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## IN THIS ISSUE

Conflict and the problems of reconciliation are the theme of many articles in this issue. SAMUEL RAYAN'S paper was presented at the Henry Martyn Institute's residential course, the first in the series "*Foundations for Reconciliation*" in Hyderabad, India. He was addressing adherents of Hindu, Muslim, Christian and other spiritual traditions in a land marked by many religious and spiritual traditions and by a growing gap between the poor and the non-poor. Through Luke's Gospel he introduces Jesus as the one who proclaims and realizes in history the Kingdom, the reign of God. The portrait of that reign has consequences for all the peoples of India "living as we are in a fragmented and conflictual society marked by deep oppression the sin of untouchability, dehumanizing poverty... and communal conflicts engineered for the economic and political benefit of a few, using religion as tool and cover." In this situation Christians are called to be peace-makers together with adherents of other religions to bring about the Kingdom of God.

OFELIA ORTEGA looks at the history of oppression of Latin American women following the Conquest. Religious symbolism is a significant factor in their resistance and their struggle for liberation. The Virgin Mary, whether of Aparecida in Brazil, or of Guadeloupe in Mexico or *de la Caridad* in Cuba - or wherever in Latin America has kept alive the collective memory of the poor of the earth. She is a powerful source of strength for the peoples of Latin America.

ELOCHUKWU UZUKWU'S reflection on human rights in Africa is included as a background paper to the preparations for the forthcoming African Synod. In the so-called Third World the focus of

the struggle for human rights is not individual personal rights - but the right to human survival and liberation. He quotes Nigerian Bishop John Onaiyekan who calls the issue of human rights "a matter of life and death" for Africa. African Bishops and Church representatives speak out increasingly against the abuse of human rights and inevitably suffer for it as has happened recently in Malawi, Kenya, Zaire and many other African countries. These are the prophetic voices that Elochukwu sees as maintaining a critical reserve vis-a-vis any human system. They may bring about a change - a foretaste of the resurrection realised in Jesus and their struggle for transformation should be celebrated in song and dance.

Persecution of Christians in Southern Sudan at the hands of Islamic fundamentalists is a scandalous development which does great harm to the good name of Islam described by TOM MICHEL, SJ in his recent SEDOS Conference on FUNDAMENTALISM IN ISLAM (March 1992). PATRICIA McMENAMIN, Superior General of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles gives an eye-witness account of one of the barbarous examples of this persecution.

JOE NWAOKORO appeals for a move from confrontation to conversion among Nigerian Christians and Muslims as Samuel Rayan appealed for a similar conversion among adherents of the different religions in India. The potential for wars, motivated in part at least by religious differences in so many parts of the world, emphasizes the great need for conversion and the perennial need for mission to bring about God's reign - the union between God and humankind and between humans themselves.

There are Mission Moments and some important notices of coming events.

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# THE KINGDOM OF GOD, RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND COMMUNALISM

## THE KINGDOM OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

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Samuel Rayan

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You have asked me to give a Christian theological perspective on the concept of the Kingdom of God as alluded to in Saint Luke's Gospel, with particular reference to justice, peace and reconciliation, stressing the Christian role as peace-makers in times of conflict.

May I begin by observing that we, adherents of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and other spiritual traditions should not, and indeed cannot, wait for times of conflict to burst upon us in order to exercise our role as peace-maker. Our efforts must aim not so much at the healing of wounds as at the prevention of wounding. The demand of our faiths is that we set ourselves to identify and eliminate the causes of communal tensions rather than merely deal with their symptoms.

### DIVERSITY

India has many religions and spiritual traditions. Adivasi religions represented in the Indus Valley discoveries, yet undeciphered; the Dravidian traditions, be they aboriginal, be they immigrant; the Aryan concepts and symbols that came in later; the protest and dissent movements like Jainism and Buddhism; Christianity and Islam which

also came from outside; the emergence meanwhile of yoga, bhakti and advaita spiritualities. All these interacted and influenced each other in various degrees. A real osmosis has happened at the level of spiritualities and world outlook. The nation comprises numerous castes, subcastes, outcasts; many races and ethnic groups; several language families and cultures; diverse historical experiences of war and peace, of poverty and plenty; of different socio-political ideologies and a hierarchy of economic classes.

A close look at our recent history would reveal a mounting concentration of wealth and power in a few hands, resulting in a deep distortion of democracy, in spiraling political violence and corruption, and in disillusionment and frustration for the masses. The majority of the people of India have become marginal and dispensable while the rich, the clever and the crafty are provided with ever-widening opportunities for self-aggrandizement and national plunder. Our land has become the private fief of an unscrupulous clique.

The growing gap between the poor and the non-poor has effectively divided the nation. There are two Indias: the India of the wealthy and the powerful and the India of the destitute,

the wretched and the hungry. It is perhaps truer to speak of many Indias than of two; truer perhaps to speak of India's fragmentation than of its division. Ours is a nation torn to shreds by the caste myth, and by the sharp practices of an individualist, competitive economy. Caste and class divisions and fragmentations are assisted, reproduced and perpetuated by disruptive educational systems with differential socio-economic possibilities and promises attached to each. There are vested interests keen on keeping the poor poor and the masses illiterate. Our development has, as a result, been lopsided and unbalanced region-wise, population-wise and class-wise. Our priorities have gone wrong; we have been caring first and most for the well-to-do and for consumerist cravings, with little time or resources left for the basic needs of the masses. The result as stated by the international Hunger Project is that:

In India nearly 11,000 people die each day of hunger. India is the country with the largest number of people who go hungry. One third of the world's hungry people live here.

That means our economic and cultural life has become twisted out of shape. And we know that our life and thought, at leadership levels, are oriented towards and controlled by the ideas, interests and manipulative tactics of our former colonial overlords, the oligarchies and banks of western Europe and the U.S.A.

#### COMMUNALISM: A NATIONAL MALAISE

It is in this context that we centre our attention on communalism. Communal conflicts and violence have been on the increase. They appear to have acquired the features of a semi-permanent group warfare. Communal disturbances, frequent enough up to independence, declined in number after 1947. But their frequency suddenly rocketed since 1964. Social analysts ask if communal violence has not become for us a way of life. They point out that communalism is a complex reality with many faces; it

encompasses economic, political, social, cultural and intellectual factors. They define it as:

A sharp divide between communities, each pulling itself apart from the rest, and feeling superior, inferior, aggrieved, hostile.

Hostility can go to the extent of calling for a blanket denial of historical facts and for the de-recognition as religion of traditions other than one's own.

#### Causes

Communal riots may be caused or occasioned by a variety of factors including:

- 1) religious disputes; 2) revivalist movements; 3) hegemonistic ideologies presuming to prescribe to others standards of patriotism; 4) manipulation of minorities or religions by the ruling class to save their vested or naked interests; 5) the emergence (for various reasons) of smaller identities based on region, caste, language or regional group; 6) the political use of communal sentiments and tensions in order to build up personal or party power; 7) economic competition breaking into divisive struggles fed by perceptions of unequal growth and discriminatory development; 8) the ascendancy of capitalism with its ethos of greed and individualism seeking domination and or balkanization; and finally, 9) ignorance of each others' culture and religion causing a litter of prejudices and negative stereotypes about each other.

One conclusion drawn from such cause-analysis is that communalism in India, "does not originate totally, or even primarily, in the religious concerns of the Hindus or the Muslims." Where then lies the primary cause? In the sphere of economic and class, answers Asghar Ali Engineer:

A modern democratic society with inbuilt unjust structures becomes highly explosive. Primordial identities on the basis of religion, caste, race, ethnicity or region acquire new

potency, and violence erupts frequently if politicians decide to appeal to these primordial identities without changing unjust social structures. Communal and ethnic polarization is a natural consequence to a class polarization and increasing gaps between riches and poverty, and monopolization of economic and power resources by a few castes or communities, religious or ethnic. (*Economic and Political Weekly*. 14 Sept. 1991, p. 2138).

### Solutions

The remedies and solutions suggested are:

1) education which should remove ignorance, prejudices and negative images of each other; 2) each group's conversion and fidelity to its own religious-spiritual ideals; 3) practice of sustained self-criticism by every religious community, political party and social group; 4) struggle by all religious movements, singly and together, against every sort of injustice, against all oppression, exploitation, discrimination and corruption without distinction of creed or colour, as well as against unbalanced development and concentration of wealth; and, more positively, 5) work together for proper, democratic, distribution or redistribution of power and hence of productive wealth.

### Challenge

The challenge to Christian faith and theology is clear. Our life and thought stand challenged to self-criticism, to reconciliation of memories, to fidelity to the finest visions of the faith, to commitment to justice and to a communitarian and participatory restructuring of economic and political realities. We stand summoned to solidarity with all the victims of oppression. We are called to clarify meanings and unmask pseudo-religions and undermine the religious props used by communalist politicians and manipulators. We are to reassert the radical opposition which Jesus disclosed as existing between God and mammon. Our task is to reaffirm the primacy of

the human and of love as the concrete image and temple and worship of the Ultimate Mystery we point to when we speak of God.

## THE KINGDOM OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

### The King and His Reign

Even before his conception Jesus is introduced in Luke as a king who would inherit the throne of David and whose reign would be never-ending (1:32-33). As he dies on the cross he is acknowledged as king by a co-sufferer, crucified for flouting the laws of the imperial colonial rule which had also passed the sentence on Jesus (23:42).

The content and purpose of Jesus' kingship is presented by Jesus himself as the manifestation and proclamation of God's kingly rule which differed from and called into question Roman imperial domination (4:43). Of the excellence and wonder of this realm and reign of God, we have a hint in the observation that the least in that divine realm is greater than the Baptizer who is the greatest of all those born of women (7:28). It is incomparable privilege for Jesus' disciples to be confided with the secret of God's reign while to others who are reluctant to follow Jesus, the secrets are served in parables (8:10; 10:23-24). For it is the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom to Jesus' disciples (12:32); and this Jesus conferred on them a little before his arrest and execution (22:29).

But gifts and privileges entail responsibilities and tasks. The disciples, recipients of the Kingdom with its secrets, are to go out to proclaim it and make its blessings available to everyone (9:2, 60). The mission has such priority and urgency that not even the duty of burying one's father may be allowed to retard or postpone it (9:59-62). The urgency springs from the fact that the Kingdom is near, very near; it has caught us unawares (11:20). This proximity is the pressing point of the proclamation (10:9,11), and of the prayer for the Kingdom's speedy arrival (11:2). We are urged to set our hearts

on the arriving Kingdom instead of worrying over food and drink which God knows we need (12:29-31). The Kingdom is in our midst and within our grasp (17:20-21).

Jesus is the voice and sacrament of the Reign of God which has always been in the midst of people and within their grasp, and which has always been active in history, enlightening, gracing, guiding and saving people. The coming of Jesus enables us to name the Kingdom, see its face and touch its blessings in Jesus' person, word and work.

### Peace

Luke portrays Jesus not only as king, but as a peaceful king, peace-making and reconciling. He surrounds the story of Jesus' birth with thoughts of peace. In Zechariah's song Jesus is referred to as the Rising Sun come to visit us, to give us light, and to "guide our feet into the way of peace" (1:78-79). The birth of Jesus is then directly associated with glory to God in heaven and "peace on earth to those he favors" (2:13-14). At his presentation in the temple, old Simeon is shown as experiencing the peace that was to crown his life (2:28-32). "Go in peace" is Jesus' life-giving word to the woman from the city who had "shown such great love" (7:50), and to the woman with a hemorrhage who touched Jesus' cloak and got healed (8:48). Both women had been social outcasts, shunned for moral or ritual pollution. Restoring them to health and dignity and rebuilding their pride and self-respect, Jesus is bidding society be converted and be reconciled. His peace was non-conformist, counter-cultural and socially transformative.

The first word his disciples - sent out like lambs among wolves - are to speak on entering a house is, 'Peace'. Salvation is offered as peace. This wish bears all the spiritual and temporal blessings of the Reign of God. If a person, open to these blessings, lived in the house, "your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you" (10:5-6). Jerusalem is an example of the refusal of the King's peace. In the last

week of his life Jesus rode a colt and entered Jerusalem. On the way his disciples praised God with works that rejoined the song the angels sang at his birth: they named Jesus king and proclaimed peace and glory in heaven. But Jerusalem would not, even on that day, recognize 'the way of peace' or 'the moment of her visitation' (19:37-44; cf. 13:34-35).

### Peace is born of Justice

Luke points to two main factors on which false peace bases itself. One is hoarded wealth which engenders snobishness and arrogance. The other is religious observances with their brood of self-righteousness, conceit and contempt for others. These are denounced and a summons is sustained throughout Luke to renunciation of riches, sharing of wealth and sobriety of living, to solidarity with the oppressed and action for justice and liberation. There is strong warning against religious chauvinism and religious pride along with a consistent call to littleness and lowliness.

Mary's visitation hymn confesses God as friend of the lowly and router of the arrogant. God fills the starving with many good things including the courage to stand for their rights, but he sends the rich away empty. This perspective is maintained in the infancy stories through reference to the manger, to the child as one destined to be oppressed and to its mother as destined to be pierced with a sword (2:6-38). Jesus' Nazareth manifesto is a clear option for the oppressed and the deprived, a firm commitment to justice and liberation; that is, to the construction of a community without prisons and chains, one that will be equal and free, reconciled and humane (4:18-19). The option was already contained in Jesus' rejection of temptations to walk the ways of the wealthy (4:1-13). It continues to express itself in Jesus' concern for the possessed and the sick (4:33); in his association with outcasts (4:23-27); in his inclusion of women among his travel companions (8:1-3); in his invariably positive and affirmative attitude to women on all occasions (7:36-50); in his

offer of the Kingdom and its blessings to the poor, the hungry and those persecuted on account of the Son of Man (6:20-23); and in the way he identified himself to the Baptizer's disciples in terms of socially transformative services to the poor and the afflicted (7:18-23).

The same option and approach is reflected in Jesus' self-identification with little ones and his word about the greatness of the least (9:46-48), and about revelation hidden from the learned and the clever but given to little ones (10:21-22). A high point is reached and extra emphasis laid on options for the poor and for justice where Jesus lays down clear norms for choosing guests to be invited "when you give a lunch or dinner." "Do not invite your friends or brothers or relatives or wealthy neighbours... No... invite the beggars and the crippled, the lame and the blind" (14:12-14). Our ways and views, our value sets and social relations are being radically questioned, remolded and re-oriented. Hence Luke's and Jesus' relentless attack on greed and hoarded wealth and selfish pleasure. The rich man who feels secure in the plenteous good things he has amassed and stored away is unmasked as a fool. Life does not consist in possessions; and worry is no provider of life's necessities. Set your hearts therefore on the Kingdom (of justice and mercy); seek out God's kingship over you, and the rest will follow in turn (12:13-15).

Jesus denounces the "holy" Pharisees' love of money (16:14-15). The real purpose and meaning of wealth is fellowship and friendship and community existence which are the really genuine human values (16:9-12). That is why the great Eater, insensitive to the wretched at his gate and around his palace, belongs with death and with the subhuman; and the chasm between the like of him and the destiny of the oppressed is unbridgeable (16:19-31). For it is incredibly hard "for those who have riches to make their way into the Kingdom of God" - harder than it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle (18:24-27).

Jesus therefore insists on renunciation which liberates the heart from slavery to wealth and liberates wealth for the life of the whole human family, and for the upbuilding of a world of friendship and a culture of tenderness. A rich aristocrat who has kept all God's commandments, is told there is something he lacks. He should go, sell everything he owns, distribute the money to the poor and come, follow Jesus (18:18-23). The man cannot respond; he is very rich. The story is followed soon after by a different story in which a rich man, in growing friendship with Jesus, does part with his ill-gotten wealth, makes ample restitution and shares property with the poor. This practice of justice and solidarity with the dispossessed meant salvation to Zachaeus' house (19:1-10). One has to renounce all that one holds dear; no one can be Jesus' disciple "without giving up all that he owns" (14:25-33). "Sell your possessions and give to those in need" - is almost a refrain (12:33-34).

#### Self-righteousness

The other ground of false peace, the other obstacle to reconciliation and fellowship is self-righteousness. This is illustrated by a Pharisee's boastful 'prayer', contemptuous of those who confessed themselves sinners (18:9-14). Self-righteousness, in league with legalism and fundamentalism, took its stand on strict observance of traditions of purity and pollution, and of laws concerning fasting, foods, and sabbaths. Rules of food and fast and sabbath must yield to the possibilities of the Kingdom of life and mercy and fellowship (5:33-39; 6:1-11). Jesus insists that traditional socio-religious attitudes to sinners, prostitutes, women in general, Samaritans and other non-Jews must change; prejudices must go; discrimination must end; and gulfs that separate people from people must be bridged (7:36-50; 10:24-37; 13:10-17, 37-41). Jesus reshapes and recentres religion on justice and love, thus laying the foundations of a world of fellowship (13:42).

## Openness

A basic feature and an essential requirement of the Kingdom is love for enemies, love for the unloving and the unlovable together with glad sharing of property. God is kind even to the ungrateful and the wicked (6:27-38). Such large-heartedness persuades us to shed all monopolistic claims, especially in religion, and enables us to live the openness and universalism of the Reign. Jesus' disciples are not to stop anyone, "because he is not one of us", from using Jesus' name to liberate people. That he who is not against you is for you is a principle or perspective particularly relevant in inter-religious relationships (9:49-50).

The Kingdom is neither parochial nor ethnic. "People from east and west, north and south, (and one might add: from ancient times as well as modern), will come and sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of God" (13:29). For it is not saying Lord, Lord, nor the possession of creeds and rites that matters, but doing the Father's will. Hence calling down fire from heaven is not a Kingdom-response to prejudice and hostility (9:51-56). A different, positive, approach is called for. Jesus' own approach is represented by that astonishing prayer from the Cross, pleading for forgiveness for his killers (23:34). Such memories are for us more than models. They are invitations and imperatives. They are religion and life.

### THE FEAST OF THE KINGDOM

The experience of the Kingdom with its offer of peace and its demand for renunciation and community is summed up and socially expressed in table fellowship. A picture of feasting is the Bible's favorite symbol for the (final) Kingdom. Among the Jews a banquet was an acted parable, in prophetic style, of final fulfillment - a metaphor for messianic salvation. The messianic banquet was a prophecy of universal reconciliation. It represented the messianic community.

Nearly all the meal passages in Luke occur in the context of the Kingdom, and allude to God's kingly activity or to the blessings of God's Reign. In Mary's song, God's saving action includes the provision of food for the poor, the filling of the hungry with many good things (1:46-53). The theme of the hungry having their fill is soon repeated in connection with Jesus' offer of the Kingdom to the poor (6:20-21). In the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, the petition for the coming of the Kingdom becomes concrete in the immediate plea for daily bread each day (11:2-3).

There are three instances of Jesus accepting invitations from Pharisees to dine with them (7:36-50; 11:37-52; 14:1-24). On each occasion Jesus provokes a controversy by letting a woman of ill repute come in, touch and kiss him; by omitting the ablutions prescribed before eating; and by healing a man on a sabbath day. Through such non-conformist behaviour Jesus was inserting into cramped and confined situations the liberating, life-giving, transforming realities of the Kingdom of God, like forgiveness and love (7:47), justice and inwardness (11:41-42), and solidarity with the poor and the lowly (14:11, 13, 21-29). Jesus was thus transmitting the Pharisee's table into a Banquet of the Kingdom by opening it up for the prostitute, the sinner, the cripple, the poor, the unwashed and despised nobodies.

The practice of table fellowship comes to a high point in Jesus' farewell supper with his working-class friends, women and men. In the course of the supper, the banquet of the Kingdom receives repeated mention (22:16, 18, 30). In the concluding chapter of Luke, a shared meal is the place of the definitive revelation of the meeting with the risen Jesus; the place and the seal of saving faith.

A banquet is a community reality. Jesus' table, symbol and foretaste of the feast of the Kingdom, is open table: it welcomes all sorts of people, for at the feast in the Kingdom people from all corners of the world will sit with the patriarchs and prophets (13:28-29).

## CONCLUSION

This portrait of the Kingdom has consequences for all of us, living as we are in a fragmented and conflictual society marked by deep oppression, the sin of untouchability, dehumanizing poverty inflicted on the vast majority of the population, and communal conflicts engineered for the economic and political benefit of a few, using religion as tool and cover. In this context our task is:

- 1) To become a kingdom community: not one of greed and competition, or individualism and unconcern, but of justice and equality, and of great tenderness; a fellowship of people who share, nurture each other and grow up together.
- 2) To remold and transform parish life, on the basis of the social indications of the Our Father and after the social patterns suggested by authentic Eucharistic assemblies and by the understanding of God as Trinity. It would mean retrieving the lost vision and innovative boldness of our beginnings as enshrined in the account in Acts 2:42-46 and 4:32-37.
- 3) To give up silence and risk speech - personally and corporately - in the face of injustices and atrocities against the powerless and the poor.
- 4) To keep studying the evolving social and institutional situation, and relate the analysis constantly to our faith and its demands.
- 5) To promote egalitarian thought and practice, a culture of sharing and fellowship.
- 6) To stress the human as the centre of religion.
- 7) and finally, to strive to live out the openness and universality of the Kingdom and its banquet, and to remember that God is greater than our hearts and our churches, and that God is with the other too, and may be speaking to me from there.

Ref. the *Bulletin*. Vol. 10, No.4, Oct.Nov. 1991. Henry Martyn Inst. Box 153 Hyderabad, A.P.500001, India.

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## LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN - A HISTORY OF REBELLION

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Ofelia Ortega

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vener of the World Council of Churches Office of Unity and Renewal).*



In the 15th century, the Indian population of America numbered some 80 million; by the end of the 16th century it was down to 10 million. In a little over fifty years 500,000 native inhabitants of Cuba (Guanatabeyes, Siboneyes and Taínos) were destroyed by the impact of colonization and replaced by as many heads of cattle. The invaders organized a system of exploitation based on the *encomiendas* - concessions which granted land and its inhabitants to the conquerors. This system produced massive genocide.

After that first genocide, African slaves, captured in the Moorish wars of reconquest, were brought to Cuba by some of the early colonizers. When we talk about these 500 years and the brutal nature of the invasion, we must not forget this 'trade' in African

labour; a hateful trade - inhuman and degrading alike for those who were bought and sold and for those who bought and sold them. Spain and Portugal were not the only ones involved. England, Holland and other European nations most of them Protestant by confession, engaged in slavery. As Europeans, they were much more inclined to discriminate than to mingle in any of the lands they conquered and colonized. Africans were taken by force to a new world. Their freedom, their cultural values, languages and traditions, their forms of socio-political and economic organization and their rights were disregarded.

Centuries later the freedom of these enslaved people was restored, but it was not real freedom; it did not give them back their cultural identity, their dignity as a people, the means and opportunity to live in decent conditions and to create their own history. And within this general process of conquest, the women of the dominated peoples suffered most.

### 1. WOMEN AND THE CONQUEST

In his book "*La Conquista de America: El problema del otro*" (The Conquest of America - The Problem of the Other), Tzvelan Todorov speaks of how the 'I' discovers the other and stresses that Columbus discovered America but not Americans. Yet even though this denial of the other as a person, as an active agent in history was general, the situation of the

indigenous woman was sadder still because "being Indian and a woman she was classed on the same level as cattle."

### Amerindian Women

In addition to the violence endured by the people as a whole, indigenous women suffered the violation of their personal integrity through sexual abuse. The colonizers treated them as 'sexual objects,' as 'bodies' which belonged to them by right as conquerors. As Enrique Dussell has written: "The Amerindian woman, the mother of Latin America, was sexually oppressed. She produced the *mestizos* who are the people of Latin America. Little or nothing has ever been written about that woman. It was she who bore the brunt of the dominant power of the European conqueror." But at the same time we must always remember that in this situation of oppression, women reacted dynamically and showed unflinching ability to rebel against it. Their rebellion is reflected in the uprisings which attempted to overthrow colonial rule.

The stereotype of women presented in colonial literature shows them as timid, servile and passive. But if we read history from the standpoint of poor and oppressed women, we come to understand the culture of resistance which Indian women cultivated in the face of aggression.

### A History of Resistance

Today we are starting to collect the oral history and the popular traditions which record the names of the courageous women who joined in the struggle. In 1760, the brave Chief Túpac Amaru was accompanied by Micaela Bastides and her band of women guerrilla fighters. On 4 April 1781, Micaela was imprisoned in Cuzco, with her husband, their three children and other relatives. Together they endured torture. Bound hand and foot, she was taken to the scaffold on 18 May, 1781. Today Micaela has been declared the Mother of the Peruvian people.

We also know the names of Ana de Tarma (1752), María Gregoria (1750), Tomasa Condemayta (1789) and María Parado de Bellido (1824). In Bolivia, which was then known as Alto Peru, Bertolina Sisa and Gregoria Apaza, fought alongside Túpac Catari (1781) and Juana Azurduy, was nicknamed '*la aguila de las batallas*' (the eagle of battles). In Colombia we find important references to a woman leader, Chief Gaitana and to Manuela Beltrán (1781) who took part in uprisings during the colonial period. When Spain was invaded by the French in the 19th century, uprisings began in various places in America and women became increasingly involved in the struggle for independence - Policarpa Salvatierra was one of them. In Argentina, Micaela Guemes, '*la guerrillera de Santa*' joined the citizens' militia. The Chilean, María Cornelia Olivares, worked for independence, as did Mariquita Sánchez, Javiera Carreras, Andrea Bellido, and Remedios Escalada de San Martin.

But beyond the names, the important thing is women's involvement in the struggle against 'the invader.' From Gioconda Belli we have this record of a woman's witness to the indigenous uprising in Nicaragua.

I received news from the women of Teguzigalpa. They decided not to sleep with their husbands any more. They did not want to give birth to slaves for the Spaniards... children for the estates, children to build their boats, children to die torn apart by dogs if they were brave warriors....

How aware were these women of sexual oppression and how much did they differentiate one form of oppression from the other? We cannot answer that question, but we can say that women, and Indian women in particular, played an active part in the resistance movement during the colonial period.

### A Quest for Liberation

It is important to note the cultural and racial component in forging the identity of the Latin American woman in

the quest for liberation. This is an important factor - not only at the time of the break with the colonial power but also today in our continent.

Women suffer oppression on three counts: class, race and sex. The fact of being Indian, black, *mestiza* or white is a fundamental element in their identity. It is essential to recognize this diversity and the (racial, social and economic) differences it implies in order to understand the varying aspects of oppression and the challenges women face in the struggle for liberation. The conquest and colonization periods introduced patriarchal elements which were transmitted along with the Christian message. There are clear indications that the morality and customs imposed 'in the name of the Gospel' were exploitative and self-serving. If we are serious about a 'new evangelization' today, we shall have to make a determined assault on this patriarchal system.

#### A Foreign God

Because of the Reformed tradition in which I grew up it has been difficult for me as a woman pastor to enter into the life and culture of my people. I do not believe that this is unique to my experience in the Presbyterian Church of Cuba - I think it applies to other churches as well, including the Cuban Roman Catholic Church. As Idrish Hamid, a Caribbean theologian, has said:

The main theological emphasis in the Caribbean has been a theology imposed from outside. God is a god foreign to our people. In the religious imagination of our people he is not one of us. Even the categories of our religious experiences are imports which do not reflect our native cultural experiences. We experience God as an outsider.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to see how the people have gradually created, recreated and recovered the religious symbolism from which they drew support in developing a 'culture of resistance.' This has enabled them to survive in situations of oppression and marginalization.

## 2. RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM: A CULTURE OF RESISTANCE

A few years ago I was invited to a baptismal ceremony in the parish of the Virgin of Regla, in one of the poor areas of Havana. Regla is a black and *mestizo* district where there is superstitious devotion to the saints. The chapel was full. The face of the Black Virgin could be seen, adorned and embellished by the people. Families filled the pews, one family to each pew - boys and girls, parents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, grandparents.

Before my astonished eyes I saw what we would call a 'family baptism.' The whole family consecrating itself to what? The Virgin? The Church? The saints? It was difficult to tell, but it was a communal, tribal ceremony such as I had never seen in our Reformed churches. Did the priest understand what was happening there? Was he aware of the 'worship' of that black, *mestiza* virgin by the people? What relation is there between that Mary and the Mary brought to us by the missionaries and the conquistadors?

#### Mary the Conqueror

The Mary of the Gospels was transformed into *María Conquistadora* (Mary the Conqueror) by the colonizers. As Antonio González Dorado points out, "the name is highly significant, because it demonstrated that the Virgin was qualitatively an integral part of the Spanish enterprise in the newly discovered territories - an enterprise of conquest.

Christopher Columbus carried images of Jesus and Mary on his banners. He gave the second island he discovered the name of Conception. On his second voyage he erected the first church to be built in America on the island of Santo Domingo, consecrating it to Jesus Christ and his most holy Mother. Hernán Cortés wore a gold chain with the image of our Lady, the Virgin Mary with her beautiful son in her arms.

The Mary of the people is not *María Conquistadora* but the Mary who is free

and who sets others free. The religious oppression brought by the colonization and the conquest is closely linked to symbolic areas of freedom signified by the apparitions of Mary. The *Virgen de la Caridad* is a saving vision in Cuba for a trio of figures: the outcast black, the poor Spaniard and the hybrid *mestizo*, representing marginal peoples united into a single cultural identity.

### The Virgin of Guadeloupe

The Virgin of Guadeloupe who appeared to Juan Diego represents popular cultural and religious symbolism. He is a symbol of the poor and oppressed who refuse to be destroyed. Although popular religion can be alienating when it is used to justify and maintain the status quo, it can be liberating when it is a source of unity and strength in the struggle for dignity.

The virgin appeared on the sacred hill of Tepeyac - one of four places of sacrifice in Central America and the sanctuary of Tonantzin, the virgin Indian mother of the gods. Her garment is light red, the colour of the blood shed in sacrifices, the colour of Huitzilpochtli - the god who gives and preserves life. Red also symbolizes the blood of the Indians which was shed on Mexican soil, fertilizing mother earth. The predominant colour in the vision on Tepeyac is the blue-grey of Mary's cloak, which is the real colour of the gods of the native people. It was also the colour of Ometéotl, the origin of all natural forces.

One of the prophecies made by indigenous wise men was the appearance of stars on a cloak, announcing the end of their civilization. In the apparition, the stars on the virgin's cloak announced the beginning of a new age. The virgin came of herself; she was not brought by the Spaniards. She came supported by heavenly creatures, representing the beginning of a new age. Round her waist she wore the black girdle of motherhood, and offered her son to the new world.

At the same time she asked that a temple be built. For the Indians the

destruction of their temples was the end of their civilization. The request for the building of a temple indicated the search for a new way of life. One civilization was drawing to a close; but another was emerging from the mother earth, bringing blessing to the people. Through flowers and music the people communicated their acceptance of the message.

### The Memory of a People

Among the poor of the earth, history is preserved and kept alive in the collective memory of the people, in their songs and dances, poetry, art, legend. All these are fundamental elements in popular religiosity. For those who have power, history is something written down, but for those who have no power it is a living thing because their collective memory keeps on telling them that things are not as they should be. The powerful cannot destroy that memory because they don't understand it. In contrast to institutional religion, this field of memory is the people's place of freedom.

It is not surprising that in the formal history of Mexico there is no place for the tradition of Tepeyac. It is to be found only in the folklore and the religious practice of the people.

Juan Diego's vision reminds us of the words of Paul VI in *Marialis Cultus*:

Mary was far from being a timidly submissive woman ... On the contrary she was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions... Mary does not disillusion the profound expectations of the men and women of our time but offers them the perfect model of the disciple... who works for that justice which sets the oppressed free.

### The Medium and the Message

We know that the form of Christianity transmitted to America was closely bound up with a western, and also an

eastern cultural heritage. In a context of political and cultural violence the Amerindian population received the message. When we speak of the oppressive elements which religion and the church helped to introduce into the colonial process, we have to remember that the church institution and its ritual and theological forms cannot be detached from the cultural patterns of the age in which this process took place. Clearly, through its educational work, the church imposed patterns of socialization and moral guidelines which did not teach the heart of the message, nor show people more clearly that the Gospel announces liberation for all peoples and all individuals. Male domination was reinforced by the power structure of the church and a profoundly patriarchal theology which set no value on the equality of all people.

The women of Latin America were particularly affected by the new customs and precepts brought to our lands by missionaries. These implied a change in the understanding of woman's role in society, her relations with her partner, her responsibility for transmitting a cultural heritage which the missionaries unfortunately interpreted for the most part as consisting of beliefs that were contrary to Christianity - idolatry to be rooted out and customs to be eradicated.

Amerindian women were able nonetheless to distinguish the essential message from the cultural trappings surrounding it and adapted the central elements of the Gospel message while preserving many of their ancestral values. This was not an easy or linear process, but painstaking anthropological and historical work has shown that it existed. The discernment and insight of the poor women of the colonial period has profoundly influenced their contemporaries who struggle for women's liberation.

### 3. THE EFFECTS OF SLAVERY

The indiscriminate slavery of the colonial regime caused the disruption of

the indigenous economy, destroyed native social and political life, and decimated the population. Men were assigned to working the land, traditionally the woman's task, while the latter were sent into domestic service in the houses of the colonizers, where they became slaves and were exposed to all the sexual whims of the master.

The violence of the slave regime hit women hardest. They were snatched from their villages, from their husbands and children and handed over to the colonial enterprise as domestic slaves and unwilling partners in reproduction. As Fernando Mires observes: "The great majority of the historians of the conquest do not include the enforced allocation of women to the colonizers among the different forms of relationships existing under slavery. The very term 'allocation' seems to be reserved solely for the male workforce."

Mires mentions four forms of allocation involving women: a) for marriage, which made it easier to appropriate land; b) for domestic service; c) as 'gifts' to consolidate alliances between native chiefs and the Spaniards; d) by force for reproduction.

Mires's comment is highly significant for our discussion and analysis: "Patriarchy of the Muslim type, familiar to the Spaniards, was imposed in America alongside the Catholic-monogamous type of patriarchy. In practice the harem was a semi-official institution, so much so that one chronicler spoke of the 'Paradise of Mohammed' established by the Spanish." By carrying out such practices, the conquistadors destroyed the Indian family.

### 4. POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE

While the advent of independence marked the beginning of another era in our continent, it did not break the cultural and economic dependence on centres such as France, Britain and the United States. Also, it took women almost a century (1850 - 1950) to gain recognition as members of society.

Independence did not bring significant changes in the condition of the native peoples and women. The struggles for emancipation led by Indians were played down. Although there was formal recognition of the part played by women in the patriotic struggle, their presence was quickly forgotten.

### New Strategies for Survival

The emergence of military dictatorships based on the ideology of national security brings us to the Latin American political scene of the seventies and the struggle for human rights. In Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Chile, repression, terror and torture, imprisonment and exile struck down a whole generation of political and trade-union leaders and militants. This repression affected women, whether as victims of persecution themselves or as relatives of those who were arrested, disappeared or killed. Luis Vitale, as an eye witness, confirms that a "sociology of the daily life of political prisoners - yet to be written - would reveal the thousand and one forms of resistance invented by Latin American women in the jails of dictators."

The women's movement for amnesty in Brazil, the committees of the families of missing detainees in Chile and - the most impressive symbol of all - the mothers of the *Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina - are examples of organized resistance by women.

From the sixties onwards, but especially throughout the seventies, the continent experienced the growth of a varied and important movement which we may generically call the people's movement. In Bolivia, the Housewife's Committee was formed around the miners' trade union movement. It played a major role in mobilizing world opinion. Domitila Chungara was one of their most outstanding leaders.

The massive presence of women in the neighbourhood associations in the poor areas of the large cities, their active involvement in land rights movements, their support for massive strikes

by workers, were to be areas in which women gained experience and increased awareness of their poverty and sexual oppression.

Women in Latin America have been learning to play an active role in the last ten years. This will undoubtedly bring tremendous enrichment to our history as a people, and our ability to kindle hope for a new life full of joy and freedom in lands weighed down by poverty, violence and death.

### 5. A CONCLUDING TALE

As the theologian Elsa Támez has expressed it: "There is great news for the men and women of Latin America and the Caribbean: Iztaccihuatl has stirred a foot, opened her eyes and cried out. Iztaccihuatl, the sleeping woman, is awakening, and Popocatepetl, the young Aztec warrior, proudly standing next to her is looking at her in fear and hope.

In Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, Iztaccihuatl means 'sleeping woman.' This is the name given to one of Mexico's volcanoes because it is shaped like a beautiful sleeping woman. And just as everyone trembles when a volcano roars, so they should also tremble when women begin to stir because they shake the columns which support the apparently eternal chains of oppression, the structures of death which deny life."

Women are awake and we intend to stay awake - as the past and present testimonies of Latin American women show. Women, awakened to consciousness, are struggling for life, and rebelling against all the forms of oppression which would deny us the fullness of life.

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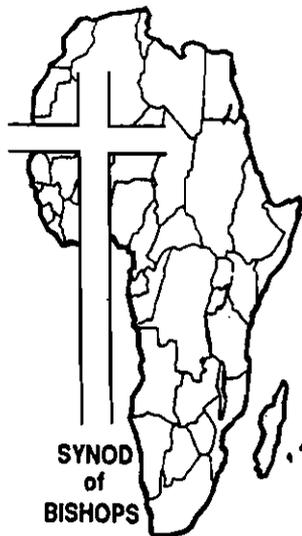
## HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRICA - A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

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### 1. HUMAN RIGHTS: AN INTEGRATED AND DYNAMIC VIEW



*Thus there was a covenant between earth and man. The earth produces the food that man eats. The earth becomes the greatest supernatural force (alusi). Eri controlled yam and other foods and the earth that grows them. No person should defile the earth by spilling human blood in violence. This is the covenant. It must be kept. We, Nri, keep it. We told other Igbo to whom we gave yam to keep it. (Nwakoye Odenigbo; Nri Myth Of Origin).*

In Africa a person is involved in multiple relationships. The African experience of person takes in the community - human and spiritual - and the indi-

vidual. This notion of person has been described as 'coherent pluralism,' the self is related: to the spiritual world (bonded to an ancestor or a non-corporeal spirit as manifested by the individual's characteristics and potential), to certain fundamental pre-natal choices (destiny from which limited free acts emerge), and to completion through relationships (for example initiation rites, marriage and society). The self is thus composite and unfinished, and tends towards completion.

#### The Art of Relationships

When one therefore considers human rights in Africa, the focus is on the art of relationship. When a right choice is made or the right of another is infringed upon, it is not just one person or one group which is effected; rather the whole environment (spiritual, human and physical) rejoices or is aggrieved. Human rights involve the totality of an individual's cosmos. In effect, African religious experience claims divinities and ancestors as guardians of morality.

As the Nri (Igbo) experience suggests, there is a Covenant relationship between the community and Ala (the earth diety). Bloodshed, the highest infringement on the right of a person, is an attack on the divinity. The divinity is the source of sanctions imposed on offenders. This African

universe in which physical elements, like the land, may assume dynamic-mystical characteristics is a moral universe. Nothing happens by chance. All segments of the universe, according to their kind and grade, act together for the benefit of human life.

The African vision of the human universe in which rights and freedoms are circumscribed is certainly non-scientific. But it is not too distant from what the physical and biological sciences have been trying to demonstrate about life and the origin of the universe. And the on-going dialogue between science and religion, which is gradually excluding the extremes of creationism and evolutionism, values this understanding of cosmology.

#### Human Responsibility

The starting point of our theological reflection on human rights then is human responsibility. For although Paul Tillich's statement that a human person is a "stranger in the world" is true, yet existence is intimately linked to all the dimensions of being in the universe.

This integral vision of the universe presented both in the African world-view and the physical and biological sciences carries for African religions a moral imperative. No action on planet earth or in the universe is an indifferent act. We are thus persuaded by the science of nature and the African vision of the world to adopt an integral (cosmic) approach to human rights beginning with earth-keeping.

An aggressive attitude towards nature especially through industrialization, has led to the situation where we are replacing nature as the engine of climate change. The daily flaring of gas in Nigeria's oil producing areas, bush burning, disposal of human, chemical and toxic waste, a nuclear explosion like Chernobyl, or the Bhopal disaster, the carnage of war in the Gulf, are ways in which we shirk responsibility for earth-keeping. If the process continues unchecked, the

United Nations Environment Programme projects a rise in average temperature between 1.5C<sup>0</sup> and 4.5C<sup>0</sup> by the middle of the next century. While other species may adapt to such temperatures the human species may face extinction.

The survival of the human species is linked to respect for the various dimensions of life in the universe. This point was aptly made by Chief Seattle, a Suquamish North American Indian. While transferring ancestral lands to the U.S. government he said:

I will make one condition: the white man must treat the beasts of this land as his brothers and sisters. I am a savage and I do not understand any other way. I have seen a thousand buffaloes rotting on the prairie, left by the whiteman who shot them from a passing train. I am a savage and do not understand how the smoking iron horse can be more important than the buffalo we kill only to stay alive. Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every mist in the dark woods, every humming insect. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of my people. This shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors.

Most traditional societies consider the land as sacred. Among the aboriginal people of Australia sacred sites assume dynamic-mystical proportions: "peopled in spirit form by the ancestors who originated in the Dreaming, the creative period of time immemorial." To violate the land is as immoral as rape.

#### Patterns of Domination

The process of industrialization especially in terms of Western modernization is in a way a rape of the earth. This rape which the theology of traditional religion condemns as morally reprehensible opens the floodgates for the dehumanization of all that inhabits the earth: mineral, plant, animals, and humans. Taking our example again from Nigeria where industrialization is only

beginning, one sees how an arrogant expropriation of the land and whatever it contains, especially minerals, without the corresponding responsibility of earth-keeping leads to an environmental chain-reaction. Crude oil is tapped with the most modern equipment in petroleum technology. Delta regions become despoiled of farmlands and fishing waters. Diseases of all descriptions compound the suffering of the wretched of the earth who have been deprived of the means of their livelihood. The earth has become ritually polluted because of immoral choices. It needs to be ritually purified in order to remove the environmental hostility which destroys both the earth and its inhabitants.

While not denying the great achievements of Western technology which have benefited humankind as a whole (for example in the area of medicine), one may not ignore the tragic consequences of the pattern of domination. One cannot fail to notice the signs of domina-

tion directed towards non-western peoples as well as nature: forceful occupation of lands, genocide against Australian aborigines and American Indians, black slavery, exportation of terror (through wars or through the support of dictators to protect Western economic and political interests).

What we learn about human rights from the theology of traditional religion, from an African, Australian or American Indian perspective is instructive for the world of today. This theology is incarnational and earthy: the body is the gateway to relationships which integrate all of life's dimensions. Rights are about humanization and humanization is about integrating the universe into a dynamic whole. The Jewish-Christian scriptures do not really say a different thing, though the dualism introduced through classical Greek philosophy and strengthened by Cartesianism produced a discordant note.

## 2. IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

The great achievements of the science of astronomy have moved our planet and the sun from the centre of the universe to the suburbs of the Milkyway. Despite the reduction of our earth to a speck in the universe, it is still considered to be the centre of the universe. As Vatican II observed:

According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their centre and crown. (*Gaudium et Spes*, N.12)

The Hebrew Bible in the two accounts of creation (Gen. 1 and 2) recognizes the bond between human life and the earth, the creatures of the earth, and the creator in whose image we are created. The earlier Yahwistic account describes this origin as naturalistic - the work of the divine architect whose breath gave life: "then the Lord formed man of dust from the ground, and

breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and he became a living being" (Gen. 2:7).

Endowed with the breath of God without being any less a thing of the earth, the "Lord God took man and put him in the garden to till it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Full companionship is realized in woman who is drawn from the first man and complements him.

### Harmony in Relationships

The later priestly account of creation lays emphasis on order and harmony in the universe. Human life is created in the 'image of God' (Gen. 1:27); and thus, in the first instance, replicates the harmony in God. Human sexuality is recognized as good, another manifestation of likeness to God.

God did not create man a solitary. For from the beginning 'male and

female he created them' ... Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. (*Gaudium et Spes*).

In this way all discrimination based on sex is outlawed. In the second instance likeness to God is realized in dominion over the animal world (Gen. 1:27-28).

Biblical religion interprets the Fall as a loss of the image of God. This loss introduced confusion into creation. We lost the power of the gentle word received from God to command animals and to prevent them from devouring one another. The legend of Cain and Abel shows how men imitated animals and devoured one another. This is the enormity of the loss of the image of God.

#### The Messianic Age

Hebrew prophetic religion makes it clear that the covenanted people of God who guard the Exodus experience as their foundational story must not oppress the poor and the stranger (Dt. 14:28-29; 15:1-4). Faced with the scandal of oppression and living in a situation which appeared hopeless, Isaiah in his third book proclaimed the liberation and consolation of the poor, and the restoration of their dignity as good news (Isa. 61:1-4).

The New Testament sees in Jesus of Nazareth the realization of this messianic hope. However these writings have little to tell us about nature, perhaps because of the city setting of the primitive Christian communities. A certain pessimism sometimes fails to get beyond Hellenistic and Gnostic dualism, and climaxes in apocalypticism which sees a new heaven and a new earth

unconnected with our universe as the end of Christian hope (Rev. 21.1). Luke who traced Jesus' origin back to Adam (Lk. 3:38) appears to suggest the dawn of a new creation in Jesus - for the Spirit of God was present at Jesus' conception and baptism just as the Spirit brooded over the waters at creation.

#### The Reign of God

Above all, the memory of the action and words of Jesus in the Gospels shows that the coming of the reign of God means putting an end to one person's inhumanity to another, and calls us to start the recovery of peace and harmony in creation through the recovery of the image of God lost in the Fall. The followers of Jesus proclaim this new dispensation in word and deed. The importance of this new social image, which restores dignity and human rights, is proclaimed by Luke's Gospel which puts into the mouth of Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry, these words of Isaiah (61:1-2):

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, anointing me to preach good news to the poor, sending me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed, proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord. (Lk. 4:18-19).

Christian theology sees in the incarnation of Jesus our restoration to the image of God lost through sin. In Jesus we learn what it is to be human. This vision rejoins the African ideal where the totality of the universe is a subject of rights. Today, in the global village, more than ever before, the test of the truth of the Christian way lies in nurturing the environment.

### 3. THE CHURCH AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Restoration to the lost image of God in Christ, invites the Christian to concentrate attention on the task of the

healing of the human family which is the starting point of recreating the universe. The Church, the bearer of

this message of reconciliation, has, through history, lived the Gospel with the greatest difficulty. Neither in its ranks nor in the world to which this news is addressed has the ideal been realized.

### An Unrealized Ideal

The early Christianity of the Fathers of the Church was besieged by the Roman empire. Christians bravely bore witness to their faith. And in their position of weakness, they denounced their persecution as inhuman, and resisted the state identification of political power with being in the right. Some Romans, like Tertullian, proclaimed religious liberty as an inalienable right.

Tertullian's defence of religious liberty was within a weak church. When Constantine decreed freedom of worship for Christians, and when Christianity became the state religion under Theodosius, the language changed. Pagan practices were outlawed, and the death penalty was imposed on non-Christians. This situation whereby the Church was identified with the state prevailed from Theodosius to the French revolution. State violence enforced belief.

It is paradoxical that Augustine who in the City of God criticized states or kingdoms for using state power, later urged the use of state power to enforce belief. Augustinian pessimism denied to the human subject the capacity for self-government because of the devastating effects of original sin. Government, even a tyrannical government, he argued, is a necessary defence against sin. The rule of one person over others, of master over slave, is a necessity. This alliance between the Church and the state to create a Christian society - one people, one king, one faith, one law - may have helped the Christianization of Western Europe, but it denied to the Church that critical reserve, and the prophetic voice needed to defend the voiceless, and to recreate the universe.

### Tarnished Evangelization

When the foibles of Medieval Christendom were exported to non-

European socio-cultural areas they caused shockwaves whose sad effects persist in our global village. The invasion of Latin America, motivated by greed for gold led to the plunder of Aztec and Inca treasures and to the subjection of the inhabitants of those lands to slave labour in gold and silver mines. It was characteristic of the spirit of Christendom to justify the conquest by reasons of evangelization. After all was it not the pleasure of God to bestow dominion over the world to the kings of Spain and Portugal? Medieval and Renaissance Christian society wounded by plagues and especially torn apart by wars made great advances in military technology and used this to great advantage in imposing its lust for wealth in Africa, Asia and America. Augustine rightly called such states 'great robberies' where impunity was added to covetousness.

### Black Slavery

There were dissenting voices to the use of the Christian religion as a basis for the construction of these 'great robberies.' But the Jesuits in Latin America and converted theologians like Bartolome de Las Casas constituted a minority incapable of changing the current. However, in that tragedy of tragedies which befell the human race - black slavery - great theologians like de Las Casas and the whole Christian society were in agreement that by their very nature slavery benefits the people of the black race. The inhumanity they suffered was theologically explained as the result of the curse of Noah on the descendants of his son, Ham (Gen. 9 and 10). Whether this racial interpretation of Genesis is to be traced to Luther's commentary or even to the Talmud, it was taken for granted all over Europe that the suffering of Africans was an act of God. Bishop Daniel Comboni, founder of the Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, prayed the First Vatican Council in June 1870 to make a solemn declaration releasing Africans from this curse. For -

No other curse has operated with such cruelty and for such a duration in the human race as this pitiless

and painful curse with which the Most High condemned the sons of Ham.

The ideological use of religion to justify evil while salving a society's conscience is characteristic of the 'ideal of Christendom' where defending the faith against infidels, winning honour and acquiring wealth were simultaneous motivations.

#### The Learning Process

The altered social conditions which reduced the Church to a position of weakness after the French Revolution, helped it to rediscover, even though in a partial way, its prophetic vocation. In the modern period, the industrial revolution, with its ideology of liberalism, brought in its wake social evils which reduced the urban proletariat to squalor and other indignities like malnutrition, congestion in town life, child labour, and absence of security in factories. This drew the attention of the Church. Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum* (1891) denounced these injustices of industrialized society, and this marked the first clear assumption by the Church of its responsibility to defend the weak in a dechristianized society where it has lost power and privilege and is reduced to a minority status. This defence of the social rights of the urban proletariat did not mean, however, that the Church no longer looked at religious liberty and other liberties of the individual with horror, as the modernist crisis showed.

The learning process of the Catholic Church on the issue of human rights reached a certain maturity during the pontificate of John XXIII, and rapidly

developed with the Second Vatican Council. John XXIII is recognized as having influenced the tenor of the United Nations 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (1948) when he was papal nuncio in Paris. It is then not surprising that his major encyclical on human rights, *Pacem in Terris* (1963), emphasized the right to worship according to the dictates of one's conscience and roots human rights in the very nature of the human person (*Pacem in Terris*, nn. 6 and 9). The use of the notion of human nature and natural law, which was first proposed in defence of the Indians in the 16th century by the Dominican Vitoria - but fell on deaf ears, formed the basis of the French *Declaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* (1789) and the U.N. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948).

With this fundamental shift at Vatican II, the Church's understanding of its social and institutional place in a pluralistic world, and the normative stance of the Church towards human rights appears to be set on an irreversible course. The defence of individual, social, and economic human rights has assumed a place of preeminence in the Church's mission to the world. From 1965, when Paul VI addressed the United Nations, to the pontificate of John Paul II, the Catholic Church has not only joined people of good will in defending human rights but has also clarified through *Populorum Progressio*, *Redemptoris Hominis*, *Laborem Exercens*, and the recent *Centesimus Annus*, its position about our place in the universe and the forces which enhance or diminish human dignity. But the Church has to demonstrate through concrete actions its commitment to human rights.

## 4. HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRICA

We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled, - in short, from the perspective of those who suffer... We have to learn that personal suffering is a more effective key, a more rewarding principle for exploring the world in thought and action than personal good fortune (Bonhoeffer).

In a 15th century account of the beginnings of slave raiding on the Guinea coast, one of the raiders, Zurara (*La Chronique de Guinée*) described how the arrival of the Portuguese implanted terror in villages. Mothers abandoned their children, husbands their wives, each trying to flee as quickly as possible. Some drowned in the sea, others sought refuge in their huts, while others hid their children in sea-weed. "From that time," concludes Metinhoue, "at the sight of a European, the black African was obliged to face the issue of personal security."

This insecurity of life in the African world appears to have increased with the passage of time. In the colonial period Europeans plundered the wealth of Africa with local cheap labour. At independence, the structures of exploitation set up by the colonizer assured the continued servicing of the metropolis by the blackman supervised by a local leadership. The whole state apparatus constitutes a threat to human dignity to the point that neither the police nor the military, not even an elected government inspires the ordinary African with confidence - they all constitute patterns of exploitation. To compound it all the 'debt trap' becomes a means whereby the poor in Africa subsidize the economies of Western Europe and the United States; they are left sufficiently alive (or rather in a coma) to keep on servicing such economies. The issue of the struggle for human rights and dignity in Africa assumes bewildering dimensions.

### The Right to Survival

When human rights are discussed in our pluralistic world we are not always saying the same thing. For the Western capitalist world the focus is the individual person who must remain unfettered to act, speak, worship, associate or accumulate wealth. For the erstwhile socialist republics, rights are about satisfying social and economic needs (mainly work and material security like housing, education, health). For the brutalized nations of the Third World, the focus is on the right to human survival and liberation

in a world where they are manipulated by the first and second worlds. It is within this context of survival and liberation that the Catholic Church and other Christian Churches in Africa see their commitment to human rights and dignity as evangelization.

One of the outspoken Catholic bishops of Nigeria, John Onaiyekan, observed in a recent paper that for Africa and the Third World human rights issues are "a matter of life and death." This appears to be the conviction of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). Following the initiative of Vatican II, John XXIII and Paul VI, SECAM has, since its inception in 1969, made declarations relevant to development, human promotion and human rights, all intimately linked with evangelization.

### A New Approach

SECAM sees its vocation to preach the good news within the context of the oppressed (cf. Lk. 4:18-19). At Kampala in 1969 the bishops insisted that it would be a betrayal of their mission if they did not voice their concern about "the want, the hunger, the ills, the ignorance, the blows struck against liberty, the tragic consequences of racial discrimination, the ravages of war and oppression which burden so many human beings in the third world." In 1978 SECAM renewed its call for peace, social justice and human rights "because in many countries of Africa human rights are flouted and trampled under foot." Then the assembly went ahead to denounce and condemn all crimes and political systems which constitute a "violation of human integrity..." In 1981 SECAM published a treatise on Justice and Evangelization. The biblical background, the African context, the external forces impinging on this context, and the pastoral programmes for promoting justice were all treated in depth. Again in 1984 and 1985 resolutions, recommendations and exhortations were made.

The situation has assumed such proportions in Africa that declarations

of a continental association like SECAM (or its Protestant counterpart - the AACC, supported by the World Council of Churches) are insufficient to restore us to God's image. The declarations, it is true, are a fruit of an analytical understanding of the conditions of the struggling Africans. But there must be a way to demonstrate in a concrete way the commitment to the struggle against marginalization and suffering.

#### Concrete Action

It is at this level of concrete action where reflection on the experience of dehumanization leaves no question but that the courage of the Church in Africa is tested. Pronouncements may be easy but concrete involvement is a different matter. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria continues to warn that the nation is still in jeopardy: the deteriorating economic conditions, the unclear political climate, the long entrenched social problems like violent crimes, endemic corruption at all levels, blatant misuse of power and position, ethnic and religious disturbances, neglect and oppression of the poor and powerless, are all a concern for the Church. Thus it calls on all Nigerians to insist on their right to participate actively in the process of decisions affecting their daily lives.

Catholics "have not only a right but a duty to work for and ensure the establishment of a just and moral social order in our nation" in order "to rescue our land from endemic moral corruption, political instability and unjust socio-economic systems and policies." The Southern Africa regional Bishops' conference (IMBISA) after reflecting on the oppression of the poor by governments of the region and on how the countries of the region are held captive by creditors who take between ten and seventy times the amount of the original debt, reaffirms the necessity of maintaining its prophetic mission even if the Church is accused of playing politics. It also renewed its adoption of the model of basic communities where reflection and social analysis will lead to right decisions in the light of the Gospel.

#### A Prophetic Theology

The *Kairos* theologians repudiated a Church theology which employs principles like reconciliation, negotiation, non-violence, and peaceful solutions without the necessary social analysis, and opted for a prophetic theology which through social analysis adopts a Christian way of approaching political solutions to problems of South Africa. They stated in clear terms their option for the political struggle:

Christians, if they are not doing so already, must quite simply participate in the struggle for liberation and for a just society. The campaigns of the people, from consumer boycotts to stayaways, need to be supported and encouraged by the Church.

These are examples of how the Church leadership and theologians have descended into the deep trenches of the arena of struggle where commitment is given flesh and bones. The struggle is clearly against 'principalities and powers.' Dictatorial regimes, apartheid, trans-national corporations, stop at nothing to maintain their exploitation of the masses. Their draconian reactions to strikes, demonstrations, and civil disobedience, creates a worse situation for the poor. A church with a long tradition of an other-wordly spirituality may feel convinced that it should counsel peaceful negotiation instead of confrontation. Within a committed church the problem of discernment is posed at every turn.

The on-going violence in South Africa projects the dilemma facing the Church leadership. The *New Kairos* sums up the situation:

...the more the Church appeals for peace, the more the violence continues; and the more the Church condemns the savagery of the killings, the more savage they become; and the more the Church speaks about reconciliation, the more the people plead for arms to defend themselves against attack... The primary task of the Church at this moment, then, is not to call for *peace* but to call for

justice. (*New Kairos*, XIII 142 - 143, 2, 1990)

This determination all over Africa in the rural areas and in urban centres, in schools and in factories to fight for goals which are noble, because they enthrone justice which along brings peace, is the sign of the emergence of the new African. (e.g. the May/June 1989 anti-SAP riots in Nigeria, the sustained struggle by workers and the youth in South Africa, the pro-democracy movements in Zaire, Kenya, and Togo). Church leadership and theologians must support and nurture this emerging image in the struggle for human rights in Africa.

### Conclusion

A theological reflection on human rights in Africa may conclude with this insistence on a positive image of a person who resists oppression in order to transform the universe. The aim of the struggle is not simply the destitution of the oppressor who creates a hostile environment for the masses - this may only reproduce the hates, the violence, and the corruption of the oppressor. Rather the empowerment of the poor is to transform, and thus to humanize, the earth. Christian theology needs to provide for the freedom movements a spirituality which integrates the cosmos into its orbit. This is based not on the anger aroused by the inventory of the wounds inflicted but on the hope of the realization of a new humanity which emerges in the struggle. This saves the struggle from what Pieris calls 'pathological messianism' which attacks existing evils in such a ruthless and reckless way as not to respect the human ideal.

The South African theologian, Mofokeng, sees such a spirituality already developing in the popular religiosity born on the terrain of struggle in South Africa. Religion is practiced on soccer fields, huge stadia, in the open air and commuter trains which ferry industrial workers to work:

...a religion that brings together and merges elements of traditional African religious practices like dancing and a high emotional spirituality, liberative elements of African culture, such as a strong sense of solidarity and sharing and a theology with a distinct political, economic and social agenda.

The enormous potential of religion has been tapped both by the weak and by the strong throughout history. While it may have served as the last place of repose for the oppressed, it has been manipulated by the strong for economic and political gains.

A prophetic theology which maintains a critical reserve vis-a-vis any human system should not only deplore and reject oppressive regimes but must also challenge revolutionary or radical movements on the humanist ideal which motivated their struggle. In the midst of the struggle this ideal should be celebrated in song and dance. In Christian terms this is the foretaste of the resurrection realized in Jesus - a transformation of the universe where death and its ugly agents are swallowed up in victory (I Cor. 16:54).

Ref. *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology*, Vol.4: 1-2, 1991. Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians, P.O. Box 9696 Enugu, Nigeria.

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## FOCUS ON SUDAN

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Patricia McMenamin, OLA

*(Sister Patricia McMenamin is Superior General of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles. Her visit to Sudan took place shortly before the government expelled all foreign missionaries).*

Pope John Paul II addressed the tragic situation of the people of Sudan on the occasion of the beatification of Sister Josephine Bakhita.

"... A source of grave concern is the situation of the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Sudan, forced by the war to abandon their homes and work. Recently they have been compelled to leave the camps where they have found some form of assistance and they have been transported to desert locations. Relief convoys from international agencies have been prevented from reaching them. Theirs is a tragic situation, and it cannot leave us unmoved..."  
*(L'Osservatore Romano, 20 May 1992)*

The open persecution of Christians continues to escalate.

### EVICTED FROM DAR EL SALAAM

Just before Christmas in Dar el Salaam, near Hella Mayo, more than 60,000 people were evicted when soldiers and police moved in and bulldozed their homes, forcing them to move to a desert area, 40 kms from Khartoum. Today what remains are the ruins of a little village, the devastation a testament to helpless people incapable of resisting the threat of guns.

After suffering the effects of war and famine, they began life anew, living in shelters made from cardboard boxes, plastic sacks and bamboo sticks. Later

they managed to build mud-brick houses. Just when it seemed that they were settled, the government decided that they were on land needed by others. With only overnight notice, they were driven out and forced to begin again. The government said they were going to a better area - one with neither light, nor water!

### RE-SETTLEMENT IN KIZITO

I visited Kizito where about 20,000 people now live, the temperature that day was 31<sup>0</sup> C; a hot wind swept across the grey and dusty earth. Children squinted in an effort to protect their eyes from the sand that stung their faces. Malnutrition was evident. In all of this area there was no water supply of any kind. People depend on donkeys which daily carry tanks of water. A 'jerry-can' of water costs 6,7 or 8 Sudanese pounds depending on where one lives.

This may seem very little in our eyes, but the people question where they will find this money every day. If they work in Khartoum, they spend a large portion of their minimal wage on transport. Planting is forbidden. There is not a tree or a shrub of any kind to be seen in the area.

Many came to say that they had nothing at all to eat. Overseas aid is part of the answer with distribution organized by different organizations. Yet even some of the gifts of food are

being sold in the market. How, I wonder, can people survive in such horrific conditions? One woman told us that 'they came and said if I would pray like the Muslims they would give me food. I refused. It is not my way.'

In another little hut we found newborn twins; the parents were delighted. What is their future and the future of thousands of other children?

Our Sisters have started many small projects to help the men and women and their families. The women come together in groups for sewing, basket-making, and tie-and-dye. This brings a minimum income for survival. A small medical clinic with centers in the surrounding villages brings hope for those who are sick; it is a drop in the ocean but an important one. Again, medical supplies are a constant problem.

#### CELEBRATION IN JABEL AULEA

Another visit was to the new 'Dar el Salaam' at Jabel Aulea where people are settling. This encounter will stay forever in my memory. The people were overjoyed to see the Sisters coming to visit after four months (it was not possible before). They danced and sang. I held back tears of strong emotion to witness such Christian love - evidence of all they had shared together in previous times.

The first thing we did was to have a celebration of thanksgiving where the Word of God was shared. That day the reading was: "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world" (Mt.5). Never before had this Word meant so much - we were evangelized in a new way by that Christian community for the Lord is close to the broken hearted.

The people rebuilt their little chapel of bamboo, carried all the way from Hella Mayo. No permission was given to put up their place of worship, but they were ready to risk because they needed a building in which to come together and pray.

Here at least there was water. UNICEF had managed to install pumps - fresh and pure water poured out, the source of life!

#### A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

The Church continues to struggle against the injustices - encouraging people not to be passive, but to respond in a non-violent way against the powers that seek to crush them. As one person put it, "It is as if people have no right to exist, as if they have come from another planet and should go away."

We recall the words of Gabriel Zubeir, Archbishop of Khartoum, during the celebration of Sister Bakhita's Beatification.

We will continue for some time to suffer, to be harassed and even to be treated as free slaves without real freedom and forced to beg for our God given dignity and rights as human beings. We will continue to experience a deep sense of hopelessness and helplessness and to look to the future with an apprehension bordering on despair.

The Beatification of the servant of God, Bakhita, has now brought us a spark of hope which we hope will break out into a burning fire.... We recognize now more than ever our duty and privilege to proclaim and witness to this God who loved us first by responding whole-heartedly to His love. We desire to give concrete expression to God's love through lives of humble and loving service to the needy. Our commitment is to become living instruments of reconciliation and understanding among and with those who cause us so much harm - those who truly do not know what they are doing to us.

Archbishop Zubeir's words are a major challenge to all who are concerned about or who work in Sudan, where a persecuted people try to live in deep faith, to make their voices heard, and to claim their human rights.

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## FROM CONFRONTATION TO CONVERSATION

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Joe Nwaokoro, SJ

The bloodiest and most devastating wars in history have been fought in God's name. From the battle of Lepanto, on October 7, 1571, to the massacre of the Protestant Huguenots by Catholics on August 24, 1572, it is a similar tale of horror and destruction. In our times nations have been devastated and people slaughtered supposedly out of love for God. For example, Northern Ireland, Lebanon, and Sudan are being destroyed - in God's name! But how far is Nigeria from the bleak prospect of a religious war? Considering the frequency of religious motivated conflicts in this nation, the future can be frightening

### THE NIGERIAN SITUATION

The Maitatsine riot in Kano in 1980 left about 4,177 people dead and considerable property damage. The army was called in to quell the disturbance. Similarly, riots in Kaduna in 1982 and Kafanchan in 1987 left hundreds dead. Mosques, churches, and property worth millions of *naira* were destroyed. Anarchy and pandemonium ensued. Civil authorities were disregarded; again the army used force to contain the situation.

This year, 1992, in Bauchi and Kano States riots claimed the lives of many people; churches and mosques were burnt; property was destroyed. Killings were indiscriminate and looting was widespread. The police could not match the fury of the rioters. The army was again appealed to in order to restore order.

#### Causes of the Situation

This unfortunate phenomenon is caused by a complex of interwoven issues:

1. Nigeria's purported admission into the O.I.C. (Organization of Islamic Conference) raises fears of domination by one religious group.
2. Absolutism and an unhealthy competition between Christians and Muslims nurtures bigotry, and a prejudiced conception of the other as rival and enemy.
3. Dialogue is mistakenly perceived as compromise or capitulation.
4. There is the fear-induced assumption that the other party is never open to dialogue.

These attitudes explain to some extent the failure of several attempts at dialogue. Unless they are seriously challenged, they threaten the nation and can only lead to division and encourage confrontation. The ultimate end will be violence. And violence we know begets violence.

#### Search for a Common Ground

Overcoming this ominous danger is not easy, but it is possible. The more we accentuate difference, the more we distrust the other person. The more we see him or her as an enemy, the more we turn to violence. But the gathering clouds of religious confrontation can be dispelled if we are open to dialogue, and to the painful search for a common ground. We can set the stage by focusing on, and appreciating the many points of convergence between Islam and Christianity:

1. Both religions are uncompromisingly monotheistic, and believe in a God who tolerates no other gods.

2. They both have Middle Eastern and Semitic origins.

3. They have a common ancestor, Abraham.

4. Muslims do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God but they honour him as a prophet. The reason Muslim fundamentalists offered for their rampage in Katsina this year was their indignation over what they perceived as blaspheming of the Prophet Mohammed and Jesus.

5. Both religious traditions honour Mary.

6. Islam and Christianity are committed to transforming, not destroying society, and enthroning peace, justice, and love.

#### CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

Peace, which both religions foster and esteem, can only be achieved through dialogue which requires:

1. Clarity and self-assurance about one's own beliefs.

2. Fidelity to one's faith. It must be noted that inter-religious dialogue is not the same as a negotiating table. Dialogue is only possible if Catholics, while being open minded, maintain the belief and hope in salvation through Christ, the revealed Word of God.

3. Openness and a respect for the differences seen in the other. While not sliding into religious relativism, we must acknowledge that no side can claim a monopoly on the truth. Moreover, it is important to see the complementarity of the other.

4. Both parties must be non-judgmental, for a judgmental attitude destroys the fabric of conversation.

5. There must be a sincere desire for peace through dialogue. Any half-hearted attempt at dialogue is bound to fail, for it is a sham. Therefore, the honest resolve to converse must be

transparent.

6. Above all, the will to engage in dialogue must be rooted and grounded in love.

Christian-Muslim dialogue is a must, for both religions seek to promote peace, not discord; love, not hatred; a just, ordered society, and not a chaotic one. Religious violence, the consequence of a refusal to dialogue, is rooted in fear and hatred and makes our claim to a God who is Love questionable.

#### Signs of Hope

It is encouraging that our desire to work for peace is neither one-sided nor marked by self-delusion. The organization of Islamic Conference is equally committed to a Christian-Muslim relationship marked by peaceful relations. In a letter to Pope John Paul II, its Secretary-General, Dr. Hamid Al-gabic promised the cooperation "of the O.I.C. and the nations and people's who make it up to employ all necessary efforts to Muslim-Christian dialogue, to promote the cause of peace in the world, and to ensure the well-being of humanity."

During his visit to Kaduna in 1982, Pope John Paul II re-echoed Vatican II's *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, when he said: "... The Church has a deep respect for Muslims since she believes that the plan of Salvation encompasses all who acknowledge the creator. This includes a readiness to cooperate with them for the betterment of humanity and a commitment to search together for true peace and justice. Dialogue is the gateway to such cooperation."

The age of crusades is over. Now is the time to move from conflict to cooperation, from rage to respect, and from confrontation to companionship. This is the age of dialogue.

Ref. *The Catholic Ambassador*,  
Vol. 13, No. 1, March 1992.  
P.M.B. 2011, Iperu-Remo,  
Ogun State, Nigeria



## mission moments

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### CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

(GHANA)

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"When I arrived in Tamale, just over four years ago, I was lucky enough to meet Aziz, a young teacher of Arabic in one of the government schools of the town.

Right from the start, he understood what the Bishop had asked me to do, namely to foster ties of friendship and understanding between Christians and Muslims. He introduced me to many influential and well educated Muslim leaders, Imans and teachers.

Once I was invited by one of the religious leaders to spend 'the night of destiny' with them in the mosque. It is a celebration of the revelation of the Koran to Mohammed. For me it was a new and very beautiful experience. After some moments of individual reading of the Koran and of spontaneous prayers, I was asked to provide some prayer intentions, I prayed for unity between Christians and Muslims and then I recited the 'Our Father' in Arabic. The Iman found the prayer so beauti-

ful that he offered to translate it at once into Dagbamble.

On one occasion, Aziz and I met one of the Imans in the street. "That one," he asked, indicating me, "is she still looking for fellowship with Muslims?" On Aziz's affirmative response, the Iman said, "One day she will find what she is looking for." Probably we are not thinking of the same thing. However we are both in search of God and of friendship."

Ref. Sr. Marie-Renee Wyseur  
*White Fathers*  
*White Sisters.*  
August-Sept. 1992  
No. 305. 5 Charlbury  
Grove, Ealing, London.

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ROMY

(PHILIPPINES)

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Romy has not walked for five years. Since that day the car hit him he has been depending on a wheelchair to get around. It is easy enough in his own house because it is designed without stairs. That is the house he shares with eight-

een others in wheelchairs. "The House of the Handicapped" - in Novaliches, a Manila suburb, and my first parish assignment as a lay missionary from Korea. It was there that I first met Romy. He and his companions have indeed taught me many things in the past six months.

Tina and I lived with a Filipino family nearby, and we welcomed a visit from Romy and the other 'wheelchairists' one afternoon. Sensitive to their being an imposition on our landlady's space, they insisted that we would chat together in the garden. Tina fetched the snacks, I was getting a lesson in another Tagalog verb, when suddenly Romy called my attention.

"Gabi, Gabi, look at the chicken" he said to me. Actually there were six chickens in the coop at the garden wall, but I saw clearly what he meant. One of the chickens had got its foot caught in the wire mesh walling of the coop and was suspended head-down in the cage. "Gabi, help it, help it, please" continued Romy, and then, after a pause, added shyly and somewhat sadly, "or it will become like us."

I was afraid of the other chickens flying in my face,

but I felt compassion for the bird which was caught, so I went into the coop and released it. The ten steps over and back to the chicken coop became a journey of deeper discovery for me as I realized that where I had felt compassion, Romy had experienced pain. Where I identified with the helpers, the do-gooders, those who set others free, Romy identified with the victim.

Ref. Gabriella Shin,  
Columban Lay  
Missionary  
*Columban Intercom*  
July/August, 1992  
Dalgan Park, Navan  
Co. Neath, Ireland.

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MARACAIBO -  
VENEZUELA

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My last four months of life in Maracaibo, revealed another face of life. Maracaibo, the capital of Zulia, is economically rich because of the presence of petroleum. It has the capacity to control the country economically because of the centralized governmental structure, but it is not independent in its developmental process. Public services are very much neglected. Even the pueblos so close to the city's center do not have a regular water supply. People have to buy water from private suppliers. It is the same with the sanitation system. Garbage remains in the front of the houses for days. The transport system

and the maintenance of the roads are no better.

One wonders why a rich city has such poor services. People live for the day. Tomorrow is not their concern. This attitude makes them enjoy life and at the same time lack the foresight to plan for the future. Most of the poor have a rich person's way of living and thinking. It comes through in their way of life and buying patterns. Luxury items which you see in a rich home in India (a poor country) are found in an ordinary home here. Houses in the barrio where we live have a television, a refrigerator, a tape recorder and many electric gadgets.

I think this is because a rich consumer market culture exists here since it is a petroleum city. The poor are simply the victims of this consumer market culture. They are not conscious of the unjust system which drains them day by day in a very subtle manner. This makes the work of conscientization and struggle against unjust structures more difficult.

Another feature which attracted me here is the obvious presence of *Guajiras*, the original people of the land. Women go around clad in their traditional robes. They have not lost their identity even after 500 years of colonization, although they are one of the marginalized groups in society. It is interesting to note that in the women's prison the majority are *Guajiras* even though they are a minority in the gen-

eral population. This is simply because they are too poor to defend themselves.

A beautiful land and its people, maltreated, molested, robbed of culture and riches, marred by many years of colonization and greed. The future hope of Venezuela is in the hands of the pueblos. They have their inner power and spirit to fight against the unjust structures and systems of corruption. Hope comes alive in the gradual awakening of people to their God-given potentials.

Ref. M. Kuruvinakunnel, SCMM  
*Intercontinent*  
July, 1992 No. 202  
8400 Pine Rd,  
Philadelphia, PA 19111.

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OPEN LETTER TO THE  
BISHOPS OF AFRICA

(NIGERIA)

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In light of the present situation in Africa, I would single out four points for your special consideration:

1. I am seriously troubled by the alarming exodus of Catholics to Independent Churches, commonly called 'sects,' to the New Religious Movements and to Islam. I am also worried by the double practices of our Catholics. It is amazing to see how they combine Catholic practices with traditional beliefs. The problem is that they

have to hide in order to be counted among the 'good and practicing' Catholics.

The impression I receive from this exodus is that the Catholic Church has yet to meet the African soul. As long as 99 percent of the People of God still find themselves foreigners in God's House, two important questions must be raised. Do the African laity consider themselves Gospel Trustees and Stewards? Have they accepted full responsibility for passing on the faith to their children, even to the point of death, like the early Christians?

2. I feel that there should be a reflection on the power structure of the Church as it is now and the African way of life. Can we sincerely maintain the present system of administration and government?

3. Undoubtedly, I understand that the present structures and disciplines of the Church were shaped through history by the Holy Spirit and also, by the Roman Empire, which is also called holy. For example, the liturgy with its music, symbols, gestures and expressions were inculturated in the Greco-Roman world. Marriage, in its mutual exchange of consent and signing of contracts by the couple, reflects Germanic-Roman

customs. Should not Africa work towards the emergence of an African rite and a code of law for the African Church?

4. The Synod of Bishops held in 1971 made the work for Justice and Peace a constitutive part of the Gospel message. Pope John Paul II reiterated this point in his recent *Encyclical Centesimus Annus*. The Catholic Church in Africa however is seen to be a powerful pressure group which supports those who exploit and oppress the people, either because the Church is too close to the government to the extent of covering up the latter's misdeeds, or the Church is unjust in its administration.

Christianity, more than any other religion in the continent, has raised the status of women. Yet, questions remain, one involves the possibility of integrating Sisters into the life and the administration of the Church.

While the Pope recommends trade unions as necessary structures to protect workers' rights, in most places the Church hires and fires its workers without due process. In most cases, mission workers have no appointment letters determining their conditions of service.

Perhaps one may ask: how many church employers, Bishops, priests, religious and parishes, pay decent wages to their employees?

Another question is whether politicians who are Catholic have really been encouraged and challenged in the exercise of their political ministry to portray the social teachings of the Church?

Lastly, the Vatican insists on dialogue with other religions. In Africa these are mainly Islam and African traditional religions. Should we not do something about the obvious misplaced sense of perfectionism and superiority which Catholics show towards other religions and their believers?

I firmly believe that God loves Africa as well as Asia, America and Europe. The Synod is a real *kairos* event, a time to mobilize all available energies toward a deep and sound evangelization and inculturation of the Gospel message in Africa, our mother and God-given land.

Ref. John Patrick Ngoyi, CICM. *The Catholic Ambassador*, Vol. 13, No. 1, March 1992. P.M.B. 2011, Iperu-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria

COMING EVENTS

DATES TO NOTE

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November 5, 1992

ECOLOGY AND WORLD DEBT  
DONAL O'MAHONEY, OFM.CAP.

1) The Religious Dimension

2) The Economic Dimension

SVD College, via dei Verbiti, 1

A morning session : 9.00 - 12.45 hrs.

(English, Italian, French, Spanish)

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November 16, 1992

HAITI UPDATE:

SVD College, via dei Verbiti, 1

4.00 - 6.15 p.m.

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December 14, 1992

SEDOS ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY:

1) A LOOK BACK TO SANTO DOMINGO

2) GENERAL MEETING AND PLANNING

SVD College, via dei Verbiti, 1

A full-day session: (Please note new date)

(English, Italian, French, Spanish).

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May 18-22, 1993

AFRICA: QUESTIONS AND PROPOSALS  
TO THE CHURCH

VILLA CAVALLETTI

(English, Italian, French, Spanish)

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