



On The Edge

Editorial

Lights for the Future

Danielle Julien, mfic, Editor

I was reading an article recently in *The Cord* talking about the “*Sacrum Commercium*” (Daniel Horan OFM, [II Poverello and Lod Pobres: Reading the Sacred Exchange in Light of South American Poverty, Vol 60, no 1](#)). One sentence caught my attention: « It is only after we move to accept God’s Wisdom over earthly wisdom that we can begin to free ourselves of worldly preoccupations. »

While reading another article in *Évangile Aujourd’hui* (Gospel Today) (No 224, October-November-December 2004), I discovered a Franciscan practice going back to the XV century: [Mounts of Piety](#).¹ I linked this practice with the creation of alternatives to the model and capitalist economic system that it is uppermost to install in order to save the planet and especially humanity. The mounts of piety are a form of charitable actions whose objective “is to build the Christian community on mutual trust and active charity”; it was about loans, in money or nature (like seeds for the farmers), “give generously and freely without any interest so little may it be”, with guarantees of reimbursements; the quantities loaned were small and for a short period. “The basic thought is to ask the well-off to facilitate the credit for those in need who had sufficient capacity and initiative to make the most of it. Thus was developed the work of those who could not have developed their activities without this help.” The loans took into consideration the economic situation of beneficiary: the person, with her reality, was replaced at the center of the economy and of the social life to become an actor and a co-actor of the common destiny, to her rightful place above the capital and economic efficiency. This was a form of redistributive justice, the Gospel in action in the wake of the initial Franciscan movement.

In this kind of system, the credit and the salary « are conceived in function of the particular capacities and necessities of real persons. Thus are stimulated the solidarity and involvement of all to the common good. Ethics gives an orientation to economy; the common good prevails over the individual good.” The house is built on rock. The mounts of piety are examples of actual initiatives like microcredit, micro-finance and the ethic bank. These initiatives are counter-current to the logic and the wisdom of the capitalist world and they go in the sense of God’s wisdom who wants happiness and well-being for all of his children.

Now, let’s turn the page, and meet women from Asia, aborigines from Australia, Sudanese from Africa, Bolivians and Peruvians from Latin America, then get out of these pages and see those you meet whose story is not yet told. Do you see initiatives that resemble those from the mounts of piety? Tell us about them! Otherwise, what would happen if, where you cast your eyes, there were some alternatives valorising justice in a similar manner?

There is a risk in transgressing the limits to dare to say that the world is not running smoothly. It is risky to say: we could do it another way. It needs courage to say: we will try it. It needs audacity to say: you’ll see it will work! Elizabeth Hayes would probably have done it, she whose feast we celebrate on May 6. “In face of these dark perspectives, the time, for men and women, capable of making the lights for the future shine, has come.” (Hervé Kempf, [To save the planet, get out of capitalism](#), p. 134). We, MFIC Sisters, with all the people within our enlarged circles of communion and solidarity involvement, we are of these men and women.

¹ Article translated from the Spanish review Truth and Life.

AMOR Conference

Maureen Andrew, mfic

This year it was my good fortune to attend the gathering of AMOR XV (Asia-Oceania Meeting of Religious) held at Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Training Centre of Bangkok Archdiocese in Thailand. This fifteenth meeting of AMOR focused on the theme of Jesus Encounters the Syro-Phoenician Woman: Women Religious of Asia-Oceania Called to Move Beyond. The beauty of the centre with its windows overlooking the artificial lake with a pavilion in the centre combined with the gardens outside captured by the joy and beauty of the people gathered within. It was hard to imagine a more wonderful moment.



From 13-21 October 2009, 110 women journeyed together listening, reflecting and understanding the call of the God of history who moves us beyond as experienced by the Syro-Phoenician woman and by Jesus himself. Tom Fox, from National Catholic Reporter, was the lone man at the program and he wrote daily reports for the website which no doubt many of you have read.

There was a well prepared exposure program where we were given the opportunity to experience the reality of the people in Thai society. The story of my own experience with Sister Joan Evans, a Presentation sister from Perth, who lives in the Klong Toey slums, has been retold many times since my return home. Through Sister Joan we met Father Jo Maier who has lived and worked in Bangkok for 40 years. His work with Mercy Care brought tears to our eyes when we sat and talked to the children who had caught AIDS from their parents.

The theological reflections challenged us to reflect on our experience and move beyond our own religious, social, cultural and gender boundaries. The person who really impressed me was Sister Rekha Chennattu. She was down to earth, inclusive and Jesus-centred as she explained how the Canaanite woman challenges women religious to redefine their identity and mission today. This was a 'WOW' moment for me.



Meeting so many religious from Asia reinforced my belief that women have special charisms. They are good at listening, are multi-skilled, perceptive and intuitive. Being energized by the reflections, shared Eucharist and the exposure programs I was challenged to reflect on and assess how the congregation I belong to can better be of service to the church and to the wider society. It is my belief that more than ever both the Church and society need the voices of committed and energetic Christian women as they keep moving beyond and ahead giving expression to the aspirations of all that is best in society.

In the words of Edna Mary MacDonald, a member of the AMOR Committee "Believing in the power of Jesus Christ we go forth with the persuasive and daring spirit of the Syro-Phoenician woman moving boundaries whenever and wherever humanity and all of creation stand in need of healing and wholeness."

As a follow up to this conference I am organising a Program in Burma to teach English and give the Burmese sisters some spiritual input. The Program will run for one month. Teachers of English as a Second Language, Missionary Franciscan Sisters and some priests familiar with Burma will be the tutors. Grants will come from CRA (Catholic Religious Australia), Catholic Religious Australia (Qld), Australian Catholic University, and some religious groups. It is one way that we can promote the missionary spirit.

A Resurrection Story

Cecilia Prest, mfic

This is a small glimpse into our ministry among the Australian Indigenous community in Woorabinda, Central Queensland. I teamwork here with Fr.Pat McGeever, a Spiritan with long years of missionary experience and the ability to not take life too seriously.

The town is an ex-Govt. reserve with a sad history of injustice and racism, and a longer history in the memories of the people of trauma inflicted on themselves and their ancestors. Some whole families are now suffering trans-generational post-traumatic stress which has led to substance abuse and social dysfunction.

Our ministry here is basically a ministry of presence and of empowerment through compassion and non-judgmental acceptance of everyone, especially the women and children. Building relationships takes a long time here so each one is a cause for celebration!

I will not use names in this story.

"*She* was a waif of a child, forced upon the mother who never loved or wanted her. When Fr.Pat first met her calling in for lollies after school *she* was eight - a charming , beautiful, quick-witted child and natural leader among the other "kids." One day he found the young gang in his storeroom; one boy trying to give another a haircut with the electric drill while a third tipped out a box of nails and a girl demolished a bottle of altar wine. The kids scattered when they saw Fr.Pat, but when he couldn't stop laughing they returned to help clean up the mess .When he realised *she* was missing he raced out to the kitchen just in time to see her nipping out the front gate with his biscuits!

She was in and out of trouble over the years and was moved to the Child Shelter just out of town in the bush, but *she* knew we loved her, and called in whenever *she* was in town.

In her teens *she* became addicted to petrol sniffing. One 5am I heard the church window smash and saw a slight figure in a balaclava .Fr.Pat was already out walking. By the time I got there the church doors were open but no-one was inside. The door to the presbytery from the church was still intact. I saw the figure again outside on the street. There *she* was, clutching a plastic bottle with petrol in the bottom. The fumes took my breath away! *She* looked so sad and thin; so lonely and unloved, and so ashamed. As we sat together *she* agreed to tip out the petrol and listened as I described God's dream for her...made in His image... so precious.

She returned to Woorabinda recently after some years away and proudly introduced us to her boyfriend, a shy, gentle young man who obviously loved her. *She* was radiant! *She* joyfully told us *she* was pregnant with a little girl, and that they wanted her "done" (baptised) in our church...

She loves to call in and chat and "story" and laugh about the past. It's hard to recognise her now from the wild child that *she* was...

Despite everything, *she* remembered *she* was loved - as *she* was - and that changed everything. Alleluia!"

Aiming for food sovereignty in the Yungas

Jean Morrissey, mfic

On the 12 of March 2010, Susan Cahill, the producer of Irish Talk Radio, chose to visit Universidad Académica Campesina -- Carmen Pampa in preparation for a program to be aired on World Food Day. This day of awareness is celebrated every year on October 16th and 2010's theme is "Feeding One Billion Hungry."

In her research, Susan interviewed staff from the College concerning the importance of education in the empowerment of farmers. She probed issues regarding rural poverty in general and in particular, issues such as access to food and the factors which influence food production.

In an interview with Dr. Hugh Smeltekop, Vice Director of the College and the guiding force behind many student thesis projects, she discussed agricultural development in the region and the basic human right to food sovereignty.

From Kyle Piispanen, a graduate student at Oregon State University who is here teaching Tropical Ecology in the Agronomy department, she learned about the Yungas' relative importance in the fight for food sovereignty and culturally appropriate food production, considering the high nutritional content of traditional Andean foods.



Those interviewed were proud to say that students here are actively engaged in research that could improve food sovereignty in the region, with one of the most important programs at the College being the Research Institute. Two students, for example, recently presented fascinating results regarding healthy milk production and appropriate soil for lentil cultivation.

For further interesting articles about the work of our students at the College in Carmen Pampa, I suggest you look at Carmen Pampa Fund communications liaison Sarah Mechtenberg's website at www.uchumachi.blogspot.com. In order to witness the College's mission statement come to life, Sarah frequently visits rural areas where our graduates now work and is incredibly animated about the creativity and dedication with which they involve themselves in projects.

In the early 1990's Sister Damon Nolan had a vision for a better life for Bolivia's poor and now it is being realized every day in many parts of the Nor and Sur Yungas rural areas.

Injustice and Corruption in Peru

Ancilla Grenham, mfic

The system of justice and the work of the police in Peru is very corrupt and unjust. It is difficult to believe this but recent experience has shown us several examples which give us good reasons for a real lack of confidence in the work of the police and the system of justice. When one needs the help of the police, one has to pay different amounts of money to them and this applies also to the district attorneys and the judges - if one wants justice. Truly there is no justice if one cannot pay their demands and sometimes that means large sums of money. So really there is no justice for many citizens, because they do not have the finance. So the poor cannot obtain justice.

In August 2009, Javier Torres Ruiz had work as a night watchman in Colán beach, which is a first class seaside area. Javier comes from a family of workers. They are not rich and neither are they very poor. It is a good family that works hard to live. They are a Catholic family and they practice their faith praying in the home. Javier has finished his university but has not been able to get his certificate because it costs a large sum and many students are not able to pay those demands. For this reason, it is possible to meet many students who have finished studying for their careers but are driving taxis or mototaxis or other types of work.

Javier had two days free so he returned to his home in Villa Jardin which is a pueblo near the city of Piura. During those two days, he chose to drive the taxi of a neighbor so as to earn some more money. Young people here are always looking for opportunities to earn more because the pay of workers in Peru is very low and the young are trying to prepare for their future lives. At the beginning of those two days, all was well for Javier. But the first night, a youth who was riding a motorcycle had a small accident with Javier and immediately the youth pulled out a gun and held it to Javier's head. Javier had seen a policeman one block behind and ran back to get help. The youth who was riding the motorcycle belongs to a gang.

Instead of helping Javier, the policeman took him in and accused him of stealing a motorcycle-something that had taken place earlier that day in another part of Piura. He accused Javier also of being a member of a gang and presented him with a large book of photos of members of different gangs in Piura and asked him to identify them. Of course, Javier denied being a member of a gang and denied that he knew any of the youth in the photos. Asked if the youth with whom he had had the accident was in the group he replied no, but possibly one of them looked like him. For saying this, the policeman accused him of being a member of a gang and of stealing the motorcycle – already mentioned. Javier was abused and beaten to make him sign a document to this effect.

Javier called his family who came and because they didn't have a lawyer, one from the state took responsibility for Javier. He was a witness to the fact that Javier was beaten and abused by the police and forced to sign the document mentioned. The lawyer himself wrote and signed a document testifying to the police abuse. The police and the district attorney demanded two thousand soles to free Javier and not to send him to the penitentiary. His family went running to friends and neighbors trying to borrow the money. But after paying it, Javier was not freed but instead sent to the prison to await another hearing.

After two weeks there was another hearing and Javier was sentenced to four years in prison, without any form of proof. What was very strange was the document signed by the state lawyer testifying to the police abuse and forced signature had disappeared. Javier and his family were ordered to pay three thousand dollars for the stolen motorcycle and two thousand soles to the court. After a month, the district attorney with three members of a gang went to Javier's house to take possession of it, if they did not pay the two thousand soles. To pay all the finance mentioned, as well as pay the lawyer, the family had to borrow large amounts of finance as well as sell land that Javier had bought for a house.

Javier is in prison even though he has had three hearings and absolutely no proofs have been found against him. Always the same thing is said in regard to the document of the state lawyer testifying that Javier was abused by the police and forced to sign it – the document can't be found. The last hearing in February was forced by a judge whose wife is a sister-in-law of the owner of the stolen motorcycle. The judge's demand for the hearing was two thousand soles or he would condemn Javier to twelve years in prison. One more time, the family had to sell all they had and try to raise the money by borrowing or whatever way possible to try to save their son from twelve years of prison.

It is impossible to imagine the state of the prison and the treatment of the prisoners both innocent and guilty. Most of the bad treatment is caused by the police who are responsible for the prison. Human dignity and human rights don't count in the prison system here. When Javier first entered the prison he brought a Bible with him but it was not only confiscated at the entrance but also torn to pieces. In the prison, there is a Catholic section where violent prisoners are not allowed but the families have to pay weekly for Javier so that he is more or less safe from the violent element. Each week or ten days, food, clothes and money which the family may have provided are confiscated and never returned. The prison food is slop! So the prisoners are allowed to buy their food from another source but if their money has been confiscated they have no other recourse.

The violent prisoners are allowed to have knives and other items with which to endanger the lives of others. Most of the time, the police responsible don't even bother to guard those prisoners and the result is that many persons are killed in the prison. One night, Javier had to go to the bathroom and there he met a group of violent drunks who were fighting. When he was leaving the bathroom, one of the group stuck a knife into his stomach. He was taken to the hospital but was unconscious. He had to have surgery immediately but before it, the family had to pay three thousand soles. When the family asked those with Javier about this attack on their son, the reply they received was, "We know nothing of this and we don't want any problems about this."

What an experience this has been for a truly good family and for their son who is innocent and in prison without any proofs of his guilt. It is sufficient to destroy them, as they will be repaying their debts for years. How terrible for a young man who has led a good life to be subjected to this treatment. And we must remember that he is only one among many who are subjected to the same. Visiting Javier in prison, he pointed out two cases beside him who have been treated the same way –they are in prison without any proof of their guilt. The family is afraid to do anything to get attention because while Javier is still in prison, revenge will be taken out on him.

Preparing the New Earth

Gustina Rentería Chinguel, mfic



To prepare the new earth for seeding requires a lot of care, patience and time, because if it is not well prepared the seed will not take root, the plant will not grow and we will not have good fruit. On the other hand, if we say that the earth is sacred, it is necessary to remove one's sandals as Moses did, because there one can see God and listen to the voice of God. That is what I have been able to see and to feel when I have had the opportunity to visit the areas for our new mission.

In order to be able to see the reality where we are going to make the new mission, some young people of the parish and we met and decided to work with the new settlement communities of Molina, Ollanta Humala and Olive Trees. These are located in the periphery of the parish where we have the mission. We analyzed the situation, visited the people and the authorities in the zones, coordinated with them, and asked them what they want to do. Their answers indicated their motivation and their desire to participate and to be committed to the mission.

According to the diagnosis we made we saw that the majority of settlers are immigrants who have come from different parts of the country, looking for better work opportunities or in the case of young people desiring to further their studies. In many instances these dreams are not fulfilled.

Most of the adult settlers work in the central market. Now they are very worried because the mayor is going to evacuate them to send them to another place far from the downtown. Two weeks ago there was a confrontation between the police and the traveling salesmen during which 6 people died. Others work in transportation, where there is now much competition.



The majority of the women work in their homes or do household labor. In these new settlements the common problems that occur are:

- “Pandillaje”, a gang of adolescents as young as 13
- Robbery, in any place and at any hour.
- Poor education, which for most settlers, is only primary or secondary level.
- The majority of settlers are Catholic who have not received the sacraments of Christian initiation, and who do not have a chapel to meet and to pray.

They are asking for talks for parents and young people. We are trying to cultivate this new, sacred earth, sharing with the settlers their life, faith, sorrows, and joys in an attempt to respond to the information that we have obtained. We have a mission plan for the year 2010, resulting from the survey that was made and observing the fundamental necessities of each slum community.

Sudanese Education on the Edge

Margot Grobsmith, Affiliate

My second trip to Southern Sudan took a whole different direction from the 2008 trip. The first year all three of us accompanied the Sacred Sisters beyond their spiritual edges with retreats and alternatives to violence workshops.

This year, Elaine and Jeanette helped grow their leadership potential while I entered more intensely into the educational field as an educated population will be their greatest future resource. With only 6% of the teachers having any training, minimal though it may be, and 2/3 of the student population consisting of internally displaced families, you can imagine the challenges. Couple that with inadequate buildings and supplies, creativity was the name of the game.

It was surprising to learn that many age levels were learning and/or repeating basic lessons because they had never received the syllabus created by the Ministry of Education two years ago. As we sought ways to divide the material into more age appropriate segments, it was so gratifying to watch teachers risk trying new methods. Their thirst for knowledge was impressive, and as their skill and self confidence grew, one could almost see their frustration with huge class size, limited preparation and dirt of supplies melt away.

One Sister (the only religious on staff) had 85 students with only plastic chairs, but no tables. There wouldn't be room for them anyway. UNICEF distributes copy books to them, but the pages are graphed rather than lined which is problematic for learning the correct relationships between upper and lower case letters. Poster paper was imported from Uganda so one teacher had meticulously recycled plastic 50 lb rice bags and hand-embroidered the alphabet onto them.

Despite the many obstacles to construction, trustworthy contractors and exploitation, the Sacred Sisters have made amazing progress since last year. They have installed a chain link fence around Mazzoldi Kindergarten, built a two classroom first grade addition with a faculty office, installed a new water tank and some playground equipment. Sacred Heart Kindergarten has just completed a new latrine with the help of UNICEF. The government is in the process of leveling and paving the road beside the school and the technical school built by the Polish Government and turned over to the sisters at the end of 2008 is empowering women with sewing skills, but the computer program has yet to take off.

The two schools where I worked at least had buildings, chairs and some desks. Many schools in Southern Sudan take place under the trees sitting in the sand and carving their letters and numbers into the dirt with fingers rather than paper and pencil. Children come to school in immaculate clothing in spite of the fact that their mothers do laundry by hand in cold water. They come on relatively empty stomachs having only a bit of tea and bread to hold them til 11:30 when they usually have some water, more bread or a lump of cold porridge. The common mode of transportation is by foot or 2 or 3 children on a motorcycle with NO HELMETS. Just before we left, they put a mini bus on the road to transport about 30 youngsters. However, the poor road conditions will do serious damage to the shocks so one only can hope it survives til the end of term which is in December. They live in mud huts with thatched roofs or shacks built from whatever they can scrounge up, no electricity and perhaps only one water tap for a whole village.. Most of their parents lack education having been on the run into and out of exile during the past 40 years of war. Therefore when the children can recite their prayers or the alphabet in English, they're thrilled. They have yet to realize how much more there is to becoming fluent in another language. The teachers give all the directions in Arabic which was the government imposed language until only recently. None of these conditions are very conducive to encouraging these students.

Please continue to pray for the Southern Sudanese as they stand on the edge of freedom. Pray that knowledge will release them from ignorance. Pray that their future will inspire creativity and the courage that brought them through war can be channeled into the building of their new nation.