

FOR 12 DAYS THEY WALKED AND WALKED and yet here they are eager to listen, to go deeper into the meaning of their lives. They are part of the pilgrimage organized by the Jesuits in celebration of the 450th anniversary of St. Ignatius - 2000 young professionals, a French majority, and a few hundreds from different corners of the world. Most of them lead a "successful" life, having gone through prestigious Universities, working as young specialists in enterprises, centers of research, universities, travelling throughout the world. And yet, during this pilgrimage through the Pyrenees -from Lourdes to Loyola - they gave up all the comfort and status symbols of their lives. When I asked some of the women about the meaning the pilgrimage had had for them, one of them said: "I discovered what - in my very busy and gratifying life - is really essential for me in the eyes of God."
(Loyola, 30th/31st July 91)

ARE WOMEN GOING TO CHANGE THEOLOGY? This is the deep question underlying all the exchanges. In the most beautiful city of Bristol (how I revel in the green of the scenery!) 150 women theologians from almost all countries in Europe are gathered together for their Congress. Most of them are in their 40's and they organize themselves in the typical way of most women's gatherings since the 70's. They are teaching religion or theology, they are all involved in some kind of theological research, they are clear about what is usually considered "women's issues". In the interest of the whole gathering for the contemporary tasks facing women in the world I sense the possibility for a theology built with the materials and events of the world. This is why throughout it all I try to think if these women will be able to give another dimension to theology - I cannot avoid the parallel with women in politics. I come back fully convinced (once again) that it is worthwhile to enter new fields in so far as women are determined to invent new paths and to address the world issues not anymore as victims but as subjects of history.
(Bristol, 5th September 91)

THE PACE OF TRANSFORMATION OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE in Tokyo (skyscrapers rocketing to the sky, new shapes defying the laws of physics and creating beautiful new patterns) can only be matched by the changes I see every year in the mentalities of the young Japanese women. In less than 48 hours one of them gathered a group of 10 young professional women at the United Nations University headquarters. In the midst of the discussion about a dominated male society several of the women challenge and refuse the basic assumptions: "What is logics? Just what is called objective? Where is the place of ethics in it all? And doesn't ethics demand the respect for subjective values?" And they go on denouncing the absurdity of the society in which they live: "What does it mean to be so powerful economically if there are people taken by "karoushi", the Japanese word that means 'death by overwork'?"
(Tokyo, 30th October 91)



WHEN IS THE MOMENT TO BE PIONEER? - During the few days I spent at Grailville, this thought came often to my mind. Fifty years ago there was, among the first Grail members in the USA and their visionary leaders, the idea that the communion with the earth could be a frame for personal growth and spiritual renewal. The group followed the cycles of liturgical life together with the cycles of nature and invited young women to share in this new adventure. This was 50 years ago! How many among those women understood what was at stake? Today, the Grail is creating several programs where the earth and the sense of the cosmic mystery in which mankind participates play a central role. Seen together these two trends emerge from the same reality and perception of spiritual life. But thinking about the many women who have participated in those Grail events 50 years ago I ask myself: how can a person be made aware that she(he) is caught in an idea, a movement, an institution, that is pointing out towards the future? And then, once the awareness is there, where to find the strength, the imagination, the perseverance to unfold again and again the virtualities of the original idea? - To see a handful of Grail women giving new shape, with hope and determination, to an idea carried for so many years was an answer to my question - the moment to be pioneer is always NOW!
(Grailville, 4th/10th November 91)

THE STRENGTH OF EXERCISED LEADERSHIP came very sharply as the main feature of the Jubilee of Church Women United in St.Louis, Missouri. Plenary sessions, workshops, prayer together - all have shown a high degree of perseverant commitment to tasks in the Churches and the amazing experience gained by all those women in their - sometimes - simple and invisible services. At any moment that the participation was called for, women came up from among this group of more than 2000 women and spoke up. What a renewal there would be in political life if this kind of women would be present there! And how important it is that the new generations of women may find in their lives the same level of opportunities. It is true that a leader cannot be an artificial creation. But it is also true that real leadership needs to be nurtured, trained, exercised in many different situations. It is the path leading ultimately to the humble service that can awake the best in everyone and can dare to face new situations and answer to new challenges.
(St.Louis, 12th November 91)

HOW ARE THE INTERNATIONAL LEADERS BEING CHOSEN? - I am in New York at the moment of the discussion about the new UN Secretary-General in the Security Council. The pressure of diplomatic sources is a continuous danse. Somebody says 'yes' to the one he does not want so as to oblige the one who has no major objections to that candidate but is committed to somebody else to say 'no'! Again and again the 'straw' votes - and nobody asking the main question: who is the best person? Most of all it is unbelievable that for the post of Secretary General the community of nations is satisfied with a procedure of individuals running for office, while in most recent positions of leadership in the United Nations (the UN University, for instance) there is a "search committee" whose task is to find the best person available for the task. The "search committee" is nowadays a current practice - it is becoming a necessary corrective to the over-equalizing and levelling down process of democratic choices.
(New York, 13th November 91)



WHAT KIND OF SOCIALLY COMMITTED CHRISTIANS are we able to foster among young people? Looking at the more than 4000 French Christians gathered together at the initiative of "Témoignage Chrétien", I wonder if all of us are able to formulate anew our own social commitment. We need to become more "contemporary" to the so-called social question and to find new ways to answer to it. At the end of the meeting a Charter of Hope was proclaimed; it starts like this:

"WE BELIEVE THAT THE REALITIES OF THE WORLD WHICH ARE EMERGING - EVEN IF THEY DON'T HAVE YET NEITHER NAME NOR FACE - ARE ALREADY A WORD OF GOD FULL OF HOPE. THIS IS WHY WE LOVE TODAY'S WORLD WITH PASSION. AS WE BELIEVE IN THE INCARNATION OF GOD, WE BELIEVE THAT GOD IS INVOLVED WITH OUR HISTORY. THIS IS WHY WE BELIEVE THAT WE MUST CONVERT OURSELVES TO REALITY."

This is very important at a time when the philosophy of "the end of history" - while history is still to come for most of mankind! - finds most Christians passively following the fashion. Aren't we able to move beyond the biased view coming from the wealth of the rich countries and from the unsatisfying practice of democracy?
(Paris, 24th November 91)

EVERY 20 YEARS NIGERIA HAS DOUBLED ITS POPULATION - I sense this arithmetic fact almost physically, here in Ota, Nigeria. Driving between the house of General Obasanjo and the Hotel in the evening I see the market, the vivacity of the people, the lights illuminating each stall...

How to think about the overwhelming and dangerous issue of population when other issues speak about survival of individuals and of countries now? And yet we cannot by-pass the issue. The question is to see it not in isolation (a problem that would be simply solved with family planning programs...) but to understand that there is a nexus between population/ environment/development/poverty/use of clean technologies. Population goes drastically down when there is development and, very especially, when women get basic schooling - the link between women's literacy and the fertility rate offers no doubt anymore.

But the discussion centers on more directly political matters. The movement towards democracy is more than a compliance with the trend in Europe and with the burning need of getting development aid from the international financial institutions. It is a very authentic movement starting from all forms of organisation in society. But all the participants stress the fact that democracy does not solve automatically the problems of development. One of the very striking elements here is the desire to know how the transition period took place in other parts of the world. Constitutional reform is discussed. The two outstanding South Africans present distinguish between the transition legitimacy and the constitutional legitimacy, a subtle difference that is very important for all the countries who try to find their own way.

(Ota, 28th/29th November 91)



AN ACTIVE SOCIETY is the concept that opens the way for a new understanding of "work" and, as a consequence, creates the conditions for women to review their different "activities" and to see their meaning in the whole society.

This is the core-message of a report issued by a High-level expert group convened by OECD, an organisation grouping all Western countries and "alike" (as it is said in the international jargon). It was an amazing experience to see that the former director of ILO (a French man), a Japanese woman professor of psychology in Tokyo, a woman professor of psychology and sociology of work in Helsinki, a woman trade-union leader from USA, a man professor of political economy in Berlin, and myself, could spontaneously be in agreement with each other! Every time that a new idea came on the table, everyone provided his (her) expertise to give a solid basis to what (at least from my side!) was very often a simple intuition. The report breaks new ground. Thanking all the members of the group for their work, the Secretary-General of OECD wrote:

"THE QUESTIONS YOUR GROUP HAS DEALT WITH ARE RELEVANT FOR MULTIPLE ASPECTS OF ECONOMY AND OF SOCIETY WHICH ARE CURRENTLY THE TASK OF SEVERAL COMMITTEES AND WORK-GROUPS WITHIN THE FRAME OF OECD. I HAVE INVITED THEIR CHAIRMEN TO EXAMINE ATTENTIVELY YOUR REPORT SO AS TO GUARANTEE THAT YOUR REFLECTIONS ARE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN THE FUNDAMENTAL TASK OF OECD CONCERNING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT."

I only hope that women's organisations in OECD countries will study the report and "force" their governments to implement its recommendations.
(Paris, 10th December 91)

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT DUBROVNIK, having as climax a Concert for Peace at midnight was an unexpected event. I was invited, together with other persons from different countries to join the French Secretary of State for Humanitarian Questions on a rather adventurous trip. We went by plane to Bari (Italy) and then a whole night through the Adriatic directly to Dubrovnik. The concert had my "colleague" (we got the doctorate honoris causa from the University of Louvain at the same occasion!), Barbara Hendricks, as the main solist. And how beautiful and poignant it was to hear her limpid voice singing "Exultate! Jubilate!" from Mozart.

Of course this event was only a symbolic gesture. I took part in it because I couldn't help being utterly disappointed with the contrast in the attitude of the Western powers - rushing "to liberate" Kuwait and allowing, with all the excuses international law can provide, Serbs and Croats to kill each other.
(Dubrovnik, 31st December 91)

"I HAVE WASTED TIME. NOW DOES TIME WASTE ME!" - It was at the Barbican Center in London. The Royal Shakespeare Company was presenting Richard II. The thoughts of the King in jail are a fascinating reflection on power - the derision of it all... and in the midst of it this very human reflection about our own life and time. How will we be able not to allow time to waste us?

