

SITUATION REPORTCHRISTIANS IN COMMUNITIES FOR DIALOGUE WITH NON-CHRISTIANS

1. "In no way persuade these people to change their rites, customs and manner of life, unless these practices are flagrantly opposed, not to the customs of your homeland, but only to the faith".... (COLLECTANEA I, p. 42) This sounds like a theme for a 1974 discussion on 'dialogue'. But in fact it dates to 1659, and is a statement to missionaries in China from the Vatican. The present-day concept of dialogue is not as new as one may think, but has deep roots in past missionary consciousness.
2. Evangelization has many facets. Dialogue is one. Our June Assembly in considering evangelization today revealed a particular concern among SEDOS Institutes with dialogue with non-Christians and non-believers. The Executive Committee reached this conclusion after studying the report of this Assembly in view of choosing a relevant topic for the September Assembly. The topic has now been formulated as laymen in small communities as agents of dialogue with non Christians and non believers.

This again reveals the special charisma of many of the members of these Institutes: that is to reach out to those who as yet have had no opportunity to meet Christ. The "non-Christian" with us, is more important than "dialogue". But in this outreach, we understand dialogue as crucial. This is why we would like to give it closer scrutiny, and why we would hope the Evangelization Synod would discuss it.

3. Dialogue is understood as:

The word "dialogue" is a word now commonly adopted by Christian writers when speaking of the Christian attitude towards other religions. It indicates an attitude more positive than passive co-existence. It spotlights particularly the mutual respect and understanding that should accompany inter-personal relationships between men of different religions. It is a word that has helped to understand the traditional concept of evangelization totally in a new perspective.

Dialogue need not necessarily be a matter of conversation or discussion. There can be a dialogue without any conversation too, as for instance, when inter-religious groups join in a session of common prayer and meditation, and together share one spiritual experience.

Dialogue is not an exercise of the reason alone. It is an action of the heart that is full of love and understanding.

A mental quality that should be expected of everyone preparing for inter-religious dialogue is a deep-seated respect for the thought patterns of others.

(OMI - Asian Seminar on Dialogue with Buddhist
Colombo, July 1974)

Dialogue will be truly religious when, however different its object, its partners share a religious concern and an attitude of complete respect for one another's convictions and a fraternal openness of mind and heart.

Religious dialogue does not necessarily mean that two persons speak about their religious experiences, but rather that they speak as religiously committed persons, with their ultimate commitments and religious outlook, on subjects of common interest.

Dialogue is animated by the common hope of going beyond tolerance to reach mutual understanding, communion and collaboration.

Dialogue is good in itself because it fosters mutual communion and edification.

Christians are called upon to have an attitude of dialogue operating at various levels of interpersonal relationships... include people who adhere to the various secular ideologies.

(International Theological Conference on
Evangelization and Dialogue in India, Nagpur)

4. "The idea of dialogue respects the inner values of spiritual salvation inherent in the other religions - as a system of salvation. With this it rejects rigid exclusivism (no salvation outside the Church) as well as that flexible sincretism which leads to indifference. Christians believe that their mission, in spite of this recognition of the positive significance (of these religions), is that of revealing the relativity of these other religions. Collaborating, with their adherents and in respectful dialogue with them, they hope to succeed to share in a convincing way the universal and definitive significance of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world...

In the first days of enthusiasm (about dialogue, after Vatican II) we did not realize that the "dialogue theologians" were working on quite an abstract level. Basically, they spoke exclusively of religious systems derived from the world's great religions. Besides the fact that other forms of religiosity escaped their attention, they forgot the most important fact: religious man and his community as the carrier of religious values... For the "dialogue theologians" the history of the mission remained an inter-church or a church centred event".

(J.M. Van Engelen, *Communio*, 908 (translated from Italian))

5. We could go on with these quotations.

Dialogue is more often talked about than actually engaged in, however. It tends to become the sanctuary of the experts. It could be seen as an escape from hard facts into the realms of subtle theologues.

In preparation for our Assembly of September 23, 1974, we attempt to throw some light on it by bringing out its practical side. We include some ideas and experiences of people who do practice it. We have been helped by an old hand and an old friend, Marcello Zago, well known in Sedos circles in the late sixties.

The structure of this report is largely the outcome of a meeting I had with him on August 29, 1974 and the "experience" which opens the report has been taken from Mondo e Missione (June-July 1974) and summarized by Fr. L. Bano. When reading it, it may be useful to keep in mind the constants of real and live dialogue -

1. Presence to the non-Christian
2. Revision of one's understanding of oneself as Christian
3. Relationship with non Christian as an outcome of 1 and 2.

The report follows these "constants" in its three main parts. It thus focuses on dialogue with non Christians rather than on the "agents" of this dialogue (Christians in Community). We think we have sufficiently covered this aspect of the Assembly topic when we reported on our June Assembly. But the message does come out again in Zago's experience in the alternative he had to face: do it alone - and fast or do it with laymen and slow. He opted for the second approach and found himself with only a community of half a dozen people. But he thinks it was worthwhile.

To make up for this soft pedalling of the "agent", however, we thought of including the guidelines for "agents" derived from the OMI Colombo Seminar. These serve as a conclusion to the whole report.

6. AN EXPERIENCE IN DIALOGUE

An interview with Fr. Zago OMI, missionary in Laos by Mondo e Missione (July 74)

I realized it was hardly possible to enter into contact with these (Buddhist) countries and to understand thoroughly their traditional religion without getting into vital contact with its adherents. This was 15 years ago, and now one can see the first results.

I was fortunate enough to have learned previously the "pali" language, the language of the sacred texts. I was posted to a little town where nobody knew that language; I was called in to teach it to the local bonzes, who did not know it either. Thus I could get into close contact with the Buddhist world, opening out for me new and unforeseen opportunities. Moved to Luang Prabang I had more contacts in our school, with a great majority of Buddhist pupils

In 1970, after a course of missiology in Rome, I was expressly called in by the local Church to open a dialogue. I could do this either by entering alone a buddhist monastery, more or less living outside the local Church; or by working along with others, Christians, priests and Bishops of Laos, as it were moving the whole CHURCH and getting into dialogue with buddhism by remaining inside my own Church and moving it towards conscientization. The first way looked more attractive and was followed by some; but though helping one to make much personal progress it generally leaves unaffected the local Church. In following the second approach I was greatly helped by my knowledge of languages (French, English, Lao, Thai, Khmer), enabling me to talk to anyone in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia.

This is perhaps the only instance of a dialogue supported by the whole local Church.

My plan developed in three stages: a) to get into touch with all missionaries in Laos and Cambodia and part of Thailand, visiting with them the local pagoda or monastery; b) in one diocese after another to hold study courses in Buddhism for missionaries, sisters, catechists, laymen; c) at national level to convene study weeks on dialogue with Buddhism. This conscientization work is not quite finished yet, but I was greatly helped in Thailand by Fr. Pezet SAM and Fr. Uliana SDB, both experts in dialogue.

After conscientization I must go deeper. Last year we had a five day course on moral teaching in Catholic schools, so as to get into line with Buddhist moral ideals. This year we are preparing a "language" course for dialogue, and later two more on funeral rites and the idea of God among the various races of Laos.

I consider myself merely an animator, as the real work should be done by the local Christians. Each diocese should have at least one priest entirely free to promote dialogue with Buddhism. There are now four such priests in Laos, two in Cambodia and five in Thailand. Once or twice a year we meet together to plan future action.

There are dangers also to be avoided. For one thing, I must continue my studies. Every year I go to Canada, lecturing and studying at Ottawa Catholic University, because "Asian Affairs can be better studied in Europe or America, where there are libraries, students and scholars invitations to talk and write, which are all very stimulating. But above all I never lose contact with the world I am studying. I give most of my time to direct dialogue with Buddhists and keep on repeating to all missionaries that the main thing is to create an atmosphere of understanding, dialogue and brotherhood with local Buddhists. One can already see a great change since 15 years ago. In a Buddhist center at Luang Prabang every month there is a one day "spiritual retreat" with as many as 500-600 participants. Every time one or two priests are invited to illustrate their religious way of life and their point of view on the topics under discussion. In Vientiane a group of 8 Catholic and Buddhist people, meet together to discuss youth problems: we learn something from them, and they learn something from us.

Things are very different in Ceylon, Burma and Vietnam, where there are considerable Christian minorities and less dialogue.

There is always the lurking danger of a purely personal display, or of talking with intellectuals only. On the contrary one should aim at reaching concretely the man in the street (Lao, Thai, Khmer) with whom we live..This is a work to be done in a humble spirit, not with a prophetic attitude, as if one was determined to prove others wrong, least of all old missionaries or Bishops. We must walk together with the whole Church, not by ourselves alone, If the Church makes slow progress, one is to help her move faster with love, obedience never severing oneself from the Church and its pastors.

I am of the opinion that dialogue is a form of evangelization. In some countries, such as those in which we work, perhaps the time of explicit announcement is at an end, at least for the greater part of the population, the Buddhist element. But today, I think, evangelization works through dialogue, that is in mutual exchange, a confrontation of values, faiths and positions. There is the danger of losing our Christian identity, and many of our Christians are already at the parting of the ways; either they discover the true authentic faith, or lose the little faith they already possessed or thought they had. Believing may become more difficult, but faith will be more genuine.

(Summarized and translated by Fr. L. Bano)

Personally, dialogue meant to Fr Zago the discovery that, in spite of goodwill and often heroic efforts, the message was not passing through. Buddhists had all sorts of distorted ideas on what Christianity was all about. It was not merely a question of language (see below). It was also one of irrelevant or distorted witness. Nothing should be taken for granted. What may be "natural" or "automatic" to us in the West may not be so to these people in the East. Everything has to be tested. And the best test bed is the relationship - close, enduring, open - established in and characterized by, the spirit of dialogue. It is a fact that Buddhists do not feel interested or involved in the Christian message. They do not "switch on" to listen. "When they do, the message remains unintelligible and they understand it according to their own mental categories, in a way that goes against the sense of the Good News and that is not a response to their basic project of liberation". (Laos Bishops, October 1973)

7. Zago's experience contains all the necessary ingredients of practical dialogue. We will call these "constants" and will try to put each in sharper focus by drawing on our more recent documentation on the matter. The report, therefore, falls into three main parts - Presence - Awareness - Relationship. It concludes on a practical note: through the courtesy of the OMI Generalate, we have been able to receive an up to the minute report of the Colombo Seminar (July 1974) and we gladly extract some of the guidelines it produced as an excellent summary of our own orientations:

8. The first "constant" of dialogue; presence

Presence can be envisaged as a one way street, going in the direction to the non-Christians (from the Christians). It is therefore more than "being there". You are there "in relation" (or even "in tension") to the other. As our Lord is present in the Church "for us", in the relationship and tension of his love. You can be "there", physically in the heart of non Christian land, but not "present", because you are walled up in your compounds or schools or hospitals or, more frequent, in a mentally defensive attitude. Presence is more than static. It is dynamic. The following cases illustrate this crucial aspect of practical dialogue.

9. EVANGELIZATION ... IS DISCOVERING WITH OUR MOSLEM BROTHERS WHAT IS TRUE...
GOOD... BEAUTIFUL ...

Envoys to the Land of Islam to make acquaintance with our Moslem Brothers we seek to know them as they are; to see and to hear what they see and hear in their own environment; to discover what nourishes their thought; to experience with them what is true, what is good, what is beautiful. This means that we learn to consider Islam as a Faith, discover in our Moslem friends the religious values which animate them, look upon this believer as a brother and open the way for true dialogue.

To help us in all this, 18FMM went to Rome to take part in a session on Islamology at the IPEA (Institut Pontifical d'Etudes Arabes) from the 7th to the 27 th of July. Three weeks given entirely to study, sharing, prayer, and in line with these three, three lectures morning and afternoon, tape recordings of conferences given at IPEA during the year by different professors, followed by a question-discussion hour on the subjects treated during the morning. The day closed with the eucharist lived together. In this way we studied the Koran Moslem history, faith, mysticism, moral, law, modern thought and the Church in the Land of Islam.

Jacqueline Millet, FMM

10. EVANGELIZATION ... IS BEING IMPELLED TO ACTION BY THE SPIRIT

The first meeting of Pastoral Workers in Quillazu was held as a service to all the missionaries and the faithful of the Vicariate who would profit from their reflections and its studies. The meeting itself grew out of the concern expressed at the Assembly of the Bishops in the Peruvian Forest Region.

The theme was, THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IMPELS US:

- to strengthen the bonds of communication between those working for evangelization.
- to dialogue and try to find together what lines of action for evangelization should be taken in order to construct the here and now Church in the Apostolic Vicariate of San Ramon;
- to revise church attitudes and activities giving full recognition to co-responsibility.

The actual state of our church: the physical features of our Vicariate defy our efforts of evangelization; highlands and jungles and very poor communications over an area of 75,000 km² with a population of 250,000 belonging to heterogeneous groups. They come from central cordillera, from the coastal areas of European cultures; "campa culture", the "piros", from the margins of the Alto Ucayali; the "cunibos", the "amueshas", etc... The Vicariate counts 17 parishes and 8 mission centres.

Around us there are many Christian communities of our separated brethren, and this has an important influence on our evangelical work: the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints; the Evangelical Church; the United Church; the Seventh Day Adventists; Jehovah's Witnesses; Pentecostals; Presbyterians...

Pastoral plans for the future are formed from our hopes and the reality

In our Vicariate, the whole of pastoral activity must be geared to the formation of an autochthonous Church. This demands that we share as far as possible the life and the culture of the people of this region, and in the light of the Gospel, find their true values and so form from the very beginning pastoral workers who are native to the place. To do this, however, a community of believers centring their life on Christ must be built on an authentic and profound evangelization.

We have, therefore, to gear the whole pastoral action in the Vicariate towards the formation of truly christian communities, and enter into dialogue with our separated brethren.

All this and much more provided matter for our reflections during the eight days we spent together. Very simply we accepted our limitations, and that gives us a greater confidence in the grace of God.

Sr. Mercedes Cortes, FMM

11. The second "constant" of dialogue: sharpened self awareness as Christians

A progressively sharper awareness of our identity as Christians can also be considered as a one way street. This time, however, the direction is towards us, away from the non Christian cultural milieu. We can ask: when this presence occurs, what is the result? On the Christian side, we believe a questioning occurs, a questioning of what it means to be a Christian. This we could call a sharpening of the Christian identity. When other Christian or non-Christian practices are witnessed, one becomes more aware of one's own practices and one's own beliefs.

12. Before Vatican II many Christians presumed they had all the truth there was to be had and no other religion had anything to offer. Then they began to realise, some for the first time, that people in other religions could be saved, and Vatican II made it very clear that the Holy Spirit can be operative in these other religions, helping their members according to their circumstance. This can have some astonishing results. As Archbishop Bellotti, the Apostolic Pro Nuncio to Uganda, pointed out at the opening of the dialogue:

"There is great richness of spirit and wisdom in the African Traditional Religions and the Church has... sincere respect for them".

This "great richness of spirit and wisdom" can enrich Christianity itself. Just as the Church was enriched during the Middle Ages through her contact with the philosophy of Aristotle which came to her indirectly through Islamic culture, so she can be enriched again today through new modes of thought and new insights that can come to her through African culture. As the final statement of the Dialogue declared:

"Truth is a horizon towards which we move, rather than something that we already possess in its perfection and entirely".

(Dialogue with the African Traditional Religions,
Gaba, Uganda, 5-7 August 1974)

13. The third constant of dialogue : relationship

This relationship between Christian and non-Christian could be envisaged as the fusion of the two "one way" streets. It is definitely a two way street and the best approach to its "content" is an identification of its main consequences, or "fruits" on the partness of the dialogue.

14. i) A first consequence is negative but extremely precious. It shows Christians the extent to which they fail in communicating to non Christians and non believers what they desire, hope and strive to communicate. This could be of major significance in our evangelization strategy. It affects our methods as well as the formulation of the content of our message. It affects our concepts as well as our witness.
15. In the Buddhist environment, we have a typical case of a failure to understand the Christian message when this is expressed in catechetical or biblical categories. The problem of language becomes really acute and basic... Salvation given by Christ appears to Buddhists to be a religious alienation, a disengagement from personal effort. Man is responsible and master of his acts; his sins cannot be eliminated or cleansed by another; each must bear all the consequences of his behaviour. To follow the example and teaching of Christ may be a good thing but as one grows in perfection one must free oneself from him. In Christianity the contrary is true. To receive life from him, to share ever more in his life, seems to them to be something like

going back to the whirlpool of rebirths. Achieved salvation expressed in categories of happiness, heaven, and even communion evokes in them the illusion of the different heavens, where one is stuck until the extinction of one's merits. This state is less privileged, after all, than that of men : pleasure keeps one from understanding the reality of misery and to opt for salvation. Salvation as the fruit of one's merits and those of Christ is perhaps understood only within the frame of this worldly logic: it seems to them eroded by egoism and closed moralism. The way to salvation seems to them to show only the first steps towards spiritual progress: precepts and sacraments are only the support or the bark of the life giving sap of the tree. Even charity appears to them to belong to the external order.

(Laos Bishops, October 1973)

16. ii) A second consequence is positive and follows up the insight of the first by bridging the gap between our concepts and those of our partners in dialogue. It can be called the "lesson of language" if by language, we do not merely mean vocabulary and terminology but the whole context of human verbal communication. This is how the matter was seen by the OMI Colombo Seminar quoted above.

"It is not enough to learn a language for the more obvious practical reasons. Nor will it do for the missionary to master the languages of his area simply to be socially accepted there. The final purpose of missionary-linguistic activity is to establish a native Christian language, i.e. a vehicle in which the Gospel can reach, without impediment and in as natural a way as possible, the non-Christian community. The eternal Word of the Father has no language. The historical Church, however, cannot do without one. The Church belongs to all languages, and unifies them. 'Ego in omnibus linguis sum; mea est graeca, mea est syra, mea est hebraea, mea est omnium gentium, quia in unitate sum omnium gentium', says St. Augustine. And in that sense, one may say that even the linguistic work of the missionary Church shares in continuing the incarnation. The technical linguist has a place of great importance in that he can supply the relevant linguistic data to the working missionary and mission experts with whom he must work in close co-operation.

Every missionary should have an introductory course in general linguistics with a special emphasis on phonetics; and that for this purpose a highly qualified technical expert should be available in every linguistic area of major missionary effort!"

(from John Wils
Scientia Missionum Ancilla 1953)

17. One of the principal barriers to fruitful inter-religious dialogue has always been the lack of a mutually understandable language. The message of each religion has been enveloped in a technical language all its own, and completely foreign to a man of another religion.

It sounds strange to say that language which is man's principal medium of inter-personal communication, could be at times a barrier to that very communication itself. Unfortunate as it is, at least in the case of religion, this is an undeniable fact; and so, until the message of each religion is expressed in a language that is mutually understandable, inter-religious discussion will be a near-impossibility, or a venture that will have to be restricted to small groups of specialists.

It is therefore the duty of the elite who know different religions well, and who have the opportunity now of engaging in inter-religious discussions, to evolve a new religious language that reveals the deep realities hidden behind ancient formulations. If these inter-religious discussions are correctly conducted, the new language could evolve naturally out of the very process of discussion itself.

From the side of Buddhism, the work of Rev. Buddhadasa of Thailand is a good example to be imitated. In his booklet "TWO KINDS OF LANGUAGE, Dharmic Language: Language of the one who knows, Human Language: Language of the one who knows not" he has tried to explain in a simple language the real meaning of many difficult Buddhist expressions such as, Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, Karma, Samsara and Nirvana. He has done as by distinguishing between the literal sense of these words, which is not of such great importance, and their religious sense which is of universal human value.

It is a work that should find a Christian counterpart. Many Buddhists today want to know, in a simple language, the real meaning of commonly used Christian technical expressions such as Incarnation, Resurrection, God-man, Virgin-birth, Christ, Holy Spirit, Grace, Salvation, Parousia, Kingdom of God etc...

18. Secular Language

The language of modern psychology could particularly be of assistance in finding a contemporary phraseology to express Christian truths. Religion after-all is a form of higher Psychology. It is that which enables a person to live a life of internal peace and harmony. Religion is the psychological force that drives a man to take his responsibilities in life and to face his daily problems with tranquility and self-confidence. Religion, first and foremost, is a system of training and reinforcing wavering minds shaken by the emotions. Its primary aim is to give character and personality to people. If the correct dimensions of a Christian personality are kept in view, evangelisation itself (and missionary work) could be defined as the process of ennobling personalities of people. Words like Salvation Supernatural life, grace would be better understood by the modern man if they were explained with the type of vocabulary used by Psychology.

19. Men who understand the deep realities behind the traditional religious formulas, admit that true spirituality could be expressed in a secular language. If so, there is no reason, why a secular terminology, be it of modern philosophy or psychology, could not be made use of to explain the Christian spiritual experience to the modern Buddhist.

Language of Youth

In the evolution of a new religious language, it could be of great help to keep also modern youth in mind. They are able to express deep human needs, problems, and aspirations in a language that is quite contemporary. If there was a way of making religion meaningful to them, the question of a new religious language will almost automatically be solved.

20. A third consequence of the two way relationship is deeper insertion in the religious and/or cultural world of both partners in dialogue. This is when witness really begins to come into its own. The Christian does not only see himself as witness, but is seen as such by the non Christian. Witness to the invisible but acting Christ. Witness within the local cultural context and, thus easily accepted and appreciated as such, almost as an integral part of the local scene. The fact that dialogue takes in the whole person as he lives in the total context of his relationships, means that the give and take (interaction) is not limited to the exchange of views but to the mutual communication of all the other aspects of the his - and their - life.
21. A fourth consequence derives from this social aspect of dialogue. It is the discovery of the communal aspect of evangelization. Christians evangelize only when they act as a community of believers in Christ.

"The Church is first of all a people gathered together, a living communion of love provides a better starting point for talk about evangelization. The Church is mission, is proclamation of the Gospel, in so far as it is communion. This is why it can be said that the Eucharist is the fullest expression and activity of the Church's mission. It is precisely as a sacrament of the unity of all mankind, transcending the abyss of space and the passing generations and all human barriers that it effectively proclaims the saving word. Only as a community united by the bond of the Spirit can it dare to utter its spoken message, which is otherwise divisive propaganda instead of a healing and reconciling word. The purpose of evangelization is therefore communion. God's word is spoken in history so that men may become one.

(Gaba, Pastoral Institut, Position paper for AMECEA, 1974)

22. PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR DIALOGUE

A Universal right and Duty

- a) For a Christian living among men of different religions and ideologies, engaging in dialogue with them is a duty, a right, and a privilege. A Christian who takes his religion seriously, will try to live in a spirit of dialogue with all the men he daily associates with, whether they be Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Marxists or Rationalists. In a country that is predominantly Buddhist, such a dialogue with Buddhists will be for him a way of putting into action the law of Christ on the universal love for mankind.

b) Friendly discussion on religious matters with men of other faiths, is by no means the right or privilege of only a few. Nor should it be allowed to be so. Nevertheless in the present state of most religions opportunities for friendly inter-religious discussions are not as profuse as they should be. For the moment only a few will enjoy such happy opportunities. Those thus privileged however, should do everything within their power to hasten the day, and to create the atmosphere in which all men of all religions will be able to benefit universally from such opportunities.

c) Different forms and dimensions of Dialogue

The social dimension of religion is one aspect that should not be by-passed in the Christian-Buddhist dialogue particularly in Asia today. There is not the least doubt that large numbers of Asians today live a life of misery in sub-human social conditions. The Christian Buddhist dialogue if comprehensively done, should help citizens of different faiths to join hands, and work together for the reform and improvement of the social order in their countries and eventually in the whole of Asia.

d) Dialogue need not necessarily be a matter of conversation or discussion. There can be a dialogue without any conversation too, as for instance, when inter-religious groups join in a session of common prayer and meditation, and together share one spiritual experience. Rev. La Salle SJ, in his book "ZEN - WAY TO ENLIGHTENMENT" has shown how a Christian could profitably engage in the Zen form of meditation and benefit therefrom in his life of prayer.

e) Education in Dialogue

Training the present day youth to inter-religious dialogue should become an important feature of modern religious education, especially in countries where Christians have to live mainly with non-Christians. Part of the formation should be given in the Catechism class itself. A more effective way however, is to provide Christian youth with opportunities to study, discuss, work and reflect together with those of other religions under the guidance of elders.

f) Seminarians as well as aspirants to the Religious Brotherhood and Sisterhood should be given very special opportunities to prepare themselves for inter-religious dialogue in their later ministry. For this purpose they should be given a good initiation to the cultural life of their countries and in places like Thailand, Laos, Ceylon, and a good knowledge of Buddhism. They should be encouraged while already in training to have contact and friendly dealings with people of other religions.

g) A mental quality that should be expected of everyone preparing for inter-religious dialogue, is a deep-seated respect for the thought patterns of others. Without the readiness to listen to another in a spirit of silence and humility, chances of a successful dialogue are bleak. The art of dialogue is different from that of disputation and debate. Dialogue is not an exercise of the reason alone. It is an action of the heart that is full of love and understanding.

h) Obstacles and Significance of dialogue

It could often happen that, due to pre-occupation with problems within the Christian Community itself, certain Ecclesiastical authorities even in pre-dominantly non-Christian countries, will fail to see inter-religious dialogue as an essential characteristic of the life of the Christian Community. It is possible that attempts at dialogue by enlightened groups will be looked upon by them with suspicion, distrust, and disapproval. In such situations it is still the duty of such groups, even if they should do so with the conviction that this is what Christ in his precept on universal charity enforced them to do.

- i) It must not be forgotten that in the past most religions, and particularly Christianity, with the intention of safeguarding the faith of their members, restricted communications with other religions almost to the extent of completely prohibiting it. Contact with other religions was seen for a long period in the past as an exposure to contamination with pagan ideas. However understandable such a policy would be in a yet undeveloped infant church, it is no longer excusable in a Christian Community of adults.

This unfounded precaution has only ended up by leading Christians unwittingly to distrust, dislike, and even condemn wholesale, large communities of men who do not subscribe to their religious convictions. The result has been that, without seriously thinking of it, Christians have conveniently laid aside the law of Christ on the universal love of mankind.

In such a situation, inter-religious dialogue today has become a matter of very special significance to the Christian. It is for him a way of filling a gap created in the Christian conscience over a long period of time. More than any time before, inter-religious dialogue today will be for him the way of re-affirming positively his deep Christian conviction in the Universal Brotherhood of Mankind.

*

PREPARATORY MEETINGS FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ISLAM GROUP

The group met at the SVD Generalate at 4 pm on 5 September 1974.

Present: Bro. J. Basterrechea FSC, Bro. A. Hien FSC, Fr. S. Calvia FSCJ, Sr. Mary Motte FMM, Fr. W. Cagney OMI, Fr. A. Verschuur SVD, Fr. W. Buhlmann OFM-CAP.

For SEDOS: Fr. L. Skelly SMA and Miss C. Gilroy.

Chairman: Fr. B. Tonna, SEDOS.

The meeting took as its topic "Laymen in small Communities as agents of dialogue with Muslims", its own adaptation of the subject chosen for the General Assembly of September 23.

1. There was general agreement that the school and the university provided ideal opportunities for real dialogue. Students, both Christian and Moslem, met and mixed easily in the classroom and in school clubs e.g. sporting, debating, social. Indeed many of these contacts persisted in "Old Boy Associations", sports clubs etc. The parent-teacher association was also a very fruitful field for genuine dialogue with the families of Muslim students. Other very useful avenues for dialogue were associations of school directors. In these the managers of Christian and Muslim school could and did establish a great deal of common ground.

In all of the above ways the Christian presence in society is created - but not asserted in any aggressive way.

2. This led on naturally to a discussion of the image which the Church presents to Moslems. It is frequently seen as a powerful international organization bent on the destruction, or at least the undermining, of Islam. It is this fear which explains much of the resentment and alarm felt by Moslems when they encounter Christians. We must abandon any traces of triumphalism that cling to us and make it clear that we are approaching our Moslem neighbours as brothers, servants of the same Merciful God. Personal contact and unassuming service to the Community can break down many barriers of prejudice. Those who engage in dialogue must be able to show that Christianity is not a purely Western thing - its origins prove that - but can make itself at home in the local culture and can express itself in the local language, whether that be Arabic, Indonesian, Hausa or Urdu. We must be prepared to share our spiritual wealth with the Moslems by inviting them to our liturgy (a gesture greatly appreciated), and be ready to share in their feasts. Where this has been attempted the results have been truly rewarding.

3. Dialogue is impossible unless we are prepared to study Islam and its teachings. Unfortunately many of our laity, even those who have many Moslem friends, have a grossly inaccurate idea of what Islam really is. They must be encouraged to learn what their neighbours believe for only from understanding can genuine respect grow. Above all ancient prejudices based on centuries of confrontation must be weeded out. Moslem scholars should be invited to help in this task of reeducation. Many examples were given of ways in which religious and laity could humbly serve the community as a whole, not distinguishing between people of different faiths and not giving the impression of proselytizing. Hospitals, dispensaries and schools could still perform a useful function but there were great opportunities to be developed in the fields of home visitation, craft training (in the home) for young women, cooperative enterprises, and care of the poor and elderly. Such works helped to break down suspicion and hostility and established genuine human relations. Service must be seen to be service and not a tool of proselytism. Let us make clear that in all we do we are disciples of a person, the Suffering Servant, and not of an institution or an ideology. Many experiences covering all parts of the Moslem world were quoted to show the fruitfulness of this approach. We must seek our own personal conversion to a truly Christian attitude of mind before we can seek a true meeting of minds with those of another faith.
4. Where circumstances permit it we must seek a true community of aim and effort with our Moslem neighbours. We have a great deal in common and what is common should be stressed and not what divides us. There is much that we can achieve together especially in the fields of social action, educational policy, joint prayer, civic consciousness etc. On no account should we derive satisfaction from the fact that in certain urban complexes e.g. Singapore, Moslems are falling away from their religious observances. Where we can do so we should encourage Moslems, and especially the young, to take their religion seriously. The Community is the poorer for any loss of religious faith in its members.
5. A warning was sounded about the Moslem tendency to exaggerate their numbers and to claim many animists and others as followers of Islam. e.g. in Northern Nigeria and Indonesia where it is claimed that the majority of the population is Moslem when the facts say otherwise. This tendency arises from fear that the Christian Church, a foreign body, is seeking to undermine Islam. We must evangelize those who wish to be evangelized e.g. in the so-called "Middle Belt" of Nigeria where the people utterly reject Islam, but our task will be made all the easier if we are on brotherly terms with the neighbouring Moslem population. Otherwise we will be accused of religious neo-colonialism.

The gathering heartily approved of the guidelines laid down in the conclusions of the Moslem - Christian dialogue at Broumana:

a) Frank Witness, b) Mutual Respect, c) Religious freedom, d) Deliberate and self-conscious collaboration for Justice and Freedom, e) Participation in each other's devotional life so as to listen to God together.

The meeting ended at 6.05 pm.

L. Skelly SMA
Secretary

PREPARATORY MEETINGS FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLYLATIN AMERICA Group

The group met at the FSC Generalate at 4 pm on 6 September 1974.

Present: Br. C.H. Battison FSC, Fr. Staudinger SVD, Sr. D. McGonagle SSND, Sr. M. Benedictine, Rio OSU, Fr. J. Meehan SDB, Fr. J. D'Arcy MA, F. G. Peeters MSF, Fr. S. Coughlan O.CARM, Sr. Mascfreet, SCMM-M; Sr. Rosemary ICM; Sr. Mary Hotta FHM, Fr. P. Ravasio FSCJ, Sr. J. J. SCMM-M.

For SEDOS: Fr. L. Shelly MA and Fr. C. Gilroy.

Chairman: Fr. B. Tonn, SEDOS.

The meeting took as its topic "Laymen in small communities as agents of dialogue with non-Christians and non-believers", as laid down by the Executive Committee.

1. The first problem to be faced was the question as to whether there were (apart from certain Indian tribes) genuine non-Christians or non-believers in Latin America. Practically everyone was baptized and the Catholic religion was part of the national cultural identity in every country e.g. Some Japanese Buddhists in Paraguay have sought Christian instruction so as to "blend". Many of course neglected their religious duties but they had a different attitude to those than Europeans; they would resent having the term "lapsed" applied to them. Even Marxists took up a very ambivalent stance and did not reject Christianity or the Church entirely. After much discussion it was agreed to take "non-Christian" as covering those who to a large degree have abandoned or drifted away from Christianity and practice. In many countries little effort was being made to reach them e.g. in Latin America is a big continent and attempts to establish dialogue with such non-believers vary in intensity from country to country. In Chile, Argentina and Brazil, non-believers, there is much intense religious activity; in Paraguay many Catholics are by part of their own and inclined to be passive.
2. Various forms of Christianity were then discussed. Emphasis was expressed for the Cursillo movement and for the Legion of Action (especially in Argentina). The Ligas were inclined to drift towards an extreme leftist position, unfortunately. In some areas basic communities inclined to becoming talking shops but properly directed they had possibilities.

Fr. Meehan gave an example from Sao Paulo in Brazil where the Cardinal had introduced a catechetical scheme founded on salvation history. The course is based geographically on compounds and the laity undertake the work. The Legion of Mary plays an important part. The course ends with Mass and many non-active Christians are drawn in. Several vocations have come from these compounds. Seminarians live with the clergy (not in a seminary) and work in the compounds. The Cardinal has divided the city into vicariates in such a way as to ensure that rich and poor areas are combined. This has resulted in several professional men volunteering to work in the poorer parts of northern Brazil. In several places the community has built a Church and parish house which they maintain from their own meagre resources. The Sisters now live among the people, visit and are visited, and contribute a great deal to animating the communities.

The basic unit is the family

3. There was general agreement that the family was ^{of} utmost importance, as Latin American people in general were extremely family conscious. If we can evangelize at that level then we will reach those whom Bishop Ruben declared to be the most urgent "objects" of evangelization, namely, youth and those who have fallen away (remark made to Fr. Arrupe SJ). Preparation for giving the Sacraments of Baptism and Marriage can give one the opportunity of approaching the family and their friends and neighbours. If this preparatory work can be undertaken by laypersons, who lay the groundwork for the priest's Sacramental followup, all the better.

In our approach to youth we must not be content with the social approach - youth clubs, craft centres etc. These are useful but young people will be far more deeply influenced by the sort of Christians we are than by our words or works. Young people are not easily deceived, but they are easily soured by any sort of hypocrisy. The senior students in the schools were looking for outlets for their idealism. If we did not fill the void then others would.

4. There was also need in many Latin American Countries for dialogue with Marxists and disillusioned left - wing Catholics. In countries like Brazil, Chile and Paraguay this is difficult as left wing groups are suppressed. But by conscientizing the Catholic laity as regards their social obligations we can at least prepare them for the day when open sharing of ideas is possible.

In those countries where Marxist-Christian dialogue is possible we must be sure that in judging the ideas of those who oppose us we adopt a truly christian stance and not simply parrot old slogans. We may in fact find much to inspire and educate us in the devotion with which so many "leftists" espouse their cause. Their methods of "evangelization" should also be of interest to us.

5. The question as to whether one had to make a choice between Evangelization and Sacramentalization was also discussed. It was generally agreed that Latin American society was so complex and the problems of the area so varied that every approach should be exploited. Different people had different charisms and all could be put to good use. Each situation on the ground had to be judged according to practical criteria and not by a set of theoretical priorities. The normal parish organization, basic cooperative ventures, Cursillos, Mass media evangelization, all had their uses. No one of them was the best or only answer.

The meeting ended at 6.05 pm.

L. Skelly SMA
Secretary

AGENDA FOR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING OF 16 SEPTEMBER 1974

The Executive Committee will meet at SEDOS Secretariat at 4 pm on 16 September with the following agenda.

After the minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising:

1. Preparations for the General Assembly of 23 September 1974

- a) Reports of preliminary meetings
- b) Guidelines for Regional groupings
- c) Should the Assembly seek concrete conclusions?
- d) Follow-up to Assembly

2. October Programme

- a) Watchdog committee re-Synod
- b) Contacts with Synod Fathers

3. Bulletin Programme

September

- N° 26 Report on Lausanne Congress on Evangelization
- " 27 Reactions to Lausanne
- " 28 Dialogue with non-Christians
- " 29 Trends in Evangelization Today
- " 30 Sociological and Moral Aspects of these trends

October

- N° 31 Synod Report 1
- " 32 " " 2
- " 33 " " 3
- " 34 " " 4

November

- N° 35 Final Synod Report
- " 36 Synod follow up : Ideas for SEDOS

4. Staff matters

- a) Visit by Executive team to Secretariat
- b) Job description
- c) Vacancy for clerk typist
- d) Preparatory consideration of 1975 Budget.

5. SEDOS Consultant with Christian Medical Commission

6. Any other business.

INVITATION

The Health Working Group of SEDOS is sponsoring a meeting on the topic:

THE PASTORAL MINISTRY OF THE HEALTH WORKER

Place: SJ Generalate, Borgo S. Spirito, 5 - Time: 18 October 1974 - 3 pm.

Sr. Godelieve Prové SCMM-M will give the opening address

PROGRAMME:

- a) Welcome by Chairman. Opportunity for delegates to become acquainted with each other (3.00 to 3.30)
- b) Address by Sr. Godelieve Prové (3.30 to 4.00)
- c) Two or three specific experiences related to the topic, delivered by delegates (preferably those back from visitation)
- d) Group meetings. Reports to be compiled (4.30 - 5.30)
- e) Refreshment break (during which synthesis of reports will be made) (5.30 - 6.00)
- f) Synthesis of reports presented by Chairman (6.00 - 6.30)
- g) General discussion as to future projects (6.30 - 7.00)

All those in any way concerned with the professional or pastoral care of the sick are urged to attend. If you intend to do so please fill in the form below and return it to SEDOS Secretariat.

INSTITUTE:

ADDRESS:

NAME OF PARTICIPANTS:

SPECIAL INTERESTS

LANGUAGE

NAME OF PARTICIPANTS:	SPECIAL INTERESTS	LANGUAGE
-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----
-----	-----	-----

EVANGELIZATION : FACTS WHICH MATTER

THE HISTORICAL STUDY OF AFRICAN RELIGIONS - LIMURU - KENYA, 23-30 June 1974

It used to be said that Africans have no history, and although this charge has now been effectively buried for all time, there are still those who say that African religion has no history. The mass of evidence produced by this conference is enough to refute this further charge which is a relic of colonial prejudice.

Although this was a conference of professional historians, it revealed certain factors of extreme importance for present day Christians in Africa and for the pastoral action of the Church in contemporary Africa, especially among local intellectuals:

1. It revealed the strength and bitterness of the opposition which many African academics display against Christianity. This opposition is largely caused by the ignorance and contempt shown for African religion by Christians, particularly priests and educators, local and expatriate. If Christians are to make any headway among the more educated levels of society, they must shed their superiority complex and learn to take African values seriously.
2. It revealed the depth of ignorance of Christians - even the most highly educated - about their own religion. The Church has failed if it cannot provide an understanding and a practice of Christianity for academics that is commensurate with their educational and professional level. The Church must shed any trace of anti-intellectualism and mistrust of academic circles.
3. Contrary to the expectations of many, the conference revealed a very positive attitude to African religions on the part of some early missionaries. This early respect for African tradition was submerged to a great extent during the colonial period. It is important that this early attitude should be studied and made known, and that it should serve as an inspirational model to ourselves.
4. The desire for what Pope Paul VI has termed an "African Christianity" was strongly evinced by the meeting, but it was made abundantly clear that such a development must rest on a serious dialogue with, and study of, African religious traditions, and that the historical study of these religions is probably the most important single method that should be adopted.
5. Finally, some important material emerged from the papers given at the conference on the subject of Independent Church Movements and their antecedents. This historical evidence reveals the extent to which these movements are heirs to the African religious tradition as well as to the Christian Churches. If an attempt is made to understand them simply as deviations from the Christian belief and practice, it would be a mistake