

EVANGELIZATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: FUTURE NEEDS

By

Bernard F. Connor

A. The present and the future.

If the Church's work of evangelization is to meet people where they are, then the realities of the present situation in Southern Africa have to be examined. This is certainly not always easy, nor is it very comforting, when hard facts have to be looked in the face; yet it can be done with courage and hope. As Pope Paul points out, evangelization has to "take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and man's concrete life, both personal and social" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 29).

The following scenario seems to be a likely one:

1. A pre-revolutionary phase of relative, but enforced, calm. Here, by sheer force of arms and power things are kept under control.
2. A phase of open revolution, involving increasing fragmentation of society and civil strife, the breakdown of essential services, violence and bloodshed, terror and counter-terror, a general atmosphere of distrust, suppression of news and the prevalence of rumours, shifting of allegiances and disregard for human values. Although some of these ills were already present in phase 1, now they will be clearly seen by all who care to look.
3. A post-revolutionary phase where a new regime is endeavouring to establish itself. In the face of various factions either against it or against one another, as well as the need to restore essential services, build up production again, restore communications, this regime is likely to be very strict and totalitarian. It is also likely to be some variant of socialism.

It is not necessary that phases 1 and 2 fall into separate periods, one following the other. Rather, as is happening already, there are periods of relative calm, then riots and fighting (at least in some areas), then some calm again, but each time and on every side violence escalates. What complicates the situation is the presence of a large number of groups in the region with different outlooks and socio-economic interests. This leads to a number of ways in which any situation can be polarised, leading to distrust if not outright animosity between groups. Some of the polar tensions are the following: Black/White; Coloured/Indian/ African; Tribe/Tribe; Afrikaner/English (with other minority groups?); Urban/Rural; Middle class/ Working class; Capitalist/Socialist/ Communist; Rich/Poor; Homelands/Black Consciousness Solidarity; PAC/ANC. The distrust and fear between these groups, which cut across one another to a considerable extent, make cooperation and acceptance of others very difficult. Yet between them there are a number of alliances, as is happening with the Zulu Inkatha movement, the Indian party and the Coloured Labour party. But, less happily, there are times when migrant workers, mainly from the country, gang up with others against the residents of African towns, as happened in December 1975.

Another dimension of the situation stems from the external forces bearing upon South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. The strategic position of the Cape sea route for bringing oil from the Persian Gulf to the North Atlantic states makes both East and West concerned to have it on their side. Added to this is the desire to have access to the region's rich mineral resources. But foreign interest also focuses on Southern Africa for another reason, and this is that so many people feel it is in some way their problem. As matters stand, the situation is a microcosm of the whole world's problems. Here a rich, white, "officially Christian", colonial minority faces a poor, black, "recently pagan", oppressed majority. Although an over-simplification, as I have indicated above, the situation mirrors the global division between North and South. This means that people from outside see themselves and their colonial past, whether as colonisers or as colonised, in South Africa. This arouses a reaction which may be one of guilt, shame or anger, because they feel involved. This leads further, in that many of the problems afflicting the country are underlying ones in other parts of the world too, but are more acute and concentrated in South Africa. Hence, others have a need to see South Africa's problems - which in some way are also theirs - resolved according to their own particular formulas, whether capitalist, nationalist, socialist, communist or maoist ones. Thus South Africa becomes an experimental area where many other people and ideologies have a stake that the experiment should work out right according to their own views.

But having said this, it is necessary to consider why the post-revolutionary society in South Africa is likely to be a socialist one. In the first place, only a determined and well organised force, which knows where it is going, is likely to overcome the present power structure. As Hitler prepared the way for Eastern Europe to become communist after World War II, and the Japanese invasion did the same for China, so it seems the Nationalist government in South Africa is preparing the way for some form of Communism. Both are fostering the myth that they are the only two political alternatives. Secondly, more and more people are wanting what the SA Catholic Bishops' Conference has called a "radical revision" to overcome such injustices as unequal land distribution, profiteering by both black and white, vast unemployment, unequal and inadequate social and welfare services, etc. At present there is little concern shown in this vein by the government. Thirdly, only a socialist society with a command, rather than a market, economy, will be able in a time of reconstruction, to cope with the demands for housing, education, welfare, etc. And lastly, a socialist society is needed to restore a sense of belonging and solidarity, which has been lost as tribal loyalties have broken down. A capitalist society is too individualist for most people, and in any case tends to be attractive only to the few independent people who can profit by it.

This, then, is an attempt to understand what is happening and foresee where things are likely to go. Some aspects of this scenario may be welcome, others very frightening; yet as Christians, once reality is faced, we can draw hope from the promises of God. But as it is, with the increasing interplay between internal events and forces, and external pressures, it is not easy to bring the message of the Gospel to bear on the

situation. The Gospel has both world wide significance and is to be preached in a local situation; it is the tricky task of the Churches in South Africa to satisfy both these requirements and bring a message of deliverance and liberation.

B. Some immediate consequences for the present Church

If the above diagnosis has any truth in it, then it is evident that the present way of working of the Churches will not continue forever. In the first place, the role of white clergy, brothers, and sisters working with black people will be increasingly problematic. Though in many areas there are likely to be calls for indirect help of the type which builds up black self-reliance, this requires a sense of knowing when to withdraw and when to come forward. Yet, on the other hand, since Christianity is to unite all nations, the universal aspect of the Church incorporating all peoples has to be given place too. Secondly, as time goes on, it will be more and more impossible for the Church to maintain its large establishments such as schools, hospitals, parish buildings, estates, farms, and most large convents and religious houses. Although these may have worked well in the past, yet even then they have at times been something of an attempt to re-create the "middle ages" of Europe and they are now likely to become counter-effective. In phase 2, they are too easy a target for disruption, while in phase 3 they are likely to be regarded as a holdover from phase 1 and so have to be swept away. On this topic, Thomas Merton speaks of the experience of Tibet, when the communists invaded the country. A young abbot, Chogyan Trungpa, sent a message to an old abbot in a neighbouring monastery, asking what he and his monks should do now. The reply he received was "From now on, Brother, everybody stands on his own feet". The Church will not be able to rely any longer on supporting its members by a well-structured and organised community life. As Merton says:

".....we can no longer rely upon being supported by structures that may be destroyed at any moment by a political power or a political force. You cannot rely on structures. The time for relying on structures has disappeared. They are good and they should help us, and we should do the best we can with them. But they may be taken away, and if everything is taken away, what do we do next? Coming now toward a sort of conclusion, it is obvious that we have to plan for the future. Let us look forward to the worst. Supposing we are totally destroyed as an institution. Can we continue?"

(Asian Journal, Sheldon Press, London, 1974)

Although Merton is speaking mainly about monasticism his remarks have a lesson for the Church as a whole. To continue to rely on large institutions, as distinct from small, flexible and mobile groups working at readily revisable projects, puts both us and the people whom we teach through them in jeopardy. There is a need in phase 1 to prepare both ourselves as church personnel and others to act without them. In phases 2 and 3 it would be too late to change so easily. It should be added that the above remarks, although based upon a response to the present situation, are also necessitated by the other changes going on within the Church and its adjustment to secular society. This phenomenon is world-wide, though perhaps forced into a clearer focus in South Africa.

Thirdly, the socialism of phase 3 will attempt to create "a new man", probably on the image of the one forged by the struggles in phase 1 and 2. This new man will have a different outlook, ideology, social structure, sense of values, etc. So the question arises: "What role is the Church to play in his creation?" There is a need now to cultivate awareness among Christians of both the ideological order that is passing away and of the new one that is coming to be. Neither should be equated with nor defended as the only God-given order of things: God's Kingdom is both present to and critical of all human societies. It is important for the Church not to imagine that it lives in a timeless world, and so not misjudge the age it lives in.

After these overall remarks one now has to consider what exactly the Church should do, what practical steps or programme should be implemented. But in order to give some answer, a distinction should be made between strategy and tactics. On a military level, strategy deals with getting where one wants to be, while tactics is concerned with what one does in a particular combat situation. Hence strategy is concerned with more long-range objectives that hold over a considerable period of time, whereas tactics will be different during successive phases as matters develop. This way of analysis may be applied to the Church's role during the three phases: the overall strategy may remain the same, while the tactics will be different from one phase to the next.

C. Overall strategic objectives

Up till now there has been little thought in the Church on this level, mainly because it was presumed that we knew where we were going, what model of the Church we should establish both in relation to secular society and the individual's needs. Most practical decisions were taken in response to some immediate need, with little thought for their long-term effects. The result of this were some happy accidents, e.g., during the Biafran war overseas missionaries had to withdraw and so the local church was able to get on its feet; a fund-collecting arrangement of dividing Kwa Thema parish into wards resulted in a new pastoral system for catechetics, adult instruction, caring for the sick, etc; an ecumenical study circle started in England between Catholic and Anglican religious orders could lay the basis for cooperation in South Africa decades later. Yet not knowing what one is striving for has brought about a number of disasters, e.g., the Catholic Church in Mozambique is still in an infantile state after 400 years of missionary activity; in France there was confusion over what worker priests were meant to be doing; the bishops in Cuba missed an opportunity when the Castro regime was established; in Los Angeles the vast and necessary church building programme to provide places of worship, schools and hospitals was seen to be very uncertain of what its aim was when Vatican II took place.

It is not possible to lay down objectives for the Church that are applicable everywhere and at all times; rather it is necessary in view of the current situation to return to the Gospel tradition and think things out anew at particular historical junctures. The need is to inquire where the Spirit is

leading the Church in its own unfolding local situation, to seek what is being asked of its members by Christ. If it cannot look ahead and see something of where it is going, it is likely to be constantly fighting rearguard actions as it tries to retain the status quo. Also it is likely to be satisfied with the wrong sort of results if it has no overall criteria by which to judge them. For instance, obviously a school is a good thing, but it would be a mistake for a religious community to undertake to open and staff one if it makes the local population dependent on their continued help. It does not give the local people the chance to direct their own lives, and it ties the religious community down to one area and task, when they could be available for pressing work elsewhere. It should not be thought that we can plan all the Church's work with the efficiency of a military or commercial operation, but it is as well to remember that Christ praised the astuteness of the unjust steward.

The following objectives are offered for consideration as being aims which the Church in Southern Africa should strive for in the foreseeable future:

1. To build up a self-reliant, self-sustaining and self-creative local church at all levels of Christ's ministry, ranging from a ward or block of houses to a national bishops' conference and even a federation of them.
2. To promote the formation of low profile basic communities that are supportive of their members, in touch with the surroundings and the events of society, yet formed in their community life and wider outreach by the Word, the Sacraments and the Spirit moving in the world.
3. To build up individual Christians so as to bring them to a critical awareness of themselves and their involvements, to give their lives a deep appreciative or contemplative dimension, and to help them be self-actualising in their service of others.
4. To let the Message and Power of God work through the Church at all levels so that in relation to society it becomes his instrument for the transformation of the world, especially by becoming more of a prophetic movement in relation to society.
5. To place a special stress on the demands of truth, justice and liberation in all their evangelical dimension, both within the Church's own institutions and in society at large.
6. To provide services of education, health and welfare within its own "middle ground" institutions where these are necessary for the under-privileged, but not to try to retain or regain slices of the secular society when there is no need for special church-run institutions. (By the "middle ground" is meant those areas of life that are under Church control but give a normal social service to people, such as schools and hospitals: they are in the middle between purely religious activities and autonomous secular society.)

These objectives, or some better formulated ones, are what we can press for now in preparing for the coming of the Kingdom. Understanding them fully, let alone justifying them all, would entail an inquiry into ecclesiology, missiology, etc. They

may be regarded as ideal values that should inform all our work and activities at the present time and as aims to be realised in the future.

Having stated these overall objectives, it is necessary to follow up by some more specific tactical considerations that can be employed in each phase of the scenario.

D. Tactical methods for phase 1

The long term aim here will be one of laying down such personal attitudes, convictions, values and lines of thought as though they were seeds which would bear fruit in phase 3. This will be primarily a time of preparation for each person, for the local community and for the Church as a whole so that it can work creatively for a "Church of the future". This will involve a negative work of clearing the ground, and a building up of a reflective or contemplative dimension of faith which will issue in and direct positive action. This will involve, first of all negatively:

1. The unlearning of much of the inherited mind set, ideology, role and expectations that people have come to associate with the Church and in particular its social position.
2. A releasing of church personnel from large institutional commitments in order to achieve greater mobility and flexibility.
3. Learning to overcome the polarising tendencies that our society, propaganda and a lack of human depth force upon us.
4. De-privatising religion by overcoming the rigid dichotomies between person, community and society; in this way religion would be less a preoccupation with the relation between God and myself, my innermost soul, my private affairs and the domestic scene around me.

In conjunction with these negative or clearing operations, care is required in building up a positive contemplative approach which will be the basis and inspiration for any activity. By contemplation is understood here not some highly mystical and esoteric activity but an appreciative approach to life, one's situation and how God is working in and through it. This will include the following methods:

5. Shifting the emphasis in prayer from "devotions" to prayer as a searching for and a being searched by the Spirit, i.e., not to reassure us as we are but to remake us as God needs us to be.
6. Opening the liturgy so that it allows the Word of God, as mediated by the tradition of the Church, to bear on present events.
7. Enabling people to come to a better understanding of themselves, one another and their situations by a greater care and awareness in the field of communications. In this way people should be enabled to become partners in a dialogue rather than merely passive recipients of whatever is put over the mass media.

8. Giving time for a self and community education/discovery programme that helps people grasp what is happening in terms of its origins. Vincent de Cuesnogle wrote in his Christmas Message, 1975:

"There are a number of alternatives open to us today whereby we can serve the poor and oppressed of the world: 1. direct help; 2. teaching methods of self-help; 3. seeking the causes of human misery and injustice. I firmly believe that...we must place emphasis upon the third alternative, though without discarding the other two, which demands professional competency in a wide range of fields, economics, sociology, politics, philosophy, theology and a host of other disciplines. History gives us a model in the mutual endeavours of Vittoria and Las Casas who championed the cause of the oppressed Indians."

Although none of us may have all these professional competencies, the point is that we have to be open to what others, both inside and outside the Church or our particular religious community can teach us. It may not be everyone's task to be an expert, but everyone can be discerning about what is happening in their own milieu.

9. Learning to cooperate within the Church on an interacting basis so that all aspects of evangelisation, ranging from that of being a silent witness to the Gospel by one's life, explicitly proclaiming it in a variety of situations, celebrating the good news in the liturgy and transforming the evangelised to be evangelisers in their turn, are cared for. A community as a whole would cover most of these aspects of evangelisation, whereas an individual could not, so mutual understanding of differing roles and gifts is required within the Church, and this should lead to joint planning and active cooperation.

10. Undertaking a regular review of life, of work and involvements within each local group in the Church so that its members may both learn by experience and continually adapt themselves to meet a changing situation. The "See, Judge, Act" method can provide a suitable basis for this.

On the basis of these more reflective activities it should then be possible to give them a more outward expression in action that is truly for the benefit of both Church and society in a number of ways, for example:

11. Educating people for self-reliance, not domestication, so that they can gain a critical awareness of their situation, Also instead of seeing education as being for their personal benefit alone, service of others by helping those with less ability or a lower standard can be put into practice right from the start.

12. Training of lay leaders in the parish, the local community, trade unions, social affairs, etc., should be undertaken so that they can bring a Christian inspiration to bear upon their society's problems. In this way, too, Africanisation would be brought about, not by having a set anthropological idea of what is (or was) African, but by letting local people get on with tasks in the way they see themselves.

13. The emphasis in the Church's missionary apostolate should be shifted from a superficial "catch them all" approach to one of "intensive cultivation" : this may involve building up neighbourhood groups, family/home centres, small living and/or working teams, specialist task forces, etc., rather than keeping a big machine or parish ticking over at low key.

14. Development work and involvement with "marginals", those whose life chances are minimal, should be undertaken by the Church. Though this is not to be done in a haphazard manner where people rush in to be helpful without much grasp of the implications of their intervention in others' lives. The love of others that development work requires has to be directed by understanding and intelligence.

15. Both within the Church itself, and extending from there to society, direct work has to be undertaken for the promotion of justice and peace.

These, then, are a few lines of work that could be taken up. It would be self-defeating to be too specific regarding methods, not only because circumstances and opportunities vary so much, but because a self-creative local community will only arise when it sets its own tasks and priorities.

E. Tactical methods for phase 2.

This will be an apocalyptic time in the sense that it will be the end of an era, of a society, where a certain set of presuppositions, values, priorities, relationships, ties and social arrangements are passing away. In this we are in much the same position as Jesus foreseeing the impending fall of Jerusalem; we, like him, are able to see that events are set on a collision course. To forecast such doom is not to wish that it will come about. Jesus wept over the city that would not listen to him and change its ways. Nor is it to predict in detail exactly what will happen or where catastrophe will strike; rather it is a matter of warning people so that they can prepare themselves to escape or deal with a disastrous time when it comes. Passages like Luke 21:5-36, and 19:41-44, John 15:18-27, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, are not predictions of what things will be like, but they help us by prompting questions, suggesting lines of thought and values to which we should remain faithful in a time of trouble.

A preliminary question here is "Should one stay?" If there is trouble and violence, should people get out of the way or remain at their post? Unfortunately there is no clear answer on this. The good shepherd does not desert his flock and is willing to lay down his life for them. But on the other hand, Christ says that if they persecute you in one city, move on to the next and preach the Gospel there. So, if one is still of needful service to the Christian community or the local people, then it is an indication that one should remain. This presumes that a person is still capable of giving some form of service, even if it is only of remaining human and "present" in a trying and violent situation. But if you can do nothing of value any longer, go on elsewhere for the sake of the Gospel. Service is the key, rather than bravado.

Unlike in phase 1, it is impossible to plan detailed activities as everything is likely to be upset, but in such a time of trouble the following points can be borne in mind as an aid to understanding:

1. Events, and particularly violence, will work in a haphazard way, so that it will be almost impossible to make any sense of them. Escapes and disasters will occur with little relation to who deserves (if anyone does) either.
2. In such a time of great fear, people are likely to let go of all human values and simply follow the strongest, because that faction seems to promise safety and deliverance from fear. In this situation it is easy for strong, ruthless and determined people to gain control.
3. Truth will be an early casualty; rumours will be rife about wars, armies and even religious portents, as many will claim "I am He". All this, whether done deliberately or not, will add to the confusion, fear and panic.
4. In such a desperate situation there will be for many people a suspension of "ordinary common decency" or "everyday morality"; it will no longer pay or people will be so overwhelmed that "they do not know what they are doing".
5. Extraordinary accusations against the Church, and particularly against clergy and religious, are likely. Such attacks will be due in part to past failures of the Church, and in part to its showing forth Christ. In other words, it is caught both ways. What will be asked of us above all is a complete and deep trust in God, combined with as much support as we can give one another and the people at large. This will be a time when our lives are not measured so much by our achievements, but by being faithful.
6. It will be of no use to over-react to all sorts of extremism, untruths, and violence with shock, outrage or an opposite extremism. Hence there is a need to avoid being "polarised". At best we should try to understand the origin of such travail and the forces that get hold of frustrated and desperate people, and help others to understand as far as possible.
7. When God's love has been spurned, either by ill-will or by our failure in South Africa to feel and meet the needs of others, then his love which should be a creative source of our lives and society can only reach us as an impersonal and destructive wrath. Thus it is in our failure to respond, as a country with its unjust laws and its system of exploitation, to God's love for us that we allow it to reach us as wrath; that's our doing, not God's (Cf. Rom. 1:18).
8. In accepting suffering, hardships and losses alongside others as our common lot, we can be a sign of courage and hope to them, showing that they are not deserted.
9. To a great extent one will have to do the best one can, with often meagre resources, from day to day and even from hour to hour in different places and situations. Continuity in life should depend on the Gospel and our mission to show it forth, rather than upon regular and institutional forms.

10. As clergy and religious we may be able to build bridges between different groups of people where no one else can. In this we can work for reconciliation, but we have to make sure that this is on the basis of justice and equity, and is not an attempt to bring about a pseudo-peace that would only lead to a greater disaster later.

Through all of this perseverance in faith is required; the one who perseveres to the end will be saved in both life and death. So we need something of Paul's attitude to realise that both can be a gain.

F. Tactical methods in phase 3.

Although with this stage one is looking rather too far ahead to make any specific proposals, it has to be pointed out that if there is to be any Christianity flourishing then, it will be because its seeds have been planted in people's hearts now. These seeds will have to take the form of giving people a sense of human values and responsibility, not solely of teaching them devotions and sentimental piety. If, for instance, people have been given some experience of justice and respect for each person's dignity, even in very limited circumstances, this can give them a taste of what to strive for in the future. Their motivation will not be solely one of rejecting injustice, and hence derived from frustration and bitterness, but it will also be one of extending the scope of justice which they already have a feel for and know how to recognise.

Since in phase 3 there is likely to be some form of socialist society, there is a need to know what the implications of that will be for Christianity. What features of it can be welcomed, what are its weaknesses and strengths, what does one have to be wary of, and in what ways might it be an inhuman or anti-Christian force? Knowing something of what to expect, and being prepared to meet it positively when the time comes, will depend upon undertaking before-hand some study of socialist movements.

The question arises here for the Church of how it can actively and genuinely contribute to the bringing about of a new society. This goes much further than thinking of how it might adapt or accommodate itself to a new regime, as though it would carry on its own business with the least disturbance. Rather, within this new secular society it has to proclaim and witness to true human and social values as a prelude to the coming of the Kingdom. This is not to say that the Church should endeavour, as happened at the fall of Rome, to found a latter day set of papal states. But one can ask how it should cooperate both with Christians of other denominations and people from other religions or of no religion to direct and motivate people in their strivings for a new society. Exactly what should be done will have to be worked out when the time comes, and that will require the ability to make a continuous reassessment of what is needed in society, what the Church can and should contribute when one keeps its overall strategic objectives and the call of the Gospel in mind. In other words, a contemplative attitude involving study, reflection, dialogue and reconsideration, all within a prayerful approach to life, will be needed all along.

There are, however, a couple of warning remarks to be made regarding the Church's position in a new society. It will be no use for either the Church or for society as a whole to return to the situation that prevailed in phase 1. Even if not everything is right, nor the new situation brought about by completely rightful means, there is no way of putting the clock back and reversing every aspect of social change. Hence it would be a mistake for the Church to seek to regain its earlier prerogatives, to rebuild former church structures and institutions, or to insist on too definite a role in Church/State relations.

During this time life is likely to be very austere, due to previous destruction of farms and industry, shortages of essential commodities, breakdown of communications and a lack of social control. There will be a need to accept austerity willingly, even if it is imposed. But it will be the Church's task to remind in word and deed that austerity and rigid control is for the sake of human benefit. Austerity should not be continually imposed where it either only benefits a few, or for the sake of technical and economic advancement that leaves human values out of account. Likewise the Church will in all probability have to point out that even if harsh security methods are needed at one juncture, they are to be replaced by a training for increased responsibility, mutual trust and greater human freedom.

Reference: AFER, Volume 20, No. 4, August 1978.

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From Adris Newsletter....future meetings:

April 19-22, 1979: Meeting of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, in Minneapolis; contact Dr. Edwin Hallstein; First Covenant Church; 1044 East Hyacinth; St. Paul, Minnesota 55106.

May 5, 1979: Conference on computer treatment of medieval texts, at Kalamazoo, Michigan; contact Anne Gilmour Bryson; Institut d'Etudes Médiévales; Université de Montréal; C.P. 6128, Station "A"; Montreal, P.Q. H36 3J7; Canada.

June 25-30, 1979: Conference in professional training in marriage and family life, in Denver; contact Christian Counseling and Enrichment; 8000 East Gerard - Suite 601; Denver, Colorado 80231.

August 2-5, 1979: Meeting of the National Marriage Encounter Conference, at Davenport, Iowa; contact Jerry and Marilyn Sexton; 263 Dessa Lane; South St. Paul, Minnesota 55075.

October 1-7, 1979: Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, in Shanti-Niketan, India; contact A. K. Narain; University of Wisconsin; Madison, Wisconsin.

October 28-31, 1979: Conference of Catholic Charismatic Renewal, in Bombay, India; contact National Charismatic Office; 70A Hill Road; Bandra; Bombay 400 050, India.

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THE REAL BANGLADESH

By

William J. Slavin

A priest, who in 1975 moved from the Glasgow slums, where he worked as an educational psychologist with the Strathclyde Education Department, to Bangladesh, to work on a programme for training lay leaders, separates myth from reality in what he calls this "agricultural slum" in south-east Asia.

It is, perhaps, ironic that, of all countries, Bangladesh may be the one to have to suffer longest from Kissinger's evil genius for facile misrepresentation. After three consecutive years of bumper harvests, the main problem being where to store it all, the image of the "basket-case" remains. Thus, according to a recent highly emotional leader in the Guardian on the refugees from Burma (now being repatriated), Bangladesh is "one of the poorest, most crowded, least appetising refuges in the world," and "hangs perilously to survival only on an international lifeline of a billion dollars a year," the "main enemy of which is its endlessly burgeoning population" and which "merits our agonised (sic) attention and much help." The whole mythology, Even the secular city has need of its "black babies." Perhaps the refugees would have been well advised to take shelter with the Bengalis in the more "appetising" Brick Lane?

Bangladesh is a country about the size of England on the Tropic of Cancer at 90° longitude east. While politically it is identified with the Indian sub-continent, geographically it belongs rather to the lush wet paddy lands of south-east Asia. The Ganges delta is the third largest river system in the world after the Amazon and the Congo. Historically it has always attracted a large population because of the fertility of the soil, but at the same time the most able have always tended to leave when the opportunity arose (for example, doctors to the UK) because of the frequency and severity of the area's natural disasters. It might therefore more accurately be described as an agricultural slum.

The first stage in demythologisation is to remove neologisms such as "Third World," "developing country" and so on. V. S. Naipul has recently said of India, for example, that it would be more accurate to describe it as a "degenerating state." The key word is "peasant," to denote an economy based on "servile" labour where the vast majority have no rights to health, education or welfare. It is of the utmost importance to realise that the average Bengali is not a beggar since that is a well-defined occupation restricted to a tiny number. Nor, on the other hand, is he a small farmer if by that term is understood someone with animals and implements. He is rather a man who either has not inherited or has not been able to retain sufficient land to keep his family above the minimal subsistence level and who therefore must go to work for someone else who will pay him the absolute minimum he can get away with. Now the military government is calling for a minimum salary of £13 monthly but the daily wages can be as low as 12p.

At the moment rice costs 15p per kilo and fish 50p per kilo. There is evidence that protein deficiency is rising faster than the population. And this is to say nothing of clothing or the simplest housing materials. It is further reckoned that as much as half the youth may now be from completely landless families.

The second stage of demythologisation is, to accept that the country is still run by an essentially colonial kind of bureaucracy, a classic example of Fanon's black faces in white masks. The government rests securely in the hands of revolving elites whose main interest is in generating enough cash for themselves that they may participate in a "western" style of living. Previously this was achieved by the export of jute with strong sidelines in smuggling (to India) and rice-hoarding. Now the resource is increasingly the import of international "aid" and consumer commerce. The majority of these people are absentee landlords and few if any of them would have an interest in the welfare of the general population even if it were a quarter of its present size. For the people are not so much exploited as rendered irrelevant in the land of their birth, which is even worse. Their only fault is that they have no cash and ideally they should be sterilised out of existence in the shortest possible time. Myrdal describes countries such as this as "functioning anarchies" since they lack completely the social infrastructure of effective local government, to say nothing of development policies, which require strong central direction. The poor here do not get to eat the food they grow with their own hands. How does any one expect them to get anywhere near the "relief" that is brought in from abroad? But it is part of the mythology to let people imagine that they can help the poor without interfering with a system that is designed to serve the wants of a minority at the expense of the needs of the majority.

The final state of demythologisation is to understand the role of the Church in this social context. Firstly, there is no question of proselytising among the Muslim majority. Secondly, although those who have become Christians usually refer to themselves as previously Hindu, the fact is that they mostly belonged to the so-called low caste groups who have never had much contact with religious traditions of any kind. These are the much criticised "rice Christians," Most missionaries are working almost full-time in the various fields of human development for these marginal groups and although it is currently fashionable to question the value of this work it might be asked what could come closer to the Gospel than to make men of those who in their lifetime have been treated as worse than animals. The work of founding a local church upon such people is, of course, an uphill task but essentially the same work as has to be done in parishes the world over. Recently however the question has been raised of dialogue with Islam since this is the primary source of social identification of almost 90 percent of the population. Bangladesh with 70 million adherents is, after Indonesia, the second most populous Muslim state.

One difficulty, of course, is the extremely conservative social views of some Muslim leaders, especially where influenced by Saudi Arabia's anti-Communist stance. Already

almost all the Indian states surrounding Bangladesh have Marxist governments and as the dominoes continue to fall to the south it is hard to see how, or indeed why, Bangladesh should remain an exception. Even FAO has gone on record as saying that a policy of really drastic land reform in Bangladesh might promote both productivity and equity. Unfortunately the Churches, for a total Christian community that represents 0.4 percent of the population, own a remarkable amount of property, mostly inherited from colonial times, and consequently do not lack their own white masks in their indigenous administration. Furthermore the foreign run schools, hospitals and projects continue to be manipulated for the most part by the wealthy and are far removed from the basic needs of the majority. Like most institutions in the country, they seem ultimately to serve as a seedbed for political discontent and social irresponsibility.

If the Gospel is to be brought fully up to date then it should be translated now as: "say to a man, go, and if he hath a visa, he goeth. If he hath not a visa, he goeth not." Previously missionaries took months to travel to their posts, started with Mass (in Latin) the first day and remained in the same place for the rest of their lives. Now a missionary can spend years waiting for a visa, more years learning the language and immersing himself in the local culture in order to find a relevant experience, only to be flown out at 24 hours' notice by the government. The reality today is that one must be prepared to be a missionary wherever one is. It is archaic to hang on to the mystique of being a "foreign" missionary. Mission itself has to be demythologised. Mission, like heaven, is not a place - it is within. To become a missionary one must, somewhere and at some time, go through the critical experiences of exodus and exile in order to become a prophet not seeking honour in any country. One is involved full-time therefore in conversion, beginning always with oneself. Then one can become able to train people with whom one lives to change their society as much as they can in order to meet the gospel requirements of peace and justice. There is abundant proof here that it is nothing but a nonsense to imagine that technical progress, for example, can be implemented without personal change and social reform. At the same time my own most practical training for the work here took place in Glasgow, in supposedly some of the worst slums in Europe. It is horrifying to hear foreigners here speak of Bengalis as natural liars and cheats; they do so because they have never worked among the poor of their own country nor learned what the poor anywhere sometimes do to survive. It is worth adding that the poor here are no less wasteful or more appreciative than the poor at home. And indeed, at home the gap was in many ways relatively easy to close. Here, the gap between rich and poor is so great as paradoxically to render money insignificant. The economic problems of the sub-continent are secondary to the moral ones of justice and peace and it is here that the Church's voice should be heard. We should therefore be committed full time to conversion, though not to proselytisation.

If the Church's mission is in crisis today it might take heart from the scrutinies to which today diplomatic and trade

missions too are increasingly subject. Meanwhile St. John might be paraphrased as follows: there is no point in sending money for your neighbour across the sea if you cannot bear the sight of the one in front of you. Especially if he is an immigrant. There for a start is a group that the whole migrant People of God should feel sent to minister to in each and every part of the globe.

Reference: THE TABLET, Volume 232, No. 7214, 14th October 1978.

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An Editorial Comment on a Country in Africa

In many dioceses of.....there is a deep-seated concern over the indiscipline in the ranks of the local clergy. Although not a major concern here in the northern dioceses, most of us are aware of priests leaving their dioceses to take up positions elsewhere. Many priests throughout the country have been meeting to discuss sanctions and are making preparations for future discussion at provincial level. All this is good and must be done.

Without taking sides on the issue, reports fail to show that many priests of the local clergy do not fall into the category of indiscipline. They can serve as a beacon, a model for others. But when we look at the symptoms of indiscipline, we may not be looking deep enough to see the causes.

What is possibly at root level in the whole issue is the apparent lack of pastoral planning in most dioceses. Pastoral planning is not a ready panacea for all ills, but it can go quite far in helping to determine fidelity to a bishop or to a diocese. A lack of pastoral planning is often a condemnation to irrelevancy. A graduate degree in ceramics looms as important as a Masters in Canon Law, without pastoral planning.

It is incumbent on each diocese to plan for the future. It is necessary to be almost choked with meetings so that the problems can be identified, priorities and goals set, gifts and talents have to be recognized, and then the diocese must set about achieving their aims. Various men and women have to be trained to insure that the best expertise can be given to all areas of pastoral life.

Some of the plans for the future must turn on an inter-diocesan level. There must be a concern for the staffing of the major seminary and its formation programme. Also on the interdiocesan level would be the need for staffing the pastoral institute. On the diocesan level would be the necessity of having men trained to be effective leaders in their parishes. Each diocese would need specialists in marriage, media, minor seminary, catechetics, Islam and the like.

Some may caution that the future cannot be known and planning is only gazing into a crystal ball. Yet planning helps in not only guessing the future, but actually creating the future. And this is where a pastoral institute could come to the aid of various dioceses, by meeting at diocesan and deanery level, to help correlate information, assess problems and difficulties, and seek remedies for the future.

Reference: CONTACT, Volume I, No. 5, May 1978.

ECUMENICAL BANK: MODEST RETURN AND MARVELLOUS THEOLOGY

It pays to invest in the poor. That is the message from a unique ecumenical bank which is determined to prove that socially worthwhile investment and fair profit can go together.

And the belief is already proving contagious. Witness the bank's \$1,900,000 share capital, gathered largely from hard-headed financiers who hold their church investment portfolios in one hand, and the Bible open at the parable of the talents in the other.

General manager of the Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society (EDCS) is Adrian St. V. Wijemanne, a Sri Lankan businessman with impressive credentials in applying international finance to the needs of developing nations. On the question of a "modest return" on all money invested in EDCS, Mr. Wijemanne is uncompromising. "There will always be a solid return," he says, "along with a reputation for safe investment and value of our capital, all managed in the very best professional way."

Yet the money lent out, according to the bank's own rules, must benefit the poor and the powerless, enable them to become self-sustaining, further local goals of social and economic justice, and provide for communal or cooperative ownership while still being economically viable and able to service loans received.

Beyond charity

That is a tall order, but Mr. Wijemanne and his US counterpart, the Rev. Fred Bronkema, are sure enough of the bank's practicality to expect an \$8 million share capital within the next two years. One major US denomination has an application from EDCS for \$1 million sitting on its investment officer's desk, along with a letter challenging the church in question to "take seriously this investment alternative to transnational corporations and commercial banks". The letter urges the church "not to seek always after the highest possible return on your money, but seek a different return along with a yearly dividend, a return that brings solidarity with the poor and oppressed".

EDCS, incorporated in 1975 in Rotterdam and co-founded by the World Council of Churches and the Netherlands Council of Churches, made its first loan in May this year: US \$100,000 was given to an ongoing agricultural credit programme for Indian campesinos in Ecuador. And twice that amount is expected to go shortly to a Christian hospital in India, to enable the lowest grade workers to build their own homes.

But can such investments, however secure, really become an option for canny church financiers? The EDCS people say yes and, what is more, they argue that the economic signs of the times are pointing their way.

"For centuries", says Mr. Wijemanne, "the church has been responding to poverty by charity and making grants. Such grants are easy to handle and much more readily available than

investment capital. But today, with the still unsolved problems of poverty and underdevelopment more desperate than ever, the age-old charitable approach has to be supplemented by a far more serious commitment."

That commitment, says Mr. Wijemanne, demands the use of investment capital which he sees as "representing the heart of the churches' worldly possessions".

EDCS puts its challenge in terms of good stewardship. "Capital is in such desperately short supply in the Third World", says Mr. Wijemanne, "that some of the poor pay the exploitative rate of 10% interest per month. The small projects and programmes of the poor go unfunded by large agencies like the World Bank because such agencies do not find it economic to deal with projects under \$200,000. The churches should be, and in large part are, more aware of human needs.

"If church institutions are not willing to put a part of their wealth at limited risk for the sake of development of the poor, then who will? Is this not a necessary sign in our age of our commitment to the living Lord who did become one of the poor, blind, captive and oppressed?"

That sort of theological conviction interlaces the EDCS approach. But it is never just theology. Always the convictions are translated into economic realities for the 96 members (35% from the Third World), all of whom have an equal vote in the society, regardless of how much they invested.

EDCS does not expect to turn investment officers away overnight from gilt-edged securities that pay up big profits even as they beg basic ethical questions.

It takes longer than three years to change the deep-rooted disbelief that it pays to invest in justice. But EDCS is not starting from scratch in proving that conviction. Mr. Wijemanne himself was earlier director of the WCC's Ecumenical Church Loan Fund which in 32 years of lending has never had a default on a loan.

Educational weapon

And for the first 14 years of his career in Sri Lanka, Mr. Wijemanne worked as a government servant, helping to resettle up to 13,000 small farmers a year in newly developed lands. That experience, along with his subsequent business career, convinced him that investment in small-scale projects, which relied on the people's trust and ability rather than their credit rating, was both socially useful and financially sound.

As a combination that is hard to heat, but perhaps even more important is EDCS's potential as an education weapon in the churches' fight against poverty - a fight that frequently takes two steps back to take one step forward.

A recent paper on the symbolic role of EDCS puts it like this: "All too often in our development efforts, we have unknowingly strengthened economic and social structures of injustice. In reality we have "baptized" these structures, forgetting the gospel order of repentance first, then baptism. EDCS does not intend to baptize any economic or social system, but to seek to be a channel through which economic and social justice can become a reality."

Reference: One World, November 1978.

DOCUMENTATION OF SPECIAL INTEREST RECEIVED RECENTLY

- Code No. (Title, author and number of pages)
- 1/831 Italy, the Vatican and the World, by Brother Gerald J. Schnepp, sm (former Sedos Treasurer). 38 pages plus 3 page bibliography.
- 1/832 Churches and Human Rights in Latin America: Recent Trends in the Sub-continent, by Brian H. Smith, sj. Focuses on church sponsored human rights commissions and pastoral programs in Chile, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina. 43 pages plus 10 pages of notes.
- 1/851 Asian Church History: An Urgent Research Field, by Dr. Bong Rin Ro. A paper for the 4th International Association for Mission Studies Conference, August 1978. Seven pages.
- 4/3089 The Population Spiral, by Arthur McCormack. Copy of article that appeared in the August 5th issue of THE TABLET. Two pages.
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- 5.IE Panorama Inter-Eglises 1977-1978, by A. M. Henry, op. Published by Centre de Recherche Theologique Missionnaire, Paris. 59 pages.
- 4/3192 Must we choose Liberation - Development - Evangelization in Mission? Workbook of the 5th Annual Working Consultation on the Future of the Missionary Enterprise sponsored by Overseas Ministries Study Center and others. May 1978. 116 pages.
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