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SOURCE

SHCJ IN AFRICA — II

SHCJ

STUDIES AND REFLECTIONS
ON THE HERITAGE OF THE
SOCIETY OF THE HOLY CHILD JESUS

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SHCJ IN AFRICA — II

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EDITORIAL

HERE at last is the second set of articles on the Society in Africa. The last issue contained the reflections of African sisters; this one largely the reflections of expatriate Americans and Europeans who can look back over 50 years of the Society's history in Africa. These articles are set in the context of a substantial and stimulating paper on the important subject of inculturation.

With this issue comes a change in the African membership of the SOURCE board. We say a big thank you to Philomena Power who was a member of the editorial board from 1984 and helped SOURCE through several transitions. We are very grateful for all she did and wish her well in her new work in Harrogate. Now we extend a very warm welcome to Henrietta Adindu who we are confident will have much to offer on the board.

The new editorial board met with the General Council in Rome in September to reflect on and review developments in the production of SOURCE. Since the present editor was appointed more than 40 people have contributed to SOURCE. It seems to us important that SOURCE should be a journal to which all can contribute, not just a select few; so once more we remind you that we welcome any contributions or suggestions, ideas, topics, art-work or responses to published articles. Would anyone like to suggest a new title for SOURCE or submit art-work for a more interesting cover? We thank all of you who have already encouraged our efforts with notes of congratulation and positive and constructive comment.

We are now printing sufficient copies of SOURCE for every member of the Society who wishes to receive a personal copy. We are interested in widening our circulation so if you know of anyone who would like to subscribe to SOURCE and receive it on a regular basis could you please inform a member of the editorial board.

Forthcoming Issues:

Ministry	late 1990
Images of God	early 1991
Formation	late 1991

Copy for the first issue of the year should reach the editor by the beginning of the previous September; for the second issue by the beginning of February.

JUDITH LANCASTER, SHCJ

THE INCULTURATION OF THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY CHILD JESUS IN AFRICA

Teresa Mee, SHCJ and Josephine Olagunju, SHCJ

WHEN we were invited to present an article on inculturation, we got together to discuss the subject from our respective African and European perspectives. We taped our conversation. For us this dialogue was a creative exercise giving us new insights. We invite you to participate by 'listening in' and we would love to have the dialogue extended to the wider Society through your responses.

What do we mean by inculturation?

Jo: When I think of inculturation, I am thinking particularly of the Gospel as it takes root in a particular culture. I take the culture as a given, and the gospel as a given as well. The culture is the particular expression of a worldview of a group of people, a worldview that is expressed in their lifestyle, their beliefs, their music and art forms —

Teresa: and their customs —

Jo: Yes. When I think of inculturation then, I hope that the gospel which is already a given can find its place in this culture, enrich it and give it its highest value. By that I mean it becomes a way of life informing the way of life of the people, informing the culture. The process then for us is to express the gospel in its African context which is different from the way it is expressed in other parts of the world.

Teresa: You said the gospel and the culture are given. I suppose we have to remember too that though the essence of the gospel is a given it was first preached and lived within a particular culture. Christ himself belonged to a culture as a Jew, and he expressed the good news in Jewish terms. On the other hand his message was addressed not just to his own people. His worldview was not so confined, so he went beyond the bounds of the Jewish culture. But of course all cultures have their human and their sinful limitations. Obviously not all elements in a culture can find an echo in the Christian way of life. Some would have to be rejected.

Jo: Yes, I understand that — even when I say that a culture is a given. The fact is that when the good news comes it comes in a particular form. The essence is there but it has to be inserted in the culture that receives it.

Teresa: That is interesting now. Because the culture in which the gospel is *expressed* is a given; and the culture in which the gospel is *received* is a given.

Jo: When they meet we expect that something in the receiving culture would be informed in such a way that the culture will have to change. Perhaps and hopefully what is good in the culture will be seen as a possible mode of expression for the gospel that is being brought. This is the essence of inculturation. The gospel is able

to take what is already there. The culture that receives it will express it in its own forms. Through observation and dialogue the foreign cultural expression would be laid aside in favour of the culture of the receivers. It is the same truth that is embedded in different attires. We talk about God changing in the incarnation. God has changed. Jesus has taken on the form of man; God has taken up humanity into God's life —

Teresa: — and we are told that in order to do this, he emptied himself. As you were speaking of the two cultures involved in the passing on of the good news it struck me that in looking at the missionary on the one hand — the transmitter, if you like — and the receiver of the good news on the other, a very purifying process that is involved. As a missionary in some ways one has to strip oneself of total attachment to one's culture, the culture in which one first received the gospel. One has to withhold one's culture while at the same time the receiver of the gospel has to also sift his/her own culture within which the gospel is received. So there is a radically purifying process going on and in fact an evaluation of two cultures in the light of the gospel.

How does the reaching out to the essence beyond the culture apply in our own missionary history here in Africa, the SHCJ history?

SHCJ Experience of Inculturation in Africa

On looking back to the early missionaries, I can discern some efforts to reach out to the African cultures. At the beginning it was the Ibibio and Efik cultures —

Jo: in Nigeria —

Teresa: — and then the Akan in Capecoast and Takoradi, Ghana. I think there was an effort to reach out in understanding of the importance of dialogue with the local people especially for decision-making. This dialogue called for an appreciation of other cultural norms and expressions, a discovery of new attitudes, relationships, mutual respect and so on; perhaps an evaluation of one's own preoccupation with the use of time.

Jo: So it was an effort on the part of the sisters first of all to be open to another culture, to meet the people, to recognise their leaders, to consult them and to involve them in what was being done. The efforts made by the sisters to reach out in dialogue is something the past students greatly appreciate today. Some of the students taught were able to see the sisters' efforts as respect for the Nigerian culture: encouraging local dances, drama, song, the form of living in the boarding schools paralleling the form of community living in the villages, the focus on the individual student, and so on.

That focus on the individual is a characteristic we inherit from Mother Foundress, a charism of the Society.

Teresa: To what extent would you say that dialogue with the receiving culture was part of Mother Connelly's heritage apart from what we already mentioned about the focus on the individual?

Jo: Before she began the Society she had already experienced an opening up to other cultures.* She was quick to make friends in Italy and immediately set about learning the language.

* Cornelia and Pierce had already experienced cultural diversity in their Mississippi valley years.

Teresa: Then she had French —

Jo: learnt in the United States. Then when she came to Europe she improved upon it and later encouraged the pupils to learn it too. So that was the background — her desire to be in touch with the people. Then when she came to England, she had English friends who were in touch with what was going on in their country. She had to study the values, customs, ways of thinking of the English as well as to learn about the educational ideas/system and needs in England before she could start a school for girls. There was a self-emptying there for her, an invitiation to look out, to be ready to accept others and their ways.

Teresa: I suppose, 'Be yourself but make that self what God wants it to be,' could be translated at community level as 'Live your culture but allow the gospel to bring it to its full development!' Yes, Cornelia seems to have reached out to other cultures but not with a total acceptance. She was discerning about it. Already there was a distinguishing between cultures and the good news. I am thinking for example of the norms of the day: it was not customary at the time for young girls to perform on the stage — yet she went ahead. Then there was the question of going out in open carriages over which she came into conflict with the bishops; here she conformed. No doubt she often had to withhold expressions of her own culture.

Jo: Perhaps you would help us to look at some other ways in which Cornelia's tradition was applied in Africa.

Teresa: Well, one way that immediately comes to mind is the SHCJ response to the call to Africa in the 1930's. When the question came up in the Chapter of starting a foundation in Africa it is very significant that the Superior General, Mother Mary Amadeus, came out to Calabar herself. She spent at least six months here, just listening, trying to understand the people and their needs. This respect for the uniqueness of the people was very much in Mother Connelly's tradition.

And it was in this spirit that the early Holy Child sisters in Africa studied the elements in the culture that could embrace Christianity as well as those which could not, though no doubt they failed at times to understand fully and appreciate certain elements in the culture. One big barrier to this understanding would have been the languages — mainly Efik, Fante and Igbo in the early days — though a few of our sisters did succeed in learning the languages and so were able to grasp at least some of the refinements of meaning.

Jo: I would say that some fluency in the language is important especially in the African culture where people express themselves so much in proverbs. That is where the real listening is, a very powerful means towards appreciating the culture as an 'insider', so to speak. So it is important to understand the language.

The Reception of the Gospel in Africa

Teresa: We have reflected on our heritage from our foundress of openness to other cultures, and on the SHCJ experience of inculturation. Could we look for a while at the wider church scene in West Africa and beyond? Could we together sift two very contradictory claims one hears about Africa? One is that the Christian church has not taken root in sub-Saharan Africa since Christianity has not been incarnated. The other is that the future of the church is in Africa; this is where the faith is already vibrant.

Jo: In terms of the incarnation or inculturation of the good news in Africa we find that the pattern is not uniform. One can distinguish three categories of people fairly representative of the African response at large. The first group comprises those who have rejected Christianity as presented by the European churches largely because they found it foreign to the African culture. It was not so much the essence of the good news they rejected as the cultural norms in which it was presented to them. They did not reject Christianity totally, rather they started their own independent Christian churches, for example —

Teresa: Yes, Christ's Gospel Church, Church of the Brethren, the Aladura Church — Aladura — 'one who prays or has prayer'.

Jo: Also Apostolic Church, United African Church, etc. The existence of these churches points to the fact that something is missing in the way the gospel has been presented. People were attracted by Christianity but they felt they had to reject it as it was presented to them. They took the bible and rejected those who brought the bible.

Other smaller groups who rejected Christianity were intellectuals who sought to separate Christianity from its cultural garb. When they failed to do this they turned instead to a study of traditional religion and culture, seeking deeper meanings there —

Teresa: or embraced some other philosophies, such as Marxism —

Jo: Yes, but not strongly because few people follow them, thanks to the African's deep sense of God.

Teresa: I sometimes wonder, when people reject Christianity, whether that rejection comes from their experience of Christianity through Christian worship — the forms of Christian worship they experience. Maybe that is jumping too far ahead.

Jo: Not necessarily. People do say that the rejection is principally a reaction towards Christian worship as they experience it. When they come to church, they take their places sitting one behind the other —

Teresa: which is symbolic of the limited extent of their participation. They do participate through the singing and dancing, and sometimes they bring produce of their farms in the offertory procession to the altar. But as far as participation at the level of understanding is concerned, I think it is limited. For people who are coming from a tradition of meaningful dialogue in the local community where everybody has a say, and is consulted, this passive liturgy, especially the liturgy of the Word, is very alien.

Jo: Yes. Dialogue relationship is at the heart of African community life. So the western European form of homily would be alien. A dialogue form would be more in keeping with African culture. For the more enlightened who recognize that the presentation of Christianity does not touch the depths of the message there is enormous frustration and impatience. Some try to practise Christianity without going to church.

Teresa: But then what about the second category: those who received the culture in which the good news was presented and who became in some ways neo-western Europeans? For these people religion and culture were more or less on the same level while the traditional culture remained. There is a divorce between Christian worship and life — between religious allegiance and daily life. Shall we say you had

a dual allegiance, an allegiance to the traditional culture on the one hand, and an allegiance to Christianity in western European garb on the other. And so when the time of crisis comes, people go back to where they experienced life in depth which is within their own culture. There is a separation between personal culture and the 'Christian culture'.

Jo: That group is the 'confused' group as it were. They accepted Christianity but more on the surface. When they are really challenged by some problem, they would say, 'Christianty no fit do am!' (that is, 'Christianity cannot resolve this!') This happens for instance where there is a serious illness in the family. People go to the divine/native doctor to find the cause and the cure for the illness; an action which would entail religious ritual unacceptable to Christianity.

Teresa: So they are going back to their traditional religion which for them was more meaningful.

Jo: Or that seemed more meaningful. They had not grasped the essence of the good news. They were confused.

Teresa: And then of course you have people engaging in expressions of African culture that are not necessarily contrary to Christianity but which seem contrary to them. And so we have a perpetual sense of guilt.

Jo: An example in this case can be seen in what some couples do when they find themselves childless. The African religio-cultural worldview which sees an unbreakable continuity among the past (in the ancestors), the present (in the living) and the future (in the unborn future descendants) would force a childless couple to any lengths to have a child. If such a couple are a 'confused' pair of Christians they would resort to traditional ways of seeking relief. Thus they seek the help of a 'native doctor' who combines invocations from the traditional religion with the use of herbal medication. This consultation of the native doctor may be frowned upon and guilt imputed both by church authorities and by the couple themselves. Some enlightened research and dialogue, however, could lead to an accommodation of this cultural practice within the Christian faith, as is already happening in the field of medical science.

Teresa: What about places where there has been a meeting point, where inculturation is really taking place?

Jo: This is the third category of people who encountered the good news. They have accepted Christianity. They see that it has a lot to offer, that it is not essentially opposed to the African cultures. An increasing number are struggling to find ways in which the gospel can become incarnate among the people. Because of their understanding of the church's universality people have difficulty being free enough to sift the gospel from western culture. Worship, for example: because of the desire to preserve its recognizability, many are afraid of adapting. Fortunately, African languages as well as traditional musical accompaniment for songs have been widely introduced, though some people still prefer Mass in Latin with organ music. Art forms are being Africanised: a black Jesus on the crucifix or a black madonna. I have heard opposition to this on the grounds that the human Jesus was white! But the fact is that he was not, because of his semitic background. More importantly, because he has transcended all cultures, it is possible to represent him in symbols meaningful for particular cultural groups.

Teresa: So despite reactions on the part of some, the essence of Christianity and

the best values within African cultures do meet. We could talk about some instances.

Jo: Yes. One such example that comes to mind is the Cameroonian expression of respect for the Word of God: as part of the entrance procession which takes the form of a joyful dance, the lector carries the Bible in a specially made bag on his/her shoulder. When the procession reaches the altar the lector places the Bible on the lectern which has already been decorated with palms.

Teresa: What is the significance of the carrying on the shoulder?

Jo: It is to show reverence and readiness to carry the weight of the scriptures, the cross, etc.

Teresa: And of course the dancing and the singing express joy.

Jo: Yes. And symbolise the royal reception being accorded to the Word of God and the desire to receive the message with joy. I was greatly moved the first time I witnessed it. It gave me a sense of awe and reverential listening when the Word was proclaimed from the bible.

Teresa: So much for Cameroon. What about further examples of inculturation from Ghana and Nigeria? One of the things that comes to my mind from Ghana is the beautiful celebration of Holy Week. People put on their mourning clothes in identification with the suffering Christ and enter into the re-enactment of the events of the Passion.

And then in Nigeria — I have been very moved by some of the offertory processions, especially a procession of a family that wants to offer thanks. As the family procession dances up the aisle leading or carrying their gifts of sheep or goat, poultry, yams, eggs and so on, the choir and congregation accompany with drumming and songs. They are celebrating life, the gift of life, and in the spirit of the psalmist they enjoy the celebration.

Jo: Some of our own liturgical celebrations in SHCJ communities and gatherings mark further efforts at inculturation in the African province.

Teresa: Yes, particularly in Jos where we have sufficient numbers to do it with some impact. Sometimes at the end of the Mass we dance out of church for the recessional. I find the experience quite moving and sometimes the dancing continues outside as we continue to celebrate even after we have left the church.

Jo: All of this is very much in keeping with SHCJ tradition.

Teresa: Celebration was an important part of Cornelia's heritage. In the early Rule her particular provision for celebrations were important not only in the congregation itself but in the schools as well. She took the children out and celebrated. She saw this as not only celebrating life but promoting life. And maybe too that is another thing that the continuation of the liturgy as celebration and life illustrates, that in the African context religion is so much a part of daily life, with no divorce between them. People speak spontaneously of religious things, of God. Mother Connelly's practice of being aware all the time of the presence of God is very much in the African experience of the SHCJ charism, practising the presence of God and speaking easily of God and relating happenings of life to the religious sphere.

Jo: In addition to that, experience of the presence of God informs our apostolate. Our personal and liturgical prayer in community lead us out to respond to felt needs. From the apostolate we bring back to the same divine presence those to

whom we minister as well as their needs. Our focus on justice with compassion which we reaffirmed at the Awka Provincial Assembly is, to my mind, the result of a lot of reflection. I feel that is one thing that the Society has contributed in Africa: that apostolic spirituality which means that my life can be comfortable with my prayer and that I can take that prayer out and continue it in my action as well as bring the action to prayer and praise of God.

Teresa: We also experience in community (perhaps it is not universal) the idea of sharing on our ministry. We had some very good experiences of that in the noviceship community in Jos, sharing with the group on ministry. Then we are praying together. The community as it were is sending me out. I am returning to the community and accountable to the community. This again is within the African traditional culture — the importance of the family. I am a community person, not just an individual. So I think that community life would be a very important part of our experience of the culture and maybe refining or living out our charism.

Jo: The gospel part of it comes to mind: when we think of the Lord's disciples going out. He sent them to minister and they came back to rejoice together; then they went to prayer. So there is a communal experience that is very strong with us and based on the scriptures. The first missioning of a newly-professed sister is to a community. Whatever she does is in context of living in community. The community is very supportive of the individual. This is very much in tune with the African understanding of community where there is real total belonging to the group that gives the member a sense of security — the people who care for me, with whom I share who I am and what I do.

Teresa: One thing about this security presents a challenge to us. I think in the African context security was given from birth. The child was carried by the mother, always in contact with the mother and the extended family. There was a great security in this extended family. I am wondering: our constitutions talk of security *and* insecurity. I think in terms of the insecurity within the community, for example, unemployment, etc. which involves insecurity. And maybe in the north of Nigeria we may not be that secure in our living accommodation either. Our security really is in God, it is not in material things and so on. Would you like to say something about that, Jo?

Jo: The insecurity of a life of faith — of total dependence on God — is a challenge to all of us. To the African sister, to let go of the security of the familiar yet limiting one-culture background, to embrace the insecurity of an international congregation — that requires total dependence on God in the vision-broadening, culture-enriching, intercultural encounters that living in international communities implies.

The challenges to the Society of faith-filled insecurity are considerable. Starting new projects for example forces us to recognise the need to be willing to let go of an apostolate when discernment reveals that we need to move in a new direction. One example that comes to mind is our moving out of some schools perhaps because a new need was discerned as more urgent, perhaps because there were indigenous people to succeed us. Whatever the reasons, we experienced the insecurity of a life of faith.

Teresa: I think too that what happened there was that the outward circumstances changed. Where we had a very thriving apostolate earlier on, the outward

circumstances changed in terms of control of these schools. That is where the challenge comes, really, that we have not got our feet all the time on secure ground so that we want to stay there. We are ready to move wherever the Lord is calling us at the time. And so we do not think in terms of what is our property. We think rather in terms of where are we needed now in the Lord's vineyard. As you say, our security is in the Lord, not in property nor even in our work. So that in a sense may be another expression of a departure from a culture because culturally one's father's land, one's father's place, is a symbol of security. But we have left all to follow God. So the security and the insecurity of a life of faith is what is encouraging us and challenging us.

That brings us to another thing we have in SHCJ: a pioneering spirit. Cornelia Connelly was a pioneer in the fact that she moved to another country. She started a congregation thousands of miles from her cultural milieu. Even before that, she had given up her previous allegiance to the Episcopalian Church. Again, listening to God and seeing which way God was calling her she moved on at very great cost even in terms of her social connections, searching, even giving up her family. There was so much giving up in her life and reaching out to where the Lord was calling her that she was a real pioneer. Out of that came the opening up of new things.

Jo: When the Society came out here there was not much in terms of the education of girls. So we were involved in starting so many girls' schools. It was a pioneering work. The main desire was to bring the Gospel to the people in this practical way. To do so sisters had to be prepared to go to various places and suffer great inconveniences. The pioneering spirit has continued in the way new projects are taken on, for example, the Cardoso Catholic Community project in Ajegunle, Lagos —

Teresa: Which of course grew out of the initial effort to listen to the people and their real needs.

Jo: I would like to speak about the Centre for Renewal with its Christian animation, interest and concern for the spiritual formation of the people in West Africa. It is pioneering in its looking around, trying to study what the needs are and to initiate programmes that would be helpful for the people. One example is the formation programme in preparation for final profession that we have been running. It was begun because the Centre team at the time saw the need.

Teresa: The pioneering spirit involves a lot of courage. Even our own way of life here in Africa requires courage. Sometimes we are not approved of. Sometimes we are seen as sticking our necks out too far and we run into some trouble, for example, where individuals have challenged the hierarchy, etc. Even in our very choice of dress — you know, I think we pioneered really the moving out of the western religious habit. Our sisters often wear African dresses — more in keeping with the culture. This is often not approved of by the hierarchy and by other religious. It has been a cause of suffering but I think we have a conviction while at the same time trying to be sensitive to other people's feelings.

Jo: You have put it very rightly. I would say that wanting to use traditional dresses is an expression of the fact that the African way of being or our appearance is acceptable to the Lord. We cannot make ourselves put on what is foreign all the time and say that is the only way. However, do not reject everything western totally.

Teresa: In terms of challenge, Jo, what would you say are some of the areas in which we are still struggling to incarnate the SHCJ spirit? What are the areas that are presenting challenge in the form of problems or dissatisfactions?

Jo: Two challenges immediately come to mind: firstly, diligent study of our cultures, of the Christian faith and of the Society. Secondly, use of indigenous names.

I see study as necessary if we are to understand our African cultures, to understand sufficiently what we want the gospel to be received into. But perhaps maybe first of all in order not to be swayed by the depth that we discover in the culture, we need to know the good news in its essence as much as is possible, what is really gospel and what is another culture in which it has been brought to us. Then we need to study the history of the church in order to know how it came to be where it is today. This could give the freedom necessary to consider seriously the legitimacy and desirability of inculturation. In order to inculturate the good news specifically as it is lived in the SHCJ charism, we must also study our own history and heritage.

At this point we would find ourselves on solid ground. So when we finally look at our cultures we would know what to adopt or adapt in order that Christianity, and as it is specifically expressed in our Society, may truly become African and stop being thought of as foreign.

The second challenge of inculturation that I have randomly chosen from so many others is to do with names. In Africa we will hardly ever ask what's in a name. For us names have sociological and religious implications. They are a wealth of information. Consider for example Yoruba names such as: Olufemi — God loves me; Olutomiwa — God has come to me; Ibukunoluwa — the blessing of God; Oluremilekun — God consoled me; Oluwasegun — God is victorious; Oluwatoyin — God is worthy to be praised. The following Ibo names are informative: Ijeoma — Go well; Nkechi — God's gift; Amarachi — God's grace, Ogochukwu — God's generosity; Ikechukwu — God's power; Kelechi — Thank God! Our older sisters who have worked in Efik/Ibibio lands may remember students who bore the following names: Ima Obong — God's love; Emenabasi — God's peace; Aniediabasi — Who is God? Iniobong — God's time; Enoobong — God's gift; Daramfonobong — Rejoice in God's favour; Nseabasi — I am looking up to God; Nsikakabasi — What is impossible to God? Idoreyen — Hope in God; Itoroabasi — Glory to God! I recommend that the province encourage the African sisters who wish to use their indigenous names because 'oruko a ma ro'ni' (Yoruba for 'names do make us reflect'). We can live out concretely in our lives what our names suggest. While we acknowledge the fact that the church hopes we emulate the saints whose names we receive at baptism, I think it is not far fetched to assume that our parents gave us our indigenous names after studying the circumstances of our birth as well as the behavioural patterns we exhibited in the first few weeks of life on earth. Let me illustrate this my my own native names: Olumbunmi — God has given me; Enioloa — a person of honour; Aduke — one to be competitively petted; Modupe — I am grateful. It is becoming clearer to me that reflection on these names could give profound insight into the mystery of the Eucharist and the Ignatian Contemplation to attain Love, and make the spirit and mission of the SHCJ increasingly meaningful for me.

AT HOME IN AFRICA

M Clara Eales, SHCJ

GOING to Africa was a continuation of the glorious adventure that began in 1935 when I was received into the Catholic Church.

In October 1972, I arrived in Ghana to teach in St Teresa's Minor Seminary and to live with Sister Frances McCort who was in charge of the novices of the Infant Jesus sisters and of two other indigenous congregations. I was to be taken every day to the Seminary, about 13 miles away. So my African education began. There was much to wonder at. Looking back, I realise that I learned far more from my students than they ever did from me.

These young men were a pleasant crowd and their eagerness to learn was heartening. Later, when I discovered that they were as avid for marks as for knowledge, I couldn't blame them. They were in perpetual fear of 'the sack'. Although English was not their first language, the examinations which they would have to pass were all English based and were far more demanding than in English schools. That, I fear, is still true, despite all the representations made by their teachers. I had worked long enough with men and boys to know that a certain amount of, call it 'diplomacy', was a must. I realised that if ever I showed surprise or consternation I would be teased unmercifully. So when several of my students assured me that a very small, gentle boy was a cannibal, the joke fell flat. I can only hope that they were as happy to have me there as I was to be with them. After a year when a DMJ Sister came and we took up residence at the seminary, we both felt that we really belonged.

In Ghana education is not easy to come by. Fees at the seminary are subsidised, presumably by Rome. Undoubtedly some vocations belong to the parents and some of the seminarians give up when they have obtained their A levels. Nevertheless many families, even non-Catholic or non-Christian, are more than happy to allow their wards to become priests. One young man took the entrance examinations for three years before he was allowed to begin. Another worked for four years in a gold mine in order to pay his way, and settled down happily, like St Ignatius, to his work in Form 1 with the youngest boys. I had the joy of being present at his ordination.

Coming from England where abortion had been legalised for some years and where a vociferous minority was calling for euthanasia, I found it heartening to see the joyous celebrations welcoming a new baby, and the reverence accorded to the old. The transcendent God who is being squeezed out of Europe, is very present to the people of Africa, where religion is a part of life, even though, particularly in traditional religions, there are minor spirits to be placated.

In Africa, as elsewhere, fear is the strongest weapon in the devil's armoury. How many times did Our Lord have to say, 'Fear not'? One day two first formers came to me in distress over some tale that there were evil spirits in two particular trees. They believed my explanation and went away happier and stronger Catholics.

Then I moved from Amisano to Ajegunle. There can hardly be a greater contrast. Instead of a paradise of natural beauty, I saw a warren of tenement houses which provided home of one room — two or three if the new tenants could pay a year's rent in advance. The tenements had been erected hastily by landlords who had seen an opportunity for profit in the thousands of people who left their own rural area after the Civil War. People still come, hoping to find work (today a barren hope for most) or education in the former capital of Nigeria.

Children play, read, dance, quarrel in the streets and in the mission compound. The other open spaces belong to multinational companies and are barred to children, but they are happy with their few possessions. The younger children love, admire and learn from their older siblings who care for them, carry them on their backs and do for them all that they can. Every afternoon, in St Mary's Church compound, classes are run by unpaid volunteer catechists who gladly give up three or four hours a week to prepare children and adults for the reception of the sacraments. The catechists are not alone in their desire to help others; the same spirit runs through all the church societies, of which there are many. 'It's the poor who help the poor', and this is certainly true of the people of Ajegunle, for a more caring community it has never been my good fortune to meet. The Cardoso Catholic Community project, begun in 1972 by Helena Brennan, SHCJ, has grown since her day. It is still run by members of the Society with the same aim — to aid in human development.

For seventeen years Africa has been my home, a home where I live with my sisters, a home perhaps unique in the Society. Five of us live and work together in the same place, with the same spirit, the spirit of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

I carry with me a private heartache. When I was in Ghana I visited some of the castles along that beautiful coast and was filled with shame when I saw something of the horrors of the slave trade carried on by my own rapacious countrymen.

Today in Ajegunle we have pain, too — the pain of being able to do so little to alleviate the pain of our friends who are suffering from the greed of the powerful and the rich.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF JOY

Ann Schulte, SHCJ

A FAREWELL Party is in full swing, and our house is alive with the guests, about forty-five in all. Many have brought different 'dishes' to make the Farewell a communal and joyful affair. The group seems to be a miniature United Nations, with people from Nigeria, Sri Lanka, England, Ireland and Holland. The group is also a cross section of tribes from Nigeria with Yoruba, Ibo, Hausa and the tribes of Gombe, Bauchi and Jos present. Further the group is an interfaith one with Moslems and Christians, Catholic, Anglican and Baptist present. It includes also a cross section of society, including a commissioner, two managing directors, teachers, a welder, priests, housewives, administrators, a doctor and crippled people.

Looking at some old photos I have just been transported back to the Farewell Party given to me when I left Bauchi in 1983, and for me perhaps it sums up something of all the gifts, joys and growth I have experienced since I came to West Africa. In miniature that party could be a sign of the Messianic Banquet when North and South shall sit down together 'at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven' (Matt. 8:11).

One inspiration of my life has been to see how Christ came to break down all barriers between races, colour, social standing and faiths in order to build one human community of God's Family. Somehow my coming to the SHCJ in West Africa has given me much scope for building community in many ways, and so to reflect, even though very faintly, the community of the Godhead.

Firstly we have our own mixed SHCJ communities. Sometimes we find American, English, Irish, Nigerian and Ghanian all living together, especially in Jos in the novitiate, and in varying combinations in other houses where I have lived. The richness this brings when one receives each person as a gift from the Lord, helps one to see God's reflection in many mirrors of different national characteristics. It can also be a humbling experience all round, when one hears how others view one's own country of origin.

In my case the colonial period in Nigeria and Ghana is a hard one to be associated with. The nightwatch in the mission here in Bolgatanga tells how his father and other men used to carry the District Officer on their heads when he visited the villages. Shortly after I arrived there was a celebration of 'Black is Beautiful' in a cultural interchange between different African Countries under the umbrella name of FESTAC. Dances, songs and dramas depicted the history, life and culture in many different African countries. One night there was a play depicting

the suffering brought by the slave trade of the White Man. It was not easy to sit through this, and yet the sinfulness of our world past and present has to be acknowledged, especially when its effects are still with us.

The intertribalism of our small group of SHCJ has been another enrichment for me. As in many places people have stories usually against another group, so too the different tribes have stories which build pride in one's own tribe, sometimes at the expense of other tribes. When we live together we have to work at getting beyond our prejudices about each other and start with the respect due to all as God's Family. I remember once I lived with an Ibo and a Yoruba sister, each of whom had been on different sides, and had strong different opinions, about the Biafran Civil War. I was impressed how they reacted when the topic came up for discussion, listening to each other's views. In fact it struck me that sometimes it must be harder for our sisters of different tribes or from Ghana and Nigeria to live together than for African sisters to live with expatriate sisters.

The values of the community of the extended family, with the responsibility to care for one another often at great personal cost and sacrifice are an example for me, coming from a different perspective where often the nuclear family works to get ahead, and the state is left to see to those who are sick, out of work etc.

The respect for the elderly and the full role they play in the family has also touched me, as it is different from the experience of many elderly people in the west. Once an Alhaji phoned me up on January 1st to say he had a donation for me, and I should come and collect it. When I arrived at his office (where he was working even though it was an official holiday) he asked me whether I had thought of building a place for old people. I said I hadn't and that I would not be in favour of doing so, especially in the more rural areas. I added that it seemed to me that the one thing an elderly person needs above all is to belong to a family. It might be that in their family the material comforts were not so many, but well-being of spirit, sense of purpose in their role and their strong sense of belonging to the group, were far more important.

This respect for the elderly particularly struck me when I went with Sr Cecilia Nya to celebrate her father's 80th birthday, when nearly all her married brothers and sisters with their grandchildren were present in their family home. The same was true when I went with Sr Sophia Onuora for a special church occasion for her mother.

In Nigeria and Ghana crippled and blind people have become my friends, and working with them has brought many blessings of its own. One has been the way many have rallied round to help raise funds for wheelchairs or for Braille machines. In fact probably the main link between the community of different people at the Farewell Party was the work for crippled people.

When I see someone's great joy in receiving a wheelchair despite a disability, I am ashamed of any depressed moments I might have. Further their tremendous efforts to help themselves is amazing. When blind Ibrahim finished at the Teacher Training College, I still had not got the Braille machines, but he was employed as a teacher in a sighted Primary School. There he taught reading, but before he went to class he had to get someone to read the passage onto his tape recorder which he painstakingly put into Braille by hand, and then 'read' with the students the next day, apparently with no discipline problems. Here in Ghana, Charles, a crippled

man has a shoe repairing stall in his village market. He used, at great effort and pain to himself, to walk on his calipers and crutches to his stall, but now he has a wheelchair as he and his family saved up part of the money. To many Ibrahim and Charles may be poor and powerless and materially they are so, but their openness to co-operate with gifts is a sign for me when I forget that anything accomplished is by co-operating with God's gifts.

My dream for the future is to see the presence of African and non-African sisters in areas of racial problems in Europe and the States to show that with patience, openness and willingness to forgive, we can break down the barriers and walls between races and peoples, and so begin to build the community of peace, unity and joy, for which the Lord became incarnate. My experience as an SHCJ living in West Africa has greatly enriched and fleshed out this dream.

'PIED BEAUTY' — TRIBUTE TO THE BEAUTY OF DIFFERENCE

Alma Cornely, SHCJ

THE varied articles celebrating the centennial of Gerald Manley Hopkins in periodicals both here and abroad have moved me to take time for a favourite, albeit neglected, occupation, reading poetry. Among the books on my shelf is the *Collected Poems* of Sr Mary Anthony Weinig SHCJ and I paused for reflection on her poem 'Half a Dialogue with Cornelia'. The enrichment of internationality which I have experienced as an SHCJ has its point of origin in the response of a Victorian Philadelphia woman to a call to go forth, to leave the known. Cornelia Connelly,

> 'left these staid squares, gardens forefatherly
> Proprieties, seeking God's will in the knife
> Edge of your husband's calling, Fidelity
> Fidelity. Whose hand held the instrument
> You never doubted.....'

This response to a call is part of our shared story and deep under all our cultural differences is the realisation that we as SHCJ have been enriched by the beauty of 'landscapes plotted and pieced' where our responses to similar calls have led us.

For twenty years my whole personhood was touched by cultural influences significantly different from each other but intertwined in an historical inter-action which left its mark on each — British, Irish and West African. Nigeria and Ghana, where the Society had answered a call to help with the education of women, provided those of us fortunate to be part of this exhilarating movement with a true international living experience. There was, per force, mutuality of ministry. The SHCJ schooled in the British educational system, (Irish and English) took the lead in professional matters, our African co-workers carefully introduced us to matters of protocol in dealing with tribal leaders and taught us the rudiments of cultural moves. We Americans put into the mix our spontaneity, willingness to plunge in and a certain impatient determination to find efficient shortcuts.

Did our differences cause friction in community living? Certainly. Did we see the value of our complementarity? A definite yes. In the 1960's a proposal was made suggesting that the international sharing of ministries should be discontinued. The American Province would be responsible for Nigeria and the English Province for Ghana. All of us living and working in the West African Vicariate voiced our consternation. Was the richness of international living no longer to be part of SHCJ life? Fortunately, wiser thinking prevailed and this impoverishment never occurred.

In West Africa we not only experienced international SHCJ community living but we were part of a real international church — lay Grail members from Holland, German Misereor workers, members of large international religious communities — the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, the Divine Word Fathers, indigenous communities such as the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters, all pooling resources in the emerging African church. The opportunity to participate in exhuberant liturgical celebrations forever impressed on my mind vivid pictures of colourful crowds singing and dancing their praise of Yahweh, totally unafraid of sound and movement.

The natural beauty of West Africa is part of my most treasured memory pictures. Moonlit palm trees swaying in a light breeze, the scent of orange trees in bloom and the perfume of frangipani trees outside the door of Ifuho's Prince of Peace chapel. The mighty rush of rain through the forests surrounding some of our remote village schools signalling an end to the searing heat of the dry season. A large canoe filled with Ghanaian fishermen standing triumphantly silhouetted against an unbelievable sunset as they glided over the reef into the safe harbour.

How did the lives of the African people enrich me? Many strands are braided in my consciousness — one, that body and spirit are one and are to be fully incorporated into our life stance; another, the full possibility of joyous living without the clutter of many things which are often considered essential. A concept far more radical and with deep implications is an understanding of the historical watershed through which we are living. Many things changed forever: colonies became independent countries, the transistor radio and later television cut across the isolation of tribal groups. Daily witnessing of the inequities in the international division of the world's riches made me realise that we are called to bring to bear on our world, in our time, no matter what our particular ministry may be, the gospel message of Luke 4.

Nigeria, Ghana and then in 1970, Italy. Eight years of international community living in Rome at Casa Cornelia, our generalate's name reminding us of Cornelia's years in this special city. My ministry demanded that I become involved in various Roman Justice and Peace groups both Italian and international. The resulting cross-cultural stimulation made it impossible for me to think of world happenings from a one dimensional viewpoint. This expansion of my whole understanding of how life can be seen enabled me to be conscious of the 'burning bush', the 'holy ground'; and I took off my shoes.

This international dimension of my life was made possible because the daughters of Cornelia Connelly whom I had as teachers made her charism, her response to call come alive in my life. This call bridged time and space and has been a source of deep clear water welling up to refresh and vivify each new call that has come from the Lord of my life, a Lord whose prodigality revelled in the beauty of differences. As Gerald Manley Hopkins wrote:

> All things counter, original, spare, strange;
> Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
> With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
> He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
> Praise him.

MY AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

Margaret M Donnelly, SHCJ

I WILL always thank God for my time in Africa, as I gained not only in years but in appreciation of other people, other places, and different ways of living. When I arrived in Nigeria in the September of 1950 in the company of Sr Catherine Duffy (R.I.P.), we had had a rough passage by banana boat to the Cameroons, and then by plane to Calabar and lastly by road to Ifuho. In Ifuho I joined a large international community — Mth. M. Osmonde (Vicar), Sr Teresa Xavier (USA), Sr Alma Cornely (USA), Sr Virginia Whitten (USA), Sr M Henry Parker (Eng), Sr Winifred Pusey (Eng), Sr Tirzah Garman (Eng), Sr Romana Dougherty (USA) and myself (Irish).

At that time Sr Alma, or Stephanie as she was known then, was in charge of the outside schools (bush schools). These were the primary schools, mostly staffed by the Holy Child students from Ifuho College. They covered quite a large area and kept Sr Alma and her assistant, either Sr Romana or Sr Anne Phyllis Ryan, busy supervising them. I mostly taught in the College — Art, Religion and Infant Teaching Methods. I also helped in the Twinnery. Sr Teresa Una, some foster mothers and myself looked after the twins brought into us. We loved this work which we shared with the Handmaids who were so helpful; we all visited the children every day. Often we washed and fed them, and played with them when we found the time. This work was taken over by the Medical Missionaries of Mary.

Our style of life was very simple. We had no electric light, so the caller, a different person every week, lit bush lamps and as she called each sister handed in the lamp to her. Meditation followed and then Mass at 6.15 a.m. Breakfast came about 7 a.m. and life in the college took on from there. There was a break about 11 a.m. and back until dinner at 1.30 p.m. We had siesta for an hour and spiritual reading followed. This was a feat of endurance, as it was very hot at this time and we were often bathed in sweat whilst trying to pay attention to the reading. After this we had a cold drink and then to office in the chapel. Classes in the college followed until around 5.30 p.m. Recreation came next, followed by supper and night prayers. Darkness fell about 6.30 p.m. so we were back with bush lamps which we used to light us to our baths and to bed.

This style of life was the normal pattern in the 50's and it was not until the Biafran War and the Vatican Council in the middle of the 60's that the pattern was broken and life-long habits were adjusted to suit the changing world. This upheaval caused many a heart-ache and quite a few religious and priests found themselves called to a more secular life and left the religious or priestly life.

I don't think we in Africa had the changes introduced in the same way as at

home, in Ireland, England or the States. Theirs was a gradual shift, but ours came on us suddenly and was almost demanded of us. I remember vividly our first experience of shared prayer. The fears and terrors that chased up and down inside me were just unbelievable. I could not picture myself praying like that. Next came the change of habit. Getting into shorter skirts and blouses was a feat in itself as they left much to be desired. Our first efforts were, to say the least, very unattractive.

Both the spiritual and outward changes caused a lot of sadness and confusion, but gradually we lived through them and when on leave we followed some courses which helped us to keep in touch with things and to become more familiar with our world.

Looking back now on my years in Africa, I thank God for all the peace, joy, and friendship I experienced there. Our African sisters and the people gave us their support and trust and we in turn helped them as best we could. Mistakes were made and sorrows on both sides suffered, but on the whole the benefits we all reaped were more than the discomforts we had to endure.

The closeness of our living together in community made us appreciate each other's gifts and talents. Here we practised 'internationality' before it became an 'in word'. And this richness of interrelationships did much to broaden and widen our horizons, and strengthened the bond between us. The war in Biafra itself showed us how useless violence is and how unnecessary are certain things in life. All in all, Africa was a very rich experience. I grew more appreciative of God's gifts in nature around me, got a deeper understanding of people and their differences, and developed a desire to pray always for Africa, its needs and its people.

Africa Revisited

Marjorie Lee, SHCJ

WHEN I left West Africa in 1980, I thought that I would never return, but an invitation from Archbishop Amissah to attend the silver jubilee celebrations of the Sisters of the Infant Jesus in Cape Coast gave me an opportunity to visit places and people in both Nigeria and Ghana that I had known and loved for many years.

In late August I arrived in Calabar, and on the 28th the Sisters of the Holy Child, many friends and 'old girls' celebrated the 52nd anniversary of Sister Mary Hubert's and my arrival in West Africa. We all enjoyed the buffet supper prepared by the community and, of course, the renewal of friendships formed over forty years ago.

Looking back over half a century, I recalled Calabar as it was then. Priests from the newly established Society of St Patrick were in the mission stations, our SHCJ numbered eight sisters, four in Calabar and four in Ifuho. The four first Handmaids of the Holy Child were in Ifuho in the fifth month of their noviceship, and with the exception of a Church of Scotland Teacher Training College for men, education was at the primary school level. During those early years every student's goal was to possess a Standard Six Leaving Certificate.

Today most of the mud homes with palm-thatched roofs have been replaced with permanent buildings. There is a variety of secondary, commercial, and technical schools, and the University of Calabar has been conferring degrees for several years. The minor seminary has helped prepare so many young men for the priesthood that relatively few expatriate priests now serve the large Catholic population.

Mary James Edet, an associate member of our Society, drove me to Ifuho to visit the Handmaids of the Holy Child. Their congregation now numbers over 400 sisters who spread the good news in several African countries. I was very pleased to meet again many of our past Calabar students; one is the superior general, and the others are now the older sisters of the congregation.

Since education courses are generally taught in the universities, the teacher training college begun by our sisters in the late 1930s is now a secondary school. It was good to see 'Holy Child School' on a signboard outside the Ifuho convent.

Back in Calabar I visited our original convent, now occupied by the Handmaids, and prayed at the graves of the first three Handmaids who are buried near the chapel. The primary school is presently administered by the government, while the Handmaids conduct a large international school with 400 children.

As I left Calabar for Accra, I enjoyed my final view of this vastly expanded town with its many housing estates, banks, permanent buildings, and an Olympic-size swimming pool. If there were mud houses, I couldn't see them from the plane. At

the Accra airport, our Nigerian Airways plane landed beside a SwissAir plane, and at the baggage claim area, I learned that Sister Nora Sweeney was on that plane bound for the US. I had hoped to see her before she left Ghana and had missed her by just a few minutes. Sister Margaret Ogejofo, whose mother I had taught in Calabar, met me at the airport and took me to our convent in Cape Coast where I stayed for the remainder of my visit to Ghana.

The Sisters of the Infant Jesus gave me a tremendous welcome. It had been my privilege to have been associated with them from 1961 to 1970 — their first years as candidates followed by the formation years of the Society of the Infant Jesus. Three of the candidates followed by the formation years of the Society of the Infant Jesus. Three of the candidates were the first members of the Society, one being their superior general for the past few years.

It was indeed most rewarding to see the few numbers I left in January 1970 now increased to twenty-nine professed, fourteen under final and fifteen under temporary vows, and five novices. I also met twenty-five of their forty pre-candidates — a promising future for the young Society. The sisters are engaged in teaching, nursing, social welfare work, one is a housekeeper for Archbishop Amissah, and another is in charge of catechetics for the Archdiocese of Cape Coast. Usually I attended daily Mass 'On the Hill', as we refer to the SIJ Convent, and I was very impressed with the way the sisters had introduced their African culture into their liturgies and ceremonies.

The formal celebration of their Jubilee had been transferred to December, but on September 10th there was a final profession of three sisters in the Cape Coast Cathedral. Delegations from all the towns where the sisters are engaged in their various ministries came to the cathedral, and after the ceremony a reception was held at the Infant Jesus Convent for about three hundred guests.

Another unexpected joy came with the arrival of the Old Girls Association that gathered for a week-end in Cape Coast. They seemed pleased to have an SHCJ meet them and celebrate Mass with them in the school chapel. Of course, they asked about all our sisters who had taught them.

Finally, many former employees who had worked on the compound came to greet me. Although some are now retired they have not forgotten us. For example, one painter named every sister he had known in the late 40's.

I admired the loyalty and devotion of all our friends in Ghana and Nigeria. The Society is well-remembered from the days when our first missionaries arrived until the present. My visit was a rewarding experience, and so is the knowledge that many African sisters now carry on the work begun in 1930 by those early missionaries.

A NOTE ON GOD AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE IN TWO WEST AFRICAN SETTINGS

Eileen Sweeney, SHCJ

Elechi Amada: *The Great Ponds.* Heinemann, London 1969.
Afua Kuma: *Jesus of the Deep Forest.* Asempa Publishers, Accra 1981.

THE concept 'spiritual life' would have little meaning for an African if it were considered as a separate entity, something not part and parcel of ordinary life. Africans naturally reason holistically, and do not operate on the narrower western mode of analysing things into separate compartments. In his essay, 'The African Road to Socialism' Leopold Sedar Senghor, the Senegalese poet and statesman, tells us how, faced with the object to be known — the Other, whether God, person, animal, tree or pebble — an African 'takes it vibrant into his hands, careful not to kill or fix it'. The African senses this object totally, feels with it, 'abandons his personality to become identified with the Other . . . He lives a common life with the Other; he lives in a symbiosis.'[1]

For the African, God, people and nature are inextricably bound together. There is a free flow of energy and relationship among them. In pre-Christian Africa the gods, for instance, are not somewhere out there. Elechi Amadi, a versatile writer of fiction, autobiography, ethics, literary criticism, gives us an insight into this inter-related world in his novel *The Great Ponds* when he describes how Olumba, the novel's hero, thinks of the gods as 'invisible, elusive, woven into the fabric of time and space, nay, woven into the very bodies of their worshippers, for one was born only at their pleasure, one worshipped them as long as one lived, and died when one had committed an unpardonable offence against them".[2]

But this closeness to their worshippers did not in any way obscure their mystery — Olumba asks, 'How did the gods reason anyway? True, they dispensed justice impartially, but the impartiality was based on arguments which at times could be untenable from the human point of view'.[3]

Because of his regard for justice, a god would be shamed if any evil befell devotees who had placed themselves under the god's protection. 'The gods are wise and will always protect the innocent,'[4] Olumba tells his wife, Nyoma. When, later, Olumba suffers an accident and Nyoma thanks Amadioha, the god of thunder, and Ojukwu, the earth god, for saving his life, she begs them to 'stand behind your son and sustain him lest any man should accuse you of injustice'.[5]

The setting for this novel is the Delta region of Rivers State in Southern Nigeria; and the tribe involved are the Ikwerre. Elechi Amadi is an Ikwerre, an intellectual, trained academically in the western mode. He wrote his novels to reveal his

people's civilisation and culture to the world. Like Chinua Achebe, he would like us to realise that 'African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry, and above all, they had dignity'.[6] This same depth and value and beauty is evident in their religion. In Amadi's novels we see his people totally immersed in the 'original blessing' of God's created world, God's primary self revelation. They recognised that, 'Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible nature, namely God's eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made'.[7] As we know, this creation spirituality is now being re-discovered by western theologians.

Afua Kuma is a very different writer: A farmer in the forests of Kwahu in Central Ghana, who never received any formal education. Her book, *Jesus of the Deep Forest* uses 'the language of African customs and proverbs, and African traditions of worship and chieftaincy, to praise the name of Jesus.'[8]

For Afua Kuma, Jesus is part and parcel of everyday life as Amadioha, Ala, Ogunabali were part of the lives of the Ikwerre people. Jesus is 'the day of month when I get my pay . . . the Thumb, without which we cannot tie a knot . . . The Spider's web is his fishing line'. He is

The Great Rock we hide behind:
the great forest canopy that gives cool shade:
the Big Tree which lifts its vines
to peep at the heavens,
the magnificent Tree whose dripping leaves
encourage the luxuriant growth below[9]

Jesus is also

the great Grass Hut, the Shed which shelters mice,
The 'Thump, Thump' of the pestle;
he beats down our hunger.

Kuma tells Jesus

You are the deep forest which gives us tasty foods.
The forest of cane and thorns.

Her imagery for Jesus is not confined to natural phenomena, great or small. Modern technology is also pressed into the service of the praises of Jesus — he is 'the Caterpillar who ploughs up the land'; he is hammer and wedge; a gun 'hot in battle' is carried to his chest.

If the machine is ruined
the Mechanic will take care of it.

As a wonderworker Jesus is the almighty:

Jesus is the one who shouted at Death
and Death ran from his face.

When we met with Jesus
he had tied together both sickness and death,
and cast them into the sea.

This is the reason the nations rejoice
and the people are happy.[10]

These are only a few examples from the wealth of Elechi Amadi's and Afua Kuma's imaginations; we can be grateful to them for the insight they give us into a way of life — of yesterday and today — where God, the spiritual life, ordinary daily life are being constantly woven together in an intricate and beautiful dance. 'I feel, I dance the Other. I am'.[11]

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A HOMILY ON THE PRIESTHOOD OF MARY

Helen Forshaw, SHCJ

Given at St John's Seminary, November 1989

Readings for the Common of the B.V.M.
Acts 1:12-14 (Mary with the Apostles in the Upper Room after the Ascension)
John 19:25-27 (Mary & John at the foot of the Cross)

THE two readings present Mary in a profoundly priestly relationship — whether one thinks of the priesthood of all the faithful or of the ordained ministry. We see her *with* her dying Son; she is *with* the infant Church in the Upper Room, just as she was *with* the Child Jesus when the Magi came to find him.

To help us contemplate the priestly quality of this *being with,* I have here two pictures of Mary which express it very powerfully. The first is the ancient icon of Mary with the Holy Child Jesus which is in St Mary Major's, Rome. Mary holds the Child tenderly but not possessively. The focus is not the Mother's joy. The focus is on the offering of the Word of God. Jesus is depicted as the Incarnate Word. He gazes away from her, one hand stretched out in the gesture of teaching, the other clasping a book. Mary holds the Word of God in order to offer that life-giving Word to the whole human family. She is with the Word, and at the same time she is clearly with us. Her eyes look out from the picture penetrating the farthest reaches of time and space. She seems to be saying: 'Here is the Word of life. Take it — Listen to it — Savour it — Let it grow in you. And in your turn offer this Word to others.'

The second picture is Michaelangelo's Pieta in St Peter's. Here we see Mary with the mortal body of her Son taken down from the Cross. At one level the sculpture is quite unrealistic: the serene beauty of the figures is far removed from what the brutal reality must have been. Yet the artist has captured the deep meaning of this moment. Once again Mary holds her Son, tenderly but not possessively. The focus is not her grief. Our eyes are drawn to look down, with her, at the broken body of her Son. She is with him in this priestly way, holding in order to offer him. 'Here is the body broken for you; here is the body broken for love of you; receive this love; let it heal your brokeness; let it cast out your fear; let it make you whole. And in your turn be with the Body of Christ, be with his Church, be with each member in their joy, in their grief, in their goodness, in their sinfulness. Let love break you for the healing and reconciliation of others.'

What is it to be a priest, but to be with the Crucified Lord, that he may be offered to those who are sick and hungry for the Bread of Life.

What is to be a priest, but to be with the Crucified Lord, that he may be offered to those who are sick and hungry for the Bread of Life.

What is it to be a priest, but, like Mary, to be always with Jesus and with his Body, the Church.

CONTRIBUTORS

ALMA CORNELY returned form Africa 19 years ago and now organises the finances for a centre for severely handicapped children in Charlotte.
MARGARET M. DONNELLY spent 23 years in Africa and is now bursar of the hostel in Harcourt Street, Dublin and a part-time parish sister.
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TERESA MEE, a former member of the staff of the Centre for Renewal in Jos, has been studying at the Mexican American Cultural Center, San Antonio, Texas, as she prepares for new ministry.
JOSEPHINE OLAGUNJU is Director of the Centre for Renewal in Jos.
ANN SCHULTE teaches at the secondary school in Bolgatanga as well as working with the disadvantaged.
EILEEN SWEENEY, a member of the African province, is currently living at Harcourt Street, Dublin and doing research into the history of her province.