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C.P. 6139 – 00195 ROMA PRATI – ITALY
+39 06688 06418 (fax)
sjs@sjcuria.org

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Fernando Franco, S.J.
Editor

INTRODUCTION

It is a privilege to be able to start the first draft of my first editorial in *PJ* on Christmas Eve. For a moment, passing and precarious as that moment may be, one feels that people all over the world agree on the importance of enduring peace in personal life and in the world at large. We are aware that without justice peace will be neither lasting nor acceptable to the victims of violence everywhere. Reading the annual peace message of the Holy Father I was struck by his insistence that peace depends not only on justice, but on truth and credibility. This is an important message for us, especially for so many of us who lived the fraud perpetrated at Johannesburg. There is no other way of describing the final unwillingness of the rich countries to commit themselves to concrete targets that can be effectively monitored and evaluated. It is a fraud against the poor, for example, to set up publicly the Millennium Goals, to accept that there are serious shortfalls in the way to achieving them, and then back off at the last minute from pledging actual substantial financial help. We must listen honestly and without prejudice to the angry words of the Holy Father. He seems to be saying, "enough is enough." What is happening to the poor all over the world, for instance, the endless and meaningless violence of the Middle East, has no justification.

PEACE AND TRUTH

There is an unbreakable bond between *the work of peace* and *respect for truth*. Honesty in the supply of information, equity in legal systems, openness in democratic procedures give citizens a sense of security, a readiness to settle controversies by peaceful means, and a desire for genuine and constructive dialogue, all of which constitute *the true premises of a lasting peace*. Political summits on the regional and international levels serve the cause of peace only if joint commitments are then honoured by each party. Otherwise these meetings risk becoming irrelevant and useless, with the result that people believe less and less in dialogue and trust more in the use of force as a way of resolving issues. The negative repercussions on peace resulting from commitments made and then not honoured must be carefully assessed by State and government leaders.

Pacta sunt servanda, says the ancient maxim. If at all times commitments ought to be kept, *promises made to the poor* should be considered particularly binding. Especially frustrating for them is any breach of faith regarding promises which they see as vital to their well-being. In this respect, the failure to keep commitments in the sphere of aid to developing nations is a serious moral question and further highlights the injustice of the imbalances existing in the world. *The suffering caused by poverty is compounded by the loss of trust*. The end result is hopelessness. The existence of trust in international relations is *a social capital of fundamental value.*

From the Vatican, 8 December 2002
JOHN PAUL II

What strikes us most vividly this Christmas is, on the one hand, the hardened hypocrisy of a political class that feels no compunction in making promises for electoral gains, and on the other, the increasing levels of despair among the poor and marginalised.

A look at the world today from the perspective of the victim would also include a recognition of the myriad efforts by small groups living in impoverished urban suburbs, by large movements of landless indigenous people, and by well-organised international networks to proclaim that 'another world is possible.' The mass of those who believe that utopias have not died continues to swell. Peasants across Latin America, and more than 10 million people in Brazil have said no to the proposed Association of Free Trade for the Americas. More than four hundred thousand people marched peacefully through the streets of Florence giving voice to the aspirations of many for a more humane and just Europe. Thousands of activists from all over India attended the first Asian Social Forum organised in Hyderabad, and proclaimed their determination that another Asia and India are possible. The World Forum of Porto Alegre is ready to start. Change is blowing in the wind, and it would be an evangelical disaster if we fail to discern the signs of the times.

The coming year will also be important for the Society of Jesus. The Congregation of Procurators opens in September 2003 at Loyola (Spain) as the natural culmination of a long process of reflection and discernment carried out in each Province through the Provincial Congregations. It will undoubtedly be a time to pause and ponder. To participate in this moment of grace, the Social Justice Secretariat has organised in April 2003 a meeting of Assistancy Coordinators to reflect on the 'state' of the social apostolate in each Assistancy and in the whole Society. We need to ask ourselves the basic questions that Ignatius raised in the *Exercises*: what can we do to serve better under the banner of Christ's mission?

This issue of *PJ* reflects the unsettling times of transition that we have experienced at the Secretariat. The contributions to this long-delayed issue have been essentially put together by the previous editor Fr. Michael Czerny. In his last editorial Michael Czerny wrote, "while my personal future remains unclear, I am completely sure that the Lord is preparing the next phase of my life in the Society of Jesus" (*PJ* 76,2). The Lord has indeed prepared a new phase for Fr. Michael in Africa, and this issue of *Promotio* brings to its readers the statement released at the launching of the African Jesuits Aids Network (AJAN) in Lome (Togo) on 10th December 2002. The Coordinator of the Social Apostolate in the Assistancy of Africa and Madagascar, Fr. Mugirhiwa Ferdinand, emphasises the importance of this project for the future development of the people in these regions. The article of Fr. Joblin traces the history of the Jesuit presence at the International Labour Office (ILO) at Geneva; the piece by Fr. Jose Maria Castillo raises a number of uncomfortable questions about the position of the poor in the Church; and the experience of Fr. Maquieira in Guatemala with violent youth gangs throws some light on the main characteristics that should sustain the apostolate with marginalised youth. We end this issue of *Promotio* with a few poems on the African reality written by Boyd K Nyirenda (Zambia-Malawi Province) studying in Hekima College, Nairobi, Kenya.

With the hope of being with you more frequently in the coming year we wish all our readers a very joyful 2003.

Fernando Franco, S.J
Editor

EIGHTY YEARS of JESUIT PRESENCE in the INTERNATIONAL LABOUR MOVEMENT

Joseph Joblin, S.J.

I have been asked to speak about my work at the International Labour Organisation (ILO) from 1956 to1981. As part of the League of Nations, and later functioning within the system of the United Nations, the ILO has included a Jesuit staff member since 1926. But what has been the role of the 'ILO Jesuit'?

The definition of the post

Rather than being a representative of the Holy See or a sort of chaplain to the personnel of the institution, the 'ILO Jesuit' has been a bureaucrat of the institution. He has not performed any pastoral role in the post-Conciliar sense of the word. If he has rendered some priestly assistance to a colleague or delegate, this must be considered as something purely private and occasional. He is in the institution to fulfil the tasks assigned to him by the Director General, and consequently has the same obligations as any official in this capacity. He is at the service of the organisation. A further clarification may be in order. He has been called to be a functionary of the Organisation because he is a priest with an intellectual and spiritual formation capable of providing expert assistance to the General Director in policy matters regarding religious affairs.[1]

The origins of the post at Geneva

At the beginning of the 19th century, European and North American Christians (Catholics and Protestants) who showed concern about the poverty of the masses did so from a charitable perspective. They tried to shelter young rural migrants from the revolutionary propaganda of socialist movements, and to organise the assistance of the most destitute. There was neither social legislation, nor, other than liberalism, any other social doctrine to be taught. Bishops, priests and lay people gradually became open to the need for institutional action to change both the political and economic policies of liberalism.

In 1839, analysing the situation of workers in his course on commercial law, Ozanam spoke of them as "slaves." He also denounced the "white slave trade" and, for the first time, he explained the manner in which the mechanism of exploitation worked. During the same period, a Protestant industrialist, Daniel Le Grand, began the campaign for the adoption of an international labour legislation. In 1887, Msgr. Mermillod and the Union of Fribourg sent a memorandum on the subject of labour legislation to Leo XIII, but the Pope probably judged that the question was not ripe enough to be included in *Rerum Novarum.* This encyclical, however, launched a movement in favour of institutional action on behalf of workers, and legitimised the existence of labour unions independent of management. Moreover, the Holy

[1] This role is different from that of another French Jesuit, Fr. de Breuvery, who was an official of the United Nations in New York (1952-1964.) Former professor at Aurora University in Shanghai, he was at the UN in his capacity as an economist to investigate alternative energy sources to coal; this was in spite of his being a priest, a dimension which caused some difficulties when he was recruited and later when promoted to the directorial grade of D2.

See was even invited to join the *International Association for Social Progress,*[2] and eventually became part of the international conventions on labour held before the First World War.

During the 1914 World War, the socialist but non-Marxist Trade Unions of both sides were in favour of enacting international labour legislation. Through the Treaty of Versailles they created an institution in which workers could be on an equal footing with employers and governments. This was the International Labour Organisation (ILO), of which the International Labour Bureau (ILB) is the permanent secretariat, and guarantees the application of decisions taken by the International Labour Conference (ILC). Albert Thomas, former socialist defence minister in France during the conflict, was elected the first Director of the ILB.

The participation of Catholics in structural action for social development

In spite of being steeped in liberal ideas, governments and management in 1919 supported the creation of the ILB because they were afraid that the Bolshevik revolution would engulf Europe. This support weakened very quickly after the peril was averted. Thomas understood immediately that adopting measures in favour of workers would depend on the pressure that various opinion makers would be able to exercise on governments.

The publication of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* marked the origin of "a great movement" (Albert Thomas) of Christians to organise themselves and bring their efforts to bear on reforming the institutions. They found themselves walking alongside the so-called "reformed" socialist movements pursuing similar goals. This is how, even before 1914, the idea of collaborating with forces having the same ideals (Don Sturzo) started to gain ground. Nothing large-scale or concrete, however, had yet been achieved. Conflict was put aside because the gravity of the situation required the collaboration of all those of good will.

As early as 1920, the ILB Director Albert Thomas contacted Msgr. Nolens, the president of the Netherlands Catholic Party, and the Dutch representative at the ILB Administrative Council, to study together the form under which the collaboration between the Bureau and Christian social movements could proceed. To further this collaboration Thomas went at least twice to the Vatican, and it was finally agreed that a priest would be associated with the work of the Bureau. In 1926, Fr. André Arnou was appointed by Fr. General to assume office in Geneva[3]. Many traditional Christians were opposed to this innovation, and the pressures were such that he had to leave the post in 1932. The director of the ILB intervened, however, and managed to get Fr. Achille Danset appointed in 1933. He died prematurely and, after several months, Fr. Albert Le Roy succeeded him (1936-1955.). He was replaced next by Fr. Joseph Joblin (1956-1981), by Fr. John Lucal (1981-1986), and by Fr. Louis Christiaens (1987-1995). Fr. Dominique Peccoud has occupied the post since January 1, 1997.[4]

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[2] This Association was established in 1900 at Bâle.

[3] The president of the Christian Trade Union Movement, Gaston Tessier, was entrusted with the task of contacting Fr. Desbuquois who, in turn, contacted Fr. General who finally appointed Fr. André Arnou.

[4] Cf. J. Joblin, "Essere Chiesa nella società pluralista" [Being Church in a pluralist society] in *Civiltà Cattolica* 1979 III 345-357; P. Droulers, *Le Père Desbuqois et l'Action Populaire 1919-1956* [Father Desbuqois and Popular Action] t.II Paris: Ed. Ouvrières (1981) p. 456.

The Rationale. Why this post?

It is striking that for nearly eighty years the Jesuit post at the ILB has been maintained by successive General Directors, in spite of certain complaints, particularly every time budgetary cuts demanded staff reductions. Although the first Jesuit on the staff worked for more than a year on a month-to-month contract basis, his successors have been more and more integrated into the corps of officials.

The presence of a priest at ILB can be explained at various levels. The first is connected with the promotion of justice. Christians and lay movements believe that the promotion of justice requires structural reform, and that social peace demands that these reforms be introduced by democratic means. This was obviously an area where collaboration among persons of good will having diverse views was possible. The common objective had to do "with defending against all odds the liberty of all workers, and working tirelessly to establish the ideal of fraternity and equality among persons." These words of Paul VI before the ILC (1969) defined the type of action proper to Christians at the heart of an international institution. Their job was not to discuss the merits of the various social doctrines but to join efforts to produce concrete results on a commonly recognised objective: the good of the poorest of the poor. From this perspective, the Jesuit at the ILB is not there to promulgate the social doctrine of the Church, but to help Christian movements to come together for realising the goal of a progressive social policy.

This does not mean that Christians, a minority in contemporary international society, should allow themselves to be secularised, or be content to support a political movement defined more or less without them. The Jesuit at the ILB is there to help judge what is possible at a given moment by making known the Christian reaction to a given proposal. He can be an engine to solve development issues, and a break against certain demographic policies.

The presence of the priest, or Christians in general, can be viewed also at another level. Peace will be better ensured in tomorrow's world if it rests upon values that are understood by all in the same way. A mutual understanding of the systems explaining human society is necessary to enhance mutual esteem, and this will allow each one, as Pius XII demanded in his Christmas message of 1956, to engage in a critique of our own heritage and leave out what is not essential. The Jesuit is expected to understand the concept of justice in a way that is free from any political or partisan influence, and as one that flows from the logic of faith. He makes it possible for others to discover the existence of a world unknown to them; this is another way of articulating the problems of life to the ILO. This perception of his role has been particularly strong since the publication of *Pacem in Terris* (1965). As a matter of fact, this encyclical is a full treatise on how to overcome ideological conflicts and a call to social movements to collaborate on the basis of concrete reforms that ought to be adopted. This approach is in line with the policy of *detente* which has always been held by the current Director General, David A. Morse. One day he called me. At one point during our conversation, he drew two circles, writing a K (for Khrushchev) inside one and a P (for the Pope) inside the other. He joined them by a line and said: "They can work together right now." Next, drawing a line toward the future, he said, "but the Pope will lose." "No," I said, "He knows that he will win."

In the end the Director General and his immediate collaborators are aware that social peace cannot depend upon the value-systems imposed by successive and changing majorities. Indeed, an international institution cannot impose a truth or a doctrine on a world divided into so many religions and ideologies. It must rather join forces to work with those social forces that let people recover "the dominant passion for the Totality" in their concrete action of the moment (Teilhard de Chardin). In traditional language this means the existence of objective values, of the absolute foundation of moral obligation as an antidote against the totalitarian or individualistic drift to which societies are otherwise condemned. The priest, no matter who he is, incarnates this reference to a deeply human truth, which is, in the last analysis, what all Christians and non-Christians are searching for.

Several fields of action

The overcoming of ideological ruptures. From the time that I came to the Bureau in 1956, the major problem that surfaced was the attitude of an international institution such as the ILB during the Cold War. The major problem that I confronted as soon as I arrived at the Bureau was to determine how an international institution like the ILB should conduct itself during the Cold War. Constituted on a tripartite basis, each of the groups of workers and employers were supposed to be independent of their governments. As soon as the USSR, Byelorussia and the Ukraine decided in 1954 to participate in the ILO, the joint presence of labour and management organisations from the Eastern Bloc countries raised difficulties that could not be ignored any longer. The choice was simple: either remain faithful to the 1919 concept of a tripartite agreement and expel the Eastern countries, or else expel the Westerners. In the belief that the western system could help the East to evolve towards greater levels of freedom, they agreed to engage with the others in an experience of coexistence. Workers and employers in the United States had earlier preferred the first option, and they pressurised the American Government to withdraw from the ILO. The Director General courageously maintained that the concern for universality was more important than the respect due to the strict rule of tripartism. On this issue he was increasingly supported by the Church. Pius XII (Easter 1954, Christmas 1956) had called for the need to establish a dialogue between people of good will on either side of the Iron Curtain and announced the coming victory of moral forces over totalitarianism. John XXIII and later Paul VI sharpened this policy. It may suffice here to remember the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* and the diplomatic policy toward the East conducted by the future Cardinal Casaroli. It was of prime importance in this debate to encourage those Catholic leaders who adopted this position and to defuse the campaigns of those who denounced the collusion of the ILB with communism. The Bureau also found an unexpected ally in Fr. Brugalora, chaplain of the official Spanish trade unions, who gave a series of conferences in favour of the ILO during a trip to Central America

Development. Roosevelt and Pius XII each turned their attention several times to the form of economic and social development that the States should adopt after the return of peace. Even the *Declaration of Philadelphia* (1944,) by which the ILO reformulated its guiding principles, called on member states to develop policies and financial structures that would favour the "material development and spiritual progress" of all without discrimination. The UN Charter spoke also of economic *and* social development. The ILO was soon committed to this path. As long as I remained a functionary in charge of relations with Christian trade unions I helped them to organise themselves in Africa, Vietnam and Latin America. Circumstances forced me to turn my attention to indigenous populations, especially in South America. I took part in the

first Convention where a text on the living and working conditions of aboriginal populations was discussed. A number of aid projects were implemented. Though the majority of those responsible at the ILB were not Christians, they were persuaded that these projects could not succeed in Latin America without the support and participation of the Church. Church officials were certainly aware of the existence of marginalised populations. They had to understand, however, that the national and international initiatives taken by them in favour of the poor could be integrated into the government's policies, and thus become more effective. Homage must be paid here to Msgr. Proaño, Bishop of Riobamba (Ecuador), who was a pioneer in this matter. Contact with such marvellous people was one of the most rewarding and moving aspects of my job. Christian publications began to emphasise the theme of development. Bishops, religious congregations, and lay people were discovering that their assistance projects had a greater impact than simple assistance to persons in distress, and found that acting in concert with the authorities could enhance their role in social renewal.

The Refugees. Since the Second World War, the fact that many "displaced persons" have become permanently uprooted has added a new dimension to the problem of refugees. The ILO first studied the issue in depth in the Near East. I was more involved with the Vietnamese refugees in Thailand. This was a particular example of a much more general question: how should NGOs collaborate with the initiative taken by UNDP (United Nations Development Program)? The problems were multiple: how to promote collaboration among NGOs so that governments and the UN would not have to deal with a multitude of spokespersons? What professional education should refugees be given so that they could either return to their own countries or migrate to a new one? In the latter case, how should the selection be made? It was at that moment that Father Pedro Arrupe founded the *Jesuit Refugee Service,* which combined education with assistance. The ILB addressed this question of professional education, and I visited several refugee camps in Asia to orient ILB projects towards the real needs of the population.

Ecumenism. There is a question many readers of this note may have asked themselves: why did only a Catholic priest fulfil this task? The reason is entirely historical. When the ILB was created in 1919, Christianity was the only religion that made social and universal claims. In fact, Albert Thomas had set up an analogous post for a Protestant, and recruited the son of a Geneva pastor, Georges Thélin. When it was clear in 1940 that German armies were going to occupy Europe, the Bureau Director migrated with a small number of officers (40), including the ILB Jesuit Fr. Le Roy, to Canada. As a matter of fact Thélin was not part of this group and his contract was terminated. Fr. Le Roy received a note ordering him to rejoin them in Canada. During the war, Fr. Le Roy drew the attention of North and South American Catholics to the responsibilities that would fall on them once peace returned.

When I entered the Bureau in 1956, a proposal for a parallel Protestant presence at the ILO was put forward. The Director General felt that Catholicism had one clear spokesman, the Pope, and adding one representative from each religion to the Bureau would not be possible. These remarks helped me to understand the need to turn toward other religions even if many of them did not show great interest in social issues. In fact, an openness to these questions poses a very grave problem to a number of religious movements which are the soul of the cultural identity of their peoples. While nothing could be done about this at first, the creation of SODEPAX helped to find a solution. Its General Secretary, Fr. George Dunne, and Mgr Gremillon, Secretary of Justice and Peace, requested me officially to participate in a SODEPAX ecumenical reunion in Beirut. In 1969 I was invited to participate at the worship

service organised by the Protestants at the Cathedral of St. Peter for the fiftieth anniversary of the ILO. These were isolated initiatives. The Jewish and Moslem Bureau officials discouraged me from establishing contacts with their co-religionists because if some special links were established with one faith it would cause the Bureau difficulties with the other religious groups. A new ecumenical advance was finally made within the Bureau's Institute of Social Studies for the organisation of multi-faith conferences on social matters.

A much deeper reflection than these brief notes should be undertaken to examine how the Church can participate in the new patterns of social action. The living conditions of the poorest of the poor depend upon the values that the international political community adopts and promotes. The presence of the Church is therefore essential at this level. This is normally ensured by the presence of observers from the Holy See to the United Nations and to various specialised institutions. The priest at the ILB does not duplicate their work. In an institution where social movements are extremely active, he interacts with them and helps them to join the new game that is being played.

Joseph Joblin, S.J.
Pontificia Università Gregoriana
Piazza della Pilotta 4 +39 066701 5419 (fax)
00187 Roma <joblin@unigre.it>
ITALY

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Statement on the Launch of AJAN*

10 December 2002, Lomé, Togo

Michael Czerny, S.J.

On 10 December, 54 years ago, the nations signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in New York, and today in Lomé, together we publicly launch the African Jesuit AIDS Network (AJAN).

HIV/AIDS is not just an illness, but a much bigger human reality. So we should turn to human rights, the basic and universally-recognised minimum standards which help to guarantee human life but which AIDS itself threatens. The struggle against AIDS must be based on human rights. That is why 10 December seems the right day to launch AJAN with the blessing of the Church in Togo, in the presence of Catholic university students from all over Africa, and with the support of representatives of UNAIDS.

AJAN is an initiative taken by the Major Superiors of the Society of Jesus in Africa and Madagascar (JESAM). In 2001 a survey identified examples of the HIV/AIDS ministry underway in several Jesuit Provinces in Africa: educating young people about prevention, home-based care for the ill, pastoral work for orphans and bereft families, medical and social services, research, writing, and popular education. In June 2002 in Abidjan, JESAM decided to intensify the struggle against AIDS in the twenty-five African countries where there are Jesuits, by setting up the Network as an important shared priority and work in common.

JESAM mandates the Network to help Jesuits and others to serve those with HIV/AIDS as well as their families, those who assist them, and their communities; to educate for responsibility and prevention; to give Christian testimony and raise the voice in Africa and internationally; and to act in the name of the Society of Jesus.

The AIDS crisis is not just medical; it is radically linked with poverty, injustice, inequalities, ignorance, migration and culture. HIV/AIDS drains African countries of their most precious resource: their people. When the youth is lost to a debilitating and deadly disease, our nations are ever less likely to develop economically, maintain a vibrant culture and sound education, enjoy good governance or show respect for fundamental human rights.

Even though the number of HIV-infected people is staggering, the stigma associated with AIDS impels many of us to deny its impact on our lives and to ignore the need to modify our behaviour. By doing so we undermine efforts to prevent the spread of AIDS. Facing AIDS compels us to look anew at core values and fundamental relationships between men and women in societies that are often neither just nor stable.

Our response must be truly evangelical. When Jesus begins to preach the Good News, his anointing and mission are "to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4:16ff), and as His followers we engage in the struggle to prevent and stop the spread of HIV/AIDS throughout the continent.

* African Jesuit AIDS Network

Everyone agrees on both the urgency and the immensity of the task, and so, as AJAN co-ordinator I solicit your prayer, concern and support in every way possible, from today when AJAN makes its début until that day when AIDS is over.

Michael Czerny, S.J.
Co-ordinator of AJAN
P.O. Box 21399
Nairobi Ngong Road
00505 KENYA

+254 2 566 873 (fax)
<aids@jesuits.ca>

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The PANDEMIC of HIV/AIDS: The PRIORITY of PRIORITIES

Muhigirwa Ferdinand, S.J.

The UN declared the 1st of December as World AIDS Day to arouse and draw the world's attention to what could be called "the disease of the century." Statistics reveal that Africa is the continent where the prevalence of HIV/AIDS infection and the number of persons infected are the highest. One speaks of 2.4 million dead in Africa out of a world-wide population of 42 million infected persons, 30 million of whom are in Africa.

The Political Declaration of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (26 August – 4 September, 2002) reaffirmed one of the principles of the Rio Conference stating that every human being has the right to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature. Because of poverty, underemployment, degraded housing conditions and deteriorating access to health care, millions of persons suffer from contagious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria (n. 41). Chapter VIII of the Action Plan of the same Summit mentions that efforts agreed upon by Africans towards stable development have been derailed by the persistence of conflicts, the low level of investments, the insufficiency of revenues from commerce, the increasing burden of debt and the impact of HIV/AIDS (n. 56). Among the ten priorities agreed upon by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), health and the struggle against HIV/AIDS occupies the fifth position.

In our opinion, none of the strategies for integral human development (which include the economic, social, political, cultural, and religious dimensions) will have a lasting impact because of the devastating consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. For us, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is not an epi-phenomenon, one priority among others, one of the major challenges, but it is, in the light of the signs of the times, the priority of priorities of our apostolic mission in the Assistancy of Africa and Madagascar. It is for this reason that the Father General of the Society of Jesus "encourages each Province to seek ways of increasing its involvement in this

apostolate." In so doing, we incarnate our preferential love for the poor "through which we exercise our commitment against every form of injustice and misery."

On 21 June 2002, when establishing the African Jesuit AIDS Network (AJAN), Fr. Shirima Valerian, Moderator of the JESAM, asked all African Jesuits to recognise this network as "an Assistancy work and important priority. Those suffering with HIV/AIDS, the last General Congregation reminds us, require of us the attention which our biblical tradition demands for 'the orphans, widows and strangers in your midst,'[5] that is, a response which reflects God's preferential love for them." The principal mission of AJAN is to help Jesuits give an appropriate Gospel response to the challenge of HIV/AIDS, taking into consideration the local faith, culture and spirituality, and establishing networks of collaboration and exchange with groups and associations which are fighting against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Today, several apostolic activities are oriented towards the fight against HIV/AIDS: education of young people about prevention, media education, peer education, home care for the sick, pastoral work with orphans and families in mourning, the apostleship of prayer, introduction to human rights issues, medical and social services, research, publication, and popular education. We try to establish links with action networks within the apostolic sector, such as education, pastoral activities, formation and social action in the Assistancy of Africa and Madagascar. In view of creating and reinforcing health systems, these apostolic activities need to be sustained with financial support so as to make the necessary medications and technology for combating HIV/AIDS available to the poor.

If it is true that AIDS has taken millions of victims, it is also true that one becomes a victim of AIDS. Our choices, our responsibility and our decisions are morally involved in how we acquire the immune deficiency syndrome. Beyond matters of prevention and medicine, there also needs to be education in the moral, Christian, and religious values of fidelity, love, abstinence, sincerity, and chastity. This education must be promoted, because what is at stake, most definitely, is not the HIV/AIDS virus itself but the person affected by the virus. Let us mobilise ourselves, putting together all our scientific knowledge, all our physical, cultural, and intellectual, moral and spiritual energies, to fight against HIV/AIDS, to promote the development of each person and the whole person. This person is the one for whom Christ had the passion to endure his Passion because he had come so that people might have life and have it in abundance.

Muhigirwa Ferdinand, S.J.
B.P. 3724
Kinshasa-Gombe <muhigirwafsj@yahoo.fr>
D. R. CONGO

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[5] General Congregation 34 (1995), Decree 2, n.15.

The PLACE of the POOR in the CHURCH[*]

José M. Castillo, S.J.

Introduction

Before entering thoroughly into the subject, two preliminary observations must be made – in the interests of honesty and justice.

1. There always have been, and there continue to be, many people in the Church who are not only concerned with the poor, but who have, in addition, consecrated their whole lives to being their advocates. On behalf of the poor, many priests, religious men and women, lay volunteers, NGO members, people of various beliefs and colours, have heroically staked their most cherished possessions, their comfort, their reputation, their safety – in a word, everything that a human being can risk in this world.

2. For a century now, ecclesiastical authority has been developing a body of "social doctrine." Especially in the last thirty years, this teaching has hit upon effective and vigorous formulations promoting the poor, their rights, their liberties and their dignity, calling for far-reaching reforms in the global economy, and condemning the repeated injustices committed against the most defenceless in this world. Furthermore, the Church continues to proclaim the gospel all over the world.

These two facts are undeniable. And yet, we have serious reasons to ask: has the Church completely resolved the question of what her relationship to the poor really means and demands of her?

1. What is the place of the poor in the Church?

In theory the answer is clear. For the Church the poor are what they were for Jesus: his favourites, the most important, the first in line. But this is in theory. We all know that in practice the reality is often different.

For example, what role do the poor play in church ceremonial? Rest assured, their place is at the entrance to the temple begging alms! They clearly do not have the choice seats. Still less are they in the sanctuary. What would they do there? They would only kneel. And what role do they play at church meetings or assemblies? What place is reserved for them in pastoral planning sessions, in diocesan synods, in the lofty congregations of the Roman Curia?

The letter of St. James roundly condemns those who assign the poor a place inferior to that of the rich (2,1-4). In the gospels, Jesus scolds the Pharisees in harsh terms for claiming to occupy the places of honour (Mk 10,37-40; Mt 20,21-23; Mk 9,35. 12,38-39; Lk 20,46. 11,43). In the Christian community, by contrast, the dominant inclination should be to occupy the last place (Lk 14,78-81), or to be present at the banquet, not seated in comfort, but serving

[*] Based on the text of José M. Castillo, S.J., "Escuchar lo que Dicen los Pobres a la Iglesia" (Listing to what the Poor Say to the Church), *Cuadernos Cristianisme i Justícia*, n. 88 (March 1999), pp. 32.

the other guests (Lk 22,27). It is obvious that this radicalism cannot last long in the Church, especially considering the way she came to be organised after the fourth century. Very quickly the poor retired to the last place they had always occupied; and the notables regained their preferred first place.

2. What influence do the poor have in the Church?

What influence do the poor have in the important decisions of the Church? Are the poor consulted? Is their point of view given any consideration? Does it ever occur to anybody that their point of view may be important? Do we call upon the poor when the subject under discussion is a proposal with far reaching effects? Can the poor offer their opinion when there is a question of appointing a parish priest, or of naming a bishop?

What influence do the poor have, not only in the decisions of the Church, but especially in the doctrine that is taught and even imposed on the faithful? To put it more clearly: what influence do the poor have in theology? That is, do the poor shape the way we understand God, explain the Gospel, spell out in what Christian salvation consists?

Now, what is surprising is that according to Jesus, the ones who are unable to grasp who or what God is are precisely "the wise and intelligent." And those who are capable of understanding Him are, literally, "those who have nothing to say," in view of the fact that this is the precise meaning of the Greek term, *nepioi* [the "little ones"], used by scripture (Mt 11,25). One would have to be blind not to see what Jesus does when he says this. He calls into question all our theology. For the pure truth purveyed by theology in the Church is the truth formulated by us – all of us who consider ourselves wise and intelligent. Correspondingly, in this manner of speaking and thinking, the *nepioi*, the only ones who understand the matter, are afforded no possibility of contributing to the discussion.

In the last analysis, what is at stake is the understanding that the God who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ is a God who cannot be reached by simple human effort, or by mere study, or by the speculation of human beings, no matter how ingenious.

Well, who are they who understand the things of God? It appears that it is not the "intellectuals," or the "powerful," or persons "of good breeding" (I Cor 1,26). And, to make sure no doubt remains, St. Paul is most explicit: "God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing" (that is: those who are on the lowest rungs of the social ladder), "to reduce to nothing those who are something." (I Cor 1,27-28).

In this light, the question suggests itself: has theology, our actual knowledge of God, ever been correctly carried on in the Church? If the poor do not have, and have never had, anything to say, have we not been depriving ourselves of the most definitive source of knowledge and understanding of the Gospel?

3. Do the poor represent a danger for the Church?

Assuredly, for not a few people in "the ecclesiastical world," the poor represent a danger for the Church. There is clear evidence for this on every side.

Throughout the centuries the poor have been the object of the Church's assistance and alms, but they have never been the subject of decisions or doctrine. To be sure, there has been a change in the last thirty years. First, John XXIII began to speak of the "Church of the poor." These words were well received by some of us, but we know of certain professors of ecclesiology who laughed – literally – at this expression.

It is not difficult to guess what has turned out to be distasteful and uncomfortable to some people. A Jesus coming from heaven is admirable, sublime, just what we want. But a Jesus coming from the poor is neither admirable nor sublime; he is probably a disturbing element and, in any case, he raises too many questions.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that during the 70s a theology appeared which placed quite properly the poor at the centre of attention, at the centre of theological problems and solutions.

For centuries on end, theology has never paid attention to the poor, except to determine the amount of alms that the wealthy should give to the needy for the sake of a tranquil conscience, or to exhort the wealthy to be generous to the unfortunate in this life.

That is why at present it is difficult to get through our heads a theology which, for the first time in history, dares to say that the poor have a decisive word to say about God, that the poor ought to be heard, that our entire theology should be rethought from the starting point of the poor.

This has proved to be a great stumbling block in not a few ecclesiastical circles, some bishops claiming that this theology divides the Church, theologians bringing their heaviest artillery to bear against what they consider to be the greatest perversion of theology. All this has become part of a certain 'official doctrine' against Liberation Theology. Undoubtedly the short life of liberation theology is the clearest proof that, for many "men of the Church," the poor constitute a genuine danger when they are taken seriously and all the logical conclusions drawn.

4. This is not a problem of dogma or of simple economics, but a problem which touches the core of the human condition.

From start to finish, Jesus lived in a situation of social marginalisation. It is said of him that he was born in a stable and died on the cross. To speak of marginalisation is to speak of something that touches the core of the human condition. For the worst thing about marginalisation is that it is an affront to the dignity of a human being. It is the absence of rights and the lack of respect each ordinary person should enjoy. For that matter, indignity is the worst thing about poverty. Or better, indignity is worse than poverty itself. People use the expression, "poor but honest." Honour and dignity are the most highly prized values among human beings. If we humans are so eager to have money, it is not only, or even chiefly, for

the material advantages that money provides. Persons and institutions want to have money for security, power, influence, social status, respectability and finally, for the fetishist force it wields in our society.

In our contemporary culture, the world turns on the economy. But in the culture of Jesus' day, the world turned on honour. It is clear then why Jesus placed himself in solidarity with groups of people who, in that society, were precisely the most systematically marginalised: the most exploited, the most undervalued – even the most hated in the case of the publicans and sinners – in any case, those who stood for nothing in society, who had nothing to say in that culture. One further understands why Jesus challenged the groups who marginalised, undervalued and hated the others.

5. "Religious persons" and the poor

We cannot lose sight of the danger that constantly threatens "religious persons." In the contemporary milieu we frequently meet people who internalise the beliefs and practices of religion so thoroughly that they acquire a strong sense of self-assurance. Nothing on earth would make them change the slightest element of their religious convictions. On the contrary, they consider themselves so solidly in possession of the truth that they develop a feeling of superiority which leads them to thank God for having preserved them from all the disorientation and corruption so prevalent in the world.

For example, it is not unusual to meet "men of the Church" who are impatient, and even angry, simply because a liturgical norm was not minutely observed at Mass. But they are not at all concerned that people are suffering, and even dying, from hunger or abandonment, perhaps right around the church where the Mass is being celebrated.

Another more eloquent example is to consider how the theme of the poor and poverty is approached in religious circles. As long as one talks of assistance and alms, all is well. But complications arise, as Dom Helder discovered, if we go deeper into the problem. He remarks, "When I give an alms to a poor man, they call me a saint. But if I ask why are there poor people, they call me a communist." To speak of the poor "in depth" is to speak of economics and politics, which leads us to express an opinion about left versus right, socialism, dictatorship, democracy, capitalism, neoliberalism, revolution, war. In this way, to talk of the poor leads us into a situation of conflict.

For Jesus, to speak of the poor was to speak of people who were weak, marginalised, robbed of dignity in the society of his time. His goal was to situate these people at the centre of his life, at the forefront of his projects and among his dearest friends. And this is folly for "men of religion." It is not only, or even principally, a matter of opening the purse strings; it threatens our reputation, our dignity, our respectability and our supposed power.

That is why one finds many in ecclesiastical circles who are disposed to "assist" the poor, even to "evangelise" the poor. But how many of us have been really convinced that we have to "learn" from the poor? And that they are able to "teach" us even about "technical" questions such as God, Jesus, the Gospel? How many managers in the Church are disposed to seek advice and support from the poor? And to how many does it occur that the poor ought to

share the burden of responsibility in the governance of parishes, the diocese, and the whole Church?

Questions such as these can seem to many "men of religion" to be radical ravings with neither head nor tail, and thus to constitute a "danger" to the Church. According to them, to let the poor have a say would be to concede them a primary role, and tantamount to the claim that society and the functional organisation of the Church should be determined by the poor. This state of affairs calls into question their carefully fashioned security, their sense of superiority and their thinly veiled contempt for every sign of marginalisation or weakness within the system.

When Jesus told the "men of religion" of his day that "the publicans and prostitutes would go before you into the Kingdom of God" (Mt 21,31), he was guilty of great imprudence. Not only did he insult these respectable men; he turned religion topsy-turvy. And for the intelligent, this was inconceivable.

6. The poor and the Church: a problem, not of persons but of ecclesiastical structures

These instances of "reticence," and even of "fear," on the part of the ecclesiastical establishment toward the poor and persons on the margin of the system show up in still another way. There is a clear resistance among authority-holders in the church to any attempt at involving the poor in the governance of the church or allowing them to be co-responsible for her decisions.

From this attitude springs the systematic rejection of the development of ecclesial base communities during the past thirty years and their concomitant project of a Church "of the poor," of a Church "of the people," or similar proposals. As we know, these communities have never claimed to organise a "parallel" church, have never wanted to divide into "sects," have never challenged the authority of the bishops. What is the explanation, then, of the institution's reticence and fear regarding the world's most wretched?

Any manual of church history will describe in abundant detail the strong influence exercised on the church (more heavy-handed than we can imagine) by emperors and feudal lords, kings and the powerful of the world, power holders and politicians, dictators and even tyrants with blood on their hands. Often enough, these eminent personages were tolerated and even highly regarded in the higher circles of ecclesiastical power[6].

Yet, it is considered an intolerable problem whenever the poor, the wretched of this world, dare to speak up, to participate in some way in decisions regarding parish matters or in general diocesan policy. The signal fires are lit and all resources are marshalled to meet the danger. That is why liberation theology was thought to be such a serious threat and the reason why steps were taken to neutralise the influence of CELAM in Latin America, and why the nomination of bishops was subject to meticulous care so as to ensure that what happened at Medellín and even at Puebla would never happen again. This is an indication that, in the eyes of those who have influence in ecclesiastical institutions, the poor are still a danger and a threat to the Church.

[6] To cite only one recent sad example: the Vatican was the only state in the world to recognise the military government that staged the coup d'état toppling the democratically elected president of Haiti, J. F. Aristide.

The more this attitude cloaks itself in the mantle of "mystery" and "religion," and even under the garb of "service of the Church," the more clearly we realise that we confront the same deep-seated evil that Jesus faced, that which He saw as the great danger for all humanity. For this attitude gives rise to the contempt in which the weak and powerless of this world have been held. Here is the precise point of departure for the death-doomed tragedy of the poor. It is at this level that the relationship between the Church and the poor makes all the difference.

7. Conclusion

What do the poor ask of the Church? What challenge does the poor offer the Church in the light of the new millennium?

First of all, the Church should have no fear of the poor. Nor should she leave them out of consideration when it is time to reflect, to decide, to act, to teach.

At the very least, the Church should pay attention to the poor and listen to them in the same measure in which she pays attention and listens to the power-brokers of this world (the wealthy, the wise, the movers and shakers of the World Order). This is a minimum. She should, therefore, pay the poor more attention and listen to them more carefully.

The Church should consider the poor, not as passive recipients of Her attention, but as active subjects – even to the point of having them present where analyses and decisions are made.

The Church should stop hounding and harassing those who pursue an option for the poor with the resultant consequences of such a decision – or those who try to build a world less cruel to the poor and less unjust to them.

And lastly, once converted to God, the Church should not place her security on the dubious support of the mighty of this world, but rather on the slender support of the poor. If this should cause problems, then the Church ought to realise that she has finally caught up with Her founder.

José M. Castillo Sánchez, S.J.
Comunidad Pedro Arrupe
Paseo de Cartuja 35, 3º
18012 Granada
SPAIN
+34 958 151 440 (fax)
<pcastillo@probesi.org>

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MARGINALIZED YOUTH in NEED of JUBILEE[*]

Manuel Maquieira, S.J.

The following reflection is offered by Fr Manolo Maquieira, S.J., on the conditions faced by young men and women living in the poor neighbourhoods of Guatemala City

Powerlessness instead of rebellion

When I first attempted to get close to young people in the most marginalised areas I did so with many preconceived notions. I thought that I would be dealing with young people who disagreed with what was happening in society, who rejected a series of social modes and who were interested in their gangs and drugs. I thought that I would come across young people with a strong dose of rebellious attitudes. As I began to immerse myself among this population, I was surprised to discover that just the opposite was true. I do not know if this is a localised experience, but I discovered that a sense of powerlessness was the fundamental characteristic. There is powerlessness to participate in a society such as this one, which others may reject, but which is seen as an unreachable utopia for these young people. Utopia is defined by others as a place that does not exist, but which motivates one to advance toward it as a goal. For these young people, however, utopia is a place that does exist, but the path to it is blocked. There are no paths in their lives leading to this utopia. There are no paths to reach this world that is real, "the other world," that they see on television and perceive everyday in their own country. They move in a different world in which rebellion is absent. There is violence and aggression, but there is no struggle to leave it behind or change it.

This leads to low self-esteem. What shocked me most when we went to talk to these young people was that they repeated two things: "we are bad", and the desire to "be normal." These were two phrases that were repeated often by everyone. They also repeated phrases like: "my family tells me what is good, but I chose what is bad," "The more bad things I did, the less people loved me;" "I make my family suffer" – "In the group we learn how to be bad. In the group we only learn to do evil things. We like to kill. We only think about killing, about revenge, about violence. We are only concerned about ourselves, we do not care about anyone else." These are phrases that reflect a sense of powerlessness.

The terrible thing for me about these young people is that they are like a mirror reflecting all the frustrations they have experienced since childhood with their parents, step-parents, older siblings, etc. They seem to accumulate the failures of those who went before them. In most cases, their parents have failed. Their parents are generally people from the interior or the highlands who came here (Guatemala City) ready to work. They believed that they would find work and progress, but they did not progress. Their lives since childhood have been full of frustrations and powerlessness, of believing that they can do nothing in life. Their lives are like mirrors in which you can see the reflection of many young people without jobs. They may not belong to a gang, but they have nothing to do. A large number of alcoholics can be seen in any of our marginal areas.

[*] *SEDOS* 32:6 (June 2000), 163-165.

Women struggle more than men

There is a difference in the situation faced by men and women. I think that women do not give up as easily as men. Women seem to be more resistant and to have more love. I do not know how to explain it, but they seem to be more responsible. Women, faced with the situation in which their children live, tend to fight. Men, on the other hand, can opt out. They feel that they are not capable of caring for their wives. I met a young indigenous couple, he was 17 and she was 15, and they had a new-born babe when they arrived here. They did not know anyone and lived in one room. I was called because the child had died. I was called to take care of them and say Mass. The neighbours called me. They had gone to the doctor the day before. The child was four months old and they took him to the hospital. They did not have the money to pay the hospital fee for the test, so they went home and watched their child die that night. Two or three months later the young man was an alcoholic and the young girl had returned alone to her parents in El Quiché. The girl would not have gone home if they had had more children. The man would have left, as he was incapable of caring for his wife and child. Life was greater than he was, he could not win the battle in this society. He lost.

The woman stays with the children and fights. She struggles, washing floors, washing clothes, doing whatever is necessary. She never stops struggling. This reality creates a kind of woman who has influence on the children. I think this is a topic that needs to be researched: the influence of a marginalised mother in a marginalised culture. A mother who has to face a tough life, a mother who is aggressive toward the man who left her, who probably abused her, a mother who, sensing aggression in her surroundings, tends to insulate the family around a closed nucleus. The child learns very early that the house is good and the outside is bad, but the child also lives on the outside and is educated in the streets about what is bad. Outside home he or she learns what is bad, that is, what his/her mother does is good and the world itself is bad.

This said, however, I do not think that women have a higher self-esteem. Women struggle more, but this does not create self-esteem. When I interview young women who belong to gangs and ask why they join, they say they "want to be like the boys." Joining the gang means being like one of the boys. Even if it means being like marginal boys, it is better than being a girl. By joining a gang they adopt the attitude young men have toward life. There is obviously some degree of self-esteem in each of them. For young women, curiously, their principal aspiration is being able to live on their own, away from their family.

Something that comes up often and piques my curiosity is the issue of the *maquiladoras* (assembly factories). In our view, we often see the *maquiladora* as exploitation, but for many young women it is a source of liberation. This is even more important at the internal level, because it allows them a degree of freedom from the husband. It gives them the freedom to search for what they want by giving them a salary.

Fear of adulthood

I think this conclusion is drawn from the same sense of powerlessness. When I ask them, "what does it mean to be an adult," they respond that an adult is someone who has responsibilities, someone who takes life seriously. One of their responses is: "We still have time to have fun in life." Adults have to think about things. Young people, on the other hand,

feel a sense of powerlessness, because they do not know if they can be responsible. They prefer to see life as a joke, because they are afraid. Joining a gang is a way of prolonging their youth, of avoiding responsibility. When they do take on responsibilities, they often feel incapable of meeting their commitments. One the saddest things I see around my house is young women aged 21 or 22, with two or three children, living with their mothers. Their young men also live in the same neighbourhood, but separately, not with their families. Many of them have tried to form a family. They are together for a year or maybe a bit longer. They have two children. They get together again and have a third child, but they do not feel capable of forming a family. They return to their group of friends because they do not feel capable of accepting responsibility. They are moving backwards. The gang frees them once more of their responsibilities.

Violence

Violence is a fatality. It is like a destiny from which one cannot free oneself. First, the young people here are born into violence. Their homes are tremendously violent. For children, even their mothers, their good mothers who would even kill to protect them, are violent. Life itself is violent here, it hits people hard. I am impressed by the figure of the mother, who is adored. The image of the mother is the strongest thing they have. I find it interesting to hear a young man who might have killed five or six other young men, say "Mom, don't hit me" or see his mother give him a beating in front of his friends.

They are born into violence. When one grows up amid abuse and humiliation, one tends to become insensitive to these horrors and repeat the pattern of abuse to resolve problems. They learn from childhood that problems are solved with violence, because that is how their parents solved their problems. Any problem, any discussion, is solved with violence. Children learn that in life you either learn how to hit or are hit. There are not many options.

The absence of a father, which produces insecurity and a sense of abandonment, leads to violence. The fact that children have to work when they are as young as 10 and 11 is a form of violence. At first, children think that work is like playing, and they like to play and have access to some money. A child that starts working at 10, however, tries to escape from work by the time he or she is 15. They might be unable to work for the rest of their lives. Lack of affection is another form of violence. They live in a world where it is prohibited to show affection. This is a violation of their personality, because they are not allowed to express affection. It is a world in which they experience pain from childhood onwards. Every time there is a corpse in the street there is a group of children watching and laughing. They go from one funeral to the next. Violent death is something normal to them. They are also treated violently because they live in a marginalised world. When the police arrive, they arrive swinging clubs. They are beaten if they are brought to jail. When they are detained there is no justice, no law, nothing. When they are arrested they know that they will not be released until they pay a bribe, regardless of whether or not they committed a crime. Violence is exercised against them and they have no other recourse but to react violently. One of the young men interviewed, who is now dead, said: "the existence of violent groups forces you to join a violent group." This is a dramatic sequence for me.

Last night I spoke to four mothers who are concerned because their sons have been threatened by other groups and can no longer go to school. The boys are in the sixth grade and they do not belong to any group. These boys have to stop going to school for reasons of safety.

The violence unleashed by young men is like exercising a kind of local power. It is a mechanism for denying that they are powerless. Humiliating or causing someone harm is a way of retaliating for the abuses that they themselves suffer.

At other times, violence is like an explosion, not of rebellion but of self-marginalisation. Because I do not want to be marginalised I will break the rules and marginalise myself because that is what I want. By marginalising myself, by choosing to be bad, I blame myself.

Finally, violence can be a form of self-punishment, a form of suicide. This is when I do not direct my violence at "others" but at people like me, those who belong to my world, who are bad like me.

What would a "Jubilee Pastoral" look like in this context?

Lack of self-esteem is the cause of many of these evils and of violence. Any kind of pastoral work has to reinforce self-esteem, this is key. The first pastoral step is to accompany young people. This accompaniment means, at times, to share in their sense of powerlessness. How do we get close to them? The fact that people from the Church are close to them makes them feel that they are important at least to someone. This is the first discovery. Many of these young people feel as though they have no meaning for anyone else in the world. When you interview them they speak with pride, because it is probably the first time that anyone from outside their world has listened to them. It makes them feel good because they feel as though they are important to someone.

Another key for this kind of pastoral work is affection. These young people have never felt affection in their lives. The only kind of affection, of feeling loved, comes from the mother. In many cases, however, the mother spends the entire day out of the house because she has to support the family. And in order to support the family, mothers also become the slaves of violence. They mix love with violent authoritarianism, because this is how they were taught to love. When someone breaks this cycle and shows tenderness, shows them they are the object of tenderness and caring, then she is working profoundly to increase self-esteem.

There is a Christian community in our neighbourhood, but it has also been beaten down. All of the members of our Church council, for example, have children who are in trouble: daughters who are living on their own, sons in prison, children living on the street, etc., so the Christian community also has difficulty in getting its message across. The central problem of our religious message is that we are working within a situation in which we cannot tell the people to do something. We cannot tell them that they need to change society. It is even difficult for us to form groups in our community... because they are embarrassed to be from here. When we ask them where they are from they mention somewhere else. The only people proud to be from our community are the gangs, because they accept their marginality.

Young people do not want to be from our community, but to be young people from somewhere else. This is their goal in life. Their identity is their lack of identity. How do you

break through this difficult situation? This becomes possible through the formation of very small groups that are well aware of what is going on around them. How do you offer identity where marginality is the key? You do this by separating geographic marginality from personal marginality, accepting the first but rejecting the second. In other words, admit that I am marginalised geographically, economically and socially, but I am not marginal as a human being. This is what our pastoral work must aim at, and this is difficult. The easiest thing for them is what is offered by the evangelical churches. These churches offer the people even more reasons to remain marginalised. First, there is evangelical fanaticism: "I have converted and am good. I am one of the good, and the rest of you are evil." The next step is reinforcing what was learned during childhood, that everything is evil. "The only thing that can save you is God. You do not have to fight for salvation, salvation comes through God". On the other hand, in the Catholic Church we complain and tell you "you have to struggle so that young people can be different." Our message, though much slower, is closer to the people, and it has a more lasting effect. It is about them accepting their own reality. It encourages people to accept that they are marginalised, but not in spirit. They are not marginalised by God.

Manuel Maquieira, S.J.
Parroquia San Antonio de Padua
23 avenida final, Zona 6 +502 2889019 (tel & fax)
01006 Guatemala <mmmc@jesuits.net>
GUATEMALA

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AFRICAN POEMS

Boyd Kapyunga Nyirenda, S.J

Teardrops

She sits along the path
Covered in teardrops,
Digging a valley down her cheeks,
Teardrops carving images;

Images of feet worn out,
Worn out from wandering,
Torn by the hot biting sand,
Backed by the scorching sun;

Images of weary faces
Sobbing tears of hunger,
Dripping sweat of labour,
Emaciated by starvation;

Images of a people
Deprived of its pride and carvings,
Infected with strange sculptures
And given vultures for leaders;

Images of elders breaking their backs,
Digging all day long
The rich stones of their land,
Whose wealth their hands do not touch;

Images of people riding on wind,
Looking to the west
For answers to their questions,
Blind to the answers in their hearts.

She sits along the path,
Her face flooded with teardrops.
But the tears dry;
Their images fade unnoticed.

The Widow

Her head is shaven
She has lost her husband

They say she has bewitched him
To get the property
And take it to her parents

Her head is shaven
She has lost her husband

She should be inherited
Married to her husband's brother
She should give to her husband's relatives
Everything – her children too

Her head is shaven
She has lost her husband

Was she exchanged for cows?
For money?
Was she bought with dowry?
Do her in-laws own her?

Her head is shaven
She has lost her husband

Promotio Iustitiae 77 (2003), 24

A Time Long Awaited

A Time to break free
From the traditions
That see an enemy
In a strange tribesman.

A time to break the cycle
Of despotic monarchs,
Who spill the blood
Of young generations.

A time for our elders
To melt diamond and gold.
No more paying a fortune
For the melted diamond and gold
Their blistered hands dug.

A time for a man
To be the shadow behind
A woman's skilled hands,
The two eating from the same dish.

A time for big hearts to cure
The dying bags of bones.
No more exotic conferences
About the dying bags of bones.

A time for gentlemen and women
To curtail their insatiable passion
That uncovers toddlers' privacy,
Soiling them with killer diseases.

A time for faceless faces
To wash their oily hands
That plunder nations' wealth,
While empty bellies grumble.

A time long awaited
To conquer these turmoils
Is already present,
Not in floods of talks in hotels
But in our determined hearts.

Cry of the African Child

How cruel World you are!
You've left me a sufferer,
I have no one to come
And set me free
From this burden.

Early in the morning,
I look at the sun rising,
Wishing my parents came
And set me free
From this burden.

African mother, African father,
O my parents,
You were good and wonderful.
You brought me into this world
Amidst songs and ululations
Of caring hearts,
Whose feet danced with joy;
Their hands carried and rocked me;
Their lips praised and jibed you,
For giving me life.

African mother, black mother,
O my sweet mother,
Memories of you possess me.
You carried me on your back
When I needed rest;
Gave me your fresh milk
When I was hungry;
Bathed me in warm water
To strengthen my limbs;
But now your touch
Has passed away.

African father, black father,
O my wonderful father,
You were my hero.
You clothed me,
took me to school,
Taught me to dig,
Gave me my heritage,
Showed me how to tell
Day time from night time.
But now your wisdom
Has faded away.

African mother, African father,
O my good parents,
Like candles in the wind
You flickered off,
Never to light again.
Hear my plea, O parents!
The faces that nursed me
See me as garbage.
Tunnels are my homes;
Papers, my blankets;
Drugs, my lullabies;
Stones, my pillows!

African mother, African father,
O my black parents,
Was I brought into this world
To bear the brunt
For the crimes of this world?

Early in the morning,
I look at the sun rising,
Wishing my parents came
And set me free
From this burden.

How cruel World you are!
You've left me a sufferer.
I have no one to come
And set me free
From this burden.

Brief Comment

These are some my poems reflecting my experience of the African reality, by and large. Even though there has been some progress as regards respect for human rights and some apparent development in various ways following their Independence, a good number of countries on the continent are still struggling to get out of devastating problems which include abject poverty, oppression of women and other forms of injustice, corruption, underdevelopment, orphanhood, HIV/AIDS and many more.

It is my conviction that commitment by Africans themselves to promoting values can alleviate this deplorable situation. As such, cultural values should really be challenged by values which will change the situation.

Boyd Kapyunga Nyirenda, S.J.
Hekima College
P.O. Box 21215
Nairobi, Ngong Road
00505 KENYA

+254 2 570 972 (fax)
<boykanyire@yahoo.com>

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