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EDITORIAL

While we are finalizing this edition of *SEDOS Bulletin*, the 'UN Fourth World Conference on Women' is being held in Beijing. For this reason the collaborators of this number are all women. **MARYSE DURRER** introduces us to the number, showing us the long way women have gone through the previous conferences of Mexico and Nairobi. She gives us a enlightening picture of the actual situation women face in the world.

Sister **MARIA RILEY, OP.**, who has been participating in preparatory UN sessions, reveals to us how the UN elaborative process leading to the "Platform for Action" for Beijing was marked by surprising difficulties and how the collaboration with the NGOs was strangely reduced.

OLIVE D. LUENA, a Christian lay women from Tanzania explains in her short contribution, how Beijing became for women in many southern countries a welcome opportunity to establish a successful sharing and project elaboration, uniting women in a new experience.

Sister **BETTY A. MAHEU, MM.**, elaborates on the situation of women in China. Many social, cultural and religious factors (Confucianism) are limiting progress. On the other hand, Christian women are giving surprising testimonies of freedom and equality.

Sister **MARY MOTTE, FMM.**, a woman missiologist, studies the modern question of the relation between 'Faith and Culture'.

EDITH LAZLO introduces us to the complex situation of a country which has gone through the communist regime (Hungary). In a renewed search for meaning and religion, the Church can give patient assistance.

The well-known African theologian, **MERCY A. ODUYOYE**, offers an extensive study of Christian Gospel in the context of African culture, dedicating a special chapter to Culture and Women.

The Mexican theologian, **ELSA TAMAZ**, presents her conviction that new elements brought into the reflective process by women could re-launch a liberative theology.

"JUSTICE AND FAITH" WORKSHOP

Sponsored by Columban Fathers (Taiwan and Philippines)

Date: August 18 — December 13, 1996.

Application until 1st January, 1996:-
Justice and Faith Workshop,
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Lane 3, No. 2, Tehwei St.,
Taipei 10469,
Taiwan R.O.C.

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16 Years of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.
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Two Sisters Killed in Algeria

On Sunday evening, 3 September, on their way home from Mass, two Sisters of the Congregation of Our Lady of the Apostles were killed. They had been working in Belcourt (Alger). Both have spent over 30 years of missionary life in Algeria.

Sister Bibiane Lederq (French, 65)

Sister Ang le-Marie Littlejohn (Maltese, 62)

All the 16 Sisters of the Congregation had earlier made a written declaration, why they wanted to stay on in Algeria.

SEDOS member Congregations are united in prayer for the Sisters and the Mission of the Church in Algeria.

DE MEXICO A PÉKIN,

LE LONG CHEMIN DES FEMMES

La IV^e Conférence des Nations Unies sur les femmes

Maryse Durrer

La femme est l'avenir de l'homme, a dit le poète. Les Nations Unies ne sont pas loin de le croire. En tout cas elles essaient de convaincre la communauté internationale que, sans la formation et la pleine participation des femmes à tous les niveaux, il n'y a pas de développement humain durable et maîtrisé.

C'est dans le préambule de la Charte des Nations unies que pour la première fois, en 1945, s'établit juridiquement l'égalité des sexes en tant que droit humain fondamental. Malgré cette déclaration novatrice et courageuse, rien ne change. Les discriminations à l'égard des femmes continuent car bien souvent elles sont inconscientes, appuyées sur des pratiques et des comportements traditionnels que la majorité des hommes et nombre de femmes ne souhaitent pas remettre en question.

Mille femmes à Mexico

Pour attirer l'attention sur ces obstacles et susciter une évolution, les Nations Unies proclament **1975 Année internationale de la femme**. Et pour donner plus de force à cette année consacrée à analyser la condition féminine dans le monde, une conférence est organisée à Mexico. C'est la première conférence mondiale jamais organisée pour les femmes. Plus de mille déléguées de 133 États y participent.

Des activités parallèles

Dès le début, les femmes sont conscientes que l'analyse des problèmes est différente selon qu'elle est faite par des experts, masculins dans leur majorité, ou par des femmes confrontées quotidiennement à la difficulté de la condition féminine. Elles décident donc de tenir une manifestation parallèle où des femmes de tous milieux, de toutes conditions participent pour échanger expériences, frustrations, attentes, mais aussi leur confiance inébranlable dans la capacité des femmes à cogérer la planète.

Un document percutant

La conférence de Mexico accouche d'un magnifique document destiné à servir de référence pour les programmes mis sur pied par les gouvernements. On y identifie les domaines jugés essentiels : coopération internationale et paix, participation politique, éducation et formation, emploi, santé et nutrition, famille, population, logement, recherche et médias. L'ampleur de la tâche est telle que l'Assemblée générale des Nations unies pour la femme : *égalité, développement et paix*.

Premiers résultats concrets

Le premier signe tangible de la volonté de sortir les femmes de leur second rôle est la création de deux organismes exclusivement consacrés aux femmes : le *Fonds de développement des Nations Unies pour les femmes* (UNIFEM), destiné à financer des activités de développement orientées vers les femmes, surtout dans les régions rurales des pays en développement, et l'*Institut international de recherche et de formation pour la promotion de la femme* (INSTRAW), chargé de promouvoir une participation complète des femmes aux niveaux politiques, social et économique.

La plate-forme mondiale sera l'expression de différentes analyses et propositions d'action faites par chacune des régions. Chaque région a ses propres problèmes, sa manière d'envisager les solutions, mais il est remarquable de voir que, du Nord au Sud, d'Est en Ouest, que les pays soient riches ou pauvres, dits développés ou en voie de développement, on retrouve les mêmes obstacles à la réalisation de la parité homme/femme. En voici une liste non exhaustive : pauvreté, santé, violence, éducation, participation au niveau décisionnel, emploi, sida, femmes migrantes, déplacées, réfugiées...

De toutes les régions vient l'appel à prendre

particulièrement en compte l'éducation des fillettes; comment oublier qu'elles seront les femmes de demain? Une autre demande est très forte : ne pas morceler la vie des femmes, mais avoir une politique s'attachant à toutes les étapes de la vie, de la conception à la mort.

De cette manière, on espère que chaque région, chaque pays se sentira vraiment responsable de donner corps à tous les engagements pris à Mexico en 1975. **L'analyse est faite, les stratégies sont connues, ce qui manque à ce jour, c'est la volonté politique d'accorder aux femmes ce qui n'est que leur droit.**

Après cette assemblée prometteuse, une première constatation s'impose : tout ce qui pouvait être fait du point de vue législatif a été fait ou presque, mais les mentalités, les comportements n'ont pas changé. Il faut trouver le moyen de **passer du *de jure* au *de facto*** et là nul expert n'entrevoit de recette. C'est à chacun de nous, homme et femme, de faire preuve d'audace, d'oser risquer le vrai partenariat, non pas suivant la fameuse recette du pâté d'alouette (une alouette et un cheval), mais celui d'une parité véritable dans tous les domaines, social, politique, économique, religieux. Un partenariat qui soit «la voie du partage entre hommes et femmes qui ne gomme pas les différences et les spécificités», comme l'a dit Simone Veil lors de la Conférence préparatoire de Dakar.

Une décennie (presque) perdue

Nous savons donc quels seront les enjeux de Pékin; il faut s'attarder maintenant sur la substance. Les thèmes sont aggravés, d'autres sont plus en évidence aujourd'hui, mais fondamentalement rien n'a vraiment changé sur le terrain, si ce n'est l'irruption du sida avec ses conséquences incalculables pour toute la société. La différence entre une conférence pour les femmes et une conférence comme celles du Caire, de Rio ou de Copenhague est qu'elle doit prendre en compte tout ce qui concerne les femmes, c'est-à-dire, par définition, tout ce qui fait la vie! Dans ce domaine les femmes ont quelques longueurs d'avance sur les hommes, habituées qu'elles sont depuis des décennies à jongler avec plusieurs rôles : familial, professionnel, social, bénévole.

Les femmes ont ainsi développé des stratégies qui méritent l'attention. Elles ont réfléchi au partage des postes de travail dans un monde qui ne peut plus assurer le plein emploi, à l'importance des relations humaines, au rôle de la famille et surtout à la nécessité d'avoir une identité personnelle construite autour de plusieurs pôles, et pas seulement sur la fonction professionnelle et l'avoir.

Ancrer la nouvelle vision

Pour donner du corps à cette problématique et assurer un cadre légal permettant de dénoncer les atteintes aux droits des femmes, une Convention sur l'élimination de toutes les formes de discrimination à l'égard des femmes a été rédigée. En signant cette convention les gouvernements s'engagent à prendre «toutes les mesures appropriées pour assurer le plein développement et le progrès des femmes, en vue de leur garantir l'exercice et la jouissance des droits de l'homme et des libertés fondamentales sur la base de l'égalité avec les hommes». A ce jour, plus de 130 pays ont ratifié la convention, mais les réserves faites par de très nombreux États lui retirent toute son efficacité tout en permettant à des pays dans lesquels le statut de la femme est moyen-âgeux de s'enorgueillir, avec un cynisme qu'on ne peut que dénoncer, de compter au nombre des signataires!

Espoir et désenchantement

Partant de ces promesses, avec des organisations internationales compétentes et actives et des États se disant prêts à tout mettre en oeuvre, il semblait que rien n'aurait dû entraver la réalisation des vœux d'innombrables femmes. Avec, comme résultat tangible, une stabilité plus grande de la société, la diminution de la violence, la réduction de l'écart entre les riches et les pauvres, etc. Il a fallu déchanter, car il y a loin du discours à la mise en application. La II^e Conférence, à Copenhague en 1980, ne peut que constater que des progrès ont été réalisés..., mais que tout ou presque est encore en devenir.

L'espoir renaît à Nairobi

A Nairobi, en 1985, le temps est venu d'évaluer les résultats de la décennie. A la cérémonie d'ouverture de la III^e Conférence, on voit que quelque chose commence à changer. Les gouvernements ont eu à coeur de nommer des femmes à la tête des délégations. Et, ce qui est une première dans l'histoire des grandes conférences officielles, les nombreuses femmes africaines — épouses de chefs d'État, ambassadrices trônant sur l'estrade — n'hésitent pas à danser quand résonne la musique d'ouverture. Ce n'est qu'une anecdote bien sûr, mais elle est riche d'enseignements pour qui veut y réfléchir. Passé ce moment rafraîchissant, nous retombons dans le monde du concept et des grandes envolées fort éloignées du concret.

Pour rencontrer la vie, la réalité quotidienne, il faut aller au Forum. Plus de 16,000 femmes, accourues du monde entier, sont réunies; elles échantent, discutent, se disputent parfois, mais apprennent surtout à s'écouter et à se respecter. Je

vois encore des centaines de femmes masai venues de leurs lointains villages juste pour être présentes; elles restaient assises, muettes, devant les salles de réunion, heureuses de participer à l'événement. Je me souviens de Betty Friedan, gourou des féministes, tenant sa cour chaque jour sous un arbre; de jeunes Iraniennes drapées dans leur tchador et surveillées par des hommes; de Japonaises venues en grand nombre rappeler l'horreur d'Hiroshima et leur volonté que nul n'oublie la tragédie, en proclamant avec passion qu'elle ne devait jamais se reproduire; d'Angela Davies et de tant d'autres célèbres ou anonymes, mais toutes habitées par le désir d'affirmer leur identité de femmes et de trouver, ensemble, les moyens de prendre leur vraie place dans la société, qu'elle soit tribale ou post-industrielle.

Quinze ans pour changer le monde

Selon la coutume, la conférence accouche d'un magnifique document qui module un programme d'action en plus de 370 «Stratégies prospectives pour la promotion de la femme», avec la volonté de les mettre en pratique pendant les quinze années précédant l'an 2000. Chacun, gouvernement, ONG, organisme spécialisé des Nations Unies, simple femme, peut y trouver «sa stratégie». Si les énergies, les ressources humaines et économiques sont vraiment mobilisées, alors, en l'an 2000, les femmes seront des citoyennes à part entière, partageant à parité les droits et les devoirs de tout être vivant sur la planète, instituant par là même la véritable démocratie, car peut-on parler de démocratie quand les femmes sont si peu présentes dans les parlements et les gouvernements?

Cependant, en 1990, il faut déchanter une fois de plus quand, pour faire le point sur l'avancement des travaux, une session d'évaluation est convoquée à Vienne. Les pesanteurs institutionnelles, le poids des traditions, la crise économique sont passés par là et il faut se résoudre à admettre que nous sommes encore fort loin du compte et que dans bien des domaines la condition féminine est plus précaire qu'en 1985.

Cent fois sur le métier

Sans baisser les bras, les experts et les organisations féminines se remettent au travail en vue de préparer la IV^e Conférence sur les femmes. Le site de l'événement fait problème : Téhéran était candidat, mais nul n'a très envie d'aller dans ce pays pour tenir un forum sur la condition féminine. Or, dans le calendrier de répartition des grandes conférences, c'est le tour de l'Asie et seule la Chine se propose. Vienne fait bien une timide tentative pour obtenir la tenue de la manifestation, mais les considérations économiques ont la priorité, malgré

le baroud d'honneur des ONG, qui renâclent à aller dans un pays où les droits de l'homme et plus encore les droits des femmes sont sans cesse bafoués, quand ils ne sont pas inexistantes. Sourds à ces appels, les gouvernements membres des Nations Unies prennent la décision irrévocable : ce sera à Pékin en septembre 1995.

Réorientation de la stratégie

L'expérience de l'inanité des grandes stratégies mondiales, si elles ne sont pas relayées par des engagements concrets au niveau régional, aide les Nations Unies à innover dans la préparation de ce qui sera la plate-forme de discussion.

- Les thèmes «Égalité, Paix et Développement» sont toujours les mêmes, mais l'accent doit être mis sur «les actions pour les promouvoir».
- Chaque État est invité à soumettre un rapport national sur la manière dont les stratégies de Nairobi ont été mises en application et sur l'état de la condition féminine.
- Beaucoup de poids est donné aux Conférences régionales, chacune établissant sa propre plate-forme d'action.

Ce qui sera fait : Mar del Plata, Vienne, Dakar, Djakarta et Amman reçoivent les Conférences régionales. Chaque fois un forum des ONG a lieu en parallèle et les ONG ont appris à se faire entendre par les instances officielles. Le groupe de pression, l'étude ligne par ligne des documents officiels font partie aujourd'hui du bagage minimum de toute bonne déléguée. Comme il est normal, la plate forme préparatoire à Pékin traite de nombreux thèmes inextricablement liés. On présente ici les principales pistes retenues pour être soumises à la discussion.

Quelles doivent être les priorités?

La longue expérience des mécanismes de fonctionnement de la société acquise par les femmes depuis Mexico leur a démontré que, si tous les domaines sont importants, deux d'entre eux sont la clé de tous les autres : la participation au double niveau de la décision politique et de la décision économique. Pourtant, on le sait, la réalité est loin de correspondre à ces exigences.

Participation à la vie politique et au pouvoir de décision

Les femmes ont le droit de vote dans presque tous les pays et le nombre de femmes employées dans le secteur public n'a jamais été aussi élevé. Mais rares sont celles qui ont accès aux plus hautes fonctions, que ce soit dans les domaines politique, syndical, économique, religieux.

**Pourcentage de femmes siégeant au parlement*
dans les 54 pays de la région Europe-Amérique du Nord
au 30 juin 1994**

(source : Union interparlementaire)

Albanie	5,7 %
Allemagne	14,7 %
Andorre	3,6 %
Arménie	-
Autriche	20,6 %
Azerbaïdjan	2,0 %
Belarus	3,8 %
Belgique	10,9 %
Bosnie-Herzégovine	4,5 %
Bulgarie	12,9 %
Canada	15,4 %
Chypre	4,8 %
Croatie	4,8 %
Danemark	33,0 %
Espagne	12,6 %
Estonie	15,7 %
Etats-Unis	7,0 %
Ex-République Yougoslave de Macédoine	4,2 %
Fédération de Russie	5,1 %
Finlande	39,0 %
France	5,0 %
Géorgie	6,3 %
Grèce	6,0 %
Hongrie	10,9 %
Irlande	13,3 %
Islande	23,8 %
Israël	9,2 %
Italie	8,9 %
Kazakhstan	11,9 %
Kirghizistan	6,3 %
Lettonie	15,0 %
Liechtenstein	8,0 %
Lituanie	7,1 %
Luxembourg	20,0 %
Malte	1,5 %
Moldova	4,8 %
Monaco	5,6 %
Norvège	39,4 %
Ouzbékistan	9,6 %
Pays-Bas	25,3 %
Pologne	13,0 %
Portugal	8,7 %
République Slovaque	18,1 %
République Tchèque	10,0 %
Roumanie	1,4 %
Royaume-Uni	6,4 %
San Marin	11,7 %
Slovénie	14,4 %
Suède	33,5 %
Suisse	8,7 %
Turkmenistan	4,6 %
Turquie	1,8 %
Ukraine	3,6 %
Yougoslavie	2,5 %

* Dans le cas des parlements à deux chambres, le chiffre indiqué correspond à la Chambre haute.

Pauvreté

«Les femmes représentent la moitié de la population mondiale, fournissent les deux tiers des heures de travail, gagnent un dixième du revenu mondial et possèdent moins d'un centième de la fortune mondiale».

L'accès au crédit leur est souvent plus difficile qu'aux hommes; dans certains pays, elles n'ont pas la jouissance des fruits de leur travail, les femmes sont les plus pauvres parmi les pauvres.

Instruction

Les taux de scolarisation des filles se rapprochent de ceux des garçons, mais qualitativement et quantitativement la différence est encore immense. Les filles quittent l'école plus tôt que les garçons et la suivent de manière plus irrégulière (il faut aider sa mère). Et pourtant il existe un rapport direct entre l'alphabétisation et la santé, le pouvoir économique, le taux de fécondité, la famille.

Santé et maternité

«Être enceinte est un pari et accoucher un combat à mort» (proverbe bambara, Afrique de l'Ouest). Ceci est encore vrai pour des millions de femmes. De bons services de santé et de planification familiale sont les préalables indispensables; mais ils doivent s'appuyer sur la responsabilisation des hommes dans tout ce qui touche à la sexualité et à la procréation. La tabagisme, l'alcoolisme, le sida ont aussi leurs effets néfastes sur les femmes et par voie de conséquence sur les enfants.

La famille

Même si une des revendications des femmes est d'être considérée en tant que femme et non pas seulement comme mère potentielle, il est impossible de parler de femme sans y inclure la famille. Depuis des siècles, le bien-être de la famille a été la responsabilité de la femme.

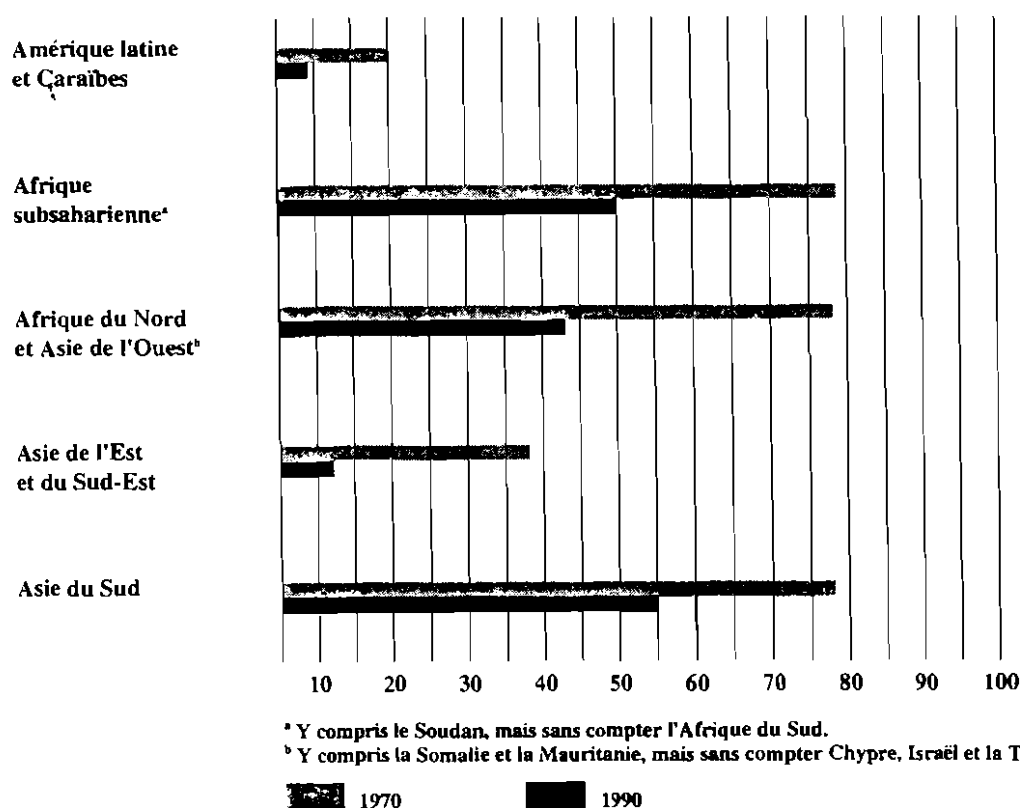
Pourtant un coup d'oeil à la société nous permet de voir que partout dans le monde :

- de plus en plus de femmes vivent seules avec leurs enfants en raison du divorce, de la migration, des conflits armés;
- L'équilibre entre vie familiale et vie professionnelle n'est toujours pas trouvé;
- un véritable partage des tâches domestiques et éducatives entre l'homme et la femme reste le plus souvent du domaine du mythe;
- la plupart des sociétés sont de moins en moins favorables à l'enfant : logement trop exigü, peu de places de jeu, politique de la famille insuffisante.

La violence envers les femmes

Aucune région, aucune classe, aucune culture n'est exempte de ce fléau. Ce n'est que ces dernières années que la communauté internationale a admis que cette violence ne relève pas seulement du domaine privé, mais que c'est un problème de société.

Pourcentage de femmes analphabètes âgées de 20 à 24 ans



Source : *Les femmes dans le monde*.

Le travail

Il faut distinguer entre l'emploi non rémunéré et le travail rémunéré. Presque partout le nombre de femmes travaillant hors de chez elles a augmenté, mais cela n'a en rien diminué les heures de travail non rémunéré fournies par les femmes. Les indicateurs traditionnels ignorent cette composante, bien que quelques pays aient mis sur pied un outil statistique pour l'évaluer; en conséquence la plupart des politiques sont établies sans tenir compte des besoins des femmes.

Les femmes souffrent de nombreux handicaps dans ce domaine:

leur formation est moins complète et moins

diversifiée;

- elles sont souvent présentes dans des professions apportant peu de richesse économique, mais une plusvalue sociale; en conséquence leurs salaires sont inférieurs (26% en moyenne à ceux des hommes);

- même en tenant compte des facteurs énumérés cidessus, il reste une différence inexplicable d'environ 8% entre les salaires masculins et féminins;

- les femmes n'ont pas une carrière qui se déroule de manière continue, puisque la maternité l'interrompt pour des périodes plus ou moins longues.

Si l'on tient compte des activités non marchandes, les femmes consacrent autant de temps que les hommes à des activités économiques dans les régions en développement.

Nombre d'heures par semaine

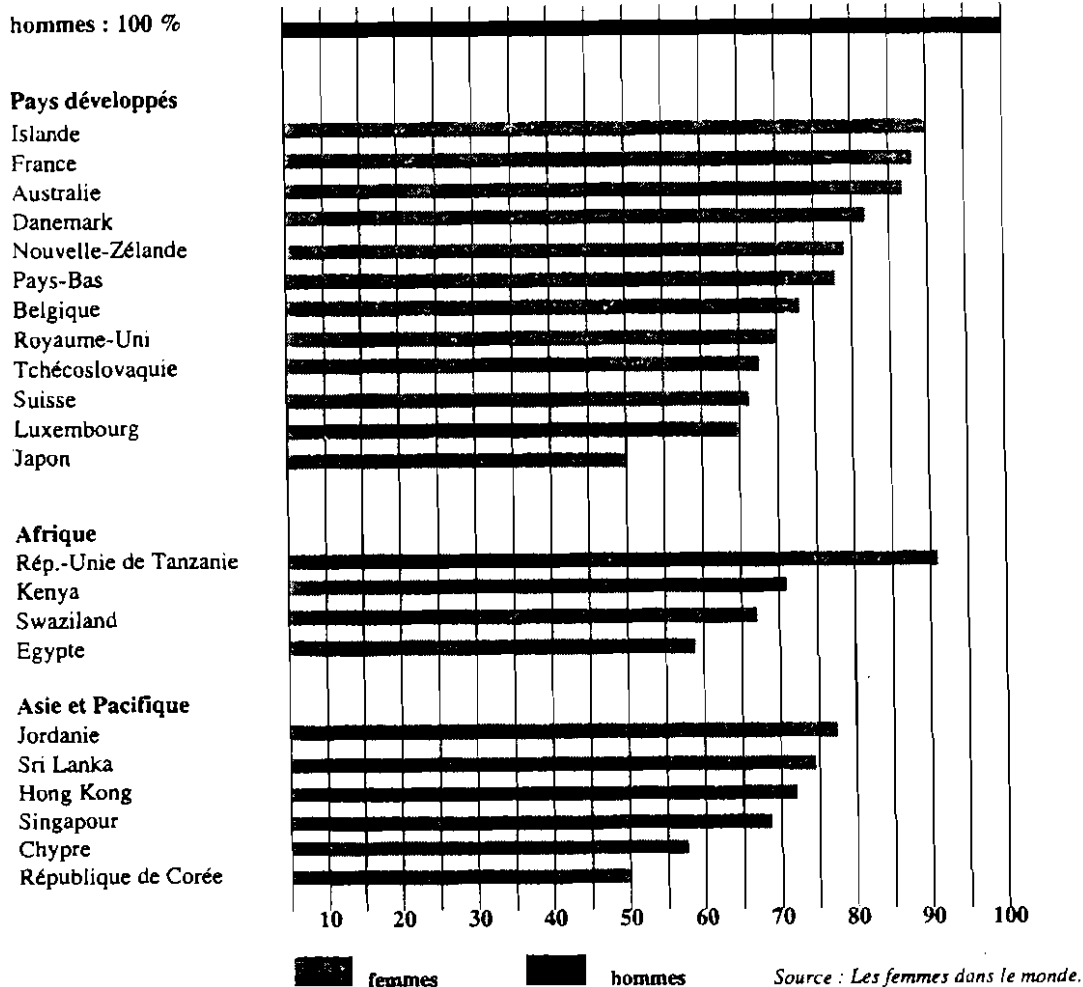
	Activité économique marchande		Non marchande	Total	Travaux ménagers non rémunérés	Travail total
	Travail salarié	Travail indépendant ou familial				
Côte d'Ivoire (zones rurales)						
Femmes	...	11,9	10,3	22,2	25,4	47,6
Hommes	...	20,3	3,0	23,3	4,2	27,5
Népal						
Femmes	3,3	29,1	15,1	47,5	28,2	75,7
Hommes	17,6	23,1	6,4	47,1	5,5	52,6

... Comprend les activités non rémunérées effectuées dans le cadre d'une entreprise familiale, l'agriculture de subsistance et autres activités économiques non rémunérées comme l'approvisionnement en eau, le ramassage du bois de feu et la construction à son propre compte. Source : Données tirées d'études nationales compilées par le Bureau de statistique du Secrétariat de l'ONU.

LES FEMMES GAGNENT MOINS

Les femmes gagnent, en moyenne, moins que les hommes. Les échantillons par pays figurant ci-dessous montrent le salaire moyen des femmes en pourcentage de celui des hommes.

1983/1987



Trente mille femmes à Pékin

Comme il est désormais traditionnel, un Forum côtoiera la conférence officielle. On y attend plus de 30,000 femmes. Se retrouveront là des femmes de tous pays, de toutes cultures, de tous âges. Elles débattront avec passion de ce qui fait leur vie au quotidien, mais aussi de leur vision d'un monde où «Egalité, Paix et Développement» seront la mesure de tout.

Dans l'enceinte de la Conférence elle-même, les représentantes des ONG suivront les débats avec attention dans la partie réservée aux ONG, mais aussi sur les bancs officiels, car nombre d'entre elles ont été appelées pour apporter leur expertise aux délégations gouvernementales. Elles y apporteront aussi les recommandations et les amendements issus du Forum; elles proposeront des amendements aux visions technocratiques, elles interpellent les États pour qu'enfin soient tenus les engagements de 1946.

Un bilan contrasté

Au moment où ces milliers de femmes veulent s'asseoir pour travailler ensemble à Pékin, c'est-à-dire après vingt ans d'action des Nations Unies au service de la promotion de la condition féminine, quel bilan peut-on tirer?

Certes, rien n'a fondamentalement changé au niveau des réalités; simplement aujourd'hui aucun gouvernement, aucun chef d'entreprise n'oserait dire que la question féminine n'est pas vitale pour l'avenir du monde. Mais qu'en pensent-ils réellement? La question reste posée, si grand est l'écart entre les promesses et les réalisations. Sur de nombreux terrains, les femmes rencontrent toujours devant elles des obstacles quasi-insurmontables :

- les fondamentalismes s'exacerbent un peu partout dans le monde et les femmes risquent d'en être les premières victimes;

- la crise économique et structurelle remet en question l'emploi des femmes et d'une manière générale leur place dans la société. De manière latente, la tentation de les renvoyer à la maison est toujours là;

- les difficultés structurelles : divorces, drogue, etc, sont encore trop souvent attribuées à la «désertion du foyer par les femmes»!

- La volonté légitime d'une nécessaire maîtrise de la fécondité et de la sexualité a quelquefois débouché sur la licence et un droit à l'avortement automatique.

Cependant ces blocages mis à la promotion des femmes sont loin de recouvrir la totalité du devenir féminin. **A côté des parties d'ombre se dégagent des quartiers de lumière** que les femmes ne cessent d'élargir. Ainsi:

- au plan international, il y a eu une reconnaissance sans ambiguïté que les droits de la femme ne relèvent pas du domaine social mais sont une partie intégrante des droits humains — on pourra dire en français que «les droits de la femme sont fondamentalement des droits de l'homme»;

- la violence envers les femmes ne ressort pas seulement de la sphère privée, mais interpelle la société tout entière;

- la parité homme/femme, dans le respect des différences, est la clé de voûte de tout progrès social, économique, politique, culturel;

- dans tous les pays où les hommes et femmes ont accès à une véritable éducation sexuelle et à la contraception le nombre des avortements ne cesse de diminuer. Et s'il y a quand même avortement, il est fait dans des conditions sanitaires respectant l'intégrité physique des femmes. Il y a certes encore beaucoup à faire pour qu'il ne soit jamais nécessaire de recourir à cette mesure extrême, mais nous sommes sur le bon chemin,... n'en déplaise aux censeurs.

S'agissant des organisations de femmes :

- Vingt ans de militantisme nous ont appris à nous respecter, à travailler ensemble malgré nos différences et nos désaccords;

- nous avons mis au point des stratégies pour être entendues sinon écoutées;

- nous savons que le temps travaille pour nous, car la situation mondiale devient si complexe, si dangereuse qu'il serait suicidaire de continuer à ne pas tenir pleinement compte d'une moitié de l'humanité;

- à Pékin, nous exigerons un véritable plan d'action, pas seulement de belles promesses.

C'est avec les *Mères de la Place de Mai* qu'il faut conclure cette présentation de la préparation de la Conférence de Pékin, car les femmes, dont le caractère aura été forgé par toutes ces années de lutte, ne sont pas prêtes d'oublier les messages de courage et d'espoir que ces combattantes adressent à leurs sœurs :

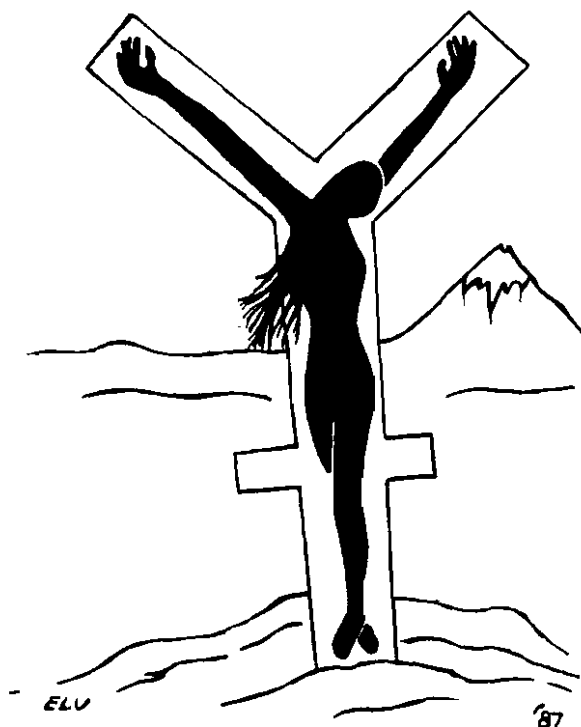
*Même si tu sens la fatigue,
Même si le triomphe t'abandonne,
Même si une erreur te fait mal,
Même si une trahison te blesse,
Même si une illusion s'éteint,
Même si la douleur te brûle les yeux,
Même si l'ingratitude en est la paie,
Même si si l'incompréhension coupe ton rire,
Même si tout a l'air de rien,
RECOMMENCE!*

Ref. *Foi et développement*

n. 2333, mai 1995, Centre Lebreton

43 ter, rue de la Glacière,

75013 Paris



UN FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: WHOSE CONFERENCE IS IT?

Maria Riley, OP

The hopes of the women of the world for a celebration of 20 years of hard work and impressive gains were dashed at the March 1995 Preparatory Commission (PrepCom) for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. Instead, the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) faced a weak and disappointing draft *Platform for Action*, a process closed to non-governmental influence, and a concerted effort by a small number of UN member states to obstruct the political process and roll back the advances women had gained through the recent series of UN Conferences. These conferences include the Earth Summit in Rio (UNCED), the Human Rights Conference in Vienna, the Population and Development Conference in Cairo (ICDP), and the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen (WSSD).

Draft Programme for Action

This document, prepared by the UN Secretariat for the Fourth World Conference on Women, presented an inadequate framework for analysing the situation of women in different parts of the world, in particular by failing to recognise major root causes of women's poverty. Lacking this clear and coherent analysis, the action recommendations to address women's needs are often weak and redundant. Because of its inherent inadequacy, the draft proved to be a difficult document for Governments and NGOs to work to improve during the PrepCom.

It is not clear why this document was so weak. The PrepCom and the Conference Secretariat had ample directions and time to prepare a good working document, so the March meeting was the third time the UN Commission on the Status of Women had met. Furthermore, the regional preparatory meetings which took place during the summer and early autumn of 1994 had provided coherent analysis and action recommendations to shape a strong document. The results of these meetings were nowhere in evidence in the draft document.

Likewise, the draft virtually ignored the significant, and in some instances ground-breaking, new initiatives women had succeeded in moving into the growing global consensus on women's criti-

cal role in society that emerged from the UNCED, Human Rights, ICPD and WSSD Conferences. For many of the women who gathered at the March PrepCom, trying to improve the draft document was like starting over again. Rather than working for new advances for the well-being of women, their families and communities, we found our energies focused on not losing the hard-won advances of the past.

PrepCom Process

During the recent set of UN Conferences, the NGO community has succeeded in gaining more and more access to the governmental process. The Women's Caucus, in particular, has become an effective and efficient vehicle for lobbying Governments to support not only specific gender issues, but also environmental, economic and social issues that promise more just societies and a more just world.

However, during the March PrepCom, access of NGOs to the Governmental process was virtually cut off. All negotiations were held in closed session, documents were not available and often agreements had been reached before the NGO community had an opportunity to influence the negotiations. The ostensible excuse was lack of time and space to include the NGOs; however, for most of the three weeks, the PrepCom coordinators were unwilling to even negotiate with the NGO community to reach some compromises. After the successes of women NGOs at the other Conferences in Rio, Vienna, Cairo and Copenhagen, this denial of access to the negotiations for the Women's Conference was incomprehensible.

What was even more disturbing was to witness the global consensus achieved in the earlier conferences being systematically eroded. Governments, operating out of their various self-interests, were backing down on the economic, environmental, human rights and social commitments they had previously made.

NGO Forum

Into this mix of confusion and frustration, the announcement that China was changing the agreed-

upon site for the NGO Forum became just one more indication that women still have a long struggle ahead before we achieve equality and equity in the dominant male political and economic world. The new site China is proposing is a tourist park approximately one hour outside the city of Beijing. Separating the NGO Forum from the inter-Governmental Conference will only exacerbate NGOs' difficulty of access to influence the Governmental deliberations. Given the political machinations during the PrepCom, the NGO community has very little confidence that Governments will negotiate in good faith on issues of critical importance to women.

Women across the world have mobilised and communicated their anger in a flood of faxes to the UN, to the China Coordinating Committee, and to their own Governments. At the time of this writing the negotiations with China are still going on and the site of the NGO Forum is not settled.

Political Analysis

With the evolution of the Global Women's Movement, the focus of the Women's Conference has shifted from a narrow set of so-called "women's issues" to a focus on all issues — political, economic, environmental, social, military — from a gender perspective. Clearly there is a growing, concerted effort among some Governments and some NGOs with a traditionalist view of the role of women to reverse the growing political power of women. They used obstructionist tactics and a campaign of misinformation and misrepresentation to deflect the energy of the PrepCom.

For example, Guatemala — supported by Honduras, the Vatican and the Sudan, among others — moved to bracket the word *gender* in the draft document. (Note: a bracketed section of the draft document means that the text is not agreed upon). The word *gender* and its technical meaning of the socially dictated roles of women and men has been used in UN documents for some 20 years. It was used consistently in the document on the World Summit for Social Development, which heads of Government signed just two weeks before the word was bracketed in the PrepCom.

The claim, suddenly given at the Women's PrepCom, is that the word *gender* is a code word for homosexuality. The irony is that only the obstructionist forces were using the word to carry that meaning and that they continue to misrepresent and to publish misinformation on the issue.

Obviously, the obstructionist forces adopted behaviour at the Commission on the Status of Women PrepCom that they did not dare adopt in the

Social Summit, where the main Government representatives were men. The message is clear: women are still vulnerable to forces that seek to control them.

Another political miscalculation was the failure of the UN Secretariat and the Commission on the Status of Women to enhance and use the growing political power of the NGO community. Among the Governmental and UN people, there was an implicit position that all women are working for the same goals and so the women on the governmental delegations as well as the UN Secretariat did not insist on NGO access to the process.

It was a serious error. Had NGOs been given access to the negotiations, the Governments would have had to have been more transparent and open about what they were doing behind closed doors. Moreover, the NGO community that has been following the conferences has a better knowledge of what Governments had already agreed to in earlier conferences than most of the governmental delegates to the PrepCom. Had the NGOs been allowed to use their knowledge and their influence more progress could have been made.

NGO Response

The women of the global women's movement have not passively accepted the events of the March PrepCom and China's attempt to move the NGO Forum. Using all the modes of modern communication, the women have been mobilising to ensure that the UN Fourth World Conference on Women represents the issues critical not only to women's survival but to women's flourishing. There is a growing determination that the agenda will reflect the growing consensus of the global women's movement as it has developed during the past 20 years. If, in the end, the Conference does not represent that consensus, the women of the world will repudiate it. In the meantime, the work of communication, networking, lobbying and movement building has only increased in the face of the obstructionist forces that are working to derail the progress of women.

All of the events surrounding the preparations for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women clearly reveal both the growing power of women and the fear that some governments and groups have of that power. However, it should be noted that this UN Conference is only a single event; it does not define, nor can it contain, the energy or the agenda of the Global Women's Movement.

Ref: *Center Focus*,
Issue #127, July 1995.

CATHOLIC WOMEN ORGANISATION OF TANZANIA

JOINING HANDS WITH THE OTHER WOMEN ALL OVER THE WORLD ON THE ROAD TO BEIJING

Olive D. Luena

About WAWATA

Wanawake Wakatoliki Tanzania (Catholic Women of Tanzania) is a Catholic Women's Organisation of Tanzania. Its aim is to unify the Catholic Women in Tanzania for their own integral development for an effective participation in the development of their Church and society — to which their contribution is essential. The organisation is under the Laity Council of Tanzania established in 1972. WAWATA is a full right member of WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women Organisation, founded in 1910). WUCWO is an international Catholic women's body which has consultative status with the UN bodies i.e., ECOSOC, UNICEF, UNESCO, FAO and ILO. WAWATA as an organisation in Tanzania is also a founder member of the Tanzania Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (TANGO) which is an umbrella organisation of non-governmental organisations in Tanzania.

How and Why I Became Interested in Women's Activities

I became interested in WAWATA when I moved to live near my present parish in 1977 (St Joseph Parish in Dar-es-Salaam). My neighbour was a devout Catholic woman; we were both in the St Joseph's choir group. She invited me to join the parish Women's group. At first — being very young — I hesitated because I always perceived that women's organisations were for older women. Indeed after attending a few meetings and prayer groups, hearing the issues and the problems that were very openly being shared, I joined the group specifically for personal spiritual formation. In the course of this, I found myself becoming more and more involved and started accepting some of the responsibilities that I was constantly requested to take up. My involvement in the parish activities until now, has led on to higher level involvement: at

Diocesan, National and International levels. It has been not only an eye-opener to me but also a very spiritually enriching experience.

Bridging the Gap Between Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995

WAWATA was part of the process towards the 1985 NGO forum. WAWATA sent a delegation of 13 women to Nairobi. After the Conference the 13 delegates were able to disseminate to the Catholic Women Organisation in Tanzania, the outcome of which was the *Nairobi forward looking strategies*. This was achieved through workshops at Diocesan, zonal and at national levels.

From the forward looking strategies, WAWATA earmarked priority areas and developed an action plan for the implementation. The implementation has been mainly in areas based on the following three themes:

Peace:

- through retreats and seminars. Issues of justice and peace in the family, especially violence against women and children in the family;
- assisting refugees through provision of accommodation in WAWATA Hostels (1985-1992).

Development:

- leadership development through workshops and seminars;
- income generating activities through trade, shops, gardens, handicrafts, soap making;
- establishment of a special credit scheme of Tshs 25,000,000 for small scale enterprises for women at grassroots level;
- afforestation programmes (environmental projects) planting trees;
- agriculture for food security towards poverty alleviation.

Equality:

- women rights literacy campaigns through workshops and seminars;
- workshops and symposium on the position of women in the Church and society;
- cultural practices that impinge on women. Women's health, emphasising on the natural family planning methods.

This has been done in collaboration at times with other women's organisations but particularly with WUCWO at the national, regional and international level. We thank the various organisations, donors and particularly our Bishops for joining hands with us to ensure our programme successful implementation.

Towards Beijing

The thrust of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women is the *Platform for action*. The platform for action aims at accelerating the removal of the remaining obstacles to women's full and equal participation in all spheres of life including economical/political/decision making; it aims at protecting women's human rights throughout the life cycle and to mainstream women in all areas of sustainable development so that men and women can work together in equality for development and peace. For this purpose the international community, Governments, non-governmental organisations and the private sector are called upon to undertake strategic action to implement the *Nairobi: Forward looking strategies* for the advancement of women in critical areas of concern.

In this context therefore WAWATA's preparation for Beijing started two years ago by evaluating the implementation of the *Nairobi forward looking strategies*. Each Diocese was called upon to prepare a report on which basis a national report of WAWATA was prepared and shared within the country with the other NGOs under the coordination of TANGO, and at African level whereby a regional Catholic Conference was held in Dakar in September 1994 and at international level in May 1995 at a special board meeting in London.

As Tanzania prepares for Beijing, WAWATA (as a member of TANGO), is in the WID (Women in Development) Committee, which is responsible for coordination of the incoming preparations: including the Report of WAWATA in order to enhance the participation of women in development.

Countrywide our motto is: *Let Beijing happen in Tanzania first!* A team of experts was commissioned by TANGO to validate the reports WAWATA/TANGO and others had submitted. The

method of validating the information collected of such reports was through seminars, discussions, newspaper cuttings and assessing through observations, the current status of a Tanzanian woman. It was anticipated that the Final Report would encompass contributions by Tanzanian women of both urban and rural areas and not only from a product of specific researchers. Five zonal workshops were conducted in July 1994, and WAWATA coordinated three out of the five workshops i.e., Mbeya, Tabora and Mwanza zone.

The culmination of the national preparatory process was the holding of the *national conference* on the three themes: *Equality, Development and Peace*. Participants were drawn from all over the country and WAWATA was represented by at least one delegate from each Diocese if not more. The other objective was to lay down concrete strategies to be discussed in the Dakar Regional Conference in 1995. To the regional preparatory conference in Dakar WAWATA, due to limited resources, was able to send only one delegate. However, many Catholic women were delegates to the same through other organisations.

On 18th March 1995, WAWATA held a *national conference* to discuss the outcome of the Dakar Regional NGO Forum and lay strategies for the Beijing Conference. The National Conference of Catholic Women made a resolution to send at least two delegates.

What can the Church do?

- for example, one of the issues that negatively affects the equality of spouses in marriage is the *payment of the dowry*. The Church in many areas in Africa has abolished many bad traditions, however I have found out that when people go to register their intention to marry before the announcement in Church, the registration form still has the question to the man: "Have you paid the dowry?". Now this question alone is enough to remind the man of his obligation to pay the dowry! We all know how the dowry affects the status of women, this is an area where the Church could play an active role.
- the Church could also insist on *equal education* for girls and boys;
- in stressing the *role of men in parenthood*: as both the father and mother have an equal role in it;
- and supporting the *socio/economic empowerment of women* for the development of the Church and society.

Ref: AMECA Documentaion Service,
P.O. Box 21400, Nairobi, Kenya.

THE CHINESE WOMAN IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Betty Ann Maheu, MM

Introduction

Over forty years ago, Mao Zedong announced, "Women hold up half of the sky". This was a clear declaration that in China women and men were to be treated as equals. This concept of equality is stated clearly in the Constitution of the People's Republic.

Women in the People's Republic of China enjoy rights with men in all spheres of life, political, economic, cultural and social, including family life.

The State protects the rights and interests of women, applies the principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women alike and trains and selects cadres from among women (Article 48).

The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women, promulgated in 1992, further explains the intent of Article 48. The law states that women enjoy:

- political rights with men;
- equal rights with men with respect to culture and education;
- equal working rights with men;
- equal property rights with men;
- equal rights with men relating to their persons;
- equal rights with men in marriage and the family.

As China prepares to host the largest international conference ever held in China, the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women from 4-15 September 1995, it is also assessing the progress it has made in implementing the Equal Rights legislation.

China is the first to admit that in its present *primary stage of socialism*, certain provisions on the legal rights of women need to be improved. A recent survey sponsored by the All-China Women's Federation and the State Statistical Bureau involving

nearly 50,000 men and women from all walks of life, between the ages of 18 and 64, from seventeen of China's provinces, concluded that: "The social status of women in China has changed greatly, especially in employment, education and the family". It also pointed out that "Women's self-improvement in different occupations, social levels and regions has not been balanced". The final statement admitted, "Many women are still far from realising equality with men in cultural standing, educational level, social participation and self-recognition".

Nonetheless, China watchers are unanimous in acknowledging that China has come a long way since September 1988, when the Chinese representatives at an International Conference in Montreal, Canada, were informed that a study on the position of women in various countries had found that China ranked 132nd in the world.

The Status of Women throughout the Ages

What had been the status of women in China throughout the ages? Students of China's leading philosophies maintain that Confucius believed in the equality of the sexes. Buddha broke with the tradition that men were superior and even allowed some women to become his Disciples. Some anthropologists even hold that long ago, especially among the minority groups, China had a matriarchal system. This system bestowed great prestige on women. In many Lahu families, for instance, the head of the household was female, property was inherited through the daughters; the family name was that of the wife. When men and women married, the husband had first to work in his wife's natal home. The wife could also order her husband out of the house and the poor chap could only take his clothes and tools with him. The fact that the woman was responsible for raising children made her the most important person in society. Many believe that today's universal consciousness of woman's right to protection and respect actually stems from the respect, trust and obedience accorded women in matrilineal societies. When important changes in China's economic structures took place and physical strength became the

mainstay of labour, the matrilineal society was transformed into a patrilineal one. Power fell into the hands of the male and women lost their superior status, their right to property and prestige, their autonomy both in marriage and in the economy.

Confucius and Women's Role

Did Confucius really believe in the equality of the sexes? If so, where then do those norms which even today define so much of a woman's role in the Chinese family and society come from? In the *Analects* (XV11:25) we read, "In one's own household, it is the woman and the small-minded men that are the most difficult to deal with". And Mencius, Confucius' Disciple, says, "When you arrive at your new home (he is speaking to the new bride) you are never to disobey your husband" (Mencius 38:2). And "the only proper norms of behaviour for concubines or wives are obedience and docility". A woman is bound by a triple obedience: to father, to husband and to her son in her widowhood. Among the feminine virtues mentioned by Confucius "fidelity to the memory of the dead husband" is the noblest.

The Status of Women Today

In China as elsewhere, the woman's role in the family and society has gone through many vicissitudes. Since the demise of the *Gang of Four*, China has given serious thought to the position of wives and mothers in China's society. Throughout its first 40 years of rule China's Socialist Government tried unsuccessfully to wipe out any vestige of Confucian tradition that might have an impact on family life. But the influence of Confucianism, at least as it has been institutionalised in China, is still present and operative both in the rural areas and large cities. Recently, even the Government, conscious of the moral vacuum in the country, is promoting Confucius and Confucian values.

The Confucian tradition is not the only factor militating against the equality of women in China. Many long standing customs work against her interests. Girl infanticides — though condemned by the Government — and the disproportionate number of female abortions stem from a long history of preferring a son to a daughter. Mencius once commented, "There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no (male) posterity is the greatest of them all (4A:26). Brides are still sold and even exported for profit and women account for a small percentage of China's educated *élite*, of cadres, professionals and delegates to the National People's Congress. Inequalities are still rampant in education, employment and politics. According to the *China Daily* (14/7/93), 70 per cent of the illiterate population are women; the majority of school dropouts are girls; in

cities 70 per cent of the unemployed are women; higher standards are set for female job applicants, and many enterprises force women of child-bearing age to quit.

Torn between Tradition and Necessity

The Chinese woman today is torn between tradition and necessity. While she is still expected to stay at home, to be a loving wife and devoted mother, she is also expected to compete with men in the workplace. She is responsible for fertility control and child care. With the new policy of openness, she is often expected to bring in a second salary to help raise the family's standard of living. And she is also expected to do equal work for unequal pay! The need to abide by traditional values and yet meet their own personal needs as well as the challenges of the times have placed a heavy psychological burden on many Chinese women threatening to make them split personalities. They are pulled in many opposing directions and confused by changing marital, family and societal values. Neither Confucianism nor socialist policies

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seem to offer any real solution to the problem. A woman, wife and mother trying to pursue a lucrative and important career complains: "I have no time for tenderness, but is it my fault?" Another sighs, "I am so tired but I have no time to rest". Another pleads, "Tell me frankly, which part of my life should I give up?"

Women in the Catholic Church in China

Does the Catholic Church in China have anything to offer the modern woman to help her confront her difficult task? Does it stand out as a herald of good news for women? For their liberation and their equality with men? A few visits to some of China's churches and convents and a few conversations with lay women and women religious are enough to convince quickly even the most casual observer that "it is a long, long road to freedom".

Because the equality of men and women is deeply fixed in the Scriptures and the dignity of the human person and respect for life deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, women enjoy a certain protection. Within this context, a pregnant Christian woman is less likely than her non-Christian counterpart to opt for an abortion on sex selection alone. A girl child is also less likely to be the victim of infanticide. However, women in the Church in China sense the same kind of sexism experienced by their sisters throughout the world, and I would venture to say, because of culture and tradition, in an even more pervasive form. It is rare in China to see a woman lector and I have never seen a girl or woman acolyte or a woman distributing Communion. Women are seldom seen anywhere near the sanctuary. This is strange since much of the Church's survival in China is due to lay women and women religious who, during long years of persecution, kept the flame of faith alive among Catholics when Bishops and priests were relegated to prisons and work camps.

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Sexism will remain a "sin" in the Church and in society until there is a change of attitude, of mentality and a change in the structures of power. In China where the very culture and traditions foster male dominance, it is unreal to think that discrimination, whether in society or the Church, can be overcome within a short time. Before the Church can eliminate its discrimination against women, it must confront and admit the sexism found in its own structures, expand its locus of authority and share its decision making processes.

To achieve equality in the Church, the women of China will have to have access to the same theological and spiritual formation as men; they will have to have available the kind of education that will make them aware of the state of injustice under which they live; they will have to develop a sense of self-sufficiency and independence and, women in the rural areas of China, especially, will need to develop a greater sense of their personal dignity and a more positive self-image.

Perhaps the Church in China is not yet ready to enter into the woman's struggle for equality. The Church is just now rising from the ashes of some 40 years of persecution; Catholics are busy picking up the pieces of their lives and moulding them into a new design; they are renovating or reconstructing their churches systematically destroyed by a Communist Regime; they are occupied with catching up with Vatican II; with changes in the liturgy, theology and ecclesiology, with building seminaries and training young men for the priesthood. Much will be lost to the Church in China if, in the long run, the State is the first to recognise the importance of women in maintaining an equilibrium between prosperity and harmony, and values that foster morality in the midst of rapidly changing societal structures. The Church in China cannot afford to turn a deaf ear to women who are essential to the Church's on-going welfare and development. It cannot afford to ignore women who, like Mary, the Church's perfect model, are women of faith whose compassion and tender nurturing can go a long way towards healing the division existing in the Church and effecting a longed for and badly needed reconciliation.

Ref.: *Tripod*,
Vol. XV-Number 87,
May-June, 1991.



DIVERSITY AND TRUTH: A MISSIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Mary Motte, FMM

This article explores the relationship between diversity and truth from a missiological perspective. This question is explored in the relation between Christianity and other religious traditions, and in the relationship between Christian faith and culture. A shift in the understanding of mission from a primary concern to build up the Christian community to a primary concern of participation in the building up of God's reign provides new spaces for understanding aspects of these relationships. Both areas of study are yielding emerging principles and criteria that are helpful in discerning the relationship between truth and diversity.

New expressions of faith are emerging among Christians as their "cultures shape the human voice that answers the voice of God" (World Council of Churches 1973). Such increasing diversity creates a concern about criteria for discerning truth. The lens of missiology focuses on the relationship between truth and diversity at the outermost borders of Christian identity. At the same time, it focuses this question even more sharply within the Christian community, where the missionary dynamic is incarnated. Inter-religious dialogue deals with truth and diversity at the borders of Christian identity in attempting to understand how Christian faith relates to other religious traditions. Studies examining the relation between faith and culture focus more on the overall shift in understanding mission. This is a shift from mission directed primarily toward building up the Church or the Christian community, to mission directed primarily toward participating in building the reign of God. Deeper recognition that the Church is servant to the reign of God appears to be a significant outcome of this transition. Truth and diversity are integral components both in inter-religious dialogue and in studies about faith and culture. A growing body of knowledge for both areas of study offers some perspectives that can be helpful in dealing with situations where truth and diversity seem to be in conflict.

Inter-religious Dialogue

Intensive study over the last several years has sought a different way to relate to followers of other

religious traditions. Dialogue as a path to understanding has emerged. It includes not only formal, scholarly dialogue, but especially the dialogue of life spoken with the words of everyday life, aiming to build a just and peaceful human society.

Search for a path suggests an image of journeying toward something not yet fully grasped. Conviction that mutual respect is the basis for greater understanding among peoples leads to honesty and to an attitude of readiness to discover something still hidden. There is greater emphasis on the mystery of God's presence within the human person as a result of the search for a path to dialogue. This sense of mystery has led many to a contemplative stance, a standing before, a presence to mystery. This stance in no way diminishes the Christian belief that God is revealed and yet remains a mystery. This God is one who loves every person and all of creation. From this perspective one reaches insight into the mystery of God that has the capacity continually to open ways to relationships in a multi-religious context. One cannot deny there is risk involved. At the same time, those who live in the everyday context of dialogue appear to grow in a deepened, contemplative awareness of God's love embracing every person and the whole of creation. There is diversity at the heart of truth as there is oneness in the Trinity — something to be contemplated awaiting a fuller revelation. A group of Franciscan Sisters working in North Africa explains their presence and mission in terms of developing an advent spirituality.

The historic tendency to identify the Church as the reign of God has generally inhibited us from embracing the other, especially when that other was of another faith. A few years ago a Hindu, who was very knowledgeable about Christian teaching, was an observer at an international meeting of Christians. As we were waiting for a session to begin one day, he turned to me and said, "Do you realise that whenever anyone here refers to me, I am referred to as 'other'? Do you realise what it feels like to always be 'other'? Cannot you who are Christians find another way to speak about me"? In subsequent years I have thought often about his

remark. It can be exclusive to speak of someone as "other". Exclusivity and negative forms it has taken historically, namely, *apartheid*, racism, and genocide, are outside the Gospel revelation of God's love. Of course, there is the alternative of inviting and enabling people to move inside and stop being "other". At times that effort has contributed to a growing Christian community that is open and welcoming. At other times, it has become somewhat shortchanged by its own good intentions, and has not been sufficiently respectful of the rights of each person. Many followers of non-Christian religious traditions may still await a proclamation of the Gospel; some may choose to follow the Gospel; some will continue within the tradition they know. All of these persons invite us to a deeper and more incisive perception of the mystery of God. There are a number of Christian theologians who appear to be moving toward a more pluralist understanding of God (cf. Schreiter 1993:9). This reflects the experience of so many who live in a multi-religious situation. Efforts to build relationships, to develop human community in mutuality and respect, confirm Schreiter's view that we are at the beginning of a third period of mission. He suggests that "the metaphor for mission in this context may be bridge-building", or in biblical terms "reconciliation" (Schreiter 1993:15).

Jacques Dupuis indicates in a recent paper that *Redemptoris Missio*, the Letter of John Paul II on mission, is the "first document of the Roman Magisterium to distinguish clearly, while keeping them united, between the Church and the Reign of God in their pilgrimage through history" (1993:12). The Encyclical states that the reign of God "present in the world is a reality which is broader than the Church. It extends beyond its boundaries and includes — even if the modalities may differ — not only the members of the Church but also the *others*" (1993:12). A further development of this idea finds a clearer expression in a consultation sponsored by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences held at Hua Hin, Thailand, in November 1991. In its conclusion the consultation notes that:

The reign of God is a universal reality, extending far beyond the boundaries of the Church. It is the reality of salvation in Jesus Christ in which Christians and others share together. It is the fundamental "mystery of unity" that unites us more deeply than differences in religious allegiance are able to keep us apart. Seen in this manner, a "regnocentric" approach to mission theology does not in any way threaten the Christocentric perspective of our faith; on the contrary, "regnocentrism" calls for Christocentrism, and vice versa, for it is in Jesus Christ and through the Christ-event that God has established his Kingdom upon the earth and in human history" (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, nn. 17-18, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences' 1991: n. 30).

A missiological understanding of how truth and diversity can relate emerges from the experience of inter-religious dialogue. The image of path and journey lends itself to perceiving the possibility of deeper insight into the mystery of God. Respect for every person is predicated on recognition that God's love reaches to every person and to all of creation. It is a love not limited by the boundaries of our human, albeit Christian, understanding of God. Growing recognition that the reign of God extends beyond the boundaries of the Church, and that the Church is in a servant relationship to the reign of God offers new possibilities of developing criteria for addressing a context which is increasingly pluralistic. Further, it contributes to developing a way of constructively allowing truth and diversity to enter into a creative relationship in the midst of situations where the patterns of relationship have been deeply conflictual (cf. Schreiter 1993:16).

The Encounter Between Faith and Culture

The nature of the relationship between faith and culture is receiving increased attention. There is undoubtedly some overlap with inter-religious dialogue insofar as some religious traditions and cultures have strongly interrelated identities. However, there are growing numbers of Christians in places outside the West, and there are significant developments in understanding culture and its influence on the human person's identity and relationships. The foundation inter-connectedness among identity, culture, and faith does not permit an uncritical transfer or acceptance of the Gospel message. At the same time, we cannot simply identify faith with culture, even though we can recognise how "culture functions as a sub-stratum for faith" (George 1990:154).

A review of Vatican II documents gives an idea of just how recently studies of faith and culture have developed. In *Lumen Gentium*, the Vatican II Document on the Church, there is no indication that faith might be expressed differently because of culture. The document on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, appearing later in the Council, treats the plurality of culture. *Ad Gentes*, the document on mission, points out the possibility of finding religious value in cultures. However, in all these texts, as well as in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which appeared approximately ten years later, "the problematic of dialogue between faith and culture remains that of unity in faith" (George 1990:48-51).

Today we find increasing agreement that theological reflection requires both Christian tradition and human experience (cf. Bevans 1992:11). But precisely because of this, a dilemma arises about maintaining unity of faith in diverse cultural situations. This concern reaches into the internal network of relationships in the Christian community. Not only cultural situations associated

with ethnic identities, but those associated with other group identities, e.g., women, are included in the framework of this search to understand the faith-culture encounter. A subtle shift in the problematic is taking place as new data emerge from the analyses of experience. While unity of faith remains a central concern, there is a growing receptivity to the idea that cultural diversity can enrich faith.

Efforts in recent years to develop an incarnational approach in theology illustrate how the interaction between faith and culture serves theological understanding. As a result, there is more emphasis on the mediated, historic nature of God's revelation, and on the relationship between grace and the Holy Spirit. Both emphases facilitate a move toward a greater grasp of the mystery of God at work beyond the limits of the Christian community. There is greater insistence on the universal salvific will of God revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the pilgrim nature of the Church on the way and searching (Schineller 1990:45-51). These new perspectives permit the Christian community to situate itself in a different space from which to reach out in relationships.

Changes in the Church's self-understanding, as David Bosch (1991) has illustrated in *Transforming Mission*, certainly evidence the impact of cultural diversity over time. As this confrontation between self-understanding and cultural diversity becomes more intensive and intentional, concern about continuity raises questions about the limits of diversity. Contextualisation involves discerning how to incorporate authentically greater diversity into Christian self-understanding. Such a task requires criteria. Wilbert Shenk (1993) suggests a five-fold framework for developing contextual theology that has human culture as a major component. The other four are *missio Dei* as the source of mission; Jesus Christ — the full embodiment of God's intention in mission; the Holy Spirit as the source of power; and the Church as God's instrument in mission. Within this matrix, the understanding of human culture is "the medium through which all communication of the Gospel is made" (1993:230). With regard to this last point, I would include a note differentiating between communicating the Gospel through human culture, and receiving the Gospel within a culture. The latter is also essential to hearing the message. It implies not simply accepting the Gospel as it has been expressed in other cultures, but in welcoming this Word, allowing it to interact freely with culture in a transforming and transformed relationship (cf. Gittins 1989:111; 1993:72-93; Oduyoye 1986:73-76). Aloysius Pieris elaborates a praxis with emphasis on a *living* contextualisation of the Gospel. He urges involvement in the "liturgy of life", that is, participation "in a consciously Christian manner in the life struggles of the simple folk". Such a Christian manner engages one in listening to the Word of God "by reading the Bible and the signs of

the times". It is this liturgy of life and liturgy of the Word that will shape a proclamational sacramental liturgy (Pieris 1993:648).

The new reality of the multi-cultural Christian community, no longer rooted solely in the West, makes the issue of contextualisation contemporary in an intensive and urgent way. The surging collage of communications, technology, and other factors shaping modernity and post-modernity contemporise this question for the West. These currents have shaped the foundational criteria for knowing and believing. Self-identity is changing, and with it, group identity (cf. Taylor 1989:25-52). Such shifts in meaning cause one to question the expression of faith developed at another historic moment. At the heart of this questioning is the issue of truth in relation to diversity. The bases for contextualisation and discernment of how diversity can contribute to understanding truth are as follows: continual reference to the Word of God; the presence of the Christian community throughout the world; and its historic memory. As expressions of faith and theological reflection are affected by cultural diversity through contextualisation, they need to be tested in relation to Christian tradition. To withstand the test, Schreiter suggests that a contextualised theology should (1) have cohesiveness, (2) have the capacity to be translated into worship, (3) stand the test of orthopraxis, (4) be open to criticism from other contextualised theologies, and (5) have sufficient strength to challenge other theologies (Schreiter 1985:117-121).

Conclusion

Developments in the study of inter-religious dialogue and the relationship between faith and culture indicate basic concerns about the relationship between truth and diversity. Studies in both these areas point to emerging principles and criteria that are helpful in discerning how one is to relate truth with diversity. Mission study will benefit from new insights gained from the contribution of understanding truth in the context of diversity as well as from criteria developed for this discernment process. As the Christian community becomes more diverse culturally, the mission dynamic at the heart of the Church's life requires that the questions posed by that very diversity be received and discerned. In this way, the truth that constitutes the life of the Church and which it holds most precious will become increasingly manifest in and through the life of the Church in the world today. Such a missionary perspective will help us become more receptive to what is new and different. It will also identify those expressions of faith that have become captive to societal and cultural values that are inconsistent with the Gospel message.

Ref.: *Missiology*,
vol. XXIII, n. 1, January 1995.

PERSPECTIVES MISSIONNAIRES

DANS LA HONGRIE ACTUELLE

Edith et Tamas Lazlo

1950-1980 : un rappel des événements

Pour mieux comprendre la situation actuelle et les perspectives d'avenir de l'Église en Hongrie, il nous paraît utile de rappeler brièvement les principaux événements des dernières décennies.

Le communisme a porté de rudes coups à l'Église de notre pays. Il en a détruit la culture religieuse, nationalisé, confisqué les écoles chrétiennes, interdit les ordres religieux qui comptaient plus de 10,000 membres, divisé l'Église et la masse des fidèles. Son Bureau des Affaires Ecclésiastiques, organe du gouvernement composé de militants athées, supervisait et contrôlait la vie ecclésiale. Aucune initiative, aucune nomination ne pouvait intervenir sans son accord préalable.

Cela a rendu difficile et parfois paralysé totalement l'enseignement religieux, détruit la confiance des prêtres entre eux et envers leurs supérieurs hiérarchiques. Le nombre des prêtres autorisés à exercer leur ministère a été réduit de moitié, puis est tombé au tiers. Le nombre des enfants inscrits au catéchisme a chuté en dessous des 10 % des enfants scolarisés. Toute une génération allait ainsi être privée des connaissances religieuses les plus élémentaires.

Vers la fin des années 1970, suite à une persécution méthodique, la vie ecclésiale était totalement disloquée. Les gens ne pouvaient vivre leur foi que dans un certain nombre de petites communautés qui tentaient de maintenir éveillée, par des initiatives ponctuelles, une Église devenue aphone et sans poids ni autorité véritables. Par la suite, l'opinion publique et les dirigeants politiques du pays ont dû se rendre à l'évidence: malgré tous les interdits, l'Église n'était pas morte. Elle montrait même les premiers signes d'un certain renouveau.

1980-1988 : les signes précurseurs d'un changement

Au début des années '80, l'Église de Hongrie, mise au ban de la société et stigmatisée publiquement par la propagande athée, sans droits ni pos-

sibilités d'ouverture vers l'extérieur, vivait sous le joug des organismes étatiques. Pourtant, certains signes encourageants de changement apparaissaient en filigrane et laissaient entendre que la situation ne durerait pas longtemps.

Après 1985, les premières éditions de la Bible et les premiers commentaires d'Écriture Sainte paraissaient en librairie. Ces ouvrages ont immédiatement connu un large succès auprès des lecteurs. Les premiers sondages autorisés faisaient apparaître un fait surprenant: le pourcentage élevé de ceux qui osaient se déclarer ouvertement croyants et parmi eux, une forte proportion de jeunes et d'hommes «cultivés».

L'éducation religieuse proprement dite restait fort limitée. Mais de nouvelles formes de catéchèse, mises en place par les petites communautés (pèlerinages, camps d'été, camps d'hiver, rencontres de jeunes, conférences culturelles, etc..) attiraient de plus en plus de gens, surtout des jeunes. Il s'agit là de quelque chose de très important dans une Hongrie où, pendant des décennies, la formation de la jeunesse était réservée à des éducateurs «politiquement sûrs», sélectionnés par l'État et le Parti en raison de leur hostilité envers la religion et l'Église.

1989-1990 : les années du changement

Dans notre pays, le véritable renouveau religieux a effectivement débuté en 1989-1990. Les événements se sont succédés, des libertés se sont offertes, que l'on croyait irrémédiablement perdues. C'est en 1989 qu'a été dissout le redoutable Bureau des Affaires Ecclésiastiques qui contrôlait et paralysait les activités de toutes les Églises chrétiennes.

En août 1989, l'interdit lancé contre les ordres religieux en 1950 a été levé. En six mois, 59 Congrégations et ordres religieux ont pu être à nouveau officiellement enregistrés. Après 40 ans d'exil, les religieuses et religieux bannis du pays ont été autorisés à rentrer dans la mère-patrie. Revenus au

pays, ils se sont, dès l'automne 1989, engagés dans les activités éducatives ou caritatives de l'Eglise et ont contribué, là où c'était possible, à former ou à reconstituer de nouvelles communautés religieuses.

Le printemps 1990 a vu la ratification par le Parlement d'une loi garantissant à tous la liberté religieuse. Elle a bientôt été suivie d'une autre rétablissant les relations diplomatiques entre la Hongrie et le Vatican.

C'est à partir de cette date que la Télévision et la Radio hongroises ont à nouveau régulièrement programmé des émissions religieuses. Livres, revues, hebdomadaires et autres périodiques catholiques ont pu à nouveau être publiés en grand nombre. Certains ouvrages importants, parus entre temps à l'étranger, ont été traduits en hongrois. Une fenêtre venait de s'ouvrir largement sur le monde catholique extérieur, permettant aux croyants hongrois de participer aux événements et d'être enfin informés de la vie de l'Eglise universelle. Les fidèles n'étaient plus isolés.

Dupuis, le Parlement a voté une loi en vue de dédommager l'Eglise de la confiscation de tous ses biens par les nationalisations à outrance du régime précédent. Le dédommagement n'est que partiel et le processus est prévu sur dix ans.

1991-1994 : les années de la liberté retrouvée

Les changements intervenus en 1989-90 ont rendu possible le voyage du pape Jean-Paul II en Hongrie, en août 1991. Les thèmes principaux de ses interventions ont été *le renouveau moral de la nation et la ré-évangélisation de la Hongrie* dont notre pays a grandement besoin aujourd'hui. Pendant les années qui ont précédé la chute du régime communiste, l'Etat et la Parti détenaient le monopole de ce qu'il fallait faire ou ne pas faire et ils l'imposaient. Aujourd'hui, il n'y a plus d'Etat bienfaisant ni de Parti omniprésent et tous doivent être conscients qu'ils ont eux-mêmes à prendre en mains le souvi de leur destinée. La force attractive de la religion s'est accrue. L'idéologie dominante qui la rejetait a considérablement régressé. Aujourd'hui, être «sans religion» ne signifie plus adhérer à un athéisme scientifiquement démontré, mais plutôt être sans relation avec le monde religieux. *De nouvelles perspectives* s'ouvrent à l'Eglise. La masse des gens regarde vers elle avec un intérêt et une attente réels.

Longtemps privée du service de ses institutions, isolée et condamnée au silence, affaiblie dans ses réserves intérieures, l'Eglise de Hongrie, affaiblie numériquement et dans ses infrastructures, *ne se sent pas capable de faire partout tout ce qu'on réclame d'elle*. Sa situation est comparable à celle

d'une voiture qui, pendant 40 ans, aurait été immobilisée devant un feu rouge. Le feu est maintenant passé au vert, et tout le monde attend qu'elle démarre au quart de tour. Mais, entre temps, l'essence s'est évaporée, le volant s'est grippé et plusieurs pièces mécaniques ont été rongées par la rouille. Il faut réparer la voiture et la remettre en état de marche.

Nous ne pouvons pas perdre de vue les réalités, aussi amères qu'elles soient. 90% de la population actuelle vit pratiquement «sans religion». La génération intermédiaire actuelle a grandi hors de la foi catholique. Les enfants, élevés dans un milieu familial religieux, ont parfois été perturbés par ce qu'ils constataient de la contradiction entre l'éducation reçue en famille et la manière de vivre dans la société environnante. Certains ont connu une très grave crise intérieure. Les plus âgés qui, avant 1950, ont pu suivre un enseignement religieux régulier, se sont plus tard éloignés de leur religion d'origine parce qu'ils se trouvaient face à d'innombrables interdits, menacés dans leur profession ou leur existence quotidienne. La répression était une réalité.

Actuellement, les jeunes enfants sont l'espoir de l'Eglise en Hongrie. Ils sont élevés dans un monde libre, sans contrainte. Ils ont soif de connaissances religieuses. Il n'est pas rare que, dans telle ou telle famille, ce soient les enfants qui convertissent les parents parce qu'ils ont découvert et appris à aimer le catholicisme. Ils ont été saisis par le mystère de la foi et réconfortés par la découverte de la Loi d'amour, entendue, assimilée et revue dans le cadre de l'Eglise.

Nous devons pourtant rester vigilants face à la concurrence effrénée de certaines sectes qui, souvent, sont de dénomination chrétienne. Elles pullulent dans notre pays et, par leurs programmes attractifs, leurs approches personnalisées, leurs tutelles sécurisantes et empressées, elles envoûtent les jeunes et les dressent parfois contre leur famille, la société et l'Eglise, pour ensuite mieux les enchaîner.

Un autre danger qui touche toute la société, et en premier lieu la jeunesse, c'est l'idéologie de la société de consommation. Venue d'Occident, et de ce fait très à la mode, se présentant comme une alternative à l'idéologie du communisme, elle est tout aussi destructrice.

l'avenir : interpellations, perspectives et possibilités

L'Eglise, le croyant, l'homme engagé se trouvent devant *des tâches multiples et immenses*. On attend de l'Eglise qu'elle crée les cadres et les

conditions de la transmission de la foi, qu'elle fasse connaître, aux jeunes surtout, les valeurs éthiques et morales fondamentales. On attend d'elle qu'elle s'engage dans les oeuvres sociales et caritatives surtout dans les secteurs réputés difficiles où l'action sociale du gouvernement est la moins efficace, par exemple auprès des personnes âgées seules, des sans-logis, des handicapés physiques et mentaux, des enfants abandonnés, des alcooliques, des drogués, etc. Il est évident que notre Eglise ne peut pas tout faire à la fois et tout de suite, mais elle connaît aujourd'hui un temps de grâce pour sa mission évangélisatrice.

La société hongroise actuelle peut se diviser en trois groupes du point de vue de la foi, de la pratique religieuse et de la conception de l'action de l'Eglise. On peut les différencier de la manière suivante:

Le premier groupe est constitué de croyants engagés qui ont survécu aux années de persécution dans les petites communautés ou mouvements spirituels. Ils prennent aujourd'hui une part active, parfois démesurée, à la vie d'une Eglise en reconstruction. Ils attendent d'être confirmés afin que revitalisés et soutenus, ils ne se découragent pas et s'engagent dans la formation religieuse des jeunes, dans la remise en route des établissements scolaires catholiques et dans la vie sociale. Ces hommes et ces femmes sont, hélas, peu nombreux, mais ils seront le levain pour leur entourage...

Le second groupe est la grande masse encore passive, en attente réelle. Elle accepte bien, à sa manière, l'existence de Dieu, mais en refuse les implications dans la vie et rejette l'Eglise. La première action missionnaire à entreprendre à son égard est de lui redonner une image positive de l'Eglise en lui montrant concrètement, par un comportement en cohérence avec l'Evangile, que l'Eglise aime et aide l'homme.

Le troisième groupe est petit mais bruyant. C'est celui des libéraux patentés et des athées militants. Ce sont ceux qui réclament à grands cris «des écoles idéologiquement neutres», qui partent en guerre en faveur de l'avortement, etc. L'Eglise, tout en ripostant clairement et énergiquement, si besoin est, ne doit pas leur répondre sur le même ton de violence.

Nous ne pouvons pas oublier les trois à quatre millions de Hongrois vivants en *minorités au-delà des frontières* de la mère-patrie, ni ceux qui vivent dans des pays où le communisme athée agressif a fait encore plus de ravages parmi les croyants que chez nous. Là aussi, nous percevons les premiers signes d'une renaissance possible. Des religieux ont

Ref.: *Spiritus*,
n. 139, mai 1995.

Les nouvelles en provenance d'Europe occidentale, nous disent que beaucoup regardent vers les pays d'Europe centrale et orientale avec une grande espérance. Nous accueillons parfois ces nouvelles avec une certaine réserve, et pourtant, nous y puisons l'espoir et la force de notre attente.

Dès qu'il s'agit de contacts au-delà des frontières nationales, la question des relations entre les minorités ethniques et les majorités nationales reste incontournable. Cette réalité est parfois aggravée par le fait que la majorité nationale confesse une autre religion. Sur ces territoires, une grande prudence et une sage mesure s'imposent, ainsi qu'une grande capacité d'écoute et la volonté d'accepter la différence.

En Slovaquie, au nord du Danube, les minorités hongroises conservent la foi et la fortifient lentement et discrètement.

- En Voïvodine-Yougoslavie, la communauté vit un temps d'angoisse. L'accent de la mission se met sur la solidarité.
- En Roumanie-Transylvanie, l'Eglise a pu rester le soutien des croyants pour la survie et la continuité de leur foi. On peut s'appuyer sur des communautés solides.
- En Ukraine subcarpathique (ancien Rusinsko), on peut enseigner l'Evangile, en luttant quotidiennement contre mille difficultés, mais avec un certain espoir.

En Ukraine subcarpathique (ancien Rusinsko), on peut enseigner l'Evangile, en luttant quotidiennement contre mille difficultés, mais avec un certain espoir.

pu visiter ces pays et nous tenons d'eux les indications suivantes:



CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN CULTURE

Mercy Amba Oduyoye

As we African Christian intellectuals continue to meet to discuss Christianity and African Culture, other African Christians are in the daily process of shaping a Christianity that will be at home in Africa and in which Africans will be at home. Very few African Christian theologians have found a way of being part of what I would like to call "the making of an African Christianity". One African Christian scholar, the late Prof. Bolaji Idowu, began such a process in the Methodist Church of Nigeria (see his *Selfhood in the Church*). In spite of the problems created by his personal style, the fact remains that the move he made to try to make Nigerian Methodists at home in their Christian life by an intensification of the element of celebration and popular participation in the liturgy received overwhelming positive approval. It was seen as reviving the process that resulted in the creation of Christian versions of the rites of naming, marriage and burial. While we discuss methodology of Christian theology in Africa and seek to define what is happening or should happen to Christianity in Africa, others are instituting forms of Christian Churches in which the religious find sustenance for their spirituality. Very early in the Christian enterprise those in Africa who instituted Churches parallel to the Western Churches and missions reckoned that attempts to Africanise Western Christianity would be futile. It was better to start afresh, letting the Gospel speak in and to Africa and to create space for Africa to shape moulds to hold the essentials of the "Religion of Jesus Christ". We have no name for this two-way process.

Meanwhile, it seems to me that for some Africans both Christianity and African culture are irrelevant to the contemporary challenges that Africans face. The University of Ibadan was, in the late 1970's, the venue for an epoch-making conference on "Women and Development". Papers were solicited on every aspect of life except religion. Is religion irrelevant in the discussion on "Women and Development" in Africa? In a pre-meeting of the 1977 Festival of African Arts and Culture, a symposium was held to highlight the intellectual heritage. I submitted a paper on "The Value of African Beliefs and Practices for Christianity in Africa". I had no response from the organisers. Was Christianity the stumbling block or, was the mention of "African Beliefs and Practices"

itself offensive, or was it my suggestion that there is something that these can offer to make Christianity a truly African religion? I decided to test the hypothesis on a group of African Christians.

The opportunity came with the meeting of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in Ghana. Extracts summarising the thesis were published in *African Theology en Route*. I had no idea that this was going to earn me the image of the woman who advocates syncretism. In 1986 I was invited to speak at an American college on "The Role of African Traditional Religion in the Development of Christian Theology". The paper bore that title, but when later the speech found its way into the *International Christian Digest*, it was entitled: "Ways to Confront Africa's Primal Religions". I wrote a protest, which was published, suggesting that it was clarifying my position. However, it confirmed my fear, that whereas it was acceptable for Christianity to transform Africa and Africans, it was difficult to admit the possibility of Africans having something to offer to transform Christianity in Africa, not to speak of world Christianity.

To make this presentation I read 47 contributions by Africans bearing the title "Culture, Religion and Liberation". These papers focused on the liberation-domination parameter. The contributors argued the use and misuse of religion and culture in the struggle for human liberation. Since this was the declared aim only a couple of contributors approached the subject of Christianity and African cultures from the standpoint of the interaction of these two complex phenomena. Now, I am asking myself the questions: do African Christians see any need to study the inevitable interaction that is taking place? Is the transformation of Africa only necessary in view of the class parameter? On what bases, for instance, do we denounce the class structure, racism, sexism and the insinuation that to be human is to trace one's religio-cultural ancestry to the Bible, Greek mythology and philosophy, and to practice a legal system founded on Roman law?

To give up on study and analysis of the autochthonous religio-cultures is to dismiss it as being of no consequence to the transformation of contemporary Africa, and certainly of no consequence to the development of Christianity and

Christian theology in Africa. It is to discount the fact of the existence of African instituted Churches and to ignore the reasons for the growth of "success Christianity" in Africa. Personally, I am not ready to give up on the need to bring Africa's religio-cultural heritage into the arena of study, analysis and transformation. In the West African context (especially Ghana and Nigeria) my experience among the Akan and the Yoruba, and specifically with regard to the lives of women, was that religions and cultures interact for liberative purposes as well as for those of domination. I hope that this period of study will contribute to the practice of Christianity in Africa.

Looking at contemporary Africa, one cannot use the word culture in the singular. Not even in pre-colonial Africa would such a use have been appropriate, for the communal way of life had a variety of manifestations on the continent. The economies differed — fishing, hunting, pasturing, planting, and the variety of industries: weaving, pottery, tool-making, decorative art, etc., reflected a plurality of cultures. They all created specific ways of life and were undergirded by beliefs and world-views that were reflected in the religion. In the communal culture, however, there was not a culture of the rich that differed from the culture of the poor. In today's Africa, as one moves from country to country, one senses a change in the way of life. One can even say that there are anglophone, francophone and lusophone African cultures and a special South African plurality of culture that we are yet to become familiar with. It is therefore neither helpful nor realistic to speak of African culture, except in the broadest terms. Culture is historical, it develops, it changes, there are continuous aspects as well as innovative ones. The Akan of Ghana say that ancient resting places are no longer in use today, "and yet the tripod continues to be the simplest form of stove". Given this diversity and complexity, this continuity and change, I can only offer a case for the study of Christianity and African cultures. This case is not Ghana nor the Akan, but the Ashante of Ghana and the Yoruba of Nigeria.

With the Ashante we are looking at a culture for which many of the elements of pre-colonial times are valid today, not only in the rural areas but also in the urban centres, for, among these people, wherever two or three are gathered anywhere in the world today there the culture lives. Much of what goes for the Ashante is valid for many Akans, but I use this limited group so as to avoid the complexity created by the patrilineal Akan such as the Akuapem. The Ashante is a very culture-conscious group, matrilineal and not easily impressed by other peoples' way of life, not least the Western Christian culture. The communal ideology of the organisation of society exists side by side with the nation State with its theoretical democracy and growing ranking of people according to wealth and participation in

the economic structure. A rural "peasant" farmer could be "royalty" controlling tracts of land in trust for the village, town or region, while a well paid banker in the city could be of little significance in the matter of descent and status in this same village. At any rate, the class analysis does not hold for the aspect of culture and interaction that I am discussing unless one were to see "Western Christian" culture as the "upper class", and "African culture" and the evolving African Christian cultures as the lesser-class. Christianity and westernisation have of course produced an *élite* whose influence on all aspects of culture, especially in terms of discontinuity, cannot be discounted easily.

The parameter for this contribution, however, is not so much liberation as it is interaction. The question is the extent to which African cultures can or have influenced Christianity in Africa and *vice versa*. Do we see or envisage a total discontinuity between the religio-cultural heritage of Africa and the received Western Christian culture? The concern is with the creativity of Africans in the religious domain. Does Africa have religious concepts, modes, worship, spirituality and ethics that can help shape a Christianity that is of vital consequence to Africans?

The Crossroads Factor

So far, the approach to Christian theology in Africa represented by the aim of the "Culture, Religion and Liberation" Conference, excludes the preoccupation of the subject of this paper. The approach of the Conference has its own validity, but it cannot preclude the concern for the interaction of the "African" and the "Western", for we have to know what the African contribution to our oppression is. We have to identify the religio-cultural sources of our oppression, whether they are Western, African or a combination of the two. We have to discover what is liberative in both, so that we can see to their mutual reinforcement. The African women theologians' focus on religion and culture in Africa reveals specific beliefs and practices that are used by the patriarchal culture, whether fuelled by Western Christianity or African beliefs and practices. The studies have also unveiled elements in traditional African cultures which, if practiced, would have been liberative to women and the whole community.

In the task of articulating or developing Christian theology in Africa, we cannot ignore this crossroads factor. In Ghana and Nigeria many people, indeed Christians, still pour libations, offer incantations, and make widows go through rites and rituals. They have elaborate naming and funeral ceremonies. These are practiced by rich and poor alike. This kind of religious culture is oppressive/liberative not by class but by gender. It is not a burden that the rich lay on the poor, but the burden of history,

beliefs and practices, that may be reinforced, modified or eliminated as a result of the dynamism of culture or the decrees of impinging religions, (in this case Christianity), or the hegemony of an incoming culture, in this case Euro-American. The religio-culture is often imposed by men on women. It is practiced by women on women as when women put widows through rites (never mind at this point that it is for the benefit of the soul of the departed spouse). This is done by women to women. There are also purely androcentric elements in this religio-culture. At times, economically poor priests of the traditional African religion and the newer forms of Christian Churches prescribe offerings for their services of providing prayers, charms and sacrifices to get by financially. In their practice, it is exactly of whom much is given that much is demanded. These services are priced according to peoples' economic standing.

As a West African I see how the hydraheaded Western Christian culture with its focus on class has come to worsen the situation. Land that was not to be sold neither by rich nor poor is now bought off the poor by rich Africans (to say nothing of aliens) who freed themselves of the traditional land culture with impunity, as in the Ahab case that theologians of South Africa have held up recently. Yet there are religio-cultural precepts that could have been used to prevent the powerful class from joining field to field were it not for the fact that, being African, we have laid them aside as unworthy of practicing. How else could African Cameroon Government officials ask Cameroonian peasants to uproot food crops that are yet to bear fruit so as to plant in their place a cash crop that the Government needs to acquire foreign exchange — the new god of Africa? This, of course, reinforces the need for a class analysis in the cultural hermeneutic, but I do not believe that it nullifies the search for empowering spirituality from African culture which may be appropriated to reinforce the liberative aspects of Christian theology, ecclesiology, liturgy and institutional orders. In the development of African theology, there is evidence that this crossroads factor is being taken seriously. We do this being aware of the fact that no single theological approach can be a panacea for the evolving Christian theology in Africa. With reference to the subject under review I summarise here by saying that in the theological area, there is recognition by West Africans that the traditional beliefs of Africa do play a role in the theology and spirituality of African Christians. It is for this reason that it remains an area of research and a fertile ground for the innovations in the Christianity practiced by Christians of the African instituted Churches (AIC).

I was asked to speak here on "Christianity and African Culture(s)". The Christian faith had met African culture(s) in the course of its expansion. How can one describe this encounter/clash? What is

the relationship between the Christian faith and African culture(s)? What are the challenges the Christian faith poses to the African culture(s) and *vice versa*? In addition, the planners were concerned that we view this discussion in the context of pronouncements of the Ratzinger type that says "What is commonly regarded as African may put the common awareness of what is *Catholic* in the shade in contrast to his Bavarian culture, which, according to him, knew how to strike the *right balance*, i.e., to create a joyful, colourful, human Christianity". The planners then asked, "Is there such an animal as an African Christianity? Can the African culture(s) convey the Christian message"?

I have quoted the request in full because I believe that this is not an issue that will go away unless we Africans decide that our tradition must give way to European tradition and that we work vigorously to complete what our colonial masters began, and which obviously has succeeded so well in parts of the continent and with many Africans and people of African descent all over the world. Christian theology must respond to the parameter of economic domination with its class structure and this it must do wherever it finds itself in the world. Class and ranking in socio-cultural aspects of life is a reality that theology cannot ignore. But if we, the Africans, accept that our traditional socio-cultural beliefs and practices are inferior to everybody else's and not worthy of study, analysis, critique and are irrelevant to the practice of what is liberating, then we do not need the above questions. Scholars, like H.W. Turner, who study the African instituted Churches are at pains to point out the African religio-cultural practices that this form of Christianity has taken on board. When these Churches describe themselves, they are at pains to show that these practices are not African but biblical. Either way, the African contribution is repudiated.

Discounting Africa's Energy and Creativity

This contribution deals with the existential fact that peoples in Africa who live by their traditional African beliefs and practices in various degrees are also operating with beliefs and practices of Christianity, Western and Eastern. There are indigenous forms of Christianity that will not occupy us here — they are the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches. We shall have to pay attention, however, to the Christianity represented in the African instituted Churches, South of the Sahara as they represent the most visible form of the "crossroads Christianity" we are seeking to describe.

In this respect we are of course faced with an almost impossible task, for, in the first place, the key words of our subject defy universally accepted definitions except in very broad terms. There may be a broadly identifiable African culture if we can define what we mean by Africa, this is why for this discussion I prefer to think in terms of African cul-

tures and to restrict myself to the Ashante of Ghana and the Yoruba of Nigeria for specific examples. Culture too presents formidable challenges to all who would attempt definitive theses on what it consists of. Up to now there has been no attempt on my part to offer a definition — were I to do so it would be a broad one covering the whole of a people's way of life. For this discussion, however, the relevant elements of culture are those that deal with religious beliefs and practices. For this reason it is the beliefs and practices of Western Christianity that concern us here. The subject, then, is "What is happening at the crossroads of the religious belief and practices of the Ashante where they encounter those of Western Christians?"

It is an observable fact that unless an African congregation in Africa (or even outside) is thoroughly domesticated by very conservative and ethnocentric Western leadership, the ethos of the Sunday worship will be different from that of most traditional Western congregations. The elements making the difference are African and they have happened because a Western form of Christian worship is no longer seen as the pinnacle of Christian offering to God. The first action of Western Christianity in Africa was to discount all traditional worship and to consign the elements to the domain of Satan and to hellfire. It is for this reason that the most obvious modification by Africans of Western Christianity is in the area of worship. The original encounter was one of disrespect, which was met with antagonism.

This encounter created a low self-esteem among Africans, to the extent that we modern Africans tend to underestimate ourselves and the resources of traditional religio-culture. Of the essays referred to above, only one advocated a review of the traditional missionary position on an African practice, namely the pouring of libation. This predictably came from a Ghanaian, whose name suggests that he is *Osanteni* (an Ashante).

The Pillaging Mission

Simon Maimela built his introduction to the conference described above on the subject "Religion and Culture: Blessing or Curse". It is in this context that he points out that "Many Africans resisted conversion to Christianity". He continues, "Even those who embraced the *new* Christian religion expressed their resistance to total conversion by continuing to practice African traditional religious rites alongside Christianity..." Today very few will associate themselves with the view that before Christianity Africans were without God or that "they bowed to wood and stone" as the quintessence of religious expression. Christianity had to do battle with the traditional religion of Akan as it did with those of the Romans and the Greeks and the Saxons. The missionaries admit this by the language of aggression that they used in describing their work in

Africa. Often they took or created opportunities for Elijah *versus*. prophets of Baal type contexts. The "power" to cure the sick was one of their greatest weapons in this context.

The traditional religio-culture held its own among the social *élites* of the traditional society; royalty, rulers and leaders of traditional institutions became Christian only when they were ready to give up the traditional roles. Both sides of the contest demanded this. Becoming Christian was presented as ceasing to be fully African. Africans who admired the figure of Jesus and the technological know-how of the visiting Jesus-people found themselves on the horns of a dilemma. A type of resistance developed that was only partial. Africans became convinced that it should be possible to adopt the religion of Jesus and still serve as a traditional ruler having roles that were at the same time political, religious and social.

So it is that Africans began to challenge missionary Christianity beginning with material and visible aspects like clothing, vestments, music, organisation, festivals, and moving on to challenge the missionaries on African beliefs and practices that the missionaries had unilaterally declared unworthy or incompatible with Christianity. The most famous had to do with marriage, inheritance and the concept of family that includes ancestors.

Where the colonisers had preceded the missionary aggression, the martial power of the West was used to intimidate Africans and to send them into the arms of the missionaries. Where the missionaries were the pioneer aggressors, the superior healing arts softened Africans for the colonial kill. The missions did what Jesus said His message would result in: African turned against African, mother against daughter and son against father. Ethnic conflicts were put on the back burner while the new tribe based on religion was evolving. A person's "family" was to become first and foremost those who were believers in Christ. This was carried to its logical conclusion in the Musama Disco Christo Church described by John S. Pobee. Generally, however, it produced Akan and Yoruba Christians who insisted on being Christian only to the extent that they could remain Akan and *vice versa*. It is for this group that the process of adaptation was set on the road by some Christians, both missionaries and Africans. It is also the spirit in which the cultural hermeneutic has been introduced into the study of Christian theology in Africa, including theological reflection as described above. However, for a lively expression of this perspective on the tabernacular Christianity in Africa we have to turn to the African instituted Churches. Here again, using Western language to label an African reality has become a problem.

When I read my contemporaries I find that we are still in the diagnostic and analytical mode, pres-

cribing what needs to be done in order to make Christianity at home in Africa. I did my reading looking for examples of authentic African Christianity with a theology that communicates and animates its spirituality. I was attracted by a possibility of a paper on the African instituted Churches, being as unrepentant as ever in my definition of syncretism!

Mutual Challenges

Taking the African instituted Churches as representing the Gospel of Christ alive in Africa, one can identify several factors that point to Christian faith as a challenge to African beliefs and practices and *vice versa*. The traditional beliefs related to the unseen world differ to a large extent not so much from the biblical equivalents as from the doctrinal emphasis of Western Christianity. One area of repudiation is the representation of unseen powers (spirits) in artifacts and nature. Western Christianity, especially the Protestant varieties, are thoroughly iconoclastic because of the fear of idolatry. So even the prophets and founders of AICs called for the destruction of these representations. The fear of ancestral cults competing with the worship of the One God led to many more prohibitions. Where saints and icons appear in Christianity the explanation is that they are Christian, so are not likely to detract from the worship of God in Christ.

Christian doctrine and practice challenged many African rites without much success because the objections sounded hollow. Hence, among the Ashante and the Yoruba, new forms of rites of passage have evolved. They incorporate the essential elements of the two traditions into one rite, thus avoiding the schizophrenia involved in pleasing the propagators of Western Christianity while doing another rite in another venue to fulfil traditional righteousness.

The veneration of the ancestors, ancestral cults, Christian saints and the observation of their days — All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day — the beliefs concerning life after death are all of a piece in the minds and often in the practices of African Christians. We cannot posit the power for good of Bavarian saints and challenge that of Akan ancestors. The challenge here is also mutual as is the question of how we clarify the religious belief in life after death in a coherent manner. What theology do we project via what we say and do when someone dies and when we remember someone who is no longer in the physical realm of life? The role of *power* in this clash is most evident.

The question for me is this: "If the Bavarian culture can strike the right balance, why should I doubt that the Akan culture can do the same?" In the Akan, Bavarian and biblical traditions, the religions and cultures have both liberation and domination elements. Even biblical Christianity has aspects that are not domination-free, especially viewed from the

experience of women.

I have gone to such a length to raise related issues because I feel syncretism is not a word of abuse, or negation, to frighten me from stating what I believe from what I know, i.e., that for many Africans and in many parts of Africa there is an African Christianity distinguishable from Christianity as practised elsewhere, including Roman Catholicism as practised in Bavaria. Those who carry the labels "Christian" and "Christianity" do so because we believe we are founded on Jesus the Christ, the One who came to promote a domination-free culture. If that culture is to take root in Africa, then the domination-free aspects of African culture should be stressed to reinforce the Jesus culture.

In my own country, Ghana, as elsewhere in Africa, one of the sources of inspiration for the institution of Churches by Africans is the cultural imperialism that was manifested in the Western Churches. Pobee reminds us the Prophet Jehu-Appiah, the founder of the Army of the Cross of Christ Church (1922) was "an active life-member of the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society which was founded in 1897 to defend the Gold Coast land. Thereafter it diverted its energies to cultural renaissance in reaction to the cultural imperialism which characterised the evangelistic philosophy of the time". Appiah began leadership in the Christian movement as a catechist of the Wesleyan Mission in the Gold Coast, now Ghana. In Nigeria, too, the African Church which grew out of the work of the Church Missionary Society among the Yoruba, had "the defence of culture" as one of its motivating factors. We do not need to multiply examples. What the founders of African instituted Churches aim at, that is, a Christianity/Churches "cultured" in the African context, is what this offering is all about.

Whose God has the power to heal, to stop the rain or bring the rain? Miracles helped the White Fathers and other Western Churches to gain acceptance in Africa. In traditional Africa there were and there are people with spiritual resources that enable them to call down the rain or stop it and to heal the sick. Among the AICs, several of them began when the power to heal and to perform miracles, including raising the dead, were demonstrated by the founders and their associates and are kept alive by the continued demonstration of power. The Yoruba words *Agbara* (power) and *Ogo* (glory) resound continuously through the ALADURA Churches. (Aladura — the prayerful ones — is how the AICs of Yoruban origin call themselves. It is used here as a generic designation). Power and profession of faith leading to following Jesus is biblical and so legitimates the stance of the AICs. The Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) articulates this in its Constitution and attributes all to Jesus:

I touched him and Jesus raised him up. What the native doctors failed to do Christ did. For I touched the deceased, and he came back to life, All in the name of Jesus Christ. In short, Jesus Christ my Saviour raised her,

Raised her from the dead. It is God the King who brings the dead to life again. When it was the wish of Jesus, He was brought back to life at midnight. Be steadfast in worship, worship will be *the* ultimate salvation of the world.

The genesis of the CCC, as of many other AICs, is based upon experiences of dreams, visions and spiritual manifestations that empowered the founders. Their gifts of healing and of counselling sustain the members. From the CCC's own Constitution and a speech delivered by Pastor Bada, the current head of the Church at the Ecumenical Centre, Geneva, (Sept. 1989), one learns that the Church was founded on 29 September 1947 "in deep mystery of the divine appearance, during prayer, of winged angels bathed in intense light, word came from God to the Founder, Papa Oshoffa". Oshoffa narrates how he began to institute the Church and his experience of the "feast of songs" staged by his first congregation made up of persons from all Christian denominations, traditionalists and Muslims.

The AICs are a challenge to mission-founded Churches in Africa — Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Protestant alike. They are also a challenge to African Traditional Religion and their success has influenced the methods being used in the "success Christianity" that is sweeping Africa. This Christianity capitalises on the seemingly endemic culture of poverty generated and manifested by the incursion of Western colonialism, economic hegemony and political manipulation of this era of globalisation. The "success Christianity" challenges the African sense of community and reinforces the individualism promoted by the mission-type Christianity. Economic salvation and soul-saving are both peddled as the concern of the individual. This Bonke-type Christianity peddles the belief in dreams, harmful spirits, and they counter all by the power of Christ and its demonstration through miraculous healing and prosperity. Jesus, I believe, would challenge this. Where the sense of community is concerned I suggest it is more Christian to be African.

We would do well under some circumstances to imitate birds as they take the fat stored in the tail to groom their feathers. The Ashante gold weight called *Sankofa* is a symbol of the need to use one's own resources, including those we have left behind. A critical appropriation of African culture will contribute to the evolution of an authentic African Christianity to enrich world Christianity as well as make Christ at home in Africa to the extent that Christ is at home where justice and compassion are integral to the community's culture.

Culture and Women

As I read for this paper, I kept asking myself, why do I cringe every time I read African self-identity or African authenticity? Then I realised that it is the male writers who make me cringe. Do they

include in the *Sankofa* philosophy (which I promote) the many religio-cultural beliefs that dehumanise women and subject them to men? When they acknowledge that the past is not all golden, are they saying that these "un-golden" aspects include the dehumanisation of women, and that these should be eliminated? When I presented E.B. Idowu as an academic theologian who advocated the "selfhood" of the Church in Africa, promoted the academic study of African Traditional Religion and attempted an *aggiornamento* of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, I did so knowing that, though he did not write about this, he saw the need for the participation of women in the theological enterprise and in the ministry of the Church, and took steps towards its realisation.

The male theologians of the 1960's and my contemporaries who see the need for *Sankofa* do not include in their critique and appropriation of culture a sensitivity to the fact that societies do not educate women and men in the same way. It has taken women to highlight this factor. Through the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle), women are meeting to study "African Women in Religion and Culture". We are developing what one of us, Dr Musimbi Kanyoro, calls a "cultural hermeneutic" by which we read the Bible, the Church, Christianity, Islam and African culture.

All the varieties of Christianity in Africa are riddled with androcentrism and misogyny. For women to be at home in Christianity, they suspend belief that it is androcracy that dominates them and not the will of God or their own special innate sinfulness arising out of being woman. On violence against women, Christianity in Africa is silent. But some Christian women together with women of other faiths have not been silent and their voices are being heard. It is so shockingly humiliating for a woman to be presented with pictures of what happens to some women who for whatever religio-cultural reasons have to have their genitals violently remodelled. At the same time it is liberating for an African women to discover resources in African cultures that are liberating and empowering. Christianity that ignores the oppression of women should not be made at home in Africa as Christ cannot be at home in a domination-riddled Christianity.

In Conclusion

The *Skenosis* of Christ in Africa is a challenge to all. It is first and foremost a theological challenge, because today the technological-scientific culture is universal. Everywhere there is a need to articulate human spirituality and to identify its source. If only it were possible for us to declare clearly what are the non-negotiables of Christianity and to agree on the marks of a Christian Church/community, we could move the discussion and the search beyond the racist-ethnocentric undercurrent that continue to make it necessary to ask the question: Can Africans

be Christian and remain African? The Bavarians have become Christians of a sort and have remained Bavarians.

All human cultures have elements that are incompatible with the religion of Jesus and the way of life He exemplified; the challenge of the Good News He brought and lived is to all human cultures. As theologians we are faced with the challenge of mission and cultures. Wherever the Church's attempts to highlight the love of God in Christ, which demands that:

- human beings respect the rest of creation,
- love one another, and
- deal with one another with justice and compassion, remain unfulfilled, there *Skenosis* has not been completed. There is nowhere in the human community where Christ is completely at home, and human beings at home with having Christ as neighbour, kin and friend. When we try to study Christianity and African cultures, we ought to do so aware that we are studying Christianity in human cultures.

The BBC programme on the ordination of thirty Church of England women deacons demonstrated the strength of the patriarchal culture on Christianity and its domination of women and what problems people face as they try to transform it. Part of the resistance to total conversion to the patriarchal culture's interpretation of Christianity is expressed in women's projection of feminist life-affirming, healing and caring culture. The feminist ideal of creating life-sustaining space for all is clearly in accordance with the religion and style of life of Jesus — clouded and veiled, as it is in the cultures of the Bible.

The challenge of Christian mission and human cultures is facing Churches everywhere. Is Christ at home in Bavaria? Is the story of Jesus known in the scientific-technological culture? On 3 April 1994, I read the following conversation in "Wizard of Id", a cartoon, in the *International Herald Tribune*. The scene is set in front of a church by a notice proclaiming "He is Risen". The conversation is as follows:

- Priest:* Did you enjoy the Easter service, Sire?
King: You call that an Easter service? Not one lousy mention of the Bunny.
Priest: There are no bunnies in Scripture, Sire.
King: Oh Yeah? Then where do Easter eggs come from?
Priest: Certainly you don't think bunnies lay eggs?
King: Are you implying they steal them from hen houses?
Priest: Beam me up, Lord.

My response to our cultural illiteracy is like that of the priest and for that reason I would like to end with words from John Pobee, "What we need is a liberation of minds that enables us to face today's realities with all the resources available to us. This applies as much to Africans as to all Africa's detractors, Africans and non-Africans equally, but especially the minds of the erstwhile colonisers and slave traders and their descendants". The

task of evolving an African Christianity is one that should not have any priorities. We are dealing with two living organisms — Christianity and culture. For both only an integrated approach will suffice.

There is only one religion called Christianity. It takes its origin from the Christ-Event. It has institutional expressions called Churches and they vary in liturgy, practices, affirmations and discipline. It is coloured by the cultures in which it lives. This showed up very early in its development — even at its inception, as demonstrated in the New Testament and in the earliest period when Western Christianity (Rome) could be distinguished from Eastern Christianity (Constantinople). To this day there are practices in the Armenian, Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches that are neither found in the Western (Catholic, Protestant, Anglican) Churches, nor even in the Eastern Orthodox Churches. These Churches have assimilated elements of the culture in which they live and of which they are a part and have contributed to moulding those cultures. The Russian language I am told is heavily influenced by the 1,000 years of Christianity and certainly the rich display of pomp and processions reflects the imperial tradition, just as the political nature of Vatican City with the Pope as Head of State, and the Church of England with the Monarch as Head of the Church, go back to the Constantinian understanding of the relation of religion, culture and the political State. Why, one should ask, should it be different for Africa?

True, the culturally coded Christianity that came to Africa from the West did clash with the cultures of Africa. Nothing new, only a further demonstration that the religion of Jesus does not come naturally to any human community and that its domination-free demands are resisted by all, beginning with the semitic culture from which it took its genesis. The success of Christianity (whatever its hue) in Africa is a continued challenge to the religio-cultures of Africa. The question, "Can there be an African Christianity?" is only meaningful to the extent that we have Armenian Christianity and Bavarian Christianity. There is African Christianity but as elsewhere in the world it is manifest as a unity in diversity. The question, "Can African cultures convey the Christian message?" is meaningless as we are witnesses to the wide variety of cultures that carry the Christian message. Why should there be a question about Africa?

Ref. *International Review of Mission*
 vol. LXXXIV, n. 332/333
 January/April 1995.

NEW HORIZONS FOR LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Elsa Tamaz

(Elsa Tamez, a Mexican Theologian, on a recent visit to Lima was interviewed by a journalist from Latin America Press).

What is the role of Liberation Theology in Latin America today?

As Liberation Theologians I think we need to recognise that the situation in Latin America has changed and we need to look for new approaches.

If liberation theology comes from the experience of God in the world and seeks to change this reality, then we need to analyse what is happening.

I think people are looking for a sign, as Jesus said, they are like sheep looking for a shepherd. They are looking for security. The people are afraid that change will take away the little bit of security that they have.

We can not say that people are free. There is repression and it is more intense today than in the past because there is no real alternative to the situation we are in today. This is leading us to look for new ways to explain what is happening because God always has new words for new situations. I think that liberation theology has a role to play today, but we have to reflect critically and re-launch it.

What do you mean by "re-launching" liberation theology?

We need to examine our theology and find those aspects that are permanent, such as the option for the poor. There are other aspects that we need to revise critically and openly. We can not enclose ourselves inside what we have already stated. We must review it and incorporate new elements.

You mentioned that it is time to look for new elements. Can you give us an example?

The indigenous community throughout the continent has met three times to discuss theology, which they call "Indian Theology". This theology takes elements from liberation theology but it has new elements that we did not incorporate. They have a non-Christian spiritual heritage, an ancestral spirituality that exists alongside their Christian spirituality. The indigenous Christians are looking for a way to synthesise their two histories of Salvation.

In addition to the indigenous people, who are some of these other new subjects?

Among these subjects are women who have developed an important voice. The challenge to liberation theology from women and from other groups, is to de-Westernise the Christian faith.

What do you mean by de-Westernise the Christian faith?

When women began to talk about God, that is, "do theology", they began coming up against a theological approach that was Western and patriarchal. Christian faith is patriarchal and, as such, we have to try to de-Westernise it.

There was an interesting process through which women discovered that they were not only oppressed because of class, or economic status but because they were women. They discovered that theology was very rigid and masculine, but they tried to see the feminine aspects. There are various theologians who are very advanced on this issue, such as Yvonne Gebara in Brazil, who is now proposing a new way of thinking and talking about the mystery (of Christ) because in the past it has always been masculine.

These challenges are making us think, but it is difficult because for so many years we have considered our theology to be dogma.

How does Liberation Theology see the phenomenon of Pentecostalism in Latin America?

This is a challenge that must be taken very seriously. Theologians, whether Catholic or Protestant, are prejudiced when we look at these churches because we are against them. We have passed judgement on them, saying that they are financed by the United States or that they represent only alienated people. But the truth is that these Churches are growing and more and more poor people are leaving the Catholic and Protestant Churches. They are leaving and they are finding something that they are missing in our Churches.

When women began to talk about God, that is, "do theology", they began coming up against a theological approach that was Western and patriarchal. Christian faith is patriarchal and, as such, we have to try to de-Westernise it.

Do you think these new Churches are related to the political crisis in the region?

I think so. In Central America, for example, these Churches spread most rapidly when the political and economic crisis were most profound.

I think people are looking for a sign, as Jesus said, they are like sheep looking for a shepherd. They are looking for security. In Peru, for example, the poor vote for Fujimori. In Mexico, they vote for the PRI. The people are afraid that change will take away the little bit of security that they have.

Has your faith changed in the last five years?

I have changed in that I am more flexible, more open to different ideas. I do not know if this has to do with the fact that I am older or because the social-economic changes have moved me to a new direction. I am looking to new things, which make me very happy. There are many challenges to theology and this will be its salvation. These challenges are leading us to examine our ideas in a profound manner.

Where do you see the Churches going in the final years of this century?

I do not think we can talk about five years ahead. If someone had told me five years ago the world would be the way it is today I would not have paid attention. I remember being at a meeting in Brazil in 1980 and someone mentioned the Pentecostals. No one paid any attention, the Sandinistas had just won in Nicaragua, it was our moment!

There is a gap between our theological thinking and our Church structures. If we continue with our rigid structures, and I am talking about the traditional Protestant Churches, we are going to disappear.

Ref.: *Ladoc*
vol. XXV
July/August, 1995.



COMING EVENTS

WORKING GROUPS

- | | | |
|-----------|----|--|
| September | 15 | World Debt - 15.30 hrs. at SEDOS |
| September | 18 | World Debt - 15.00 hrs. (French) SMA Generalate,
V. della Nocetta 111 |
| September | 27 | The Philippines - 15.30 hrs. at SEDOS |
| October | 19 | China Group - 16.00 hrs. at SEDOS |
-

October 13

BELJING:

WORLD CONFERENCE FOR WOMEN

One-Day Activity

Dr. Eleonora Barbieri Masini
Sr. Helen Mc Loughlin, RSCJ
Sr. Rose Fernando, FMM

Fratelli Cristiani, via Aurelia 476, 09.15 — 16.00 hrs (translations)
