

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF THE WORLD ORDER

By Robert Muller

(Nothing is more refreshing to the Christian than to learn of highly-placed leaders in the United Nations whose approach to the complexities of today's world is informed by the spiritual dimension of human existence. UN official Robert Muller speaks to the possibility for nations to resolve even their most acute differences through patient and respectful dialogic encounter.)

Introduction

I don't consider myself to be a theologian, a philosopher nor a scientist. True, I have had the practical privilege of living for 30 years in the midst of the world's turmoil and seeing the first universal organization on this planet trying to cope with whatever human problems were brought to it. Nonetheless, after these three decades in the United Nations, I still feel like a lost, bewildered human being trying to make sense out of all he has lived during 55 years of life, war and peace. I have encountered many nations, many languages, cultures, beliefs and ideologies. And yet, I cannot begin to match the great answers that have been given already by the prophets, those great visionaries who have interspersed human history.

So then, I will confine myself to some personal impressions. You can draw your own conclusions from them, comparing what I share with your own experience and with the witness of others who speak to the crucial problems confronting humanity today on the spiritual dimension of science and the spiritual dimension of human fulfillment.

The Centrality of the World

I think that never before in the evolution of any planet have there been so many challenges, so many problems, such a bewildering complexity arising from our own knowledge and our increasing efforts to make sense out of this chaos. I will give you in very humble terms the sense which appears to me as a world civil servant who has been living within the United Nations system for so many years and who in the last five years has had the particular task of coordinating the work of 32 specialized agencies and world programs which make up the United Nations system. So in my daily work I jump from the issues of outer space to those of the atom, from a preoccupation with the concerns of the handicapped to hijacking. All these problems confront the United Nations. They are daily problems, world problems, and you have to try to make some sense out of them.

As a matter of course I have been forced to bring a certain order to this bewildering complexity. It has been impossible for me just to be a submerged, passive recipient of all the claims, of all the ideologies, of all the problems, of all the cries on this planet. I had to grope for an understanding. It took me quite some time, and it is only during the last few years that I've been able to articulate some of what I wanted to clarify.

I begin with a rather simple classification vis-à-vis all our complex problems and all our sophisticated knowledge of space. Of course philosophers and scientists will immediately demur saying I have neither a correct notion of space, nor a correct idea of time. But in my pragmatic work dealing with governments and political people, there is a specific notion of space. In the United Nations today we possess an almost Copernican vision of the centrality of our world in the midst of space. Increasingly, this vision clarifies the human issues behind the daily concerns regarding world cooperation among governments and provides us with a reasonably intelligent understanding of our actual place in the universe. Beginning with the universe itself, this vision embraces outer space, but also focuses on the infinitesimally small.

This Copernican perspective of the importance of the world is a concept which should be comprehensible to all persons since we know so much today about the universe. We have been able to place equipment on Mars analyzing the composition of its soil and atmosphere. Many instruments have been sent to Venus, the planet most similar to ours. We have sent people to the moon and in the last 30 years have derived an astonishing knowledge of our own solar system. And from this we have learned a great deal regarding the fate of our own planet.

Encouraging Signs of International Cooperation

Much can be said on the subject of international cooperation. I could discuss at length world cooperation in outer space, the various treaties, the collection of data currently taking place around the world. Our relationship with our sun and the solar energy was discussed in the United Nations as early as 1957. The subject of space telecommunications is rapidly growing since there are now about a thousand satellites circling our planet. We also have world cooperation on global atmospheric and environmental programs dealing with our little biosphere - the shell a few miles thick in which all the life of our universe is located. We cooperate in aviation: the United Nation's Aviation Agency deals with supersonic transportation and the ozonosphere in order to secure a world order for aviation from country to country.

I could speak of the oceans and seas which are the object of the Law of the Sea Conference. This law seeks to establish a completely new order for international bodies of water. Continental land masses also have been investigated thoroughly - our mountains, our international rivers, our arable land, the cold parts of our world, the bits of the crust of our planet where we have mapped the underground reserves of oil and the water itself. Did you know that 99% of all fresh water is in reservoirs which we didn't know existed 40 years ago?

We know the earth's crust better. We are examining world-wide all living creatures and all plant life. Our international atomic energy agencies are investigating the infinitesimally small, the genes and the smallest particles of life we can imagine. So we have today as a result of humankind's amazing scientific discoveries and widespread facing of human problems a quite clear picture of the universe, extending from the farthest reaches which we have penetrated through our telescopes and X-ray satellites, down to tracking the subparticles of the atom through cyclotrons and fantastic machines.

What we know today, from the infinitely large to the infinitely small, is really an incredible picture of the achievement of the human race. Men and women have been able to multiply the senses which have been given to us either by creation, by God or by evolution. We are able to see into the infinitely large and infinitely small through telescopes and microscopes. We are able to hear the sounds of the universe. We are able to use automation and computers thereby multiplying the capacity of our brains. It has been the explosive flowering of a species which in the last few hundred years, and especially in the last 30 years, has become almost the god, the master of its own planet.

Mystery Remains

Yet when it comes to the infinitely large and the infinitely small, we confront complete mystery. The more we have learned about this extraordinary universe and planet of ours, the less we are able to understand what we know. It is one of the present crises of science that the more we have tried to understand and figure out the universe, the less we have come to correct conclusions. The whole theory of creation by evolution has been challenged in the last few years. Whatever Darwin or Einstein thought yesterday is completely challenged today. The theory of gravitation that works for man does not work when it comes to the infinitesimally small. According to certain scientists, it is almost impossible to defend the old thesis that life began with some chemical reactions in the seas. Mathematically, apparently, that is impossible. Our knowledge of planetary evolution is now being challenged to the point that in spite of all we have learned we still have no answers to the mystery of creation or the mystery of our place in the universe.

Nevertheless, from a practical point of view, and I now speak as a United Nations official, we have to deal with the satellites whose telecommunication systems keep observing our environment. We have to deal with atomic energy. We have to deal with the fact that we might blow up our planet as a result of atomic bombs. On and on. So this Copernican vision of the centrality and importance of our world is valid. It confronts us with a stark reality, and the human species through its world organization is trying to find a viable and secure existence in this world.

The Time Dimension

The second dimension which has become clear to me in the last 30 years is the phenomenon of time. Here again we encounter revolution. Probably never before in human history have we been forced to think so far into the past and at the same time so far into the future. When I was a young official at the United Nations, we considered the Eastern European Communist countries to be almost lunatics for having five-year plans. How can one plan effectively for five years?

Today, in any United Nations' agency the normal time frame for thinking, analyzing and forecasting is a minimum of 20 years - to at least the year 2000 - which is the target for health, for education, for the environment, for economic development and growth, for anything one can imagine. It is a minimum of 100 years when it comes to population, and several hundred years when

it comes to making an evaluation of the future climate of this planet. I've just returned from a meeting in Geneva. One of the major decisions taken there was to convene next February - in addition to our many world conferences - a world conference on climate. Where is our climate going? How long can we count on the present climate? We have learned so much, but we must now increase the time dimension.

Therefore, in addition to the Copernican framework which goes from the large to the small, we have the added dimension of going from the beginning to the end. Of course, once again we confront astrophysics. Today, we are reasonably certain that our solar system has existed for four and a half billion years. We know more or less when the various species developed. We know more or less that our species is from two to three million years old. We want to preserve the past. We try to preserve the languages, cultures and archaeology of our past. Saving the history of our planet is becoming an enormous concern.

Yet at this juncture we find ourselves between the immensity of the past and the immensity of the future (because astrophysicists tell us that our planet will still be around six to eight billion more years). We know that when one species is lost on this planet, it is lost for the next six to eight billion years. The more we look into the future, the more scared we become of our own actions and their effects on the future of four billion people - tomorrow's six billion people or perhaps even more.

All this means that the dimension of time is complicating the entire structure of our knowledge because this time frame exists in the universe; it exists in outer space; it exists for our solar system, for its planets, for human society, for culture, and for a human being who lives 70 years. It diminishes and diminishes as one goes into the infinitesimally small, until particles are reached which are unobservable, practically, which have a time span of a billionth of a fraction of a second.

It follows then that the time dimension which has pressed in upon us during the last few years is again an immense Copernican framework. It combines itself with the space dimension. It has created today a complexity of knowledge and a bewilderment which means that when we know the most, we still are ignorant of the very reason for our existence on this earth.

Finally, Humans

The third problem which we face in the United Nations is the human species itself. Here is a species growing in number - a cosmos of its own on this little planet. We have made great progress in knowing how many we are - something no one knew in 1950. Today we know the world's population. We know the sex composition. We know the age grouping. We know how many handicapped exist. We know how many malnourished people we have. We know how many blind there are on the earth. We know practically everything you can imagine when it comes to the human species itself. We have had whole series of world conferences examining population, women and the handicapped. We have organized an UNICEF for the children, and 1979 will be the international year of the child.

We know this species on this planet. At the same time we also know that this species is grouping itself in thousands of fashions: by races, languages, cultures, religions, geographic locations, and more recently by multinational corporations - completely new allegiances of people who group themselves around the organizations they serve. Probably one of the greatest problems we have today is how all these groups can live together in peace and how they can find the way to the greater fulfillment of the human species on this planet. This is the most challenging problem we have in the United Nations.

Yet as a global organization there is actually only one thing we can do, and that is to build bridges. This is the great Buddhist answer to life: we will always live in darkness; there will always be tensions among people; but we must always try to build bridges until through evolution we find a greater fulfillment. Priorities emerge in the United Nations when the debates focus on the human species on this planet. There is no doubt that the foremost priority has always been and remains the physical one.

It is very difficult in the United Nations to speak about religion and spirituality when you have 500 million people in the world who are hungry. They will tell you that the first moral principle and the first spiritual aim is to live. You cannot have any spirituality if you die at the age of two or three or four. Thus, the top priority prevailing in the United Nations is to work for the physical fulfillment of life: to achieve a world where people do not live 70 years in one country while their neighbors in another live 35 years. To preserve the sanctity of life remains our most important priority.

Communism has always answered that first comes life and afterwards philosophy and religion. Even the Romans said this in their time. This sense of priorities is something which has remained very important in the minds of the developing countries, and I want to remind you of this as missionaries because you encounter this problem in many parts of the world.

We Have Made Tremendous Progress

I could discuss at length the progress of the human species on the physical plane - two years ago we eradicated for the first time on this planet a global disease - smallpox. The savings for humanity are two billion dollars a year. Not only have we licked this major disease; we are licking one major epidemic after another. From the health point of view life is a miracle compared to what it was a hundred or even fifty years ago. There is no doubt that the human species has made magnificent progress on the physical plane. Even in the developing countries significant progress is being made year after year. The United Nations' statistics abundantly confirm this. It is, of course, regrettable that the health problems of the whole world cannot be solved even more rapidly.

And we are making progress on the second plane - the intellectual. After food, the miracle of life requires a minimum of knowledge, a minimum of education. What is it worth to be born if you are not told about the beauty of this planet, if you are not told about this universe, if you do not get the minimum of education so you can read and understand and be fulfilled as a dignified human being? This is the second priority as we see it

in the United Nations and this is why education and the eradication of illiteracy is one of our highest priorities - especially in UNESCO.

The third is the moral plane. I must say that in the last few years I have seen the United Nations begin to move from the physical and the intellectual into the moral realm. At one time I had a marvelous boss - a most wonderful human being - Secretary General U Thant, a Buddhist. He impressed upon me the hierarchy of values. For him the highest values were morality and spirituality. He once explained to me the charter of the United Nations in religious terms. He showed me that it was really a code of religious conduct telling countries and nations not to lie, to be understanding of each other, to be truthful, to settle their problems through pacific means, to try to work together for a peaceful world in which they could enjoy both unity and diversity.

U Thant was a man who left to the world an extremely profound legacy. I would suggest that you read his memoirs which have just been published by Doubleday. Particularly read the second chapter in which he conceptualizes the role of the United Nations Secretary General in purely spiritual terms. He doesn't quote a single politician. He quotes rather from the writings of Buddhists, Catholic priests and a Protestant missionary. As a Secretary General he had the courage to repeat time and again that morality and spirituality were the ultimate values on this planet and alone pointed the way to achieving an orderly and peaceful society.

On the moral plane much progress is being accomplished. The philosophy of human life is being defined in the many political declarations on human rights. Never before has the human species defined its own rights, its own dignity. These are marvelous instruments. They represent one of humankind's greatest philosophical achievements.

Alas, it is tragic that these lofty statements are violated in too many countries where the rights of the state are considered more important than the rights of the citizens. At least we have these texts. We have their explicit ideals to work toward, to complain about, to debate constantly in the United Nations. And our objective is to bring about someday a world in which human rights will be fulfilled - just as slavery, which at the time of Jesus was prevalent, has been eradicated on this planet. Humanity can and must make progress in all fields that bear on human dignity.

Morality is now pervading practically the entire United Nations' world. I could speak to you of many aspects of the emerging new ethics - world ethics and world morality - sometimes very difficult to define, sometimes changing overnight. For example, the sanctity of life is being challenged and questioned at a moment when the human species is proliferating to the point that it might endanger the future of the planet itself. Nevertheless, colossal attempts are being made on a universal level to develop progressively an ethic of the environment, an ethic of preservation, an ethic of peace, an ethic of greater understanding, an ethic of give and take, an ethic for a greater fulfillment of life.

Progress in Spirituality

Last, but not least, we come to the problem of spirituality. Of course, I would say that in this connection within the political world community we still have a very long way to go. You will have long since observed, as I could not fail to observe a few years ago as these matters became clear to me, that what is emerging from the world cooperation today between so many agencies and among so many experts, social scientists and other people, has a very close resemblance to the overarching goals of practically every religion.

I think it is to the credit of the great prophets and visionaries that they always had a total view what ranged from the vast universe to the infinitesimally small. There is no religion that doesn't begin with the creation and end with the apocalypse. I do not think that there is any religion that does not embrace the physical, the mental, the moral and the spiritual aspects of persons. As I have seen the United Nations grow in the last 30 years, I have seen it approach a point where the fundamental questions now being posed are: Why are we on earth? What is our relation to others? What is our relation with this planet? What is our relation with time, with eternity and with the immensity of the universe?

The moment these questions are asked, spiritual issues are raised. Not that we engage in endless debates about these questions. Our attention is largely taken with other priorities like food, better health, better life, more education. But more and more we are finding that these spiritual questions preoccupy the minds of most of the delegates whenever they come together to discuss world problems.

There were at least two men for whom these were the fundamental questions: one of them was Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, the other was U Thant, his successor. I have known both men. Hammarskjöld left his Markings. U Thant has now left his memoirs. It is wonderful to realize that among the political leaders of our times, these two Secretaries General had the courage to confront the ultimate questions regarding the meaning of life on this planet. They did it in two completely different ways because they were two different persons. One came from Sweden; he was an economist, a rationalist. The other one was a man from a traditional Asian religion, a humble man who accepted the religious teachings of his father.

Hammarskjöld, in searching for an answer to his fundamental questions of life turned out to be one of the greatest mystics of our time. When he died he was reading St. John of the Cross. His last words were about love. When you study his Markings, you see the acceleration of his discovery of God. Until he came to the United Nations, his Markings make practically no reference to God. From then on, however, he enters into dialogue with God and becomes the magnificent mystic who must explain his "negotiations with God." He finishes this task with tremendous words, concluding that the way to sanctity in our world is only to be found through entering the world of action.

This is what he tried to do in the United Nations. By his activities on behalf of world peace and better understanding he sought to realize the spiritual fulfillment of his view of the place of persons in the universe. It was the same with U Thant,

except that U Thant didn't have to negotiate with God. He accepted his non-theistic Buddhist faith and found that it gave him a satisfactory perspective on life and service in the world. He applied this every moment of each day.

I joined him in 1970 and must admit this man was a revelation to me. Of course, as a Westerner I attached more importance to the intellect, to material success - the values of the West. But in U Thant I discovered a man for whom there was no distinction whatsoever between religion and life. He just couldn't understand those who sought to make a distinction. For him life was religious. For him the fulfillment of each individual person was "purity of behavior." If this purity were coveted and sought by all the world's four billion people, it would create a purity of our human society. U Thant was a magnificent example of this utopian perspective.

Earlier this year in an interview with Archbishop Agostino Casaroli from the Vatican, I raised the question: "How can institutions become moral? People are more moral than institutions. Nations are wrong. Corporations are wrong. And it is institutions that fight for power." Archbishop Casaroli gave me the same answer U Thant had, saying in the end it is the purity of the individual within the institution that counts.

When U Thant was leaving the United Nations he gave a farewell address to all of us on the staff. But he put aside his written speech and his last words to us were about his own hierarchy of values in life. For him the highest value was spiritual. He defined spirituality as the purity of the inner self. Of course, this is a problem which we have yet to discuss in the United Nations. We discuss the external world, the universe, outer space, our planet, energy, our resources, agriculture, our cities - everything you can imagine - but ignore the internal world of persons. This is the great vista which still remains to be opened up. U Thant understood its full importance.

Both Hammarskjöld and U Thant ended their careers speaking about love - a very surprising topic in the United Nations! Love for them was the understanding and adaptation of the human being towards other humans and towards the planet. I would like to make a prediction. As our understanding grows of our place in the universe - now that we have begun to think of our place in the planet and in our environment and with other human beings in our social relationships - one problem remains to be faced: our cosmic environment. Who am I in this cosmos? Who am I in the universe? Who am I in eternity?

My prediction is that from the moment these questions begin to be faced by the scientists in the United Nations, we will enter one of the greatest spiritual ages ever on this planet. We will then discover that indeed we are part of the universe; indeed we are part of eternity. This is the teaching which was so simply put by U Thant when he said that if you do not believe you came from somewhere and that you are going somewhere, you are closed off at both ends. There can be no meditation. There can be no prayer. There can be no serenity. There can be no happiness.

If you concede that you have come from somewhere and that you are going somewhere, you are a link in the chain of life. It is a great privilege to be part of the chain of life. But this privilege brings responsibility for that chain of life. This is what the United Nations is all about. During the last few years we have sought greater understanding of the streams of which we are a part. I am speaking to you as a practitioner. I do not have the time to read much philosophy; it is not given to me. But when I observe the issues that are debated in the United Nations, this is the picture as I see it.

On his deathbed U Thant wrote down some of the things he had not covered in his memoirs but to which he attached great importance: one was why he had invited Pope Paul VI to come to the United Nations. Commenting on the Pope's statement in 1964 at the Bombay International Eucharistic Congress, he said:

These words coming from the head of a great religion were in line with my own thoughts which I had expressed on several occasions. I had said repeatedly that a widening gulf between the rich and the poor countries was far more serious and ultimately far more explosive than the division of the world into East and West based on ideological differences.

How right U Thant was! He went on:

Moreover, I felt that the General Assembly Hall of the United Nations had been the forum for statesmen and politicians, the Communists and sociologists, Why should not this great hall be the forum for spiritual and religious leaders?

U Thant then discussed with the President of the General Assembly his idea of extending an invitation to His Holiness. His Holiness the Pope accepted, and U Thant described this visit:

The scope of the speech covered the essential provisions of the United Nations Charter. He touched also on themes which were not in the Charter. He said the edifice of modern civilization must be built on spiritual principles which alone can support it but also illuminate and animate it. As one who believes in the moral and spiritual development of man, I was deeply moved. In fact, the Pope's visit to the United Nations was not only of symbolic significance but his speech was of historic importance. It left a lasting impression on the assembled diplomats of all religious affiliations.

I end with this quotation to show you that despite all the world's preoccupation with material matters and with issues arising from the intellectual explosions of our day, this problem of spirituality exists. It is all so complex, yet so real: the problem of the ultimate mystery of life and our transcendence, our empathy with this mysterious universe and the cosmos, the convictions that there is a design in all this, that there is a Creator, that life is not an accident and that things do not happen by chance. Indeed, there must be a meaning to human life.

These impressions are on the minds of many delegates in the United Nations despite their daily problems. It is during the latter part of the past 30 years that this subject has come to the fore. I can assure you that if you had asked me to speak to you 30 years ago, or 20 years ago, or 10 years ago, or perhaps even 7 years ago, I would not have spoken to you as I have.

Conclusion

I am only reflecting now what I have seen and observed. My conclusion to you would be that the world's peoples are anxious as never before to understand the greatness, the sanctity, and the miracle of life. If you present to them your religion - or seek to describe to them the efforts of an organization like the United Nations - within the context of attempting to give answers to the great mysteries of life, they will listen to you. They will never be satisfied completely - as they are not today - with only materialistic and intellectual answers.

Life is much greater than materialism and intelligence. Scientifically, we have not even begun to probe the immense virtues to be explored in love, in understanding, in compassion. These topics have been almost ignored by scientists because they allegedly cannot be analyzed. But they are great concepts, I am very hopeful that beyond our microscopes and telescopes and beyond all the inventions which we have made during this last hundred years, we are now entering the age in which we will pay attention to these concepts - creation through emotion, creation through love, creation through understanding the other person, the creation of giving and the creation of working together. I underscore this last point because of the many miracles that have already taken place in those limited fields where nations have attempted to work together - in the United Nations.

I believe that the human species has arrived at that place in its evolution where, of course, there can be accidents. Life can be obliterated. Many of the greatest scientists believe that we are not going to make it. On the other hand, a Teilhard de Chardin believes we will. We have those who believe that the moment has come where a world sentiment, a world intelligence, a world brain is being born.

I see it being born in the United Nations, I see instruments of total analysis being fashioned. I see the sort of warnings being made against what is wrong on this planet. And these are the warnings to which people respond. When you tell them that the environment is being injured, they respond. The result is that every nation is obliged to create a ministry of the environment. I think that we are on the threshold of a new age, a global age, in which spirituality, as U Thant said, is going to be considered the highest value.

There is in my mind very little doubt about this success, and I would throw down my gauntlet in support of the human species at any moment. I am sure that we will make it. I am sure that we will be able to organize on this planet a life which is so fulfilling that there has never been any precedent for it, despite all the indications to the contrary which we see today. I come from France - a war-torn country - and what I have seen happen there and elsewhere during these past 30 years I would not have believed possible if someone had predicted it at the beginning of my work here at the United Nations. All the improvement I have seen makes me conclude that more is possible if we work at it, if each one of us has the emotion and the optimism to make it happen. And, in my opinion, it will happen!

I speak to you as missionaries, as theologians, as very privileged people working in the field of spirituality. You have a very important role on this planet. You are to give confidence to the people that it can be done and that it will be done.

(Note: Inevitably, this lengthy address provoked all sorts of reactions. Many were struck by its buoyancy and optimism. In the question hour that followed Dr. Muller was asked whether he did not recognize the inveteracy of human evil or the demonic in human history. But he stuck by his guns, and made no concessions. What provoked the greatest wonderment was his total silence regarding Jesus Christ. The Name was not mentioned either in the address or in his replies to questions. But has Christ no role in the human quest for the perfection of society? One conferee remarked, "He spoke of hope, but he didn't give us enough hope. There are better grounds for hope and deeper grounds for hope than he actually articulated." Ed.)

Reference: Missiology, An International Review, Volume VII, Number 1, January 1979.

--There is a cassette tape of this talk by Dr. Muller available at the Sedos Documentation Centre.

--Dr. Muller has written a book of his life and experiences at the United Nations. It is entitled: Most of All They Taught Me Happiness (published by Doubleday & Co, \$7.95).

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THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY has been described as a "qualified success" by observers to the Vienna conference. The meeting resulted in the establishment of a UN agency to oversee the continued advance of technological nations. Critics of the session felt that most of the discussion was on the theoretical level, with little practical application suggested, and felt that the private sector was over-represented to the exclusion of advocates of alternative structures. Observers were encouraged by the large role played by the developing nations, and the attitude of First World nations that the global issues involved were more important than individual concerns.

Reference: MISSION INTERCOM, No. 89, October 1979.

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WORLD CONFERENCE of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development, and Peace to be held in Copenhagen, Denmark, July 14-30. The Secretary-General of the Conference is Mrs. Lucille M. Mair. The Conference will:

- a) Review progress made in carrying out the World Plan of Action adopted in Mexico, 1975.
- b) Design an action-oriented programme for 1980-1985 with emphasis on Employment, Health, and Education.
- c) Examine the situation of apartheid as it relates to women and draft special measures for assistance.

NGO's in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN will participate in the Conference as observers. Contact Ms. Virginia Saurwein, Room 1850-A. United Nations. (212) 754-6451.

Reference: MISSION INTERCOM, No. 89, October 1979.

REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL
 ORGANIZATIONS, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC
 INFORMATION, (GENEVA - 16 - 17 OCTOBER, 1979.)

By Sr. Joan Delaney, mm

Since the meeting was sponsored by the Department of Public Information, it was not surprising that the main objective was to inform the non-governmental agencies concerning various U.N. issues and meetings such as UNCTAD, human rights, disarmament, anti-apartheid, energy, transfer of technology, the women's conference of 1980, as well as the future policies of the United Nations.

The participants consisted of more than 300 delegates from a wide variety of organizations in eastern and western Europe. Participants were from religious groups such as Pax Christi, Society of Friends, Christian Women's organizations, the YMCA, the Ba'hai religion etc; from special interest groups such as architects, teachers, jurists, disarmament groups and development organizations, as well as U.N. groups from various countries in all parts of Europe.

The informational character of the meeting was reflected in the timetable which was divided into two parts: plenary sessions and committee meetings. The plenary meetings dealt with the following topics: The U.N. in the next 20 years, the U.N. and the N.G.O's, Disarmament, the New International Economic Order, the Role of the Economic Commission for Europe in the Development Strategy for the 1980's, the Evolving Role of the U.N. in Safeguarding International Peace and the United Nations: Realities and Prospects. There were three sets of committees: Committee I dealt with question of trade and commodities, food and the transfer of technology; Committee II was concerned with science and technology, questions of energy and the protection of the environment; Committee III dealt with disarmament, human rights, apartheid and the role of women in development. Again in keeping with the purpose of the meeting, the committee meetings consisted of oral presentations with very little time for questions or exchange. As usual with U.N. meetings a great deal of written material was available, especially in relation to disarmament since Disarmament Week was scheduled for 24-30 October.

Since it would be much too long to go into all the details of the conference, I will confine my comments mainly to the relationships between the U.N. and the N.G.O's. Several of the speakers mentioned the change in the role of the U.N. in the past 30 years. They see the future of the U.N. concerned more and more with three main areas which are also areas of concern to N.G.O's

- Disarmament
- The Gap between the Rich and the Poor
- Human justice including problems of human rights, apartheid, equality of women, etc.

They see the N.G.O's as being able to contribute resources, and advice as well as being able to mobilize public opinion. It is important for them to be an early warning system to potential crises - such as violations of human rights, environmental concerns, refugee situations, etc. N.G.O's should contact sensitive people on national and international levels and make their concern known. They can inform their members of U.N. activities and ways in which the organization can co-operate. The work of Canon Moerman was mentioned in promoting the Year of the Child. Reference was also made to the work of Amnesty International in the human rights area. The Pope's speech on the need for all groups to cooperate was also used to emphasize this need of cooperation between N.G.O's and international groups such as the U.N.(cf. below)

In the midst of the many speeches, comments and questions it is only possible to highlight certain features. Among them could be included the overriding concern of the dangers of the arms race, the honest admission of the failure of the UNCTAD Conference in Manila, mainly because there was no agreement on interdependence and structural change, the firm condemnation of apartheid and the explosiveness of the minority rule in South Africa, the concern of the position of women in development strategies, the failure to promote the Declaration of Human Rights in schools, the problem of 2/3 of the world's women who are illiterate, the need to establish the Indian Ocean as a peace zone, the importance of the media in situations of political crisis, the complicated relationship between disarmament and possible unemployment of those in armament factories and the role of the Churches in promoting U.N. peace endeavors.

The final talk of the plenary sessions was given by Mr. Robert Muller. He pointed out the many changes in the U.N. since it was established including the number of roles beyond peace-keeping with which the U.N. has had to concern itself - outer space, climate, airspace, law of the seas, deserts, biosphere, solar energy, population, housing, etc. It was however, his personal conviction which was the greatest contribution. He stressed the fact that humanity has entered into a period of global living and we are a primitive people in this type of living. We need to learn, to correct the mistakes we will make. We are in the world not only to receive its benefits, but to be concerned that all men have an opportunity to share in these benefits. A thought which is of interest to all missionaries is his statement that "Global living is the last frontier". If this is true what role do we as missionary organizations have to play in it?

--Pope John Paul II in his address on 2nd October to representatives of Intergovernmental and Non-Governmental Organizations said the following:

"No organization, however, not even the United Nations or any of its specialized agencies, can alone solve the global problems which are constantly brought to its attention, if its concerns are not shared by all the people. It is then the privileged task of the non-governmental organizations to help bring these concerns into the communities and the homes of the people, and to bring back to the establishment agencies the priorities and aspirations of the people, so that all the solutions and projects which are envisaged be truly geared to the needs of the human person."

MISSION IN THE 1980s

By Johannes Verkuyl

Among the issues that must be in the forefront of Christian missionary thought during the decade ahead, I suggest that the following are of major significance:

1. The kingdom orientation of the church's mission is highlighted in the theme announced for the World Missionary Conference to be held at Melbourne, Australia, in 1980: "Your Kingdom Come". What does such an orientation mean to our hopes and activities throughout the world, to the missiones hominum in general? In what ways does this prayer call for reorientation and renewal in our approach and attitudes?

2. This kingdom orientation requires a rearrangement of our methods. The kingdom stories and the parables of the kingdom in the New Testament interweave proclamation with fellowship, service, and social justice. We must do away with the dichotomy we have retained between verbal proclamation on the one hand, and koinonia, diakonia, and the struggle for justice on the other.

3. Proper communication of the gospel in the relationship between the church and the Jewish people has been totally neglected in much of our missionary strategy. Deeper attention to this issue will be unavoidable in the 1980s, and two aspects of it should have priority: First, what is the context of the message of the kingdom in that relationship? There is as yet no consensus among Christians about the answer to that question, and I believe that it needs much deeper elaboration in the future. The second matter has to do with the state of Israel and political Zionism. The churches and missions have a responsibility to further a ministry of genuine reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinian Arabs. This can be done only through deep sensitivity for the rights of both partners to this conflict, and not by issuing one-sided statements. This is an issue that cries out for an honest solution in the years immediately ahead.

4. What does total commitment to Jesus Christ - incarnate, crucified, and risen - mean in a religiously plural world? During the 1980s that question will increasingly arise as a challenge, and our response to it will require:

- A growing sensitivity to and knowledge of what is happening in the different religious communities with respect to the relationship between accumulated traditions and personal faith.
- A search for fresh ways to express the universality of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a real encounter with people of other faiths.
- The development of three kinds of dialogue in such an encounter: dialogues to promote common understanding, dialogues to promote cooperation within the pluralistic nations, and missionary dialogues to confront one another with the deepest choices coram Deo.
- Continuing development of a theologia religionum to guide and help us in encounters with people of other faiths.

- Concrete elaborations of this theology of religions with respect to specific religious communities.
- Materials to help common people in the encounter with their friends of other religious communities in their own immediate environment.

5. We need further reflection on political ideologies. Their influence on the lives of millions of people is enormous, in some countries much greater than religious influence. During the 1980s we need to pay more attention in particular to an analysis of the varieties of communist ideology, to situations in which a particular religion is transformed into a political ideology, to ideologies of the secular state, to techno-fascist ideologies, and so forth. Our task is to evaluate them in the light of God's promises and demands. In so doing, we should honestly take into account the extent to which our own interpretation of the gospel, missionary praxis, and missiology may have been influenced, however unconsciously, by certain ideologies. We should also pay deeper attention to the communication of the gospel through churches living in the context of particular state-ideologies, and to what can be done to promote a "just, participatory, and sustainable society" as the embodiment of God's call to justice in different nations and areas.

6. Theological developments in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean deserve further attention. During the last ten years there has been a growing interest in theological developments in the so-called Two-thirds World. Greater information and documentation of contextual theologies have led theologians in the western world to a realization that their work also has been and continues to be contextual, even when they thought it to be perennis and universal. Is it enough to inform and to provide documentation, or should we go further? Is it not necessary for us in ecumenical missiology to promote an ecumenical theology? Through our combined efforts we can try to elaborate those elements in the different contextual theologies that are useful to the development of a truly ecumenical theology, giving account of the totality of the gospel and of God's law for the whole world. For years we have attempted, consciously or unconsciously, to develop "theology in loco" and "ecumenical theology" alongside one another. The time has now come for their interpenetration with a view to constructing a real ecumenical theology.

Visser't Hooft, in his review of my book Contemporary Missiology, asked why I merely provided a guide to literature about the different theological developments instead of evaluating those developments. The reason is in my awareness that a western theologian of a particular denomination is often inclined to test other theologies on the Procrustean bed of his own tradition, and I don't want to be guilty of that. Yet Visser't Hooft's question is a legitimate one! Our task is to proceed in collaboration with Christian theologians of all six continents. Theological development is a worldwide concern. The specifically missiological test is the extent to which theological developments either hinder or promote the communication of the gospel. The issue for the 1980s is what can be done to promote an ecumenical theology that is helpful to world mission.

7. The unfinished task of world mission, stressed by numerous church assemblies in the 1970s, is still neglected in practice. In the North Atlantic world there are three causes for the neglect: the shock caused by the rise of religious pluralism even in the western world; the revival of relativism and skepticism; and some forms of false repentance for the mistakes of mission history, resulting in stagnation, whereas true repentance should lead to renewal. In the 1980s one of the main concerns must be what we do in churches throughout the world to realize mission in, to, from, and for all six continents.

8. Another urgent matter is a new relationship with the people of China. In the 1980s we approach the end of the second millennium in Christian history. Will a new encounter with China mark the beginning of the third millennium? At this point the question is real, and we have already begun to demythologize our concepts of the new China. We know that in China, as everywhere else, there is both good and bad. We know that it is a poor nation, preoccupied with its struggle for bread and justice. As one China-watcher puts it: "Sensitivity to the problem of poverty is the basis on which the Chinese people will continue to distinguish between their friends and their enemies, whether they come under the sign of the Hammer and Sickle or of the Cross." In the decade ahead, the issue will be one of involvement with what is really taking place in the hearts and minds of the people of the new China, and to build up communication in the deepest sense of that word. The question of who are called to build it up is a secondary matter in which the Holy Spirit will guide us.

9. The relationship between Protestant churches in mission and the Roman Catholic Church should also be on the agenda. In this, there is no place for an ecumenical triumphalism, ignoring the deep differences that separate us. Neither do we need the kind of ecumenical defeatism that focuses merely on what separates us, fearing everything that threatens the status quo. There are many ways Protestants and Roman Catholics can work together in the 1980s if we are really open to the world in which we live and to the unfinished task of mission.

10. It is time for denominational missions and "faith missions" to meet. I hope that the 1980 Melbourne Conference of the World Council of Churches will be a meeting place between these "Protestant crosscurrents in mission," and that in the 1980s we may see blessed results in contacts, cooperation, and even integration among those who share the unfinished task of world mission.

Reference: OCCASIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH, Vol. 3, No. 3, July 1979.

(Dr. Verkuyl's book on Contemporary Missiology is available in the Sedos Documentation Centre).

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The Osservatore Romano recently reported the death of Mr. Ray Boylan, founder of Palms, a lay missionary organization in Australia which has trained more than a thousand lay men and women for work in Australia, Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Islands and Asia. (A description of Palms can be found in the Sedos Bulletin 78/341).

LETTER TO RELIGIOUS

This letter was written by the men and women religious superiors of the Philippines after their annual convention.

June 30, 1978.

Dear Fathers/Brothers/Sisters,

We write this letter to you at the conclusion of our Convention devoted to the theme of New Ministries. The theme, as you know, was discussed by the Asian Bishops early in their Hong Kong Colloquium in 1977. Our focus was on New Ministries as they have begun to be engaged in by our religious in the Philippines, their relation to the charism of our founders and the traditional ministries of our respective institutes, and the problems and difficulties that have arisen, especially with regard to personnel.

Since it is not possible to capture in a few lines all that transpired in the convention, we limit ourselves here to just a few salient points.

1. In view of the rapid changes which characterize our century, we need to be ever open to the emergence of new ministries.
2. Among the new ministries that have come to our attention are:
 - a) BCC-CO, or Basic Communities using the tools of community organisation;
 - b) CBHP or Community-Based Health Program, as well as the Family life and Pro-life program;
 - c) Ministry for Tribal Filipinos, not as an entirely new target group but in view of the special problems they are facing today;
 - d) Ministry of Presence, or life-style identification with the materially poor;
 - e) Formation of Lay Ministers and Lay Missionaries;
 - f) The Ministry of Justice and Social Transformation (e.g. Ministry for Detainees).
3. These, and other forms of new ministries, are calling for our moral, financial and personnel support, including the support of our traditional ministries which need a re-orientation for this purpose.
4. Therefore, we need to seriously analyze the social realities of our day so as to recognize the new challenges they pose to our Institutes, discern the responses they demand in line with our respective charisms, and decide on our priorities.
5. To do this, we feel the need for immersion in these social realities, especially on the part of those in formation, those who direct formation, and those who make decisions.
6. But immersion through action and life-style must be accompanied by a penetrating and systematic analysis, constant faith-reflection and be rooted in a deep life of prayer.
7. We realize that this process is not without its difficulties, uncertainties and risks. Those among us who are directly involved on this process should take care not to alienate themselves from the religious community. On their part, religious communities should take care not to alienate the

individuals and minority groups so engaged. It is especially important to show mutual affirmation, understanding and trust, and to engage in open dialogue and healthy communication.

8. In the light of the above, we pose the following questions to all of us for further reflection:

- a) To those of us with a charism for education:
 - What other forms of non-formal education work can we engage in, especially in favor of those who cannot be reached by formal education?
 - What can we do to make formal education more accessible to the majority who are in the rural areas and in the lowest strata of our society?
 - What contribution can we make towards the formation needs of the new ministries that are emerging, especially at the local level?
 - How can we re-orient our present institutions to be more sensitive and responsive to the needs of the most deprived sectors of the communities in which they exist?
- b) To those engaged in health-care:
 - What proportion of our personnel in secondary and tertiary health care can be fielded for primary health care programs?
 - What effective means can we take to prevent the drain of doctors and nurses to other countries and to the urban centers to the neglect of the rural areas.
- c) To those of us engaged in pastoral ministry:
 - What contribution can we make towards the formation of parish, diocesan, sub-regional, regional and national pastoral plans?
 - What can we do to remedy the shortage of ministers, especially in the rural areas?
 - What specific assistance can we render towards the formation of lay ministers?
- d) To everyone of us engaged in any kind of ministry:
 - How do we encourage the poor and the oppressed to become aware of their situation and unite together to find solutions for their problems?
 - What specific form of support do they expect from us and what can we realistically offer?
 - How do we ensure that the process of action-reflection become a real faith-action and faith-reflection?
 - How do we combine committed action with a deep sense of prayer?

These are just a few questions for our on-going reflection. It is our hope that the process we ourselves have undergone in this convention may find an echo among communities and individuals.

We end with a prayer that the Spirit may be sent forth among us to create interest in New Ministries and thus move us to contribute our share in His work of renewing the face of the earth.

Yours devotedly,

The Major Superiors of Men and Women

Reference: PRO MUNDI VITA, MINISTRIES AND COMMUNITIES, No. 20, April 1979.