative ways in a multi-religious society.

Conclusion

In concluding, I wish to point to some linkages between the different themes that I have discussed above. By seeing mission as prophecy focused on the Reign of God, we can note its special affinity to religious who have a prophetic function in the Church and in the world as symbols of the Reign of God. Mission as option for the poor has a special resonance with religious life as a liminal pole in the dynamic life of the Church. This liminality also gives a special role to religious in the practice of inter-religious dialogue. In the context of modernity, religious life can be seen as a special antidote to the pursuit of pleasure, power and immanence. As we focus on persons in our mission, symbol and example may be more effective than word. Thus we can see that the identity of religious life is better understood in the context of the Church as mission. Religious life has an essential role in the actualisation to mission today.

WOMEN BEARING WITNESS TO THE EVER-NEW AND LIFE-GIVING GOSPEL

Maria Teresa Porcile Santiso

(Dr. Porcile Santiso is a scripture scholar from Columbia. What follows is an edited version of a presentation which she gave in May 1993 at a meeting of the UISG (International Union of Superiors General in Rome).

Today as witnesses of history we have to present a history that is multi-cultural, multi-racial, polyfaceted. All of us compose this story. It is the *her-story*, to use a word coined by women who reflect on theology in the Northern Hemisphere.

Today we are aware that we have no identity either at an individual, group, community or collective level unless we have memory and story. History is an experience of what has been lived, a treasury of identity through the centuries, and for this reason, story is fundamental.

So of what history are we speaking? I have noticed that the New Catechism, among its other methodological novelties, has recourse to the witnesses of history. Together with the Word of God, the tradition of the Church, the texts of the Magisterium, there appear the

testimony of women saints: Teresa of Avila, Teresa of Lisieux, Joan of Arc, Catherine of Siena. This is extraordinary. In this official text, a compendium of faith and morals, the word of women who have been witnesses to the faith is officially recognised: it is the first time this has happened in the history of the Church and it needs to be pointed out.

It must also be taken into account that women's experience have received a masculine interpretation. Even the biographies of women saints that we have read, have been written or interpreted by men. In fact, if we look at the history of spirituality, we can see that the immense majority of spiritual directors or authors of spirituality have been men. Obviously, all this has an influence on the spiritual experience of women and on the way in which we see, understand and comprehend ourselves.

THE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN

Three attitudes have affected the spiritual experience of women.

1. Men have tacitly ignored a feminine perspective of the spiritual life. It is logical that this should happen; they cannot know an experience they have not had. Quite often spiritual directors and retreat masters have put before women an ideal which is a combination of masculine practices and an eternal feminine ideal. More recently they have spoken to women

about the *anima* of Jung and warned them about faults and problems that are more specifically masculine: aggression, violence, pride, lust, disobedience to hierarchical authority. Seldom have women been asked to see timidity, faint-heartedness, weak submission, manipulation, as faults.

2. Pre-eminence has been given to the intellectual over the emotional, the methodical over the intuitive, asceticism over mysticism.

Women have been exhorted to be virile.

3. Another lamentable effect of masculine mentality in the area of spirituality has been the partial eclipse of feminine models in Scripture and in the history of spirituality. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Peter are part of the history of salvation, but we do not hear so frequently of Sara, Rebecca, Rachel, Myriam, Ruth, Mary Magdalene.

Such spiritual giants as Juliana of Norwich, Catherine of Genoa, Teresa of Avila, Mechtilde of Magdeburg, Gertrude and Mechtilde of Helfta, Brigid of Sweden, Catherine of Siena, Mary of the Incarnation, Angela of Foligno, have been ignored in the history of spirituality and theology. Women have become conditioned to see feminine experiences as negative. Even such an exceptional figure as Teresa of Avila sometimes uses the word woman in a way that could be understood as weak.

The New Catechism

The Catechism of the Catholic Church recognises, values and rescues the holy women of the Old Testament:

- 64 Through the prophets, God forms his people in the hope of salvation, in the expectation of a new and eternal Covenant that is meant for all people (cf. Is 2:2-4), and which will be engraved in their hearts (cf. Jer 31:31-34; Hab 10:16). The prophets announce a radical redemption of the people of God, purification from all their infidelities (cf. Ez 36), a salvation that will include all nations (cf. Is 49:5-6; 53:11). It will be above all the poor and the humble of the Lord (cf. Zeph 2:3)

who will maintain this hope. The holy women like Sara, Rebecca, Rachel, Myriam, Deborah, Hannah, Judith and Esther keep alive the hope of the salvation of Israel. And the purest among them is Mary (cf. Lk 1:38).

It also recognises the witness of New Life, the first fruit of the Woman:

- 641 Mary Magdalen and the holy women who went to embalm the body of Jesus (cf. Mk 16:1; Lk 24:1) that had been buried hastily on the Good Friday afternoon because the Sabbath was approaching (cf. Jn 19:31-42), were the first to meet the Risen Lord (cf. Mt 28:9-10; Jn 20:11-18). So, too, women were the first messengers of the Resurrection of Christ to his own Apostles (cf. Lk 24:9-10). It was only later that Jesus appeared to them, first to Peter and then to the Twelve (cf. I Cor 15:5).

- 643 Far from showing us a community wrapt in the heights of mystical ecstasy, the Gospels present disciples who are downcast ("with sad faces": Lk 24:17) and afraid (cf. Jn 20:19). That is why they did not believe the holy women who came back from the sepulchre and "their words seemed senseless to them" (Lk 24:11; cf. Mk 16:11-13). When Jesus showed himself to the eleven on Easter evening, "He rebuked them for their incredulity and their obstinacy in not believing those who had seen Him risen from the dead" (Mk 16:14).

It is no small matter that 30 years of theology from a woman's perspective should have borne such fruit.

WOMEN IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

In John's Gospel there is another language that speaks of woman life and witness. We shall not dwell primarily on a level of diaconal *doing* with its historical possibilities that look to the past, but rather on the symbolic level of *being*, from a perspective that opens up consequences for the future. This perspective shows us other possibilities and offers another basis for a dialogue that is open to God's action.

In John's Gospel, we do not see women exercising recognised roles or ministries in an established community. In John's Gospel we see encounters of women with Jesus.

Who are these women in John's Gospel? What do they do? How do they do it? On reading John's Gospel, we find there is a particular way in which women appear and behave. Each

woman announces a style of witness and of diaconate that is gradually unfolded.

The Mother of Jesus

The first woman to appear is the Mother of Jesus; she is, par excellence, the Woman of the Hour, which is the central theme of the whole Gospel and looks forward to "the Hour of the New Covenant" (Jn 2:1-10). All is ready for the Marriage of the Lamb, but yet... "they have no wine". Mary pronounces a word that sets out a programme that is fundamental to the whole Gospel:

"Do whatever He tells you". (Jn 2:5).

Faced with the absence of the feast, faced with the lack of wine, in spite of the fact that "the Hour" does not seem to have come, Mary anticipates, propitiates, provokes, calls for this

In John's Gospel, we do not see women exercising recognised roles or ministries in an established community. In John's Gospel we see encounters of women with Jesus.

"hour". When the hour comes (Jn 14:19) Mary will be there. She stands at the beginning and at the end, framing the "time of Salvation".

At Cana there is a *diaconate of mediation*: mediation between the presence of God and the feast of humankind. The good wine has not yet been served; it is Mary who propitiates. The diaconate of Mary is a diaconate of attentiveness, a contemplative diaconate of direct knowledge, of deep intuition. She recognises that "the Hour" can be anticipated because the true bridegroom is already present. It is for him to produce the new wine, yet it is necessary for someone to point it out, to recognise it and to indicate that what he says is to be done. It is Mary who does this. When Jesus presents himself as the True Way (Jn 15), announcing that the Hour is near, Mary will also be near.

The Samaritan Woman

In chapter 4 (Jn 4:1-42) we meet the woman of Samaria. Jesus reveals himself to her in a manner that is special, profound, personal,

intimate and transcendental. It is to her that Jesus says "I Am" with all that this implies. There seems to be a parallel between this woman and Moses. To the latter was revealed the Name of God, close to the burning bush (Ex 3). And he, with the Secret of the Name, conducted the action of liberation. To this woman, near the well, near the water, is revealed the Name (I Am) of her mysterious interlocutor and she also will be converted into a witness-liberator of her own people. It is here that Jesus reveals himself as the truth and as the true place of adoration, in Spirit and in Truth. The water which she was seeking from the well will now become a fountain of life within her. She is entrusted with the Lord's confidence and she will be the first woman evangeliser, the first woman witness in the Gospel of St. John. The diaconate of this woman is one of evangelisation, of joyful witness, of proclamation; she leads the whole town to see and to hear Jesus (Jn 4:30). We do not even know the name of this woman, (just as we would not even know that Mary was called Mary if it depended on John). They are women, and symbolically, the Woman.

Mary and Martha

Continuing on in John's Gospel, the next encounter is with the other Mary, the friend of Jesus who lived in Bethany. She and her sister Martha and her brother Lazarus are intimate friends of the Lord (Jn 11:1-43).

Mary is the one who anoints Jesus with perfume; it is her tears that cause Jesus to be "deeply moved" (Jn 11:32). The Gospel tells us how she kept her perfume for the burial of Jesus (Jn 12:7). Her ministry of transfigured passionate love, establishes the memory of her loving gesture. Her services of diaconate are those of the loving wonder of faith, of stubborn hope, of attentiveness, of suffering, of anticipation, of death; it is a diaconate of total extravagance of compassionate love, of tears and of perfume.

And as for Martha, in John's Gospel, it is she who receives a revelation that is as fundamental as that made by Jesus to Peter in Matthew's Gospel (cf. Mt 16ff): "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (Jn 11:25). The "I Am" of the messianic revelation made to the Samaritan woman is now completed with the Paschal revelation. Martha has a ministry of daring, of being an advocate; she pleads, she demands that the Lord give her a revelation such as cannot

be found in any other place in the Gospel of John.

The Women at the Cross

At the Cross (Jn 19:25-27) the Mother of Jesus appears for the second and last time. Jesus says "I thirst", something very like what he said to the woman of Samaria. However, in the "I thirst", of the Cross there is the final completion of the Hour after which "all is consummated" (Jn 19:28-30): the Lord surrenders his Spirit. It is in this moment that the soldier pierces his heart with the lance and from that opened hear there flow blood and water, and the Church is born. The Heart becomes a cavity, a space of life, the mystery of the feminine. Medieval mystics dared to say "Jesus, the Mother".

What is corporally and symbolically feminine is to be found in him through that life-giving space which opens in blood and water. The feminine is also to be found in the Church which is born on the Cross. That is why Mary and John stand at Christ's side; together they receive the water, the blood and the Spirit. It is there that the Church, the Bride is born. The Church, the Bride, is John and Mary together. They stand as the Incarnation of the whole Church.

However, it is important to underline the fact that John is also born there; that Mary and John receive each other and that Mary "contains" John. Jesus says first: "Woman, behold your Son" (Jn 19:26). Mary is first; she receives the disciple of her Son, the crucified Lord of Glory. Then Jesus says to John: "Behold your Mother..." He does not say "your woman" (cf. Jn 19:27). In addressing her, the Son, who is Lord and Bridegroom, invokes her as

"Woman", saying the word which symbolically contains all that is feminine in relation to the Lord; but to the disciple she is given in a precise relationship, that of "Mother". The Woman, in relation to the disciple, is referred to as Mother (it is she who gives him Life). The Cross is the place of fecundity: it is there that the disciple-son is born. She is in a privileged way, the figure of the Church. The diaconate of Mary at the foot of the Cross is that of the Incarnation of the whole Church: every disciple obtains Life through her.

The Women at the Resurrection

Very early in the morning, Mary Magdalene goes to the empty tomb. She is the only woman in the whole of John's Gospel who is explicitly convoked. In the socio-cultural context of that period in which women were left aside, the fact that Jesus calls her by name, has great symbolic significance; above all, in the light of the biblical theology of the name, especially in the writings of John. Mary recognises herself and recognises him, calling him "Rabboni". Jesus is alive and Mary, convoked, receives "the great mission": "Go and find my brothers and tell them that I have risen to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (Jn 20:17). Mary is to be "the apostle to the apostles", as is sung in the Orthodox liturgy, and as the New Catechism reminds us.

To Martha he revealed himself: "I am the Resurrection, the Life". To Mary Magdalene he shows himself as the living one! She is the first one to announce the Good News of the Resurrection: she incarnates the theological diaconate of faith and of supreme hope, not only of love which is as strong as death but of love which is much stronger than death.

THE HISTORICAL SYMBOLISM OF LIQUIDITY

These are the women who meet Jesus, the witnesses that John presents to us. If we glance rapidly at all these encounters, there is something about all of them that calls for our attention. Next to Jesus, there is a central figure, a woman and next to this woman, between Jesus and the woman, there appears, in one way or another, an element common to all these encounters: a liquid. At Cana this liquid is the water in the jars that is changed into wine. At

Sichar it is the water of the well that transformed springs up to eternal life. At Bethany there are the tears and the perfume that prepare a body for burial. On Calvary water and blood flow from the heart, from an open side. In the Garden of the Resurrection there are tears. In each instance, a woman enters into a relationship with Jesus and surprisingly the dynamic element of a liquid - liquids flow, change, are transformed.

In the Bible, liquids are full of symbolic significance: water, blood, perfume, tears. The language of that which overflows, is poured out; the language of extravagance, of giving without counting the cost, symbolizes love. It is therefore striking that in the gospel of John, everything is expressed in a dynamic of love, a fluidity of love between the Lord and women disciples who exercise forms of diaconate that speak of transformation. Each time John's Gospel presents a woman in relation to Jesus, there liquid is involved as if to indicate a woman's way of being present: dynamic, transforming, fluid.

Witness/Diaconate - Feminine Service in The Gospel of John

The form of witness of the women in John's Gospel is more of being than of doing. They enable us to imagine a ministerial future of the feminine in the Church. Action consists in creativity, grace, love, fullness of power in so far as power is dynamism. In Greek, this is a power that comes from vulnerability, because these women are vulnerable in their encounter with the Lord.

At Cana, anyone could have noticed that there was no more wine; however, it was only "the woman" who perceived and who pointed it out. In Samaria, anyone could have gone to seek water from the well; however, it was "the woman" who made the move and to whom was promised the living water. In Bethany, anyone could have perfumed the body of Jesus; however, it was "the woman" who performed this very concrete action, that looked ahead to his burial. At the Cross, anyone could have represented the disciples, the Church; however, it was "the woman", the mother, and that special disciple (about whom little is known except that Jesus loved him; he knew his heart, that

space of blood and of life, because he had rested upon it). In the garden, anyone could have sought and found and hoped; however, it was "the woman", Mary Magdalene, who did so with an extraordinary sensitivity for the Body of the Lord. In these situations there is an extraordinary affectivity, a sensitivity, a feeling of being affected by what is happening to the Lord.

These texts can be taken as a theological foundation of a Theology of Witness: women exercise ministries that are central to life. It is a question of ministries which derive from a quality of attentiveness and of presence, of affection and of vulnerability in relation to the other. What would happen if, within the Church, profit were to be drawn from the witness of attentiveness, of evangelisation, of compassion, of adoration, and of hope, to which so many women who have met Jesus are already giving lived expression in every part of the world today?

The Mystery of the Church

In John's Gospel the manner of being of the Church is expressed in the Mystery of the Covenant. The Church-Mother-Bride is the whole Church: it is not a question of the "role of woman" or "women" in the Church, but of the whole Church, as Woman, being witness to Life and being called to the mystery of indwelling. For this reason, the whole Church must live the Nuptial Mystery of the Cross. And she does this by being the voice of witness and of desire in the desert as well as by receiving the water and the blood at the Cross, like John the Baptist, and like John the beloved disciple. What we need to do in the Church is to find a way of uniting witness and prophecy, charism and intuition, in a fruitful, organic manner.

THE BODY: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Woman's body has been the object of all kinds of readings, uses and abuses. It has been utilised; it has been changed into an object for sale; it has also been made productive with a biological fertility, that is mechanical and non-responsible, as in the case of polygamy.

In the history of philosophy, of theology and even of spirituality, when it has not been the object of suspicion, of negligence, of punishment or even of disdain, it has been forgotten. At the beginning of this century, first philosophy and then theology began to discover it as an inseparable part of the human being. In

Biblical language it had always been so, but cultural models, inherited perhaps from a Greek dualism or other sources, had not allowed it to be discovered.

Today we live in the "era of the body" and through anthropology, theology, psychology, techniques of corporal expression, communication, meditation and prayer, we are rediscovering it. However, for the first time in history, there is the possibility for woman to interpret herself for herself from her own person, as body-subject and not body-object. We are retrieving the language of the body, in a way that goes far beyond its biological composition. We are moving towards a psychosomatic structure: the body is the Word that speaks, that signifies and has meaning.

Four Essential Moments

A woman's body is a convergence of space and time, marking the maturity of life. A life that can be conceived within her. In the words of Nicole Fatio, a Protestant theologian from Geneva:

"My body is a woman's body and the perception of reality that it gives me bears that mark. It seems to me that there are four essential moments. Before all else the monthly cycles that govern my life according to a rhythm of rise and fall, with moments in which I have control over by body and other moments in which my fragility is apparent. Regularly and stubbornly, **menstruation** calls me to order, preventing me from imagining myself to be other than what I am. **Pregnancy** has taught me what it means to wait; a waiting that is full of promise. **Childbirth** has been that moment in my life when with great intensity I have experienced rupture, a rupture that is indispensable so that a new human being may appear. Finally, **breast-feeding** has allowed me to measure the price that has to be paid so that another being may live. A price that has to be paid with oneself, from one's deepest reserves, a price that admits of no deceit. My woman's body reminds me unceasingly of my limitations; when a new life appears it teaches me the value of time, and the high price that I have to pay with my own person. It also reveals to me the otherness of every human being, including the one conceived in my womb. If I listen to it, this pedagogy of my body opens me to certain dimensions of life. Not all women have been able to bear children, whether by their choice or not. However, one would not be mistaken to

think that they bear within themselves the imprint of this possibility and that they do so their whole life long".

A Woman's Body

Woman's body, a space for indwelling of fecundity indicated by a dynamism of life and of blood. This is the starting point for a phenomenological description of the body as feminine: a femininity that is rich in life, life which is manifested exteriorly through its "liquid" elements. A woman's body is a paschal body: it suffers, is transformed, dies and rises. Her body teaches her a way of being human and feminine, makes her realistic, concrete, and "situates" her in life. She holds within herself

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the sense of time; that is why she can be an agent of hope. She knows the secret of the time that is drawing near - knows how to wait, how to prepare and be prepared; she knows how to anticipate. Within her body a woman knows what is meant by **the Hour**, knows this cyclically and definitively.

That is why the language of life, resurrection and hope is characteristic of woman. Jesus knew this and, according to the Gospel, marked his Hour with encounters with women. And, more than this, Jesus identifies himself with the Hour of the Woman.

The Final Parable

As a good Rabbi, Jesus spoke in parables, in narratives that are full of images. The one that Jesus calls, "the last", is found at the end of John's Gospel.

John's Gospel can be divided into two parts: the Book of Signs, in which the Son comes into the world (Jn 1-12), and the Book of Glory, when the Son returns to the father (Jn 13-20).

For our purposes, we shall take note of two things; the mention of the Hour and the woman in these two books. In the Book of Signs, four women appear: Mary, the mother of Jesus (Jn 2); the Samaritan woman (Jn 4); Martha and Mary (Jn 11); Mary "the perfume" (Jn 12).

In this book there are six explicit references to the Hour: two of them stand in relation to a woman (Jn 2:4; 4:21); two have no relation to a woman but they are also saying that the Hour has not yet come, (Jn 7:30; 8:20); then two mention the Hour and two explicit announcements to his disciples (Jn 12:23; 12:27). In this Book of Signs, in which there begins to be announced the glory that will later be revealed to those in intimate relationship, the announcement of the Hour is received both by women and the disciples; both have a similar relationship of intimacy with Jesus.

The Book of Glory, the second part of John's Gospel, begins thus: "Before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that the Hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father" (Jn 13:1). And from this point, after the washing of the feet, and the betrayal of Judas, the farewells appear. Jesus begins to take

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leave of his disciples, of those who are intimate, and in the midst of these farewells, they are given the hope of a re-encounter, of his return. It is in this moment that Jesus again mentions the Hour, but now for the first time he speaks of this hour in precise terms; he now refers not to his Hour, but to the "hour of the woman". And this hour of the woman is an hour with which he identifies in two ways: on the one hand it is certain that the Hour, a landmark for the whole Gospel, is the imminence of his passion, death, resurrection and ascension, the Hour of the Pasch; but on the other hand, it is likewise the hour being lived by the disciples.

The Pasch

There is a Pasch of Jesus, and a Pasch of his

disciples, and both are found reflected in this Hour of the woman. And in relation to the so-called Book of Signs it is interesting to note that to Mary in Jn 2 and to the Samaritan woman in Jn 4 as well as Andrew and Philip in Jn 12, direct allusions have been made to the Hour.

There are 4 verses (Jn 16:19-22) with a dialectic relationship between "not seeing Jesus" and "seeing him again" (vv 19 and 22), and these two moments are framed "in time" - the first "for a little while" is repeated (Jn 13:33; 7:33; 12:35; 14:9). The "little while" of waiting is a time of mourning and weeping for the disciples, and a time of festival for the world, but the mourning and sadness of the disciples will be turned into joy. Jesus is telling them this - and it seems as if they do not understand what he is saying: it is at this moment that he makes use of a parable. And it is the image of a woman at the moment of giving birth: an image well-known to his disciples, for it is used in the First (Old) Testament to speak of the suffering of the People of Israel (cf. Is 13:8; 26:16-17; 37:3; Hos 13:13; Mi 4:9-10).

Jesus gives his disciples the image of a woman "giving birth" (Jn 16:21). This *anthropos* is the new humanity that is born from the Paschal Mystery of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. The disciples are sad *thlipsis* in Greek, which is almost a technical term to describe the tribulations that will precede God's eschatological intervention (Dan 12:1; Zeph 1:14-15; Heb 3:16). These are *hevlei iolda* (the pains of child-birth in Hosea 13:13), or the *hevlo he mashiaj* (the pains before the coming of the Messiah, cf. Mt 24; Mk 13).

The whole of creation is in the pangs of giving birth (Rm 8:22). In the Greek text, v. 21 speaks first of a child, *paidon* and then of a man, *anthropos*. "The woman... when she has given birth to the child, *paidon*, no longer remembers the suffering for joy that a man has been born into the world (Jn 16:21). What Jesus is saying is that he is coming into the world, and that he is doing this as the New Adam, as a new creation through his disciples who, in reality, are the Church in the state of giving birth.

This parable of "the hour of the woman", as the Hour of Jesus, and the hour of the disciples is one of the richest in the Gospel: it is one to be explored and contemplated at length.

THE HOUR OF THE WOMAN, THE HOUR OF GIVING BIRTH, THE HOUR OF THE SPIRIT

In the whole history of salvation, from Genesis through to the Apocalypse, we see the Spirit of God giving life and bringing to birth (Jn 3:5). The being of the Church, the life-giving action of the Church, cannot be other than that of the Spirit. At the hour of giving birth, the disciples, the Woman-Church and the Spirit are those who bring about the Lord's coming into the world: they cause him to be born, to draw near, to appear... "Come, Lord Jesus" (Apoc 22).

And what women have to do is to give their secret, their unique, untransferable experience of being real, true woman to the symbolical, mystical and yet also real being of the whole Church. And then the Church, like a woman, will bring to birth a newness, a dynamism of transformation.

It is not by chance, therefore, that in the Bible, the Holy Spirit is a feminine *ruaj*, a giver of life, from the entrails of mercy (*rehamim*), a God-of-the-Womb. For this reason, the witness of life of women is a witness of likeness to the Spirit in an outpouring of

love in all its forms.

- Witnesses to the Festival, the New Wine, at Cana (Jn 2)
- Witnesses to the Name, the Living Water, at the well of Sichar (Jn 4).
- Witnesses to the Resurrection, tears at Bethany (Jn 11).
- Witnesses to the "Gospel of Woman", the anointing at Bethany (Jn 12).
- Witnesses to Glory, the Blood and the Water of the Crucifixion (Jn 19).
- Witnesses to Eternal Life, balm in the Garden (Jn 20).
- Witnesses like the Spirit: there are three that give witness - the Spirit, the Water and the Blood... and these three are "one" in the very being of each woman, and that is why the Lord chose them "the first" (New Catechism No. 643).



THE SYNOD ON AFRICA: JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Herman Wijtten, SVD

(Herman Wijtten is the International Coordinator for Justice and Peace for the Society of the Divine Word and a founding member of the African Faith and Justice Network - Europe (AFJN-E)).

"I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:27)

During a visit in Botswana I received an original oil painting made by a refugee from Zimbabwe. The artist pictures Jesus as an African in the midst of fellow Africans serving them their meal. He is among them "as one who serves" Lk 22:27. His demeanor radiates an authority that attracts attention. I like to think that this is the way Jesus wants to be perceived, not as chief or lord, but as humble servant. Today more than ever Jesus wants his Church to be a community of service, responding to the signs of the times. "You shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

The *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops aims at "a deep renewal of the Church in Africa so that Christians on that continent may be fired with zeal to live the gospel fully and to share Christ's salvation and liberation with all humanity". Renewal is not so much an event but rather a process. More than four years have

passed since John Paul's announcement of the synod for Africa. It has been a time of great expectations, enthusiasm and hope. There have been deep frustrations and great disappointments as well. But above all a process has been set in motion. The Spirit has touched and moved the hearts and minds of thousands, if not millions. The question before us is: "Will the participants in the synod be filled with the Spirit of Africa?"

The timely publication of the *Instrumentum Laboris* offers ample opportunity for wide-range discussion and intensified preparation for the synod. It is hoped that the results of these many discussions and reflections will enter the synod halls through the synod fathers and "mothers" from within and outside Africa. It is with this hope that I write my own personal observations about the document's approach to human promotion, justice and peace. The overall orientation to these issues gives reason for hope. This does not exclude some serious criticisms e.g. the total absence of the ecological issue.

HUMAN PROMOTION, JUSTICE AND PEACE

For an appropriate appreciation it is necessary to see how human promotion, justice and peace are treated in the context of the entire document, more precisely in the treatment of evangelisation and a socio-cultural analysis of Africa.

Returning to that great classic of Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, evangelisation is described

as "a complex process made up of complementary and mutually enriching elements, such as the proclamation of Christ to non-believers, inner adherence initiative. It also includes human promotion, and the transformation of cultures and unjust structures of society" (IL 12; EN 24).

The authors of the *Instrumentum Laboris*

deserve praise for striving towards a holistic concept of evangelisation by referring to it as proclamation, inculturation, dialogue, justice and peace, and communication. I must immediately add that I had hoped for a greater integration of these sub-themes into one single, yet comprehensive concept of evangelisation. Inculturation, dialogue, justice and peace, and communication are not sufficiently presented as essential and interlinked components of the Good News. The following paragraph which could have become the key to the integration of the subthemes is more or less left aside. "Jesus himself, the Good News of God, was the very first and greatest evangeliser; he exercised this role to perfection and to the point of sacrificing his earthly life' (EN 7). At the centre of his Good News was the Reign of God, an expression of God's caring authority over the whole of life. The Kingdom is also salvation, that, 'great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the Evil One'" (EN 10; IL 8).

In another paragraph, not quoted in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, Paul VI states: "As an evangeliser, Christ first of all proclaims a kingdom, the Kingdom of God; and this is so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes 'the rest', which is 'given in addition' (Mt 6:33). Only the Kingdom therefore is absolute, and it makes everything else relative" (EN 8).

The Kingdom of God, already present and still to come in its fullness, is the integrating and unifying concept in a holistic understanding of evangelisation. It seems to me that a greater attention to the idea of Kingdom of God, could have brought out more clearly the interrelatedness of the subthemes as constitutive dimensions of evangelisation.

Such a holistic approach would ask for a basic description and socio-cultural analysis of the overall African situation. This analysis is simply not there and omission is one of the main reasons why the reader never gets the sense of being in touch with Africa and its people. If such an analysis were made, the ecological condition and its disastrous consequences could not have been overlooked. The environment is a matter of life or death for millions of Africans. The destruction of the natural environment, and the uprooting of people from their land has also serious religious, socio-cultural, and political implications.

As it is, we find sketchy elements of an analysis scattered throughout the document. Little attention is given to the fact that the great majority of African men and women have a strong sense of ethnic belonging, a blessing which all too often is turning into a curse. Absent is a basic description of the continent's colonial experience and its effects on Africa today. The issue of refugees, urbanisation and emigration are only briefly touched upon. Health is entitled to one meagre sentence: "Malaria is still a great killer in parts of Africa;

I for one, experience the African man and woman as the great absentees in the document that lies before us. They have been actively involved at all levels of the preparatory process, but their voices are missing. The document speaks to Africa rather than representing its voice.

recently AIDS has created a medical and social problem in some parts" (IL 118).

The Church and Human Development

In the statement of their seventh general assembly of July 1984, The Church and Human Development, the bishops of Africa and Madagascar write: "We wish to work for the growth in Africa of a "new man" who will be able to assume the challenges of modern life, while at the same time giving an up-to-date expression of our permanent African values. To do this, we shall take into consideration the spiritual intuition of those who are the poorest, the active involvement of Africans who are struggling for development, the wisdom of the sages of our continent, no matter to which tradition they belong, and the studies of our specialists".

The *Instrumentum Laboris* offers little or nothing when it comes to permanent African values, the spiritual intuition of the poorest, Africans struggling for development against all odds, and the study of specialists. In a document that is supposed to have Africa as its focus there are only three direct quotations from SECAM general assemblies. During his visits to the continent, John Paul addressed many key

African issues in a direct manner, but there are only three quotations from these speeches. The chapter about justice and peace is entitled: A Total and All-inclusive Evangelisation of the African Man and Woman. Yet, I for one, experience the African man and woman as the great absentees in the document that lies before us. They have been actively involved at all levels of the preparatory process, but their voices are missing. The document speaks to Africa rather than representing its voice.

The Latin American bishops at Puebla (1979) focused on the theme, 'Evangelisation in

Latin America's Present and Future' and dedicate a special chapter to a 'Pastoral Overview of the Socio-cultural Context'. They then describe the 'Ecclesial Reality Today in Latin America'. These two chapters provide the background against which they deal with evangelisation in their continent. A similar approach would have been very helpful in preparing for the synod for Africa.

What has been said thus far has implications for all the subthemes, but is particularly relevant for the document's treatment of the specific area of justice and peace.

TOTAL AND ALL-INCLUSIVE EVANGELISATION

This subtitle of the chapter about justice and peace is a clear indication that a serious attempt is made to come to a holistic concept of evangelisation. It raises questions about the role of the Church and of the "all-inclusively evangelised" African in the context of a religiously pluralistic continent. The overall approach is person rather than structure. Human

A good number of pastoral letters of national bishops conferences and individual bishops, are beautiful examples of the contextualisation of the universal Church's social teaching, yet they are basically ignored. Let's hope that those attending the synod will be familiar with these important resources originating from the African Church.

promotion, justice and peace are considered basic human rights. This is clearly expressed towards the end of the chapter: "To bring improvement to situations where there is a violation of human rights, a fundamental rethinking of the methods of evangelisation is imperative. First of all, it is necessary that the link between the mission of evangelisation and human promotion be considered as an integral part of the general programme of evangelisation. Human promotion and the duty of justice and peace are not supplementary to apostolic activity, but an integral part of apostolic work

as a whole: 'man's development derives from God, from the model of Jesus - God and man - and must lead back to God. That is why there is a close connection between the proclamation of the gospel and human promotion'" (IL 125).

Since the synod of bishops of 1971 and especially since *Evangelii Nuntiandi* there has been a growing awareness that in evangelisation we may not separate love of God from love of neighbour. Pope John Paul II follows in the tradition of Paul VI, but puts a greater emphasis on the person and his/her need for redemption. His influence is very evident in the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

Speaking about the content of evangelisation Paul VI observes: "Between evangelisation and human promotion, development and liberation, there are in fact profound links. These include links of an anthropological order, because the man who is to be evangelised is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic questions. They also include links in the theological order, since one cannot dissociate the plan of creation from the plan of redemption. The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combated and of justice to be restored" (EN 31; IL 138).

Therefore, "it is impossible to accept that in evangelisation one could or should ignore the importance of the problems so much discussed today concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world. This would be to forget the lessons which come to us from the gospel concerning love of our neighbour who is suffering and in need" (EN 31; IL 19).

This basic orientation of Paul VI was taken over by the Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar in the document, *Justice and Evangelisation in Africa* of their plenary assembly of 1981, and further developed in the final communiqué of their symposium in Kinshasa in 1984, which had the theme 'The Church and Human Promotion in Africa'. The well chosen references to *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* in the communiqué of their Pan African Seminar on Justice and Peace in Rome, Lesotho in 1988, show the influence of Pope John Paul II.

The communiqué of this Pan African Seminar states: "We reiterate the teaching of the Synod of Bishops in 1971, that commitment for justice and peace is a constitutive element of the preaching of the Good News of Jesus Christ which was given magisterial commendation by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical letter *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*".

The above mentioned documents, and for that matter a good number of pastoral letters of national bishops conferences and individual bishops, are beautiful examples of the contextualisation of the universal Church's social teaching, yet they are basically ignored. Let's hope that those attending the synod will be familiar with these important resources originating from the African Church. Let me add that these African documents are far superior to the *Instrumentum Laboris* in making concrete proposals for the promotion of integral human development and justice and peace in the missionary and pastoral ministry of the local churches.

Many would agree that "the documents on human promotion, justice and peace from the Holy See and the Episcopal Conferences are generally little known and poorly circulated in Africa" (IL 114). The reasons given are the absence of translations in local languages, the distribution being almost exclusively limited to intellectual circles and a style which is incomprehensible to simple people. It is also a fact that many national conferences of bishops do not have a national justice and peace secretariate. The 1990 Directory of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace lists under Africa 49 national bishops conferences of which 25 have a national justice and peace commission. Only 15 of these commissions have a secretary. It can be assumed that in some countries the promotion of justice and peace is attended to by

their social or development offices. The Church's minority position and the presence of dictatorial governments, combined with fear, are among the principal reasons why the Church's social teaching is not reaching the people. In some instances it might also be due to a lack of prophetic fervour on the part of the Church's leadership. I fully support the idea that the appropriation of the Church's social teaching by the faithful "is particularly urgent

In describing the present African situation the Instrumentum Laboris touches upon important issues, but the presentation is sketchy and unsystematic. Little attention is given to the inter-relatedness of the issues, their historical and cultural rootedness, the effects of the international political and economic order.

because in the majority of countries in Africa, the current situation of human promotion, justice and peace gives cause to worry, in others it is disastrous" (IL 114). Yet priority should be given to the conscientisation of the Church's leadership.

In describing the present African situation the *Instrumentum Laboris* touches upon important issues, but the presentation is sketchy and unsystematic. Little attention is given to the inter-relatedness of the issues, their historical and cultural rootedness, the effects of the international political and economic order. I do not wish to go into detail since I have already dealt with some of these issues above. Yet, I want to mention a few: environment, ethnocentrism, poverty, refugees, women, youth, urbanisation and health.

The document emphasises external factors, without denying that internal factors play a role too. These causes are of a political, economic, and psychological-religious nature. The concentration of political and economic power in the hand of a few deprives the majority of their basic human rights. "On the psychological-religious level, the most manifest cause is the devaluing of the human person which is exemplified in the inversion of values" (IL 121). Emphasis, as mentioned above, is on the person - some persons depriving others of their

basic human rights. While I am convinced that this emphasis is justified, I am also of the strong opinion that it needs to be complemented by a thorough scrutiny of prevailing sinful or simply inadequate structures.

On one hand, the authors are conscious of the structural dimension since they point out that in recent years "pastoral letters of bishops and of Episcopal Conferences have often been the means through which the following abuses have been denounced: 1) the evil effects of structures which compromise human promotion; and 2) the violation of the basic human rights of man" (IL 122). Mention is also made of the efforts of the Church in mediating the democratisation process in some countries. Here they add: "The Synod is an occasion to evaluate the involvement of the Church in these new situation, and specify her proper role" (IL 122).

The work of national and diocesan Justice and Peace Commissions, development commissions, and Caritas are described as person oriented. Nothing is said about a critical evaluation of their effectiveness in confronting dehumanising structures and the need of coordination between these organisations. The same critical evaluation is missing with regard to the Church's role in the field of education and health.

In its presentation of dialogue with Islam, the *Instrumentum Laboris* treats the injustice and oppression in fundamentalist Islamic states. Many of these countries have dictatorial governments, but there are also many other dictatorial and/or one-party governments which are equally oppressive. Most of these countries have laws which suppress basic human rights. Although some countries are moving towards greater democracy, most have a poor record in promoting human rights and participation in shaping the future of the country. Even laws that favour the people are being "frustrated by the very authorities who put them in place" (IL 123). The Synod is recommended to "help discern how the laity can be made more committed to restructuring the State so that it will truly serve the African person" (IL 123). Hopefully the Synod will also consider the ways and means by which the laity can count on the Church's cooperation and support.

The following statement very well reflects the basic scope and limitation of the approach taken by the working document: "What is in

question in the efforts for justice and peace is the total and all-inclusive evangelisation of the African person, as individuals and as communities. The Synod should help us devise pastoral approaches to lead every baptised person to an ever greater conversion to the demands of the gospel and to becoming more and more an agent of evangelisation wherever he or she may be, in the family, in society or in economic and political spheres" (IL 124).

Not Without Hope

A working document is only a 'working' document and should stimulate the discussion. Working or even struggling with the *Instrumentum Laboris* has been a real challenge; it has helped to clarify my own understanding of justice, peace and integrity of creation as being constitutive dimensions of evangelisation.

It is my sincere hope and expectation that the participants in the Synod will study the document in its general orientation and in its presentation of the subthemes. Having done so they need to ask themselves how the present day realities of Africa and the voice of its people can enter more deeply into the heart of the assembly.

Let me conclude with the vision of the role of the Church as it is so powerfully expressed by the Pan African Seminar on Justice and Peace: "Africa needs the Church because Africa cannot survive long without fidelity to what is essentially human and criticism of what is fundamentally inhuman and anti-human. Without criticism, freedom yields to totalitarianism, justice gives way to exploitation, charity recedes into ruthlessness, peace dissolves into hostility. But we need a Church which offers itself as an agent which makes the human community stand under judgement of the ensuring values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Church must be a place where all those forces, personal and political, which challenge and undermine these values, are themselves effectively exposed, prophetically denounced and courageously disarmed and dismantled. It must be a Church which proclaims, without compromise, the dignity and worth of every person, lest one becomes swallowed up in society's technological jaws, a Church which as a revolutionary, never rests until the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are everywhere realised and extended". (no. 27)

AN ASIAN PARADIGM:

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

Aloysius Pieris, SJ

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Inter-religious dialogue is having its own way in Asia and reveals its own theology of religion. This has to be seen against the background of what transpires in the Western patriarchate in the same field of theology. I select **one particular model** which has created tension between the **two magisteria** that function dialectically in the Church today: the 'academic magisterium' of the theologians and the 'pastoral magisterium' of the bishops and in particular the bishop of Rome. They differ in their responses, but they begin their theology of religion by asking almost the same question.

Their starting point as well as their frame of reference is the issue of 'Christian uniqueness' and/or the 'uniqueness of Christ'. The influx of oriental religions into the West (not only through Asian emigrants but also through conversion movements) as well as the West's secular democratic tradition which respects pluralism and religious freedom amidst growing secularisation and de-Christianisation, creates a certain amount of apprehension among concerned Christians about the concomitant crisis in traditional Christianity. To assert itself as a living force, Christianity has to rediscover its identity as well as reformulate its inalienable role in society. Thus the question of specificity and uniqueness - a euphemism for absoluteness? - of Christ and his religion becomes the pivotal point of the Western patriarchate's theology of religion.

Three Categories

Today the academic magisterium in the West has developed this theology in terms of three

significant categories: **exclusivism**, **inclusivism** and **pluralism**. In the first category are those who perceive their own religion as exclusively salvific; the Christian version of it is reflected in the adage *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Hence conversion of others to their own faith is a religious imperative that invokes love and compassion for the unredeemed as the driving motive for direct evangelisation.

The inclusivists would situate the Salvific Absolute (Christ) in their own religion, but hold

What then is this Asian paradigm? I would describe it in terms of three overlapping concerns which do not receive any emphasis in the Western approach. The first is the acknowledgement of a third magisterium, namely that of the poor; the second is the liberational thrust that defines our theology of religions; and finally, the social location of this theology in the basic human communities.

it to be secretly operative in other religions which thus become indirectly salvific. Other religionists are saved in so far as they are potentially Christians (awaiting *fulfilment* in Christianity) or anonymously Christians (needing *explicitation* of their true identity in and through Christianity). The goal of dialogue is to

complete the incomplete, in the first case, or name and recognise the implicit discipleship, in the second.

The third school, pluralism, attributes to each religion its unique role in salvation, rejecting as almost irreligious any attempt at co-opting the other's religion to one's own paradigm of soteriology.

The pastoral magisterium, also concerned with the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity, is apprehensive of both inclusivist and the pluralist trends. I see *Redemptoris Missio* as a counter-move against these two approaches which may have diminished the old missionary spirit in the Church. The conversion of Asia to Christianity is specifically mentioned as an urgent missionary task. Non-Christians are urged to 'open the doors to Christ'; furthermore, the physical expansion of the Church (*plantatio ecclesiae*) is stated to be the practical aim of mission.

The renewal of this zeal for conversion of the world, it is hoped, would rejuvenate the contemporary Church. The pre-occupation with the contemporary challenge to the belief in the uniqueness of Christianity and of Christ has probably pre-determined the encyclical's subtle regression to a pre-conciliar (exclusivist?) approach to other religions.

In Asia, the Western mission started in the sixteenth century with the exclusivist theology. Gradually, the two versions of the inclusivist approach, namely that of fulfilment (later taken up by Vatican II) and that of explicitation (current in the post Conciliar decades) came into vogue in Asian theological circles. Understandably, those Asian theologians who condemn both exclusivism and inclusivism as imperialistic get easily thrown into the third slot. They are labelled pluralists. It is not surprising that Asians themselves often employ these categories of the Western patriarchate to describe their own theological stance - so ubiquitous in the Euro-American thought in the Christian enclaves of Asia, and so contagious, too!

An Asian Paradigm

I am embarrassed when I am asked in classrooms and in public forums whether I am an inclusivist or a pluralist. The reason is not that I dismiss the paradigm that gives rise to these categories as wrong, but that I have found myself gradually appropriating a trend in Asia,

which adopts a paradigm wherein the three categories mentioned above do not make sense. For, our starting point is not the uniqueness of Christ or Christianity, or of any other religion. *A fortiori* such a concern would never be hidden agenda in any inter-religious dialogue that may engage us. Furthermore, inter-religious dialogue itself is not a conscious target pursued as something desirable *per se*, as it is a luxury which the urgency of the socio-spiritual crisis in Asia would not permit.

What then is this Asian paradigm? I would describe it in terms of three overlapping concerns which do not receive any emphasis in the Western approach. The first is the acknowledgement of a **third magisterium**, namely that of the poor; the second is the **liberational thrust** that defines our theology of religions; and finally, the social location of this theology in the **basic human communities**.

My intention is to present the new paradigm by spelling out the implications of these three concerns.

The Third Magisterium

The *poor* (the destitute, the dispossessed, the displaced and the discriminated) who form the bulk of Asian people, plus their specific brand of *cosmic religiosity* constitute a school where many Christian activists re-educate themselves in the art of speaking the language of God's reign, which is the language of liberation which God speaks through Jesus. Neither the academic nor the pastoral magisterium is conversant with this evangelical idiom.

Some members of the two official magisteria, here in Asia, did make an all too brief, perhaps a merely symbolic, effort to enrol themselves in this school in 1986, in preparation for the seventh session of the Bishops' Institute for Social Action (BISA VII) which discussed 'the religiosity of the Asian poor'. These 'exposure programmes' ended with a powerful declaration, which was, of course, prepared by the theologians and approved (after discussion) by the bishops.

After a few days of learning, these two magisteria thought they should teach it to the rest of the Church. We are programmed to do very little learning and a lot of teaching. The real purpose of this exercise, which a few exemplary bishops and theologians have not forgotten, was to persuade the twofold teaching office in the Church to be in a permanent learn-

ing relationship with the poor of Asia.

Cosmic Religiosity

As one of the resource persons working out those exposure programmes, I was able to pick up seven liberative features from the 'cosmic' religiosity of the poor, though it cannot be said that what I say, here, in any way replicates the Bishops' statement.

The poor have a distinctively **this-worldly** spirituality. They cry to heaven for their daily needs. To those of us who have all our material needs, they may appear materialistic. For, their life's basic needs - something to live on (food) something to live by (work), something to live in (shelter), something to live for (decent human setting) - colour their prayer life and their spirituality.

Secondly, in these needs, they do not have mammon at their beck and call, as most of us do. So in their utter helplessness, they **totally depend** on God. Hence theirs is a God of rice and curry, God of shelter and clothing, God of marriage and children, in short the only God of this life, and, of course, the only god of *their* life. This total dependence on God is their spirituality.

It is also to this God that they **cry for justice**. In many Asian cultures there is a divine manifestation (often in female form) which is concerned with retribution or restitution already here on earth rather than in some post-mortem state of existence.

Their 'this-worldly' approach to God and religion however, is **not secular, but cosmic**. The difference is crucial. The secular is the non-sacred or the religious world vitiated by the acquisitiveness-consumerism cycle; the cosmic is a blend of the sacred, the womanly and the earthly, making that vicious cycle physically impossible except when and where the secularising process (brought by capitalist technocracy) erodes into that world. Hence the following consequences:

In the cosmic spirituality of the poor, **women** often find some space to express at least symbolically their state of oppression. In contrast, the metacosmic religions (including Christianity) are more inextricably entrenched in patriarchalism.

The constant awareness of earthly needs and the faith in various cosmic forces which

determine their daily life, making their spirituality **ecological**. The involvement of the oppressed classes of women in eco-movements (for example *chipko* movement in India) is therefore a distinctive feature of feminism in certain parts of Asia.

The most powerful idiom of communication in their religious tradition is the **story**. Human liberation which constitutes their only religion is the story of a God amongst his/her people. The world is the sacred theatre. The epic, the narrative and the drama are media very sacred to the masses.

These ingredients of the *cosmic religiosity* of the poor have somehow or other entered the theological world of Asian Christians, specially among the liberation theologians and feminists. Hence our second concern which determines our theology of religions.

The Liberational Thrust

For too long a time we Christians have dialogued exclusively with the metacosmic religions (the so-called higher forms of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam) and tried to create a theological language to communicate our common experience of the Absolute. The cosmic religiosity (tribal and clannic religions, as well as the popular forms of metacosmic religions, for example, popular Buddhism, popular Hinduism, popular Christianity) was looked down upon as an immature and infantile stage of spiritual development.

This approach has resulted in a distorted view of the Asian religious ethos. One aspect of this distortion is the underestimation of the liberative potential of cosmic religiosity. As I have substantiated elsewhere, many great social transformations in Asia have taken place thanks to the involvement of tribal and other groups known for their cosmic religiosity. Their 'this-worldliness' as well as their faith in a God of justice, far from being an opiate (as some Asian Marxists thought), has often been a stimulant in revolutionary situations whenever it is mobilised in an appropriate way.

Today, we are happy to observe that, in the common struggle against poverty and destitution of the masses, many adherents of metacosmic religions (Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians) have learnt to reinterpret their beliefs according to some of the liberative elements in the cosmic religiosity of their co-believers who belong to the poorer classes.

Thus a re-interpretation of the sacred scriptures of metacosmic religions along a liberational thrust is noted among the exponents of various faiths, who have been involved with popular movements, for example, Sulak Sivaraksha in Buddhism, Swami Agnivesh in Hinduism, Ali Ascar Engineer in Islam, to name a few.

Christianity too has begun to appropriate this trend, not in seminaries or in houses of religious orders, but in basic human communities, where the magisterium of the poor is taken seriously. Hence I cannot speak of the liberational thrust that Christianity has received from the cosmic religiosity of the poor without entering into a discussion of the social location of such theologising: these communities.

The Role of the Basic Community

The basic human community is not a group that has come together for inter-religious dialogue. Dialogue is not an end in itself. Nor is there any preoccupation about one's religious identity or uniqueness. The origin, the development and the culmination of the activities of the community is, ideally, the total liberation of the non-persons and non-peoples. It is within the process of this on-going liberative praxis that each member discovers the uniqueness of his or her religion. My religious identity is not something I seek and find through academic discussion; it is something that the other religionists impart to me. It is in the process of naming and

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recognising both sin and liberation as experienced and acted upon by us in the community that we acquire for one another our respective religious uniqueness.

Let me recount a concrete example of something I have experienced more than once. In the course of a seminar which I conducted in July 1989 for Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Marxist members of a community (the Christian Workers' Fellowship) I was drawn into a very

lively exchange with one of the participants from a Buddhist-Marxist background. We discussed the liberational thrust of the scriptures. He was Sarath Mallika who, nine months later, died a martyr's death at the hands of a Sinhala extremist.

Sarath's interventions centred round what he thought was unique to biblical Christianity. He acknowledged that the rationalist literature which he had read as a young man had made him see the Bible as a fairy tale. But he pointed out that in their common struggle and their common reflections on each other's religious literature, and in the sharing we had at that seminar, he had discovered that the concept of 'God' which motivates Christians to liberationist activity was so radically different from the concept of God which the Buddha is reported in the Pali Scriptures to have rejected as absurd and chimerical. As a Marxist coming from a Buddhist background, he could not accept the idea of God, but 'if I ever have to believe in a God, this is the only one worth believing in', he confessed; and I responded: 'To believe in any other god, as most Christians do, is idolatry'.

The Defence Pact

'This is the first time I have heard of a *God who has made a defence pact with the oppressed*', he declared. Christian participants came to realise that what is unique about their religion in that *Jesus whom they follow is this pact!* We further realise that we Christians tend, unfortunately, to duplicate the institutional aspects of other religions in Asia and thus compete with them rather than preach and practise that which is our unique mission!

In the ensuing discussion, it became evident to the Christian members that if they do not confess that Jesus is God's defence pact with the non-persons of the earth, 'there will be no eternal life in them'! Thus, this Buddhist-Marxist activist and would-be martyr who had laboured tirelessly for the workers of a sugar factory and had learnt from the 'little ones' of the earth their language of liberation, was eminently capable of capturing the liberative essence of the Gospel for all of us.

This discovery was a recurrent experience in many such encounters in many such groups, so that one begins to see why an Asian theology of liberation proclaims God as the one who is reached only through the mediation of the (mostly) non-Christian poor, and equally

proclaims that Jesus is this mediation. Such a kerygma does not clash with other religions, and does not compete with them for adherents. But it does clash with the official catechesis of the Church.

The Credibility Gap

But there is a *conditio sine qua non* for Christians to live out their uniqueness and be recognised as Christians: their credibility. And this depends on how far Christians join other religionists in that which is the only common denominator between religions, namely, the spirit of non-acquisitiveness or the renunciation of mammon (which, in theistic terms, amounts to a total reliance on God); it is evangelical poverty proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount as constitutive of discipleship. It is the basic spirituality of God's reign, which is also the spirituality of Jesus who precisely on that account can become at home in most Asian cultures, if only he so appears in the belief and behaviour of his Asian followers!

The much desired Christian credibility, however, is threatened by every form of financial and ideological subservience to euro-ecclesiastical power-bases. Most Asian churches, consequently, find it difficult to exercise their two-fold evangelising role: to experience solidarity with non-Christians by witnessing to the *spirituality common to all religions* (by joining the poor against mammon's principalities and powers that create poverty and oppression).

The Church, instead, takes refuge in a more convenient kind of uniqueness which she spells out in terms of the theandric (God-Man Saviour) model which makes no sense in many of our cultures where it often evokes the image of one of the many cosmic forces rather than of a personal and absolute Creator-Redeemer. Moreover, this model, utterly untranslatable into some Asian languages, suffers also from an ontology before which soteriology (concern for liberation) fades out into insignificance.

A Futile Dream?

But the aspiration for a liberator - a God of *this life*, a God of *justice* and a God who can transform this earth into the garden of delight it was originally intended to be - such an aspiration of the poor, so clearly expressed in their cosmic religiosity, is spurned as a futile dream by some adherents of metacosmic religions, who propose in its place another kind of 'future

world' which coincides with a sort of an 'acosmic Absolute'.

Which of these two is purely utopic? As for inter-religious dialogue accepted within the ecclesiastical set up, one wonders whether it resonates also with the cosmic religiosity of the poor or only with the metacosmic spirituality of the elite. Are not the Christian ashrams also guilty of this onesidedness? Finally in terms of its organised charity, does not the Church organisation find it more convenient to gain control over the poor than to join them in their struggle for emancipation? There are the questions raised in the basic human communities.

But some communities, too, operate as non-government organisations (with Western aid) and thus fail to witness to the common spirituality (opted poverty) so that their struggle with the poor runs the risk of being ineffective in their proclamation of that which is unique to their religion: that Jesus is Good News in so far as he is also Yahweh's irrevocable answer to the cry of Asia's (mostly non-Christian) poor.

But wherever the Christian members of basic human communities make themselves one with the poor in their total dependence on God (opted poverty as common spirituality), and thus qualify themselves to proclaim the new covenant between God and the poor (Christian uniqueness), there, Jesus comes out convincingly as God's story in the lives of her covenant partners (the Asian poor) rather than as a subtle combination of natures and persons.

As Marinus de Jong has admitted in the epilogue of his brilliant description of the *Early Christian Responses to Jesus* (the sub-title of his *Christology in Context*, Philadelphia, 1988), the characteristically Christian way of communicating Jesus to others would continue to be through drama, narrative and poem. This is the idiom of cosmic religiosity. The story of God's public agreement with the poor to embark on the common task of transforming this world into the new heaven and a new earth that God and the poor are dreaming of together, is a story the Asians would never refuse to hear; and it is the story that Christians fear to narrate. And yet that story is Jesus.

New Categories

Now, one might rightly ask: where does exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism fit in, here? If categories are needed at all in this new paradigm, my suggestion has been the following

three: syncretism, synthesis and symbiosis.

Syncretism is a haphazard mixing of religions: something of a cocktail which changes the flavour of each constituent under the influence of the other. That really does not exist among the poor, but is attributed to them by 'observers' (some theologians and some sociologists). **Synthesis** is the creation of a *tertium quid* out of two or more religions, destroying the identity of each component-religion. This, of course, is a personal idiosyncrasy of certain individuals, or groups of individuals.

But what happens in the basic human communities is a veritable **symbiosis** of religions. Each religion, challenged by the other religion's

unique approach to the liberationist aspiration of the poor, specially to the seven-fold characteristic of their cosmic religiosity mentioned above, discovers and re-names itself in its specificity in response to the other approaches. What I have been describing as Christian uniqueness in the basic human community experience, reflects both the process and product of a symbiosis. It indicates one's conversion to the common heritage of all religions (Beatitudes) and also a conversion to the specificity of one's own religion as dictated by other religionists. You may call it inter-religious dialogue, if you wish.

Ref. *The Month*, April 1993
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WOMEN'S AGENDA: NEW HORIZONS

Addressing the women's global agenda will demand a much more precise analysis of the gender dimensions in all arenas where U.S. foreign policy projects power and influence. Such seemingly remote issues as trade, the global financial system (particularly its present emphasis on neo-liberal economic policies), the policies and programs of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, foreign investment all have significant implications for the quality of women's lives both here and abroad. These, too, must become part of the "women's agenda" in the 90s.

War and peace issues are at their core women's issues. Nothing so quickly destroys the content of women's contribution to the family, the community and the social order than war. Nothing so diminishes the potential for human and community development as the disproportionate amount of money dedicated to armaments and militarisation. The central question is not whether women should be in combat, so much as how we can envision and direct security needs toward policies and processes that protect life, human dignity and the human community. We need to be about the task of constructing a world which works toward preventing war.

Ref. Maria Riley, OP; *Center Focus*, January 1993
The Center of Concern, 3700 13th St. 5 N.E. Washington, D.C. 20017



mission moments

WHERE CAN I FIND THE LORD OF HISTORY?

(BRAZIL)

This morning, my prayer did not go beyond the first page of the breviary. This has been a bitterly cold winter in the city of São Paulo. The thermometer has hovered around 10 degrees centigrade, but given the fact that I've been living for years in the torrid Amazon climate, it is enough to transform me into an ice cube.

Yesterday in the cathedral of this metropolis of fifteen million inhabitants, fifty bishops, two hundred priests, sisters, religious and lay people met to celebrate the silver jubilee of the episcopate of Cardinal Paul Evaristo Arns.

I don't want to describe the solemnity of the ceremony. I forgot it, and the little bit that I remember is not enough to mention. I only know that after the final benediction while I descended the crypt to get my stole and surplice, I almost tripped on the shivering body of an old man, lying on the pavement trying his best to keep warm. Further on, inside the confessional, a little boy had found his place to sleep away his sadness in relative warmth.

Yes, in the cathedral of a major South American city, during the most solemn ceremony of the Cardinal's silver jubilee, "the faithful" disputed the space with hundreds of homeless poor who take refuge in the Church from the bitter cold of the city hall square.

With me is an Italian boy who is visiting Brazil. He asks me astonished: "Why are there so many vagabonds around here"? Please Firenzo, don't call them that", I replied. "You see men with long beards, tattered children, women with filthy clothing. You quickly label them 'vagabonds', but you should know that years ago the poor lived in favelas, shacks on the outskirts of town. But today whoever has a shack, even a tiny one in a favela, is considered fortunate".

In the past twelve months, a million workers in São Paulo have lost their jobs thanks to the economic "recipe" imposed on Brazil by the International Monetary Fund, the Banks of the Creditor Nations and the World Bank.

This is where these "vagabonds" come from. They are the disenfranchised: jobless and homeless. They sleep on the street, and take refuge in the Church during the day to keep warm.

While I am walking through the São Paulo cathedral more freezing gusts of wind are blowing. Meanwhile, in the middle of the square, several preachers are proclaiming their faith and their offers of miracle cures shouting at the top of their lungs and using megaphones and loudspeakers. God's name is used and abused. Here and there are gangs of street children, and young girls "selling" themselves: fragile, emaciated creatures who are still in their doll playing years.

We walk to meet the Lord. But where can I find the Lord? In the cathedral, under the flashes of the

photographers and the cameras of the cinematographers? Or even in the confessionals with the shivering child? In the square among the gangs of children - one certainly can't be more than five years old - who pass around a plastic bag full of carpenter's glue, the cheap drug with which they are slaughtering the children of Brazil?

Ref. Savio Corinaldesi, SX
Xaverian Missions Newsletter
March-April, 1993
101 Summer Street
Holliston, MA 01746-5857
U.S.A.

THE IMPASSE

(TOGO)

A cross near a Shell service station, just around the corner from the taxi part of Lomè, marks the spot where the first Divine Word Missionaries landed on Togolese soil on the morning of April 12, 1892. In 1887, Fr. Moran, SMA, had made an attempt to establish a mission in what is today Togo, but had been poisoned by his hosts at Atakpamé. It was only in 1913 that a string of missions were established in the northern regions of Togo. A station attendant busy changing the oil of an old car, looked with surprise at a visitor who wanted to take a picture of the cross.

A dugout canoe, set in cement to preserve it from rain and sand storms, sits by the parish Church and Marian shrine of Togoville, a Catholic town strung along the shores of a beautiful

lake: it is the monument to the first missionaries who brought a miraculous painting of the Blessed Mother and the gift of faith to those shores.

It is impossible to understand the Togolese Church without taking into account the strength of voodoo. Voodoo is a religion based on fear: fear of God, fear of avenging spirits. It embraces all aspects of life from birth to death, through all the phases of growth of an individual's life, the family and the village community. Legitimate traditional medicine is all too often mixed with sorcery and treachery. Blessings and curses are taken literally by uneducated villagers and by educated city dwellers alike. To become a Christian means to betray ancestors, family, the community: a dangerous path indeed.

Missionaries have worked long and hard to make a dent in the system. In a way the approach of the first German missionaries was very simple: voodoo was wrong at the core, the work of the devil, and as such it had to be rejected, the fetishes burned, the altars dismantled. Today the approach is not so simple. In February 1993, Pope John Paul II, visited Benin and met with the representatives of this traditional religion. In his speech the Pope stressed the need for dialogue with people who, like Christians, believe in God. Some of the bishops were not totally happy with the Pope's words, because they may be taken as an encouragement by Christians, who are already inclined to make room for both religions in their lives. Yet, they admit, there must be some kind of dialogue, if what is good and proper in Togo's traditional way of life is to serve as the basis for the advent of Christianity. In ancient times, in fact, voodoo was not connected with sorcery. It was only a series of religious rituals and initiations, closely connected to the cult of ancestors and the spirits of the forest. Critical minds are ready to admit that too little has been done to study what unites the old and the new: Christianity and voodoo as a West

African version of New and Old Testament.

Unable to resist the attraction of the old, but fascinated by the advantages of the new, many early Christians have settled down to a form of religious syncretism. A prominent local cleric has said: "Older Christians have only received faith as a thick coat of paint. They act like Christians on Sunday and they are fetishists at home". The same source admits that even some religious are not beyond dabbling in voodoo rituals, when pressed by personal problems or family trials!

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that, after 100 years of evangelisation, Christians are only about 10% of Togo's total population of about 3.5 million. In spite of the small numbers, the Church has planted strong institutional bases. As the number of foreign missionaries decreases, the Church can count on over 150 local priests and close to 300 religious. It also comes as no surprise that, with the advent of stricter rules for admission to the catechumenate and baptism, many Christian communities are made up mostly of young people, who are ready to break with the past. They are the hope of the future.

Ref. Joseph Bragotti, MCCJ
Comboni Press, July 1993
via Luigi Lilio, 80
00142 Rome
Italy

SIGNS OF HOPE

(ZAIRE)

The daily news about our government, and more concretely, the astronomical rise of the cost of living seems to show that we are regressing rather than progressing. "Many have lost hope", a man said at the community meeting last night. "We even

doubt that a recovery is possible". I asked, "What happens when one has no hope?" "There are those who accept the present condition and adapt to it; for instance by raising the prices of their products; there are those who forget the way of justice and those who turn into thieves or, out of frustration, destroy the property of others".

We are reflecting on chapter seven of Isaiah, where King Ahaz, full of fear of the advancing enemies, chooses to ally himself with the king of Assyria, rather than to trust in God, who is always faithful to his promises. Though the king refuses to ask for a sign of God's fidelity, Isaiah proclaims to him and to the people the sign of God's fidelity: the birth of the Emmanuel.

We too feel like Ahaz many times. We are tempted to forsake the Lord and to seek salvation elsewhere. But even in our present, seemingly hopeless situation, there are signs of God's presence, signs that his kingdom is growing even in our midst. A community leader began the reflection by stating that it was difficult to see signs of growth. He personally did not see any. After a long pause, another added, "When we experienced the first upheavals in Kinshasa, we thought we had started a civil war and that we all would be in for a great catastrophe. Instead the situation calmed down and now we have relative peace".

Another offered, "If we look at the high prices in the market place, many ought to have died of hunger already, but we, thanks to God, found and are finding enough food every day and we are all alive. This is a sign of the presence of God". And yet another said, "Many acts of charity are also a sign that God is with us. We are all in great difficulty, but we have seen many people - even poor ones - feeding other hungry people".

I was inspired to say, "You are a sign for me that God is with us. You have gathered tonight for the sole purpose of hearing and learning the word of God in order to proclaim it to your

own communities. You do not receive any material benefit, and what is even worse, there are those who might laugh at you who volunteer your service. And yet you are here, by the grace and power of God, because He is in you and calls you to this mission work".

To conclude the meeting I read a passage to them from a letter of the bishops of Zaire: "Inadequate structures and systems produce the evil that we see and one is tempted to believe that it would be enough to change structures and the political system to renew the life of the country. The change is necessary, but even more necessary is the conversion and the change of heart of all the citizens. Your effort to be faithful to the word of God, the service of proclaiming it to your communities is the heart of the renewal, of the change we need. Your communities are to be the leaven for a new world God is creating through you".

Ref. Teresina Caffi, SX
Xaverian Missions Newsletter
May-June, 1993
101 Summer Street
Holliston, MA 01746-5857
U.S.A.

WHY MARIA LEFT

(CROATIA)

Maria and her family left Croatia on Jan. 16, 1992, shortly before they found the following note on their front door:

"Your are not Serbs. We want to have a clean Serbia. Leave immediately. Otherwise, we'll kill you". It was signed "The Black Hand".

At first, Maria who did not want to reveal her last name to protect family members still in Croatia, did not want to leave their home of more than 20 years.

"But the Serbs began to shoot every apartment in the village that was not occupied by Serbs", she said. "They (the gunmen) always wore black masks. When the shooting started, my son always cried".

Out of concern for him, Maria, her husband and son left their apartment and headed north for Hungary, where they have relatives.

"The same day we left our apartment, they (gunmen) broke down our door and a Serb family moved in", she said. Maria and her family were one of 24 families evicted from two villages in the region. Most of those evicted worked for state agencies.

"I was accused of helping a priest who had been beaten", she said. "They also said my son was sent by the Croatians to count Serbian tanks and troops. This was reason enough to evict us".

Maria is one of about 30,000 refugees now living in the Diocese of Pécs in southern Hungary. She works as a volunteer for Caritas Pécs in distributing food coupons to fellow refugees.

Ref. *International Catholic Migration Commission*
37-39 rue de Vermont
CH-1211 Geneva 20
Switzerland

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

(UGANDA)

I would like to share a deep experience I had with Denis Ssebuggwao. He had nearly finished his up-grading course at Kyambogo Technical College to become a teacher in carpentry, when he fell victim to AIDS. When he became very sick, he went to his grandparents' home, in accordance with the Baganda custom for the first

male grandchild. His grandparents are good practising Catholics who had given him a sound family education.

When I met Denis for the first time, he was still walking, doing small jobs and even riding a bicycle nearby. He had AIDS but was still hoping to be cured. Then began our journey together, passing from hope to fear, from anxiety to peace. I accompanied him for seventeen months on his way towards God who is life.

Gradually the faith of his childhood came to the surface. Surely the kindness he received from his grandparents, particularly the loving care of his *jja-jja* (Grandma) helped him to rediscover God in his life.

Denis never complained although his body was full of deep wounds. From June 3rd, to the feast of the Uganda Martyrs, his condition deteriorated rather rapidly. I began to visit him every two days and later every day. On the day that he died, his young cousin came to call me. When he died, I was asked to close his eyes, something usually done by someone close to the dead person.

Some days after the funeral I visited the family. Denis' grandfather gave me a letter which I read on my way home. He ended it saying, 'We have entered your name in the family book as one of my elder daughters. Your name is *Namagga* (the name given to the eldest daughter)' signed: Benedicto T. L. Ssalongo.

Ref. Jeannine Malo, MSOLA
White Sisters - White Fathers
No. 309, April-May, 1993
Sutton Coldfield
West Midlands
England

COMING EVENTS

WORKING GROUPS

October	5	SUDAN
October	6	ZAIRE
October	7	EASTERN EUROPE
October	12	THE PHILIPPINES

Place: SEDOS Secretariate; via dei Verbiti, 1
Time: 16.00 hrs.

October 28

ACCEPTING THE OUTSIDER: THE REFUGEE PROBLEM IN EUROPE

Speakers: Mark Raper, SJ; Jef van Gerwen, SJ

Place: Brothers of the Christian Schools; via Aurelia 476
Time: 9:00 - 17:00 p.m.

December 7

SEDOS ANNUAL ASSEMBLY INCULTURATION IN AFRICA AND ITS PRACTICAL APPLICATION ALSO

GENERAL MEETING AND FUTURE PLANNING

Place: Brothers of the Christian Schools; via Aurelia 476
A full-day session 9:00 - 18:00

1994

May 17 - 21

ASIA: CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH SEDOS RESEARCH SEMINAR

Place: Villa Cavalletti
