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St. Scholastica's Priory
Manila

Dear Sisters,

I am writing this editorial at the Pusan airport waiting for the time to check in because we came very early to the airport. Anyway, I want to share with you my insights after listening to a Trappistine nun, Sr. Josepha, about the struggle of her village to fight against the multinational corporation that wants to build a shipyard in their village. This will not only displace the villagers but will cause environmental disaster in the region. She is very much involved in the struggle of the village people. I resonated with her determination to keep on struggling in spite of the great obstacles. I realized that all over the world there are David's pitted against Goliaths of this world. I thought of the people of Rapu-Rapu and the indigenous peoples fighting against mining in their areas. I thought of the Sumilao farmers. Also of our own seemingly futile struggle against the systematic, all level, structurally embedded corruption in our society. Somehow the reassurance that St. Paul got from God that God's power and strength are manifested in our weakness came to my mind, too. The knowledge of these little David's in many parts of the Globe holding on to their slingshots gives hope to continue in our own struggle even if we do not see the light at the end of the tunnel. Once again in our history, we seem to be given another chance to bring about a fundamental change. Surely, we sense the new awakening of people who are forming coalitions for truth, accountability and reform in many parts of the Philippines. The students seem to have awakened from their stupor and we see them launch crusades for truth, caravans for truth, truth centers, etc. Let us fan these glowing embers with our fervent prayers and involvement in prophetic communal actions. Let the David's prevail over the Goliaths of this world.

Lovingly yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

S T A T I O C O N F E R E N C E

POVERTY

by Sister Mary Thomas Prado, OSB

“Enriched by His love, we have left all things in order to be totally available for God and His Kingdom.”
Constitutions, Chap 2.

Introduction

Those who received the transfer call this school year know the challenging experience of packing personal things: weeding out our things, throwing away or burning papers, returning borrowed things, giving away our hand-me-downs. It is an opportunity to make an inventory of the things we really need and those we can live without. The downsizing of our luggages makes us feel emotionally and spiritually lighter too because it clears the way to see what is essential.

Answering the transfer call is also an experience of embracing insecurity. One goes back to the starting line - adjusting, learning, listening, observing, establishing roots and ties again. There is the sense of uprootedness, homelessness, liminality, even displacement as the familiar comfort zones are taken away and new routines are set up. But this experience of insecurity gives us the opportunity to anchor ourselves to the true security and the constant One in this religious journey.

We reflect this Statio Sunday on our vow of poverty. If we read our Constitutions and our Chapter documents all the theological foundation and motivation and the practical considerations of poverty are contained there. This statio conference will seek only to highlight some themes and will reflect on the challenges of the vow in the particular realities of our day.

The Poverty of Jesus

There are three aspects of the poverty of Jesus that I would like to emphasize: his poverty as kenosis, his poverty as a mission lifestyle, and his poverty as solidarity with the poor.

Poverty as kenosis. In his book, *Poverty for the Kingdom*, Jose Cristo Rey Paredes takes the self-emptying of Jesus as starting point in understanding his poverty. St. Paul expresses this in 2 Cor 8:9: “You are well acquainted with the favor shown you by our Lord Jesus Christ: how for your sake he made himself poor though he was rich, so that you might become rich in his poverty.” This kenosis is seen in the two events of the incarnation and the paschal event, as well as in his life and ministry. The Son of God, to whom all riches and power belong, “made himself poor in order to enrich the world through his poverty.”¹ He opted for “voluntary impoverishment and humiliation” in being born poor, in living in this status, and in dying in this state on the cross. The self-emptying included the fundamental experience of depending radically on the

¹ Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, *Poverty for the Kingdom*. Quezon City: ICLA Publications and Claretian Publications, 1995, pp. 1, 2.

One he called Abba and the total submission to Abba's will for the establishment of the kingdom. In our attempt to identify with the kenotic experience of Jesus, we are challenged to discover the riches we have received by his fidelity to God's will and his self-sacrificing love for the people.

Poverty as a mission lifestyle. Luke 8:1 describes the way Jesus carried out his mission. It was mainly characterized by itinerancy – proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God from city to city and from town to town. This *missionary itinerancy* involved leaving family, possessions and embracing the insecurity of being on the road (Luke 9:57, 58). Moreover, it invited abandonment and dependence on the providence of God and the generosity of the people. The nature of this evangelizing mission called for a life of poverty. In Matthew 10: 7-10, Jesus admonishes his disciples not to keep gold, silver, money, tunics, sandals or a staff. Here we see that poverty is a defining feature of following him. The freedom from possessions will make the followers of Jesus totally available for the task of kingdom. J.C.R. Paredes writes, “We have to understand the poverty of Jesus under the key of his total availability for the service of the kingdom: in a permanent state of itinerancy toward the final fulfillment of his mission, in a permanent going up to Jerusalem, in total uprootedness from his very self.”²

Poverty as solidarity with the poor. The kingdom that Jesus announced and established is the reign of justice, peace, and joy in the Spirit. The preferential recipients of this reign, as shown in those who benefited from his missionary activities of healing and preaching, were the poor, deprived, oppressed and the excluded. Jesus' birth and death are expressions of this solidarity with the anawim. Likewise, his denunciation of riches that impoverish others, his work of liberating the oppressed, his call to greater works of compassion and charity – feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick and the imprisoned (Mt. 25:34-36) were various actions of solidarity.

Missionary Benedictine Poverty

If we examine the short section on Poverty in our Constitutions, it appears to be divided into three parts: the personal experience of poverty; the meaning of our communal poverty; and our vow of poverty in relation to the poor.

Poverty as detachment and a radical dependence on God. As Missionary Benedictines what is the foundation and teleology of our poverty? Our Constitutions (Chap II, n.6) states that our embrace of poverty is “to be totally available for God and his kingdom.” The two movements involved are: detachment from earthly things in order to be freed for the “real treasure”; and our “complete dependence on the Father.” How is this possible? There are two lines in this paragraph in our Constitutions that tell us how we are enabled to undergo this conversion -- first, we need to realize that we are already “enriched by his love” and that secondly, we are “powerless” without the strength that comes from God. The praxis of poverty then is congruent to the depth of our grasping of these two guiding truths: we have all we need with God's love and that God is the source of all that we are, all that we can be and all that we can do.

² Ibid, p. 6.

In initial formation, the fervor and enthusiasm to undergo conversion in detachment is visible and quite edifying. I have seen our formandae challenge themselves towards a life of poverty. However, when I was going through all the Priory Chapter documents with the novice preparing for profession, there were recurring provisions chapter after chapter regarding poverty: sharing of our resources with the poor and the simplification of lifestyle (recreation, travels, vacation, “community exposures”, etc.). There were endorsements to the communities to regulate the use of things and technology – starting with telegrams, long distance calls and fax messages, progressing to cellphones and the internet, and finally in the last chapter, the ATM and credit cards. What’s next? We cease pointing fingers but we need to ask what is the air that our formandae and young sisters are breathing after they leave the formation house. Thomas Merton put it this way: “Everything depends upon the atmosphere of the community in which you live. If you are living with monks, you become a monk. If you are living with a bunch of clowns, you become a clown.” Claude Peifer adds, “the role of those in formation, while important, is rarely decisive. What is decisive is the community, the total environment.”

Poverty and the communal life. Our Constitutions states, “...we share our goods and place our work, skills and time at the disposal of the community and its mission. We depend on the community for what we need. We openly and humbly state our real needs but are also content if these needs cannot be fulfilled.” In this paragraph the primary characteristic of our communal poverty and economics is that it is *relational*. Living simply and putting things in common not only reduce competition, individualism and tension in the community but also create *mutuality* and *interdependence*. I can depend on the community in good times and in bad, whether I’m healthy or sick, active in the apostolate or retired. This is by virtue of my membership and not by my “contribution”. The mutuality that is created by our vow of poverty, however, goes deeper than economics, it is found in our need for one another in living this life and vocation. In St. Benedict’s mind we become holy together.

A consequence of the communality of goods is harmony and peace in the community. In the book *Introducing Benedict’s Rule*, Michael Casey and David Tomlins posit that the reason for the distribution of goods according to need (RB 34) is Benedict’s desire that the house be at peace. Quoting J. Rippinger, “The real end-goal of poverty is not regimentation or individual asceticism but peace and harmony in the community.”

We can also reflect on the communality of resources and the vice of “private ownership” in the RB within the dialectic of abundance and scarcity -- a major problem in our world today. St. Benedict frowns upon private ownership for reasons of equity and austerity which will guard our relationship with one another. But also that when I keep, say a laptop, as private possession and do not let any community member use it, I create scarcity in the community. This kind of scarcity is fabricated – I invented it by making the laptop unavailable to others and making it a rare commodity in the community. There is the present rice crisis in our country, a crisis that is not so much about the lack of rice but of the manipulation of scarcity through hoarding and because of the economic (and political) interests of the few. We look at leadership in the Church. If we say that only men can be ordained, we make priests as well as the sacraments in short supply. If I become so powerful in my position, I have made power scarce in the community or in the institution. If I reject an assignment or resist taking active responsibility in my community or in the priory, I have contributed to the scarcity of personnel. What is wrong

with this invented scarcity? It contradicts the God of abundance and other people suffer and are deprived. In the state of scarcity, God is not proclaimed as the God of life.

Poverty and our relationship with the poor. Globalization has generated new forms of poverty, exclusion, and marginalization. How is the vow of poverty to be lived amidst the cries and groanings of the poor in our country and in the world? In Chap II, n. 7 of our Constitutions we read: “As disciples of Jesus Christ we share his special love for the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed. When we have to bear inconveniences, privations, sufferings, and even injustices, we will do so in the spirit of the Beatitudes, as an expression of our solidarity with the poor.” This section states a personal attitudinal stance that will express solidarity with the poor. In practice, however, our solidarity action has a wide range -- from our involvement in the cause of uplifting the dignity of the poor, to justice issues, and down to our community economy. Religious communities are challenged to adopt an *economy of solidarity* that realizes our compassion to our co-sisters in their need and our service to our poor brothers and sisters who will be able to live by our living simply. For example, at the beginning of the school year, we come together as a community to set up our objectives, daily schedule and budget. David Couturier in his book *The Four Conversions* writes that our budget is a *theological statement*. It reflects what we place value on. This holds true in our institutions – at times our mission statement say one thing and our budget (and expenses) another.

Poverty and stewardship. The reflection on Benedictine poverty is not complete without the concept of stewardship. We declare in our Constitutions, “We use goods reverently and gratefully, conscious that we are mere stewards of God’s gifts and accountable for their use.” The two attitudes regarding our use of goods are: *reverence* and *gratitude*. These can only be adopted when there is acknowledgement that the goods are not our own possession but are received as gift and handled as such.

In RB 32, the chapter on *The Tools and Goods of the Monastery*, St. Benedict calls for care of the things of the monastery and for making an inventory of them. In our present time we call this accountability -- an accountability that is founded on transparency. Stewardship is the Benedictine ethos with regards to the created order. Once adopted in the monastery, there is the bigger “workshop” to practice it -- this created world, finding its expression in the care for the earth and our environment and all things sacredly created. Abbot John Klassen, OSB, in his article on *The Rule of St. Benedict and Environmental Stewardship*, invites us to reflect on the monastic virtues of humility, stability, and frugality as forming the foundation of environmental stewardship. This means the acceptance of the truth of the human situation and our selves (humility), having in-depth knowledge of and caring for the local environment and monastic places (made possible by stability), and frugality as an alternative vision of sustainable consumption -- based not on want but on essential need.

Conclusion

The Second Vatican Council gave a new focus on the vow of poverty. Camilo Maccise, OCD, in his talk on *The Vow of Poverty in the Context of World Poverty*, traces the changes in the understanding of the vow: as *consecration* poverty is a sharing in the poverty of Christ; as

communio religious have to be poor in fact and in spirit and that poverty is collective and shared; as *missio* poverty is service to the poor.

As our world evolves, we are challenged to continue our reflection on the vow of poverty and the spirituality that will be generated by the emerging context. Daily though, we are called to witness to being poor “in fact and in spirit”, to being poor among the poor, to being poor so that God’s kingdom will flourish in the here and now, and to being poor in order to point the way to the true riches of the *eschaton*.

Suggestions for reflection and sharing:

At the personal level:

1. Our formation program and our community are only helps in shaping us in poverty. Fundamentally however, each one needs to ask -- How do I form my self for a life of poverty?
2. What is my sense of being poor spiritually, emotionally and materially?
3. What blocks my saying NO to offers that jeopardize the simplicity of life and radical dependence on God? Can I live within what is available? If my community has the means to provide for more, can I distinguish between what is privilege and what is necessity? What am I seeking in my craving to possess? Can I elevate this at another level of seeking?
4. Has my praxis of poverty generated a greater availability for the work of the kingdom?

At the communal and institutional levels:

5. What practical decisions inspire us towards a renewal in the vow of poverty (such as forms of recreation, furnishings in our convents, etc)?
6. What is the general lifestyle of the community?
7. What are the challenges to our communal and institutional living of poverty?
 - what theological statement is our budget (community, school) saying?
 - what is the consciousness of our community and mission partners of the suffering around us?
 - how are we contributing to the scarcity in our society?

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THE FEAST OF THE ASCENSION by Mother Mary John Mananzan, OSB

Christ made His last appearance on earth, forty days after His Resurrection from the dead. The Acts of the Apostles states that the disciples were in Jerusalem. Jesus appeared before them and commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the "Promise of the Father". He stated, "You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5).

After Jesus gave these instructions, He led the disciples to the Mount of Olives. Here, He commissioned them to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It is also at this time that the disciples were directed by Christ to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Jesus also told them that He would be with them always, "even to the ends of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

The Ascension provided the setting for the GREAT COMMISSIONING. Since we have been mandated by our latest General and Priory Chapters to focus on MISSION, it is fitting that we reflect on this last earthly act of Jesus. The words of this commissioning which is expressed in the Gospel of the Feast has three parts:

1. THE PROLOGUE: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."*

This is very important because it emphasizes the fact of the MISSIO DEI—The Father has given power to Jesus to give us a mandate to continue his mission which is the mission of the Father.

Maybe this thought that our mission is God's mission should first of all prevent us from a certain proprietorship about our apostolate—you know—"my project", or even "my poor". We can so deceive ourselves that we think we are doing things for people when in reality we are using people for our own ego trip. A certain detachment is called for. If we are so obsessed by our work, and if we cannot even leave it to go where we are called, maybe we have to ask ourselves in all honesty if we are doing God's mission or our own.

It is also an assurance that even if we cannot show tangible fruits of our efforts, we are consoled in the fact that the Father will take care whether our words had an effect on our students, our counseling did in fact help, that our efforts for the poor did actually empower them.

2. THE CONTENT OF THE COMMISSIONING

2.1. *“go, therefore and make disciples of all nations”*

In another version, the disciples were commanded to be His witnesses ...to the ends of the earth.” This shows that the essence of discipleship is witnessing. Preaching is not enough. What is called for is the personal testimony by one’s life of the truth of what one preaches.

Our witnessing, both personally and in community is the mandate we received from Jesus. As I have said in one of my letters, we and our community could be the greatest inspiration for or the greatest scandal to the people we serve. We may be gifted in our words, even profound in our insights and in our admonitions, but the only real thing that gives us credibility is how we relate with one another and to other people. We should remember this when we are tempted to scold people in public, when we quarrel with another Sister in front of outsiders, when we contribute to negative remarks about our own sister, when we are hard-hearted and lacking in compassion in our decisions, when we show favoritism, etc, etc.

2.2 *“baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

When people are baptized, this means that they have been marked as belonging to God. They no longer belong to themselves. They have been consecrated to be disciples—followers of Christ.

As religious, we have a double consecration, by our baptism and then by our profession which is but a renewal of our baptism. But do we really live and act as if we belonged to God? Have we totally surrendered ourselves or have we in the course of time gotten back bit by bit what we have given? Do we still unhesitatingly say our Fiat to our assignments or have we started to waver and to negotiate? Do we still leave in the hands of God the welfare of our family or have we become unduly worried and become too entangled in their affairs?

I was struck when Sr. Estrella Castalone, FMA who is my “co guardian angel” accompanying Jun, was asked in a forum:” If Mr. Lozada is in danger of his life, aren’t you and Sr. Mary John also in danger?” And she answered for both of us: “But we have given our lives to God, so what life have we to lose?”

2.3. *“teaching them to obey everything what I have commanded you.”*

It is Christ’s teachings that we have to propagate, not our own. It is his commands, which sometimes are radical demands that we have to teach—for

example to love our enemies, to forgive seven-times seven times, to turn the other cheek, to go another mile, to make peace before the sun goes down, to give up our lives for the sake of our friends, etc.

Do we really take these commands seriously or do we regard them as idealistic admonitions that may be good to have in mind but which we are not really expected to actually implement? Sometimes, I am disturbed by the fact that although we are religious, we are not even acting like Christians—as when we refuse to talk to a Sister for months while receiving communion everyday, when we hear such remarks as “I have deleted her from my memory,” or when we are lacking in compassion for our employees, or when we refuse to give our time to someone asking for help, when we are vindictive against people who have hurt us, when we use power and our position to put people in their place or to make them see “who is the boss” etc.

3. EPILOGUE: “And behold, I am with you always till the end of time.”

What a great reassurance and what a cause for our confidence and encouragement. If God is with us, who can be against us? What a sense of security this gives us. This brings us back to the prologue. God will be with us till the end of time because it is God’s mission that we are doing.

Maybe sometimes we ask ourselves: How can we be forever giving to the foreign mission when we lack personnel ourselves? But God is never outdone in generosity. The more we give, the more we will be given. This is the same in our personal lives. When we give, we give willingly with extravagant generosity and then we will experience being fully blessed with abundant blessing, full, shaken together, running over. We do our work with confidence and courage, with serenity and security because God will be with us till the end of time.

A BLESSED PENTECOST

by Mother Mary John Mananzan, OSB

The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church. Without the Holy Spirit, the Church would be just an international religious organization, the seven sacraments would just be some social rituals. And what would our spiritual life be—since our spiritual life is the life of the SPIRIT in us? Join me in meditating on the SEVEN GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT dwelling in us. The Spirit transforms 7 human attributes into manifestations of the divine energy permeating our whole being,

WISDOM

On the human level, this may be the insights accumulated by learning from one's experiences. As such it is the virtue of the old rather than of the young since youth lacks the life experiences that occasion these insights, although of course it is not automatic that the old are wise since not everyone learns from one's experience. But wisdom as the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to everyone regardless of age. It is the gift of seeing the world and events from God's perspective. It is the wisdom that made Solomon discover the true mother, it is the wisdom that made Maximilian Kolbe choose to take the place of the condemned man in a Nazi camp. It is the same wisdom that makes a young woman turn her back on a promising career to enter the convent, and for Jun Lozada to choose to tell the truth even if his intellect told him this will mess up his life.

In the course of our religious life, we may have to choose between the world's perspective and God's perspective, for example in determining the success or failure of our apostolate, in our struggle to accept an assignment, in making a correct but unpopular decision, in selecting between two good options, in the temptation to compromise to make life easier, etc, etc. Let us pray for wisdom to make the proper choices. As Pope John Paul II put it: "Through this gift the entire life of the individual Christian, with all its events, hopes, plans, and achievements, is caught up in the breath of the Spirit, who permeates it with Light from on high..."

UNDERSTANDING

This human attribute when inspired by the Spirit, goes beyond intellectual understanding and becomes an insight of the heart as when the disciples of Emmaus exclaimed at their moment of recognition of the risen Jesus: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" We are given the ability to realize the Divine touch in the ordinary and extraordinary events in our life. It moves us to empathize with someone whose experience had once been ours. It enables us to discern the signs of God in the personal, communal and societal events that happen to us.

Let us pray for this gift to see the meaning of unwelcome events in our personal lives—the death of a loved one, our being diagnosed with cancer, failure of our plans or projects, betrayal of a friend. And in our communal life—to understand why we have to live with this superior with whom we cannot get along, why we are given this assignment when we honestly think we are better in doing something else, why we are transferred when we are about to see the fruits of our labor, etc. And in our societal life—to discern what position to take in certain issues, to have the courage to make a stand.

KNOWLEDGE

As a gift of the Holy Spirit, knowledge is not just an accumulation of learned data, or academic knowledge, or intellectual sophistication, or technical know-how. It is more a BECOMING AWARE OF, AN AWAKENING OF CONSCIOUSNESS, A CONSCIANTIZATION. We can know many facts without being aware of them. For example, everybody knows there is poverty in our Philippine society, but not everybody is aware of it—not everybody is bothered by it, not everybody is concerned about it and certainly not everybody is doing something about it. The same thing with corruption, violence against women, degradation of the environment.

More than acquiring knowledge of facts, let us strive to be aware of what we know, to be moved by them, to be challenged by them, and to act on them. For example in our school, we may know that there is some bullying going on among our children. Are we disturbed by it?, are we concerned about the victim?, have we done something about it? In our society, we know there is incredible corruption going on in all levels. Are we disturbed by it or have we accepted it as a fact of life? What have we done about it? We know that there are various forms of violence being perpetrated against women and children. Are we righteously indignant about these? Have we personally done something for such victims of violence? The degradation of the environment goes on relentlessly around us. Has this knowledge changed our life-style and have we started something do-able within our area of influence?

COUNSEL

This gift enlightens our conscience in the moral choices which our daily life presents and it enables some to help others do the same. This is so important in our society today because of the deterioration of values, the deadening of conscience, and even in religious communities where the values and ways of the world have undeniably seeped in.

We thank God for guiding us in our decisions not only with regard to our personal choices but in our decisions as superiors and administrators that affect the lives of our Sisters, our students, the people around us. The essence of our being religious is being prophetic which means announcing the good news and denouncing the bad news. We need to be the conscience of society—to courageously stand up for what is right, to condemn what is wrong even if those whose vested interest we touch may be vindictive towards us. Lay people look to us for moral leadership and we should not fail them.

FORTITUDE

It is difficult for this virtue to thrive in a society where compromise, capitulation and cooptation are the usual responses to domination and controlling power. We see this in the kowtowing of the weak and cowardly to those who are in power who in their turn are relentless in their oppression of the weak and defenseless. That is why this human virtue needs the infusion of the gift of the Spirit which Pope John Paul II defines as “a supernatural impulse which gives strength to the soul, not only on exceptional occasions such as that of martyrdom, but also in normal difficulties: in the struggle to remain consistent with one’s principles: in putting up with insults and unjust attacks: in courageous perseverance on the path of truth and uprightness, in spite of lack of understanding and hostility.”

At some phases of our religious life, we may experience daily martyrdom. It may be due to some personal “sting of the flesh” which St. Paul himself experienced and which God allowed in order that the grace of God may be made manifest in weakness. It may be because of some bad chemistry in the relationship in a community or in our work place. Whatever it is, we ask for this gift of the Spirit to be faithful to our vow of conversatio morum and to persevere in the path of goodness.

PIETY

It is a pity that this virtue has become synonymous with a sickly sweet spirituality that is debilitating rather than invigorating to the spirit. But piety as a gift of the Spirit is the melting down of our hardness of heart and opens us to a filial relationship to God and to God’s children as our brothers and sisters. When Jesus said that those who believe have the right to call God Abba, Father in the same manner as he did, he was bestowing on us a unique relationship with God. He is challenging us to discover our own divinity just as he discovered his. And this sharing in his nature enables us to feel God’s unconditional love for us which evokes in us a total surrender of our being. This then opens us up to our brothers and sisters, to embrace them in compassion and tenderness.

On this feast of Pentecost, let us pray that we may truly experience God’s unconditional love for us in spite of our weaknesses and failures or maybe because of them. Let us pray that we do not seek security in human anchors but to truly “cast our cares upon the Lord.” We pray that God melts the hardness of our hearts towards our co-sisters and co-workers, understanding their weakness, forgiving them for having hurt us, being extravagantly generous to them in their time of need.

FEAR OF THE LORD

Our Holy Father Benedict in his Holy Rule wisely modifies this attitude with “Loving”—“Loving Fear”. Humanly speaking we are afraid of Someone who has power over us, in whom we depend for our very existence. And sometimes this is only the remaining deterrent for human beings to refrain from doing evil. But as a gift of the Holy Spirit, Loving Fear of the Lord means awe and reverence before the tremendous majesty of God but being aware all of the time that this almighty Being is one’s Parent who loves us unconditionally. Just as we fear offending our earthly parents not just because they will punish us but because we don’t want to hurt their feelings, we refrain from sin not just because we are afraid of hell or God’s punishment but because God’s overwhelming love shames us when we betray this love.

In trying to have “ a personal relationship with God” as our Formators enjoined us to do, let us not think that we can be buddy-buddy with God, that we can put God in our pocket—that we can somehow make our will God’s will. And this is a great temptation among us religious. We do make discernment but we can still deceive ourselves that what we want to do is God’s will. Let us decide in the awesome presence of God and listen to God’s voice speaking perhaps through our superior or reliable people. And here is where the gift of loving fear of the Lord will help us to be relentlessly honest with ourselves whether we are truly obeying God’s will or our own.

MAY EACH ONE OF US EXPERIENCE OUR OWN PERSONAL PENTECOST!

THE STORY OF WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN MISSION

by Susan Smith, RNDM

(Excerpts)

In approaching the history of the role of women in Christian mission, and in appreciating better the theologies in which that story is grounded, my first task was to decide how to break the two thousand years of Christianity into manageable historical periods.

One difficulty we face as we seek to understand the role of women in Christian mission is that the criteria traditionally used to divide a 2000 year history into manageable periods are derived from an androcentric reading of history. The different periods revolve around events or movements that reflect the roles of eminent theologians such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther or George Carey, and powerful political figures like Constantine, Charlemagne or Henry VIII. As Barbara MacHaffie points out, histories of Christianity, and by extension, histories of Christian mission “have been traditionally ‘his stories’”,¹ rather than “her stories”. Today there are attempts to redress this situation.² Attention is devoted to the stories of particular Protestant and Catholic women’s missionary groups.³ There is a lot of “in-house” writing, particularly by Catholic religious congregations of women about their Founders. Much of this work is hagiographic in nature and may lack a critique of the theologies of mission and Church that motivated women to found religious communities dedicated to mission.

How Do We Define Mission?

Before we begin to study the story of women in Christian mission we need to define mission. I offer four possible definitions. First, mission is the work of conversion, of “saving souls” who inhabit bodies in far off places.

Second, mission is concerned with planting the Church in those places where it is not yet established. This understanding has been and still is important for the Catholic Church though I venture to suggest that it is assuming less importance for many Catholic missionaries working at grassroots level among the poor and dispossessed whether this occurs in “first” or “third world” countries.

Third, mission is understood in socio-economic categories as Christians recognize their responsibility toward those who experience economic, cultural, ethnic or gender discrimination and oppression. Missionaries who actively work to ensure a more just society see this work as a continuation of the mission of Jesus (cf. Lk 4:18-20), and part of a wider movement that will bring about the Reign of God in its fullness.

Fourth, and assuming more importance in our contemporary world, where religion is often identified as a cause of disquiet, tension and even armed struggle, interreligious dialogue is assuming more importance as Christians seek to understand the beliefs and traditions of other religious groups.

Finally, inculturation has emerged as yet another important missionary priority as members of a particular local church strive to understand and express more effectively the relationship of the Good News to their cultural context.

These different perceptions affect the way in which women's missionary role is understood. If the goal of mission is conversion and 'saving souls', it suggests a model in which the sacramental role of the priest is prioritized over other aspects of missionary work. Women's role is subordinate to this sacramental ministry. If mission is about planting the Church, then one of its goals is the establishment of hierarchical and often patriarchal structures that can cause unease for contemporary women missionaries (cf. JRS in Ethiopia).

On the other hand, understanding mission as liberation, as interreligious dialogue, or as inculturation suggests an expanded understanding of mission which is more acceptable to women missionaries, enabling them to move beyond a role that is subordinate to that of the ordained minister. It is an understanding of mission that focuses on hastening the coming of the Reign of God through participation in those movements directed to ensuring that people can live with dignity and respect.

A Feminist Perspective on Mission

I propose to look at the story of women in Christian mission through a feminist lens, that is to say from a women's perspective rather than from a male perspective. I do this because patriarchal culture has decided that the women's role should be restricted to the private/domestic realm, the home. Patriarchal culture believes that women are biologically programmed or destined to be mothers, to be carers and nurturers. To be otherwise is to be unnatural. Men on the other hand belong to the public realm, which is not concerned with home-making but with history-making, which involves them not so much in instinctual or natural patterns of behavior as in rational and intellectual behavior. Using a feminist lens allows us to identify whether women's mission is primarily an extension of their biological role as nurturers and carers, therefore belonging to the domestic realm, and driven by the imperatives of a patriarchal culture. As a corollary to this, I also believe that in the case of Catholic sisters involved in mission, the cloister was a structure used to restrict their possible role in the public realm.

By following this line of thought, I want to demonstrate that the history of women's mission can be divided into three eras.

- after the death and of Resurrection of Jesus, the first Pauline communities seemed to have encouraged women and men missionaries to work together in the public realm.
- by the end of the 1st century and through until the 1960's, apart from some valiant efforts to move into the public realm, women were again restricted to the domestic realm. In effect, they were to care for women and children as teachers or nurses or carers of orphans or in other works of charity.
- after Vatican II Catholic women missionaries begin to claim for themselves missionary activity that propels them into the public realm.

The First Era – Women as Co-workers with Paul

In those NT Letters that unequivocally can be identified as written by Paul, (I Thessalonians, Galatians, I and II Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, and Romans, written between 51-63 AD), there is evidence that women had an important role in the mission of early Christianity. (Incidentally, this allows for an interpretation of Paul as other than unredeemably misogynist). Time precludes a detailed examination of Paul's Letters but there are two important points to notice about the role of women in the different Pauline communities:

Women as co-workers and deacons

In Philippians 4:2-3 we read (I urge Evodia and I urge Syntyche to be one of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the Gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the Book of Life). Paul is writing to two Gentile women, Euodia, whose Greek name meant "good journey" and Syntyche, another Greek name that roughly translates as "good luck" urging them to be united as they struggle in the work of the gospel. They are named by Paul as co-workers with him and Clement in the proclamation of the Gospel.

In Romans 16:1-16, Paul equates some women with deacons, apostles, and co-workers. For example, Phoebe is one of the women whom Paul knew and described as "sister" (Gk *adelph-*), "deaconess" (*diakonos*), and "benefactress/patroness" (*prostatis*) in Rom 16:1-3. Phoebe belonged to the Church at Cenchrae, a Greek seaport. The three titles that Paul gives her are critical for our understanding of women's role in the mission of the Pauline communities. "Sister" *adelph-*, is a term that can identify a member of a missionary team because Paul frequently uses the masculine equivalent of sister, "brother" as a designation for Paul's important missionary collaborator, Timothy (cf. Phil 1; II Cor 1:1; I Thess 3:2). Phoebe is also called 'a deacon', another title frequently used by Paul of men (cf. Phil 1:1; I Cor 3:5; I Thess 3:2). Phoebe is also referred to as patroness or benefactress, *prostatis*. In this instance, the masculine equivalent is *prostat-s*, and means legal patron. These texts suggest a Christian community which has moved well beyond "ladies a plate please" mindset.

Women as heads of household churches

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul is concerned about discord in the community generated by Christians allying themselves with important authoritative figures in the early Church—Christ, Apollos, Cephas or Paul. While in prison in Ephesus, he learns about this because "it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters" (I Cor 1:11). Chloe is the head of a household church. In primitive Christianity, the household was "the basic structural unit of the early Christian Church",⁴ and often enough leadership in the household church belonged to women. Christians gathered in households to celebrate the Lord's Supper, to hear the Gospel proclaimed and explained, and to provide hospitality for traveling missionaries such as Paul and his companions. The fact that Paul mentions Chloe indicates her important leadership and missionary role in the early Church. Paul would have regarded people like Chloe as "social equals in Corinth".⁵ Women's role as leaders of household churches formed a bridge as it were between the private and domestic realm. Household in the ancient world implied more than the nuclear family home as it would have included the extended family, servants and slaves.

The Second Era – Post Pauline Developments

However as the Deutero-Pauline Letters, those Letters formerly attributed to Paul but now regarded as written by his disciples after his death, (Colossians, Ephesians, I and II Timothy and Titus), indicate, by the end of the first century, the situation was changing and a patriarchal culture was ensuring that women's primary role remained domestic rather than public. This is obvious in those texts referred to as the "household codes" (Col. 3:18 *Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord*); Eph. 5:22-6:9; I Tim 2:11-14 *Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived; the woman was deceived and became a transgressor*); Titus 2:1-10; cf. later 1st and 2nd century writings, I Peter 2:18-3:7; Didaché 4:9-11; Barnabas 19:5-7; I Clement 21:6-9; Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians) which enjoin obedience and submission of women to their husbands, and forbid them to teach or have authority over men.

The canonical Gospels and Acts of the Apostles offer conflicting messages regarding the role of women. Women disciples are faithful disciples as their presence at the cross and the tomb of Jesus indicate. In particular, their role as first witnesses of the Resurrection is pregnant with missionary overtones. However, as some texts, particularly Luke-Acts indicate, the Good News can and is sometimes interpreted as bad news for women. One example suffices to explain Luke's somewhat ambivalent attitude toward women. All the Gospels have stories about women who anoint either Jesus' head or feet. In Mark and Matthew, just prior to the Last Supper, we have the wonderful story of the unnamed woman who anoints the head of Jesus in a manner reminiscent of Samuel's anointing of Saul in the Old Testament. In John's Gospel, Mary of Bethany anoints the feet of Jesus, again just before the Last Supper, and so prophetically acts out the actions of Jesus in washing the feet of the Disciples. In Luke, an unnamed woman, who is identified as a sinner, repents of her sinfulness as washes the feet of Jesus with her tears and dries them with her hair. Luke denies her the type of prophetic role that we find in Mark, Matthew and John.

Therefore, as the 1st century draws to a close, we see that women are again relegated to the domestic realm, where they tend to stay for the next nineteen centuries. There are attempts to recapture something of the pro-active roles of Prisca or Evodia and Syntyche as the lives of Clothilde, wife of the first Frankish Christian king, Clovis, Hilda, abbess at Whitby in the 7th century, the Beguines and Hildegard of Bingen in the late medieval period, the two famous 16th century women, Teresa of Avila and Angela Merici, Foundress of the Ursuline Sisters, and the English woman, Mary Ward, who founded the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1609, indicate.

One of the most obvious signs of women's relegation to the domestic realm is the Church's insistence on the cloister for nuns. In 1298, Pope Boniface VIII's Decree, *Periculoso* insisted on the necessity of a cloister for women religious. This was reaffirmed by Pope Pius V's *Circa Pastoralis*, (1566). In the early 17th century, Church authorities required that the Visitation community founded in France for work among the urban poor be semi-enclosed. Though the Foundress, St. Jane Francis de Chantal, had hoped that her community could engage in missionary work unhindered by a cloistered life style, in 1615 she was required to adopt the cloister structure.

The 19th century witnessed a veritable explosion of women's congregations, many of them founded to work on the foreign missions or to work among the poorer classes in a Europe that was becoming industrialized, urbanized and secularized. We may like to see this development as an indication of incipient feminism. However, it is more correctly understood as a response to a patriarchal Church's belief that the role of women was essentially that of being carers and nurturers. For example, in the early 19th century, the Archbishop of Lyons wrote to Mother M. St. John Fontbonne in the early 19th century, "we must have apostles for the children and mothers of families, and the aged",⁶ confirming that women's ecclesial role was to be restricted to their biological roles of caring and nurturing. There was little enthusiasm among Church leaders for cloister-free congregations. This emphasis on the importance of the cloister meant considerable tension for those women religious actively engaged in mission. As many of us know this problem did not begin to be resolved until well into the 20th century, when women religious, particularly in the English-speaking world sought to redress this tension. Vatican II then encouraged and legitimated what many women religious knew in their heart of hearts, and what the 20th century exercise of mission required of them.

The Third Era – Contemporary Developments

After World War II, the situation of religious women began to change. Their involvement in schools and hospitals necessitated professional education, and this in turn led them, particularly in North America to recognize the need for theological education. Vatican II (1961-65) and slightly later, liberation theology, radically subverted traditional ways of understanding the mission of women. Women's attempts to move beyond their traditional and biologically determined roles of nurturing and caring were not always greeted with approval and acclaim by key figures in Church and society.

However, women missionaries, influenced by liberationist theologies, particularly feminist theologies began to envisage their task as other than domesticating women and girls for their roles as wives and mothers in a patriarchal culture, and a patriarchal Church. Rather, mission was about liberation so that women could become the subjects of their own development. This work occurred in different ways. It can be seen in women missionaries' efforts to work with oppressed women and to identify strategies with them that would allow them to move beyond those situations that prevented them from confronting the reality of the patriarchal culture's oppressive elements. In some instances, it led to women religious working outside of the institutional Church.

Another important development at this time was the emergence of lay women missionaries. To some extent, some lay women had been active in mission within their countries through their involvement in such organization as YCW, or the YCS, but the affirmation of the role of the laity in the life after Vatican II, coupled with the decline in the number of women entering religious life, saw significant developments in their involvement in missionary work.

Just as important were developments at the scholarly level. Authors like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and more recently Elizabeth A. Johnson, are identifying the parameters of theologies that legitimate such developments and show them to be consistent with Christian tradition.

To Conclude: What Might Women Bring to Mission?

- A capacity that they also share with many lay male missionaries, and that is moving beyond understanding mission as only a Church-directed and Church-focused activity.
- Their innate and acquired ability to respond readily to people's immediate personal needs represents an example of embodied proclamation that often speaks more loudly than verbal proclamation.
- An experience of marginality in Church and society that allows them to empathize and identify with other marginalized peoples and groups.
- A growing enthusiasm for a theology of mission that directs attention to the presence of the Spirit in creation, in history and in other cultures and traditions. This provides a theological foundation for understanding mission in categories other than ecclesiocentric, or Christocentric.

The movement from women's mission understood as domestication to mission understood as liberation is proving for both women missionaries and those among whom they live and work subversive of more traditional understandings of mission, and encouraging a movement toward more egalitarian and inclusive structures in Church and society.

¹ Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), 1.

² See Leslie A. Flemming, ed., *Women's Work for Mission: Missionaries and Social Change in Asia* (Boulder, San Francisco: Westview Press, 1989), Mary Taylor Hubert and Nancy C. Lutkehaus, eds., *Gendered Missions: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999).

³ See Penny Lernoux, *Hearts on Fire: The Story of the Maryknoll Sisters* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993).

⁴ Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, *Sacra Pagina*, vol. 7 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 74.

⁵ Antoinette Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), 42.

⁶ Cited by Yvonne Turin, *Femmes et Religieuses au XIXe Siecle: Le Feminism en Religion* (Paris: Nouvelle Cite, 1989), 70, quoted in Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 602.