

THE MISSIONARY IN THE 1980s -
BETWEEN UNCERTAINTY AND EXPECTATION

By Sr. Godelieve Prové, scmm-m.

(On 20th May, 1980, the following talk was given to more than 700 Dutch missionaries, who gathered at 's Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands, commemorating the 10 year jubilee of the Central Mission Commissariate.)

The subject of this introduction, as condensed in the title, evokes many questions in each one of us. It also contains a certain contradiction, a paradox.

What else can we expect but uncertainty, when the whole world around us is constantly changing? Aren't we on the right road if this uncertainty affects us also personally? Is it not a liberation when the waves of uncertainty, which inundate the world, also flood our own ecclesiastical and missionary world? And when we are no longer immune and protected within that world?

Once we realize and accept, that we too carry these same uncertainties within ourselves, the real questioning and searching for the meaning of 'mission' in the 1980s begins.

What exactly do we expect? Are we longing for a new certainty? For a clearly defined image of the missionary for the 1980s, in the same way as there was a clear image of the missionary in the 1950s, and even at the beginning of the 1960s?

This is exactly where the paradox lies. We have adapted and revised our own expectations, buried them as time went by, to replace them by still other expectations. Not once, but twice, even three times. And thus it finally dawned on us that a certain period was closed off for good.

The very uncertainty in which we find ourselves now, no longer knowing what to expect, challenges us to ask others what they expect from us. With our own expectations left behind and buried, we can once again hear the Lord speaking, asking, calling in the expectations of the poor, of the third world, of the young churches, of a world in anguish.

I visualize the missionary of the 1980s being born out of the reality which lies before us: out of our uncertainties and their expectations.

OUR UNCERTAINTIES

We are part of a world which, during the last fifty years, has changed so drastically and totally, that there is ample reason to speak of a revolution, of a complete turn over/overturning. Communication, science, and technology have fused all that lives and exists on this planet into a closely and immediately interdependent whole in which more than ever before, people have power over life and death.

There was a time when people hoped that all those new discoveries and changes would make it possible for everyone on earth to live in human dignity.

It was a beautiful dream. In the course of time it became evident that this dream was not being realized. Increasing violence and oppression, concentration of economic power, irresponsible exploitation of environment and of sources of energy, the destructive potential of the present nuclear weapons: all these lead to greater injustice and to a deeper rift between rich and poor. Many among us shudder at the thought of the possibility of a third world war.

For some time, we have known a certain feeling of helplessness when the world seemed to be swept into a maelstrom of changes which we could no longer control. In the course of the 1970s this helplessness has grown into powerlessness.

This powerlessness, this uncertainty, overshadows the whole world like a cloud. But possibly missionaries are yet being affected more than others. After all, we once hoped so sincerely to build up something permanent and durable. In some places the exact opposite is true. We can see with our own eyes that a period of growth and progress is now followed by a regress to conditions that are even more distressful than those we met when we began so many years ago.

The general uncertainty of this moment in history provides an excellent feeding ground in which the specific uncertainties of the missionary take root and flourish. Therefore it is necessary to keep reminding ourselves that there are countless multitudes who do not know where their next meal will be coming from. Therefore it is necessary to become quite aware that the majority of people, be they poor or rich, white or black, live in uncertainty today. Everything, everywhere, changes. The former social, economic, cultural and religious patterns and institutions are being either discarded or absolutized, or their deeper values are being laboriously integrated with the revolutionary elements of our times. A new culture is being born.

This is the great challenge for the church, for all people with a mission. God's message of salvation and liberation in Jesus Christ can never be expressed in perfectly adequate terms, once and for all, in our limited human possibilities and circumstances. Time and again this message demands new expressions, new words and deeds in the lives of those who believe. The process of incarnation continues, in every age, in every culture. The moment this process of God's message becoming flesh and blood comes to a standstill, the message does not appeal any longer.

A phase of great changes and of uncertainty in our world like the present one, has repercussions on those who believe; it tries their faith to discover its real essence. In this search the whole people of God are involved. We find it in the churches of the first world as well as in those of the third, in all communities of people who are concerned about the gospel. But here too, missionaries are being confronted more strongly than those who experience this process of inculturation within their own environment and culture.

In the churches of the third world there is a powerful and moving searching for their own identity and expression, for fresh words and true deeds of justice and love, which will make the message indeed a message of joy. Apart from the original values and symbols, the poverty of the great masses plays a very important role in this process. And we, who are strangers or permanent guests, are excluded from that, and experience the pain of not being able to really participate in it.

It is even more painful for the many indigenous priests and catechists, for religious of diocesan congregations, that they are equally far from their own people, that they have become aliens in their own land. Some of them are not even sure whether, during their years of formation, they were converted to our western culture, or to God. What an identity crisis for those who have the courage to raise this question!

With them we share a similar sorrow; a similar uncertainty, which is typical for that particular phase of colonial and concurrent missionary history. So it is not only, or not so much, a question of worlds--first and third--or of two cultures which, groping and searching in uncertainty, confront each other, but rather of two periods in history. We must make that distinction. It is important for ourselves, but even more so for the young, there and here, for the new generation born in the post-colonial period. They are free in this regard--they belong to an entirely new period. We must be careful that we do not transfer to them that uncertainty of ours, which is so strongly connected with history.

Against this background of a world in revolution towards a new culture, of the people of God in search of real signs, words and deeds as credible expressions of the message of salvation in Jesus Christ in these times--against this background we must place the more specific uncertainties of the Dutch missionary of today. We know those uncertainties only too well, but we must mention them just the same and face them as the reality in which we live.

Those who are still fully involved in work "over there" feel the pressure of that work very strongly. They are not getting any younger, and know that practically speaking they cannot count on additional personnel or replacement from home. Who is going to continue the work? The local people, of course. How are they going to continue? In their own way, of course. How should we prepare them to take over the work in the near future? What exactly do we want them to continue? What do we want to turn over? If things are going to be different in any case without us, wouldn't it be better to leave at once?

Ultimately we are up against the fundamental question: why are we really here? What is the final and the deepest 'why'? Why did I start this--long ago perhaps --with youthful enthusiasm?

In the deepest instance, what mattered was that the Lord should live among these men and women, that His presence should be experienced among them as liberating, forgiving, healing, for individuals, for the community, for the people.

If we keep this deepest 'why' clearly before our eyes, many other things will become of secondary importance. Then today's activities will again have direction and we ourselves shall direct our activities more and more towards conveying the meaning, the 'why', the relation to the mission we took upon ourselves.

For example: Is it a question of this hospital continuing the way it is now? Or is it more the question that the community realize that each member has a right to health and total well-being, that the community discharges this responsibility as well as possible, and also be present in a caring way to the sick, the ailing and the dying?

It is a fact, that in view of the present socio-economic conditions and in view of the strong desire to be--also as church--economically independent many of our involvements, will not continue the way we once expected and hoped. Much of our uncertainty will disappear if we abandon any false hopes in this respect.

We shall again be able to see a road ahead of us, when we start planning systematically for this kind of future--once we have chosen that future, decided upon that direction.

The difficulty with this is, of course, the fact that these decisions can only be taken in the context of a pastoral plan for a whole church community. This takes courage and patience, and often difficult dialogue between bishop and people, priests and religious, who all have their own expectations. But without united

effort in searching, decision making, and planning, the moments of crisis and frustration will increase, while people fruitlessly labour to keep something alive that actually has no future, and therefore no meaning for the church of tomorrow.

Even if decisions about whether or not and how our works will continue, give direction and clarity for the future, the personal question still remains--and uncertainty until it is answered--whether I, as an expatriate, with all my peculiarities of education, experience, age and personality, am capable of coping with the changes. Am I, with my past, a help or a hindrance for the local situation? Can I still adjust, even if I would really wish to? And if I no longer fit in this situation, then where do I fit: different work there, or back to the Netherlands? A return to the Netherlands raises a number of new questions and uncertainties: I am no longer really Dutch, I don't fit in there either, they don't understand me: actually, I am afraid of the Netherlands.

The answer I dare propose here is this: let us opt for the place and the circumstances in which we can be most effective as people with a mission. Let us not have preconceptions that this should be the 'third world' as long as possible, at any cost, nor that it is better to repatriate as soon as possible. Let it be a very personal decision, weighed carefully by each person individually. This seemingly simple answer, is a challenge, and at the same time it throws a bridge between our uncertainties and their expectations.

THEIR EXPECTATIONS

What do others expect from us, from people with a mission? They expect a visible manifestation and a social communication of the values of the Lord and of the good news. First and foremost we are expected to point to the Lord.

And here lies our difficulty. We often have very efficient, suitably organized institutions, be they schools, parishes or hospitals, which are not, or are no longer effective, and do not really communicate the values of the Lord.

It is not easy to incarnate these values into a world in turmoil. Humanly speaking it is impossible--an endless task--in these situations where normal conditions no longer exist; where the state of emergency has been going on so long that it has--at least for the time being--become the normal way of life.

When children and teachers are hungry, good education has but little meaning. Stones instead of bread. Can we peacefully continue to get our provisions from abroad, while the people around us become poorer and poorer? How do we share our daily bread, that bit of bread, with the masses? Where people are hungry, where the most elementary needs are not satisfied, where people are tortured and disappear for good in the prisons, very different expectations arise.

It is not simple to take in the whole situation, to integrate it and carry it forward into the future: the experiences and attainments of the past, the discoveries of today, the grim reality in which we live.

It is no solution to just leave all past achievements behind and close the doors of our institutions. It is no solution to pay attention solely to the material needs of the poorest of the poor and to scorn all highly qualified professional work and expertise. Neither does the solution lie in resorting solely to pastoral work, or in fleeing into prayer and contemplation, as if, after all, there were no solution to be found for today's problems. In times as these, the temptation is great to cling to some simplistic solution. That would be short-sighted.

Our whole world, with all its environments and cultures, needs the liberating presence of the Lord. Wherever we live, in East or West or South, in the first world or in the third, in city or village, we cannot escape the sharp and acute problems of today. These problems demand new expertise, and demand to remain informed about what science and technology have to offer. In addition this calls for a critical evaluation of the proposed solutions, and of the strategies designed on local, national or international level. All those circumstances, all those environments, in which people are trying to remedy the world, cry out for critical questioning by the values of the Lord and of the Gospel; they call for a wisdom which only the Spirit of God can give us.

Informed knowledge in order to work fruitfully in a give environment and situation is simply taken for granted as a necessary condition. But our effective presence in all these places will depend directly on the intensity of our faith, on our one-ness with the Lord in that particular situation, so that we remain creative through the power of the Spirit who overcomes all discouragement and fear.

That is what the third world expects from us, according to the words of one of her own leaders. Patrick D'Souza, bishop of Vanarasi, India, spoke in the name of that third world at the missionary congress held last December in Manila. This congress is generally regarded as a turning point in the mission history of the church. After a lengthy analysis of the situation of world and church, he comes to the following conclusions:

"Only a servant Church will be able to follow in the footsteps of her Servant Messiah. It has to be a fast and a radical kenosis, evidently a painful one. The great temptation of the churches in the third world will be the same as the temptation that accompanied the Lord's mission, namely, not to be a Servant Messiah but to achieve his mission in his own strength and power."

If the Church is ever to fulfill this role of the Servant Messiah, it must be the Church of the poor. Time and again this topic has come up in big congresses in various parts of the Third World, and yet the situation has not changed substantially even now. The churches in the Third World continue to give the appearance of association with the higher classes of society; of relying on the power of money and prestige."

"An immense new orientation will mark the new course of the Third World missions: the firm commitment to poverty as an essential ingredient for a credible proclamation of the Gospel, receiving everything from the Father."

"The good news must be presented as "total liberation" of the socially and economically oppressed. We should have no illusions: religion will be severely tested in the Third World, and the test will be precisely the social question. No religion, be it Christianity, Islam or Hinduism, that is unable to create a world in which justice dwells, has a chance of seeing much of the third millenium.

This new phase of the world mission starts with a call for conversion. Some of the salient features which would act as the criteria of genuine conversion of the converted ones would be the realization that mission work is the over-flow of the Christ-experience, and therefore can never exist without a deep concomitant contemplation and life of prayer. Mission work is not in the first place, as is mistakingly thought by many, a question of finances and personnel, but the over-flow of the Christ-experience into others."

And he finishes his long address as follows:

"We have reached a decisive turning point in the mission history of the Third World: there is no return to the past, neither to the past mission theories, to the past mission methods, nor to the past mission goals. A new era has started, that of the Third World Mission which grows harmoniously out of the past into a new future.

The tiny Third World Churches are no longer only "missions", the recipients of material help and of "mission personnel". They have now been entrusted by Divine Providence with a tremendous task to be and to proclaim the Kingdom of God in the Third World with great faith, and a still greater hope, even though their success in terms of the Church structures they will be able to put up, may be minimal. Even so, the Third World Churches are called upon to proclaim God's Kingdom not only to the Third World but far beyond to the whole world.

Our attitude should not be one of fear and despair, but of immense expectation. The Lord of history will manifest His mighty deeds in this world of ours."

MISSION IN THE 1980s

These expectations are so clear, that they leave little or no doubt about the image of the future:

- In the 1980's the whole world will again be mission.
- Challenged by these times, the churches experience a process of conversion that leads to a renewed faith in Christ as the source of ultimate liberation and salvation for every person and every community.
- Such faith through the very power of the Lord, is by itself missionary. It manifests itself, just because these times are in such need of the experience that life and love are stronger than death and violence.
- In this all those who believe form one missionary community, which shares life and gives life, and expands in an ever widening circle.
- In every church, men and women will also be called and/or sent, to share this actual life in faith and love and justice with other churches, other peoples and cultures.
- This vocation is not the privilege of the first world, but we find it in every faith-community.
- Without power, without prestige, without superiority - or inferiority-feelings, this exchange between faith-communities will continue as an effective sign of hope and as an actual contribution towards a new world-community, in which the narrow boundaries of one's particular culture and of self-interest are transcended.
- Those who are called and sent to do this will be very modest and humble people, who can insert themselves inconspicuously into the environment of life and work in which they find themselves. They will be people who are longing to receive others, to be touched and changed by others; to give themselves and share their own views.
- Thus more and more men and women will discover, in mutual exchange and friendship, how the Lord is present and alive in the various peoples and cultures. They will confirm and strengthen one another in their faith, to become one missionary community for this world.

Christians will thus be able to give to the world with ever greater clarity and conviction, what only they can give: God's message of ultimate salvation and liberation in Jesus Christ.

Reference: Enclosure SMM-I No. 121, June 1980.

THE SECOND BISHOPS' INSTITUTE FOR INTERRELIGIOUS
AFFAIRS (BIRA II) OF
THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES (FABC)

(Kuala Lumpur, 13 - 20 November 1979)

STATEMENT

Introduction

The participants from the Episcopal Conferences of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand came together 13-20 November 1979, at the Residence of the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur in the Second Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA II) sponsored by the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

2. The purpose of this colloquium was to deepen our understanding of and commitment to dialogue with Muslims. The intention of our meeting was pastoral. We approached our subject in three steps:

1. A reading of the situation--reports on the dialogue with Muslims in the various countries represented and the difficulties encountered.
2. Theological reflection on the nature and role of dialogue in Christian life.
3. Pastoral orientations and specific recommendations.

A Reading of the Situation

3. Since the Second Vatican Council's call for Catholics to dialogue with Muslims, we see a picture of multiple openings and considerable advances, side by side with frustrations and failures. Certain shared attitudes towards life in our modern world have encouraged dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

4. Christians and Muslims share an eagerness to serve the one God, await His judgment and hope in His eternal reward. Both search for true moral values in the midst of a fast-changing world, and endeavour to apply them to the complex demands of daily life. Both are committed to the establishment of a more just and human social order. Christians and Muslims can see one another as servants of God striving to bear witness to His sovereignty and to carry out His will for men in the midst of modern forms of idolatry (consumerism, egoism) and godlessness (materialism, atheistic ideologies).

5. A further encouragement for dialogue between Christians and Muslims is that both are involved in a religious renewal of their own, by which they hope to realize more deeply the divine message in which they believe. This renewal process may help them overcome the enmity and suspicion that have often existed between them. Christians and Muslims today are challenging themselves to centre their attention on the divine message at the heart of their faith. Those who sincerely seek the will of God should come closer in love to one another.

6. Despite these factors which bring Christians and Muslims closer together, both groups must be aware of negative attitudes and situations which inhibit and present obstacles to dialogue.

Predominant among these is fear--fear of a minority group towards a majority, of the politically or economically disadvantaged towards those in the position of strength, fear of being proselytised, as well as nameless and irrational fears based on centuries of strife, prejudice and ignorance of the other's religion.

7. A second factor inhibiting dialogue is a triumphalist attitude still present on both sides. Many Christians and Muslims consider themselves superior to all others and feel that they have nothing to learn from any partners in dialogue. Such an attitude makes impossible any true dialogue, which pre-supposes attitudes of humility, openness and equality as persons, without sacrificing one's religious identity.

8. The political implications of religious questions hinder dialogue in many Asian countries. Islam and Christianity have a genuine interest in influencing every aspect of man's life. Neither of them can ignore the political, economical and social surroundings in which man lives. Only in an atmosphere of mutual trust can the participants in dialogue find the patience and forbearance necessary to continue their exchange in the face of political issues which often arise.

9. In spite of these obstacles, there is a growing awareness on the part of Christians for the necessity of dialogue as an activity intrinsic to the Christian response to God's message.

Theological Reflection

10. From all eternity God has spoken His message to mankind, to make the power of His word rule over the individual and social life of man. This eternal message of God became incarnate in Jesus, who announced the Good News of God's reign in this world.

11. The Church, the sacrament of God's message in the world, continues Christ's work of dialogue. Her duty is always to proclaim the reign of God, to bring the proclamation of this message into every aspect of human life, and to seek the fulfilment of all things in Christ. The Church is particularly concerned with man's religious experience, the motivating and leavening agent in his culture. This means that the Church must constantly be involved in dialogue with men of other religions (1). The Christian finds himself continually evangelizing and being evangelized by his partners in dialogue. (2)

12. Christians believe that God's saving will is at work, in many different ways, in all religions. It has been recognized since the time of the apostolic Church, and stated clearly again by the Second Vatican Council (3), that the Spirit of Christ is active outside the bounds of the visible Church (4). God's saving grace is not limited to members of the Church, but is offered to every person. His grace may lead some to accept baptism and enter the Church, but it cannot be presumed that this must always be the case. His ways are mysterious and unfathomable, and no one can dictate the direction of His grace.

(1) Nostra Aetate, 2. (2) Evangelii Nuntiandi, 13.

(3) St. Justin Martyr attributed all truths in non-Christian religions to the Word of God (Christ). St. Gregory Nazianzen, at the funeral oration of his father who was converted just before his death said: "Even before he entered our fold, he was one of us. Just as many of our own are not with us because their lives alienate them from the common body of the faithful, in like manner many of those outside are with us, insofar as by their way of life they anticipate the faith and only lack in name what they possess in attitudes". Vatican Council II in line with Scripture and Tradition teaches: "We ought to believe that the Holy Spirit, in a manner known only to God, offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this Paschal Mystery" (Gaudium et Spes, 22). In Lumen Gentium, 16 the Council Fathers say: "The plan of Salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among these are the Muslims..."

(4) Redemptor Hominis, 6.

13. The purpose of the Church's proclaiming the message of Christ--which is its central mission--is to call man to the values of the Kingdom of God. We find such values also present in Islam. In dialogue therefore, a Christian hopes that both he and his Muslim brother will turn anew to God's Kingdom, their own faiths richer by their mutual inter-change, their mission to the world more fruitful by their shared insights and commitments.

Pastoral Orientations

Dialogue with Muslims

14. Dialogue of Life. Christians living among Muslims should recognize the importance of dialogue with their Muslim brethren. For most Christians, this means what can be called a dialogue of life, This is the most essential aspect of dialogue, and it is accomplished by Christians and Muslims living together in peace. Each gives witness to the other concerning the values he has found in his faith, and through the daily practice of brotherhood, helpfulness, open-heartedness and hospitality, each shows himself to be a God-fearing neighbour. The true Christian and Muslim offer to a busy world values arising from God's message when they revere the elderly, conscientiously rear the young, care for the sick and the poor in their midst, and work together for social justice, welfare and human rights. We encourage Christians to be ever more deeply involved in this dialogue of life.

15. Formal Dialogue. This also has its place in the relationship between Christians and Muslims. When they come together for this purpose they must do so in attitudes of humility and openness. They should direct their attention to the issues that confront believers who have a special mission to their societies, and share the experiences that arise from their own religious heritage. From such common roots, Christians and Muslims can search together for solutions to the pressing needs of our nations and our world.

16. Theological Dialogue. Scholarly dialogue also has a special role. In this work the real differences which exist between Christianity and Islam must be acknowledged, but these differences must not be exaggerated or distorted. This attempt to clarify misunderstandings and to delineate the areas of convergence and difference between Christianity and Islam is a goal of formal, theological dialogue. Irreconcilable theological differences need never be an obstacle to dialogue.

17. Education for Dialogue. Many Christians feel they know very little about Islam, and thus find it difficult to understand the practices and ideals of Islam. Christian parents, catechists and educators should teach their children about God's love for Muslims and about the many good and holy values in the Islamic religion. Basic knowledge about the beliefs and practices of Muslims, taken from reliable and objective sources, should form a part of Catholic catechetical training. Education about Islam should give an unbiased presentation of the religion of Muslims, while at the same time avoiding any tendencies towards indifference. While firm in their commitment to Christ, Christians must respect the beliefs and practices of Muslims.

18. The Role of Bishops. Bishops living in areas where there are Muslims should try to present an example to their people by their knowledge of the teachings of Islam and by fostering cordial and open relations with Muslim leaders. Bishops are urged to provide training for priests, brothers and sisters, and lay leaders so that they have understanding and respect for Islam. Bishops' Conferences should also send individuals for specialised training at established institutes, with a view towards their working as animators in their respective countries.

19. Ecumenical Dimensions. Catholics must not forget the ecumenical aspect of the dialogue. In a number of countries, Christians of other denominations have preceded Catholics in the area of dialogue with Islam. Catholics are encouraged to co-operate with other Christians in common projects and in sharing resources. Catholic Bishops' Conferences could give leadership to Catholics in this matter by working together with national Councils of Churches.

Conclusion

20. What the participants of BIRA II are calling for is dialogue. This means a change of attitude towards Islam. In the past, the attitude of Christians towards Muslims has not always followed the example of love given by their teacher and saviour, Jesus Christ. We exhort Catholics in Asia to let their lives be guided by the spirit of the Second Vatican Council (5):

"Although in the course of centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind, let them make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom".

(5) Nostra Aetate, 3.

Reference: ENCOUNTER (Documents for Muslim - Christian Understanding), No. 66, June-July 1980.

The story of M&B 693 tablets has always intrigued me. It means that May and Baker laboratories tried and tested 692 chemical combinations which were useless before the 693rd attempt produced a useful drug. In the Pentecost season, it is consoling to think that the same spirit motivated the 692 fruitless and the one successful attempt: the spirit of human initiative, enterprise, patience and perseverance. God's Spirit might be just as supremely active in the thought patterns as in the emotional complexes which influence our planning, in the serenity of the obvious, in the everyday sameness and in the unexciting demands to which the human spirit responds, as in the flash of inspiration, the unexpected discovery or the uplifting experience. To believe this takes faith.

Reference: SMM INTERCONTINENT, SMM-I no.120, May 1980.

A THOUGHT TO PONDER

Silence has its limits.

There are moments when, without any tangible utility,
Something has to be said

for no other reason than that it is true.

If it is not said, the moral order of the world suffers a blow
that is hard to overcome, harder than its violation by brute force.

And this principle is valid also for the silence "to prevent something
worse happening"...for ultimately the worse that could happen is that truth
and justice would no longer find spokesmen and martyrs
on the earth.

a German priest in 1934

Reference: IMPACT, Volume 15, No. 5, May 1980.

RESETTLING AUSTRALIA

Mark Raper

The arrival of refugees in this country offers an opportunity to Australians. Many are anxious to help in a practical way. Volunteers working from their own experiences are being mobilised for many tasks which need new skills, new understandings, and ability to change. It is not only the refugees who have to adjust.

Australian people are now confronted with a challenge of massive proportions. Concerned with the distress of Indochinese refugees seeking safety, the moral and social questions that face us are considerable. Hundreds of thousands of people are at risk and no solution is adequate. One immediate course of action presented is the resettlement of refugees in Australia and other countries. With over 50,000 people leaving Vietnam each month, Australia's acceptance of 14,000 a year from all of the Indochinese refugees is by no means a 'solution'. While fully endorsing this emergency measure, I am anxious that we understand the responsibilities it implies.

The responsibilities to the refugees do not cease when they have been rescued from the boats or camps and brought to Australia. The resettlement of Indo-Asian people in Australia will entail a difficult adjustment both for them and for longer settled Australians. Their recent traumatic experiences, the continuing anguish of family separation and the stress of culture shock make this transition hard. Our inexperience in resettlement and the lack of adequate structures make the reception of these people an enormous and widespread community task.

There is a strongly emotional response to the current crisis provoked by the dramatic stand of the ASEAN governments in temporarily closing their shores to further refugees. Emotional and sympathetic responses are all to the good - certainly far more laudable than apathy, indifference or bigotry. But the generous and long term response required is at odds with the materialistic goods enunciated for this country both by government rhetoric and commercial example: the pursuit of trivial comforts and consumer goods. Compassion and community goodwill, however vital, need constructive channeling. This requires changes in the attitudes and practice of many people. Even before the arrival of these refugees there were needs for improved multi-lingual information, welfare services, education in community relations. At present it is the poor and immigrants who bear the brunt of unemployment and reduction in government spending.

Australia has a resettlement policy and structure (announced in May 1978), but its agents are only just now being assembled. We have a refugee policy (announced in May 1977), but its implications are now for the first time being explored. We have experience in resettlement of immigrant people and even of refugees (170,000 after World War II) but even now 400,000 Australians cannot speak English because of the previous lack of any effective policy of resettlement.

The same challenge is present for the churches and voluntary agencies. This problem is so large and so new that existing agencies are quite pressed in meeting the needs. The crisis is greater than the present capacity of any one group. So new guidelines and structures are being asked for by the churches. And more co-ordination of efforts is needed for mobilising for this present crisis and in future years.

The needs are in providing services for the refugees, in community education of the Australian public and in co-ordination and liaison over these efforts.

A multicultural Australia is not something that can just happen to us. Longer settled Australians need quite new skills in order to make it work.

People in inner city suburbs to which the refugees move after leaving the hostels have chances for face to face contact. These on the shop floor at Ford or Repeo also have chances to appreciate Indochinese people. But if we live in the outer suburbs, or otherwise out of contact, it will be an effort to find ways to develop understanding and a personal contribution to the settlement of these new Australians. The middle classes who are principally the ones calling for more refugees to gain entry to Australia, are the ones who must make most changes if they are to be received in an adequate way. The decision to admit refugees is a decision to change the nature of Australian society.

Reference: ASIAN BUREAU AUSTRALIA NEWSLETTER, No. 47, August 1979.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Cheaper than Machines

Most of the silicon chip circuits used in the new mini-computers are made by young, rural women in Southeast Asia.

Kim Hai Kwee, 19, sits tensely hunched over her microscope. Jaunty music plays in the background and her head aches dizzily from hours of soldering tiny gold wires to almost invisible chips of silicon. Kim is one of 100,000 workers in South Korea's export-orientated electronics industry. Some 90 percent are young women aged 18-23. They work 8-10 hours a day, six days a week. In 1978, the average wage in Korean factories with U.S. investment was about \$92 a month, less than \$4 a day. Basic living expenses of about \$112 a month - which includes only one-half pound of meat and no medical care or entertainment - eat up Kim's entire wage. And many women must support their families as well as themselves.

In a similar Korean assembly plant in 1978, 95 percent of the total work force developed severe eye problems during their first year of employment - 88 percent chronic conjunctivities, 44 percent near-sightedness, and 19 percent astigmatism. Virtually anyone who stays on the job more than 3 years must wear glasses, and is called 'grandma' by her friends.

The Malaysian government touts the 'manual dexterity of the oriental female' in one investment brochure as an incentive for Western investors. In 1977 several women from the American Friends Service Committee visited the National Semiconductor plant in the Free Trade Zone in Penang, Malaysia. They talked with young women who worked in the plant, dipping the assembled units in large open vats of sulphuric and nitric acid. Heavy fumes were everywhere and the floors were wet and slippery. The women wear boots and gloves, which sometimes leak, causing burns. The workers in these plants are exposed to some of the most dangerous acids and solvents, such as trichlorethylene, xylene, and benzene, which cause nausea and dizziness. They have also been linked to cancer and liver, kidney and lung diseases.

Reference: SMM INTERCONTINENT, SMM-I no.120, May 1980.

LAY MISSIONERS

(A report on the International Week-end for Christian Volunteers held in Fichermont, Belgium, sent to Sedos by Father George Konings, cism. Father Konings was a participant in the Sedos Seminar on Lay Missioners.)

In the middle of June, an international week-end for christian development volunteers took place in Fichermont, at the "Maison d'Accueil Notre Dame". This meeting was the third in a series of international encounters among organisations of christian volunteers, on the European level.

Two meetings took place previously, one in Rome, on the initiative of Sedos (A Study Centre of Missionary Institutions); the other, in London through the English organisation for volunteers: the "Voluntary Missionary Movement" (V.M.M.).

The meeting which took place in Belgium was organised by the "Bureau of Personnel Assistance" of the Missionary Institutes of Belgium (B.P.A. - C.M.I.) and by the sending organisation "Volunteers for Education", which has its seat at the Guimard Street 1, 1040 Brussels.

The week-end was attended by 34 persons, representing 18 organisations from 11 countries: Canada, Ireland, Scotland, England, Holland, Belgium, France, Germany, Austria, Italy and Switzerland.

The theme of the encounter was: "the integration of the christian development volunteer in the local church of the Third World". It was inspired by the following concern: many young development volunteers arrive in a milieu quite strange to them, having a totally different cultural, socio-political, and religious background. From the experiences of many organisations it appears that a healthy and well-balanced initiation of these helpers is not easy.

How are they received? What can and may we expect from them with regard to their christian commitment?

In view of this, we searched for the real meaning of "local church" or "local christian community". What does one mean by "local church"? Is it the local parish (mission) or the broader concept of the local population of christians and non-christians?

During the discussions much attention has been given to the "christian profile" of the volunteer. Has he to be explicitly a lay-missionary? (Anglo-Saxon group) or rather "un volontaire" who desires, in first instance, to live with the others sharing his faith with them? (French speaking group).

Whatever it be, the way of living and working of the development volunteer must flow from his "christian conviction", through which he becomes part of the local christian community. Others remarked that he had to be at least a witness, through a positive attitude of living, respecting the local population and their customs.

During the introductory conference, Alex Ericx of "Broederlijk Delen" situated the volunteer in the local church. What expectations do both have? After that he asked the participants the following questions: Can a volunteer be

a "witness"? If so, what are the organisations doing to prepare him or her for this role, and what guidance do they offer? If not, why send people abroad?

Mr. Lefèvre, protestant minister in Ath, ex-volunteer in Burundi, gave a living witness of a believing protestant. For many of us this was a meaningful enrichment.

We also learned many things, e.g. the real distinction (juridical) between the autochtone protestant church in Burundi and the Scandinavian mission in that same country.

Mr. Adolf Lemmens, a Belgian volunteer, and Marianne Kester, a Dutch Mill Hill volunteer, gave their contributions regarding Bolivia and Sarawak (Borneo) respectively.

People from the Third World told us how European volunteers appeared to them: Sister Theresia-Maria Pham, a sister of Fichermont in Vietnam, and the Zairian priests Mpolo and Lowa.

From them we learned that the local population does not always know how to make the distinction between missionary religious personnel and the volunteers. This may lead to confusion. The people need to be prepared and to be properly informed concerning the arrival of volunteers.

During the conference and the discussions, the following suggestions came to the surface:

1. A more intense collaboration between the sending organisation and the receiving community is of vital importance as to the selection, the preparation, the right assignment, the information, the reception and guidance in the place itself.
2. More attention should be given to the human and christian profile of the volunteer; nuances may appear according to the project, the place, the personality of the volunteer.
3. Before his departure the volunteer should learn and experience as much as possible about the local community he will be sent to. This can be done by means of a prolonged contact with the missionary congregation he is to work with.
4. Integration into the local church abroad is only possible if the volunteer has been involved in his own local church of origin...

As a whole this week-end confirms that encounters on international level are very enriching, provided that the language problems are sufficiently taken care of. It is striking to notice that the organisations of volunteers, in different countries, are struggling with the same kind of problems. We feel the need to meet regularly. The next encounter will take place in Holland, in May, 1981.

List of organisations participating in the Fichermont week-end.

- Centre de Formation pour le Développement (C.F.D.),
rue St. Léon, 67082 Strasbourg - Cedex, France.
- Service de Coopération au Développement,
42, Montée Saint-Barthélémy, 69005 Lyon, France.

- F.O.C.S.I.V.,
Via Palombina, 6, 00165, Roma, Italia.
- Viatores Christi,
97, Malahide Road, Dublin 3, Ireland.
- Volunteer Missionary Movement,
Shenley Lane, London Colney, Herts AL 21 AR, England.
- Institut für Internationale Zusammenarbeit,
Singerstrasse, 7, 1010 Wiew, Austria.
- Frères sans Frontières,
34, Grand-Rue, CH - 1700 Fribourg, Suisse.
- A.G.E.H.,
Postfach 210 128
Theodor-Hürthstrasse, 2 - 6, 5000 Köln 21, West Germany.
- Volunteer International Christian Service,
2475 Queen St. East - Toronto - Canada.
- Nederlandse Missieraad (Afd. Personele Assistentie)
Halve Maanstraat 7, 's Hertogenbosch, Netherlands.
- Bureau voor Personeelsassistentie (B.P.A. - C.M.I.)
en Vrijwilligers voor het Onderwijs,
Guimardstraat, 1, 1040 Brussels, Belgium.
- Samenwerking Latijns-Amerika (S.L.A. C.A.L.)
Tervuursestraat, 56, 3000 Leuven, Belgium.
- Association Protestante de Volontaires,
rue du Conseil, 4, 1000 Bruxelles, Belgium.

DUMPING AND THE DOUBLE STANDARD are illustrated by the following international sales:

In 1977 the sale of childrens' pajamas impregnated with Tris was banned because research showed that kidney cancer would be caused in 300 of each million male children, 60 per million female children. Quantities of the 240 million pairs produced were bought up cheap and shipped to Europe, Central and South America.

Depo-Provera, an injectable contraceptive banned in the U.S. because of its horrible said effects, is sold by the Upjohn Co. in 70 other countries and is widely used in population control programs sponsored by the U.S. government.

Some 450,000 baby pacifiers have been exported throughout the world since they were banned in the U.S. because unsafe.

"Dumping" is a kind of smuggling in reverse: unsafe U.S. products moving out of the country to the tune of an estimated \$1.2 billion a year.

Innocent people in the U.S. as well as in the Third World may be paying the price for the crime of "dumping". For example, nearly half of the green coffee beans imported by us are contaminated with pesticides that have previously been banned here.

Reference: MISSION INTERCOM, No. 92, February 1980.

BURMA: PAGODAS AND POVERTY

In any country the first thing a visitor should do is watch the people pray. It's especially true for Burma. If possible a visitor should try to arrive in Rangoon in the late afternoon and go immediately to the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, the oldest and most beautiful Buddhist shrine in the world.

It's a site where people have worshipped for 2,500 years. What the visitor experiences in this place of peace and joy, with windblown bells and women splashing water on the statue of Buddha, the smell of flowers and joss sticks, families walking happily from shrine to shrine, will show a Burma that is not apparent elsewhere.

Time wrote recently an article on Burma that, though partly critical, ended on a hopeful note. Few people in socialist Burma are as optimistic. "We have enough to keep skin and bone together," one man said.

Even agricultural development, which socialist states usually stress, is shaky. Less land is now cultivated than 20 years ago. Land reform laws which are modest to begin with---landlords are allowed to keep ten hectares---have not been implemented. The country, once one of the biggest rice exporters in the world, now exports very little. Peasants complain of the low prices given by the government for their rice.

In the cities, workers who are mostly government personnel since all business and factories are nationalized, receive about 25 dollars a month, which with inflation has forced the workers to drop meat and even fish from their diets and caused them to look for second and even third jobs with a drastic drop in efficiency.

In Rangoon, few new buildings have gone up, and none it seems have been painted since World War II. In the downtown area, long streets of four story tenements remind one of the run-down, crowded areas of Harlem and the South Bronx in New York.

Corruption exists, according to local people, at every level. At the airport, a customs man required that a visitor hand over to him six cigarette lighters and a bottle of perfume. He didn't mind that the long line of visitors behind looked on.

Openly in the streets of Rangoon, Burmese buy T-shirts, soap, umbrellas, combs and a host of other items smuggled in from Thailand and India at prices far above what they would cost in Calcutta or Bangkok. The products of the nationalized industries are not accepted as adequate by the people.

One wonders what happened to the serene humanity seen in the pagoda. It is well hidden by government decrees and practice, but it surely is there awaiting a freer, more humane environment.

The Church

The Church in Burma numbers 300,000 Catholics, mostly tribal people from the border areas and Indians brought in during English times to do low paying, manual work. Some Christian villages spring from Portuguese soldiers captured by the Burmese kings. Jesuits with them were the first priests in Burma as they

were in most of Asia, men who travelled restlessly back and forth across Asia in search of China and new civilizations to bring to Christ.

There are nine bishops, all but one Burmese, and about 250 priests and twice that number of sisters.

In Burma as in no other country one can see Catholicism practiced as it was everywhere before Vatican II, because they have had little contact with the outside world. The devotions of the people, the impressive piety and the concerns of the priests, sisters and bishops, for example, have not changed in 30 years. As in pre-Vatican II days, priests do not leave the priesthood.

Change will come since Burma is opening up gradually to the outside world and coming in contact with the universal Church. Will the Burmese Church adapt to the outside world without traumatic changes is a question that many ask.

Reference: INFO ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Volume 7, Number 5, May 1980.

BUREAU SERVING CHINESE DIASPORA NOW 25 YEARS OLD

Singapore (UCAN) - The Singapore Catholic Central Bureau, set up to assist Chinese Catholics living outside China, observed its 25th anniversary in May. It continues to offer assistance worldwide, publish a Chinese-language newspaper and operate a religious-instruction correspondence course.

The Apostolic Visitor for Chinese Diaspora, Archbishop Peter Chung of Kuching, West Malaysia, and his predecessor, retired Bishop Carlo van Melckebeke, both attended observances of the occasion along with Archbishop Gregory Young of Singapore, and priests and nuns working at the bureau.

Bishop van Melckebeke (81), established the bureau in June 1954 after he was appointed Apostolic Visitor for Overseas Chinese by Pope Pius XII in May 1953. The bishop had been expelled from China, where he was Bishop of Ningsia, the previous October.

The Hai Sing Pao, established by the bureau in 1955, has a vital role, according to its 51-year-old publisher, Archbishop Young. "We have a ready-made means of spreading the good news of salvation through the Hai Sing Pao," he said on the newspaper's silver anniversary. "Let us explore its potential to the full."

Over 43,000 people have enrolled in the religious-instruction course since a Scheut Mission priest initiated it in 1955.

The course, which is advertised through the secular press, aims at both Catholics and non-Catholics. Interested persons ask for lesson booklets and send completed questionnaires to the bureau at the end of each lesson--all done through the mail. At the end of the course students receive diplomas and, if they request them, letters of introduction to a Catholic priest who is invited to prepare them for baptism.

About 40 percent of those who enroll complete the course. Nearly the same numbers of people have requested the English and Chinese courses.

Branch centres now operate in 20 countries, and the course has been adapted and translated into various languages including Burmese, Dutch, French, Indonesian, Japanese, Thai and Vietnamese.

The course, based on American and British material, was initially translated into Chinese by Father Carlo Ly, now pastor at Our Lady Queen of Peace parish in Singapore.

Reference: SUNDAY EXAMINER, Catholic News of the Week, Vol. XXXIV No. 25, Hong Kong - June 20th, 1980.

FIVE YEARS IN PRISON

Fr. Edicio De La Torre

(Father de la Torre, 36, after almost five and a half years in prison was released this April. Part of the agreement made with the Philippine government is that he go to Rome for studies. This interview was made shortly before his departure on May 31. People who have met him remark that he shows no signs of bitterness. He laughs easily, often at his own expense, remains fully committed to the poor and presents his ideas without any of the intensity and dogmatism that often go with the political activist. A longer version of this interview will soon be distributed as OHD Papers #5.)

I'm not bitter. If I were, it would mean the last five years were senseless and without meaning, useless. I learned so many lessons in prison and formed deep friendship. I grew, I think. It needn't have been in prison but that's where it happened. If I had been tortured badly or been kept in isolation, I'd probably feel differently.

We have to forgive. We are all weak. In prison you know this very well. I remember an Italian journalist who wrote of the Viet Cong cadres who lived and worked in Saigon for years before the communists took over. I admired them, the journalist said, because of their dedication, but I'm scared too. Would men who took such risks and made so many sacrifices understand human weaknesses when they came to power?

You've heard the expression "wounded healer". That's what we are in prison. You have to know weakness in order to forgive and restore a person. In prison we know human limitations. Young people in the movement don't. In prison we're more tolerant and human. Don't crush the bruised reed.

Prison is like a novitiate. You learn a spirituality, a spirituality for struggle. It's a time to gather yourself together as a human being. You're not worried about skills or assignments - just as in a religious novitiate - but about what you are and what is your total commitment. In prison I made my decision to be with the poor forever. I took my vows: obedience to a group that is obedient to the call of the people; creative participation, meaning you just don't implement the decisions of others, but also make suggestions and act as a subject; and thirdly perseverance - keep slugging, that is.

I'm worried about middle class leadership that has not risen from the grassroots. They will tend to be more divorced from the day-to-day life and the perceptions of the poor than leaders who have come from the villages. I have a genuine fear that a group may take advantage of all the peoples' sacrifices, install itself in power and the people remain a base only. A leader from the village will always be able to look back on his own experience of the peoples' lives - he can visit them - and so he is more anchored in the people. This is not to deny the need of broad planning and administrative skills.

We need strong local leaders rising in the movement as we need them in the villages. They are the people who can stand up and challenge the other leaders. Any leader if unchallenged will be paternalistic; he should try not to be so, but it's almost unavoidable. We need this tension between people and leaders. The best guarantee that we will have it is if our leadership is from the villages and not the middle class.

It's wrong to think of the Church leading a mass movement. We are to be the leaven, the critical element, the dynamic, creative, independent voice. The temptation exists in the Philippines to forget this and to rely on the power of the Church or on its leadership. The rest of Asia where this is not at all possible because of the small numbers of Christians teaches us what our real task is.

How to be a creative minority? How to know the realities of power and not be naïve? How to avoid being absorbed by power and the wish to dominate? That's the problem.

There will always be a role for the free, prophetic Christian. Even if the new system is better there will still be problems and people in charge who don't like criticism. We must be prepared to speak out. We shouldn't place our hopes in any system but be ready to criticize and to expect persecution if we work for the creative transformation of society. When I say Christians will always be a minority, I mean that, regardless of numbers, our position is not based on power but on truth. How do we create this minority?

You remember Berrigan's phrase "remembering - disremembering". At mass we often used it. The first mass was celebrated when Christ and the apostles were about to be arrested: it was celebration in the face of crisis. The group was about to scatter, one would betray him; they would forget their vows to one another. They met and Christ once again tried to forge their commitment, to bring them to remember their promises.

The mass, then, provides for weakness: it is a time for remembering, and it alternates with times of weakness, forgetting and scattering. The call of the mass is always to begin anew with one another, to re-vow commitment, to stick with old friends and groups even when there has been weakness and not look for new ones. Some day this group, constantly renewing itself, will be so strong, we hope, that it will not shatter under attack.

This is the season of disremembering. No group now is strong enough to weather all attacks; they will be scattered. But the time of strength will come.

I'm for everything that speaks of freedom, for the individual and the group. We can't coerce people. We have to provide options suitable to the needs of people which vary so much. The movement can't be monolithic and hope to succeed. We can't succeed if there's no place in the movement for people like Bishops Labayen and Claver. Every sincere person is welcome.

Christianity must never be a tool. We shouldn't say as one theologian said once - he's changed since - that he does theology because it's useful in the struggle. That's not finding your real self-identity or gathering yourself as a human being. You must do theology because it's what you totally believe in. If we Christians are not completely one with ourselves there will be no creative Christianity or Marxism or anything else.

The man of wholeness who is able to withdraw, to reflect, who has, as they say, silent spaces, shows coolness in crisis. Life's situations have a way of coming together and making sense for him in the way that a poem finally fits together in the poet's mind. Whatever he is doing he knows he's making revolution, even if he is just arranging cars and apartments. He is able to relate small things to bigger events. He's less selfish. He knows he has value independent of his achievements. Wholeness clarifies the basic ideological stand point: for whom do we struggle, with whom.

