

Editorial

The chicks have come to roost! The Abacha junta has bared its fangs! No one is any longer in doubt about how far Nigerian military dictators will go to realise their insatiable desire to control and use power in the most primitive of forms. The self-insulation of government behind draconian decrees replicates ancient African autocratic monarchies like Mali or Songhai. But those medieval kingdoms may have much to teach our 20th century African dictators on the humane treatment of citizens.

The recent statement of the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria must be repeated over and over again to our citizens under siege from military dictators: "We want to remind our beloved country men and women that we are free people. We may be vulnerable but not helpless under the present circumstances. We must not allow anyone to reduce us to slaves through repressive decrees".

The republican spirit which characterized the experience of authority in many traditional African societies is offensive to our gun-totting soldiers. The democratic or collegial exercise of kingly authority in many traditional African kingdoms is intolerable to African military and one-party dictatorship. Under the guise of "state security" the press is gagged; and the citizenry is dared to question any of the actions of our rulers anywhere on earth. But, as human beings, "we are free people".

In the previous issue of our **Bulletin** we examined the question of **Democratization** in Africa (BETH 5/2: 1993). We highlighted the difficulties facing African nation-states in showing creative leadership in the exercise of power. Events since independence from colonial rule have confirmed that the chief crisis of African nations is a crisis of leadership. In the exercise of power the feelings of the people are not fully consulted. Authority is not understood as leadership.

This number focuses precisely on this thorny question of leadership in the African state and church. It suggests that a new pattern of exercising authority as leadership is possible through creative cultural action. Patient listening to the

experiences of traditional African social and political institutions - retrieved and modernized - may lead to the emergence of democratic states in Africa. Similarly, a church-community in touch with elements of traditional African institutions may bear convincing witness to humane living while at the same being very close to the new testament experience of Church. Such a creative pattern of building community will provide an alternative to the abuse of power by rulers and the denial of human rights to the daughters and sons of Africa.

Two papers deal directly with the issue of authority in the State and church. Uzukwu explores the two prevalent patterns of social organisation in Africa: the one which entrusts authority in many hands and the other which concentrates authority in the hands of a king but under the close control of a council. He underlines that both systems lay very strong emphasis on consultation at various levels before decisions touching the society are taken. The organisational metaphor is "listening". He argues that the adoption of this listening model to build christian communities in Africa may help the churches to bear witness to an alternative way of building society in Africa. The second paper by Twohig-Moengangongo looks at the question of power from a feminist perspective. The model of power as dominance is rooted in patriarchy which entrenches and justifies inequalities in human relations by its subjugation of women. This model has been sacralized by Scripture, the Fathers, church teaching and theologians. But patriarchal dominance is not the only model of the exercise of authority, Twohig argues. Relational power is the alternative and liberating paradigm. It is inclusive and concrete, it is power-with instead of power-over. It entrenches mutuality and creativity.

Two other papers deal with the use of power in the religious domains. In his characteristic way Hebga questions the dominance of the Roman church over the churches of Africa under the ideology of universality. He examines closely the burning issue of the relationship between African customary marriage and christian marriage. This is an example of the mistaken identification of a Western cultural practice with faith in Christ. He advocates a healthy pluralism

in the reception of the faith. Metuh revisits the issue of religious conflicts in Nigeria in his search for a recipe for peace. According to him the root causes of the ferocious religious riots are traceable to fear of domination. The domination may be ethnico-political or politico-religious. To get beyond such fears Nigerians should not only be ready to understand one another and their religious beliefs but eschew provocative acts and utterances.

We conclude this issue with the **Communique** of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria which, to date, is the strongest challenge by any church organisation in Nigeria to the way the military control power. We add that the Bishops should **look** seriously at the structures of their church administration. The witness to **humane** living within Church itself may convincingly challenge the tyranny of our military dictators.

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