



THE IGNATIAN WOMAN

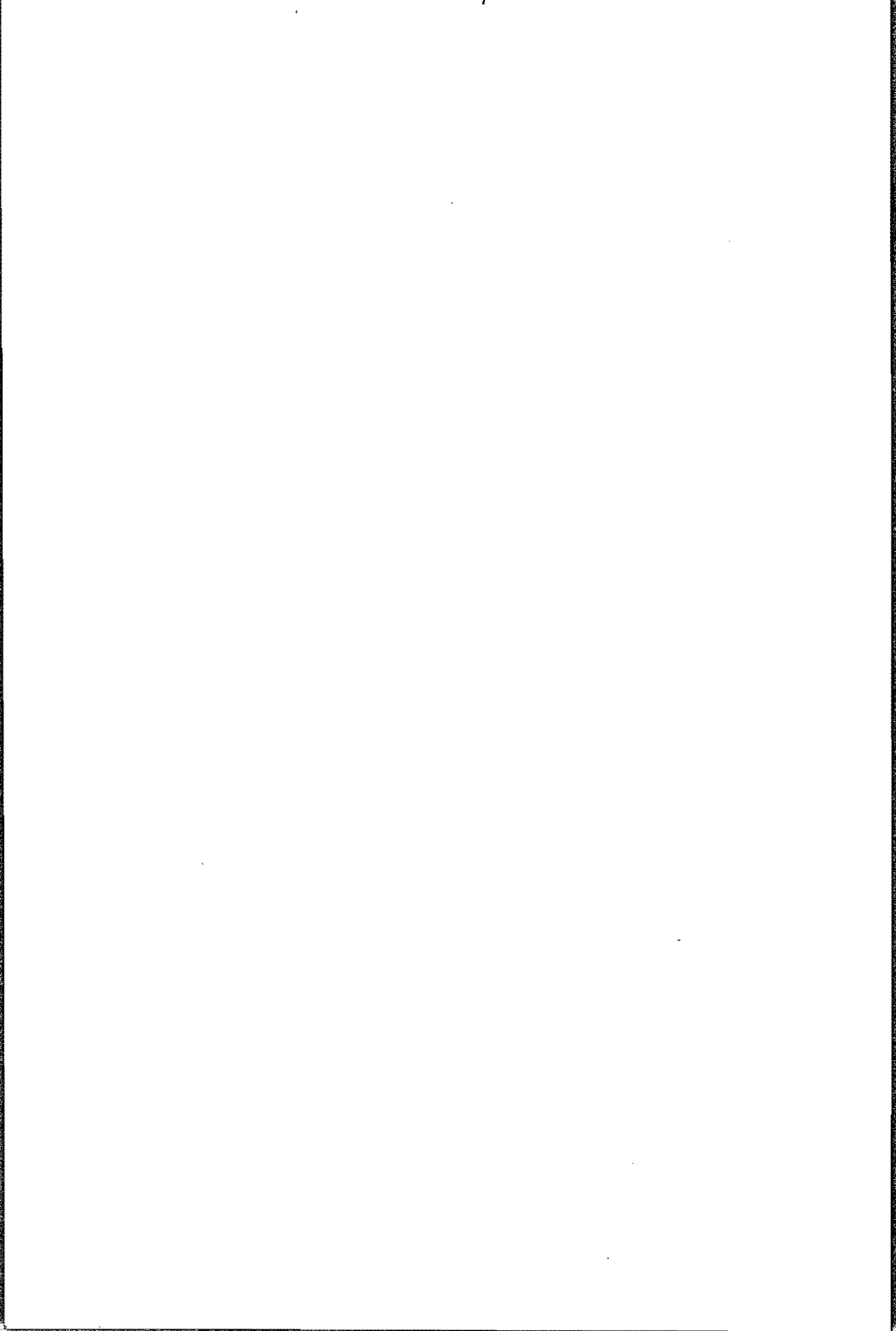
Nos 1 and 2 1996

PUBLICATION OF THE WORLD CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY

C.P. 6139-(Borgo S. Spirito, 8)-00195 Rome-ITALY

English-Spanish-French Editions

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CONTENTS

Editorial	3
What can CLC add to the Reflection about Women	4
Josefina Errázuriz	
Mary Ward: a Woman for our Time	16
Sr Immolata Wetter, I.B.M.V.	
Mary Nolan tells her Story	23
Journey towards Unity	28
Marilena D'Angiolella	
My Commitment to Refugees	34
Agnes Rausch	
The Fourth World Conference on Women	38
Annie Lam reports	40
Ann Noonan reports	48
My Personal Reflections, Josefina Errázuriz	53
SJ  and Women	56
30th World Communications Day	58
Message from Pope John Paul II	59



HERE AM I,
THE SERVANT OF THE LORD;
LET IT BE WITH ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD.

Luke 1.38

Hour ZERO
turning point of history

All creation holds its breath — in this moment two thousand years ago *GOD the ALMIGHTY* waits for the answer of a woman to save the world. And your answer, *Mary of Nazareth*, wonderful woman, bride, mother and sister: HERE AM I, THE SERVANT OF THE LORD. How free you must have been, and how whole, to have given this answer. How much we love and admire you for your courage, love and endurance. And what a strong message, example, comfort and promise you are for all women throughout the centuries.

These and many more thoughts came to my mind when meditating *A. Della Robbia's* 15th century sculpture, which is illustrated on the opposite page. Could there be a more suitable picture for a first page of this double issue of *Progressio* which has as its theme, the *Ignatian woman*? The very roots of our spirituality is the mystery of the Annunciation and Incarnation. Through *Mary of Nazareth* and her life, the keynote of our spirituality: *FIAT VOLUNTAS TUA, to fulfil the will of the Father*, is perfectly expressed.

In a competitive society we CLC women are called to develop our talents, and bring our complementary gifts to work **together with men** for a more just world. Josefina Errázuriz, with her article, leads us deeper into the subject.

The exemplary life of Mary Ward spells out what it means to be an "Ignatian woman". This is continued through the witnesses of three CLC women from our World Community: Mary Nolan from Australia, Marilena D'Angiolella from Italy and Agnes Rausch from Luxembourg.

The reports on the *Fourth World Conference on Women* show our efforts to be involved as an NGO in today's social and political issues.

The last word has been given to Pope John Paul II with his address on promoting the role of women in society, the theme of this year's *World Communications Day*.

What can CLC add to the Reflection about Women

Josefina Errázuriz from Chile is known to many in our World community. She was World CLC Vice-President from 1982 -1990, belongs to the "founding generation" of the Chilean CLC, is a theologian, a member of the Council for the Laity and has six children and ten grandchildren. Josefina has written various articles for *Progressio*. She is much involved in CLC formation and very active in the Church. Since 1982 Josefina has been director of *Trabajo para un Hermano* (Job for a Neighbour), a Foundation of the Church in Santiago. As a member of the Chilean delegation she participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing last year. *Progressio* is grateful to Josefina for the following article, and also for her reflections on the Conference, which you can find on page 53.

PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

The arrival of women in public life and the world of work is a major characteristic of our times, one that has changed all our relationships. There is a new awareness and respect for our way of being men and women in the world, open to a common future for which we are all responsible. However, in spite of positive considerations, this change has given rise to much anxiety, doubt, and

a variety of complex attitudes. In the self-awareness of women, the change continues to be a slow and difficult process; like childbirth it causes pain, but borne well, it is a source of new life. As women, we are searching for different ways of living our femininity. The range of attitudes begins with the traditional, where the only feminine role is in the home and working outside the home is

seen as something threatening. At the other extreme there is a vehement struggle against male dominance and family values are considered not important. Generally, we find difficulty in uniting family life with our contribution outside the home. We find it painful to be a woman in this complex and challenging world where we must live, divided between the family and our wider, professional contribution to society. We are disoriented by different attitudes that offer new ways of living. We want to live our femininity in a way which will make our hearts beat with the "good news" for ourselves and for others: for the life of the couple, for family life, for society as a whole.

An indispensable contribution to the modern world can only come from a greater recognition and affirmation of women's talents. We need new attitudes that enable us to grow without bending, to love passionately without enslaving ourselves, to face conflicts courageously without being militant or bitter, to participate in wider areas of society without severing our family roots, to work with men in building our common world in solidarity together. Above all, I believe that the Christian faith holds profound "good

news" which respects us and our contribution to the world.

ST IGNATIUS, HIS CONVERSION, AND FRIENDSHIP WITH WOMEN

Ignatian spirituality has much to offer to this reflection on women today. We need to put aside the false assumption that it is more suited to men than to women because Saint Ignatius was a military man who did not like women. This stereotype is far from the profound truth of Ignatius and his spirituality, which brings freedom to both men and women.

After his conversion, Ignatius sought to win both men and women of his time for Christ by means of the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius was affectionate, approachable and exacting with these disciples. Affectionate, because he sees his neighbour as a beloved child of the Father and a brother or sister for whom Jesus Christ surrendered His life. Approachable, because contemplation of the Scriptures reveals to him a Jesus who was and who made Himself approachable. Exacting, because accompanying Jesus in His work of building the Kingdom is of the utmost importance; it is the most urgent and universal work.

Ignatius became a spiritual father for many men and women of all social levels. He had good news to give to everyone, as well as a call from God to be apostles, uniting faith and action in their lives. He sought to help people in a personal way, but he also tried to orient them towards good relationships. In this way they could give mutual support to one another in order to achieve greater apostolic efficacy. Slowly, he formed a group of *companions* who helped deepen the knowledge gained from his conversion experience. This furthered a more fruitful apostolic work and a more lasting good which brought about changes in the structures of his time.

Ignatius' affection and concern for women is bound up in his tender and intimate relationship with Mary *the Mother of Our Lord* who liberates him from his image of soldier, so that he can relate to women in a more human and spiritually fruitful way. That is why the figure of Mary is the key to his spirituality. She is his Mother and his Lady who is near. By her power she can change hearts and *place them with Her Son*. The contemplation of Mary in the Spiritual Exercises convinces Ignatius of the tremen-

dous strength of love and of apostolate that woman is capable of when she abandons herself to the will of God. The influence of his love for Our Lady helped him to appreciate, love and guide spiritually many women who were his friends and his benefactors.

In his spiritual journey not only is he a friend to women whom he guides towards God but he learns from their experiences. We read that the "spiritual person," who in the first stage of his conversion helped him the most, was a woman: "*for all the time that I was there, I could find no one, neither in Barcelona nor in Manresa to help me as I desired. Only that woman from Manresa... who seemed to be more involved in spiritual matters.*" (Autob. 37).

Throughout his apostolic life, he formed various groups of women and guided them to work for God's Kingdom. The first group, in Manresa, is one of friendship and spiritual counsel (Autob. 21). Later in Alcalá, Salamanca, Barcelona and Rome, he forms various groups of women with whom he shares his spirituality, and which have, therefore, a strong apostolic spirit. United to Jesus in his work for the King-

dom of the Father, Ignatius relates to and works with women from all the social and cultural milieu of his time.

His letters to women are filled with spiritual richness and demonstrate what he thinks and feels about women (Cf. Hugo Rahner, SJ, *Ignace de Loyola et les femmes de son temps*. Collection *Christus* No. 13 & 14, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris). His letters constantly encourage them to focus on God, to work for the Kingdom and to serve their neighbour with love, always opening new horizons that are urgent and universal. He teaches them how to discern the loving will of God, to take seriously their own feelings and desires, to be perceptive in recognizing whether the "spirits" that move them come from God or from the "enemy".

A WOMAN'S VIEW OF CLC

CLC is a place of human and spiritual growth which can contribute to woman's search for her identity and mission. The CLC is nourished by the profound experience of St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises as the "*specific source and the characteristic instrument of our spirituality*" (GP 5). This experience leads us, as communi-

ty, to a vital attitude of discernment of life as apostolic mission.

The spirit of discernment proper to CLC, life as apostolate and the experience in mixed communities, help in our present search for a greater awareness and recognition of being a woman and the importance of women's full participation in the Church and society.

I believe the joint contribution of men and women is indispensable and crucial if we want to move towards a more human society and a new relationship. This indeed, would be good news for all of us and the world we live in. I would now like to elaborate on the three essential and vital dimensions of CLC life: community, spirituality and mission:

● *Community experience*

We are an association of "*lay men and women, adults and youth, of all social conditions*" who feel called to live our faith in community. Although belonging to the World Community, we live in the intimacy of small, mostly mixed groups, bound together by a common commitment to the Lord. We respond to God's call through a common way of

growth, animating and supporting one another on the way. (GP 4 & 7).

The community is the human space where we learn to know, love and serve the Lord our God, through the Ignatian charism. We recognise the ways of God's love, discover His tenderness and limitless fidelity and learn to answer His call to a fuller and more joyful life. We are laymen and laywomen, thus our communities are characterised by this reality. This means that we dedicate ourselves to temporal activities — family, friendship, work, study, associations, unions, political options, etc. — where we search for the Lord's particular call for each of us. (GP 4).

The search for and discovery of the Lord's call is shared, discerned, deepened and enriched in community by being lived in union with Christ our Saviour on all levels of our lives. With the help of the community, we judge our fidelity to God in our daily life, (GP 7,8 & 11), immersed as we are in the structures of the modern world and in solidarity with it. The mixed community helps us to know and respect one another as men and women. Together in our day to day life as

community and through the discernment that is practised there, we discover the immense richness of God's love who created us men and women. As Pope John Paul II says in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, the community can be the place where we give ourselves and understand more profoundly the will of God who created us different. The community is the place where we can discover all the richness of the Creator's plan in its manifold and surprising facets. We have received different but complementary gifts. Thus, we can recognise each other more deeply as beloved children of the one Father, who created us, men and women, to be partners. The experience of mixed community has the important advantage of helping us to welcome, to accept and to love one another in our diversity. It is a great school for making us better human beings and it can help us to overcome traumas, rigidity and insensitivity. To see ourselves as God does and to work together to build a world in accord with God's spirit is healing and liberating.

In community we can give ourselves adequate room to develop new forms of warm and loving

relationships between men and women: relationships that celebrate the differences, accepting them joyfully. In community we can learn to live deeply a loving friendship between men and women, not generally accepted by the world in which we live.

In spite of the tensions and difficulties that can arise, it is worth the risk of learning to live this attraction with a new perspective. It has the power to open our sensitivity to new horizons and to colour our world and its challenges with attractive hues.

The example of Mary can help us as it helped St Ignatius to open our hearts and see more clearly, so that we can establish profound, affectionate ties with persons of the other sex.

Profound and affectionate relationships in the Lord and for the Lord help us to live with greater joy and freedom. We will thus be more committed to bringing about the necessary social changes.

CLC's goal of identifying with Jesus Christ and unifying our lives by following His criteria is impossible for us on our own. In community, we have the certainty that the Lord helps us to do it by

His transforming Spirit of Resurrection (GP 1,2 & 6).

Jesus promises this when He says *"where two or three come together in my name there am I in the midst of them"* (Matt. 18,19-20). And: *"know that I am with you always, even to the end of time"* (28,20).

With this assurance we unite CLC around the Lord, and we ask Him to be truly our Lord, imbuing us with His criteria. This includes a change of perspective about being woman, the relationship between man and woman, and the place of woman in society.

- *A discerning spirituality*

Today, in a world going through accelerated changes, women are looking for new areas where their presence is necessary, where they can grow as women and contribute more fully to the formation of a more humane and harmonious society. In other words, a society which respects the fact that God has created us men and women.

Ignatian spirituality today flows from St Ignatius' spiritual experience of conversion and total surrender to God. This living spiri-

tuality places God as the unique absolute (Sp.Ex.23) and teaches us to look at the world with the eyes of God (Sp.Ex.102). It is a spirituality which seeks "*the greater glory of God*" by helping our "neighbour" to contemplate God in the actual situations of daily life where God is always working (Sp.Ex.236).

It is a liberating and creative spirituality because it opens to us the ever new horizons of God's will. We arrive at this understanding by using the methods recommended by St Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises: reflection and meditation based on the reality of our lives, orienting them towards God.

Contemplation of the Scriptures leads us to know and love Jesus of Nazareth. We wish to give ourselves wholeheartedly to working with the Risen Lord.

The *Examination of Conscience* teaches us to be in tune with God's action in our lives. It is not a question of having predetermined goals, except those proposed by St Ignatius for discerning our feelings and inclinations, and the needs of the world in which we live.

This leads us to listen to the affections of the heart, and social reality; to judge whether we are distancing ourselves from God and others or if we are offering a greater service to God and His daughters and sons in this our world. God uses what is human to enable us to know Him. It is in being totally ourselves, in listening and acting according to our human nature that we judge our fidelity to God's call.

This spirituality contributes to the harmonious development of each person in the deepest part of his or her being, both the feminine and masculine imprint that we all bear within us.

Through this experience, both men and women are helped to develop attitudes of openness, of listening and discernment, of availability and the impetus to set out to answer the needs around us. It also prompts decisions and the risks of acting for justice and truth. It is a spirituality which aims at making us apostles who, united with Jesus, want to win the world for the Father.

This will only happen in long hours of silence and contemplating God's plan for salvation. We discover it by contemplating

Jesus in the Gospels. We look at Jesus, listen to Him, come close to Him by contemplating the mysteries of His life. We allow Him to win our love and to change our hearts from within. Then we will be able to set out to win the world for God with hearts blazing with love because we have first been loved.

We, men and women, must undertake this with contemplative hearts; hearts that see, hear, feel and touch the presence of God in everyone and in everything. This spirituality wants to convert us into "contemplatives in action"; and to "active people" who know how to contemplate.

This leads us to incarnate within ourselves Jesus' and Mary's way of life in poverty, obedience and humility. It is a spirituality which uses strategies diametrically opposed to those employed by the world in which we live.

When we contemplate the Scriptures, Jesus and Mary will win our hearts for the Father. A love is born and will grow; it leads us to life with Jesus and His Mother, it leads us to live, as they did, the sufferings and resurrections which take place every day. This love creates spiritual attitudes of

listening and accepting the call to service. With loving imagination we search for new ways of encountering the Lord in men and women and in their needs. We will cooperate in building a more just world.

In a world that advocates competition, it is refreshing to have the experience of cooperation as it is lived by Jesus and Mary and the first followers of Jesus; a cooperation and complementarity where we women enrich men with the sharing of our specific gifts and where in return we accept theirs.

In a world filled with discordant models that isolate us, meeting Jesus and Mary opens us to ever new horizons. In a world overrun with slogans, a spirituality of discernment is adapted to the personal growth of men and women; because of that, it is liberating.

It helps us to take seriously our differences and complementarity and to have great respect for one another's affections and reactions. It can lead us to a man/woman friendship which evokes unimagined spiritual forces to construct our world according to the will of God.

The Spiritual Exercises lead us to love in the service of the Kingdom. It is an affective and effective love for individuals, the world and all of creation, as is the love of God who gives us all in all and works in all (Sp.Ex.234 & 236).

- *Life as mission*

At this time, when the Church is calling us to *New Evangelization*, the experience of salvation lived in community moves us to a discerned missionary response. Mission is a central dimension of Ignatian spirituality because the Spiritual Exercises give us an apostolic view of the world, calling us to be attentive to society's needs, to strive to serve there where the needs are most urgent and necessary.

That is why CLC invites each of us to live out mission in three important dimensions:

- the basic dimension of being an authentic Christian;
- the personal apostolate to bring Christ into the society we live in;
- the common apostolate where united to others, we strive for a greater and more permanent good, which will have a deeper impact on society.

Here, my reflection will revolve around the first and most profound dimension: that of *being Christian* marked by baptism to be — as Christ was — sent to live life as mission.

From this human and Christian depth we can attain a new awareness of the need for our contribution as women. This is different but complementary to the contribution of men. Together we can construct a society that is more profoundly human and Christian. But all this has to be understood in the light of searching for God's will, lived out more in *being* than in *doing*. It is in the depths of "being woman" or "being man" that we find the divine call to live life as vocation and mission.

Vocation and mission are inseparable realities. Vocation is a call of God to the chosen person to participate in His saving mission. There are general vocations and particular vocations. Woman's general vocation is identified with her "being woman." Creation itself is a "call to be," a vocation that spells out fundamental characteristics of the "way to be," and qualifies us for the mission we are aiming at.

To better understand our "being woman", it helps to reflect on the terminology which the creation narrative of Genesis 1 uses. Here it says that God, in creating the human person (= Adam), in His image and likeness, creates him as "zakar" (man) and "nekevah" (woman). ADAM (the human person) signifies *taken from the earth* in the same way that "human" comes from humus (earth). ADAM is the name used by the text to indicate the human couple. It is the human couple zakar and nekevah who are called, who have a vocation, and a mission to be *the image and likeness of God* in this world in order to respond adequately to the Creator's plans. They are images of God who wants to be expressed both in the *zakar* (man) and the *nekevah* (woman) to remain complete.

Nekevah symbolizes woman as a person having openness to receive life and newness. The biblical text shows a person having inner space, capable of intrinsically influencing the development of this life and this newness, to make it grow, to give it light and to offer it to the world. She is a person ready to welcome the *new*, as Mary of Nazareth did, to welcome, to caress and to

nourish *Life and Newness* par excellence: the very Son of God made man in her womb.

In this reflection, we need to refer to the vocation and original mission of the human being to be *the image of God*, to make God visible in this world. Our faith teaches us that we are called together towards infinite growth, challenged to be *image and likeness of God* in our lives and in our society. God, who wants to be seen and to be known, in history and in reality, under the two complementary aspects of man and woman.

Women are invited to show God's female countenance, and men, God's male countenance. He has put into our hands the wonder of enlightening the world by showing it Himself and the infinite facets of His love.

What are we doing about it? Are we being faithful to the goal of creation shown to us by the life of Jesus? It is, therefore, important that men and women participate in a balanced and complementary way in the Church's *New Evangelization*.

Within this partnership, woman is called to incarnate the

Creator's idea: a person who is open, with inner space where life can shelter and take shape.

Our vocation and mission is to live this on the different levels of our lives: in the family, with friends, at work, in society and on the cultural level. To live it within the different relationships: as wife, mother, daughter, friend, sister, colleague, etc. Thus we will enrich creation. But beyond specific tasks which respond to a particular vocation, we have this vocation and mission of being woman.'

At this time in history, when the need for *New Evangelization* is preeminent, a personal encounter with the Father, with Jesus and with the Holy Spirit through the Spiritual Exercises can help us to understand better the gift of sexuality. It is meant to enhance the development and quality of life of the human race. Understood rightly, it will increase our capacity to love, filling us with a new fire of love, to ardently embody God's love in the world.

In the experience of the Spiritual Exercises it is enlightening to contemplate Mary of Nazareth as we find her in the Scriptures. She is a simple and courageous wom-

an who welcomes and incarnates the *Creative Word of God* and shows through her life the feminine countenance of God's love. Mary's life radiantly reflects God's plan when creating woman; that is: to be open and to listen, to know by intuition what happens around us, in the family and society, to welcome others to our hearts, to feel ourselves involved in what happens to others as if it were happening to us, to understand the mystery of life in every relationship, to be faithful to the life that grows from our centre, so that the hidden newness can become explicit (cf. Puebla Doc. Nos. 291, 296 & 299).

These feminine attitudes can only fully develop if they come together with the masculine contribution to the world. By a profound and magical act of creation men and women can awaken one another to their respective masculine and feminine charism, mutually facilitating their becoming authentic men and women.

In this shared journey, in our interactive accompanying, completing one another, changing one another, and cooperating in the construction of the world, we will make visible the loving image of God Who creates and saves,

and calls all the baptized to live the mission on which the *New Evangelization* launches us.

Within this partnership in life and in the mission, a balance arises which God saw as "*very good*", and I want to emphasize the sending "to make history." The mission to "*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it*" is the vocation of the human couple, to fulfil creation and the relationships within it. This vocation must be expressed both in the masculine and the feminine form. They are different and complementary dimensions of the same call to "make history."

I believe that the masculine way of "making history" has an emphasis on "understanding the past to construct the future" with an emphasis on heroic gestures. The feminine way of "making history" is expressed more as being a "living memory" for humankind. For centuries women have maintained traditions and accumulated wisdom in their hearts, and handed these on to their children.

We must continue caring for the "faith in life", the true root of so-

ciety and culture, so that new generations may be more open and confident in facing the future. Our capacity to be intuitive, to be involved and faithful to the growth of life in all its manifestations, it seems to me, points to this gift to give life. Indeed, our task is to "conceive and incarnate" the Body of Christ and God's Kingdom among us in our daily lives. We are called to allow the future to take shape in our world as an answer to God's love.

We must be open to new ways and responses in human coexistence more in accord with God's love. Thus we will create a new human culture and the Good News will become a reality among us.

We express our vocation and mission by consciously becoming the "living memory of the human race to create the future" and in this way we show the feminine face of God's love for all creation.

I am convinced that CLC can contribute much in today's world to a new, loving and balanced partnership between men and women.

Mary Ward

a Woman

for our Time



Mary Ward (1585-1645)

in her time a prophet and pioneer, indeed a truly emancipated woman, is the foundress of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which exists in three branches throughout the world. Her life was marked by suffering, persecution and setbacks, mainly from within the Church. Religious life for women without monastic enclosure was not acceptable in the 17th century. In spite of all these difficulties and the persecution inflicted on her by the ecclesiastical authorities, Mary was faithful to God's call and to the Church. **Her whole life was the living out of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola.** We are grateful to Sister Immolata Wetter, I.B.M.V., who is a well-known authority on Mary Ward, for the following article, and we thank Sister Bernadette Ganne, I.B.M.V. for her translation from the German original.

During the Jubilee Year, 1995, the Institute Beatae Mariae Virginis, together with students and friends throughout the world, commemorated its foundress, who died 350 years ago. The celebrations were in honour of a woman who had the needs of the

Church and of the world at large profoundly at heart; indeed in her Plan she made use of the Ignatian spirit, in that the members were to pledge themselves *"to carry out whatever the Roman Pontiffs may order which pertains to the progress of souls and the propagation of the faith,... whether they are pleased to send us among the Turks or any other infidels, even to those who live in the region called the Indies"*.¹

Mary Ward founded houses with schools in Saint-Omer and Liège, in Cologne and Trier, in Italy, Bavaria, Austria and Hungary. There was also a little group of her Companions living "underground" in London — truly an incredible achievement for the 17th century.

And yet the entire Institute, with all its houses and their schools, was suppressed by the highest ecclesiastical authority in the form of a solemn Papal Bull. The work and its foundress might have fallen into oblivion, but good seed is never lost.

Like a tiny plant, the memory of "that incomparable woman" (Pius XII), of "that extraordinary Yorkshire woman" (John Paul II)

survived thanks to the fidelity of her Companions; later on the Church granted its approval to the work which the members had carried on, indeed are still carrying on: the education of girls.

In our own day, Mary Ward's other field of work is coming into its own, blossoming out into various forms of pastoral apostolate. The broader vision of this Englishwoman is now becoming clearer, which is possibly the reason why her radiant power is more keenly felt now, although it was never completely absent during the centuries of the turbulent history of her Institute.

Nowadays many women look up to this woman as an example. She lived at the turn of an age, in a period of transition like our own, although ours is evolving faster than was the case in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Mary Ward was "only a woman" — words which we associate so closely with the events of her life, but which equally apply to her personally; aged thirty-two, she protested in spirited tones at the depreciatory terms in which a Father of the Society of Jesus minimized the successful achievements and the zeal of her Com-

panions, by declaring that "*they are but women*".²

Mary Ward knew from experience just how much good a woman can accomplish, by helping others in their needs, confirming them in the faith and encouraging them to put their lives in order. She was unable to come to terms with the contemporary image of women, especially the one confronting her in Italy. She disagreed with the opinion that women, compared with men, were mere second-rate creatures.

An overall glance at the early history of the Institute makes one realize that the attitudes prevalent in society and in the Church would eventually seal Mary Ward's fate. She continued steadfastly in petitioning Rome for the approbation of her Institute, including exemption from enclosure, because for her work to succeed, she needed this freedom of action, and this trust on the part of the Church. But Mary Ward failed to cross that barrier so rigidly reinforced by the decrees of the Council of Trent.

The experience of *Francis de Sales* throws light on Mary Ward's situation. He presented his plan to the Roman Curia to

found an Order without enclosure with *Jane Frances de Chantal*. But he could see the hopeless struggle ahead of him, so *Jane Frances de Chantal* submitted, and accepted enclosure.

Mary Ward came from a land suffering persecution, one in which she too wanted to do good, but she felt this would be impossible if the members had to live under lock and key.

Mary Ward had no *Francis de Sales* to back her up. She was no more than a woman, yet hoping in God "*that it will be seen that women in time to come will do much*".³ Hence her resolve to remain with the task which she believed had been assigned to her by God, and this even in the face of a losing battle. In this she showed herself to be a woman endowed with inner serenity. For her, it was not a matter of "*veritas hominis, verity of men nor verity of women, but veritas Domini, and this verity women may have, as well as men*".⁴ The words are taken from her *Speech* to her companions at Saint-Omer in 1617.

The one important thing for Mary Ward was to fulfil the will of God, to be *just* before God,

understanding *justice* in accordance with its meaning in the Old Testament. She surrendered her life to God for Him to dispose of it. Hence Pope Pius XI described her as "*an utterly devout woman*".

Originally, Mary Ward wanted to live a consecrated life in the most austere Order, in complete seclusion, until God called her away from this, "*in manner against my will*",⁵ as she writes.

"*Some other thing*" she was to do. And so she allowed herself to be torn away from what she had planned for her future with the best of intentions. She had to wait two and a half years longer before the nature of that "*other thing*" was revealed to her in the words "*Take the same of the Society*".⁶

Mary Ward complied, although quite apart from the initial difficulties, it was not easy for the Ignatian heritage to take shape in a religious order for women.

Mary Ward kept consistently to the path which she felt certain God intended her to follow. Her conviction remained firm, even in the years after her work was destroyed, because she never

doubted that a task had been entrusted to her, even if it was not to be fulfilled in her lifetime. She submitted obediently to the Church, faithful both to her personal mission and to the Church.

Mary's first experience of the meaning of Ignatian missionary life came from the Jesuits in her own country. She witnessed the courage with which the Jesuits risked freedom and life itself in the service of the faith. She wanted to do the same, hence her original radical choice to enter the most austere Order, "*that a soul might give herself to God, not in part but altogether*."⁷

Her aim and that of her Companions was to labour for the faith, "*to undertake any other works of charity*", as she declares in her Plan, to strengthen the faith of others.

Mary Ward's life seen as a whole may be compared with the way mapped out in the Exercises. The process of turning to God, the *foundation* had already taken root when she was young in her own country, later to be confirmed in her vocation years. To quote her brief, concise words, God was for her "*the beginning, middle, end and sole cause why*"⁸

The *purgative way* was also part of the process. In 1615, she saw plainly what was lacking in her. *"I end with desires to be good, which I see I am not."*⁹ Her writings also reveal her efforts to struggle against taking pride in her social rank, hence the need for her to learn humility.

Her longing was to follow Christ in truth. *"To proceed as Christ did was the portion of grace I only desired for my part,... to embrace with great affection, whatsoever might make me like unto Christ in life and manners."*¹⁰

Success in the years of founding her Institute did not make her over-confident, nor did the ever-present obstacles depress her, even when they caused her deep suffering.

She also had to practise indifference. She once wrote wonderful words which enable us to glimpse an important step of hers towards inner freedom. The text dates from the year 1616: *"...Things desired were still desired..., but without solicitude, things contrary declined, but without anxiety, the mind equally satisfied whichever of these contraries should happen.... One is ready to do, or not to do, yet indif-*

*ferently resigned whatever happens..., a great confidence that God will do His will in conclusion; one is free from all and desires only one thing, which is to love God... Being present to all, yet cleaving to nothing."*¹¹

Another text of hers, dated 1619, witnesses that to attain such freedom required her constant attention. She describes this *"contentful freedom"* as *"a separation from diverse things of this world, so as they had no part in me, nor I in them. I could equally have or want [lack] them, see them and not love them, like them and not live in them."*¹²

Mary Ward's following of Christ led her to the Passion, to follow her Lord under the standard of His Cross, even if she never mentions this in her letters. We have no other writings of hers referring to this period. Uncomplaining and without rebelling, she remained *"a most obedient daughter of holy Church"*,¹³ bearing with her disgrace and disappointment.

In reality, Mary Ward was permanently on the journey *"for attaining love"* (Sp.Ex.230). When the grain of wheat lay buried in the ground, that is during those silent years following the Suppres-

sion, the path of "loving service" (Sp.Ex.233) was even more apparent in her than during the decade when she was often externally active. The few Companions still gathered around her noticed her inner "radiance"; they felt "the waters from the source" (Sp.Ex.237) flowing from this humble woman. God had now really become her "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28), "my only help".¹⁴

During the last quarter of her life, Mary was less taken up with external affairs and hence better able to devote her attention to individuals. Her first biographer, the faithful, reliable Companion, Mary Poyntz, relates that very many people came to visit Mary Ward; after being in her presence, they came away with a change of heart. Mary could strengthen the faith of others, bring out the good in them, because she sensed the needs of each person. Her love, in whatever way it expressed itself, remained her love for her beloved Lord. It was that very same love which she communicated to others which led to a rebirth of her Institute.

Mary remained convinced that the seed of this plant was born of

God. On a page written in her own hand, probably in preparation for her first interview with the General of the Society of Jesus, she quotes the words of Scripture, "*None can come to Me unless the Father draws them... every plant that the Father hath not planted shall be rooted out*".¹⁵

Did she ask herself after the dissolution of her Institute, whether this little plant of hers had been rooted up for ever? Such thoughts may well have occurred during her imprisonment in the Angerkloster in Munich (a place where she was kept prisoner on the orders of the ecclesiastical authorities in Rome). But they did not last; Mary's trust in God was so great that it always won in the end, reassuring her and enabling her to have inner peace.

We have a witness of this in the so-called lemon juice letters which she wrote from the Angerkloster. Her feeling of peace, the same with which she faced death, enabled her to die with the certainty that the day would dawn once again for the seed that the Father had planted.

Her life had been taken up with the one, single longing: to fulfil the task God had entrusted to

her. In merely human eyes, she had failed; but she had fulfilled her task in the Christian sense, namely, by discovering the Cross and holding fast to it.

Such was the path followed by Mary Ward, down to the hour of her death, when after repeating the Name of Jesus three times, she surrendered her life to God.

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Mary and John Nolan with their son Chris in the front garden of their house

Mary Nolan tells her Story

The most influential and energising grace in my life is the gift of experiencing myself ever more deeply as personally loved and forgiven — accepted and called by the Lord just as I am. It has been said that

the energy for mission comes from this First Week experience — in experiencing such great love, I/we are moved to respond in deep gratitude (cf. Lk 7:47). I suspect this motivates all I am and do personally and commu-

nally in CLC and in my relationships with God, others, myself and the environment. I often pray that He reveal my/our sinfulness and most often am surprised at what He reveals! It was a rich and often difficult journey that led me to "know" this love — that all is gift.

Born the eldest of five, I have lived most of my life in rural Australia. Family, community and rural background in this vast land have been strong influences which the Lord has used to form me.

My childhood was happy — marred only by the gradual deterioration of my parents' marriage. I loved them both dearly and became a peacemaker between them. When I was sixteen, my mother left the farm and my father, and we children went with her to live in a provincial city. In that era a Catholic did not leave a marriage and there was no support. We were ostracised by many of the close Irish Catholic community to which we had belonged. A bright student, I failed my final exams. It was a very difficult period and in the pain of isolation and rejection, I began to reflect — if this was Christianity/Catholicism, then I wanted nothing of it! Vatican II was im-

minent as I slowly articulated my central question "What does it really mean to be Catholic in today's world and is it for me?" It was in this mood that I began training as a radiographer in a public hospital (most Catholics went to Catholic hospitals).

After my marriage to John in 1965 I moved to live on his sheep farm (settled by his family around 1860) in a much more diverse community where Catholics were in the minority, and I continued to work part-time before and after our two children, Mary Louise and Christopher, were born. Still pondering "What does it mean to be a lay Catholic today?" I did some adult faith education and theology courses and read widely. I was a catechist and very involved with liturgy and music, and in general community organisations (often as a foundation member) in the social, political, environmental and professional areas.

The late '70s and early '80s saw another period of struggle. Our daughter had two episodes of psychiatric illness which was devastating for her and us as a family. She questioned God and the justice in the world, and challenged me not to hide behind

"God language", little by little stripping me to seek God in experience and to reflect and respond (cf. Acts 17: especially 27, 28; Genesis 28:17)

This time coincided with a very difficult parish situation during which John and I began a small group which met for nearly two years. I was leading the group wondering "Where do we fit in Church?" at the same time that God was leading me to deepened prayer and the question "Where do I fit in Church?". No one else seemed to have this thirst or be drawn to "more"!

After reading about the first CLC course in Australia in 1982, I contacted Fr Noel Bradford SJ who often says that he did not know how to respond. I lived one thousand kilometres from him in Sydney, and two hours from the nearest Jesuits. Encouraged by John, I went to Sydney in 1983 for my first eight day retreat and five day CLC course with Josée Gsell, and my first contact with Jesuits. I can never find words for that profound experience of "coming home", of finding a common stream of Christian life with others very different from me, a profound sense of being loved and accept-

ed as I am, for which I still give thanks. I realise now that God had been leading me in the way of Ignatius far away from Jesuits. I did not have the Ignatian language, but I had the experience, and ongoing formation, and the Spiritual Exercises have deepened and matured both.

My later experience leads me to believe that many others who have never heard of Ignatian spirituality are also led by God in this way, and I operate from this belief in mission.

In late 1986, after our first National Assembly, I was asked with two others to form a state coordinating group for CLC in Victoria. Father Patrick O'Sullivan SJ returned from Rome at that time, and we asked him to join us, forming and working as a collaborative team. We later realised the deep significance of the way we proceeded — using the CLC process in a communally discerning way as priests and laity, giving to and receiving from each other. (See "Glimpses of a Real Collaboration" *Progressio* Jan. 1989).

In May 1988 Lou died in a car accident at twenty-one years old. This initiated a period of grief and suffering which at times I

wondered if I and our marriage would survive. I don't understand, but somehow "know" that the Lord took her at the best possible time for her, and my relationship with Him and my husband deepened in and through the pain.

In 1989 I was elected to our first National CLC ExCo and then became President. I was elected as delegate to Guadalajara World Assembly in 1990 and took three months to finally say yes to nomination for World ExCo! John said, "Let the World CLC decide", and you did! Afterwards, I made a short retreat at Gethsemane in the United States, the monastery of Thomas Merton whose books I had read. The words of a monk (giving short evening conferences from De Caussade), "If I **really** fell in love with the will of God, how would my life be different?", moved me to tears as I realised that this was in fact what had happened to me — I **was** deeply in love! All that I am and do is influenced by this being-in-love, however imperfectly.

I am still National President and can see that the skills learned, my affinity with the land and the

"rhythm of life" (similar to the process of the Spiritual Exercises), and the way I have been graced have been important to CLC in this period of development; in listening and "reading the signs", building structures and "exercising" the national community to grow from child to adult. Our National Gathering in January 1995 saw a shift in our identity towards adulthood. The mediation between my beloved parents and rejection by others probably prepared me to listen, dialogue and seek truth in our differences in CLC at all levels and in collaborative projects with Jesuits, wider church, and society (especially young people with whom I have become increasingly involved). In December, our son Chris and friends organised the fifth annual Independent Music Festival on our farm in a natural amphitheatre in our bush paddock. Four thousand young people camped and listened to over twenty bands playing their own music. The "signs of God" were there — peace, appreciation of each other and the environment, idealism, taking some stance against mainstream music culture — amid funny clothes and alcohol! It was challenging to be with them. I never cease to wonder that they seek us out.

In November, we responded to the Australian Bishops' Consultation with Youth and listened in small groups to young adult professionals (baptised and mostly inactive Catholics) and their experience of Australian society, their struggle to live Gospel values, and disappointment with Church which seems out of touch with their lives. Then the groups came together for a very good meeting with a Bishop — listening and exchanging with each other — “the bridge” a powerful conduit for inter-cultural and generational meeting. The young have, I believe, an energy and voice of the Spirit for our times which is so fruitful when it meets the wisdom of elders in faith.

I am committed to young people and a collaborative way of proceeding. At this stage, my image of myself (and perhaps of CLC) is that of a bridge firmly inserted in two banks, providing access between “different” people, e.g. rich and poor; young unchurched and Church; priests, religious and laity working together in church; different cul-

tures and disciplines. I believe this enabling of real meetings of peoples is one of the greatest needs of our time. Our cyclical CLC process and tools of listening, reflection on experience, spiritual conversation, discernment, response and evaluation are gift for our day. People are becoming more and more individualistic and isolated from God and one another, especially in Western society, and yet hunger for a better way — for connection and relationship. My hope is that we as CLC realise the unique gift we have to meet this contemporary hunger of the children of God who loves **all** unconditionally, regardless of creed, colour and sinfulness. Josefina's words at Guadalajara touched my passion then and do so now, “CLC has the potential to transform the criteria by which judgments are made in our societies”. Transformation requires conversion of people and groups. Conversion needs loving acceptance as we are (as distinct from what we do!). Are we open to living this First Week grace more deeply communally?



Marilena D'Angiolella with her husband Pietro and their sons Pasquale and Raffaele

Journey Towards Unity

By Marilena D'Angiolella

I am pleased to share with you a part of my life and the life of the Italian CLC. As I write

this, I experience the meaning of belonging to a world community.

The unique vocation to which the Lord has called us goes far beyond the barriers of our diversity, beyond the fear of letting ourselves be known. It helps us to discover the beauty of experiencing communion with so many persons whom, paradoxically, we have never met but carry within our hearts...

THE CRY OF MY HEART:
LIVE IN DEPTH!

Since learning about the Spirituality of St Ignatius and the CLC, I have always believed that the Lord "invented" these gifts with me in mind. This was especially true when I participated for the first time in the Spiritual Exercises in 1980. I felt as if I had become part of a project of infinite love that even had room for **my** life!

Looking back over the years, I realize that from the time of my childhood, I always wanted a space that was larger than the little village near Naples where I was born and still live. I was always looking towards the future, never satisfied with what I was living at the moment...

Like Martha in the Gospel, for many years I lived "*worried and*

anxious about many things": high school, university, the parish group, volunteer work in an institute for the handicapped, marriage, children, teaching, even my commitment in CLC, the diocesan family program, animation of youth, service to the poor, courses for engaged couples, teaching catechism, summer camps... Thus, I was an "active apostle," in fact, a super-active one, but at the end of each day I felt tired and worn out until, during the Exercises of March 1989, I gave voice to my heart: a desire to live in depth. I consider this the moment of my true conversion. It had been difficult to get there, because my children were very young, but I felt that the Lord had something important to say to me.

From the first day, I saw that I had arranged my life in a way that would make me feel needed, indispensable. I concealed my desire to be loved by finding things to do, but this temptation which brought deception and division meant that to have more life I acquired more death, to feel better I lived worse.

This was the experience through which the Lord gave me the grace to allow me to "know with

my heart" what was essential for my existence: to proclaim in words and actions that the Lord is the one important person in my life and that we can find peace only in Him. How I resisted what the Lord was showing me! How can a married woman with children allow her life to say that the only true good is the Lord? It is not easy to explain in words the feelings this aroused in me because no words seem equal to the unique and inexpressible name by which the Lord called me.

That experience was the beginning of a journey of unity and integration into the heart of life — a long journey, filled with joy and with suffering. In this journey I am learning to love His presence in my experience as a woman, a wife and a mother. I realize that only if I begin with the events of daily life itself can I possibly tell myself and others that the Lord is the Absolute. Only by entering into the depth of one's being, into the most intimate and true part of oneself is it possible to encounter the Other. I am beginning to understand that the significance of life does not reside in doing but in being and that all doing flows forth from being...

In this journey the Lord has led me by the hand towards choices. Together, my husband and I decided that I should leave my work as a teacher of philosophy to give more time to the voluntary service of the Lord in CLC. Thus, I have placed my professionalism at the disposition of the community. I am also involved in a work of research and study with some Jesuits and lay people on how to interpret Ignatian spirituality in a language that is more understandable to the youth and adults of our time. We want to find an educative way for training others to make choices and to discover their personal vocation.

After some years of service in the CLC of my village and in the region of Campania, I was called to be vice-president of the National Executive Council, and at the Italian General Assembly in April 95, I was elected president.

AT THE SERVICE OF THE NATIONAL COMMUNITY

When my candidacy to the Executive Council was proposed, I had an inner struggle: the fear of not being up to the task, family

difficulties... but there was also the desire to serve the national community, to give back, at least in part, the gifts it has given me. Now I am serene because I feel that this is where the Lord wants me; I trust in His help and know that I am not alone. I realize that I belong to a community which has a keen desire to work and journey together.

When I think of my commitment and of the commitment of all CLCers, the image of the relay race comes to mind. Each of us personally, and as a member of a community, has the task of bearing witness, along a route marked out by the General Principles and in the style characteristic of our spirituality. This means feeling part of a bigger story which helps us to overcome individualism. It also means an awareness and responsibility of feeling the presence of the Lord who in the "today" of our history calls us towards the fullness of His Kingdom.

WHAT IS THE *MAGIS* WHICH THE LORD IS POINTING OUT TODAY TO THE ITALIAN CLC ?

We, the Executive Council, asked ourselves this question

during our first meeting. Listening to what the Italian Church considers a priority today, and verifying the journey that we have made in these years, we recognize that today the journey of the CLC converges with the pastoral priority of the Church at the threshold of the third millennium: *New Evangelization*. For us, evangelization is, above all, a spiritual commitment: to let the Spirit of the Gospel challenge us, to be converted, to be transformed by the Word of a God who, through us, wants to become a companion with His pilgrim people. Right now we must "construct an open and welcoming community" where people can experience God and become persons whose lives and works proclaim to all that Jesus Christ is Lord.

We can reach this goal only as a community of mature men and women who feel their responsibility to serve in the Church. We must be aware of the need for dialogue in a more and more diversified and multi-ethnic society, and our lives must proclaim the truth that Jesus is Lord.

The last general assembly of the Italian CLC underlined the importance of the communal wit-

ness, recognizing that it is possible to evangelize only where the radical message of the Gospel is accepted and lived in community.

It is difficult to remain in a milieu where hypocrisy dominates while remaining faithful to the Gospel. Today certain values must be lived as a group, otherwise we will be overcome. We need constant dialogue to make communal decisions on strategies, and, in the light of the Word, to verify them. Only in community it is possible to see how the Gospel is liveable in our actual reality.

All this invites us to grow in our ties to CLC: the community is not a deliverer of services, whose purpose is the motivation of the members. It is a value at which we should aim; it is an experience given by the Lord, received and lived by us, which becomes a style of life and an invitation.

In practice, this signifies that we in the Italian CLC must start an educative process leading towards the rediscovery of our identity, and our specific charism, one that offers us experiences enabling us to grow as part of one unique world community.

THE CHOICE OF BEING A WORLD COMMUNITY

Belonging to CLC is a vocation; it is a call and the answer to a particular way of acting. Even in diversity and richness of expression we must feel united in the same charism, in the same spirituality and even in a communal search for a real response to the call of Christ in a continuous effort to live the General Principles.

To increase the sense of belonging to a world community, the Italian CLC has offered to set up a "data bank." When so requested, they will collect and send information regarding the mission of all the national communities. Moreover, we intend to cooperate with the Spanish and Portuguese CLCs in three specific areas: socio-political commitment; a rapport with poorer countries; and accompanying young adults in their faith.

The World Community has offered us another opportunity: to find criteria of common reference for the CLC formation. We must reflect seriously on the document: *Criteria for the CLC Way of Life and Mission, a Pedagogy for Laity* and ask ourselves what elements cannot be put aside, what language can be used to transmit our

spirituality to the men and women of our time, what are the implications of being a public association of the faithful and not just an association of laity...

These are small signs; we can find others to increase knowledge and cooperation among national CLC groups and thus feel ourselves part of one and the same community.

THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ONE UNIQUE JOURNEY

Thus, what I offer you from my life experience is this: the journey towards unity cannot be neglected on the different levels where it is lived, beginning with one's own personal life. The CLC vocation leads us to overcome a fragmentary concept of existence, to begin a process of interior unification. This is possible when our desire for inner unity encounters Jesus Christ. He is the treasure who transforms us from within and unifies us, making us happy individuals.

This integration between faith and experience leads us to live community not as a place where we spend a part of our free time, but as a choice of a particular way of

being, always and everywhere proclaiming to others the salvation that God is bringing about in us.

The encounter with Christ is an encounter that prepares us for a state of mission. Discernment is not the final aim of our being together in community, but it is an important means for understanding how to become communicators of faith, hope and love. Therefore, it is part of our mission to make this charism known to others, to share this gift that God has given to us and to the whole Church.

Thus it will be possible to build communities that are vital places, capable of signifying, proclaiming and anticipating the newness of Jesus for our time, communities that are cenacles of prophecy and hope. This can be lived in concentric circles: the local, the national, the world community.

We must increase international sensitivity, which for the European communities signifies working to overcome their barriers in order to be open to a real connection with the cultures and societies of the other continents. In CLC, we must open our national communities to the international dynamics of the World Community.



Agnes Rausch, with Arassi, Basaboli and a Ruandan sister

My Commitment to Refugees

By Agnes Rausch

INTRODUCTION

For almost five years, the Lord has sent me to work with refugees. By writing these few lines about my professional commitment to the CARITAS-Luxembourg service for refugees, I will try especially to show you how I was challenged to respond to the

most urgent and universal needs, and how CLC is present in the situation.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

During the Eighties, I underwent two fundamental experiences:

- at Diekirch, Luxembourg, where my own parish — also my place of work — welcomed two Vietnamese families. This was a tremendous experience of solidarity and unity in our diversity.

- at Kisangani, Zaire, I was welcomed with open arms and hearts. During those four years I sometimes forgot, for a few rare moments, that I was white, one of the “tribe of former colonizers”, because I felt so much at home in that great African family.

SIGNS OF THE TIME

From 1988 on, when I was working with young homeless people in Luxembourg, new signs challenged me to action:

- the General Assembly of CARITAS-International listed refugees as one of their five world-wide priorities

- at the same time I learned that Father Arrupe had founded the *Jesuit Refugee Service*.

- I again encountered the issue of refugees when I was involved in the preparations for the ecumenical assemblies *Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation*.

- But the essential sign was the chance encounter with some African refugees, asylum seekers in Luxembourg. They felt themselves unwelcome in Europe, and apart from the official authorities, no one bothered about them. That was how I discovered the two Government centres where refugees were given shelter, one for single men, the other for families; there were about sixty people in all at that time.

THE BEGINNINGS

In January 1991, CARITAS opened its *Service for Refugees*; at that time I worked alone there. My first initiative in the Service: an open letter to the authorities, claiming rights and not charity for refugees, earned me some hostility, which lasts to this day. It nevertheless helped to clarify the position of the Service right from the start. This letter was the fruit of long meetings with refugees and was signed by themselves.

At the same time the *Service for Refugees* was instrumental in founding a collective refugee service, the *Luxemburgish Refugee Council*, which today unites seventeen associations (covering the

area of Human Rights, NGOs of developing countries, foreign associations, movements against racism and for peace).

Ten months later, with the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia, the real need for the Service for Refugees was confirmed. Since then 3,000 refugees from the former Yugoslavia have sought asylum in Luxembourg!

AND THE CLC ?

Since the beginning of this process, "my" group, MARA-NATHA, have given me matchless support. Coming as they did from different backgrounds, their attentive listening, their questions, their encouragement were all the more valuable to me.

It was especially during times of anger and despair that the love and prayers of Guy and Edith, of René and Marie-Paule, of Liliane and Camille, of Josée and Pierre helped me the most.

I will give you two examples of such difficult moments. The first arose, when Aziz was deported to Algeria and I came into conflict with an anonymous adminis-

tration, where responsibility was passed from one to another. The second, when Kata went into hiding just in time to avoid expulsion to former Yugoslavia, and I was regarded as an enemy of State security. But apart from my group, many other CLC members are committed to the welcoming of refugees and, what is most important, are united in friendship with them. Some of these are: Anne and Marthe, tireless in teaching refugees German and French; Blanche, Milly and Romain, in the north of the country, where the sense of isolation is sometimes greater; Marie-Josée and Antoinette, who welcome families into their own homes.

These examples of practical help are a visible sign that most CLC members are committed to a multicultural society, open to the stranger, where each person is enriched as a result.

AND EUROPE ?

In the area of immigration and asylum, European politics are made at the level of the Council of Ministers, thus excluding the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice; a pro-

cess that is fundamentally anti-democratic.

Even if it is often a fight of *David against Goliath*, the community, represented by means of associations, must work towards greater openness and democracy in the politics of asylum in Europe.

It was therefore important to me that our Service for Refugees should contribute to this effort in the following two organisations, which I participate in:

the **CARITAS-Europe group on migration**, and the **European Refugee Collective**, which is composed of religious and non-religious associations working mainly on behalf of refugees.

This last group works essentially on political lobbying to safeguard the right to asylum in Europe. My own contribution is small, but I am finding out how much the exchanges and the common struggle are building a new Europe, a Europe of human faces.

CONCLUSION

My distress: confronted by the egoism of governments and that of many people who have mainly their own interests in mind, faced with endless wars and disregard for human rights, I acknowledge my distress, I cry out each night to the One who saves me and the world.

My joy: I offer it to Him as well, the joy that fills me when, for example, Serbs, Croats, Moslems and Luxembourg citizens — among them the Minister of Justice — all dance together during a festival.

My hope: sometimes a weak flame, it flares up brightly when strengthened by *the prayer of loving attentiveness* — this is what the German CLC call the daily examen! — for I know that I am in the hands of God, and I entrust Nila, Arassi, Basaboli, Senada, Xhavit, Noemi, Lucija and all the others to Him. Isn't that the most valuable help that I can bring them?



The Fourth World Conference on Women

FROM A REPORT BY THE
UN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INFORMATION:

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China, from 4th to 15th September 1995, is considered to be the largest world conference ever held by the United Nations. Almost 50,000 people, more than two thirds of them women, attended the inter-governmental Conference in Beijing and its parallel event, *the NGO Forum on Women '95*, in Huairou. The number of UN Member States attending the Conference was 181. The Holy See delegation attended in the capacity of observer.

With the **Beijing Declaration** — a 38-paragraph joint declaration adopted by UN Member States taking part in the Conference — and the **Platform for Action** produced by the Conference, the world now has a comprehensive action plan to enhance the social, economic and political empowerment of women, improve their health, advance their education and training, promote their marital and sexual rights and end gender-based violence. The *Platform for Action* is a 362-paragraph document. It recommends action on the following twelve “critical areas of concern”, namely: *burden of poverty, education, health, violence against women, armed conflict, economic structures, power-sharing, institutional mechanisms to promote the advancement of women, human rights of women, the role of the media, women and the environment, the girl child*, which are considered the main obstacles to women’s advancement.

Building on the accomplishments made since the first UN conference on women, held in Mexico City in 1975, the *Platform for Action* offers corresponding strategic objectives and actions to be taken by Governments, the international community, NGOs and the private sector over the next five years, to remove the remaining obstacles. It is not a legally binding document. Its implementation is primarily the responsibility of Governments, but depends also on a wide range of institutions in the non-governmental sectors.

Mrs Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Conference, declared, on the concluding day of the Conference: "*My dear sisters and brothers, we have made it. ... We have managed to transcend socio-economic disparities and diversities; we have kept aflame our common vision and goal of equality, development and peace. ... The Conference is concluded, but the real work of transforming words into action is only now beginning.*"

AND CLC'S PARTICIPATION

With *PROJECTS* No. 98 the World Secretariat in Rome informed the World Community of the reasons for our participating in the Conference, and at the same time introduced the CLC delegates, Annie Lam and Ann Noonan. We are grateful to Annie and Ann for the time so generously given and the personal sacrifices they took upon themselves in rendering this important service to the World Community.

We are grateful, too, for the interest and concern of so many CLCers throughout the world in the Beijing event and the support given to Annie and Ann. We also thank all our readers, men and women alike, who sent us articles for publication. It shows how burning an issue this topic is in CLC. Please understand if your article was not published. We could not cope with the amount of material received.

Through the following reports by Annie Lam, Ann Noonan and Josefina Errázuriz you are now invited to get a "CLC insight" into the big event of last year.



Annie Lam reports from Huairou and Beijing

Beijing has brought me sweet and sad memories over the past decade. I still remember the happy moments of my first visit to the Chinese capital with several Hong Kong CLC members, including Fr Sean, Eadoin and Grace. This time I went as a World CLC delegate to the United Nations-led Women's

Conferences; it was another inspiring episode in my life. Though I have been in and out of Beijing more than a dozen times, I had anxieties before attending this big event. I was not sure if I was well prepared as a CLC delegate, and how to face people's anti-Catholic views and values. God comforted me during the

weekend retreat just before my departure to Beijing with the verse "Be not afraid" as well as through the encouraging messages of support from CLC members from different countries and Hong Kong.

I participated in most of the NGO Forum on Women, from Aug. 30th to Sept. 8th at Huairou county, 40 kilometers from Beijing city, and was joined by Ann Noonan, the other CLC delegate, at the Fourth World Conference on Women from Sept. 4th to 15th.

THE NGO FORUM FOR WOMEN

At Huairou, the call for women's empowerment and for the removal of discrimination was constantly heard. Women from Africa were sharing the difficulties of their lives because of inadequate development programs; those from Bosnia and Croatia were telling stories of their bodies used as battlefields; Japanese women criticised their male-dominated society which obstructed women's participation in decision-making. Hong Kong participants shared their anxieties over the coming of 1997 and the difficulties facing middle-aged women seeking jobs. Lesbi-



Annie Lam
with delegates from the Sudan and Turkey

ans were asking for recognition of alternative sexual orientations and debating the concept of gender. Muslim women were introducing, or rather, defending their religion.

Many more stories were shared by women from North America, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, the Pacific region, Asia and Eastern Europe; stories of exploitation, discrimination, torture, but also stories of women's work, success, happiness, health and education.

Through sharing, drawings, dance, crafts, posters, leaflets, demonstrations, talks and video shows, the women participants hoped for support, sympathy and solidarity from the others.

It was not always easy to digest and analyse, but the pluralistic nature of women's issues was very clear. And the call for empowerment and advancement was universal and fundamental to human rights and human life.

THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

To raise women's status and change the male-dominated society by every means possible requires the support of government and legal authorities. It was good that most of the 190 member states of the UN had sent delegations to this conference in Beijing.

In many working groups the delegates worked day and night for two weeks on the draft Declaration and the Platform for Action, going through the draft painstakingly.

In international meetings, such as the Forum and the World Conference which involve formulating statements, mastery of English is

inevitably advantageous. In my view, English-speaking countries gained the upper hand in the choice of words and interpretation, even in voicing opinions. Many Asian nations do not count their mother tongue among the six official languages of the UN — Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. Even simultaneous interpreters for Chinese could not always follow closely what was being said, and I expect there are similar problems with Arabic and Russian translation.

However, among the 12 areas of the draft document, there was no specified priority of concerns or immediate needs set for the suffering and poorest women of the world. Ann and I had compiled a statement (p. 43 ff.) from the many CLC members' messages from different parts of the world, which we hoped to read out at the plenary session, but our application was twice refused because of too few time slots available.

I was disappointed at first, yet I think that CLC's presence at the conference was already a sign of care and concern for women in the world, and we were able to distribute copies of this statement to all the delegations and UN agencies.



From left to right: Ann Noonan, Annie Lam, Josefina Errázuriz

HERE IS THE STATEMENT:

The World Christian Life Community (WCLC) is a Catholic world community found in more than 60 countries, which has had formal *NGO consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council* since 1975. The WCLC urges us to proclaim the word of God and to work for the reform of unjust structures in society, while participating in efforts to liberate the victims from every kind of discrimination, and especially to abolish the differences between rich and poor. As human beings, we recognize that we all have both physical and spiritual needs.

Our community's goals for this Conference are to utilize our *Ignatian spirituality* by joining with other Christian and non-Christian

groups in speaking a message of peace with one voice, and to emphasize the need to respect the dignity of women throughout the entire life cycle.

Our Vice-President, Maria Clara Bingemer from Brazil, has expressed our priorities for this Conference. *"It is important for women to develop a feminism based on the differences and not [solely] on equality. Women are different from men and that difference is the one which can bring the most interesting revolutions between private and public, about the rights and ways of facing reality. It is important to denounce the 'feminization of poverty' Among the poor population of the world, women are the most poor."*

The following statements from our women members from all five global regions express their concerns during this remarkable and historic event here in Beijing.

One group of young women from Zimbabwe wrote that as youth of this generation... *we see women treated as pawns in a social battle for equality of the sexes.*

Our women members from Kenya especially noted discrimination in laws concerning inequality in such areas as spousal relationships and inheritances. Their overriding concern was the poverty of women.

Our women from Malta call for a just society built on mutual concern and interdependence, not only across gender but also ethnicity and class. They would like us to take into account the different ways action needs to be taken in the wide variety of cultural realities, without allowing the western individualistic atheistic mode to impose itself. Also concerning these members is the plight of refugees in war-torn countries, and those suffering the loss of members of the family, women and girls who are subjected to degradation and rape.

Women members from France are particularly aware of the dignity of woman in her vocation of mother and spouse, and of her rights within the family, including the rights of children to be born.

From Luxembourg, women members have reminded us that in line with the Social Summit of Copenhagen, we ask to put forward the depth of the problems of so many poor and developing nations, especially the refugees, and perhaps leave the western feminist agenda for another time.

Members from Calcutta, India, are concerned that the girl child continues to be kept down in every way, especially in poor families where they are faced with the choice of educating their sons. Dowry deaths still continue in middle class families, and abortions are increasing among the well-to-do. Women's issues are nowhere near being changed for the better. We are better in our country with the 'absence' of women's rights. Women are being beaten, burnt and ill-treated to such an extent that suicide is the [only] way out as they see it.

Our members in Hong Kong call for equal employment opportunities for male and female, and elimination of discrimination against women over 40 and those with little education, because these groups of women have great difficulties in finding jobs nowadays.

Women members from the United States are disheartened that the proposed *Platform for Action* promotes social programs which have failed domestically [in the US] and harm and kill many women, and tear apart many families. By promoting abortion and artificial means of birth control instead of Natural Family Planning, the proposed document totally disregards the many physical and psychological dangers women must suffer from using these methods and procedures. These programs accommodate men while risking women's safety and wellbeing. Members are also offended that this proposed document gives the impression that women who stay at home to raise their children are cast either as victims or failures.

Our women from Argentina implore us to strive that society may be concerned for the family and to recognize the perspectives of women with reference to work, within the full development of her profession and role, without suffering discrimination because of her condition as mother.

Concerns from CLC women in Guatemala include the mission to promote the dignity of women, in accordance with the divine plan of God.

In conclusion, we honour the Blessed Virgin Mary as a love and faith model for women and men in a special way, and we rely on her help at this World Conference in fulfilling our mission and service for the world.

Meeting with Christian sisters and brothers of China



Ann, Josefin and I were interested in meeting Chinese Catholics while there, and through contacts we met Catholics from northern China. They shared their difficulties with running faith formation programs and an orphanage without resources or guidance. As China implements the one-child policy, there are many abandoned babies, and in some villages, Catholics have started homes for them. But the young women caring for the babies lack childcare training and government funds.

The three of us discussed the possibility of CLC members helping

these homes, with resources being channeled through the Hong Kong CLC.

We also attended a prayer service at the chapel set up at the conference venue, where we met a young priest and a middle-aged sister from the government-sanctioned open Church of Beijing diocese.

OUTSIDE THE CONFERENCE VENUES

During the NGO Forum, the hour-long coach trip to Huairou

offered me opportunities to talk with other delegates, and I became friends with an elderly Swiss woman, who was a veteran worker on development issues.

One Sunday I went into the countryside with a French journalist and chatted with some people, among them a peasant woman, who told us that the status of women has been raised a great deal and that sexual equality exists now; a great leap forward from the days of her mother, whose feet were bound. (Feudalistic and paternalistic Chinese society decades ago considered the binding of women's feet to less than 10 centimeters symbolized wealth and status for women, but in fact it caused permanent physical and psychological damage to the woman).

The others agreed that more dialogue between husband and wife is encouraged in today's Chinese families. Many of them had heard of the two women's conferences in Beijing, but knew nothing of the subjects discussed because China's domestic news reports were superficial. My elderly former professor in Beijing told me that her husband, also a professor, had never taken care of the children or the household, because he considered

these matters the wife's responsibility. Both of them are now at retirement age, and her husband is beginning to realize the need to share the responsibility of running the home.

BACK TO HONG KONG

I was one of the few NGO delegates from Hong Kong who stayed for the *Conference on Women*, so as a representative of CLC and a member of the local Catholic Church, I was invited to a public report session by Christian women who had attended the Beijing conferences. Because I was also one of the very few Catholic participants at the Conferences, I had the additional responsibility of presenting my reflections and experience through writing articles, and conducting talks and workshops at pastoral sisters' meetings, parish women coordinators' meetings, justice and peace and other faith sharing groups, and, of course, the Hong Kong CLC groups.

I took these opportunities to introduce the CLC spirit and concern for women, and its determination to eliminate discrimination in accordance with the General Principles, to other Catholics and the wider public.



Ann Noonan reports

INTRODUCTION

After attending the 39th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Preparatory Conference at the UN this past spring, I was keen to continue representing World CLC in its role as an NGO at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. I believe there is a need for a strong Catholic presence at this remarkable time in history, and I prayed for the grace to discern whether this was the right thing for me to do.

When I met with the Executive Secretary, Roswitha Cooper, in August, she shared her vision of CLC with our Metro group, and gave me guidance and the confidence to be one of the two WCLC representatives. The other representative was Annie Lam from the Hong Kong CLC. I am deeply grateful to the WCLC for allowing me the opportunity to go to the Beijing meeting, and to continue working at the UN.

It is no surprise that the voices of young married mothers are barely heard at these conferences, because the daily demands of raising a family preclude their physical presence. My local CLC group helped to make this possible for me by their love and support. After overcoming the obsta-

cles involved in preparation, I was accredited and ready to go.

I had a two-day stopover in Hong Kong, for which I was grateful, and especially for the welcome that I received from the Hong Kong CLC; I was reminded of the parable of the Vine and the branches by the way CLC groups are thriving as part of an international whole.

On my arrival in Beijing, Annie Shun-Wai Lam and I finally caught up with each other. The differences in our cultures and roles in life made for an interesting time, and we worked well together.

AIMS OF THE WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

The purpose of the UN Conference on Women was to implement strategies for the advancement of the roles of women in our societies and governments, a goal which has been traditionally ignored and undermined throughout history. Our roles of motherhood, fatherhood, marriage, family and faith always need support and nurturing, so that poverty, ignorance and disease will be eliminated.

The WCLC therefore encourages the UN's Economic and Social Council to foster and embrace programs that work with families to keep them intact while recognizing the role of women in family life. In considering that one of the causes of the feminization of poverty is the father-absent family, it is essential that men share their responsibilities in raising the children they help to create.

We strive to work as an NGO with the UN's ECOSOC "to work for the reform of structures of society, participating in efforts to liberate the victims... of discrimination and especially to abolish differences between rich and poor" (GP#8).

THE CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

As the two WCLC affiliates at the Women's Conference, Annie and I did not focus on only one specific area in the *Platform for Action*. Since there was the opportunity for delegates and affiliates to present their organization's views, we prepared a Plenary statement which incorporated the concerns of WCLC members who had written to us in the summer. The contents included the need for commitment to social and

economic justice for all women — equal pay for equal work, equal access to quality education for girls throughout the world, and an end to the violence against and sexual exploitation of women.

While the day-to-day schedule was very fast paced and draining, we had the opportunity to attend daily Mass and the Rosary in the hotel where I stayed. I am almost unable to explain what a moving experience it was to attend Mass every day in a small hotel room with over 40 Catholics in the middle of Beijing, China!

Annie and I had the opportunity to meet with fellow CLC member Josefina Errázuriz, of the official Chilean delegation; Dr Lucienne Salle, a member of the Vatican Delegation from the Pontifical Council of the Laity; and Maryann Glendon, the first woman to lead a Vatican Delegation. We attended a meeting between the Vatican Delegation and the Catholic NGOs, as well as many informal interfaith meetings. It was wonderful to witness the interfaith movement in action, promoting the respect for the dignity of the human person at every stage of development, not only on the official level, but at the grass roots as well.

One rewarding aspect of this international gathering was the chance to sit down with a diverse group of women, in mutual respect, and share our concerns about the discrimination we have faced, and suggest different approaches to resolving some of these problems. Although we did not always share the same views, it was an opportunity to get to know each other as real people, and break down some of the walls of prejudice and preconceived ideas.

CLC teaches us how knowing each other's stories helps avoid some of the needless conflict that tears communities apart. This type of conference allowed for a peaceful means to get to know each other better.

COMMITMENT TO THE PLATFORM FOR ACTION

The Holy See was the first delegation to pledge its commitment, by undertaking that all 300,000 educational, healthcare, and relief agencies within the Catholic Church will work to improve the status of women and the girl child. As a Catholic organization, we need to consider our role also in implementing some of the goals of the *Platform for Action*.



Ann Noonan and Josefina Errázuriz at work

In the year that the US celebrated the 75th Anniversary of Woman's Right to Vote, we still need to find ways to advance the role of women and assist with unplanned pregnancy situations, as well as address the rise in teen pregnancy without relying upon an abortion industry which con-

tinues to victimize women and sacrifice their children.

Many present at the conference believed that the resulting document would impose cultural imperialism on other countries. The endangering of the sovereignty of their own countries was some-

thing very familiar to many delegates who had often been coerced into conforming to consensus with reservations. Unfortunately, these reservations are too often subsequently ignored in references to past documents and in preparation for future UN documents.

The measure of dissatisfaction over these social statements was seen when more than forty countries expressed specific reservations in their acceptance of the final *Platform for Action*.

CONCLUSIONS

It seems that this conference has resulted in a very imperfect document. This must not end our belief that economic and social justice can be accomplished through the UN, but rather points up how better organized we need to become.

The long established groups will see gains in their areas; as we develop a stronger presence and sense of continuity in working

with other NGOs, we will see greater results too. Through our participation as NGO affiliates at the UN, the WCLC is provided with a structure which can focus our apostolic outreach on the goals set in these conferences.

The Conference's focus on women provided me with the opportunity to reflect upon the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary — her role as a woman and a mother, as well as our CLC role model of love and faith. As we strive to imitate her discipleship, we pray for her intercession in assisting us in fulfilling our Mission. With the guidance of St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, we will be able to understand our particular roles in fulfilling God's will, because if we really want to change the world we must start with ourselves.

The next UN conference, Habitat II, deals with many community concerns; I would encourage the WCLC members to use our status as an NGO at the United Nations to continue to promote economic and social justice as well as peace.



Josefina Errázuriz

In Beijing 1995 My Personal Reflections

There was a colourful atmosphere when women in national dress arrived at the UN Women's Conference in Beijing. They came from almost every country and culture, of diverse religions and political beliefs, to spend 12 days working together for the rights of women.

More than any previous events, this Fourth World Conference on Women had not gone unnoticed even in the preparation stage. Many had become interested by the lively debate about it in the media. I consider this in itself positive. However, it involved the risk of putting the delegates under the pressure of public opinion in their home countries, and

making them less open to the ideas of the other participants at the Conference. I was afraid that the delegations could have their own hidden agenda that would hinder constructive discussions. In addition, after I had studied the draft of the *Platform for Action* I felt that it would be almost impossible to achieve agreement on the different points of view which were put in brackets in the draft paper. So, it was unclear what was going to happen in Beijing.

The Conference was in many ways a surprise in its scope. I would particularly like to underline what, I think most distinguished it: how seriously the par-

ticipants worked towards consensus on the controversial issues they were discussing.

Coming as they did from diverse cultures, races, and religious beliefs, everyone showed a sense of responsibility and a profound respect for democracy.

Apart from the different pressure groups, I think that the process used to resolve differences, so that we could work together, was especially remarkable. We were all convinced that by discussing women's rights to equality, development and peace, we were contributing to the development of the whole human race.

The topics covered an immense range of areas where women are undervalued, discriminated against and subjected to violence throughout the world. I feel that the issue of poverty, of the "feminisation of poverty" at every level, is the driving force of the whole *Platform for Action*. This call for solidarity with women to help them out of the poverty trap is the most urgent if we truly want to build a more just and equal world.

The *Platform for Action* also expresses another crucial concept;

it renews the invitation for men and women to work together in unity for a better world: an invitation to share responsibilities in every sphere, in the family and at work, and in the different ways of building community. This is why the statements in the press shocked me, when they affirmed without any justification that the aim of the Conference was the liberation of women from all responsibility or family ties.

We must understand, too, that the *Platform for Action* is directed to all the countries in the world. It is intended to raise the consciousness of the world concerning the problems which women have to face.

These problems are differently perceived by different cultures, religions and traditions. In order to reach a consensus, the document's formulations are not always very clear or well put. The editing of certain paragraphs allows different interpretations, which could explain some of the controversies, e.g. in the passages dealing with law on abortion.

As is the case in nearly every human effort, the final text contains much that is debatable, but overall, the *Platform for Action* is a

positive development. It offers ways for governments and other groups to empower women to participate more fully in building a better world.

To say today that the family, religion and motherhood were understood in a negative way in the *Platform for Action*, seems to me not very responsible and even dangerous, because it casts an overall doubt on the value of the Conference itself. The definitive documents — the *Platform for Action* and the *Beijing Declaration* — refute these assertions and speak for themselves. For example motherhood and pregnancy are treated as problems only when it is a question of teenage pregnancy; the dignity of the young woman is always emphasised.

To sum up my reflections on the Conference, I was impressed by the professional and efficient

way in which the participants worked, respecting different opinions and ideas.

Throughout the Conference I was impressed by the open, straightforward and cooperative working style of the groups working side by side on burning issues. That is why it is hard to understand some press reports on the way the work was carried out during the sessions.

I felt that matters progressed in mutual patience and respect, and if the same point was raised again, everyone tried their best and with great patience to find a formula acceptable to the majority.

That is why I think it important to give credit to the Conference, by emphasising the wide range of the themes under discussion and the extent of the agreements which were achieved.

SJ



And

Women

One year ago, on March 22nd, after nearly three months of hard work, the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus was concluded. Many of our CLC members have studied some of the twenty-six decrees that came out of the General Congregation. Decree Fourteen is entitled:

JESUITS AND THE SITUATION OF
WOMEN IN CHURCH AND CIVIL SOCIETY.

If you would like to receive the whole text, please contact the Jesuit Province of your area, or write to the World Secretariat in Rome. Here is a summary of the document to give you an idea of its scope:

The situation of women with its existing injustice and male dominance is highlighted, but also the beginnings of change for the better, mainly due to the *critical awakening and courageous protest of women themselves*, as well as to the fact that *many men have joined women in rejecting attitudes which offend against the dignity of men and women alike*.

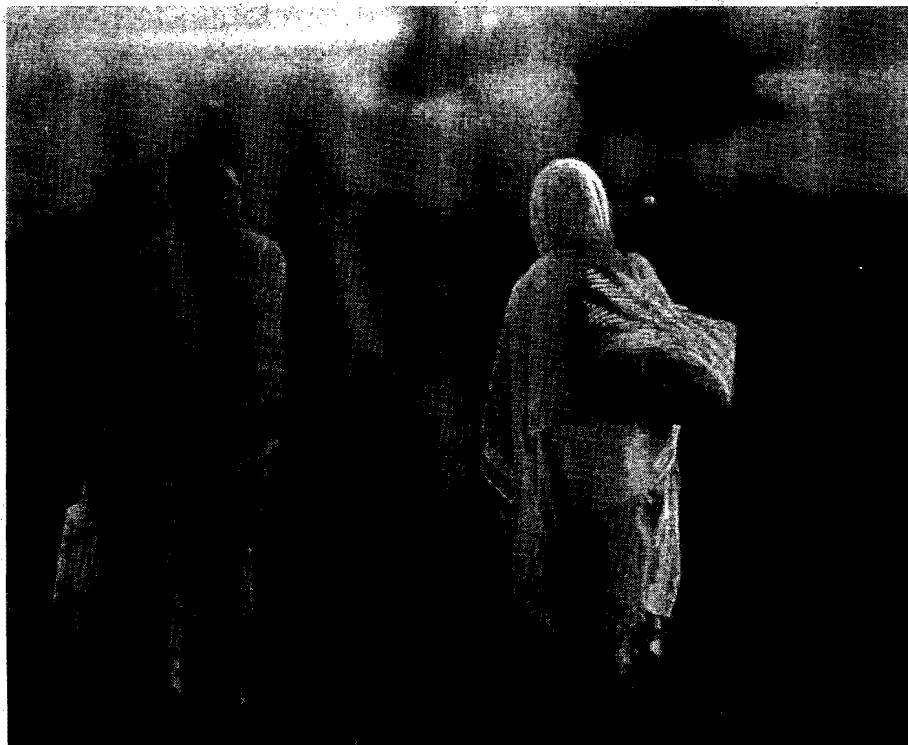
The way in which the Church addresses the situation is mentioned, and the role and responsibility of the Jesuits is discussed. It is recognized that conversion is necessary, to overcome clericalism which has reinforced male domination. The important role of lay and religious women in all fields of mission is appreciated, and some ways in which Jesuits may better respond are specified.

It is emphasised that cultural differences have to be respected and a sensitive pedagogy should be adopted *that does not drive a further wedge between men and women who in certain circumstances are already under great pressure from other divisive cultural or socioeconomic forces.* As the first step on the way forward, the necessity of listening to women in a *spirit of partnership and equality* is emphasised. Secondly, all Jesuits are invited to *align themselves in solidarity with women.* The following practical ways of doing this are suggested:

- *explicit teaching of the essential equality of women and men in Jesuit ministries, especially in schools, colleges and universities*
- *support for liberation movements which oppose the exploitation of women and encourage their entry into political and social life*
- *specific attention to the phenomenon of violence against women*
- *appropriate presence of women in Jesuit ministries and institutions, not excluding the ministry of formation*
- *genuine involvement of women in consultation and decision making in Jesuit ministries*
- *respectful cooperation with female colleagues in shared projects*
- *use of appropriately inclusive language in speech and official documents*
- *promotion of the education of women and, in particular, the elimination of all forms of illegitimate discrimination between boys and girls in the educational process.*

The document ends with giving thanks for all that has already been achieved and promises the commitment of the Society of Jesus to *regard this solidarity with women as integral to their mission.*

What could the response be from women in CLC? Our brothers in the Society have expressed their goodwill in bringing about change. We are asked to use our female intuition and persistence by affectionately and patiently reminding them to put into practice the precious insights of this document. It could be a big step forward towards a new relationship between men and women in the Church.



A long way to go

30th World Communications Day May 19, 1996:

THE MEDIA: MODERN FORUM FOR PROMOTING
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

This is the theme chosen by **Pope John Paul II** for this year's *World Communications Day* that will be celebrated throughout the world on the Sunday before Pentecost. To emphasise the importance of *the Media* in our society, *Vatican II* announced this as an event to be celebrated world-wide. It has become a tradition that the Holy Father's message is published on the Feastday of *Saint Francis Sales*, the patron of journalists. This year's message, which follows, is a continuation of the Holy Father's emphasis on the role of women in society and in the Church.



Dear

Brothers

and Sisters,

This year, the
theme for World Com-
munications Day:

***The Media: Modern
Forum for Promoting
the Role of Women in
Society***

play a crucial role not only in promoting justice and equality for women but in fostering appreciation for their specific feminine gifts, which elsewhere I have called the "genius" of women. (cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 30; *Letter to Women*, 10).

Last year, in my *Letter to Women*, I sought to advance a dialogue, especially with women themselves, on what it means to be a woman in our time. I also pointed out some of "the obstacles which in

so many parts of the world still keep women from being fully integrated into social, political and economic life". This is a dialogue which people in the communications media can, indeed have an obligation to, foster and support. People in the media often become advocates, and commendably so, of the voiceless and the marginalized. They are in a unique position also to stimulate public consciousness with regard to two serious issues concerning women in today's world.

First, as I noted in my Letter, motherhood is often penalized rather than rewarded, even though humanity owes its very survival to those women who have chosen to be wives and mothers. It is certainly an injustice that such women should be discriminated against, economically or socially, precisely for following that fundamental vocation. Likewise I pointed out that there is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancement, equality of spouses with regard to family rights, and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic State.

Secondly, the advancement of women's genuine emancipation is a matter of justice, which can no longer be overlooked; it is also a question of society's welfare. Fortunately, there is a growing awareness that women must be enabled to play their part in the solution of the serious problems of society and of society's future. In every area, "a greater presence of women in society will prove most valuable, for it will help to manifest the contradictions present when society is organized solely according to the criteria of efficiency and productivity, and it will force systems to be redesigned in a way which favours the processes of humanization which mark the *civilization of love*."

The *civilization of love* consists, most particularly, in a **radical affirmation of the value of life and of the value of love**. Women are especially qualified and privileged in both of these areas. Regarding life, although not alone responsible for affirming its intrinsic value, women enjoy a unique capacity for doing so because of their intimate connection with the mystery of life's transmission. Regarding love, women can bring to every aspect of life, including the highest levels of decision-making, that essential quality of femininity which consists in objectivity

of judgment, tempered by the capacity to understand in depth the demands of interpersonal relationships.

The communications media, including the press, the cinema, radio and television, the music industry and computer networks, represent the modern forum where information is received and transmitted rapidly to a global audience, where ideas are exchanged, where attitudes are formed — and, indeed, where a new culture is being shaped. The media are therefore destined to exercise a powerful influence in determining whether society fully recognizes and appreciates not only the rights but also the special gifts of women.

Sadly though, we often see not the exaltation but the exploitation of women in the media. How often are they treated not as persons with an inviolable dignity but as objects whose purpose is to satisfy others' appetite for pleasure or for power? How often is the role of woman as wife and mother undervalued or even ridiculed? How often is the role of women in business or professional life depicted as a masculine caricature, a denial of the specific gifts of feminine insight, compassion and understanding, which so greatly contribute to the *civilization of love*?

Women themselves can do much to foster better treatment of women in the media: by promoting sound media education programmes, by teaching others, especially their families, to be discriminating consumers in the media market, by making known their views to production companies, publishers, broadcasting networks and advertisers with regard to programmes and publications which insult the dignity of women or debase their role in society. Moreover, women can and should prepare themselves for positions of responsibility and creativity in the media, not in conflict with or imitation of masculine roles but by impressing their own "genius" on their work and professional activity.

The media would do well to focus on the true heroines of society, including the saintly women of the Christian tradition, as role models for the young and for future generations. Nor can we forget, in this respect, the many consecrated women who have sacrificed all to follow Jesus and to dedicate themselves to prayer and to the service of

the poor, the sick, the illiterate, the young, the old, the handicapped. Some of these women are themselves involved in the communications media — working so that *the poor have the Gospel preached to them* (cf. Lk 4:18).

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord (Lk 1:46). The Blessed Virgin Mary used these words in responding to the salutation of her cousin Elizabeth, thus acknowledging the “great things” that God had done in her. The image of women communicated by the media should include the recognition that every feminine gift proclaims the greatness of the Lord, the Lord who has communicated life and love, goodness and grace, the Lord who is the source of the dignity and equality of women, and of their special “genius”.

My prayer is that this Thirtieth World Communications Day will encourage all those involved in the media of social communication, especially the sons and daughters of the Church, to promote the genuine advancement of women’s dignity and rights, by projecting a true and respectful image of their role in society, and by bringing out *the full truth about women*.

From the Vatican, 24 January 1996

Joannes Paulus II



HOW BEATIFUL YOU ARE, MY LOVE, HOW VERY BEAUTIFUL!

YOUR EYES ARE DOVES BEHIND YOUR VEIL....

YOU HAVE RAVISHED MY HEART, MY SISTER,

MY BRIDE, YOU HAVE RAVISHED MY HEART

WITH A GLANCE OF YOUR EYES...

HOW SWEET IS YOUR LOVE, MY SISTER MY BRIDE!

HOW MUCH BETTER IS YOUR LOVE

THAN WINE, AND THE FRAGRANCE OF YOUR OILS

THAN ANY SPICE!

Song of Songs 4....

Picture Sources

page 2: "Annunciation", by Andrea Della Robbia, 1479, a sculpture in the Franciscan Shrine of Verna in Tuscany

Photos on pp: 40,41,43,46,48,51,53, by Annie Lam, Hong Kong

page 58: Women in Ethiopia, by John Isaac, taken from *Choices*, a publication of: Division of Public Affairs, United Nations Development Programme

page 59: Pontifical Council for the Laity

page 63: Young woman in Ethiopia, by Mark Raper SJ, JRS Rome