

In this issue: This issue contains the texts of the talks given by Ms. Christine Weizsäcker-Radtke and Fr. Jean Yves Calvez, SJ at the Seminar on Dialogue with Non-Christians together with some of the points that arose in the discussion with the Speakers.

At a time when so many signs of gloom point with particular weight to the effects of mans' inhumanity to man and the inability of the human race to live in peace, there are hopeful signs also that women and men both of the older and younger generations, are re-discovering Kingdom values and learning to seek them.

There are cautionary remarks about the dangers of a fundamentalist development when turning away from the condition characterised as post-christian and a salutary warning that the option of the Church for the poor in Latin America does not replace the need for a well informed and educated Christian leadership in the Community.

Read the piece on "Rooftop Fiddlers". It will dispel gloom!- and the excerpt from Jan Schotte's notes on peace. Can we ignore the demands on our Christian involvement?

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Coming Events:

Residential Seminar:

NEW MINISTRIES FOR A DYNAMIC
LOCAL CHURCH.

March 20-24, 1984, at
Villa Cavalletti.

POST-CHRISTIAN YOUTH AT THE
VERGE OF DE-SECULARISATION?

Christine von Weizsäcker

(Voici le texte de l'allocution donnée au Séminaire de SEDOS sur le dialogue avec le monde postchrétien. Mme M.S. Christine von Weizsäcker rappelle les rapports entre religion, économie, politique et science. Elle prend ensuite la science et la religion comme des exemples en vue d'une analyse plus approfondie. Elle continue en examinant pourquoi aujourd'hui tant de jeunes rejettent le statu quo entre ces deux forces. Et elle conclut en discutant les aspects religieux sous-jacents dans les mouvements pour l'accomplissement de soi-même, pour la protection de l'environnement et pour la paix.)

1. SUMMARY

The following essay is meant to be the contribution of a resource person hopeful of starting off a discussion rather than a well-polished professional lid on a pot of long established controversy.

I shall first try to recall to your mind the *modus vivendi* between religion, economy, politics and science. Since I am most familiar with them, I shall take science and religion as my examples.

The next point to be discussed will be the disregard of many young people for the established status quo between these forces.

Religious aspects in the movement for self-perfection, the environmental movement and the peace movement will be discussed.

2. THE STATUS QUO OF MODERN SECULAR SOCIETY

The idea that politics, economy and science have ideological aspects will surprise very few people nowadays. Philosophically inclined persons may even recognize the lingering notions of truth and power in the tangle of interrelationships of these three. Their mythologies, however, have been largely overlooked. So let us dwell a little on the mythology of science.

Science presents a whole Olympus filled with the finders of new scientific paradigms. Their story is coherent but each one has his own special traits. We have the yearly canonisation by Nobel-prizes for lesser heroes and who does not know and recognize the scientist by his ritual outfit, the flapping white lab-coat and the test-tube. Science can also pride itself on one of the most elaborate initiation rites. Only the temples of banking, perhaps, are nowadays more numerous or glorious.

Is it not quite surprising that at a time when vernacular language in the churches has gained uncramped acceptance and even acclaim, science should gain similar acceptance for a singularly un-vernacular language.

At yet another point there is a strange inversion between the churches and the sciences. In any church in my country I would not be surprised to hear the priest stress in his Sunday sermon that his

teachings do not contradict scientific findings. 100 years ago there are touching, elaborate prologues to scientific papers proving that the findings and their interpretation do not contradict any teachings of the church.

The task of legitimisation has been reversed. The question now is: Since science replaced religion in some fields, is it religion?

Is Science not transcendental in its promise of ever increasing knowledge and well-being? But did it really promise that? Scientists themselves, knowing their job, have been quite content with the description that they know more and more about less and less until they know everything about nothing. One of the great feats in science is to be able to define the limits of the conditions under which a statement is valid. Since Popper even the word verification is on the index. Unsuccessful falsification is all there is left to do.

Although the scientific community may give warmth and a sense of belonging to the initiated scientist, science never promised to make sense or to give sense to peoples lives or to the universe. Some inhabitants of countries with a longer history in science and technology used it to boost their position of grandeur in the world.

Truce: On the whole there was a sort of truce between science and religion. They did not really invade each others territories in a threatening way. It may be, however, that under this wary, but peaceful status quo the qualitative differences between the different spheres got lost. Priests and professors all were seen as polite specialists.

Marxism: It is necessary to exclude Marxism in its combination of world interpretation and scientific foundation from closer scrutiny, not because it is irrelevant but because it will keep us so busy that we cannot look at other movements. Let me just flatly state, that desecularisation proved very successful there.

3. THE QUEST FOR WHOLENESS IN A FRAGMENTED SOCIETY

Our religious, social, economic, political reality is fragmented and people do not like it. They blame it for being unemotional, cold, full of statistics but void of irreplaceable individuals, like the pieces of a puzzle that never will make any complete picture. The new myths of science are after all quite simple and crude, lacking in the complexity old myths offered. Well, these myths are only a by-product after all.

Wholeness: Now it happens that a lot of young people burdened with the task of finding their individual identity and their place in the world destabilize the above mentioned status quo. They are in the quest for wholeness of body, mind and soul, in the search for a meaningful coherent universe. They are not starving for polite specialists' conversion but for strong inner pictures, strong emotions, strong actions. They are in urgent need of the hidden, if need be occult line, that gives everything its right place and meaning.

You may meet persons, who, with irritating irreverence for discipline will perform breathtaking juggling tricks: One person may take the thermodynamics of non-equilibrium systems by Prigogine

as their book of revelations, use yoga for saving on doctors' bills and use a special diet to fight aggression and to procure a loving heart. The same person might, to make things even more complicated, sing in a church choir for its euphorizing effect, have psychotherapy because this is the conventional thing to do, and finally work for a third world group because she or he loves one of the co-workers there. Since this person will think so, let us also assume, that there is cohesion between all this. Since the christian religion makes up part of the fragmented world, it is treated like the other parts, one of the bits and pieces which go to make a new attempt at a fitting whole.

I shall now turn to the three examples of movements, not quite as erratic as my individual of the section above.

4. THE SELF-PERFECTIONIST; BETWEEN MYSTIC AND PHARISEE

That self-perfection is a movement indeed, I recently saw in Central Park, Manhattan, on a Sunday. Everybody moves. Everybody undergoes a difficult, judging by the facial expression, even painful exercitium, dressed in ritual robes. The robes clearly indicate whether somebody is a member of the order of the bicyclists, the joggers, the roller-skaters or the footballers. All this could, of course, be taken merely as an illustration of the saying, hanging in every shop: You never can be too rich nor too thin.

The most fascinating person I saw was a young man around the well-trained legs of whom, hung the aura of the pin-striped trousers of a Wall Street apprentice. He was all by himself moving in a strange way under the autumn trees. He trained and executed to perfection the whole array of gestures of self-expression and communication. They were full of bodily grace, emotional assurance. He played on the scales of human body-language like a virtuoso. When he passed, one could detect the earphones, giving him instructions. So the tape-recorded programme was the only partner of all this beautiful communication. Still, he enjoyed himself; he enjoyed being clay in his own hands, making himself in his own image. He had a good programme for getting rid of the last imperfections.

Mystic: Behind this bodybuilding and soulbuilding is an inner search for the real self and an inner vision of an attainable state of grace. This state of grace may be called perfect health, free flow of energy, satisfaction, happiness, realism, success. As strange as it may seem, these are the elements of a mystic experience hidden somewhere. Some people, who would never dream of calling their experience religious, go a long way in this experience. Their real disadvantage as compared to christian saints like Theresa of Avila or John of the Cross is, that they do not look for anybody but themselves.

Pharisee? However, there is not only the mystic to be found but also the pharisee. Like the pharisees of old, the new pharisees believe, that if only they observe the rules, they will be right and justified. So they faultlessly attend their psychosessions, eat their non-cancerogenic slimming diet, exercise their muscles and do their relaxation in a very righteous manner. If somebody has unhappiness

with a partner, thin legs or cancer, this is a punishment for not following the right rules. Old age and death, though admittedly a problem, have also been successfully dealt with. There is an old age in perfect health and sexual happiness to be expected. Even death has lost its sting. The right attitudes to healthy, perfect dying have been described in books. This death has the smell of reincarnation hanging around it, presumably to a yet bigger and better status in life. Beauty, power and harmony are the signs of the right kind of people. Who will care for the hopeless dropouts?

The wide tension between mystic and pharisee is a field in which the church has gained quite a working knowledge over many centuries. It is worth a dialogue.

5. THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT; FROM ADAM TO NOAH

Let us now turn from the introvert to the extrovert. While the persons of the previous section are dealing mainly with themselves, the people in this section see themselves as one knot in a magnificent but endangered network. They have the strong belief that everything is contingent with everything. If other people eat, it does not mean that they are communicating with the universe. For environmentalists it is so. They do not want to dominate but to fit in. Humility is one of their virtues.

Whether it is whale or frog, the Amazonas jungle or the weed in the backgarden, the laboratory rat or the rare butterfly, or even soil bacteria, environmentalists are ready to serve in an empathic way. Service is also an attitude that had grown out of fashion and is in again.

Common Origin? When human beings define their place in nature they very often stress either their uniqueness, singularity and dominance or they stress their common roots, common dignity and belonging. If I may I shall make a short historical annotation: I doubt whether Darwin would have written his Origin of Species the way he did, if he had not been linked via his mother to the Wedgewood family who had been pioneers in the fight against slavery. Slavery meant the refusal to accept a common root and common dignity to some persons. For many environmentalists NATURE is the matrix of this dignity and cohesion.

As christians we also have a story of common origin and dignity, our creation by GOD as written down in Genesis. Unhappily this has so long been interpreted as a story solely concerned with proving human superiority that it is ambivalent reading stuff for ecologists. St. Francis however is an unspoilt pleasure. Let me point out to you the curious fact that St. Francis was mentioned in publications in the Luther Year in Germany nearly as often as Luther himself.

The New Goddess: The merging of the old goddess Demeter with pantheism and the biological discipline of ecology has produced a new goddess Nature and its myths. A golden age of perfect harmony between humans and Nature is assumed. This age was followed by some not well-defined sin, may it be the invention of agriculture, the end of matriarchy, overpopulation, the use of pesticides or the invention and application of nuclear physics; money, capitalism and overheating may also have contributed. The plagues by which we are ridden are

seen, not quite without reason, as the consequences of our sins. A conversion, an alternative life-style is asked for. Since I feel myself belonging to that movement, a little self-criticism may be allowed: the element of penance is also there with scratchy wool-knits and unnecessarily tasteless food.

I see a great weakness in a notion that there is a perfectly harmonious ecosystem if humans do not interfere. The notion of a perfectly attuned ecological system seems too much like the perfect mega-machine which it is supposed to fight. Environmentalists very often do not find it aesthetically satisfying, that a one-eyed rabbit with gastric trouble should raise its litter after all. Salvation by all that is natural from all that is unpleasant is a very simplistic view of the problem.

The realisation that humans and nature share something sacred is the common ground on which to start discussion with environmentalists. Genesis ends with the story of Noah, does it not, with the story of special human responsibility?

6. THE PEACE-MOVEMENT AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNTAIN

Many people see their engagement for the environment and for peace as logically linked. But there is a difference. The ecomovement can place its fiends much more easily outside, as an unnatural agent, whilst they feel that they are nature's advocate. The peace-movement cannot but see the problem as one inherent in human nature; they are their own problems. The ecomovement could hope to establish new and lasting harmony with one conversion, not so the peace-movement. Theirs is a problem to last. For an ecologist the idea that Nature will slay the sinners has its appeals, not so for a member of the peace-movement. No wonder the New Testament is cited so often in the peace-movement.

One of the best-selling books in my country is by Franz Alt and it is called: Peace is possible, the politics of the Sermon on the Mount. I know a lot of young people for whom this was the first reading of the Sermon on the Mount in their lives. Irrespective of demographers putting them in the religious or irreligious half of the youth of the EEC, they dared to take it as a practical manual. The Cross and the presenting of the second cheek make sense to somebody who learns, that unless he can do the impossible, i.e. love his enemies, there will be a nuclear holocaust. In this movement the disregard for the limits set by secularized society is blatant. Religion might not lose the youth but it might lose some of its comforts.

DIALOGUE WITH "POST-CHRISTIANS"
SEDOS SEMINAR, November 8, 1983

Jean Yves Calvez, S.J.

(Dans une allocution faite au Séminaire de SEDOS sur le dialogue avec le monde postchrétien le P. Calvez explique les différentes significations que peut avoir l'adjectif "postchrétien" dans le monde occidental. Il décrit ensuite quelques caractéristiques du dialogue demandant une approche spécifique, y compris parfois, celle de la première évangélisation. En discutant du dialogue avec des "post-chrétiens" d'Afrique ou d'Amérique Latine, il attire l'attention sur la faiblesse d'un apostolat basé seulement sur la justice sociale en Amérique Latine, il insiste sur l'importance de l'éducation et du laïcât adulte en Afrique et en Asie, et sur les dangers du fondamentalisme dans tous les continents.)

'Post-Christians'? The term sounds a bit strange to me. Not that I am not familiar with it, but I feel that I heard it used a lot some 10 to 15 years ago, much less in recent times. When I make this comparison in time, however, I may be thinking too exclusively of Western Europe or North America. Probably the term 'Post-Christian' is coming of age somewhere else today. As a matter of fact I think that the reality if not the term, is certainly coming of age even in Africa and Asia.

I shall begin with some clarification of the meaning of 'Post-Christian' making reference mostly to the West. Then in the second part of my talk I shall try to address myself more to the situation in the South and East.

I. POST-CHRISTIANS AND DIALOGUE WITH
POST-CHRISTIANS IN THE WEST

Clarifications: A post-christian can first be someone who has been a Christian but is no longer so, one who has lost his or her Christian faith and generally has become, not necessarily a Muslim or a Buddhist, but perhaps an agnostic, an atheist or a Marxist.

Individual basis: A post-christian can also be someone whose parents were Christian but who, himself or herself, has never really been a post-christian, one who has in fact never adopted Christianity even if he or she received a Christian education during childhood. Maybe they reacted against their education. More frequently, in recent times, they just seem to have been untouched by it, insensitive to it; Christianity has made no impact upon them, it has remained irrelevant for them. This has been a frequent occurrence in some traditionally Christian countries. It affected the children of the most militant Christian families during the 15 years following the Second World War. They have not broken off with Christianity, they just did not catch up with it.

Historical basis: This phenomenon, indicative of a whole generation, comes close to what has been called "post-christian", no longer on an individual basis only, but on a historical basis. One thus speaks of a post-christian era or epoch not so much in the sense that people have lost their Christian faith but in the sense that the

whole culture and all the social institutions which used to be officially Christian have ceased to be so through the well known process of secularization.

Post-Christendom: Post-Christian then, is more or less equivalent to post-Christendom, if by Christendom is meant the traditional situation, a close, even if not profound, integration of Christianity and of social or civil institutions as well as of culture at large. There are Christians in a post-Christian (post-Christendom) situation but these Christians are different Christians. They are personally involved with their faith and with their community, more personally committed, used to living in an environment that does not explicitly bear the mark of Christianity or of Christian values. In such a post-Christian situation not only are they a different type of Christian, but they are in a milieu which is no longer only Christian. They find themselves in daily coexistence with non-believers, or with people who have at least become indifferent when there was no longer a sociological pressure to be Christian.

What I am here describing has obviously happened in varying degrees, in many countries of the West which had constituted Christendom or some kind of Christendom even after the Reformation. At times one tends to speak of a post-Christian situation especially when the process has been carried to an extreme limit, when the Christian community has become a minority and visible traces of Christianity have practically vanished, when Christianity is no longer very visible and to many it is just a remnant of the past. This has happened, with or without persecution, as we can see from the case of France on the one hand and of the Soviet Union on the other with some differences of course.

CHARACTERISTICS OF DIALOGUE

Let me add some characteristics of dialogue in the situations I have described.

Personal loss of faith: Dialogue is especially difficult with persons who have themselves lost their Christian faith. Post-Christians of this type are generally the most difficult partners in dialogue. They may have had personal difficulties with the Christian institution; they have suffered from these difficulties, they are wounded. It needs a lot of patience to explain so many things that are obstacles for them.

New Generations: Dialogue is still difficult but easier with a new generation that has really never caught up with its parents' faith, although complications may come from the fact that there is an implicit criticism of the way in which the parent lived (lacking sincerity, lacking freedom...). But one should not give up dialogue with such youth, with a young man or woman although he or she can be approached only with difficulty by ordinary pastoral means or parochial care. Specific means have to be devised, by all means having a Christian label, but not of a parochial nature.

Christianity irrelevant: First Evangelization: A post-Christian population in the sense of a population for which Christianity has become irrelevant, insignificant, inconsistent for many following the crumbling away of a Christian situation, can be approached only through a kind of new or

first evangelization. One should here reflect on the ways and means that have been used or are still being used in other situations of first evangelization in countries of Africa or Asia bearing in mind, however, the major differences in levels of education. One should also reflect on the way in which many sects succeed in getting in touch with such people, even very educated ones at times. They answer the need for close community relationships and a certain need for esoterism. Religion has to go really beyond the ordinary reaches of life which have shown their limitation, and their incompleteness.

The School: It is worth noting that, as in 'mission countries', a school is often the best place in which to reach the younger generations of such a population. A Christian atmosphere, the presence of Christian values, may reach them even before the gospel proper is preached. But one should not refrain either from proposing the Gospel to these people because their minds are no longer burdened with those problems of the past, problems which perhaps their parents were incapable of overcoming.

There is still the possibility of a much fresher approach in those situations where Christianity has more or less been erased, violently or not, over a period of generations. In the Soviet Union two or three generations have been kept at a distance from Christianity but, while the anti-religious policy has succeeded it has not made many people deeply atheistic. Nowadays a number of young people are liable to discover Christianity with all its new force when reading a page of the Gospel for the first time with a school companion, or suddenly reflecting on the occasion of some brutal event of life of death.

They may become converts living with all the freshness of a first conversion. They may be fragile too. Even if the means of evangelization are extremely poor there is obviously a new Christian breed emerging from these situations. However, it does not appear that the masses will be converted in such a manner, at least for the present.

Theology does not help much here but rather factors like sincerity, a sense of humour, human rights in the concrete, the Church as a space of freedom, a way of life, prayer which changes one's outlook, proximity, the kind of approach to persons that unites the human and divine.

II. POST-CHRISTIANS AND DIALOGUE WITH POST-CHRISTIANS

IN LATIN AMERICA, AFRICA, ASIA

Thus far my reference has been mainly to the Christian West, or Christian East (speaking of the Soviet Union), where these phenomena have often had a long history, and where answers to the situation are by no means perfect nor, in most cases, even adequate. One is groping. What about Asia, Africa, Latin America?

Latin America: Speaking first of Latin America I note that phenomena fairly similar to those of Western Europe are developing there, although with some delays. I should add immediately of course, that Latin America is by no means one. In some countries there, social and public life has been more secularized, in others less so, but the process is going on almost everywhere. Education too is progressing and whereas there are still Christian masses among less educated people, the evolution is already very varied and often definitely "post-christian" in the universities.

The Church is not too well equipped to deal with the situation. She now enjoys a certain prestige because of her commitment to justice. I am afraid, however, that this will not be so for long. There will not be a sufficient protection for the faith if we do not raise the level of intellectual reflection and if we cannot cope with all the new questions arising for people who are rapidly receiving an education which is definitely superior to that of their parents. The evil of irrelevance or out-datedness of the Christian religion could spread along with education, into wide layers of the population, as it has done in other times in many countries of old Catholic Europe. Enquiries on the religious attitudes and persuasions of university youth show that there is no immunity here from the type of religious crisis which has already taken place in other Christian countries.

Social Justice - a partial answer: A clear commitment to social justice and to human rights is very important in these conditions. I want to stress however, that it is only part of the answer. There is need of a deep dialogue, intellectual and spiritual, if Christianity is not to become irrelevant for the generations awaiting for education, particularly higher education. When I mention intellectual dialogue I mean of course, that it takes place on a basis of a very friendly and close human relationship. Thinking of universities and schools, I would say that to-day, the Church (not just priests) has to be present there, or has to be close to the youth there, more than anywhere else.

Asia; Africa: What I have said of Latin America is also significant in my view for Christian communities in Asia and Africa. True, Christianity in these Continents is generally a minority, at times a tiny minority, but this does not guarantee however, against the situation typical of the moment in which Christendoms collapse. In fact there have been Christendoms in Asia and Africa, small Christendoms which developed for good reasons in the past. They are losing ground very quickly today, and so, situations that are really post-christian appear on a small scale even within the environment of a largely non-christian or never christianized country.

The breaking up of traditional village Christian communities on the one hand and on the other hand the spread of education with the consequent loss of trust in a parent generation which remains uneducated, are among the factors that quickly lead to the growth of post-christian, post-christendom situations.

Possible remedies: One remedy lies in active community building in the cities while the population is arriving there and this is not infrequently done. A second remedy, and one not so frequently applied, is a specific approach to the newly educated younger generation often ashamed of the situation (including the cultural situation) of its

parents and of what goes with that, particularly traditional village Christianity.

Specific Approach: As soon as Christianity become associated with a past which has been overcome, or should be overcome, some kind of post-christian situation sets in. In Africa, for instance, it has set in for a large number of the more educated sectors of the urban population. Those who have gone to foreign universities have also learnt from the situation there. In fact the process has been going on for a long time in French West Africa from the time that higher education was available only in the Seminaries.

If no appropriate pastoral effort is devised, or if the little that is done is not quickly increased, there is a real danger that the more educated and, in many ways, the more influential section of the population will become estranged from Christianity, or rather hostile to it, even if the process of conversion continues in the villages.

The perils are there in Asia too, but I have a feeling that something more is already being done. Perhaps the resources of the Church are more significant for that type of apostolate there. In some countries of Africa, however, the process of a post-christian estrangement of the educated elite has already taken on such proportions that as in much of Europe, there is a need for a new specific approach, distinct from what is ordinarily done in the parishes.

As you may see, "specific" is one of the adjectives I have used quite a few times regarding the pastoral effort needed to dialogue with post-christian sons and daughters of Christians who have been unable to transmit their faith. This means that the problem has to be approached for itself, and not only within the general context of the pastoral care of traditional Christian communities. Christianity will have to grow in new circumstances not associated with a past that has been overcome.

There is need of a sufficient training in order to be able to deal with the problems encountered by the youth in educational growth and development.

Christian Communities: Communities are also the solution, or part of it, not so much the general communities of the parents as specific communities open to the post-christian population. Such communities should be at the same time thoroughly and explicitly Christian, not hidden Christian communities. They should be welcoming in a fraternal way, without any kind of pressure, answering to human as well as spiritual needs which are often unnamed. Deep charity is the key but coupled necessarily with a level of intellectual competence which is needed in order to help, not least, by understanding the problems of post-christian youth.

Adults: I have spoken much of youth because it is a decisive sector but one should not forget educated adults, people with social or civil responsibilities, professionals, who often have a feeling that they are abandoned by the Church, even if it is they themselves who have in some sense abandoned her. In general, they have not become atheists positively nor agnostics but they are drifting. In fact the Church says nothing to them on their own ground.

One additional reflection on how to undertake this work. Priests are in far too small numbers to be able to undertake by themselves much of the needed approaches or dialogue. The cooperation, even the initiative of lay Christians is necessary and should be encouraged.

Fundamentalism? This is not without its problems, however, since educated Christians or lay persons who have remained Christian, may tend to be fundamentalists to some degree, in their religion. Even if they have a good scientific culture their religious reflection is not on the level of their general culture. They particularly lack philosophy and a training in the historic - exegetical sciences and very often lack historical background. Thus, if we want to have good lay apostles for dialogue with educated post-Christians, or Christians on the way to post-Christianity, priests should direct much of their efforts towards forming those lay people to a serious and openminded religious reflection that can be at the level of their scientific culture. This would enable them to dialogue with their post-Christian contemporaries without risk of a fundamentalism which could probably only make matters worse.

Questions: Let me conclude by proposing some questions that may help for further discussion:

- Have you experience, particularly in Africa or Asia, of the kind of post-Christian situations of which I spoke, even side by side with a flourishing Christian community of less educated people?
- Have you seen pastoral planning for such situations? How was it organised?
- What forces are available to approach those educated people who have drifted away from Christianity in the present generation?
- What is your own experience of dialogue with such people? opportunities? difficulties?
- What do you think of the idea that there is need of a specific or special approach, so that Christianity can be encountered, dis-associated from situations in which it is linked only with the past or with infancy?
- What about training lay apostles to be able to meet their educated contemporaries with a kind of freshness, a deep missionary spirit, and at the same time real competence in Christian reflection in a more educated world?
- Do you think one should concentrate on youth, that is on the sons and daughters rather than on the parent generation already involved in the drifting process?

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POINTS FROM THE DISCUSSION,
SEDOS SEMINAR. DIALOGUE WITH POST-CHRISTIANS

1. *In the so-called 'Third World' especially the educated élite are associated with the post-christian phenomenon in contrast to the mass of simple-minded faithful. Is it not true that whatever changes will take place will be brought about precisely by members of the educated groups, techers, catechists, community leaders, professionals? Is it not possible to bring the two together?*

There is an obvious gap and it is unavoidable. The Church should try to keep the educated élite in contact with their origins, their traditional values, their roots, to impress on them their solidarity with the rest of the people to achieve a balance between them. The Charismatic movement might play a role here. Practically speaking we need to bring the poor to a point where they can talk on a more equal level with the élite. We cannot continue to accept the gap as inevitable. There has to be some balance of power between the élite and the poor before they can dialogue.

Some participants shared experiences of this happening: a school for Brahmins in India which was opened to poorer classes eventually involving the Brahmins in working for the human rights of the poor people; co-operation between a rich and poor parish in Caracas which did achieve some useful if not spectacular results; the persistent investigation of the Seveso disaster at the Italian chemical plant, which eventually helped the Vietnamese.

2. (a) *The Mass Media of Europe continue to project, to youth specially, an image of attainable luxury, a luxury they will never reach; they project an image of education leading to their fulfilment as members of society while in fact, many will be unemployed, maybe up to 70%, ten years from now.*
- (b) *They present a way of living in society which caters to every material need, but this is accompanied by a sense of powerlessness and frustration.*
- (c) *Beaurocratic governments control vast areas of living but politicians appear to be powerless to control the effects of the mass media campaign and the materialistic way of life it advocates. What can one say about the challenge of life to people, for example in Sweden today, where every material need is catered for?*

Vast changes are taking place in society. The first pioneers of consumerism held out promises of continuous social privileges. (e.g., the first drivers of cars were held in esteem in society, but they had open roads on which to drive!) The pioneers promised that social benefits could and would be distributed justly. It is now necessary to say clearly that these promises cannot be kept.

While recognizing the critical situation of post-christendom today it is necessary to look also for signs of hope even where there appears to be little space for hope. The search for meaning goes on. There are openings for transcendence, for religion, for God. There is not just a one-directional drift towards materialism. The situation is fluid. Even from the Soviet Union come examples of deep faith, of vocations to priesthood and religious life.

A sign of hope and of a turning to religious motivation was the unusual commemoration this year in Kassel, Germany, on the anniversary of the fire-bombing of that city during the war when 10,000 people burned to death. Over the years the commemoration tended to take on a more and more secular character with political overtones. This year the Christian Churches decided to commemorate the deaths by asking 10,000 people to light and hold candles. The response was beyond the Churches expectations. More than 10,000 candles were lit and held in silent reflection. More than half of those who joined in this demonstration were post-Christians. People are turning away from barren political confrontations, turning to a transcendent presence, to God. Only a short time ago it would not have been possible to envisage such a happening.

Another example, again from Germany, is the careful way in which protests for peace are being studied and organized by people in such a way as not to provoke violence by the authorities. These protests are inspired largely by the Sermon on the Mount by Christian motives, by the realization that one has to love one's enemy.

3. The promises are still being made and more blatantly still to the underdeveloped world. In a recent experiment eleven out of a group of twelve London sociologists who were asked to match a word with "Africa" following their visit to some African countries, wrote "transistor-radio"! Were the speakers not too optimistic in seeing signs of hope?

It is a scandal - a dirty trick - to go on promising to the "Third World" what does not work, what has proved a failure, in the "West". A well motivated study of the difficulties in Europe could help to avoid making false promises in the Third World. More profit can be made from selling sophisticated goods to the rich than essentials to the poor and that is what motivates the materialistic approach of the "West" so often. There are still many signs of hope. It is important to recognise them.

4. How can you dialogue with post-Christian African youth when in many areas from 75% to 90% of their parents are excluded from a sacramental life because of marriage problems?

Christianity should not be identified with morality. Can the West speak of marriage problems in Africa without acknowledging the crisis in marriage in the countries of the West. The question is whether the youth will lose their faith in Christianity because of the way they see their parents have lived but the problems of the parents should not be visited on the children. Values are changing continuously.

The struggle for human dignity is very important to Africans. There are appalling misconceptions of "the African" diffused and readily believed in the West. A poor image of their parents can be very harmful to the young who feel the need to prove their intelligence and to show that they have an ordered and discipline life. It is interesting to note that an estimated 90% of African students in the USA are studying electronics - perhaps to prove this point.

At the last two Synods, African Bishops stressed the desire of youth from Africa to find true values in their own cultures. The

Bishops asked that the Church trust them and promote this process. They asked that their people be respected while they want them also to take responsibility for their own failings and not just blame all evils on the effects of the disparity between the Northern and Southern hemispheres.

5. *Are Schools such an important element in dialogue with Post-Christians?*

Schools are even more important today than in the past when the influence of parents and families was still considerable in moral formation. It is possible to be in touch with youth at a personal level in schools whether they are Church managed or not. There are problems. The quality of people working with the young in schools is very important for one can change the curriculum of the schools quickly but not the quality or attitude of the teachers.

Neither the family nor the school alone can cope with the fast changing problems today. Oppressive situations influence teachers who then oppress pupils, a classic example being that the struggle to pass examinations becomes paramount. There is still need for the presence of the Church in schools perhaps more than before.

We ourselves need to be evangelized. There is a constant tension between the urgent need to be more global in our thinking and more precisely local in our application of this thinking.

7. *In an effort to be more precisely local could Sedos perhaps perform an additional service? Where practical, local solutions are called for? Would it not be possible to investigate a small area where several of the Sedos members are working and invite those members to collaborate perhaps in finding personnel for a project where the needs are manifest or of great urgency for a Bishop or a Conference of Bishops?*

It does happen that personnel are more urgently needed for a project in the local Church than for projects judged to be urgent by a particular missionary Society. In fact there are collaborative efforts of this kind in existence at the level of research and study (cf. Conference of Representatives of the Unions of Religious Superiors together with SECAM). Another example of such collaboration is the decision by the Religious Superiors of Ghana in collaboration with the Bishop to undertake pastoral work among the poor in Accra. Interested groups of Sedos member Societies could be contacted about similar initiatives.

8. *Regarding fundamentalism, - is there not just as much danger from fundamentalism of the Marxist and Islamic varieties?*

Yes, a vacuum of values is in danger of being filled by esoteric sects and movements Christian or other. In Christian circles fundamentalism provokes rifts in the Church between those who would use even nuclear arms in the "struggle against evil" and those committed against such a development. It appears also in the extreme positions taken up in feminist movements and between those who claim to defend life at all

costs and those who oppose such a stance. The effects of fundamentalism are evident in the churches of the USA and Europe and they appear also in Africa, Asia and Latin America. If we do not succeed in giving the means of solid Christian reflection to young people there, they will take up simplistic ideas and adopt fundamentalist attitudes. An example came from some dioceses in Holland where there are special programmes for the training of lay people precisely in order to avoid such a danger. Lay leaders (catechists, lay apostles) following a three year course of formation in which the first year is given to general principles and the following two years are given to specialised topics such as youth work, catechism, work for the aged etc.

Such efforts at reflection based on Christian principles by an adult-laity are more than important to-day.

- end -

THE HYPOTHESIS OF PEACE

Christians and all men of good will are called to a joint effort to work for the disavowal of the hypothesis of warfare and its replacement with the hypothesis of peace. That is the premise which must influence political, economic, and social leaders. People must be convinced that peace is possible and this conviction must mobilize all the human, technical and economic resources in the world today.

It is an arduous task to make the hypothesis of peace prevail because, as we can see, the difficulties are cultural or collective in nature. It is therefore necessary to tackle the anti-peace attitudes anchored in public opinion and in the behaviour of States and institutions. That is why a joint effort will be necessary in order to transform mentalities and attitudes and to act on culture in an effective fashion. In fact, it is necessary to work on behaviour models and their underlying values.

How can Christians achieve this end? First, they can enlighten public opinion with an intelligent and criticism of the absurd policies that generate a permanent state of belligerence and bolster the psychosis of warfare.

The Church has an exceptional network of influence on public opinion and the action undertaken can assume a determining effect in ensuring the prevalence of the hypothesis of peace in national and international politics. Through its ordinary preaching, in the parishes and the pastoral institutions, the Church can perform a task of essential persuasion. It is important to realize, however, that in order to act effectively on culture as a collective phenomenon, an appeal addressed to isolated individuals does not suffice. It is necessary to reach the centers of influence on mentalities. In the realm of cultural action it is difficult to talk directly about "conversion."

Ref. Fr. Jan Schotte, CICM., Secretary of the Pontifical Commission "Justice et Pax".

ROOFTOP FIDDLERS

The opening scene of the musical, 'Fiddler on the Roof', is one of the most beautiful images of heaven on earth that modern theatre has given us.

The leading character, Tevye, reflecting on the life of a small Jewish community in an overwhelmingly hostile Russian environment, has this to say:

'A fiddler on the roof - sounds crazy, no? But in our little village of Anatevka you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof, trying to scratch out a pleasant simple tune without breaking his neck. It isn't easy. You may ask, why do we stay up here if it's so dangerous? We stay because Anatevka is our home. And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word: tradition. Because of this tradition, everyone here in Anatevka knows who he is and what God expects him to do!

What do these fiddlers tell us? Perhaps they tell us something very profound: that the closest we can get to heaven on earth is to be perched precariously on a slanted roof, doing something no one would expect us to be doing there - trying to scratch out a tune without breaking our necks.

But Tevye is right: only people imbued with the faith of a religious tradition that tells them who they are and what God expects of them will ever be able to fiddle on roofs.

And faith tells us that, unpleasant as it is to be perched on a slanted roof, all the seemingly more secure spots in life are even more dangerous. Life is inevitably precarious and requires us to take risks.

It is grace, not human strength or ingenuity that will keep us from sliding off the roof - no need then to cling to it. And we should play some music - for our own enjoyment and to raise the spirits of those around us. We are to sing the Good News from the rooftops. The kingdom of heaven on earth is a collection of rooftop fiddlers.

What a joy to be a member of this orchestra!

Glory to God in the highest -
Praise him with tambourine and dancing,
Praise him with strings and pipe
Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Ref. Quoted in Arnoldus Nota, SVD Bulletin November - December 1983
from 'The Sign'.

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