

77/18

November 15, 1977

During the last meeting of the Human Rights Work Group, the discussion centred on Lay Ministries. Since some of the members present mentioned the Malaysia experience of a "priestless month", we are printing an evaluation of this important experiment.

The work on the revision of the Statutes is nearing completion and a copy of the proposed revision will be sent c/o The General Superior / The Sedos Delegate for any suggestions you may have. In reviewing the statutes we realize that a certain confusion has arisen from referring to both the discussion and the business meeting as the "General Assembly". Actually the General Assembly is the policy-making body and we should distinguish between the two activities. Hence we are now calling the meeting - Seminar/General Assembly.

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Future Meetings

- 16 Nov 77 - MARXISM Work Group - 4pm. - FSC Generalate
- 18 Nov 77 - HUMAN RIGHTS Work Group - 4pm. - FMM Generalate
- 22 Nov 77 - WOMEN'S CHANGING ROLE - 10am. - PA Generalate
- 12 Dec 77 - BRAZIL - 4pm. - Christian Bros. Generalate
- 19 Jan 78 - Seminar/General Assembly - FSC Generalate

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SEDOS - SERVIZIO DI DOCUMENTAZIONE E STUDI

 CAN THE CHURCH FULFILL A LIBERATING MISSION IN THE WORLD ?

by: Adolfo Nicolas, SJ

Note: This is the summary of a talk given in Tokyo on March 1, 1977. Fr. Nicolas is a well-known Spanish Jesuit theologian who teaches Theology of History, Eschatology, etc. at the Jesuit Theologate in Tokyo, and a retreat director in several Asian countries. Fr. Nicolas has recently been named director of East Asian Pastoral Institute (Manila).

This topic begins with a question. Can the Church Fulfill a Liberating Mission in the World?

This question has a double difficulty to it:

First: Our Church is in a minority situation. Our thinking has to be very realistic if we want to say more than platitudes. The question should be: Can a small, not totally united, pluralistic.....Church Fulfill a Liberating Mission in the World?

Second: The concept and the task of 'liberation' is so wide, so ambiguous, so far reaching that we might end up talking about nothing and everything. 'Liberation' like all important concepts can be a source of inspiration in some sectors, and an alienated and abused term in others, as the experience of the last decades is showing.

We take here liberation as an open concept.

- It indicates a process from one situation to another.
- It says that the starting point is one of not being fully yourself as a free person, loving, caring, searching for truth, being able to communicate, to share life, truth, peace, nature, the good of the earth, joy and hope. Socially and politically it is often described as 'oppression', dependence, exploitation, manipulation. Psychologically, as manipulation, instrumentalization, fear, paternalism. Religiously, as being bound to sin, the past, the law, death, idolatry and many other forms of alienation.
- It says too that the final point, the term of the process is full humanity in every sense; economic, social, political, psychological and religious. It indicates some utopia of humanity. That is why it will always be 'open' and its definition will never be fully satisfying. Because we can never fully define the fullness of man - unless we use 'religious' terms that have to be defined again and leave us faced with

a deeper mystery still.

- It is therefore concept that can find a meaning only in tension. It indicates the transit from the present 'oppression'. Dependence, fear, alienation to the possible communion, sharing, freedom, peace, justice we are having a glimpse of. . .

And we ask again : can the Church fulfill in the world a liberating role?

I do not think I have the answer. I think the answer is in the Church itself. It can fulfill the role, 'IF IT FULFILLS IT'. Any other answer is bound to end up theoretical, self-satisfying and in the long run barren and useless. 'If the evil spirits are cast out, it means that the Kingdom of God is near' (Mt. 12,28).

Therefore, as someone without answers, I'll try to share with you a few remarks that might be introductory to Fr. Ogawa's lecture and even prepare our hearts and minds for the prayer that will follow, in solidarity with other Christians, our brothers, who are also, like ourselves, living and deepening the liberating experience of Christ.

The first remark - which in a sense summarizes the rest of my talk - is that to my mind, the task of 'liberation' has not been entrusted by God to the Church. This remark might sound strange at this point. Let me explain it a bit more.

Anything we say about the Church in history has to be understood in the context of a 'Theology of History'. God at work in the world through the toils, sufferings, hopes, striving of men and peoples. Liberation begins often even before the Church is aware of it. It belongs to the most dynamic forces of history, that history in which God works - even on Sunday - and in which the direction of God's Spirit makes everything alive and new. It is part of the highest aspirations of mankind. It is not the Church that has been entrusted with the task of starting it or carrying it out.

In this sense I think that what the Church is called for is 'to be present' - bodily and spiritually - in the process, to grasp the deeper meaning of it, to reach out for its sources and to keep it always open to wider horizons.

Let us point out some implications of this general preliminary remark.

If liberation begins at the point where God listens to the 'cry of the people' (Ex. 2, 23-25) it is obvious that any Church willing to contribute to, and deepen the process, will have to be in the midst of its people, able thus to hear its cry and see its destitution. The central theme of the Incarnation stresses the same point.

We can say that Liberation in the Bible is always an answer to a reality. The way God is presented to us in the Books is as a God who cares and is concerned with our problems, suffering, hopes and despair. That is the way He manifested himself in History and in Jesus Christ. Because Jesus lived in the flesh and felt in himself the suffering of his fellow men. He answered the call of all those who were around him. And when the crowds were too big for him to respond he called disciples and gave them the mission to follow his style, his work and his message.

It is clear from the above that the Church will need a clear analysis of the situation in which she lives. Being in the midst of people and aware of the demands of God's Kingdom, we have to be very precise and concrete about the realities we are handling. Analysis of our society, its systems, its pluses and minuses. And aware specially of its intricate structures. It is so easy to be misled by apparent goodness, or by hard data that are articulated at the service of the powerful = economically or politically. A scientific analysis of reality, work and production, power structures and methods of coercion, etc, will help us understand the whys of the suffering of the people and the causes of injustice.

Now, since there is no possibility of a totally objective analysis we need to be aware of the bias present in every one of them, even our own. And here, a Church that wants to live in the following of Christ should not allow itself any other bias than the one Jesus had: to look at reality from the point of view of the poor ones: servants, the oppressed, the margined from our societies.

And the most important, our analysis has to make us aware of how ideological and narrowminded our own understanding of the faith and the Scriptures can be. Religion has important social functions. A religiosity that is not liberating, challenging, and disturbing to the established system becomes of necessity an alienated religion, a force - and a very powerful one - at the service of the status quo, a social silencer for injustice, oppression and reduction of man to the needs of the market.

Which leads us to the difficult question of the need for some sort of concrete political or social options. We cannot spend our lives preaching a message, even if it is a Kingdom of God, without concrete options for determined ways of living in society, of sharing, of acting and fighting for a better future.

We can maybe all too easily tend to answer with the Pauline theological summary of 'liberation' in terms of liberation from the law, from sin and death. But that does not solve all our problems. We have to give content to these expressions and rescue them from the historical reduction they have been submitted to in the past. We have to avoid archaeological simplification as if the last 20 centuries did not matter at all. And we have to translate these words in concrete terms that can carry meaningful consequences for us today.

Liberation from sin is one of our options. Now sin is not an individual affair. Every sin has social roots - even the most hidden one - and social implications - even if it is only perpetuating nonsense and disintegration in the world. And we can easily acknowledge that the most important sins are those that destroy life, exploit people, take away from men and women what belongs to them in term of dignity, humanity, livelihood, freedom and hope. Sin is in the heart as well as in the socio-political systems.

Liberation from the law becomes meaningful when we are able to point out which law it liberates us from. Not certainly the law of Moses or the little laws of the Churches. The law that oppressed men today is much more powerful and comes to the heart through values: systems, fashion, mass media, education and all the other means by which men are forced practically to live one way or another.

We are dealing here with the Kingdom of God. And the point is that we have to be 'present' there where the Kingdom is in tension, where it suffers most, where the little ones cry out for help and justice and fraternity and love.

If liberation implies a theology of history, we can say that our theology of history is not an effort to explain, but an incarnation in its midst in order to effect its transformation as a response to the need for justice: it has to be a 'responsible' theology. Understanding of history is 'understanding of the Church itself in the midst of the process of liberation'.

First condition, therefore, for a liberating mission : To be among the little ones of our society. Present where the Kingdom suffers violence, where the weak and the oppressed cry out for justice, sharing and the dignity of a free humanity.

But this is only a starting point. We already mentioned the fact of 'liberation' being abused by every ideological struggle. The Church cannot allow itself to be manipulated by limited parties. It lives and must understand itself immersed in the Mystery of Life, History and ultimately God. We are part of the people - I wish we were part of the 'suffering people' - but that part that is always open to the Mystery of God, challenged by his Word carried away by His Spirit, filled with a sense of mystery.

That implies a Church of wide horizons. A Church that knows that God can never be reduced to concepts, ideologies, values, systems. With a sense of mystery that makes the staunchest critic of every institution, of every age, of every idolatry. It can therefore never accommodate itself to the false gods of a consumer society that reduces men to consumers or projects an image of women based in alienation, exploitation and abuse.

A true Church of the Living God, the God concerned with men, who makes them free and invites them to share the fruits of the earth in justice and peace as a token and beginning of a definite sharing in His own life. A Church that sees history and society from the point of view of the Kingdom - utopian as that viewpoint might be. That sees life as something offered to all, to be enjoyed and shared by all, together with the fruits of the earth, the land, and all the blessings of creation. A Church therefore that can never stop at the individual level but is concerned with all men, with societies, systems, nations and international justice because the Mystery of God is opening ever anew its horizons.

This Church knows that human life, human dignity, the earth and the land, food and dignity, freedom and justice - all are God's and He has given them to men as part of the gift of life. And that consequently they cannot be given Caesar - as many of us might have believed for too long a time - but have to be given back to Him in sharing and justice and freedom. Only a Church who has discovered what really belongs to God can realize a liberating function, in spite of all the Caesars of the world.

Its life, therefore, will have to be a life of response to the realities of the Kingdom or the absence of it. An answer to the poor, the powerless, the suffering, the persecuted - in terms of offering them the Beatitudes. And an answer of criticism and challenge to the powerful, the rich, those who having everything have forgotten to share and are all too busy enjoying themselves in isolation (Lc. 6).

And liberation from death is not only an eschatological affirmation about the future. Because there are many walking corpses around. People are being killed while standing up. It is through inhumanity, injustice, social pressures, economic and social discriminations, absurd educational systems that we kill people, because we take from them the only **life** worth living in sharing and self-respect, in freedom and joy, simplicity and compassion. All of which can be a anticipation of the physical death which maybe not so terrible after all.

And when all this becomes concrete, then we realize that our options are not general abstract ones, but concrete and have to do with social systems, ideologies and future social institutions And the choices appear in definite shapes : are we for Capitalism as it functions in our world today? Or are we for a revisionist form of the same capitalism? Is our option social change? Socialism in one form or another? Communism? to have an option is not to reduce the Gospel to it. It is rather to be concrete, to realize that only the imperfect and the contingent can we move ahead towards the more perfect and definite as an open choiche.

Concrete options lead naturally to concrete action. And this is where the Churches find themselves quite often in a fix. Before even deepening or making concrete their understanding of God's Mystery and their concrete option for ways of contributing to the Kingdom of God in society, they anticipate problematic strategies for social change that scare a great number of our brothers, thus leading the Church to inaction or to a going back to the refuge of spiritualistic faith.

But, to my mind, this anticipation - specially in reference to the problem of violence - in theoretical and abstract terms is illegitimate and will never lead to the realities we might face if really committed to the cause of justice. Who could have anticipated Jesus' action in the Temple while listening to the sermon on the Mount?

The only rightful thing we can do is **start** new way of living, in the foot-steps of Jesus himself. He declined the way of worldly honors and 'power over people' (Mt. 4,1-11, Par.) and chose the way of service, compassion and sharing in love. He declined the Messiahship of auto-salvation. He declined also the desire to anticipate the times by the use of alienating power. He became a servant among men, sharing his life with them and being part of all their sufferings..... and challenging from this position service all institutions and theologies of his own time. We can say that his strategy developed in contact with people and reality --- and that it was so powerful and so challenging that society had to eliminate him in order to save itself (Jn. 18,14).

Could we not say that the Church in order to contribute creatively to liberation has to start a new way of living in community, sharing goods compassion and forgiveness, and challenging from there whatever is contrary to it in terms of values, systems, institutions and the like? And then leave it open to the future what kind of concrete actions and strategies will be suited for the recovery of justice, freedom and humanity? Does not the Bible itself offer us different strategies in different politico-historical situations? Exodus is revolutionary as any revolution can be. The Exile asked for a sort of unwilling cooperation in view of a future liberation.

And persecution times forced Israel into a new kind of politics or strategy of apocalyptic : a resistance that ranges from open guerilla warfare to peaceful disobedience all the way to martyrdom. How could we systematize a christian strategy in abstract without being unrealistic and unjust?

Maybe what in fact hinders the Church from being free and liberating is an unconscious rejection of the Cross : the scandal of the Cross. A life so realistic and so committed like Jesus' cannot but lead to the Cross. -- and this understood possibility that becomes a menace to our securities, our institutions, our own future, might well be the real reason behind the resistance we all have to see God's liberating action in the World as a call of us to join Him and suffering mankind.

To join the cause of mankind in search of liberation is a much welcome move bound to raise expectations and increase the popularity of whoever does it. Jesus experienced it too and the multitudes went after him with a new hope and a recovered joy. But often - more often than not - those very expectations and popularity are bound to concrete limited horizons and in the long run tend to produce new bonds and new alienations. Jesus seemed quite aware of it and avoided by all means any more that would put him in situations where he would lose the freedom to go on loving, preaching and acting the Kingdom of God. And his position became more difficult all the time. He respected the law without selling himself over to the legalism of the schools; he preached freedom without joining the zealots and their causes; he shared everything with the crowds without being ever manipulated by them. And at the end he was attacked by some of them and abandoned by all the others. The right tried to eliminate him; the left got discouraged; the crowds just could not understand; his own disciples ran away because Jesus' freedom was far greater than they had anticipated. Only the Resurrection and the power of the Spirit would bring them back to the horizons of the Kingdom, in Galilee.

That for the Church is going to remain the key point. The cross is going to be the last frontier of a true conversion, the measure of the community's desire or willingness to risk the danger of liberation, the depth of her solitude when the people with whom she might be suffering will desire to stop fighting and go back to the garlic and onions of Egypt, the test of our consistency with the Mystery of God and His Kingdom in face of the present world, humanity and ourselves. And when the Church will be ready to face the Cross, then will she be able to understand what the Resurrection is all about, as "hope against hope" and as the gift of the Living God who really liberates us from the last enemy.

Maybe we can summarize again what has been said with the "irresponsible" remark that only a Church aware of and immersed in the life of the suffering people of today's world and ready to die in the struggle for justice, a justice that goes beyond the present set up and structures, oppressions and manipulations, values and images, only a Church like that can fulfill a liberating role in society.

That readiness to die will mean a willingness to reconsider radically her ecclesiastical institutions and her position in society. A Church that will attempt to define her orthodoxy only in terms of orthopraxis - as a surer and more direct way to be faithful to the truth. A Church on the look out for the signs of the times and the direction of the Spirit in engaged people

more than in predefined theoretical conclusions - even if speculation and serious study will always remain as a source of reflection and references.

This kind of Church will need to be a Church that can dissociate itself from Caesar in order to be responsible to God. She will give to Caesar what is his, that is the minimum necessary to serve the people and make it possible for them to be fully free, cooperative, sharing and live in peace fruitful because based on justice: Shalom. But very jealous at the same time to give to God what is his, that is: Man, his freedom, his life, his self-respect and his right to create, think, hope, and share responsibly in the task of building a better society. And that is going to put her in to a difficult situation because Caesar tends to believe that the people are his with the land and its wealth and that God only deserves a secluded place in the private life for the few who can address him as Father. That is why the Church will have to be very suspicious wherever Caesar and his people are too happy or cooperative with her, praise her and her work because that could mean we have lost the power to listen to the cry of the people and move along with them towards the future.

In this sense a liberating Church will have to (1) Join the people in their march towards a better and more liberating future, based on justice and freedom, sharing and creating peace; (2) liberate its word and catechesis from the ideological blockade it was in; and (3) get to the task of offering new symbols and a new vocabulary, that is faithful to God's work today.

Taken from: TCL INFO ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT - Vol.4 - N. 6.

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News from the Chapters:

School Sisters of Notre Dame have elected the following new council:

Mo.Gen. Sr. Mary Margaret Johanning

Councillors:

Sr. Mary Abbot	Sr. Helena Arns
Sr. Iuitborg Brandl	Sr. Hilaria Hatko
Sr. Godeharda Lippok	Sr. Wonda Potts
Sr. Louis Mary Seifried	

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LES PRETRES " FIDEI DONUM " AU SERVICE DES MISSIONS

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++ Sous ce titre, l'Agence Fides de la Congrégation pour l'Evangelisation du monde (4 juin 1977) a publié le bilan ci-après de l'application de l'encyclique FIDEI DONUM vingt ans après sa promulgation :

Le 21 avril dernier, on célébrait le 20e. anniversaire de l'encyclique Fidei donum adressée au peuple chrétien par le Pape Pie XII . Dans ce document, le Saint-Père lançait à l' Eglise entière et tout spécialement aux évêques un appel angoissé en faveur de l'Afrique. Il y insitait pour que les diocèses des vieilles chrétientés fassent un effort pour envoyer des prêtres au secours des jeunes Eglises en difficulté.

Il est difficile d'établir avec précision le nombre de prêtres Fidei donum qui travaillaient durant ces vingt dernières années en pays de mission, difficile aussi de dire combien d'entre eux y travaillent encore aujourd'hui.

Les dernières statistiques que nous possédons nous permettent toutefois de nous faire une idée assez proche de la réalité. Il y avait, au début de 1975, 20000 prêtres diocésains, momentanément détachés de leur diocèse pour venir en aide aux jeunes Eglises et répartis comme suit :

Afrique	1 056
Amérique	2 742
Amérique centrale continentale	795
Amérique centrale (insulaire)	168
Amérique du Sud	2 862
Asie	689
Océanie	124
Europe	12 475

Quant à la répartition de ces prêtres par pays d'origine nous la donnons telle que nous avons pu la reconstituer :

ESPAGNE : 686 prêtres (provenant de 60 diocèses) d' travaillent en Amérique Latine et 51 aux Etats-Unis où il sont au service des communautés de langue espagnole.

ITALIE : 603 prêtres (493 en Amérique latine et 110 dans 52 diocèses d'Afrique et d'Asie) .

POLOGNE : Ce pays comptait en 1975 220 prêtres diocésains en terre de mission et 68 aux Etats-Unis .

BELGIQUE : 170 prêtres Fidei donum en 1974, se répartissant comme suit : 107 en Amérique latine, 61 en Afrique, 1 en Inde, 1 en Jordanie.

FRANCE : 367 prêtres ainsi répartis : 168 à Madagascar, 37 en Afrique du Nord, 130 en Amérique latine, 18 en différents pays, 6 en Asie et 8 en Océanie.

Ceci d'après une statistique de 1976 .

Nous ne possédons pas de statistique récente concernant le Canada. En réponse à Fidei donum, surgirent les collèges missionnaires de Madrid, Louvain, Vérone, etc. Une autre réponse fut l'ampleur que prit le mouvement des prêtres Fidei donum.

L'idée de Pie XII, selon laquelle les évêques du monde entier et tout le peuple chrétien avec eux devaient se préoccuper de l'oeuvre missionnaire, fut reprise et développée par Vatican II. Elle a abouti à la constitution des Commissions épiscopales actuelles pour les missions, au jumelage de diocèses et à une solidarité croissante entre les anciennes et les jeunes Eglises. L'encyclique fut aussi à l'origine du mouvement laïc missionnaire. Le message de Paul VI à l'Afrique, du 31 octobre 1967, est, peut-on dire, le reflet exact de l'encyclique Fidei donum du Pape Pie XII.

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TOPIC : Lay Ministeries

Ken Williams, C.Ss.R.

A PRIESTLESS AUGUST ?

" Aggiornamento - Malaysia "
2 - 31 August :
A Summary and an Evaluation

Fr. Ken Williams is a young Redemptorist Priest from Malaysia. Having obtained the ecclesiastical degrees in Europe, he came back to Penang, to work in the Seminary of Pulau Tikus.

Introduction

A priestless August?

I don't know what stupidity is going on in the Church nowadays. All this change is so confusing. And this last move is the limit. We are supposed to take care of ourselves without priests. I suppose the next thing we will be told is that priests are no longer necessary. I tell you, if I lose my faith, I am not to blame.

The Church leaders have made the decision and I suppose they know best. I suppose it is a good thing. People nowadays don't respect priests. If the priests are away for a month, then they will realise how important it is to have priests. As it is, we take them too much for granted. As might be expected, reactions to the prospect of a priestless August were varied. Nevertheless, from August 2 - 31, all the clergy of the three dioceses of Peninsular Malaysia left their posts and met in Penang for what was called " Aggiornamento - Malaysia ", a month of renewal, review and planning. This article will try to summarise what happened during August and offer an evaluation of the Aggiornamento within the historical, ecclesiological and sociological context of the Catholic Church in Peninsular Malaysia.

How It All Started

The idea of having a renewal program had begun very simply. Some of the priests had attended renewal courses at the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI), Manila. It seemed more convenient and less costly to bring EAPI staff to Malaysia and have the program conducted here. A renewal seminar for all priests was proposed to the Bishops' Conference of Malaysia and Singapore in August, 1975. Meanwhile the major religious superiors had met and seen the need for some sort of renewal program for the Church in Peninsular Malaysia as a whole. They asked the Bishops' Conference if non-clerical religious could also attend. But the Bishops felt that some of the priests would not accept the presence of these religious and that the priests had their own problems which had to be solved. In November, 1975, the bishops of Peninsular Malaysia announced a program of renewal for all their priests during the month of August, 1976. "We see," they wrote to the priests "the present situation in Malaysia and in our neighbouring countries, especially Vietnam. We understand the need to prepare the laity for deeper Christian commitment.

All the clergy of the three dioceses were expected to attend for the full month. The bishops pointed out that "... this means preparing your people for your absence. We are well aware that no Mass for one month may seem a radical step to take but this may well be the thing needed to awaken our Catholics and to help them to understand the reality of their faith and Christian values." (1) The bishops stated the objectives of the renewal program as: the experience of Christian community, theological updating and pastoral renewal. Another statement of objectives, this time by one of the organisers of the program, directed attention to "... the importance of Christian community" and then referred to "... the added dimension of placing this community building in the realistic context of the local Church and the Malaysian scene today." (2) It is interesting to note how this "contextual dimension" came into the scope of the Aggiornamento. The renewal program was aimed initially at the usual areas of dogma, moral, scripture, catechetics and priestly spirituality. However, in the meeting of religious superiors in October, 1975, the social dimension of the gospel had figured largely. Then, just before the November meeting of the Bishops' Conference, there took place in Kuala Lumpur the Third Bishops' Institute for Social Action (BISA III), 2 - 16 November, 1975. These two events had highlighted the importance of the social issues. A group of religious approached the bishops to request the first week of the Aggiornamento be devoted to the social, economic and political context. The Bishops agreed.

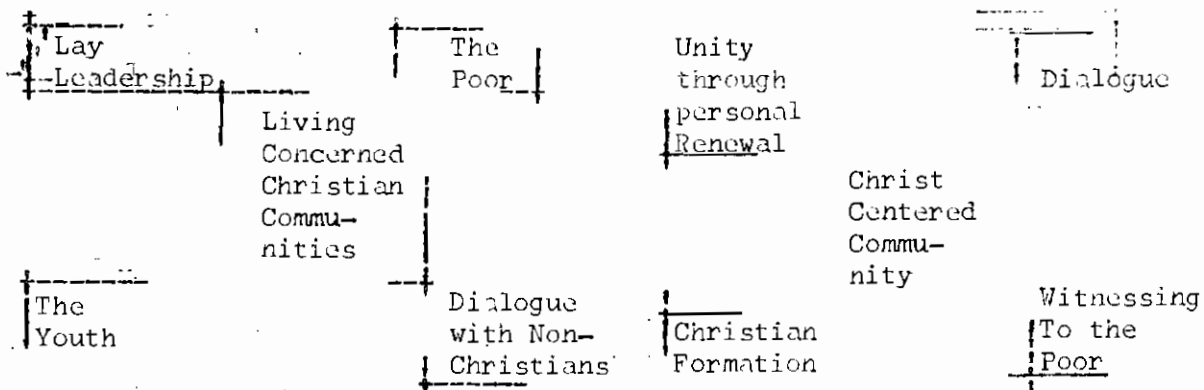
What Happened During August

During the months that lead up to August, the laity had to be prepared to meet the absence of priests. Each parish prepared itself for the various tasks - mainly liturgical: communion services and burial services were drawn up; people were prepared to preach, lead services, give communion, visit the sick and bury the dead. Then on August 2, 1976, one hundred and twenty priests and three bishops assembled at the Major Seminary in Penang. Some came eagerly, others hesitantly. Some were against the whole idea but came nevertheless. So the whole presbyterium of Peninsular Malaysia, with the exception of those priests who were away of leave or overseas studying, was gathered together. During the first week, the lecturers directed attention to the socio-economic and political situation of Peninsular Malaysia. Among the lecturers were government ministers as well as parliamentary member from an opposition party. Topics included: The problems of racial and cultural integration sociological and human dimensions of development; poverty eradication and racial economic balance; the aspiration and struggles of the Malays; the aspirations and struggles of the non-Malays in relation to those of the Malays; Islam as the national religion and its relation to Christianity; the implications that the third Malaysia plan has for pastoral practice and apostolic orientation; and the involvement and non-involvement of the Church in social issues. The result of this first week is hard to judge. In Malaysia, as in every developing country, socio-economic and political involvement is a tricky business. Government authorities often do not distinguish between "subversive activity" and genuine, Christian, social action. Many of the socio-economic and political questions have been categorised as "sensitive issues" since the racial riots of May 13, 1969. Discussion of them is prosecutable under the Internal Security Act. So, during this week, even though the Government ministers who lectured were frank in their answers, apprehension was high. Discussion was cautious. In short, it would be fair to say that nothing concrete resulted, but that awareness of the issues was increased. After the first week, the

lectures centered on other aspects of renewal: a deeper understanding of Scriptures, the Church after the Vatican II, modern approaches to Christology, catechesis, a deeper understanding of the priestly vocation. One of the "unprogrammed" areas in which renewal took place was that of community living. An important part of the Aggiornamento was the experience of living together with fellow priests, some of whom one had not seen for years. Joys and hopes, fears and anxieties were expressed and shared. Often the sharing was a source of mutual strength. But the airing of views also brought to light a disunity among many of the clergy, a disunity that made its presence felt when it came for planning diocesan and national pastoral policies. There was a debate among the priests of one diocese on the distinction between "local clergy" and "indigenous clergy". "Local clergy" were defined as those who have been implanted in the diocese by circumstances for missionary purposes and who subsequently acquired citizenship - these included mainly the China-born priests. "Indigenous clergy" on the other hand, were those who were born in Malaysia or outside Malaysia but who had been educated here and who consequently vibrate the life style and aspirations of the people. One group insisted strongly that the future leadership of the Church depended on the "indigenous clergy". The clergy of another diocese spent most of their discussion and planning time sorting through conflicts between the younger and the older priests and between the priests and the bishops. They could not reach a consensus of a diocesan pastoral policy. When they found that the other two dioceses had drawn up pastoral directives for themselves, a small group for this diocese drew up a plan which was put forward as the plan for the whole diocese. This plan, in fact, did not represent a consensus. The priests had concluded that they should begin by achieving unity among themselves before setting about any large-scale planning. There was also some unexpressed tension between the foreign missionaries and the local priests, with the foreigners having previously decided not to speak up too much lest this be taken as "interference" and to leave the tasks of meeting problems and finding solutions to the local clergy themselves. Finally, each diocese got together to discuss its core and found related needs. The results were as follows:

Diocese of Penang
Core Need and Related Needs

Diocese of Melaka-Johor
Core need and Related Needs



Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur
Core Need and Related Needs

United
clergy
religious
laity in
all fields

Family
Christian
Witness

Committed
Basic
Christian
Communities

Formation
of leaders
of various
groups

The

Poor

The three bishops then wove these three plans into a plan for the nation:

Inter - Diocesan
Peninsular Malaysia
Core Need and Related Needs

Unity among
bishops, priests
religious and
laity in all fields

Formation as an
on-going process
of all groups to
produce committed
and motivated
ly leaders

Christ-Centered
Communities
(at all levels)
with concern
for:

Dialogue with
Christians and
Non-Christians
when and where
possible

Integral
Human Develop-
ment of the
Poor

Because one of the dioceses could not arrive at a consensus on its diocesan plan, we must take care not to give too much importance to the national plan which was drawn up more as a "lowest common denominator" rather than as a plan which had the concerted backing of all the clergy of West Malaysia. The plans which de facto matter are the three diocesan plans. Each of the dioceses is now working along the lines of its plan and not along the lines of the national plan. We venture to make the following comments regarding the three

diocesan plans.

1. There was a clear agreement on the core need: the building of basic communities. Not all, however, understood this in terms of the creating of "grassroot-level communities" (comunidades de base). Some interpreted this core need in more general terms: the building up of Parish Community spirit.

2. The stress on the need for inner unity may seem to be indicative of a Church that looks more inwards upon herself than outwards to the needs of society. But the division among the clergy that showed itself during August was serious enough to make this a vital need.

3. The concern for "The Poor" was highlighted by a realisation that the Catholic Church in Peninsular Malaysia is predominantly a middle-class Church.

4. There was consciousness of the need for dialogue with non-Christians since Catholics make up less than 2 per cent of the population.

5. The main concerns, however, were internal rather than external. All were conscious of the need for united Christ-like communities, without which no amount of service and witness would succeed.

At the end of the Aggiornamento, a pastoral letter was sent to the Catholics of Peninsular Malaysia. It summarised the outcome of the planning.

All 126 of us have arrived at a consensus, that the most important or core need among the Catholics of Peninsular Malaysia is the formation of basic Christian communities, inspired by the early Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles.

By "basic" communities we mean group of people who live in the same area, or who share the same profession, or who belong to the same language, cultural or economic group. These groups should be Christ-centered in the sense that they accept Christ, His teaching and His way of life - in their personal, social and political life, and agree to review their life together in the light of the Scriptures. Such communities should be alive to the needs and aspirations of the people around them and strive sincerely to find ways and means to meet those needs and aspirations. In relation to the core need, we saw four related needs - all of which call for our attention in the immediate future. First, there is a need for more communication and dialogue among all of us - Bishops, Priests, Religious and Laity, in order to achieve unity of purpose and co-operation in building real witnessing Christian communities. Secondly, we saw the need to stress the formation of Christian leaders at all levels. Our special concern in this area is our Youth the hope of tomorrow. Thirdly, in our efforts to be true Christian of our time and country, we saw the need for increased dialogue with people of other other religious beliefs and ways of life. We rely on you to continue working even more closely with a group aiming at bringing about integral human development and national unity as basis and starting point for real and effective dialogue. Finally, in all this we realised how much we have to be aware of the injustices and growing inequalities existing in our society. Our main concern is with the poor, who in one way or another are victims of economic and social structures which causes oppression and do not take into consideration the rights of man and social justice. We think particularly of the urban and rural poor, the drop-outs, the frustrated and, in general, of all those whose voice is never heard. (3)

We shall now consider what has happened in practice as the result of the Aggiornamento.

The Aggiornamento Follow-Up

i. LAY LITURGICAL MINISTRIES

In general, the response of the people to the lay liturgical ministries was positive. A major reason for this acceptance was that many saw what was happening in terms of "temporary substitution" - that is, because the priests were absent the laity had to do the job. People commented favourably on the way lay ministers carried out their functions with dignity and reverence. Reservations were expressed mainly on the issue of women giving communion and leading the Sunday services. The strength and frequency of the objections varied according to the socio-economic level and cultural background of each parish: less in predominantly English-speaking, middle-class parishes and more in the Tamil and Chinese-speaking rural parishes; more in the traditional Indian communities and less in the western-educated, predominantly Chinese communities. Many reasons were given to substantiate the objection against women in these ministries, most of which reflected the prevailing attitude to women's place in society. (One group, of men and women, in a post August discussion, expressed what may well have been the only honest reason: "Women are unclean," they said!) The continuance of lay liturgical ministries not so much as "substitutive" than as belonging to lay people by right, have tried to maintain as high a level of involvement as is possible, taking into account the sensitivities of the people. Detailed statistics are not available. But on the basis of reports from most parishes around Peninsular Malaysia, one can conservatively estimate that about half the parishes are maintaining a level of lay liturgical ministry that is greater than the level that existed before August. Another factor influencing involvement is that most Catholics viewed the August experience as a "temporary substitution" and would not be eager to continue a high level of participation unless encouraged to do so by the priest.

ii. BUILDING BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Most of the priests are implementing their diocesan plan in relation to this core need. But three factors seem to be working against a concerted implementation of the plan.

1. There is no clear agreement on the meaning of the term "basic community". Some see it as referring to "grassroot-level communities" which share common socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Others see it as referring to the need to revive general community spirit in the parish.

2. The implementation is being carried out, at present, on an individual "priest-and-his-parish" basis. This also applies to the training of lay leaders - one of the related needs as set forth in the national plan.

3. The traditional framework of the parish system is difficult to break from, so that a wider co-operation (e.g. team ministry) is not easy to implement. Another aspect of the Aggiornamento follow-up is that it has tended to be priest-centered and priest-directed. During August much was said about co-operation at all levels: clergy, religious and laity. Some consultation of the laity has been carried out either through questionnaires or through area group meetings. The priests have met regularly about once a month to share progress reports. But there is, as yet, little evidence that the direction of the Church in Peninsular Malaysia is being discussed and worked on in a concerted and methodical way by religious and laity as well as by the clergy.

Summary and Conclusion

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The history of Peninsular Malaysia is a history of colonial policies that resulted in a multi-racial and religiously pluralistic situation - largely the result of 19th century immigrations of Chinese and Indians - a situation wherein each race existed in relative compartmentalisation and isolation. When history turned around and the movements for independence gained force, this carelessly constructed multi-racial structure proved to be a serious obstacle to the new ideals of unity, harmony and national identity. Of course, such considerations were non-problems to most missionaries until recently.

The Catholic Church arrived in Malaysia in 1511 when Portuguese captured the port of Melaka. They were ousted in 1641 by the Dutch. But trade in spice was the main concern, and although the Portuguese evangelised that area more than the Dutch did, neither left much of an impression on the religions of the local population. The real establishment of the Catholic Church dates from the end of the 18th century, with the arrival of the Society of the Paris Foreign Mission. It was the task of this Society, an instrument of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, to bring the missions of Asia under Rome through its Vicars Apostolic and to foster native vocations. The early efforts to found a native clergy were hampered by an attitude which considered Asians to be generally lacking in intellectual and moral fibre. Furthermore, the missionary work was guided by the theological principles of the time, whereby the Church was seen primarily as centralised institution, whereby the orthodoxy of revelation and faith was protected by strictly defined propositional truths and according to which the most important task of the mission was to "snatch souls from damnation" by the waters of baptism.

Such an approach encouraged the transplantation of an institutionalised, European Church, rather than indigenisation or contextualisation (i.e. allowing the Christian community to grow with its roots in the local, cultural tradition with its concerns focused on the concrete issues of life.)

Furthermore, the work of the Paris Foreign Mission coincided with the period in which the British colonial government became wary of encroaching even further on the rights of the Malay-Muslim population. Already the British Advisors and Residents had reduced the status of the sultans to that of mere figureheads and it was political expedient to assure them that at least their religion would be safeguarded. So the colonial government unofficially, but firmly, discouraged any evangelisation among the Malays. The result of all this was a Church that was largely foreign in its leadership and institutions, isolated from the Malay population, uninvolved in the movements and nationalism and independence, and zealously pursuing a ministry that centered on sacramental administration, on prayer and on charitable work. Even though the Church took a leading role in the fields of education and medical care, it was largely a Church that looked inwards upon herself than outwards to society.

As the Aggiornamento has shown, the consciousness of the need for a new style of mission has been growing in the Catholic Church in Peninsular Malaysia - a mission that is indigenous and contextualised in its forms and concerns. In the growth of this consciousness, the Church owes a great debt to the French missionaries, many of whom have been focusing our attention on this need for the past ten years. These missionaries find themselves in the awkward position of being made very conscious of their "foreignness". They face the dilemma of speaking up and being put down as interfering outsiders or of remaining silent and not contributing as much as they feel they can. It is not a comfortable situation to be placed in. But perhaps they can take consolation from the fact that the basic orientation of the August

Aggiornamento are the fruit of many ideas and values that they have tried to share. It is now up to the local priests to decide whether we will reject an idea because it is Western and unsuitable, or brand it as Western and unsuitable because it suits us not to accept it. It is only, three months since the experience of August - rather a short time in which to expect momentous results. If the August experience was a maturing one, it was also a sudden break from the style and direction that the Church had been used to for more than a century and a half.

What August '76 will bring may take years to discover. But what it demands is clear. The intentions that brought about the Aggiornamento and the orientations that flowed from it demand of the Church a continual searching and cooperation on the broadest scale. Above all they demand of the Church the courage to take calculated risks - risks calculated on the conviction that the God who began her is also always before her, calling her onward towards a goal that she can now only dimly perceive.

NOTES

1. Pastoral letter of Archbishop Dominic Vendargon, Bishop Gregory Yong and Bishop James Chan to the priests of the dioceses of Peninsular Malaysia, 21 November, 1975 (mimeographed)
2. Soter Fernandez, "Communication No. 2 : Aggiornamento-Malaysia, 1976" Penang, 20 January, 1976. (mimeographed)
3. Pastoral letter from the Bishops and Priests of Peninsular Malaysia to the Religious and Faithful, Penang, 31 August, 1976 (mimeographed)

++ Taken from: - EPAI - Volume XIV - 1977 - No.2 ++

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The heavens tell out the glory of God
the vault of heaven reveals his handiwork.

One day speaks to another,
night with night shares its knowledge.

And this without speech or language
or sound of any voice.

Their music goes out through all the earth,
their words reach to the end of the world.

-- Psalm 19:1-4

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LES 50 ANS DE LA CONFERENCE DES OIC

Un coup d'oeil sur le thème de la récente Conférence des Organisations internationales catholiques OIC, tenue à Fribourg, par le Frère Furic.

..... La diversité des vocations des organisations membres de la conférence explique la diversité des options prises, dont les principales se groupent sous quatre titres :

-- Communication et information : une action plus efficace dans ce domaine dépend d'une part de l'intensification des échanges entre les diverses organisations spécialisées dans la communication et d'autre part de l'amélioration de l'information destinée au public.

-- Education : les organisations centrées sur l'enseignement, conscientes que l'école est un lieu privilégié pour promouvoir l'éducation aux droits de la personne humaine, jugent important d'insérer dans leur travail les préoccupations majeures qui se sont dégagées de l'assemblée concernant le respect des droits de la personne humaine.

-- Droits de l'homme : Les OIC paraissent conscientes que, face au mépris affiché pour les droits de la personne humaine, elles doivent plus que jamais lutter pour défense et obtenir leur respect. Toutefois, elles estiment que cela serait suffisant si en même temps elles ne s'appliquaient pas à faire reconnaître de nouveaux droits que la conscience universelle n'a pas encore acceptés. D'où la création d'une commission se préoccupant particulièrement de ces questions.

-- Solidarité et responsabilité : les OIC tiennent enfin à réaffirmer la solidarité qui les unit entre elles dans l'Eglise et leur solidarité commune avec le monde, ses problèmes et ses espoirs. En même temps, elles prennent une conscience plus vive de la responsabilité qu'implique leur présence dans les instances internationales. Reconnaissant qu'elle est souvent trop faible, elles ont exprimé leur intention de la renforcer.

bw

" La Liberté " Fribourg 1977.

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News from the Chapters :

The Usoline Sisters have elected the following new council:

- Mother Mary Judith Mietzfeld, re-elected for another term.
 - general councillor :
 - Thérèse Arbert, Angela Fernandes, Miriam Patricia Faricy, Miriam Szymeczko, Jhon Bosco Rolfe, Jeanne Hartono.
 - secretary general : Willibrord Verweij
 - treasurer general : Lorette Brophy.
- Sr. Marie Jose Van Dur, former SEDOS delegate will be returning to Indonesia, we wish her well in her new apostolate.

Agenda for the working session of the ad hoc group on the question of human rights - new ministries

to be held November 18, 1977 at the fmm generalate, via Giusti - 12 at 4 pm.

A. some points for furthering our reflection in relation to the work accomplished to date:

Taking points raised at the first meeting, the working session on the 21.10.77 brought to the fore certain ideas and facts which seem to lead to further points for reflection, study, exchange and action.

To date the tendency has been, because of the nature of the questions used as focal point for the discussion, to look at what is happening in the field with attempts to identify needs, difficulties in relation to new ministries. Where problems have been cited, possible solutions have been suggested, always with cognizance of the limitation that the real solutions have to emerge from the local situation, just as new ministries must emerge from the community and cannot be imposed from outside.

Both working sessions have indicated from various perspectives that the influence of attitudes/behavior of missionaries in relation to the laity is a crucial factor in the change process. There is need to see the organizational aspects of the Church differently because of the changes taking place in society. Attitudes and behavior which express material and/or spiritual power need to change to attitudes and behavior expressing service.

It has been noted that new ministries must not be seen as stop-gap solutions, i.e., supplying for shortages of personnel in mission areas/Local Churches; and yet given the concrete reality of the situations which face us, perhaps our thinking about new ministries is initiated from a negative viewpoint, namely:

- . lack of vocations
- . deportation of missionaries
- . population/"parish" areas which are too large.

And perhaps we could ask ourselves whether this point of departure for our thinking about new ministries takes precedence, consciously or unconsciously, over a very deep and positive, action-oriented conviction that the laity have a permanent role and responsibility in the Church that

3) How does the development of new ministries figure in the orientation that we give from the generalate level to the missionary activity of our members through:

- . on-going reflections,
- . visitations,
- . talks,
- . retreats,
- . publications,
- . letters,
- . preparations for general chapters and enlarged general councils ?

4) have we included concretely -- and to what extent, in what way -- the development of new ministries in:

- . the initial formation of new members,
- . the on-going formation of members,
- . formation programs for the laity,
- . opening our thinking to new horizons: formation of laity by laity ?

5) What means do we have available, particularly in decentralized situations, of tying up priorities at the generalate level with those at a province level ? (as concerns new ministries, for example)

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C. with the above questions as a basis, the working session will attempt to draw up some guidelines for reflection and action on the part of mission-sending generalates in relation to the development of new ministries.

note: those who have copies of the FABC Papers, no. 3: "Conclusions of the Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church", are asked to please bring them along to this meeting, along with any documentation from your institute which pertains to the development of new ministries. Thank you !

members present on 21.10.77

Joan Delaney, rm
 Mel Grady, ofm
 Thérèse M. Barnett, scmm-t
 Anthony Ramanattu, tor
 Benitius Igberink, o.carm.
 Francis George, omi

Bertha Salazer, mmb
 Charles Walter, fscj
 Sean Coughlin, o.carm
 Margaret Francis Loftus, snd-n
 Josephine Iozzo, fmm
 Casimir Unanadickam, sj
 Mary Motta, fmm

is proper and specific, which is not given to them, but which belongs to them by right. This is the direction in which the missionary Church should be moving.

Are we conscious that we have a role in setting this direction of the missionary Church in line with the directives given by Vatican II? Do our formation programs take such thinking into account or are they too narrow in the concept of formation needed by our members?

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B. some questions as background preparation for the next working session, november 18:

1) Taking for granted that we are convinced about the necessity of ministries and that the missionary Church should be moving in this direction, how do we set up priorities to foment ministries in concrete situations of a Church which in its various aspects may be seen realistically as:

- . a peoples' church,
- . a community church,
- . a charismatic church,
- . a pluralistic church,
- . a poor church,
- . an ecumenical church,
- . a church of service,
- . a prophetic church,
- . a liberating church,
- . a church on the move?

2) How does the development of new ministries, i.e., the leading of all Christians to realize fully their potential for responsibility in building up the Church and in extending the mission of the Church in time and space -- fit into our priorities for new insertions for evangelization generally?

and

- . in situations where there is conflict over human rights between Church and State?

From - RHODESIA: THE PROPAGANDA WAR -

published by the Commission of Justice & Peace through CIIR of London (Catholic Institute for International Relations).

This is the document which led to the recent arrest of the four members of the Commission.

" This latest report from the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia highlights the extent of the propaganda war being waged by the Rhodesia Front regime. It also illustrates the contradictions of the propaganda campaign - to assuage white fears on the one hand and on the other to terrorise the black population in an attempt to isolate the guerrillas. As support for the nationalist cause has increased, the propaganda has become increasingly strident. It takes several forms -- displaying the mutilated corpses of guerrillas and distributing photographs of them accompanied by threats, warning the black population that if they cooperate with the guerrillas they will be killed. The latest element in the psychological warfare is the mass distribution of crude leaflets depicting the guerrillas as 'mad dog terrorists', responsible for killing, rape and spreading venereal disease. At the same time the government has issued regulations which make it an offence to publish or distribute anything which may contribute to the spreading of alarm and despondency. Whilst the regime is thus actively engaged in spreading alarm and despondency among black Rhodesians, it is going to inordinate lengths to prevent white Rhodesians from knowing the truth of their situation.

International coverage of the war in Rhodesia is at best mediocre. There is a dearth of foreign correspondents inside the country so that several newspapers have to rely on the same reporter writing under different names. Foreign correspondents have to be careful not to be too critical of the Rhodesian regime. Those who are too critical either have to leave the country or are deported. Recently the BBC correspondent Brian Barron has been refused an extension of his work permit because when he reported on a massacre of 23 blacks in north-eastern Rhodesia he said " Well, we only have the Rhodesian security forces version of the massacre ..." Few journalists are permitted to enter the operational areas and those who are allowed to do so are subject to censorship. As a result, most reporters are dependent on government statements and few have any opportunity for rounded investigation. In consequence the realities of the war are distorted.

This report includes an analysis of the Rhodesian regime's policy of rounding up rural Africans into "protected villages". It is estimated that these villages now contain half a million Africans in conditions of great hardship. This inhuman policy has gone largely uncriticised in the media. Indeed Rhodesian propaganda presents these villages as havens of safety and welcomed by the local people.

It is clear that some of the atrocities of the war are committed by the Rhodesian security forces. Indeed the judgement of many missionaries on the spot is that the army is responsible for the bulk of the terrorising, brutality and killing of civilians. Rarely, if ever, is this conveyed in the international press. One incident described in this report tells of the killing of 35 civilians, most of them women and children and the serious wounding of another 31 by the security forces. The initial report of this incident in London's largest evening newspaper, the Evening News, stated "guerrillas kill 34". According to the first report in the Evening News "Security chiefs (said) the civilians were lined up and shot with automatic weapons". In later editions the story had altered to the "killed in crossfire" account which also appeared in other British newspapers. The security forces, who claimed they were merely engaged in a normal follow-up operation of nine guerrillas, described the incident as "an unfortunate set-back". Eventually the truth of what had happened was conceded but dismissed as "unfortunately inevitable in fighting of this nature". (Rhodesia Herald Editorial, May 11, 1977.)

The fact is, far from protecting black civilians, the Rhodesian security forces place little value on their lives. In view of such incidents it is understandable that nationalists accuse the Rhodesian security forces of shooting anything black that moves. Nor is it surprising that the control of the army and police is a crucial factor in any negotiations for a settlement.

Evidence of the kind of lawlessness which is being legitimised by the Rhodesian government is continually emerging. In the most recent example, the Rhodesian Minister for Justice and Law and Order, Hilary Squires, assured white vigilante groups that they would be indemnified against any legal repercussions if they killed anyone whilst recovering stolen cattle (The Times, July 28 1977). Statements from the Rhodesian government about the importance of maintaining law and order in the 'interim period' sound hollow under such circumstances. "

CIIR, London, September 1977

SEDOS Doc. No 4/2662

The full report is available at the Sedos Documentation Centre.