



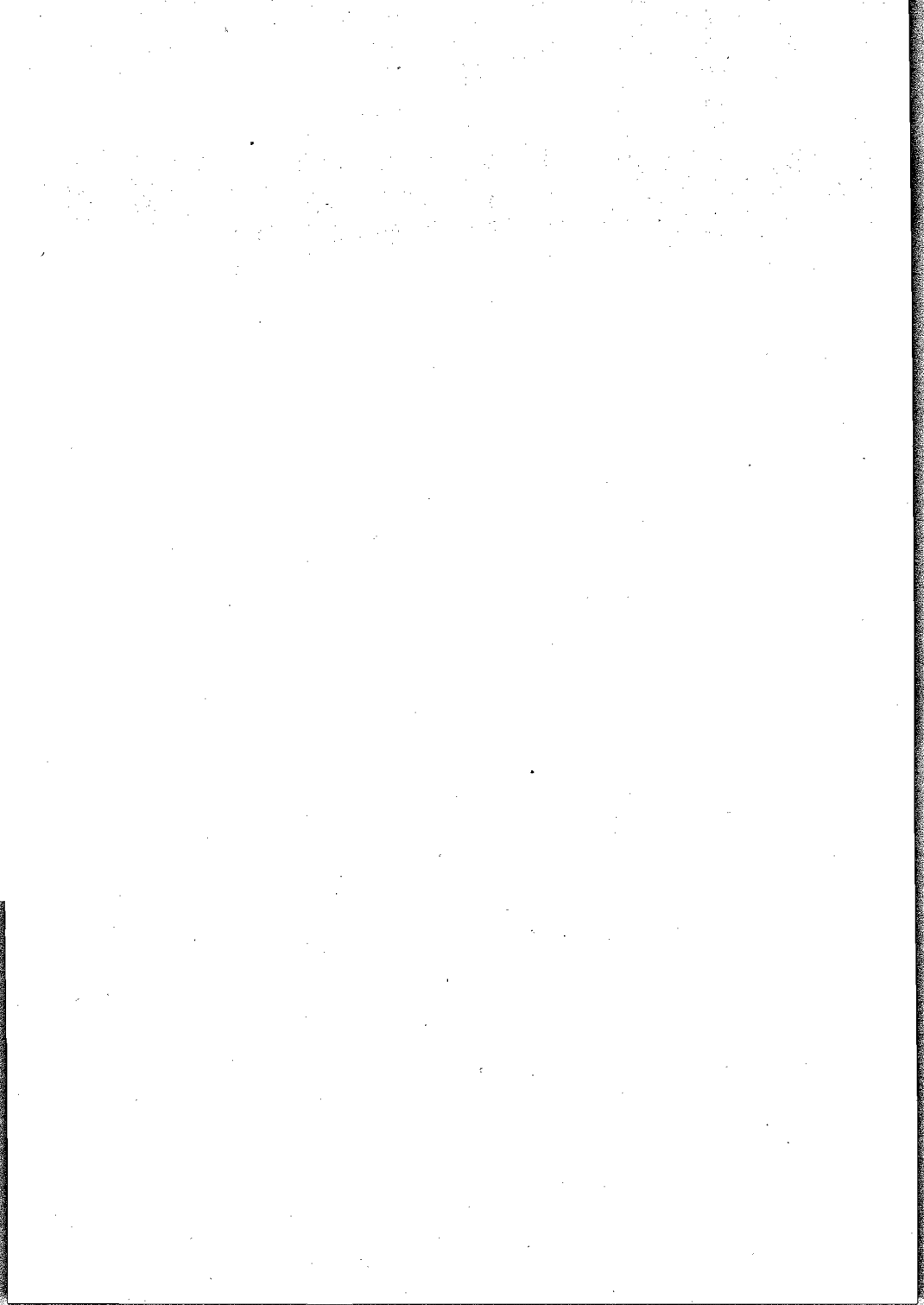
PROGRESSIO

SUMMARY

MAY 1989
N.3

- PORTUGAL: THE MISSION OF THE LAITY
IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES
(Maria da Assunção Souto Moura) 3
- SOME TIPS FOR ANALYSING THE SITUATION
OF OUR COMMUNITIES IN MEXICO
(Luis Valdés s.j.) 11
- POLITICAL FORMATION IN GENOVA
(Pietro Millefiorini s.j.) 21
- QUESTION BOX:
Group guides: is there a time for change? 28
- ECHOES... ECHOES... ECHOES
(Zambia, Egypt) 30

PUBLICATION OF THE WORLD CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY
C.P.6139-(Borgo S.Spirito 8)-00195 Rome-ITALY
Tel.: (6) 68 68 079
ENGLISH-SPANISH-FRENCH EDITIONS
Editor: JOSE REYES



**PORTUGAL: THE MISSION OF THE LAITY
IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES**

The Portuguese CLCs held their National Assembly in November 1988. The theme that was chosen is a clear expression of our desire to live our mission in the context of the local churches. Below is the text of one of the lectures on this theme, that is surely universal.

INTRODUCTION

This article does not pretend to review all the ways in which the CLC spirituality responds to the challenges put forth by the National Congress of the Laity. It is rather a simple reflexion on the CLC vocation in Portugal, offering a few suggestions on ways to go. With what is specific to us, we can make the Church more present, more active and more challenging in Portuguese society.

- We live today in a climate of change - in the family, at work, at school, at the university, in relationships. Whatever its positive aspects, change produces stress and conflict, and especially a profound sense of insecurity with respect to the values and models of life.

- Beset by the fear of encountering ourselves, and for lack of better ideas, we turn increasingly to immediate gratification. Thus leads to widespread consumerism and the search for a kind of wellbeing in which competition and individualism (often in the group kind) take on terrifying proportions.

- This climate of change can also be felt in the Church. Although Portugal is a Catholic country where most people are baptised, in recent years the number of practising Catholics has significantly decreased.

- On the other hand, a recent survey showed that in Italy, although the number of practicing Catholics is decreasing,

inner restlessness and the search for transcendence are very real, particularly among the young and the better educated. The situation is much the same in Portugal.

In response to these realities - recently analysed by the National Congress of the Laity - and to the challenges put forth by the same Congress to the Portuguese laity, two additional approaches can be suggested:

- we must find a new way to speak of God.
- We must find a new way to witness to "the Kingdom".

A new way to speak of God that does not only involve a new manner of speaking, but rather a new mentality. A way of looking and listening to life and to the world in the light of a relationship with God that enlightens all our other relationships.

A new way of witnessing to "the Kingdom" that is founded on this intimate relationship with God and is expressed primarily by way of a presence and an intervention in the secular society and in temporal life.

This challenge to the whole Church speaks to us, members of Christian Life Communities. The Ignatian spirituality by which we live is founded on such a personal relationship with God and on the orientation of our entire life in accordance with His will (see the First Annotation to the Spiritual Exercises), and points to an attitude of Apostolic Discernment: to discover at every moment and in each concrete situation the best way to announce the Gospel. The General Principles of our communities also provide concrete guidelines for CLC life-style in the world, so that we may be in all circumstances witnesses to "the Kingdom".

I will now discuss certain aspects of the Spiritual Exercises and of the General Principles that, for me, contain the elements of an answer to the two great challenges. However, our spirituality is so rich that obviously much will be left unsaid.

THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Principle and Foundation

At the very beginning of the Exercises, we are placed before a vision of God, of Creation and of the human person as three inextricable poles. For Saint Ignatius, people do not find fulfillment in themselves or in the realities surrounding them. Only in their relationship to God, in surrender to His love, do they find fulfillment, completeness, happiness and a sense of meaning to all creation.

This approach answers the great question of the meaning of human life and at the same time is positive and liberating.

- It is liberating because it offers us the free use of our relationship with, all that surrounds us, since we are the purpose to which all creation is geared.

- It is positive because we can discover in all things the presence and the hand of God. It is the understanding (later developed in the final Contemplation to attain Love) that created things are not simple instruments for us through which we find God, but are in themselves points of encounter and of Love.

Thus, the Principle and Foundation (which is the starting point for anyone who wishes to live the experience of the Spiritual Exercises) proposes a new vision of all things, small and great: those that concern each one in particular and those that concern humanity as a whole.

- A new image of God. Accessible, active, He is a God who calls us to be His sons and daughters, to participate in His Life, to be more fully human.

- A new image of men and women and of their objectives. As Father Joseph Thomas said: "It is in seeking God that we find ourselves. In searching for the greatness of God, we become great."

- New approaches to our human relationships:
 - with things and with the Universe;
 - with our own history;
 - with ourself
 - and with others.

To a God of denial, recrimination and blame, the Principle and Foundation opposes a God of Love capable of giving meaning to our lives and to all that surrounds us, including pain, failure and our own sin.

2. The first week

I will refer only briefly to the First Week. It leads us to a wonderful vision of God. The week begins with an analysis of sin in the world, and of our own participation in it through our attitudes and our criteria, or simply through our passivity and forgetfulness, and leads us to meet the God who welcomes us and forgives us, the God who is Father. God wants us to find the place where we can be truly "at home"; God suffers with our sins because He loves us and sees us destroying ourselves.

3. The Second Week

During this stage we follow Christ, we identify with Him and participate in His Mission. With Him we are called to be prophets with a mission to ANNOUNCE Gospel values and DENOUNCE evil, both in the private and in the public spheres.

Faced with the current crisis of values, and indeed with the preference of many for "counter-values", it is essential for us to know how to announce those values that Christ proposes.

For this, we must begin by internalising these values, making them our own personal criteria, to such an extent that they will shine through naturally, transforming our whole way of being and living into a continual proclamation of Christian values. In the family, at work, in politics, in culture.

When this comes about, the spirit of poverty overcomes the craving for wealth; service replaces the thirst for power and humility conquers pride.

Finally, it is important that we do not stop along the way, that we learn, whenever possible, to proclaim in words the truth by which we live and that so many seek in vain.

Let us also continue to denounce the false values that arise around us. To situations of injustice and inequality, to oppression in its many forms, to all lifestyles that are founded on domination and competitiveness, on falsehood and the desire for profit, pleasure and wealth, to all of these we must know how to say: NO! There is nothing inevitable in these situations. There are other possible paths.

4. The Third and Fourth Weeks

In these last two stages, the Exercises invite us to "die" with Christ, so that in Christ we may be reborn to a new life.

The Grace we pray for in the Fourth Week is "to participate in the immense joy of Christ and of His Mother". For Ignatius, the true glory of God is our joy and happiness. We are happy because we can love!

Finally, a contemplation to attain the Love of God: here all separation between the world and God, between prayer and action, presence in the world and presence to God, disappears. We are led to see all of creation as the work, the gift and the presence of the Father. Thus, God is no longer a stranger to us and to the things that surround us, but rather he manifests himself from within all things. The relationship with God does not take place outside the world but precisely through the concrete circumstances that surround us.

The more closely we are in touch with our surroundings, involved in the world in which we live - the

more we meet Him, the more we become Human, and the more we become Children of God.

THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The General Principles of our communities invite us precisely to come out of ourselves and enter into close relationship with others, to become concretely involved in the environment in which we live.

In 1967, the Marian Congregations decided to undertake some fundamental changes (see letter to Cardinal Cicognani, 25.3.68) in order to become the CLCs we know. They did this because they had become aware of the need to respond to new situations with new forms of action.

Thus, their apostolic action which until then had centered essentially on subsidiary service to the priestly ministry (catechesis, social assistance, formation activities, etc.) was supplemented - as provided for in the General Principles - by a new service for "the renewal and the sanctification of the temporal order, (...) working for the reform of the structures of society, participating in efforts to liberate the victims of all forms of discrimination and especially to abolish differences between rich and poor within the Church (...) in a spirit of service, to establish justice and peace among all men and women". (G.P. 7)

Indeed, our communities are much more than places of formation or personal growth, even though prayer, both individual and communal, growth in faith and discovery of personal vocation find stimulation in them and are the starting point for any effective apostolate.

A reading of the General Principles - and it is good that members of our communities should get used to finding in them a point of reference - clearly shows that our groups have as their objective the formation of men and women engaged in the service of the Church and of the world, "especially for those concerned with temporal affairs" (G.P. 3) so that all aspects of human life may be animated by the Gospel.

In addition, we are invited to come out of ourselves, out of the "comfort" of our little groups, and "to work together with the whole People of God for progress and peace, justice and charity, liberty and the dignity of all men and women." (G.P. 7)

In response to this call, it is imperative, I believe, to develop first of all within ourselves a sense of individual or group mission. Then, to insert this mission into the context of the Universal Church and its priorities; and finally, to foster within ourselves a "group spirit" through a deeper bond with the movement to which we belong.

As I have said before, a central purpose of CLCs is to help members to define and realise their missions in the concrete world in which they live. This sense of mission is not something one can acquire immediately upon entering into a community. Generally, members start out with some form of service and only later, through a process of continual spiritual discernment, they go on to a mission.

Indeed, spiritual discernment - the profoundly ignatian inner attitude of one who seeks the will of God - must be at the root of any apostolic choice made by a member of a community (or even by the entire community if it feels called to this) and must guide the way we are and the way we behave in life and in the Church. We do not walk along a path that is parallel to that of the Church, but rather we walk in the Church, "sensitive to the times and the movements of the Spirit" united with the Church and sharing its "concern for the problems and the progress of mankind..." (G.P. 5)

This bond with the Church is expressed through involvement and service for the greater good, the good that is more urgent and more universal.

It seems important to point out that involvement and the search for the greater and more universal good do not always find the same concrete expression for different

people. In other words, apostolic commitment can have a variety of expressions.

Thus, some are called to a more direct involvement in the structures of the Church or to some form of concrete service within the framework of the Church's priorities. Others may be called to authentic Christian witness in their daily life. Involvement in the Church and the bond to the Church ensure that she is present in the various aspects of each person's life.

As Pope John Paul II stated at the Cathedral in Lisbon: "The Church must be present in every aspect of human activity and nothing human must be foreign to her. It is up to you, beloved lay people, to make sure that she is present. If the Church is accused of being absent from any given field or of being indifferent to any human problem, this points to the absence of enlightened lay people in that field or to inactivity on their part."

This union between desire and possibility, between the highest ideal and concrete daily life in the framework of continual discernment represents yet another aspect of our spirituality. Through this process we are invited to constant growth and dynamism in accordance with each person's situation and possibilities.

Finally, we must not forget that we belong to a World Community. "Our responsibility to develop the bonds of community does not stop with our own group, but extends to all the federative movement." (G.P. 6)

For the Christian lay person who is also a member of the CLCs, all the above reflections lead to a concrete proposal. If we accept this proposal, it becomes a permanent challenge. The response we give shall always be incomplete so that the hope for a better world will blossom. The response we give must constantly be renewed so that we may become ever more true images of Christ.

Maria da Assunção Souto Moura
(Portugal)

**SOME TIPS FOR ANALYSING THE SITUATION OF
OUR COMMUNITIES IN MEXICO**

Visiting and getting to know the various communities in Mexico has helped me to understand the differences characterizing them. A comprehensive identity card might carry the following information:

MARITAL STATUS: There are the married, the single and the widowed members;

AGE: adolescents, young and mature adults and the elderly;

LOCATION: virtually at all points of the compass;

CLC IDENTITY: sympathiser group; groups about to join (pre-communities); communities of every type - some of long standing and mature in one specific aspect, e.g. prayer and perhaps not yet mature in others (e.g. mission, service); some, again, more advanced in their formation as CLC;

ECONOMIC CONDITION: members can be very wealthy, wealthy, poor and quite poor; among them you will find factory owners, white collar workers and manual workers.

POLITICAL AFFILIATION: there are sympathizers with many and greatly differing political trends, with differing emphasis on values (some more generous, others insisting on greater coherence from the politicians), with differing "negative" values (racist tendencies, attraction for materialistic, consumer society, etc.); differing religious attitudes (there are the "conservatives" and traditionalists, while others - the majority - occupy the middle ground, and there are a handful of "progressives"); differing cultural backgrounds, such as are to be found, e.g., in the north or in peninsular Mexico); and differing degrees of education (some with little more than primary schooling, others with university degrees).

When I look at the mosaic I describe, the first thing that comes to mind is the enormous diversity among our members and our CLC groups. It is these members, these communities, that are invited, ever since the Puente Grande Assembly in 1985, to progress in the understanding

of social analysis (*) and bringing it to fruition.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

The response to this invitation has shown a similar range of diversity: confusion as to the problems to be identified; courage; defensive attitudes; a desire to analyse reality in depth. There have been communities that have gone about the task with great success because the moment and their needs demanded that they should do so.

For other communities, the response has been rather like the paper hats we put on at parties - the ones we take off when we leave.

It must be made clear, in the first place, that social analysis is not something that our people must be forced to undertake. A comparison may help us to understand what it is all about. Social analysis is rather like the situation where you feel ill and you see a doctor for him to analyse the problem or give you a check-up. So, it is not a question of making an analysis for the pleasure of it but because we know and feel that not all is well. Analysis will tell us the cause - are we suffering from an amoebic or a bacterial disease, for example. And from the findings of the analysis a prescription for treatment and the medicines can be determined.

In the same way, if there are those who want this social analysis to be made it is because they know and feel that society is a sick society. They want to know the causes of this sickness and be able to decide on the best treatment so that life can be saved. The quest is for health, and that is what analyses are about.

To be sure, we meet people who are ill but do not want to be examined (because they have no money or because they refuse to admit they are ill). A typical example of this sort of person is the alcoholic. The alcoholic will

(*) The Mexican CLC National Assembly in 1986 mapped out four action approaches, one of them "Social analysis".

not admit he is ill. He has all sorts of excuses; he tries to justify himself; he says that he can give up drinking at any moment; that there are others who drink more than he does. People like this can only hope for a cure if they recognize that they are ill.

Similarly, we meet with people who do not realize that society is sick or refuse to admit that the society we live in is very sick and needs serious treatment. This blindness lulls them into thinking that no analysis of reality is necessary - that it is meaningless or is something for other people, for other situations. But the question won't go away for all that. The sick person still has to answer the question as to why he doesn't realize he needs the doctor - to determine the causes and the cure.

All this brings us to the matter of faith. "Why do we not realize what is our sin?" The question can be put to each one of us and each one of our communities. Do I feel, do I know that our society is seriously ill? Do I realize this, or am I blind?

Each and every one of us must reply sincerely. However, by way of help, I would like to look again at certain limitations, certain obstacles and conditionings that make us reluctant to embark on an analysis of reality (no particular order of priority in the following list).

I - OBSTACLES

1. Intellectual limitedness - difficulties in examining something complicated, possibly because of our "academic" level; possibly due to failure to understand or failure in our method of study.
2. Unpleasant experience with this analysis. Maybe we have been inoculated against what is difficult or unpleasant as a result of some earlier attempt and we react negatively to the next social analysis.
3. Spiritual experience that is only partial and incomplete, that has stolen our heart and hidden it somewhere - somewhere in any case far from difficult and

painful situations - due to the long time we have been looking upwards.

4. Is mine a comfortable economic situation? There must be no changing society since I would lose by it, If the world is all right by me, why change it?
5. An ingrained "banking" attitude. We receive - or we "deposit" a certain amount of knowledge that forms a credit account in our memory. From it we make withdrawals as need arises. We have had a merely receptive and passive upbringing, with no room for criticism, and we have just taken things in without discussion.
6. A sense of powerlessness. Why do this analysing if there is nothing we can do at the end of it all? Ther's no cure for society as we know it.
7. Fear of the unknown. Being afraid of uncovering painful truths that undermine our security and well being.
8. Fraudulent publicity, hammering in such ideas as "All's well". "Things are going bad only for the lazy people". "The poor are spineless and ignorant." "Get working." Repeat all this often enough and it will be believed.
9. The negative witness of other Christian groups who are unconcerned for a society that is sick yet go in for convenient, simple religious practices.
10. Lack of help to understand and practise social analysis.
11. A heart of stone; a lack of compassion for another's sorrow; and any sensitivity put to sleep by way of self-defence.
12. Fear of communism and marxism inculcated by so many of the mass media - a publicity that has wrought its effect and reduced many Christians to a state of paralysis - a fear fit to undermine one's faith in Our Lord. Just as in the "banking attitude" we spoke of,

when we are recipients of "sums" of knowledge in our account - Christian knowledge - so we fear that we will be passive recipients of marxist and communistic ideas and practices.

13. Being incapable, as in the case of the alcoholic, of acknowledging that we are sick. We are ashamed to admit it and that we need help.
14. Incapability of changing mentality. This is not so much due to reasons of age (there are old people that are very young in mind and there are young people old before their time), but due to a too rigid religious education; or perhaps because we are oversure - on the strength of the teaching we have received.
15. Conservative political opinions that sometimes have made us too sure and continue to make us so.
16. A paternalistic (or maternalistic) attitude. Here we may well recognize that we are sick, but still not see the need for being examined; we put our faith in simple remedies and try to cure a cancer with some folk remedy or other.

All the limitations listed have encouraged us not to be concerned about the situation of the rest of humanity - or about the causes underlying that situation.

II - SOME MINIMUM ATTITUDES

All this is not to say that all of us in CLC have to be experts in the social analysis. On the other hand, there should be some among us prepared to take the matter further and to help others to do so. All of us, however, as Christians and CLC members, need to be concerned about:

1. An ongoing check as to our attitude towards the situation in our country. Am I bothered about what is going on? If I am, why? If not, again why?
2. Progress to a more critical attitude towards our own (and others') way of looking at reality. Not to

remaining passive - lulled by the certainty of dogma or conventional formulas. If we are depositaries of "dogma" or "truth", then too easily we may be fiven to judging the rest of humanity.

3. Allowing ourselves to be affected by the pain of mankind, of the poor of this world of ours. To be confident and to realize in practice Jesus' saying: the one who loses his or her life for justice sake will gain it and the one who gains his or her life will lose it.
4. Opening up ourselves - as the church has done - to the signs of the times and being ready to change our way of thinking - and speaking - about social concern, as the Pope and the Bishops have done.
5. Making the effort - perhaps with the help of others to look at reality from different viewpoints in order to discern the causes of the great poverty in which millions of God's children find themselves.
6. Making the effort to discern, both as individuals and as a community, what God is calling us to within the context we have here been examining and to be ever desirous of ensuring that our faith and justice shall form an integrated whole.

III - WHY PRACTICE SOCIAL ANALYSIS?

Our immediate experience - our everyday lives - tells us that society is beset with problems - whether they concern, say, water shortages, drug addiction, unemployment, violence, or whatever.

There are problems that are very wide-ranging - affecting the whole country or several countries (the external debt, for example). And there are particular problems encountered in the city, the new town, the quarter where we live. And we will note that some problems are more serious than others.

By way of an exercise, let's make a list of the problems we are aware of:

1. What problems, exactly, do we notice in the town, the quarter, etc., we live in?
2. Who is affected by these problems?
3. How serious are the problems, to what extent and in what way do they affect people?
4. Are many of these problems interrelated?

To describe, classify, bring into focus all these problems is our first step - but only the first.

Our next step is to ask ourselves seriously about the causes underlying these problems. Here the effort asked of us is greater, if we are to go beyond hearsay or merely noticing a situation. An example will suffice. Here in Mexico we are aware that unemployment is running at 35%. We are aware, then, that there is unemployment. Many people will tell us that the main causes of all this are the vices of the poor - laziness, drunkenness, etc. But we know these are appearances which these "many people" talk about, as if they were the reality. Hearsay, in this case, means that these people are supposed to have observed with their own eyes poor people without work, so the poor people, they say, must be slothful. And that is why we must keep an open mind and accept the possibility that there may be other - older and deeper seated - causes.

We search out the causes of problems with the intent of dealing with them. Giving thought to causes is one way of analysing them - analysing reality. It is not always easy, however, to uncover the causes of a given situation, of a conflict. We need a suitable instrument for our task, just as we would need a microscope to discover germs responsible for an infection.

To analyse reality is itself to come into possession of the right instrument - not to make us feel wiser than the rest of humanity but to get at those causes and do something about changing the situation.

IV - THE STARTING POINT FOR OUR ANALYSIS OF REALITY

We have just said that we need the right sort of instrument. Which instrument, then?

An immediate answer might be that the instrument we need is the one that affords us an objective analysis, an analysis clinging to the truth and unbiased. We might think it better not to take sides with anyone in society, and that it is merely a matter of discovering the truth. But this is just not possible.

Who has the truth on his side? Who can really be neutral? It is practically impossible to be neutral, when we consider that the way of understanding problems is not the same throughout society. Very naively we may think that our being in society is something "up in the air", in some neutral space. But a neutral space is non-existent. Being "in" or living in a given society means that we have a history behind us - history that has marked us, that has left its traces in our way of thinking and doing and in our relations with others. There is no "vacuum capsule" that we meet with in physical experiments. An example may help to clarify. Many people in Mexico say they are neutral in politics because they neither vote for nor belong to any political party. But this is an illusory neutrality. To stay out of things, to fold one's arms, is another way of supporting those who are in power. Allowing them to do as they choose means giving them support.

But back to the problems. Nobody with two or more cars feels the same way about the transport problem as the person that has to take the bus. In other words, we observe and view all social problems from our own particular standpoint, and in the way that they are related to our own interests. And our standpoint will be just that - where we actually stand within society. An economic crisis will not be felt in the same way by the person earning the minimum wage and by the factory owner. We see how there are problems touching only a section of society and others that, for all that they affect the whole of society, do not affect all its members to the same degree. Some people

even benefit from there being this, that or the other problem (e.g., those with a dollar account will gain by a fall in the Mexican peso exchange rate). When we analyse reality we do so at all times from a well defined place in society and with a specific experience and mentality governing our approach. There will be all the difference in the world between the assessment made by a person desirous of changing society and the assessment made by someone who wants things to stay as they are.

To summarize, we know that an analysis is needed if we are to understand our situation and do something about it. But there is no such thing as a "neutral" analysis, for any analysis is conditioned by one's own life and experience, by one's mentality (ideology) and, above all, by the individual's (or the group's) interests. That is why it is absolutely essential that before we embark on our analysis we should be aware of where we are "located" in society. That done, we shall have to give an honest answer to the following questions:

1. To what group within society do I belong? If I imagine a pyramid, at what point on it do I place myself - taking into account my economic, social, educational, etc., situation?
2. Am I interested in seeing society changed? - that it should be changed to a certain extent? - to a great extent? - totally?
3. In making my analysis, what interests, and whose, am I defending?

Lastly, we should not forget that, quite apart from social conditioning (background, economic standing, education, etc.), CLC members have undergone a further "conditioning", which is what determines our way of seeing things and the interests we have at heart when we analyse reality. And that "conditioning" is our faith in Jesus Christ, the fact that we are Christians.

While this is not the place to develop at all fully the option that our Lord made, I should like to say something briefly on the point. In taking our humanity, Christ could not be at one and the same time both rich and

poor, highly educated and ignorant. He chose to be poor so that from the condition of the poor he could save all mankind. Nothing "neutral" about Our Lord here; and for that same reason there is no putting Him in a sort of vacuum capsule, disregarding society and the historical context in which He lived.

And just as we take up a position vis-à-vis the Government, the political parties, the farmers, the businessman, so we take up a position vis-à-vis Our Lord. The conditioning or the limitations of the standpoint from which we view society also influence our understanding of Christ. Therefore, it is essential that we realize from what position we approach Him (for He will be seen differently by the merchant and by the beggar).

Two questions we can ask ourselves will help:

1. From what standpoint do I read the Gospel, and try to live them out in my life?
2. When reading the Gospel, whose perspective should I make my own to practice social analysis?

As an example of a non-neutral position, the Bishops of Latin America in their Puebla statement, indicate that the chief interests that Christians must defend are the interests of the poor and of the younger generation.

Note: Having seen that there can be no such thing as a neutral analysis, perhaps we get the impression that no analysis can be objective but that judgement will go "to the highest bidder". Not at all. Even if it is true that analyses are closely tied up with the interests of individuals and of groups, this does not imply that they are radically vitiated. Analysing reality presupposes a range of firmly grounded and systematized knowledge, and cannot divest itself of its scientific character in favour of some ideology or vested interests. Social science has its own autonomy and is not dependent upon any interests.

Luis Valdés Castellanos, s.j.

POLITICAL FORMATION IN GENOVA

Many today are disillusioned with political action. Yet, politics still represents a challenge for many Christians. The following pages contain excerpts from an article that appeared in Cristiani nel mondo, the Italian CLC magazine. The author describes a CLC experience in Genova (Italy) in the field of political formation, and outlines the theoretical background underlying the experience.

In the spring of 1987, the Christian Life Community (CLC) of Genova invited Father Bartolomeo Sorge s.j. to the Arecco High School to speak on his personal experience, his guiding principles and concrete realisations in the field of political formation. Father Sorge's innovative school of political formation is deeply grounded in the realities of life in Palermo (Sicily). The talks he gave attracted much interest and made a profound impression.

There have been a number of requests in Genova for systematic and reasonably sophisticated courses in social and political action founded on an awareness of Christian values and motives.

POLITICS AND THE CHURCH

Why are Catholics so interested in politics?

If politics are "dirty", if they are only a subtle, destructive, machiavellian schemes, Christians should indeed stay away from them.

The distressing sight of politicians and political activists for whom public affairs are nothing more than the pretext for a battle of economic interests and personal ambitions, offers apparent justification for the disenchantment of many - particularly among the young - who have lost interest in politics and in any form of participation in public affairs.

Yet, vital issues are at stake and must be confronted urgently on many levels and not only in economic terms. They concern life itself and the future, women, families, minorities...

Voluntary work is flourishing and initiatives are often deeply moving and can make a profound impact on the social structure. By themselves, however, volunteers cannot cope with the wide range or the seriousness of the social imbalances produced in part by rapid and traumatic change in industrial and post-industrial society. This means that no Christian can afford to remain aloof from the politics of his or her country. If traditional public institutions and political forces seem too clumsy and inadequate to respond to the many desperate needs of our society, it may well be precisely because of a lack of motivation, an emptiness of the spirit. Christians have an obligation to contribute an added spirit, a breath of humanity and of ethical sensitivity, and instill fresh young life into deadened and benumbed bodies.

Without impinging on the role of political institutions, the Church wishes to educate the faithful to an awareness of moral issues that affect not only human consciences but also social relations. Its purpose is to encourage the State to act in a spirit of solidarity, in accordance with the principle of complementarity proper to a participatory democracy that does not tend toward power concentrated at the top and does not aspire to monopoly.

Ideals motivate and instigate commitment. They are not sufficient, however, in themselves. Cathedrals were not built by faith alone; technical expertise of architects was also necessary. In the same way, formation to social and political action, enlightened by these ideals, has become in many parts of Italy a strongly felt need, especially by the young.

The Synod of Bishops met in Rome in October 1987 to discuss "The Vocation of the Laity in the Church and in the World" and attempted to answer questions raised during the first twenty years following the Vatican Council. These questions were summarized as follows: "What kind of

evangelization of family, culture and politics can we visualize for the latter part of the twentieth century to ensure that the third millenium will not be post-Christian as well as post-modern? In the contemporary secularised context, who are the more suitable ecclesial persons to improve relationships between faith, culture and politics?" (CC 3299 pp 417-418)

In his final summary of the Synod's deliberations and recommendations, Monsignor Eyt, special secretary to the Synod, stressed that "there was much insistence on political responsibility and on the need for formation in these activities, especially through a deepened understanding of the social doctrine of the Church". Recalling Paul VI's statement that "politics is a challenging expression of Christian commitment and service to others" (Octogesima adveniens, 46), the episcopal assembly recommended that local churches promote initiatives and schools for the formation of those lay people who are involved in public life.

For a time, Catholics in Italy were left somewhat behind in the area of political involvement. This was due to the over-heated climate of the post-Risorgimento years, and to the special emphasis placed on social action. During the past seventy years, however, well before the Vatican Council, this tendency has been reversed. The documents of the magisterium illustrating this are numerous, and indeed it would be difficult to list even the most significant ones.

Pius XI considered political action to be an exercise in charity. Later, the Council made similar statements: "Let the faithful labor and collaborate with all others, in the proper regulation of economic and social life." (AG,12); "Catholics skilled in public affairs and adequately enlightened in faith and Christian doctrine, should not refuse to administer public affairs, since by performing this office in a worthy manner, they can simultaneously advance the common good and prepare the way for the gospel." (AA, 14)

In 1975, Paul VI reminded us of the link between

evangelization and human development on the anthropological level as on the theological and evangelical levels, and he defined the sphere in which the laity should be active: "Their primary and immediate task is not to establish and develop the ecclesial community - this is the specific role of the pastors - but to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world. Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics..." (EN, 70).

The Church encourages its members to consciously shoulder public responsibilities for moral and evangelical motives. In this, the Church does not intend to interfere in national politics through some nostalgic desire to recover the temporal powers it has lost. "The Church in no way desires to inject herself into the government of the earthly city. She claims no other authority than that of ministering to men and women with the help of God, in a spirit of charity and faithful service." (AG, 12)

If political action enlightened by faith is seen as Christian commitment, as evangelical action, does it then follow that there should be a Christian or a Catholic politics, in other words politics based on Catholic values, content, norms, objectives?

Politics is an aspect of "legitimate autonomy" from among the realities of the world recognised and discussed from a theological standpoint by the Vatican Council (GS 58, 59, 76; LG 36). It poses the subtle and delicate - yet essential - problem of the distinction between the two dimensions, the earthly and the supernatural, between the order of creation and the order of redemption, between people who are members of human society (one that is essentially pluralistic and secularised) and at the same time members of the Church. A subtle distinction, yet a strong one; but one that does not signify a break or a conflict. On the contrary, Christians will aim for a higher synthesis, between faith and politics, just as they do between culture and faith, with full respect for the autonomy of each.

This is by no means a new problem: Macchiavelli exalted the autonomy of politics from moral values with no concern for coherence between the two. Thus he legitimised any act in the name of what was later to be called "reasons of state". Such criteria could well lead us to include Robespierre, Stalin and Hitler among the most virtuous of men.

The roots of the conflict between "differentiation" and "harmonious integration" can be traced to the fact that the two orders - creation and redemption - legitimately differentiated by their properties and their finalities in the historical realisation of God's plan are unified in the salvific will of the only God, author of both creation and redemption. "The legitimate autonomy of earthly realities finds its meaning and its locus only within the unique economy of salvation" (John Paul II in his address to the ecclesial assembly of Loreto, 11.4.1985).

"In their proper spheres, the political community and the Church are mutually independent and self-governing". "But it is always and everywhere legitimate for her to preach the faith with true freedom, to teach her social doctrine, and to discharge her duty among men and women without hindrance. She also has the right to pass moral judgments, even on matters touching the political order, whenever basic personal rights or the salvation of people make such judgments necessary." (GS, . 76).

The world of politics does not receive "from faith or from grace its intrinsic structure, its laws, its substance or its goals, but rather it receives its inspiration, its motivation and its approach" (CC, 3302, p.111); "In practice, Christian politics (N.B. the article from CC distinguished between 'the politics of Christians' and 'Christian politics') derives its central principles of absolute respect for the human person, solidarity, preferential love and particular care for the "least" in society, the promotion of the highest human values such as culture, moral life, religious life, family, cooperation among men and women and among peoples and peace from its Christian faith. These are the principles which must inspire its actions" (ibid; p.112).

This means avoiding amoralism as well as "integrationism".

OUR INITIATIVE

On the basis of the above considerations, which have now become carefully thought out convictions, a lay group belonging to the CLC of the Arecco High School has encouraged the establishment of a school for political formation. For the current year, this will involve a series of meetings and debates on basic issues and on specific aspects of catholic action in the social arena. By next year, the group hopes to offer a structured course of lectures divided into semesters and academic years; this will be open to all and intended primarily for young people in the graduate/post-graduate age-group, seriously committed both to preparation and to action.

This initiative represents a heavy burden for the CLC, since it receives no support because it is in no way connected with any political organisation. However, the CLC has received the friendly cooperation of alumni and even from other interested persons and groups. An association called "Christians in the world" was set up for this purpose and is open to all who are interested. Support came from another source as well, one that is particularly lively and caring: the Jesuits of Arecco High School. The CLC does not simply avail itself of the space provided by the school; it also lives on and is nourished by the spirituality of St. Ignatius, a spirituality that finds its magna carta in the Spiritual Exercises.

In Genova, Jesuits are seriously involved in social issues. Despite the current shortage of personnel, several young priests have been assigned full-time to work for "the poorest" (in the parish of S. Marcellino) and for those who are drug dependent (at the CEIS). The fact that the CLC initiative for political formation sprang up in the same city was not the result of a plan, but of a shared spiritual experience. It is not by chance that the CLC is involved on both fronts.

The spirituality of the Society of Jesus has stressed in recent documents the inseparability of

"service of the faith and promotion of justice". And justice must be promoted in every form, ranging from direct interventions in favour of the "least", to political action. The latter belongs properly and specifically to the laity. However, Jesuits, particularly in collaboration with lay persons formed in Ignatian spirituality, must commit themselves to the task of "forming and multiplying multipliers" - to use an expression coined by former Fr. General Pedro Arrupe - who yearn for justice and share a political ethos that is founded on Christian values.

Federico Lombardi, Provincial of the Italian Jesuits, recently listed five criteria for formation to political commitment: "constructive dialogue, cultural seriousness, moral integrity, a credible presence, unshakeable hope" (CC 3300, p.549-554): they represent for us a programme.

Despite its limitations, this initiative hopes to stimulate a re-awakening of a moral and civic conscience; an indignant rebellion against politics in the service of power and exploitative of the humble, a yearning for freedom and equality that would abandon the rarefied atmosphere of rhetoric and descend to the humble concreteness of real life.

Pietro Millefiorini s.j.

Abbreviations used

- AA: Apostolicam actuositatem, decree issued by the Second Vatican Council on the contributions of the laity.
- AG: Ad gentes, decree issued by the Vatican Council II on the Church's missionary activity.
- CC: La Civiltá Cattolica, bi-weekly magazine published by the Italian Jesuits. The first figure indicates the Volume.
- EN: Evangelii nuntiandi, apostolic exhortation issued by Pope Paul VI, 1975.
- CS: Gaudium et spes, constitution of the Vatican Council on the Church in the modern world.
- IG: Lumen gentium, doctrinal constitution of the Vatican II Council on the Church.

GROUP GUIDES:**Is there a time for change?**

* Question: My question is simple and direct: for how long should one guide accompany any given group? Are there rules or at least some guidelines in this matter?

* Answer: Being a guide in the CLC process is a service to the National Community through a particular group. For a number of reasons, the group should be assisted by different guides in the various stages of its development. There is no precise schedule for this. Experience shows, however, that any given person has a certain "useful cycle" as a guide to a particular group, usually no longer than six years. In the course of a typical CLC development process, a group will experience "highs" and "lows". Some of these moments can become more or less lengthy crises. The guide is useful to the group to the extent that he or she retains the capacity to help the group visualize the next step, make the necessary decisions, and interpret what is happening. Frequently, a guide that has assisted a particular group for some time, loses the ability to remain objective by becoming too familiar with the style - and the faults - of the group. He or she may also lose the ability to help the group effectively because the members have in fact benefited maximally from this particular style for a number of years, and to some extent the person is the very cause of their present situation.

The group may have to make important changes: re-organise itself with other groups that are experiencing similar situations; or perhaps disband in order to give its members a chance to make new choices within the CLCs or outside, and radically transform the style of their meetings. The guide can help the group understand the need

for these steps. He or she can help them see that a change of a guide could well be a concrete sign that they are entering into a new phase of development.

All of this is particularly true when the guide has also been the founder of the group and has been its central cohesive element. It is also at times the sign of passage to a new age-group, for example from a youth-group to a young-adults group. Whatever the circumstances, a change of guide can be most useful, in principle. It always helps members to grow through an increased awareness of belonging to a community that goes beyond their own little group.

It is also important to take into account emotional factors. At times, the guides develop deep emotional bonds with group members and may not feel the need to leave the group. If the group is also emotionally involved with its guide, its members will also be unlikely to feel the need for change.

Thus the group gradually becomes "a group of intimate friends". The identity of the group at this point depends largely on the individuals in it rather than on a wider communal project. At times, the group actually becomes known by the name of its guide (so-and-so's group), and a change of guide can feel like a loss of identity.

Each situation must be examined separately. However, it is important that both guides and CLC members continue to grow in the feeling of belonging to a National Community, a World Community. A change in guide should be viewed in this perspective of the growth and development of the Community rather than as a sign of its disintegration and disruption.

* * * * *

INITIATION CEREMONIES AND THE CHURCH IN ZAMBIA

Through this brief witness, we'd like to show how, with the involvement of the Christian Community, our culture can be maintained and promoted in a beautiful way.

It was in August 1988 at Maala in Namwala District when the Catholic Church (St Martins) decided to get involved actively in the initiation ceremony of a girl about to enter womanhood. Within the Catholic Church of Maala, there are several Christian groups namely CLC, Charismatic, Pioneer, to mention but a few. The responsibility for looking after the girl, whose initiation ceremony was being celebrated, was the responsibility of the CLC group in conjunction with the elderly women of Maala and the girl's family.

The girl was confined to her home for two months and two weeks. Brenda Nkalonga is a Catholic and comes from a Christian family. Hence, the parents accepted that she be confined in a Christian manner. From the time she was put in seclusion, Christians were urged to remember her frequently in their prayers. And some CLC members were assigned to visit her in order to strengthen her faith through Bible sharing.

Two weeks prior to her coming out of seclusion, the group met to discuss how they would join their programme with that of the traditional way of conducting the initiation ceremony; they resolved that Brenda would be taken to Church for prayers since she was to come out on a Sunday. The idea of having her in Church before she would be exposed to the traditional ceremony was a clear demonstration to other people that the Church respects such ceremonies and wants to preserve our culture.

On 9th October 1988. Brenda's inkolola ceremony was celebrated. She was taken from her home in a vehicle provided by one of the CLC members. They and the choir accompanied her whilst singing hymns.

The group in conjunction with the congregation provided very good Christian music both in church and at her home. There were entertaining traditional activities throughout. The excellent music provided by the church choir was really inspiring especially for parents whose daughters were yet to undergo the initiation ceremonies.

Brenda was given donations to the sum of K1,070.00 on the day the ceremony took place. Plenty of food was provided for all participants by her parents. On the following day with much gratitude she presented K100.00 to the Church.

We all wish Brenda a successful life now that she has just entered womanhood. To all Christians, we beg you to pray for her so that she may always journey with Jesus, Our risen Lord.

A CLC from Zambia

SOME ITALIAN CLC MEMBERS VISIT EGYPT

During the last Christmas season a group of 18 people, representing CLC of Turin (Italy), were invited to tour Egypt for 11 days by Fr. Oliver Borg s.j., National Assistant in that country. Fr. Borg s.j. had visited us during the spring of 1988 and discussed the complex reality of his adoptive country and the work of CLC. We were then invited to observe these realities for ourselves.

We planned the journey and Fr. Borg and the members of Cairo CLC organized a perfect itinerary and stay for us. We were able to admire the archeological riches of the ancient Pharaoh Civilization. However, we were also able to pray in the Copt monasteries and attend most respectfully at the prayers in the mosques. The evening moon rise and our breathtaking dawn watch on the peak of Mount Sinai were the strongest and most impressionable moments. We anguished over the contradictions between the plagues of recent wars and widespread poverty in the city and countryside, with the luxurious tourist hotels and the residences of the very few wealthy people. We met

people with great dignity who always had a smile for foreigners and an incredible sense of hospitality despite their daily difficulties. Finally we met the CLC members who were totally available to us and whose apostolic presence towards the social and religious complexities and difficulties was visible and effective.

Through this meeting a proposal emerged to liase and institute forms of collaboration between Cairo CLC and Turin CLC. We hope that there will be similar developments within the scope of the Worldwide Community. All in all it was a trip, a holiday and also a spiritual experience with times for prayer and ecumenical openings.

Giorgio Cerutti
CLC Turin (Italy)

The World Secretariat phone number in Rome has been changed...

