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IN THIS ISSUE: The Sedos Seminar on November 2, 1987 had for its topic A LOOK BACK AT THE SYNOD ON THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD 20 YEARS AFTER VATICAN II. The present issue contains the talks given by the five speakers at the Seminar. Sister Helen McLaughlin Superior General of the Sacred Heart Sisters, President of SEDOS and President of the Union of Major Women Superiors was a representative of the Major Superiors of Women at the Synod. She gave an overview of the Synod, her impressions of the small group in which she took part and which reflected at length on the call to justice and how to live our faith in the context of the demands of justice and political involvement.

Father Anthony McSweeney, Superior General of the Priests of the Blessed Sacrament who attended the Synod as a Representative of the Major Superiors of Men also shared his experience of the Synod and the Synodal process. He focused specially on the 'laity' on the positive definition of the lay faithful, as the Synod came to designate them, on lay spirituality and lay involvement in the parish. Mgr. Jean Baptiste Kiedrebeogo of Burkina Faso shared with us his concerns about his diocese of Ouagadougou of which he is the Auxiliary Bishop. During the course of the Synod the President of Burkina Faso was assassinated. The Bishops talk made us aware of the concerns which Bishops brought with them from their different Local Churches throughout the world an important element in the context of the Synod.

Signora Peregrina Morgan di Coni from Peru reflected on the Synod

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from a Latin American perspective. She gave special attention to lay involvement in education and the formation of women.

Father Jacques Dupuis, SJ. considered the Synod from a theological aspect and situated it in the evolving status of the Synods of Bishops since they were initiated by Pope Paul VI. He too spoke of the dynamics of the Synod and on the inadequacy of the method of work used in the Synod.

All the speakers spoke with enthusiasm of the experience of coming together from such diverse backgrounds and situations. Once again, as at the Extrarodinary Synod of 1986 the world-wide character of the Church to-day was underlined by the variety of peoples and local Churches represented at the Synod. And many remarked on the profound influence exercised by the presence and participation of the lay faithful. Will they be present at future Synods as part of the people of God?

There were problems also. Many expectations were unfulfilled. In particular women were disappointed many seeing themselves the "losers" in this Synod. But Cardinal Hume had warned beforehand against expectations and saw the Synod as just one more step on the Church's pilgrim journey.

Does this Synod represent a retreat from the decision of the Extraordinary Synod of 1986 to speak in its own name? And does the method used hinder rather than facilitate the possibility of delicate issues being faced and enabled to come through the Synodal process? Time will tell.

We include also in this Issue an abbreviated article on contextualisation which we recommend to our readers.

"There is an offense in the foreignness of the culture we bring along with the gospel, which must be eliminated. But there is the offense of the gospel itself, which we dare not weaken. The gospel must be contextualized but it also must remain prophetic - standing in judgement on what is evil in all cultures as well as in all persons."

This quote from Paul Hiebert's article on Critical Contextualization sums up the tensions that are present in efforts to contextualize the gospel in the various cultures in which we are working. In addition to an invaluable historical analysis contextualization, the author presents practical steps in the process of inculturation which will be helpful for pastoral workers and missionaries and the people with whom they work. The full text is available at SEDOS Documentation Centre.

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**An Experience Of The Synod:  
A Representative Of The Major  
Superiors Of Women**

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Helen McLaughlin, RSCJ.

One of my lasting impressions of the Synod is and will be the experience of listening. So much was shared during the month that I believe it will take me at least another month to assimilate what I heard for there simply was not sufficient time to assimilate what took place. The aim of the Synod - as of all the Synods, was to keep alive the positive Conciliar experience of Vatican II. This aim was achieved for me by the experience of our coming together, the sharing and working together in an attempt to apply the Second Vatican Council teaching to the laity.

I see it as very important to situate the theme "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World 20 Years after Vatican II" precisely in relation to Vatican II. But did we really deepen the insights of Vatican II? Many of these insights were developed and implemented during the Council and in the immediate aftermath. Then came the loss of momentum, the quieter period. What of this Synod? The mystery of the Church as it appeared in Vatican II cannot be understood/attained and lived without the full acceptance of *Lumen Gentium*. But it is in the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* that the lay faithful find an authentic teaching of their place in the Church and world and how they are helped to live up to the challenges of modern civilisation in areas of culture, politics, economy, peace etc. Let me now describe the experience of this Synod in 4 phases.

An Introductory Phase. Three sessions were dedicated to what had taken place since the last ordinary Synod on Reconciliation and Penance. The preparation for this Synod was described and it became evident that this had been carried out in greater detail and with considerably more participation than for previous Synods. In many countries and Dioceses the lay faithful had really been consulted at various levels: diocesan, parish and national, and through special interest groups. But then there are 'laity' and 'laity'. Perhaps those consulted were those who were already actively participating in Church matters, those who were more involved, and consequently more articulate. What of the lay people whom we describe as "Sunday Massgoers" - the masses. Was their voice heard?

Some preparations were admirable as for example, the widespread consultation with lay people carried out by the Conference of Bishops of the USA. Their description of the number of meetings held to discern the hopes and desires of lay people throughout the USA was impressive. There were many such examples. But the absence of preparation was notable in other dioceses and this was felt in their contribution during the Synodal process.

1st Phase: Then began the First Phase of the Synod which lasted until 13th October. This consisted of general meetings in the Aula when speeches of 8 minutes could be made. Many spoke. In some cases Bishops Conferences grouped their interventions so that a particular Conference could make, in fact, an intervention lasting 16 or 24 minutes. Bishops, concerned with the sometimes dramatic events in their home dioceses, their problems of poverty, suffering, at times even coups or threats of coups, described their preparation for the Synod in the context of these difficulties tending to speak at length of their preoccupations. Although inevitably repetitive this was good as it revealed the universality and diversity of the Church, the complexity of cultures and the very great variety of situations and circumstances represented among us.

2nd Phase. This was the richest for me. The Synodal participants were divided into 12 groups (circuli minores). Our group which was French speaking, was made up of 26 members - ten from Africa one from Latin America, one from North America and others from Europe. There was no representative from Asia. Five were lay people, two were theologians. In this group we experienced on the part of the Bishops a real desire to listen. We were really a united group and our contributions as auditors and laity were heard. We were united and we were trusted. We had the feeling we could enter into the discussion whenever we wanted. There were common problems and we felt a shared responsibility to answer the questions given to us. I experienced here an affirmation of the lay faithful and of myself as a woman religious.

However, the working papers for the groups were in Latin! This was one of the difficult aspects of the Synod. Papers continued to be distributed in Latin and the President continued to state that Latin was the official language - which did not seem to be heeded by many speakers. Cardinals and Bishops continued to speak in their vernaculars - which was a great help to the laity.

The questions proposed by the Synod Secretariat for discussion in groups included the definition of laity, charisms in the Church, the parish, 'movements' in the Church, youth, family, formation, inculturation and evangelization, political involvement, the place of women, ministries....

3rd Phase The groups were supposed to work towards drawing up a series of Propositions for the Pope. Each group presented a synthesis of its discussions. Ours presented 30 pages! Other groups prioritised their findings more rigidly some presenting just five propositions. There were 12 group reports. The complexity of arriving at a reasonable synthesis of this material will be readily understood by those of us who have taken part in general chapters. What made this task quite impossible was the short amount of time allocated for making this synthesis. The secretaries of the groups were given only four hours to work with the Special Secretariat - Mgr. Eyt, Auxiliary Bishop of Bordeaux, Marie Garcia de Sales and Jean Louis Dherse together with the theological experts. In fact the work went on till 4.30 a.m. the following morning and other secretaries worked until 6.30 a.m. to type the text.

Ours was not the only group to be very disappointed at the Synthesis which emerged. We felt that the key ideas from our groups had been watered down if they had not entirely disappeared.

We then set to work again on this synthesis of propositions in an attempt to emphasize anew those elements we thought were important by introducing amendments. The Secretaries were given 1 1/2 days for this second version of the propositions. The final propositions could only be voted on by the Synodal members. They could reject the propositions or approve them and propose modi - amendments. The final text to be presented to the Holy Father would be reworked and finalised in the light of this vote.

With the completion of this work the Synod then voted for the 12 members of the Council for the forthcoming Synod, 3 from each continent. The Holy Father then nominated a further three members after he had seen the composition of the elected Council.

4th Phase A "Message from the Synod" was then drawn up by a group of synodal members drawn from different continents and language groups.

A Note on the Methodology: When I compare our own General Chapter of about 100 members to the complexity of the Synod - 250 members from all parts of the world - I believe it was expecting too much to believe that the Synod could successfully deal with such an extremely broad agenda in such a short time. Furthermore, in my opinion the methodology used did not help. Ideas were presented in the Aula. Because the procedures did not allow for reactions and discussion in the Aula we did not know if these were the ideas of only one Bishop nor how many agreed with them. The only time there was real freedom to speak and react was in the small groups.

To have expected the Secretaries to complete their task of synthesizing in a period of four hours was inhuman. Only four or five

persons continued with the work until 4.30 a.m. so there is a legitimate question as to whose ideas prevailed at the end and found their way into the Synthesis. The Report/Synthesis came back in Latin! We as auditors did not get a copy so we had to follow the discussion without a text before us. The Statutes of the Synod did not provide for the possibility of the auditors receiving the text so it was not a lack of confidence in the auditors. One of the Bishops expressed the desire (not only his) that the auditors, who had participated fully in the groups and contributed so much, be given a copy. The second time we were given them as he requested. This amended version was also in Latin. Voting on this was Yes, No, or Yes with amendments. A fourth possibility was added - Abstention. We had to give back the documents at the end of that session. The Bishops could keep them overnight and return them the following day. I concede that it was difficult to arrive at propositions from all this complex material but it is also difficult to see how the methodology which was used helped the process.

The Horizontal Dimension: Lastly came the concluding Mass - a simple celebration in St. Peter's followed by a meal to which all the participants were invited and which was a real agapé. The Holy Father spoke inpromptu from the heart, without notes. He had meditated much, he said, on the experience of the Synod and as a result was more aware of the need to emphasize the horizontal dimension of shared responsibility in the Church in addition to the vertical. "Words, words, words had been the experience of the past month", he said, "now we are called to deeds, now is the time for action".

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**An Experience of the Synod:  
A Representative of the Major  
Superiors of Men**

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Anthony Mc Sweeny, SSS

Expectations: As we all know the synodal process is still a developing one. I don't think the synodal machinery is running satisfactorily yet since we are moving from an absolutist ecclesiology as well as a vertical and centralized experience of authority to one of "communion" and "people of God". I think it will take us quite a while to mould the right process.

Some synods are a success and some simply have no impact. The synod on Justice and the one on Evangelization had an impact. The process was an important aspect of this impact. Naturally, we all work from political models and this conditions our expectations regarding process and outcome. However, the synod does not exactly fit any current political models.

Significant Changes: This is only the second synod that I have attended but already I can see significant changes between this synod and the former one I attended. This time the bishops spoke more in terms of "what I am hearing from my people". The bishops were not talking about what they heard only from the clergy in the diocese or from other bishops but what they are hearing from their people. But now we must ask: "How are they hearing those people?" and "which people are they hearing?"

LAY PARTICIPATION

This was the most significant aspect of the synod. It is something qualitatively new. There were a significant number of lay people 60 or so-and 230 synodal members. They were called lay auditors or hearers but they were fortunately very vocal hearers.

In the Assembly: The lay auditors were present at all sessions and at critical moments. During the synod 18 lay auditors-9 women and 9 men - addressed the Assembly and spoke on such issues as Catholic Action, the parish, CEBs, movements etc. The interventions of the lay participants were placed among those of the bishops and thus there was a kind of dialogue going on.

Frankness was a particularly refreshing feature of lay participation. Their language was freer, less hampered by certain

clerical prudences. For example, one talked about the difficulty of defending the Vatican when there was so little transparency in Vatican finances.

In Language Groups: The lay auditors participated fully in the language groups which comprised the second phase of the synod. In my group we had 21 synodal members, that is, 20 bishops and myself, 8 lay persons of whom 5 were men and three were women and 2 theologians, one of whom was a woman. I considered it very important that there were women theologians and the one in our group was particularly good.

The lay participants in my group were given complete freedom to express their point of view in the group. In fact, the leader of our group invited the lay members to vote with us. When it was a touchy issue we divided the vote. Synod members voted first and then the lay auditors. We were able to see what their thinking was on an issue even if their vote wasn't officially countable.

#### ISSUES RAISED AT THE SYNOD

The Real World: We found that the lay auditors called us back again and again to the real world out there. Sometimes they were quite impassioned with us when we got carried away with questions of defining ministries and so forth. They reminded us there is a big world out there and that there were real problems that they were coping with.

Spirituality: There was a very heavy insistence on their part on spirituality. A number of the lay auditors stressed the importance of spirituality in order that they could perform their mission in the fields of politics, economy, family life etc. They felt the need of a strong spirituality so that their witness in the society would really flow from the Gospel. There was also a stress on the historical dimension of spirituality and the importance of including the Church's social teaching as an integral part of spiritual formation i.e. the concern for the poor, the need to build the society of justice and concern. This issue emerged from a real conviction.

Spirituality and Sexuality: There was a stress in dealing with the whole of experience in spirituality - a wholistic incarnational experience. Here the married couples were very important. One of the women auditors from Australia, spoke about the sexual experience of marriage and sexual intimacy as a key element of the knowledge of God and therefore a fundamental dimension of their spirituality. I found it new and fresh that a married woman was telling the synod of bishops what their experience was. Even there we were constantly confronting the clerical tendency to water-down things. That expression that got into the document became "A spirituality that deals with marriage, also the sexual part". It got reduced

and reduced but at least that dimension remained.

The Sacrament of Marriage: Certain significant phrases would not have appeared in the final Message except for the insistence of the lay auditors. In the section regarding the family, the lay auditors really lobbied the synod members because the sacrament of marriage had not been mentioned in the draft of the Message. It was put in the final Message. It's significant that we clerics can talk about lay people and not mention the sacrament of marriage. In fact, it came up again and again that we clerics "know about" marriage - we perform marriages, we prepare people for marriage and we try to deal with marriage breakups. The lay auditors, however, were bringing up marital issues they experience day by day.

Community Dimension of Parish Experience: The synod recommended "to favour and foster the development of community experiences in parishes." The preparatory document said that "many people feel the need for closer bonds and sharing" and we felt that this statement was not strong enough and so we went a step further. There was a strong stress on fostering small communities, basic communities, living Christian Communities of different kinds. The parish has a missionary thrust - to announce the gospel to non-believers and to the baptized who have not fully grasped what their baptism means. Here there was a recommendation that we institute processes of post-baptism catechesis on the model of the catechumenate. This is nothing new but if we took some of these priorities seriously we'd really have to change a lot of things in our parishes. The stress on parish was important because it was dealing with the mass of believers and not simply the elitest ones in movements and associations.

Movements and Associations: This issue was felt much more strongly in the Latin world i.e. Italy, Spain, South America and to a certain degree in France. In my group we didn't even discuss it. It just wasn't known to be a problem, whereas it is passionately debated here in Italy.

Assimilating Vatican II: We're not going to have lots of new ideas at synods. Synods do not break ground. Often enough I think that synods are a measure of how we are assimilating Vatican II. For example, we saw that in the extraordinary synod a fundamental concept of Vatican II "the People of God" was in some way not being received. Some people were complaining that the concept "People of God" was being manipulated. Of course, the concept first appears in Vatican II. For example, we saw that in the extraordinary synod a fundamental concept of Vatican II "the People of God" was in some way not being received. Some people were complaining that the concept "People of God" was being manipulated.

The Women's Issue: In this Synod there was timidity and fear of the women's issue. The first round of proposals began with a presentation of the problems in society amongst which the women's issue was emerging - you began to feel that you were being prepared to be wary. In fact, in my group we found a perspective in Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*. It stated that women's sense of their dignity and their participation in public life was "one of the signs of our times". We found again and again that when an expression was considered a bit too dangerous or strong at this synod, a comparison with statements from Vatican II on the same issue proved the Vatican II statements and those of John XXIII and Paul VI to be better and far stronger.

A Learning Process: The difficult process of assimilating and receiving Vatican II is going on and the synod is a way of bringing to the surface some of our hesitancy. What matters from the synod is what we learn from the process. Not only this, of course, the synod must change something in the life of the Church. But in my group I found that there was a learning process going on when for example, someone could say that this is what Vatican II is saying about women or another issue and when we could all acknowledge that Vatican II was saying stronger things than we are saying now.

#### MAJOR WORLD PROBLEMS

Present Issues: Political (freedom).  
Economic (debt, poverty)  
Social (marginalization)

Religious Issues: Unbelief, atheism, mass-media culture

Ethical Issues: Scientific research and its technical applications.

Emerging Issues: Ecology (we are not yet dealing with this issue in a full enough way).  
Non violence (This issue came out of different experiences i.e. Bangladesh, Northern Ireland and South Africa. The emphasis was on a positive combative non-violence. An effort to find strategies to promote non-violent change that brings out the originality of the Christian contribution).

### CONCLUSION

Methodology: There was a problem of methodology. The method is unsatisfactory. Some of the burning issues were not fully faced because of certain dynamics at work. At this synod the women's issue did tend to get watered - down and wasn't really faced.

On the positive side, the experience of ecclesial communion was rich and fundamental especially now that the bishops' conferences are sending different men to each synod.

The Synod gave a deeper, more nuanced vision of the Church in its complex global presence.

Issues: Issues are appearing when they are urgent even if they don't get fully faced for a time. The women's issue would be one of those that is just going to keep coming up. Thirty-two interventions focused on this issue in the General Assembly. That's quite a lot and the interventions came from different continents. One participant mentioned that, "This is not just a North American issue."

Grassroots Participation: We are still not really listening to the grassroots to bring its voice through all the channels. The parish has a key role to play and perhaps there is a lack there because often parishes don't have participative processes that can really reflect the reality of the grassroots.

Clericalism: We still have the problem of clericalism. In some parts of the world, lay participation is highly developed while in other parts it is virtually non-existent. Here we confront the very big problem of clericalism in the Church.

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## L'Eglise au Burkina-Faso A L'Heure Du Synode: Angoisse et Esperance

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Au moment même où le Synode s'acheminait sereinement vers le sommet de sa réflexion et de son expérience vivante de communion, le Burkina Faso (anciennement la Haute-Volta) offrait au monde le douloureux spectacle de sang et de division. Le Président Sankara, qui dirigeait le Burkina Faso ("Pays des hommes libres et intègres") depuis le 4 août 1983, a été tué, avec onze autres personnes, lors d'un autre coup d'état, le jeudi 15 octobre 1987. L'auteur du putsch, Blaise Compaoré, était un ami, "un frère" du président défunt.

J'ai donc vécu le Synode comme un temps d'angoisse, à la fois pour mon pays et pour l'Eglise qui est au Burkina. Cependant, l'expérience d'une communion effective et affective vécue dans ce Synode a suscité en moi une profonde espérance quant à l'avenir de notre Eglise et de notre pays tout entier.

Pour mieux situer les responsabilités des laïcs au sein de notre Eglise et dans notre pays, puisque c'est le thème du Synode, je retiendrai quelques points qui me paraissent les plus significatifs des préoccupations actuelles des chrétiens laïcs face aux défis lancés par la situation de notre pays.

### 1) Une Eglise dans une société multiforme

Sur les huit millions d'habitants que compte le Burkina, on dénombre :

a) Plus de soixante ethnies différentes d'importance numérique inégale. Le dernier recensement, qui a eu lieu en 1986, a consciemment négligé ce paramètre, dans le but de sauvegarder, croit-on savoir, la cohésion nationale. Il en a été de même des groupes religieux, dont les données statistiques remontent aux années 1960.

### b) Du point de vue religieux, on estime donc :

- 57% de pratiquants des religions traditionnelles
- 30 à 32% de musulmans
- 10 à 12% de catholiques
- 2% environ de protestants.

Les premiers heurts de la mission l'ont été avec l'administration coloniale et la société traditionnelle en particulier. Aussi les missionnaires dès le départ ont particulièrement soigné leurs relations avec les sociétés de culture traditionnelle, étudiant la mentalité, les us et les coutumes, et

s'y insérant avec plus ou moins de bonheur. De ce point de vue on peut affirmer que les conflits sont restés très limités (au moins extérieurement). Le plus gros obstacle fut et reste, dans plusieurs ethnies, le combat pour la libération matrimoniale de la jeune fille. En s'attaquant au système matrimonial, c'est toute la société qui est attaquée dans son fondement. Cela, les anciens l'ont compris. La question de la femme se pose à nos communautés non en termes de droits individuels mais en terme de libération collective à travers un changement de structures sociales et de mentalité.

- Avec l'Islam, les missionnaires avaient trouvé une religion relativement tolérante au niveau de la masse de ses fidèles. Quelques responsables de confréries ont montré une hostilité, mais l'on peut dire que dans l'ensemble la coexistence a souvent été pacifique, dans une même famille, entre musulmans, catholiques et pratiquants des religions traditionnelles. Cependant la combativité musulmane est montée d'un cran depuis quelques années, avec l'envoi d'émissaires de l'organisation de la Conférence islamique (OCI).

- Les relations ont été autrement plus agitées avec la mission américaine protestante. Les dénigrement mutuels étaient monnaie courante et le fait de vouloir recruter de préférence dans la communauté catholique n'a pas facilité les choses. Aujourd'hui on observe un esprit oecuménique, surtout chez les pasteurs africains.

### c) Du point de vue classes sociales :

L'immense majorité de la population est constituée par la masse paysanne (85%). Les salariés ne représentent que 2% de la population active, au sein de laquelle se détache une petite élite intellectuelle occidentalisée, à majorité chrétienne. Mais cette élite prend ses distances avec la communauté chrétienne et c'est dans ce milieu qu'on trouve la plus grande proportion de non-pratiquants. Cela peut s'expliquer par l'influence des idéologies matérialistes rencontrées à l'école, mais aussi par le sentiment que l'Eglise est de tous les combats d'arrière-garde : monarchie, extrême-droite, apartheid, impérialisme, etc.

### 2) Une Eglise en situation de révolution

Les coups de tonnerre éclatent rarement sous un ciel bleu. Il y a toujours quelques nuages... Bien des nuages s'étaient accumulés à l'horizon de notre histoire avant que ne retentisse le cri de la révolution : "La Patrie ou la mort, nous vaincrons !"

Les 25 premières années de l'indépendance formelle ont été en fait terriblement agitées dans notre pays comme dans bien d'autres. En vingt-cinq

ans la Haute-Volta a totalisé trois républiques, quatre régimes militaires, marqué chacun par un coup d'état.

C'est dans ce contexte de changements, de tâtonnements, que s'est préparée la révolution dans laquelle vit notre pays depuis le 4 août 1983. Dès les premiers instants du coup d'état, la voix du Capitaine Thomas SANKARA annonçait la création d'un Conseil National de la Révolution (C.N.R.), et appelait la population à créer des Comités de Défense de la Révolution (C.D.R.). Dès ce moment, les discours enflammés devenaient la règle. Des mesures énergiques furent prises contre "les ennemis du peuple". Signalons le licenciement de plus d'un millier d'instituteurs grévistes. Quelques exécutions en 1983 et en 1984 susciteront une vive émotion parmi la population.

Cependant, tout n'est pas négatif : bien des choses furent réalisées positivement : la baisse des prix des loyers, la lutte contre la corruption, l'effort pour l'auto-suffisance alimentaire, etc. Et pourtant, malgré ces acquis et une unité de façade, on entrevoyait de profondes dissensions entre les groupes au pouvoir : Regroupement des Officiers Communistes (R.O.C.), Parti Africain de l'Indépendance (P.A.I.), l'Union de Lutte Communiste (U.L.C.).

### 3) Les interrogations des chrétiens laïcs

Dans les Actes des Apôtres il est dit qu'après avoir entendu le discours de Pierre, le jour de la Pentecôte, les auditeurs "eurent le coeur transpercé et ils demandèrent à Pierre et aux Apôtres : Frères, que devons-nous faire?" (Ac. 2, 37)

Oui, que devons-nous faire? N'est-ce pas la même question qui se répète de génération en génération lorsque la Parole de Dieu atteint une communauté dans la profondeur de son existence ? C'est bien cette même question de foi et d'espérance que les fidèles laïcs nous posent, à nous Evêques, successeurs des Apôtres dans l'Eglise au Burkina.

"Chacun d'entre nous s'interroge et interroge l'Episcopat du Burkina. Chaque chrétien du Burkina s'est senti désemparé devant les transformations radicales qui s'opèrent au Burkina avec l'avènement de la Révolution. Quelle appréciation porter, quelle attitude tenir ? C'est pourquoi lors de certains événements dramatiques qui se sont produits au Burkina Faso, les chrétiens s'attendaient à entendre la voix des pasteurs de l'Eglise, pour éclairer leurs consciences."

C'est en ces termes directs que se sont exprimés les membres du Conseil National des Laïcs (C.N.L.) lors d'une rencontre d'échange avec la conférence épiscopale au mois de juin dernier.

#### 4) L'option fondamentale des Evêques pour une Eglise-Famille

A tous ceux qui leur posaient la question : "Que devons-nous faire?", Pierre et les Apôtres répondaient "Repentez-vous et que chacun de vous se fasse baptiser au nom de Jésus-Christ" (Ac. 2,38).

A la suite des Apôtres, notre réponse a été et sera toujours un appel à une conversion profonde à Jésus-Christ et dans une vision toujours renouvelée de l'Eglise. C'est pourquoi il y a une dizaine d'année, à l'occasion du 75e anniversaire de l'évangélisation de la Haute-Volta d'alors (1975), les Evêques invitaient tout le Peuple de Dieu :

- à s'orienter "vers un changement d'esprit devenu nécessaire" et à imprimer à la pastorale de l'évangélisation un souffle nouveau;

- à passer d'une Eglise de mode clérical à une communauté chrétienne au sein de laquelle le laïc formé prend ses responsabilités matérielles, spirituelles et apostoliques en collaboration avec le clergé, les religieux et les religieuses.

Deux ans plus tard (avril 1977) toutes ces orientations devaient prendre corps et faire l'objet d'un document-clé intitulé : "Options fondamentales pour un nouveau départ". Dans ce document, avec tout le peuple de Dieu, les Evêques s'engageaient à bâtir une "Eglise-Famille de Dieu" : une Eglise qui veut que tous et chacun de ses fils soient solidaires, responsables et unis, pour son devenir et son avenir.

En entendant cette parole, les fidèles de notre Eglise "eurent le coeur transpercé". Ils eurent le coeur transpercé, non seulement d'émotion, mais d'attente profonde et de foi parce que cette parole les rejoignait dans une expérience vitale, celle de la vie familiale. Ils découvraient en même temps, avec émerveillement, que Dieu lui-même est une Famille. Oui, Dieu est seul, mais Dieu n'est pas un solitaire, Il est Famille : Père, Fils, Esprit-Saint. Par le baptême Dieu nous fait partager sa vie de famille dans l'Eglise. N'est-ce pas ce que le Concile a voulu nous dire en parlant d'Eglise-Communion ?

Dans cette perspective d'Eglise-Famille, la parole des Evêques devait nécessairement revêtir une autre forme que par le passé.

Depuis toujours et particulièrement depuis l'année de l'indépendance formelle en 1960, les Evêques n'ont cessé de faire entendre leur voix, soit individuellement, soit collectivement, devant les circonstances les plus marquantes de la vie nationale. Leur dernier message date du mois d'avril 1983, suite au coup d'état de l'année 1982. Depuis lors, ils semblaient se retirer dans un mutisme absolu. Par peur ? par calcul politique ? Non,

rien de tout cela, mais tout simplement pour qu'ensemble, dans la réflexion et la prière, l'Eglise-Famille toute entière (clercs - laïcs) affronte le défi lancé à tout notre peuple : bâtir un Burkina Faso, c'est-à-dire un pays d'hommes libres et intègres.

C'est un véritable défi, quand on voit tout ce qui peut entraver notre liberté, notre dignité et notre unité.

#### 5) Les espérances suscitées par le Synode

Il faut bien le reconnaître, ce Synode n'apporte pas de réponse immédiate à la question que se posent souvent les laïcs : "Que devons-nous... ?" Un mois durant, les évêques se sont mis à l'écoute de toutes les interrogations du peuple chrétien, à la mesure de leur cœur de Pasteurs. Avec toute la sollicitude pastorale dont ils sont capables, ils ont essayé d'analyser, de définir, de préciser les choses, et d'entrevoir certaines solutions. Mais que tout cela semble encore loin de la réalité !

Sans apporter un savoir-faire immédiatement applicable, ce Synode nous a introduit dans un savoir-être par lequel nous retrouvons ce que nous sommes en réalité : une famille participant à la vie de la Famille de Dieu. Evêques, laïcs, tous réunis autour du Pape, nous avons durant un mois fait l'expérience d'une vie familiale en Dieu. Ensemble, nous avons partagé les angoisses et les espérances de nos Eglises, ensemble nous avons été "assidus à l'enseignement des apôtres et à la communion fraternelle, à la fraction du pain et à la prière" (Ac 2,42). En toute vérité les Evêques pouvaient dire aux laïcs, à la suite de St Augustin : "Avec vous nous sommes chrétiens, pour vous nous sommes évêques." Cependant, comme dirait Tertullien : "On ne naît pas chrétien, on le devient." C'est peut-être ce que le Synode nous aura appris le plus : à devenir tous chrétiens et à le devenir sans cesse.

Mgr Jean-Baptiste KIEDREBEOGO

Evêque auxiliaire de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

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## Looking At The Synod in Retrospect

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Peregrina Morgan de Coni

Sisters and Brothers,

I am grateful to SEDOS for the opportunity to comment for the first time on the recently concluded Synod on The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World. It is a special thanks, because I am able to share this unique experience with those who have inspired the meaning of my life. I mean that it is to religious, women and men, to whom I owe my formation, and whom I find accompaniment in my life and in my work.

The perspectives that I offer are, first of all, those of a Latin American woman, a Peruvian, who participated in the Synod as someone from this precise background. My perspective is also that of an educator who, together with other lay persons, has assisted in and contributed to bringing about a different way of looking at women. I also believe in the necessity of reflecting on the education of women so that it will be consistent with the new vision of women that is emerging.

The Second Vatican Council: This Synod on the Laity took the Second Vatican Council as a point of reference.

"In trying to face up to these challenges since Vatican II and the Medellin Conference, the Church in Latin America had overall positive experiences and taken steps forward. It has also encountered difficulties and crises." (Puebla 779) "Some crises have naturally affected the Latin American laity, particularly the organized laity. They have suffered from conflict-ridden assaults, not only from society itself (repression by groups with power), but also from a forceful process of ideologization and from distrust among themselves and from institutions to which they belong. This has even gone as far as either painful ruptures between the lay movements themselves, or between them and their pastors." (Puebla 780)

The Puebla Conference: The Puebla Conference points out to the laity "their identity as human beings in the Church in the midst of the world, and human beings of the world living within the Church." (Puebla 786) It also points to the participation of the laity in the world of temporal realities; in politics; in defending

the dignity of human beings and their inalienable rights; in protecting those who are weakest and most in need; in fashioning peace freedom and justice, and in creating more just and communal structures. (Puebla 790-793).

The Synod, during its entire process: in the presentations of the Synodal Fathers, in the participation of lay faithful, in the work of the small groups, in the Final Proposals and in the Message, brings to the Church and to the lay faithful of Latin America in a special way, elements which will allow them to continue going forward.

#### LAY FAITHFUL IN LATIN AMERICA

It is helpful to quote some of these elements, in order to show how they affect the Latin American church:

- The Call to Holiness, makes clear that this is not possible without a commitment to justice, without solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, and that the model of holiness for the lay faithful must incorporate in it the social dimension of the transformation of the world according to the plan of God. (Message 4).
- The Help of the Holy Spirit, is necessary for the discernment of movements and charisms and for their harmonious integration in the local church. (Message, 5)
- Ministries and Services, which include the right of the lay faithful to work with the clergy, with religious women and men, in the new evangelization. (Message, 6)
- The Family, based on the sacrament of marriage, is the privileged place of human formation and of growth in faith. (Message, 7)
- Youth, so numerous in Latin America, is the strength of the Church. They will require special pastoral care. (Message, 8)
- Women, who by tradition have been marginalized in Latin America, are emerging and assuming more active roles in the society and in the Church. The Church reaffirms the word of God in presenting the equal dignity of women and of men. Mary is presented as the archetype of the dignity of women, and as an unequalled model of participation in the work of salvation. (message, 9)
- The Parish is the ordinary place for the gathering of the faithful. It is the center of the Basic Ecclesial Communities and of the groups and communities which give it its dynamism. (Message, 10) In Latin America, the emergence of popular churches is a reality. Thus it is necessary to integrate them into the pastoral of the whole diocese where they will find a framework for their activity.

- Socio-Political Involvement entails a well thought-out formation that is proportionate to present and future responsibilities. Coherence between faith and life must be a part of the life of the faithful who operate in the political sphere. (Message, 11) Latin America needs lay people at the highest levels of decision making: in the formation of politicians, in lawmaking, in development planning, in education, in science and technology, in culture and in the means of social communications.
- Formation. The spirituality of the laity and their participation in the new evangelization requires an integral formation. (Message, 12) The formation of the laity in Latin America is a task to be undertaken jointly by the family, the parish, the Basic Communities, the school, the means of communication. Catholic education has a wider scope than that of the schools run by religious women and men. Lay faithful must have professional competence so that they may participate in the formation of educational policies and curriculum which are value-oriented and which, without ignoring cognitive aspects of learning, are oriented towards solidarity, justice and peace.
- Peace. The synod on different occasions and by underlining certain aspects, took a stand on peace. Latin America is devastated by violence: structural violence, brought about by the situation of poverty; terrorism, prompted by ideologies; violence, due to fratricidal wars which escalate into unending armed conflict. In face of this situation, the lay faithful of Latin America work to build up a Culture of Peace. This is a concept in opposition to the Culture of Violence which dwells in the hearts of people and which runs rampant in today's world. The poor, women and youth, those who are the most numerous in Latin America - demand that peace be strengthened.
- Up to this point, I have commented on the Synod as seen from Latin America. The second theme taken up by the Synod was women and their education.

#### WOMEN

The interventions on women presented at the Synod expressed a similar point of view. They referred to women's being rather than their doing. This idea defines a new line to be followed with regard to the education of women. The profile of women which is being drawn signifies balance, with regard to the existing polarization that exists. On one side, the traditional position of woman: submissive, in the shadows, relegated to the less relevant tasks and marginalized with regard to her rights. On the other side, there is the woman who competes with men in order to occupy the same space, who tries to equip herself as well as possible and to be like them.

At the Synod the position of men and women was discussed and the following emerged: the reaffirmation of the equal dignity of both; the disapproval of the discrimination which still exists in different forms; the acknowledgement of the right of women to fulfill their mission in the Church and in the World.

The question is, then how to educate women and men so as to reflect their equal dignity.

It is at this point that the process of reflexion begins for all, especially for women and men religious and for lay faithful.

For women and men religious, especially for those engaged in education.

For lay faithful especially for parents and for educators.

For me, lay women, mother, educator. From my point of view it is important to ask the following questions:

- What is this profile of women and men that is being proposed by the Church?
- How can these profiles be integrated into an educational project?
- Regarding the generalized profiles, how can they be translated into ideas for curriculum, and how can this curriculum be developed in a gradual and reverential way within the educational system?
- How can we take up the idea of co-education? What does research tell us about it?
- How do we form women and men for participation in public and political spheres?
- How do we educate parents?
- How can we influence the mass media?
- How can we present Mary as a model for all youth?

I must end, accepting the fact that it is easier to formulate questions than to give the right answers. I am only sure of one thing: that I have found in this Synod a strong motivation for a personal commitment and to engage others in this challenge.

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## The Synod On The Laity A Theological Perspective

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Jacques Dupuis, SJ.

I was present at the Synod as an interpreter and theological adviser to the Asian Bishops because of my thirty-five years in India.

A Special Tone: One of the most positive elements of the Synod was the ecclesial experience and exchange of opinions between bishops. The month-long meeting was an occasion for the bishops from different continents to broaden their perspective and their approach to problems. The presence of the lay people gave a special tone to this Synod by their sincerity and their courage in speaking out. There was a friendly relaxed atmosphere especially in the small groups.

Setback: The 210 interventions in the first part of the Synod were very rich in suggestions but as often happens in synods, there was a setback as the synod moved into the second part. Why does this setback occur and thus the outcome of the synod not correspond to the expectation created before and in the early stage of the synod? The widespread consultation done by so many bishops' conferences before the synod as well as the enormous amount of theological literature generated in preparation for it heightened expectations among all those interested in the synod. The perspective and preoccupations of participants from the so-called Third World were not adequately listened to and were not adequately reflected in the concrete results.

Dynamics of the Synod and Method of Work: There is a problem about the status of the synod of Bishops. In reality, since its initiation by Paul VI, the Synod is only consultative. However, even with this status, the 1971 Synod succeeded in publishing two substantial documents in its own name with the approbation of the Holy Father. Also the Extraordinary Synod on Vatican II produced its own final document. The other synods made only recommendations or proposals to the Holy Father. Based on these the Holy Father later wrote an Apostolic Exhortation.

This particular Synod on the Laity was also geared from the beginning to submitting propositions (sub secreto) to the pope who would later write an Apostolic Exhortation on the subject. But the question must be asked: "Is there a will to allow the Synod to speak in its own name, OR is there rather a will to ensure the contrary"? The will was clearly not there in the case of this particular Synod.

At one stage of the Synodal proceedings the President announced that all the Chairmen of the Working Groups had agreed to this pro-

cedure, but this finding does not appear in any of the Group Reports. Later it was stated that all the Groups had agreed to this procedure.

#### THE INADEQUACY OF THE METHOD OF WORK

1. One may query whether the first report to the Synod adequately represented the communications of the Episcopal Conferences to the Synod since these remained unpublished.
2. The second report to the Synod, made after the approximately 200 eight-minute speeches in the Aula, did not live up to the richness of these speeches. The questions proposed in the report for discussion in the Groups were very theoretical and avoided the delicate issues which had emerged.
3. The Assembly expressed dissatisfaction with the synthesis which was made by the Secretariate following this discussion as many of the salient points made in the Groups did not appear in the synthesis.
4. There was a second period of discussions as a result of which each Group had to establish a set of propositions. These were never communicated to the Assembly notwithstanding four or five interventions questioning this procedure. The questions were not answered.
5. Instead the 'elenchus unicus' of propositions to be submitted to the Holy Father was drawn up by the special Secretary with his helpers and the Group Secretaries. When the first vote on the 'elenchus' was taken one thousand amendments were proposed. How were these amendments dealt with? According to what criteria were they integrated into the text, accepted, rejected? It is not known.
6. What were the criteria for the composition of the twenty-four theological experts nominated by the Vatican to attend the Synod? Many considered they were not adequately representative of different cultures and theological trends. In particular, there was not one from Asia. All these point to a certain guidance from above which was designed to impede certain issues from coming through the synodal process.

Classic examples of this were the questions of women in lay Ministries and of a study to be made of the possibility of women being ordained to the diaconate.

#### A First Reflection on the Synodal Documents.

The Message: This was well drawn up; it is better than some of the final messages from previous synods. But it does not

include the delicate issues which emerged during the first stage of the Synod and in the Group Workshops.

There is one regrettable feature. The reference to the special dignity of the priesthood did not appear in either the first draft of the message or the amended draft. In fact the Synod had emphasized precisely the opposite - the equal dignity of all. One can ask therefore, from where did the insertion come in the official text. It leaves an embarrassing contradiction: all have the same dignity, but some have a special dignity! All are equal, but some are more equal!

The Propositions: There are some serious gaps:

- 1) a. The ecclesiology of communion is absent. (The German Bishops had done excellent work on this for the Synod).
- b. The theology of the local church is also absent.
- c. There is nothing referring to the social analysis of the world situation today. A Spanish workshop had an excellent presentation on this). As a solution to these lacunae a proposition was passed suggesting that the Pope should include these elements in his Apostolic Exhortation.

An Evaluation of the Propositions as the fruit of the Synod would require an elaborate study - assuming that one had the texts, - and the final text would need to be examined in the light of the 'elenchus modorum' (red book). It would be necessary to know on what principles the 'modi' (amendments) were rejected or integrated.

The Second Draft of the Propositions was undoubtedly an improvement on the first but there are anomalies:

- there is a positive definition of laity in the Church (but then an insistence on their secular specificity as if the whole Church were not in the world).
- the importance of the parish is toned down in relation to basic Christian Communities.
- new 'movements' are recognised but Catholic Action is stressed.
- the responsibility of the local Bishop in discerning the relevance of charisms in new movements is toned down in this second draft in favour of a process of discernment involving the people.
- the burning questions do not appear, as for example, assemblies without priests, and priestless communities in situations where the priest can only be present once or twice a year. This in spite

- of a request from a group of 19 Bishops.

The Place of Women in The Church: The propositions dealing with this question are unsatisfactory.

- One asks for a revision of "Ministeria quaedam" on instituted ministries as to the question upon the criterion of eligibility for such ministries. But it is not suggested either explicitly or implicitly that they be extended to women;
- 'Munera' - tasks exercised by lay people are not to be too easily erected into instituted ministries. This could create confusion;
- the "proper" dignity of women is to be fully acknowledged and to be put into practice;
- this is to be done by avoiding discrimination, making them members of Church councils, involving them in catechetics, etc.
- but on the question of the study of the diaconate for women there remains nothing.

Missionary Outreach of the Church 'ad extra' does appear to a satisfactory extent; lack of ecumenism is seen as an obstacle to evangelisation; the struggle for justice is seen as an integral part of evangelisation; inter-religious dialogue is re-introduced but not stressed; relations between older and younger Churches are to be reciprocal.

Conclusion: The Documents of this Synod speak of a multitude of interesting topics but they say less, and say it less well than previous specific documents dealing with the same topics. There is little doubt that with better dynamics much more could have been said.

The Synod could have produced a substantial document. We have only to note the excellent preparatory work done for example, by the German Bishops on the Theology of the Laity, by a Spanish workshop on social matters, and by others which could have been integrated almost, as they were presented, into a document from the Synod. The Pope will write an Apostolic Exhortation 'in tempore opportuno'. Whether it will go beyond the propositions or say less only the future will tell.

In this synod many felt that women were the "losers". Were people disappointed? The answer depends on what one has come to expect of the Synod. A Synod of Bishops could be deliberative. Paul VI envisaged the Synod as Consultative - making a contribution from outside the Curia. How will it evolve? - growing in importance as a serious organ of consultation or deteriorating into a simple institution for the sharing of information?

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## Critical Contextualization

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Paul G. Hiebert

("Le caractère étranger de la culture que nous apportons avec l'évangile est quelque chose de choquant qui doit être éliminé. Mais il y a aussi le caractère choquant de l'Évangile lui-même que nous n'avons pas le droit d'affadir. L'Évangile est un juge de ce qui est mauvais dans toutes les cultures ainsi que pour tous les hommes." Cette citation de l'article de Paul Hiebert sur la "Contextualisation" critique, résume les tensions qui existent dans les efforts d'accomoder l'Évangile dans les différentes cultures où nous travaillons. L'auteur nous présente une analyse très utile de l'histoire de la "contextualisation". Il nous propose aussi quelques étapes pratiques de ce processus de contextualisation, très utiles pour les missionnaires et les travailleurs pastoraux.)

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I shall limit myself to the narrow question of how the missionaries responded to the traditional beliefs and practices of new converts - in other words, to the "old" culture. Missionaries do not enter cultural vacuums. The people to whom they go are members of ongoing societies and cultures. The people raise food and build houses. They marry their young and bury their dead. They pray to their gods and propitiate their spirits. How did - and how should - missionaries who bring a new gospel respond to the old one?

The data will be drawn from the India scene, which has a long history of debates on the subject and with which I am most familiar. I believe, however, that the model is applicable to many other parts of the world.

### EARLY RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION

Early Roman Catholic missionaries struggled with the issue when they came to India. They were impressed with the sophistication of Indian culture. In many ways it was superior to that of Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But they were sharply divided over the question of what to do with the existing culture. The Jesuits advocated accomodation and the retention of traditional Indian cultural forms. The Franciscans contended that they were selling out the gospel.

Early Protestant missionaries, too, were impressed with the Indian culture and its philosophical foundations. Many of them

learned Indian languages well enough to produce dictionaries and to write classical literature and hymns. By the early nineteenth century, however, a major shift had taken place. Missionaries entered an era of noncontextualization. (non-inculturation).

#### THE ERA OF NONCONTEXTUALIZATION

Roughly from 1800 to 1950 most missionaries in India, and later in Africa, rejected the beliefs and practices of the people they served as "pagan". John Pobee writes: "... to the present time all the historical churches by and large implemented the doctrine of the tabula rasa, i.e. the missionary doctrine that there is nothing in the non-Christian culture on which the Christian missionary can build and, therefore, every aspect of the traditional non-Christian culture had to be destroyed before Christianity could be built up." In view of the earlier willingness to use-traditional cultural forms, what had changed? Why this growing rejection of existing cultures?

Rise of Colonialism: Colonialism proved to the West its cultural superiority. Western civilization had triumphed. It was the task, therefore, of the West to bring the benefits of this civilization to the world. Old medical systems were seen as witchcrafts and hocus-pocus, and had to be stamped out. Old governments were seen as feudalistic and had to be replaced by modern, national governments. The result was "direct" rule in which the British sought to replace the Indian governmental structures from the top to the bottom.

For Christians, the parallel was the superiority of the gospel. Paganism had to be rooted out. Many missionaries, in fact, equated the two. Christianity, civilization and, later commerce (the three Cs) went hand in hand. Western civilization was spreading around the world, and it was assumed that people would become both Christian and "modern". There was no need, therefore, to study old cultures or to take them seriously. They were on the way out.

The Theory of Cultural Evolution: A second reason for the rejection of non-Western cultures was the emergence of the theory of cultural evolution. Westerners could ignore other cultures by labeling them "primitive," "animistic," and "uncivilized." In fact, anthropologists until 1915 spoke of "culture," not of "cultures." They saw all cultures as different stages of development of the same thing; some were more advanced and others more primitive.

Given this historical paradigm, noncontextualization made sense. Why contextualize the gospel in other cultures when they are in the process of dying out? It is only a matter of time before all people are civilized. What is important, therefore, is to bring the gospel along with civilization.

The Triumph of Science: A third factor leading to the rejection of other cultures was the triumph of science. When William Carey went to India, he was much impressed by its cultural sophistication. Certainly in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries there was nothing in Europe comparable to the sophistication and technological advancement of the Mogul empire.

The rise of science changed all this. By the end of the nineteenth century, Western technology had conquered the world, and science had made giant strides in conquering nature. Faith in the final triumph of science was widespread. Scientific knowledge was seen as objective (uncontaminated by the subjectivity of the scientist), cumulative, and true in an ultimate sense. In contrast to this, the knowledge of other cultures was thought to be subjective, piecemeal, and false.

This same phenomenon was carried over into the realm of theology. Thus it was thought that if carefully crafted, theology could be totally objective and absolutely true. In the light of this, other religions were seen as highly subjective and totally false. Consequently, Christians did not need to take other religions seriously, just as scientists refused to take other belief systems about nature seriously. The task of the missionary was to transmit his or her theology into new cultures unchanged.

#### THE CONSEQUENCES OF "NONCONTEXTUALIZATION"

Colonialism demonstrated the superiority of Western civilization, evolutionism legitimized this in terms of history, and science and Christianity provided the intellectual foundations on which the whole was built. It is not surprising, therefore, that the period from 1800 to 1950 was anticontextual in its approach. This stance was essentially monocultural and monoreligious. Truth was seen as supracultural.

In missions this had two consequences: First, Christianity was perceived in other cultures as a foreign religion identified with Western culture. Christian converts were expected to adopt Western ways. This cultural foreignness was a great barrier in the spread of the gospel.

The second consequence was more subtle. Old beliefs and customs did not die out. Because they were not consciously dealt with, they went underground. Young converts knew they dare not tell the missionary about their old ways lest they incur his or her anger. So these ways became part of the new Christians' hidden culture. Public marriage ceremonies were held in the church, and then the people

returned to their homes to celebrate the wedding in private. Amulets were hidden under shirts, and Christians did not admit to Christian doctors that they were also going to the village shaman. In India caste differences were denied in public, although Christians privately continued to marry their children along caste lines.

From a Christian point of view this monocultural point of view has its good sides. First, it affirmed the oneness of humanity and of human history. Second, it took history and culture change seriously. Third, it affirmed absolutes and universals, both in human cultures and in the gospel. It was concerned with preserving the uniqueness of the gospel and avoiding the syncretism that might result from the incorporation of non-Christian beliefs and practices in the church.

But this view also had its bad sides. It was reductionist and acultural - it did not take other cultures and religions seriously. It was ethnocentric - it judged other cultures and religions by its own standards and found them wanting, while assuming that its own ways were right. And in the end it hindered the missionary task. The foreignness of the gospel was a barrier to evangelism, and syncretism was not prevented. Far too often the missionaries ended as policemen enforcing what they believed to be Christian practices on the people.

#### THE CASE FOR CONTEXTUALIZATION

The picture began to change by the end of the nineteenth century. Colonial rule was expanding, but already the seeds of its destruction had been planted. These were to bear fruit in the recognition that other cultures had to be understood and appreciated in terms of their own worldviews, and in a revolution that would call into question the nature and supremacy of science itself.

Postcolonialism: By 1900 three important forces were at work that would bring about the destruction of colonialism and its intellectual foundations.

1. The first of these was the growing cry against colonialism voiced in the west. Soon afterwards, discussions about the contextualization of the gospel message in local cultural forms began. Protestants articulated in the "three-self" formula the need for churches to be organizationally independent.
2. The second force undermining colonialism was the very success of the colonial endeavour. In India the aim of colonialism was to bring "civilization" to the land. It is not surprising, then, that by the twentieth century there was a growing number of highly educated Indian leaders with a nationalist vision. By 1930 they had organized into an effective movement for independence.

3. Ironically, the third force weakening Western dominance was the introduction of "direct rule." In India the British totally replaced the existing governmental structures from the village level to the national government. The expense of this, however, was prohibitive. Consequently, when they expanded their empire in Africa, they needed a less costly way of administering the colonies. The answer was indirect rule, in which British administrators provided the overarching government under which indigenous tribal political structures continued to function in tribal matters. But indirect rule required that British administrators know something about the political, economic, and social structures of the people they ruled. Consequently, early anthropological research in Africa, often funded by the government, focused on indigenous forms of social organization. Africa began to play a key role in the formation of anthropological theory.

Postmodern Science: Not only was belief in Western cultural superiority called into question, but the certainty and absolute nature of science itself was under attack. By the mid-twentieth century, the charge was led by the social scientists who began to apply their theories to analyzing science itself. Psychologists began to examine the subjective nature of all human knowledge; sociologists showed that science was a community affair, influenced by normal social dynamics; anthropologists placed science into its larger cultural and worldview context; and historians of science showed that our textbook understanding of the nature of science was misplaced.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEXTUALIZATION

In such an intellectual milieu, it is not surprising that missionaries and missiologists placed a great deal of emphasis on contextualization, not only of the church in local social structures, but also of the gospel and theology in local cultural forms.

1. Taking Cultural Differences Seriously: First, on the positive side, this approach avoided the foreignness of a gospel dressed in Western clothes that had characterized the era of noncontextualization. The gospel message had to be communicated in ways the people understood. It avoided the ethnocentrism of a monocultural approach by taking cultural differences seriously, and by affirming the good in all cultures. And it affirmed the right of Christians in every country not only to be institutionally but also cognitively free from Western domination.

Embracing an uncritical contextualization, however, had its problems. Obviously the denial of absolutes and of "truth" itself runs counter to the core Christian claims about the truth of the gospel and uniqueness of Christ. Moreover, if the gospel is contextualized, what are the checks against biblical and theological distortion?

2. Form and Meaning: Second, as Mary Douglas points out (1970), the separation between form and meaning implicit in these theories blinds us to the nature of most tribal and peasant societies in which form and meaning are inextricably linked. For example, names and shadows are tied to a person's identity, and religious rites are performances, not simply the communication of messages.

3. Emotive Dimension: A third problem has to do with the emphasis that contextualization places on the accurate communication of meaning, often to the point of ignoring the emotive and volitional dimensions of the gospel. We are in danger of reducing the gospel to a set of disembodied beliefs that can be individually appropriated, forgetting that it has to do with discipleship, with the church as the body of Christ, and with the reign of God on earth. Here Charles Kraft's call for a "dynamic-equivalent" response to the gospel message is a healthy reminder that in the Bible "to believe" is not simply to give mental assent to something; it is to act upon it in life.

4. A New History: A fourth area of concern is the historical nature of most discussions on contextualization. Contemporary cultural contexts are taken seriously, but historical contexts are largely ignored. In each culture Christians face new questions for which they must find biblical answers and they can learn much from church history. To become a Christian is to become a part of a new history and that history must be learned.

5. Unity: A fifth area of concern is that uncritical contextualization, at least in its more extreme forms, provides us with no means for working toward the unity of churches in different cultures. Instrumentalism is built on the belief that different cultures and paradigms are incommensurable - there is no basis for mutual understanding. Each can be understood only in its own terms. But if this is so, there can be no real communication between Christians in different cultures, no comparison between their theologies, and no common foundations of faith. At best Christianity is made up of a great many isolated churches.

6. Weak View of Sin: Uncritical contextualization has a weak view of sin. It tends to affirm human social organizations and cultures as essentially good. Sin is confined largely to personal evil. But social systems and cultures are human creations and are marked by sin. There is a need, therefore, to take a stand against corporate evil as well as individual sin.

7. Syncretism: Finally, a call for contextualization without an equal call for preserving the gospel without compromise opens the door to syncretism. William Willimon points out: "The persistent problem is not how to keep the church from withdrawing from the world but how to keep the world from subverting the church. In each age the church succumbs to that Constantinian notion that we can get a handle on the way the world is run." There is an offense in the foreignness of the culture we bring along with the gospel, which must be eliminated. But there is the offense of the gospel itself, which we dare not weaken. The gospel must be contextualized, but it also must remain prophetic - standing in judgment on what is evil in all cultures as well as in all persons.

#### CRITICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

Where do we go from here? We cannot go back to noncontextualization with its ethnocentrism and cultural foreignness. Nor can we stay in more extreme forms of contextualization with their relativism and syncretism. Specifically, what does one do with traditional cultural beliefs and practices? Here I am indebted to Jacob Loewen and the work of John Geerts, who developed a method of contextualization among the Wanana of Panama that is applicable in other cultural contexts.

Exegesis of the Culture: The first step in critical contextualization is to study the local culture phenomenologically. Here the local church leaders and the missionary lead the congregation in uncritically gathering and analyzing the traditional beliefs and customs associated with some question at hand. For example, in asking how Christians should bury their dead, the people begin by analyzing their traditional rites: first by describing each song, dance, recitation, and rite that makes up their old ceremony; and then by discussing its meaning and function within the overall ritual. The purpose here is to understand the old ways, not to judge them. If at this point the missionary shows any criticism of the customary beliefs and practices, the people will not talk about them for fear of being condemned. We shall only drive the old ways underground.

Exegesis of the Scripture and the Hermeneutical Bridge: In the second step, the pastor or missionary leads the church in a study of the Scriptures related to the question at hand. In the example we are considering, the leader uses the occasion to teach the Christian beliefs about death and resurrection. Here the pastor or missionary plays a major role, for this is the area of his or her expertise.

The leader must also have a metacultural framework that enables him or her to translate the biblical message into the cognitive,

affective, and evaluative dimensions of another culture. This step is crucial, for if the people do not clearly grasp the biblical message as originally intended, they will have a distorted view of the gospel. This is where the pastor or missionary, along with theology, anthropology, and linguistics, has the most to offer in an understanding of biblical truth and in making it known in other cultures. While the people must be involved in the study of Scriptures so that they grow in their own abilities to discern truth, the leader must have the metacultural grids that enable him or her to move between cultures. Without this, biblical meanings will often be forced to fit the local cultural categories. The result is a distortion of the message.

Critical Response: The third step is for the people corporately to evaluate critically their own past customs in the light of their new biblical understandings, and to make decisions regarding their response to their new-found truths. The gospel is not simply information to be communicated. It is a message to which people must respond. Moreover, it is not enough that the leaders be convinced about changes that may be needed. Leaders may share their personal convictions and point out the consequences of various decisions, but they must allow the people to make the final decision in evaluating their past customs. If the leaders make the decisions, they must enforce these decisions. In the end, the people themselves will enforce decisions arrived at corporately, and there will be little likelihood that the customs they reject will go underground.

To involve the people in evaluating their own culture in the light of new truth draws upon their strength. They know their old culture better than the missionary, and are in a better position to critique it, once they have biblical instruction. Moreover, to involve them is to help them to grow spiritually by teaching them discernment and by helping them to learn to apply scriptural teachings to their own lives.

New Contextualized Practices: Having led the people to analyze their old customs in the light of biblical teaching, the pastor or missionary must help them to arrange the practices they have chosen into a new ritual that expresses the Christian meaning of the event. Such a ritual will be Christian, for it explicitly seeks to express biblical teaching. It will also be contextual, for the church has created it, using forms the people understand within their own culture.

#### CHECKS AGAINST SYNCRETISM

What checks do we have to assure us that critical contextualization will not lead us astray? We must recognize that contextualization itself is an ongoing process. On the one hand, the world

in which people live is constantly changing, raising new questions that need to be addressed. On the other hand, our understandings of the gospel and its application of our lives is partial. Through continued study and spiritual growth, we should, however, come to a greater understanding of the truth.

1. Contextualized practices like contextualized theologies must be biblically based. This approach recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all believers open to God's leading.
2. The church is acting as a hermeneutical community. We all need Christians from other cultures, for they often see how our cultural biases have distorted our interpretations of the Scriptures. This corporate nature of the church as a community of interpretation extends not only to the Church in every culture, but also to the Church in all ages.
3. Within an international hermeneutical community should come a growing understanding, if not agreement, on key theological issues that can help us test the contextualization of cultural practices as well as theologies.

Conclusion: Critical contextualization does not operate from a monocultural perspective. Nor is it premised upon the pluralism of incommensurable cultures. It seeks to find metacultural and metatheological frameworks that enable people in one culture to understand messages and ritual practices from another culture with a minimum of distortion. It is based on a critical realist epistemology that sees all human knowledge as a combination of objective and subjective elements, and as partial but increasingly closer approximations of truth. It takes both historical and cultural contexts seriously. And it sees the relationship between form and meaning in symbols such as words and rituals. Finally, it sees contextualization as an ongoing process in which the Church must constantly engage itself, a process that can lead us to a better understanding of what the Lordship of Christ and the reign of God on earth are about.

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NEWS: Ms. Jacintha Alagiah

At the end of November 1987 SEDOS will be losing the services of Ms. Jacintha Alagiah who has been with us as Secretary since September, 1982.

Jacintha is entering the Congregation of the Missionaries of Fatima, Via Arco della Pace 5, 00186 Roma and will commence her novitiate on December 8th 1987.

In addition to her skills as a Secretary Jacintha has brought to the office of the Secretariat and the membership of SEDOS a spirit of joy, happiness and good will which has been an inspiration. We will miss her very much. Our good wishes go with her and the assurance of a place in our hearts and prayers specially during her novitiate.

COMING EVENTS:

SEDOS ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

On December 9, from 9.00 to 4.30 p.m. at the Jesuit Generalate, Borgo Santo Spirito; Topic of the Morning Session: BUILDING INTER-CULTURAL COMMUNITIES IN MISSION SITUATIONS.

EVANGELIZATION: THE CHALLENGE OF MODERNITY

SEDOS Annual Seminar at Villa Cavalletti, from 15-19 March, 1988. Early registration is recommended.

MY NEIGHBOUR'S FAITH - AND MINE: Theological Discoveries Through Inter-Faith Dialogue. In the Spring of 1988 Fr. Michael Amaladoss, SJ will facilitate a three-Session study of what it means to be a Christian in a culturally, religious and ideologically plural world. These sessions are being conducted by SEDOS in response to an invitation from the Central Committee of the WCC for a five year study programme. Dates will be announced later.

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