

TOPIC: New Life Styles

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE
SEARCH FOR NEW LIFE STYLES

(Report of the Second Workshop on the New Life Styles held in Glay, France January 31 to February 5, 1977. By Churches Participation in Development W.C.C.-)

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1. Christians and the Search for a New Life Styles

Almost everywhere in the affluent world it is possible to observe the coming to life of groups of people searching for new life styles. Reacting against prevailing patterns of behaviour, stereotyped attitudes and individualistic values, these groups try to open ways to a renewed life. In this process Christians participate with non-Christians, and such involvements lead to some of us to raise questions concerning our faith and our witness in society. Although our participation in most of the cases is not always motivated by theological thinking, we feel we cannot avoid discussing such questions.

For example, in the developed world, we are increasingly becoming aware of ecological problems, and trying to develop responsible attitudes and behaviour vis-a-vis nature and available resources. What we are trying to develop in this sense is a new life style, which could correct past experiences. We form groups and associations aiming at more harmonious relationship between human beings and environment, developing our action through campaigns and other types of actions, oriented towards awareness-building on these problems. For us, nature is not opposed to human life, but the necessary context of it. To continue to abuse nature, or to destroy it, is to damage what is human. Some of us involved in this type of action which manifests a new life style towards nature, are in effect posing some theological questions; how to understand creations in which the redemptive work of God is being accomplished? How to be responsible in our relationship with nature, reflecting also our faithfulness to God who is Creator and redeemer? What kind of corrections should be introduced in theologies that see nature only as a reservoir of raw materials which human beings can dispose, and not as a gift of God to human beings of all ages? These and other similar questions, are posed in the context of the search for the new, of renewal of human life, of attempts to express "a new life style".

We are also becoming aware of the great disparities that exist between life in developed and the underdeveloped countries. We feel uneasy because of the possibilities and degree of consumption of the rich people

which is in contrast with the scarcity and suffering of the poor majority of the world's population. We think that we have to curb consumption in affluent countries and call the attention of their peoples to this problem, inviting them "to live more simply in order that others may simply live." We Christians concerned about a new life style feel that this is a way to express - at least in part - our responsibility towards the poor of this world. Why accumulate superfluous things and waste unnecessarily, while so many others are struggling merely to survive? For some of us giving full expression to this responsibility implies going further and taking a necessary complementary step: to share with those in need whatever results from our resolve to curb consumption. This may be an expression of Christian charity but it is also a witness to the concern for those in need in their own countries, especially in the Third World. Simplicity, and solidarity go hand in hand in this case. In this context the teachings of the Epistle of James calling believers in Jesus Christ to oneness, becomes a challenge in our present world. Christian fellowship is not limited to those who live around us; those of us practising this life style say that it has to reach the least of the poor, among whom Jesus Christ expects manifestation of our love and care. (Matt. 25: 31-46) . Many, if not all of us feel convinced that we must also try - in fellowship with other peoples - to advance social justice in the world. The search for new life styles cannot be separated from community life. We are concerned, for example with the situation of the migrant workers in affluent countries, as well as with social economic and political structures which allow some to take advantage of the work of many. We are involved in social mobilization, in conscientization efforts, in political struggles.....Some of us are motivated by ideologies which claim to achieve equity and a more human society. As Christians we are becoming involved in such efforts as ways of witnessing to a life lived in the expectation of the "Kingdom of God", of a world of justice and freedom. We believe that our participation in these movements is the opposite of the way of life which creates massification and indifference towards social, economic and political matters. For us, to live in this way militantly for justice in the expectation of the Kingdom, is to give expression to what St. Paul wrote: " Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Rom. 12:2) . Our life style is perhaps not entirely new, but we try to innovate to recreate to open new avenues and build new channels of human relationships in society. For us, this is an expression of our deep feelings and expectations.

We also do not accept the growing gap between developed and underdeveloped people, and we ask for a more equitable world. Our claim is for "another development" to correct prevailing patterns of economic growth. We emphasize the need for technology which could be appropriated for and by everybody. We would like to give warning of unpredictable damaging consequences of expansion of use of nuclear energy to future generations of humanity. Through these new lines of action we search for a new life style corresponding to the "New International Economic Order," which implies changes not only at the international level, but of national structures as well. Again as Christians involved in the practice of this life style we ask for a simpler living and solidarity with the poor and the victims

of injustice. In this context we relate the vision of the new world order to the search for a new society. Although we realize their limitations we strive for change as a form of participation in the mission of the Church which we understand not only as proclamation but also as involvement for justice and peace among nations. We believe that from a theological perspective it seems necessary to discuss again the problem posed by the contradiction between the powers of the world and the authority of Jesus Christ. We are not trying to justify our action through this kind of reflection, but to understand how we should work at this level of human life.

As an implication of the commitments indicated above, we feel compelled to improve different types of community life in order to counter prevailing patterns of individualistic existence which create alienation, lack of personal communication with others, and loss of the sense of community. Particularly among those of the younger generation this movement is visible: It is an affirmation of collective and communitarian values, as well as an existential active search for more appropriate social structures for human beings. As Christians involved in such processes we question ourselves about the relationship of these forms of living together with the meaning of fellowship (koinonia) for the people of God. Instead of thinking in terms of "social order" we rather think in terms of how the Holy Spirit is uniting people, how He is at work renewing our existence through this style of life and creating conditions for potential changes in society. Most of these expressions of living together have services in society as a purpose, which poses again the question to us about the relation between community and service (koinonia and diakonia) as manifestation of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-23).

Many of us in the new life style movements have made fundamental and even radical decisions. Some of us have been motivated by the other's suffering because of our feelings of social responsibility. In depth of these situations we have experienced "the love of Christ which constrains us" (II Cor. 5:14), which has helped us to reorient our ways of living trying to achieve a more meaningful personal and collective human existence. In this context, the different involvements in the search for new life styles may very well be expressions - almost signs - of the renewal of all things that is continually done by Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit.

2. Some Points of Departure

Having sketched the main aspects of the context in which the search for new life styles takes shape today, we indicate in what follows: some points of departure for further theological reflection. Instead of making a systematic presentation, and without any claim to comprehensiveness we propose three examples for possible lines of thought as an endeavour to relate traditional theological discourse to the present day life style discussion and vice versa. The first section on Co-workers of God has its context in the tradition of the Reformation while the two sections on "Church and the Cosmos" and on "The sacrament of the poor" are rooted in the tradition of eastern orthodox theology.

a) Co-workers of God

The search for a new life style takes place in the context of the apparently irredeemable, world-wide self-destruction of mankind. The powerful few exploit vast masses of the powerless, reducing them to a state of extreme poverty, even delivering them to certain death, and in doing so they destroy the very basis of life itself. This historical setting is experienced by many as a combination of destructive trends which converge in a process that leads irreversibly towards a fatal destiny.

The growing momentum of the search for new life styles cannot be deducted from this context. Instead, it reveals the conviction that new life is available in spite of and "from beyond" the apparent hopelessness of the situation. Irrespective of its different, **specific** motivations and irrespective of its different expressions in different settings, this search - in all its pluralistic manifestation - has a common thrust: it affirms the principle of hope and it thus negates the power of fatalistic necessity.

The fact that many individuals and groups who embrace this search live outside or often merely at the fringes of the institutional church poses a serious challenge to all those who profess to be servants of the Gospel. It is not the Church which claims to live by the promise "behold I make all things new?" (Rev. 21:5). Should the manifestation of hope in the face of ~~hopelessness~~ not be the central event which continuously regenerates the life of the Church as a genuine demonstration of eschatological existence? In other words: is it not the task of the Church, her very *raison d'être* to affirm a life born of the promise of the new in the midst of the threats of the time? Is not the Church called to exhibit the certain trust that the Lord meets us in the dark future a trust which does not remove the darkness but which deprives it of its power? And ~~it~~ is not in a life of such hope that the power of the Gospel removes resignation and opens our eyes so that we may discover the manifold signs through which the promised new life announces itself as a foretaste of the coming of the Kingdom?

The manifold endeavours in search of a new life style exhibits an affinity to an eschatological understanding of the Kingdom of God in history. As an affirmation of hope they partake of the tension between the "not yet" and the "already amongst you" tension which the Church herself has often tried to maintain. Can we discern in the search for new life styles and its implicit trust that new life is possible one of the signs which indicate that God is still with his creation? And if so how does this affect the witness of the Church? Does all of this remain peripheral or does the Church perceive it as a call to repentance?

The **significance** to the search for the new becomes even more clear if we consider another aspect of its affinity to the biblical witness. This search calls into question certain central assumptions of the form of scientific/technological development which dominates our lives. It rejects more or less explicitly the notion that nature is merely a reservoir of resources ~~for~~ us to use in an unbridled fashion. In one form or another the gropings for a new life style are undergirded by the conviction that we must discover and practice forms of personal conduct which are oriented towards the maintenance

of life on this planet and which are informed by the desire for a just distribution of our limited resources. Central to the affirmation of these aims is the acceptance of finitude, the acceptance of the limits to our existence. But such acceptance strikes at the very root of the development which we practice at present, for our present form of development is by its very nature the negation of finitude. We begin to understand it ever more clearly as the culmination of the promethean revolution which - determined to destroy the limitations of creatureliness - destroys creation itself.

The Church should have no problem with understanding the significance of such affirmations since they reflect essential biblical views. In the creation story a vision of man is projected as the co-creator, as the one who on behalf of God, is to tend creation. The task "have dominion over them" is given to man who has not yet partaken of the fruit, that is, to man who - together and in harmony with all of creation - exists in "natural" finitude. Finitude, not as a prison, rather as the realm in which the fullness of life unfolds. Throughout the biblical witness the vision of the reconciliation of human beings with each other and with all of creation occupies a central place. It shines forth in the messianic prophecies (Isa. 11: 1-10), it is taken up in the beatitudes in which the land is promised to the meek. To St. Paul (Rom. 8) the promise of the new life issues in the convictions that in Christ all of creation will receive justice through the gift of justification (our reinstatement into the role of co-creator) to us. Does this not imply that the exploitation of man stems from the same root and does this not also imply, that social justice cannot be achieved without justice for all creation?

Seen in this context our continued exploitation of our fellow-creatures is a practical denial of our Easter faith, irrespective of what we profess with our lips. By the same token, the longing for other modes of living may in its depth be understood as the yearning for an Easterly existence.

b) Church and the Cosmos

Between the resurrection of Christ and the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God, is the Church. The Church since Whitsunday, animated by the action of the Holy Spirit is the place of personal encounter between God and human beings. Her constitutive element is the eucharist. Each Christian is in communion with other members of this community through the eucharist and also with a Trinitarian God. It is the birth of cosmos like a body of Glory; it is the rebirth of humanity assumed and redeemed by Christ. The Church through her liturgical life is the divine human place, where the universal body of the new human being is slowly created. "The entire creation suffers the pains of childbirth until the moment of its regeneration" (Roman 8: 20-22). The mysteries of the Church, that is to say, the different aspects of the life of the ecclesial community are the centre and the sense of cosmic life. Things are assumed and sanctified by the prayers and the blessings of the Church. In every civilization we see two tendencies: The wish to return to Paradise through feast, art, leisure where human beings freely admire nature, and the work as humanization of the world substance in one body belonging to all of humankind. Here human beings are called upon to collaborate with God for the salvation of the universe.

In the knowledge of nature and in its transformation, it is up to us to live a cosmic eucharist. "That which is yours and which comes from you, we offer it to you, all and for all". (Liturgy St. John Chrysostomos).

c) The "Sacrament of the Poor" -- (Matt. 25: 31-46)

Personal existence in the ecclesial community is an existence of communion with other persons, according to the image of the Trinitarian God, whose essence is love. "By this may be seen who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil; whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother" (I John 3:10). We have to bear in mind the Last Judgment. Christ tells the just ones: " Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Matt. 25: 34-36). It is John Chrysostomos who has spoken in relation to this text about "the sacrament of the brother", and especially of "the least" among the brothers, that is, the poor. Chrisostomos strived for the freedom of spirit and the rights of of the poorest of Constantinople against the intentions of the imperial power, paying for that with martyrdom. Chrysostomos strongly emphasized that Christ is the other, and that the sacrament of the eucharist must be at the service of justice, that is, like an oblation which is not merely an expression of piety, but of sharing in order to a better social life.

The sharing of goods as it was done in the Church of Jerusalem has remained throughout the history of Christianity the inductive image, not of an economic system that would resolve all problems (which never has been the case)", but of a victory of human will on egoism and greed, in order to live "unanimously" in love.

Many Fathers of the Church have underlined the relative character of private property, and have strongly criticized the heritage of the means of production and they have also shown that natural resources belong to God, and that human beings can only make use of them for the good of all. Simultaneously they rehabilitate human work, which was considered as servile in the old Greco-Roman civilization. The example is given by St. Paul making tents. The Fathers have seen in human work the cosmic responsibility of the human person and the expression of solidarity through which communion is manifested.

When constantinian conformism made Christian parishes groups of different people, the possibilities of expressing love (agape) and living fellowship decreased. It was at the time that monastic communities appeared. They aimed at giving witness to the apostolic love, and to bring to life again, in a new historical context, the example of the first Church of Jerusalem. Monasteries, always open to the people, where all monks had to work (as it is still the case of the Eastern churches, were a demonstration that the rejection of oneself demands the rejection of riches.

The movements for evangelical poverty that have shaken societies in the late Middle Ages and at the beginning of modern times were echoes of the teachings of St. John Chrysostomos. These movements, terribly repressed,

are like the expressions of one of the most disastrous schisms in the history of Christianity: the schism between the sacrament of the altar and the sacrament of the poor. The Church has preserved the mystery and the mystique of the Risen One, but many Christians have demonstrated very often to be little sensitive to the crucified Christ of history among the poorest, especially during and after the time of Industrial Revolution (many factors in Church history have led to this situation: decline of monasticism, development of an individualistic piety, not much able to provoke creative ethics and so on).

The evolution of the functions of deacons illustrates such distortions: in the Early Church the deacon gave to the eucharist the whole of its social dimension; he was, on behalf of the bishop, the person responsible for the social work of the church to be done as a sacrament. However, through the ages, the ministry of the deacon has de facto disappeared in the West, and has become merely liturgical in the East. Separated from the eucharist - by which alone the sacrament of the poor can be revitalized - those who were able to understand and to practice the sacrament of the poor, have oriented their hopes to the violence of utopias, towards the passionate expectation of a "millenist Kingdom", which could become real through some kind of liberating catastrophe. Here we face the origins of modern socialism.

There is no guide to the action of Christians other than active, creative, stubborn love, always ready to begin to move again, and animated by the vision of the whole man being a co-worker of God.

3. The Churches and the Search for a New Life Style

There is a process of challenge between Christians and churches participating in the search for new life styles. It would be unfortunate if the opportunity for fruitful dialogue were lost, because of refusal by either party to carry on a conversation about these problems; for example, the churches request to participants in different groups striving for new life styles, to reflect upon how their concern is related to Christian faith, to the repentance of sins, to conversion and salvation, to the redemptive work of God, and so on. In other words, churches have every right to remind those involved in these active researches, not to lose but rather to look for a better understanding of their Christian contribution to society and also to the Church.

In the same way, Christians involved in these processes, have every right to challenge the prevailing life style in many churches, which to many has become like a "week-end parenthesis", or which to others is a reflection of the existence of the enclaves where a formalistic piety is being exercised, characterized by an undeniable trend to comfortable "embourgeoisement". Because of this, for many Christians who search new life styles, church life is synonym for stereotypes, that is, of lack of creativity and freedom. But, what does a "new life style" mean to the churches? We are not assuming that it does not matter what proposal for change is accepted and introduced in the life of the Christian communities. Nevertheless, to be faithful to Jesus Christ is to be open to the renewal that the Holy Spirit brings about within the people of God. The churches, then, in one way or the other have to answer questions like: How do the different manifestations of the search for new life styles affect the life of the Christian congregation? How do we express a new life

style in the missionary work of the Church? What is the relationship between new ways of living and liturgical forms in the life of the Church? In what ways can church structures be open to the challenges posed by the search for new life styles. In what ways do power structures within the churches give evidence of people's real participation in decision-making processes? How to avoid a situation in which, while the life-style of committed believers of Jesus Christ is changing, the institutional life styles of the churches continue to be more or less the same? How can churches become appropriated groups of fellowships for people's search for new life styles? How do we understand the concept of stewardship in our time?

We feel that it would be helpful if some of these questions could be considered by churches immediately following this meeting.

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Reflections from the First World

" It has often been pointed out that the new life styles issue seems to be popular mainly in the middle class circles. (This does not mean that the problems necessitating a new life style exist only for those classes. But for different groups or classes the priorities may differ. Nevertheless for many people, conflicts within their own society (such as racial injustice) may be more urgent than ecological or development issues (both of which are major motivations in the movement for new life styles). This raises some questions. If people engaged in the search for a new life style choose to work on different problems or with different problems or with different strategies than those chosen by the working class, to what extent are these differences legitimate? To what extent are we dealing with an escape from the traditional conflicts in society? "

These differences might separate the new life style movement from other classes in society. This danger is increasingly being perceived and there are some signs that such separation can be overcome. (For example, the Dutch new life style movement supported a boycott of South African products that was originally organized by the trade unions.

" It may be that middle class people have better opportunities for discerning such problems as international maldistribution of food, energy materials and so on. This class enjoys a good level of comfort, leisure, security, and education compared to the workers. It may well be that due to a genuine concern for those who are suffering from these conflicts, rather than out of self interest, that in the new life styles movement, the ecological and development issues receive a high priority."

Reflections of a Participant from a Socialist Country

For us, living as a group in a socialist country, the question of a new life style has become relevant through considering problems of underdevelopment and of the international conflict of different social orders.

To follow Christ for us is the call to join God on his way toward man.

It is the challenge to share the life of the poor because it is among them that we should seek and rediscover God. The call to discipleship will lead us also to take sides with the struggling people. By doing this we will be next to the struggling Jesus. This fight requires to engage as partisans with those who struggle for their liberation.

Therefore the quest of a new life style for us is the question of living in solidarity.

We recognize the political meaning of solidarity. Solidarity has its firm place where progressive changes are taking place, where systems and structures which produce exploitation, oppression and injustice are changed. Solidarity means standing firmly together in order to eliminate oppression and suffering.

Solidarity with others enables us to seek a new way of life. We call it a life in solidarity.

This life in solidarity is governed by two motives. First, we turn away from our egotism and consumerism and learn instead a new asceticism and simplicity. New asceticism is not to be understood as an individualistic attitude; we want to rediscover community and to consume goods together. Second, by taking sides with those who need our support our life is enriched by engagement. Today we encounter everywhere the phenomenon of demanding things, the attitude being "this is my right", "this belongs to me", so on. In this respect solidarity is a piece of self-liberation.

With whom should we be in solidarity? With all the oppressed and exploited people; with those who liberate themselves.

With whom can we not be in solidarity? With all those who consciously are woven into capitalism.

Toward what aim do we use our solidarity? Towards a society in which justice lives, in which communities can grow.

The question new life style is put as if there were a corresponding concept (though in a different context and based on different assumptions) in our socialist society.

I cannot enter into theoretical reflection, but I can share with you some experiences. After my theological studies I worked for seven years as a pastor in a parish. Since 1961 I have been working in a factory, as a worker in basic production units.

There I saw myself confronted with a different kind of reality. This reality is characterized by a basic principle: Learn the socialist way, work the socialist way, live the socialist way. The concept is a socialist way of life.

In the beginning I thought I could not identify with my fellow workers. I thought that a socialist way of life was in contradiction with my Christian way of life.

But I had no choice. I simply was integrated into this socialist

way of life, whether I wanted it or not. This forced me to reflect on the question whether a socialist way of life and my Christian faith excluded each other, or whether they coincide on certain questions.

I experience daily in my work what a socialist way of life means. I want to share with you four features of it, which illustrate what the socialist way of life means:

1. It is guided by the principle : "From I to we". All workers in the factory are members of the socialist collective. I had to ask the question whether life with others in group is really incompatible with my Christian faith. I remembered that the Old Testament always speaks of the people of God; in the gospel we hear of the group of disciples, the epistles are mostly addressed to a congregation. I discovered that life in a group is closer to Scripture than life in an individualistic way. Another discovery was that Jesus Christ freed me to live with others, even in a secular group.
2. A second feature of the socialist way of life in the factory is that we are called to participate in planning, in work, and decision-making. For me this a clear call to responsible living. My Christian faith impels me to take responsibility for my neighbours, in fact for the whole of society. Therefore I could not refuse concrete demands to assume responsibility.

Thus I have been directing a socialist collective for many years. I am also an elected member of the trade union leadership of my department in the factory, and a member of the commission responsible for dealing with labour conflicts. This has made it clear to me that assuming responsibility and thus participating in decision making is possible only by joining existing socialist institutions.

3. In our factory we are clear about the fact that our work is an important contribution towards the building of a socialist society. Our long range goal is to transform ourselves into a communist society. Thus I had two alternatives only: Either to adjust, and somehow to survive, or to decide to live committed to the goals of this society. Of course I do know that socialist society is not identical with the the Kingdom of God. But society as it is programmed by socialism, comes closest to our vision of the Kingdom, because it attempts to realise more peace, more justice, more liberation than other forms of social organization I know of. Therefore I commit myself to the building of a socialist society.
4. A last feature is that we commit ourselves to international solidarity. All members of socialist working brigades are expected to practice solidarity by giving a certain fixed percentage of their income to support groups struggling for liberation.

There are people who do this with a bad conscience, especially Christians. To me, personally, solidarity is motivated by my faith. Regarding the question of channels for development aid, I would say this is secondary. However, my experience is that even here cooperation between Christians and Marxists is possible. Thus in our factory we

we have worked together on this issue. We have looked for a project which was supposed to be financed by "Bread for the World" (DDR).

Regarding Chile we even signed a contract with Bread for the World, which could not be realized however, because of military takeover. From many conversations I have come to the conclusion that development aid can be effective only if a country has already changed its social structure and is in the process of building a new society.

Right now I have to reflect seriously on what living in solidarity means in my encounter and in work with Algerian colleagues who are being trained in our factory. What does it mean to live in solidarity more specifically is it just sharing?

When I translate these principles into my Christian vocabulary, they signify for me: Life in a group means living responsibly; living in solidarity means living with commitment. Thus the concept of a socialist way of life becomes often an opportunity to practice my Christian faith in our particular situation.

I presume that the concept of a socialist way of life, unlike the new life style connotes also some kind of an "alternative life style", because the question is not to change existing structures but to concretize, and fill with life structures which have already been charged by the socialist revolution.

Voices from the Third World

It may be misleading, from a Third World perspective, to speak about new life styles. Though the movement is concerned with the quality of economic, social and political relationship at national and international levels, the word style does suggest that it is primarily a matter of rearranging these relations within a given framework.

In most Third World societies the question is not to rearrange, but how to arrange it all. Thus it is more appropriate to ask what kind of life, and hence which type of social organization, is to be sought.

- Some definite criteria for the kind of life desired include: Food, shelter health and education, work, participation in decision-making processes, control (and participation in the control) over nation resources and fuller participation in international, economic and political decisions.

It is quite clear that the social process aiming at these goals is different in different countries. In many Third World societies it is actually at an impasse. Political and economic power have been centred in the industrialized countries; even with the seizing of some of that power by the OPEC nations, decisions made in alliance with national élites in the Third World very often clearly militate against the wellbeing of the vast majority of poor people in the world. Injustice and oppression prevail, with the growing trend towards authoritarian governments enforced by suspension of civil liberties, violation of human rights, military regimes and torture. These conditions make it more and more difficult for people to struggle effectively for a meaningful life.

Nevertheless, while we recognize that justice within the Third World societies is far from being realized, more justice in international relations is imperative. Consequently we need to take supportive action regarding the negotiations for an international economic order, going on in the UN, trade and tariff negotiations carried out in UNCTAD and GATT, commodity agreement negotiations, policies of the IMF and the World Bank, international code of conduct conferences (such as Law of the Sea and others), business practices and policies of Trans-national Corporations, and so on.

The new life style movement, which is of Western origin, will gain credibility only if it can put up signs that it is also concerned about changes of power relations. These changes must come at many levels, but not **least** at the level of the international negotiations mentioned above.

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The Churches and New Life Styles

The mission of the Church implies that she has to be in the world but not of the world. Today many of our churches are part of the establishment and therefore do not react against its materialistic tendencies. In this sense, the Church has betrayed both the Lord of the Church and those whom it was meant to serve. The task of the Church today is to preach and practise love in the world, and to proclaim judgement.

The Christian Church is an institution but is also a community of human beings gathered for worship and sent forth to witness in the world. Many of these same human beings in their daily lives participate in decision-making that vitally affects our future.

However we want to define the Church, we know that it has image and perhaps also authority in society. It is expected to have an opinion, to promote a certain way of living and to create an atmosphere which inspires the search for the new.

The Churches often have great material resources. They also can mobilize people who are prepared to create opinion and to try new life styles. They ought also to look for people who are already going against the mainstream and support them. This might be done by giving them access to the buildings, land, money and members of the Church, and cooperating in experimental alternatives (e.g. building a solar hot water heater for the Church, growing a communal garden on church land, supporting those people who attempt to live a communal life in their development of new liturgies, etc.).

The temptation for many churches to be too much of the world is also revealed in extravagance of their buildings, equipment etc. Responsible stewardship of resources should be the moral guide when financial decisions for example regarding costly restoration of church buildings, are made. The corporations, the banks and other institutions in which the churches have financial interests should be closely scrutinized to determine whether such interests are in line with Christian belief. Churches should also consider the parable of the talents when dealing with their valuable

possessions. In some cases there is too much of a gap between the salaries of the highest and the lowest paid among lay and ordained church employees. The churches should implement a leveling on income and a rapid equalization of salaries and should play a leading role in implementing the same policy in secular society.

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(Taken From : "IN SEARCH OF THE NEW (II)" document of the Commission of the Churches Participation in Development, World Council of Churches).

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Other documents received include: "Living Together and New Life Styles" "Systematic Changes and New Life Styles". Annotated Agenda for workshop on New Life Styles, Alternative Types of Life and Life Styles, and many other papers.

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Book Review :

No More Plastic Jesus , by Adam Daniel Finnerty,
Publishers: Orbis Books - Maryknoll, N.Y. - 1977.

Mr. Finnerty writes about the global situation, which presently involves a great contrast between the rich and the poor. He points to a world situation that is no longer sustainable unless the richer nations, are willing to change their life style. He calls for the forming of a new group of people called the "World Service" to operate on the world stage and to bring about a new international order. Sound advice is given to people who wish to develop their skills for world service. There is a special call to the millions of Christians to respond to the Gospel teaching of a simple life. This Christian commitment would shine as a ray of hope for the building of a better and just society. The writer also explains in detail the Sharkertown Pledge to which he agreed in 1973:

I declare myself to be a world citizen.....
I commit myself to lead an ecologically sound life.....
.....and to share my personal wealth with the world's poor.....

Excerpt from 'Une Eglise pour l'Évangélisation du Monde d'Aujourd'hui' --
COMMENT ÉQUIPER LES COMMUNAUTÉS ECCLESIALES DE BASE

1. Il faudra abandonner la conception cléricale du ministère

Si le but de la pastorale sera la création de communautés responsables de l'évangélisation, de la mission du Christ, dans leur propre milieu, il faudra un tout autre conception du ministère pastoral dans l'Eglise.

Avant le Concile Vatican II le ministère et la responsabilité proprement ecclésiastique étaient le fief du clergé. La hiérarchie, les évêques et les prêtres, était conçue comme au dessus du peuple, comme les médiateurs entre le Christ et le peuple de Dieu. Ils avaient la garde de tous les trésors de la grâce. Les laïcs, le peuple, n'avaient qu'à recevoir d'eux ces trésors de la grâce, leur nourriture spirituelle et à suivre leur direction, plus importante en pratique, que leur conscience personnelle.

"Laïcs", nom qui originellement signifiait membre du peuple, citoyen responsable était devenu synonyme dans le langage courant d'incompétent et d'homme séculier par opposition au prêtre, l'homme du sacré. Dans cette conception, comme le disait un conférencier français, "ils étaient devenus tellement prêtres, qu'ils avaient oublié qu'ils étaient avant tout chrétiens".

Tout marquait la distinction, la séparation entre le simple peuple chrétien et le clergé, caste sacrée et privilégiée dans l'Eglise et dans le monde chrétien. Ils avaient le monopole de la responsabilité ecclésiastique et du sacré, seuls ils avaient le droit d'entrer au sanctuaire, de toucher les saintes espèces, les vases sacrés, etc. Ceux furent autant de tabous pour bien accentuer leur caractère sacré, au détriment, pouvons-nous dire, du caractère sacré du peuple baptisé qui était plutôt profané par toutes ces interdictions, c.à.d. relégué au domaine du profane. Leur vêtement, leur genre de vie, les honneurs qu'ils recevaient, tout devait bien marquer la démarcation entre peuple et clergé, pour mettre ces derniers sur un piédestal sacré au dessus des simples fidèles.

Le rapport des conférences épiscopales de l'Europe ou synode l'exprimait avec force: "Nous amorçons à peine le passage d'une Eglise de type cléricale à une Eglise où est vécue organiquement la responsabilité commune des fidèles. Ce passage exige la révision de nos structures de communion ecclésiastique". (D.C. 18, 864)

Et le rapport du Canada considérait cette distinction dans l'Eglise comme une distorsion: "Il faut faire attention au fait que, dans l'histoire de l'Eglise, est apparue la distinction sacerdoce-laïc, distinction qui a disloqué le ministère ou la mission de l'Eglise: le clergé s'est approprié tous les éléments du ministère ecclésiastique. Cette dislocation a introduit deux classes dans l'Eglise: un clergé actif et dominateur, et un laïc assez passif". (D.C. 20, 977).

Une analyse plus approfondie de la crise actuelle des vocations sacerdotales aussi bien dans l'Eglise catholique que dans les grandes Eglises protestantes, montre que c'est justement cette séparation cléricale, ce monopole du sacré, qui rebute les jeunes dans un monde de plus en plus sécularisé et, au moins comme aspiration, démocratique. La diminution, souvent vertigineuse des clercs dans nos séminaires ou les facultés de théologie, en opposition avec l'intérêt croissant des laïcs pour suivre des cours de théologie est bien frappante.

L I F E S T Y L EC H I N A

In Raymond Whitehead's recent book 'Love and Struggle in Mao's Thought' (Orbis books, 1977), chapter four deals with "A Revolution in Lifestyle". The author describes the following features of Maoist lifestyle as:

- Plain living and hard struggle
- Anti-individualism
- Self reliance
- Class hatred
- Basic honesty and anti-consumerism
- Criticism and self-criticism
- Mao Study

He concludes the chapter with the following:

EVALUATION OF MAOIST LIFESTYLE

"Various people will evaluate the Maoist lifestyle differently, but a few general points can be made. There are elements of the lifestyle in China that will strike some people as strange or unattractive. Other elements may look good in theory, but seem too demanding in practice.

There is an emphasis on class hatred and militancy that at first may seem unnecessarily harsh. The Chinese lived through a century of war, deprivation and revolution. They have identified the evils of that era with the class system and the gross inequality they witnessed. The militant rejection of that system will seem harsh to those of us who have been living in relative comfort, who have not experienced a situation that allowed famine for some while others lived in luxury. As we become sensitive to the brutalities of the present world economic structures we may be less repelled by the language of class hatred. Or at least we may be able to understand why there is such a severe rejection of the old inequalities.

Enjoying a life of relative comfort may make it difficult to appreciate the call to plain living and hard struggle. China is a poor country, although it has been able to achieve a fair enough distribution of national resources to make grinding poverty and starvation a thing of the past. If frugality were not emphasized there would be the danger of a small percentage of the population again monopolizing the limited resources.

Plain living and hard struggle may sound too ascetic to be very appealing. This emphasis in the Maoist lifestyle has sometimes been seen in China itself as frugality for the sake of frugality. Maoist writers deny this. "We are not stoics," they have written, and "we are neither ascetics nor puritans." The very need for such denials is an indication of the problem. There is a rejection of luxurious living, and physical labor is seen as good for keeping one's thought pure. There is an ascetic tendency here.

The question of asceticism, however, goes back to the question of distribution. It is not that the pleasures of life are evil, but that unequal access to these pleasures is not tolerated. There is a great effort to prevent class distinctions from emerging again.

It might be said by Western observers that the Chinese are simply making a virtue out of a necessity and that when they achieve our level of affluence they will not need to emphasize plain living and hard struggle. This is only partly true. As productivity in China has increased, the goods available to all the people have also increased. It is possible to project a future of a much more abundant life for people in China. The error of this assessment is that it overlooks the unequal distribution in Western societies. To assume that the luxuries enjoyed are based simply on greater productivity is to ignore the fact that the high standard of living in the West is based both on gross inequalities in the social system and on the extraction of wealth from other parts of the world. One must also not overlook the fact that such unlimited consumption of the world's resources is an artificial lifestyle which would be impossible for all the people of the world to enjoy, and which will eventually exhaust irreplaceable resources.

Plain living and hard struggle, then, is both a realistic response to China's present level of production and a lifestyle based on an understanding that high living is always at the expense of others. There is a short-range frugality that will be eased as production increases and all the people have a greater share of life's necessities and pleasures. There is also a long-range frugality which seeks to find a way of life in balance with the resources available.

The emphasis on a simple lifestyle and hard work is related in the Chinese experience to the problem of individualism and consumerism. Happiness is not to be found, according to Mao's struggle ethic, in the amassing of more goods for oneself, but in working for the good of the total community. One Marxist writer was criticized for his view of happiness in which he said that a person "should be well-fed and clothed, should live in a spacious and clean house, and should enjoy love and life in amity with spouse, parents and children." There is nothing wrong with food, house, clothes and family love, but it was considered too individualistic to talk only of building one's "comfortable nest" and neglecting society. In contrast to this, the Communist ideal is ...

"... to eliminate classes, exploitation, the difference between mental and manual labor, the difference between workers and peasants and the difference between town and country; to raise social productivity and the ideological and cultural level of the people to a great extent, turn labor into the first need of human life, enable every person to give full play to his ability on the premise of serving the people, and enjoy a good material and spiritual life in the collective."(1)

The overcoming of individualism and selfishness is furthered by using the method of criticism and self-criticism and by emphasizing that advanced education is for the purpose of greater service and not personal gain. An individual should not have a free choice of career without reference to community needs and goals. A person should not be encouraged to get ahead, since this implies stepping on other people who are falling behind. A spirit of community cooperation rather than individual competitiveness is being nurtured.

This approach is in conflict with the social values of success, fame, wealth, and position. It may seem to some that the Maoist lifestyle is a violation of individual freedom and human rights. It may also go against a widely-understood view of human nature. What of those who cherish a right to liberty, free choice of career and place of work, and individual pursuit of happiness?

The Maoists are not opposed to liberty, happiness and personal fulfillment, but feel that these should be found in collective rather than individualistic effort. They also feel that these liberties and opportunities are not equally accessible to everyone in Western societies, but that economic conditions determine one's life chances. This conflict of values and difference of perspective will be covered more fully in the following chapter. The Maoist approach is motivated by a desire to achieve a society where equality and community spirit are truly present. Insofar as this is the case, the conflict in values deserves careful consideration.

We may have things to learn from the Maoist lifestyle. A system of individual freedom may cause problems of poverty and injustice of which we are not conscious and which, on reflection, we may want to avoid. The moral revitalization, the selflessness of the Maoist ideal, the willingness to put community interests above personal goals, may be characteristics that would be helpful in overcoming some of the problems that many face today.

This is not to say that the Maoist lifestyle could ever be taken over totally in other societies. The West may need more social unity than it has, but there may be more unity in China than the West needs or desires. In the United States people enjoy political satire, foreign policy debates in the press, and the rough and tumble of electoral politics. Learning from the Maoist lifestyle would not necessarily threaten these.

In American traditions there has not been the same disdain for physical labor, the same deprivation of power among the common people, the same willingness to allow some in the society to starve, the same degree of class bifurcation as the Chinese experienced in their past, although Americans do suffer from injustices in many of these areas. We can learn from the Maoist experience, but the kind of transformation our own society requires is not the same as China's, and the lifestyle that will emerge from our continued struggle will reflect our own cultural heritage."

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Footnote (1) Kan Feng, "What philosophy of Life is this?: On Comrade Feng Ting's Communist Philosophy of Life," CYN, October 31, 1964, CB, n° 750 (January 13, 1965), p.5.

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ECUADOR:

The widening gap

Commenting recently on the publication of a church study on political, economic and social conditions in Ecuador, Cardinal Pablo Muñoz, president of the Ecuadorean Bishops' Conference, said that Ecuador's new wealth from oil has resulted in the widening of the gap between the country's rich and poor. Apparently prompted by repeated promises by the military junta to transfer power to civilians in the near future, the bishops undertook the study to recommend corrective measures for the nation's ills. According to the documents, ten years ago the bishops voiced their concern that the people's extreme poverty and the government's low revenues made it difficult for any administration to achieve satisfactory progress. But there is now spectacular new wealth, coming mostly from new oil discoveries and production, which has sharply increased government revenues. However, the Cardinal said, "there is worsening of conditions regarding social justice, as the gap between rich and poor grows". Noting Ecuador's rapid change from an agricultural, semi-feudal society into a modern industrialised nation, the church study points to restructure the foundations of its political, social, economic and cultural life. Among the obstacles which need to be overcome, it mentions political instability, lack of civil virtues among the people and the leaders, the arms race undertaken by the military, and repeated violations of human rights.

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La véritable alternative c'est une foi militante et créatrice pour laquelle le réel n'est pas seulement ce qui est, mais tous les possibles d'un avenir qui apparaît toujours impossible à qui n'a pas la puissance de l'espoir.

R. Garaudy, l'Alternative

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S E D O S

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

M I N U T E S

77/14

The Sedos Executive Committee met on 12th October at 4pm. at SEDOS. The following were present:

Fr. P. Divarkar, SJ	Sr. Mary Motte, FMM
Sr. Danita McGonagle, SSND	Sr. Frances Webster, SCMM-M (for Sr. Codelieve)
* Br. Benildo Feliciano, FSC (for Br. Pablo)	*Br. Vincent Rabamahafaly, FSC
* Fr. Anthony Mettrop, PA	Sr. Joan Delancy

(* invited for discussion on the January Seminar/General Assembly)

I. The minutes (77/13) of 19th September were approved.

II. Matters arising

77/12 Item 8a) A communique from Fr. Tonna indicates he has no knowledge of Mr Kofalidis having worked at Sedos.

77/13 Item 4.2) The replacement for Miss Wooldridge has not yet been settled.

77/13 Item 4.5) Mission to Europe This was discussed briefly with Fr. Kerkhofs. It will be further discussed when more members of the committee are available.

77/13 Item 4.7) CODEL Evaluation It was agreed to forward Mr Waite's comments. Fr. Cullen has apparently been unable to stop in Rome.

77/13 Item 4.9) Visit of Fr. Kerkhofs on 4th October. Fr. Kerkhofs met with some of the members of the Executive Committee. There was a valuable exchange. Father expressed interest in our Human Rights topic as this will be the subject of a Pro Mundi Vita Seminar next September. He is also interested in suggestions for topics for the Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin. One topic being researched at present is "New Beginnings" both inside and outside religious communities. If Sedos members have information on such experiments, please let the Executive Secretary know and she will forward them to Pro Mundi Vita.

77/13 Item 14 Talk on Missiology by Fr. Neuner, SJ. This was attended by the Executive Committee on 24th September. Fr. Divarkar offered to supply a summary for the bulletin.

77/13 Item 14 A discussion with Mr Robinson of FADICA was held and dealt with ideas of development and problems of funding.

III. PLANS FOR SEDOS SEMINAR AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. Date: It was suggested that this be changed to THURSDAY 19th JANUARY as January 18th is the USG Meeting.

2. Approach: Sr. Mary Motte reported on the meeting on Human Rights held on October 7th. It was felt that it would be best to approach the topic from the point of Lay Ministries. (An account of the meeting will be in the October 1st bulletin.)

It was agreed that the focus for all three groups would be on various aspects of Service.

3. Preparatory Committees

A. HUMAN RIGHTS -- Sr. Mary Motte, fmm
Fr. Joseph Lang, mm
(Next meeting -- 21st October)

B. MARXISM -- Sr. Danita McGonagle, ssnd
Br. Benildo Feliciano, fsc
Br. Vincent Rabemahafaly, fsc

C. CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN
-- Fr. A. Mottrop, pa
Sr. Catherine Lafferty, snd-n

The committees will hold preparatory meetings and draw up questions to be discussed at the 19th January Seminar.

4. Tentative Plan for the Seminary/General Assembly

8.30	--	9.00	Registration
9.00	--	10.00	Presentation of topics
10.00	--	10.30	Coffee break
10.30	--	12.00	Small Group Discussions
12.15	--	1.00	Eucharist
1.00	--	2.30	Lunch
2.30	--	3.30	Reporting back
3.30	--	4.00	Tea Break
4.00	--	6.00	Business Meeting

- It was noted that the discussion groups should mix people of different backgrounds and experiences.
- The reporters should be well chosen for their ability to summarize. It was understood they would need most of the period from 12.00 to 2.30 to work on reports.
- The 4.00 to 6.00pm Business Meeting would be for Superiors General and/or Sedos delegates. A certain confusion arises from calling the entire day "General Assembly". Actually the formal business meeting is the "General Assembly".

IV. Revision of the Statutes

At this point in the meeting, Sr. Frances Webster, Br. Benildo and Br. Vincent and Fr. Metrop withdrew and the remaining members of the Executive Committee worked on the revision of the statutes. It is hoped that the old statutes and the new ones can be sent out in early November for members' comments.

V. Any other business

1. The Executive Secretary noted that a meeting had been held on 20th Sept. on the Hong Kong Survey of Priests & Brothers. Nine persons attended including Fr. Einaudi, PIME, Vicar General of the diocese of Hong Kong.
2. Thirty-two persons attended the meeting on South Africa on 27th September. Bishop Butelez and Bishop Brenninkmeijer were present and an interesting exchange took place.
3. Date and Time of next Executive Committee Meeting.

15th NOVEMBER 3.30 pm. at SEDOS

NEVER MISS A MEETING ! IT'S THE BEST WAY TO GET SOME EXTRA WORK.

(quoted in ANS - Salesian News Agency)

C H I N A

"ESPERIENZA CINESE E FEDE CRISTIANA" - "THE NEW CHINA: A CATHOLIC RESPONSE"

Italian edition by
Fr. Angelo Lazzarotto, PIME,
published by EMI, Bologna
v. Meloncello 3/3, 1976 pp204, 3,000Lit.

English edition by
Fr. Michael Chu, SJ,
published by the Paulist Press, U.S.A.
545 Island Rd, Romsey, N.J. 07446
pp. v+165, paperback \$4.95.

Review translated from the Italian in POPOLI E MISSIONI, Feb. 1977

Two Ecumenical Symposiums held in 1974 in Sweden and Belgium, dealt with the problematic significance of MAO's CHINA for Christian theology. Convinced that deeper reflection was called for, Fr. Joseph Hsieh, SJ, invited a few of his colleagues at the Theology Faculty of the Gregorian University, Rome, together with two lay experts, to reflect on different aspects of the same problem. The writers were of different nationalities and were not emotionally involved as former China missionaries would be.

The book does not represent a Study of Church Strategy: the Church may have failed in China, but the truth remains that the Gospel and 850 million people are not incompatible. The initial question tackled was: "Should there be a religion for a world that refuses it? And if so, what religion?" The front cover carries the question - "The Maoist Revolution: A Sign of the Times for the Church?" Since the Christian conscience is faced with the problems posed by the reality of China, this book makes interesting reading.

The writers study the China reality just prior to Mao's death, covering the positive, economic, technical, social and political aspects. Negative aspects are less evident apart from those concerning the Christian faith. We would have welcomed greater emphasis on the price paid by the Chinese people for the Communist victories, although Fr. Collins does speak of Christ's passion and the Chinese people. There is very little space given to the Chinese Church.

Some of the contributors are: JULIA CHING, born in China, a convert, specialist in Chinese philosophy and religion, and teacher at Yale University, who questions the significance of China for Christianity and of Christianity for China, the meaning of Maoism and its attractions.

PAUL RULE, director of religious studies at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia and an expert on the first Jesuits entering China, who analyzes the religiosity in the doctrine and cult of Mao, its tendency towards transcendency, essentially denied but yet present in its teachings.

GERALD O'COLLINS, sj, teacher of dogmatics, Faculty of Theology, Gregorian University, Rome, who draws a parallel between Jesus and Mao, between the imitation of Jesus and hero emulation.

DOMENICO GRASSO, sj, pastoral teacher at the Faculty of Theology, Gregorian University, Rome, who compares the Maoist Liberation and Christian Salvation; the "new" China reality and the plan for salvation; the dialogue between Christianity and the "new China". (This study is marked by its substance and clear expression and a basic optimism.)

FRANCIS SULLIVAN, sj, teacher of dogmatics, Faculty of Theology, Gregorian Univ. , Rome, who examines authors who see a secularized conception of salvation at work in the new China and recognize in it signs of salvation, but goes on to point out that certain theological conceptions must be verified such as: 1) In what sense the Church is "the universal sacrament of salvation" i.e. to avoid its being understood as monopolistic; and

2) What is the role of the Church in the "secular" salvation, which so many Christians see in the emergence of the new China and in its liberation from feudalism, imperialism and the numerous social ills that oppressed and humiliated the Chinese people throughout the last century?

ROBERTO FARICY, sj, teacher of spiritual theology at the Faculty of Theology, Gregorian University, Rome, who draws a strong contrast between the basic elements of Mao Tse Tung ideology and the Christian Faith and theology.

Despite its limitations, the NEW CHINA, which offers an interesting example to developing countries and others too, does have something to say to the Christian need for personal development, for the evolution of the entire Christian community, and for more productive Christian action and thought.

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Recently Received:

§ § "First Centenary of Don Bosco's Missions" - :
121 pages on the history of the Salesian Order and the work in the Missions. The last section includes an attractive presentation of statistics of the Salesian priests and brothers and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. There are 2913 Salesians serving in 40 countries. § §

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Topic : Health care in China, by Patricia Jacobsen mm.

(Two articles on China by Sister Patricia Jacobsen, mm. Sister Patricia formerly in Hong Kong, visited China in 1976; these two articles appeared recently in the Maryknoll Magazine.)

The People's republic of China is very much preoccupied with the health of her 800 million people. Since Mao Tse-Tung's 1965 directive, "In medical and health work, put the stress on rural areas", medical effort has been directed primarily to the 80% who live in the rural areas. The "Before Liberation (1949)" recitals about health care that I heard at formal and informal briefings during a visit to China in October and November 1976 confirmed reports by missionaries in the 1920's and 30's. Babies were abandoned by parents unable to care for them. Most people in rural areas lived their entire lives without ever seeing a doctor and died in great number at early ages of treatable diseases. While medical personnel in China acknowledge that they have a long way to go before all have access to the care they require, considerable development of services is evident. Generally, people appear to be healthy and health education in schools and at adult community centres emphasizes good nutrition, fresh air and exercise, sanitation and immunization. In Peking market individual portions for a well-balanced meal are set up much like a TV dinner. Tiny children go out-of-doors at daybreak to practice back bends and splits and in their nursery schools sing of good health habits. Streets and courtyards are swept daily. We saw very few flies and mosquitoes and no rats. A Shanghai production team makes electric insect catchers. In the North Street section of Peking's Yueh Tan neighborhood, we visited a one room clinic responsible for 210 of Yueh Tan's 110,000 residents. In charge was a retired woman doctor and two "barefoot doctors" (so called because paramedics started in the south where they worked barefoot in paddy fields). In this case, the two were housewives with six months training. They are responsible for treating minor ailments, giving health education and immunization, overseeing sanitation and meeting with couples to help them plan their families. Couples marry when the man is 28, and the woman, 25, and they should have two children five years apart. Commune members may belong to a cooperative medical health system for about 50 cents annually. Additional expenses are made up through the commune's cumulative fund. The State assumes medical expenses for cadres, factory workers, soldiers and university students through the medical health system. In large city hospitals we saw skilled surgeons perform delicate brain and thyroid operations using acupuncture anesthesia. A Wunan Hospital out-patient department claimed to treat 2000 persons daily. Those we saw received acupuncture--with and without electrical impulse--for paralysis and pain, and "cupping" treatments for rheumatism and lumbago with an infusion of ginseng for the latter. Expectant mothers lined up for prenatal care. At briefing sessions doctors explained that medical services combine the old and the new, western and Chinese methods and medicine. All hospitals, they say, practice the three-in-one system: care, research and teaching. Facilities include a herb garden and laboratories for making the herbs into medicines. Of the 1,300,000 "barefoot doctors", Chinese authorities say: "Barefoot doctors who till the fields with their medical kits close by are the most active medical workers in the rural health network. Most of them are young people from poor and lower middle class peasant families. Some are city school graduates who have settled in the countryside. A few are traditional doctors familiar with medicinal herbs. While their educational level is only primary or junior middle school, they have a high political level and a strong desire to rapidly improve the medical health situation in the countryside." (to be continued...).