

News:

Congratulations: Sr. Agnetta Pionkowski set up the SEDOS Documentation Centre eighteen years ago, shortly after SEDOS was founded. In recent years, in a part time capacity, she continued to watch over the development of the Centre which to-day has over 5000 reference cards on current mission situations. SEDOS is very much indebted to her for her many years of faithful service.

Sr. Agnetta returned to her native U.S.A. which she always cherished, in March of this year. In July she will celebrate her golden jubilee together with nine companions, after fifty years of dedicated service in her Congregation, the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters. The occasion will be marked by a Solemn mass of Thanksgiving at 2.30 p.m. on Sunday, July 28th, 1985.

We send her our sincere congratulations and join with her in thanksgiving to God. And we pray also that God will be with her during many more years of active and dedicated life in the Convent of the Holy Spirit, Techny, Illinois 60028 where she now lives.

A Request for a Part-time Documentalist. SEDOS is searching for a part-time documentalist for the Documentation Centre; preferably a person having some experience in a cross-cultural situation of mission; preferably from the membership of SEDOS itself. The extent of part-time occupation is open to dialogue. It is based on a minimum of at least one morning session per week. Please contact the Executive Secretary at SEDOS. Tel. 571350 for further details.

Villa Cavalletti 1986 SEDOS SEMINAR

May 6 - 10, 1986.

has been held since 1981 in the third week of March.

Please make a note of the new dates for this Seminar which

SEDOS Secretariate will close on Wednesday, July 31, and re-open on Monday, September 2, 1985.

We wish all our readers a happy and restful Summer holiday.

THE NATURE AND EXIGENCIES OF DIALOGUE
IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN ASIA TO-DAY

BIRA IV/I - SAMPRAN, THAILAND, 23 - 30 OCTOBER 1984
A BRIEF REPORT ON THE ASSEMBLY

(Nous avons reçu le document ci-dessous grâce à l'obligeance du Secrétariat pour les non-chrétiens. Il esquisse les traits marquants de cette importante Assemblée qui a étudié plus à fond les exigences du dialogue avec d'autres religions en Asie.)

We, the undersigned, representatives of ten National Commissions for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), gathered at the Salesianum in Sampran, Thailand, from 23rd to 30th October 1984, to take part in the first of a series of "Bishops' Institutes on the Theology of Dialogue" planned and sponsored by the FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA).

Our purpose in this meeting (BIRA IV/I) has been to deepen our understanding of the nature and exigencies of dialogue in the context of the mission of the Church in Asia today. We also wanted to discern, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the priority tasks to be undertaken by all of us during the coming years so that we may realistically hope to add further impulse to the dynamics of the interreligious dialogue in Asia, and everywhere in the world. The service of the Asian Churches to the universal Church in the area of dialogue has been, from the beginning of our meeting, one of our main concerns.

We were helped and encouraged during our deliberations by the presence of and the insights offered us by three representatives from the Vatican (Archbishop Francis Arinze, Pro-President of the Secretariat for Non Christians, Father Marcello Zago, Secretary of the same Secretariat, and Father Herve Carrier, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, representing also the Secretariat for Non Believers) and of Rev. Dr. Lourdino A. Yuzon, representative of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA).

After an enriching sharing of experiences introduced by the keynote address of Archbishop Fernandes of Delhi (member of OEIA Committee), we examined the basic conditions for a genuine interfaith dialogue, and the new challenges before us. The document issued by the Secretariat for Non Christians on Pentecost Sunday 1984, entitled, "The attitude of the Church towards the followers of Other Religions: Reflections and

Orientations on Dialogue and Mission", constituted one of the principal bases of deliberations.

The participants in the Sampran meeting would like to give the Presidents of the FABC Member Conferences a brief report outlining the highlights of our assembly. This report is by no means complete. A more comprehensive report will be published as soon as possible.

The main points of agreement may be summarized under two principal headings.

I. THEOLOGICO-PASTORAL ISSUES

The issues which emerged during the consultation cover a wide range in both the theological and the pastoral fields. We did not have enough time to deepen the study of these issues. Still we see them as an object of study in depth that may be fruitfully done first by the individual bishops at the local level, then by the national conferences of bishops at the national level, and finally by the various BIRA IV meetings which are being planned at the continental level. A brief enumeration of the emerging issues related to dialogue, as we saw them, may be of some help.

1. Theology of Dialogue: It seems to us that a solid study of the theology of dialogue is necessary if the nature and importance of inter-religious dialogue is to be founded on solid basis. This includes:

1.1 Clarification of the basic concepts related to the mission of the Church, the relationship of the Church to the Kingdom, the local Churches, the concept of mission and evangelization both in themselves and as applied to the concrete Asian situation. This clarification should precede the consideration of other topics such as: the emphasis which is to be laid on the spiritual aspects in the missionary activity of the local Church, the commitment to the service of faith and the promotion of justice, the understanding of "liberation" in the Asian context as closer to "deliverance" than to struggle, non-violence, and the like.

1.2 Acknowledgement of the work of the Holy Spirit both in the Church and beyond its visible boundaries, since the Spirit acts in freedom and His action cannot be reduced to persons, traditions, institutions or problems of relationships. The Spirit's action, His presence and ministry can -- and must -- be discerned both in other religious and even in secular movements that may be shaped and leading to the Kingdom of God.

1.3 Relationship between conversion and dialogue wherein the problem of what each religion understands by conversion should be openly dealt with, and where personal as well as "cultural" conversion appears to be a pastoral imperative. By itself, interreligious dialogue does not intend to convert any of the partners to the other's religion.

2. Inculturation. We perceive dialogue as a necessary condition and instrument for inculturation.

To achieve inculturation, dialogue with and the study of religious traditions and the local cultures are expected to carry a preponderant weight. Two aspects seemed to us to deserve particular attention:

2.1 Harmony seems to constitute in a certain sense the intellectual and effective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia. Hence the imperative of a study in depth of the theology of harmony in the Asian context leading to interreligious dialogue appeared clear to us.

2.2 The Church is a "sign" and sacrament (LG 1). It seemed important to us to have an objective view of how the Church is viewed by different groups both within and outside the Church in Asia, and to evaluate how effectively the Church fulfills, or does not fulfill, the aspirations and needs of the peoples of Asia, particularly the youth. In this respect the "spirituality" of the Church in the concrete Asian milieu should be seriously reflected upon, leading to both a change in personal and institutional life-style and a sincere commitment to the poor in the true spirit of service.

3. Prayer and worship

3.1 The ways of prayer and worship in the Asian context and dialogue have been the object of reflection of FABC at the continental level. It seems, however, that there is an increasing need of both living and deepening these aspects of the Asian life, so that the Church in Asia may become truly incarnated and liturgical inculturation may become both real and meaningful.

3.2 In this respect we feel the need of entering into dialogue with hundreds of millions who live their relationship with God in a way which has been described as popular religion and is the patrimony of the immense majority of the followers of established religions and practitioners of animism in Asia.

4. Involvement in Dialogue

4.1 Finally the involvement of the laity in the ministry of dialogue -- whether informal or formal, doctrinal or practical, dialogue of ideas or dialogue of life -- is a necessity of the Church in Asia. And this is not simply because of the scarcity of clergy but because of the intrinsic nature of the baptized in virtue of his/her participation in Christ's prophetic, royal and priestly role.

4.2 Education for and involvement in dialogue seem to be also a necessary part of the seminary formation as well as the formation of the religious working in Asia.

II. COROLLARIES FOR ACTION

From these issues of a more general character some corollaries follow. Our assembly saw certain more urgent needs which seem to demand a more immediate attention. Among them the following deserve to be pointed out:

1. A true metanoia regarding the importance of dialogue in the mission of the Church is one of the first goals to be attained if interreligious dialogue may ever become a reality. This affects both pastors and ordinary faithful. Measures should be

taken to favour this change of heart and mind at the earliest possible time: the Church in Asia should move now.

2. The pace of inculturation must be accelerated not by trying to attain maturity or results by artificial or superficial means, but through the fostering of proper conditions. Among these conditions a deep Asian spirituality, love for meditation and prayer and the use of non-violent means to attain results must take always due precedence.

3. The fostering of an Asian Theology and for this, the formation and development of Asian theologies seem to be one of the immediate steps which will lead to a theological reflection on the reality of Asia, both from the human and the specifically Christian perspectives.

4. Finally, the seven-year plan of ten on the Theology of Dialogue (BIRA IV/I-10) which had been approved by the FABC Central Committee meeting in Seoul (7-10 May 1984), was also readily accepted by the participants. After the present BIRA IV/I, the remaining nine meetings are to be held between 1985 and 1990, year of the 5th FABC Plenary Assembly. These meetings will be held in various countries at different times. They are planned in such a way that each bishop in Asia will have the opportunity to participate in at least one of these BIRA IV meetings. Details incorporating the suggestions made will be sent to the Presidents of the FABC Member Conferences as soon as they will have been finalized.

Sampran, Thailand, 30 October 1984

Bishop Joachim Rozario	(Bangladesh)
Bishop Michael Duraisamy	(India)
Bishop Paschal Hardjasoemarta	(Indonesia)
Bishop Raymond K. Tanaka	(Japan)
Bishop Anthony Selvanayagam	(Malaysia/Singapore)
Bishop Bienvenido Tutud	(Philippines)
Bishop Kingsley Swampillai	(Sri Lanka)
Bishop Ratna Bamrungtrakul	(Thailand)
Bishop Peter Carretto	(Thailand)

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF HUMANHOOD - WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES

Jeanne Devoc ICM

(From 21 to 24 November, 1984, Jeanne participated in the National Consultation on Women's Perspectives organized by the All India Council of Christian Women, the Council of Catholic Women and Women Theologians in India. Participating in this meeting, held at Whitefield, Bangalore, were 66 women and men belonging to 23 different religious denominations.

Following are important parts of the statement which was drafted at the end of the meeting and endorsed by all participants.)

THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

We are alarmed at the deteriorating condition of women and the growing incidents of violence against women in our society. We wish to affirm as a symbol of hope the women's movements that have brought to light the glaring discrimination women face in all aspects of life. We feel the need to support and join these movements, as recent history has shown that they are quite efficient in helping women to come into their own.

The deepening economic crisis, together with the growing national destabilization and the increasing presence of police and paramilitary forces have led to a general loss of our civil values. One of the most blatant manifestations of this loss is the brutality and injustice meted out to women.

Low legal status, economic and political marginalization, cultural and religious pressure have eroded the self-esteem of women. The assertiveness of fundamentalist and communalist forces constitutes an additional threat to women's independence and full participation in church and society.

We have shared experiences of the humiliation and physical violence women undergo in the public and domestic spheres. Such violence is designed to break the personality of a woman and to stifle her growth to full humanhood. In this context, we feel that the institution of the family ought to be reviewed, in order to overcome patriarchal structures and to create relationships in which every human being can experience acceptance and dignity. We condemn the pernicious system of dowry which treats women as non-entities and liabilities.

We wish to unleash women's creativity, to break through the culture of silence imposed on them and to encourage positive creative expressions. We see the need to reappropriate whatever is supportive in our cultural heritage and particularly to draw inspiration from popular culture.

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF HUMANHOOD

We affirm our faith in God's good creation that has been con-
fided to women and men, whom God created according to His own image.
We realize that patriarchy is the outcome of the fall of God's good
creation. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ has opened up the
perspectives of working towards God's new creation in which the
distortions of sexual exploitation will be overcome and God's image
will be fully restored in the female as well as in the male.

We pledge ourselves to work for a humanhood in which women and
men are freed from the traumas of inferiority and superiority, and
in which power and freedom are accessible to all and not acquired at
the expense of any other human person.

We are aware that we have to develop a new methodology in order
to rediscover women's contribution to the life and theologies of the
early christian communities, thus transcending the particular
patriarchal, socio-cultural context in which they lived.

We are further aware that we must make women's history visible.
We wish to acknowledge the sufferings of our foremothers and restore
to them the dimension of the resurrection.

We dedicate ourselves to live the discipleship which was most
forcefully expressed by the women who were around Jesus, who risked
their lives by following Him up to the cross and who were chosen to
be the first witnesses of His resurrection.

We feel called to develop a new ecclesiology which expresses
itself in church structures, safeguards women's participation and
frees them from the stigma of impurity. We are fully aware that
feminist theology is part of liberation theology and as such essential
for the renewal of church and society at large.

SOME IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

Quite concretely we recommend the following:

1. For christian women and men, in small groups, to strengthen
their commitment to liberation from a christian perspective,
so as to develop the consciousness of a new humanity and prepare
for full involvement in women's movements.
2. To develop a new form of spirituality based on theological
reflections of women's lived experiences in their specific socio-
cultural milieu.
3. To courageously experiment with new forms of ecclesial structures
which transcend existing patriarchal, hierarchical patterns that
are rendering women quasi invisible in the church.
4. To revitalize the theological education in seminaries, in pulpit
homilies, in catechesis, in Sunday school, in family life and in
christian counseling, etc... so as to include a sensitivity to the
humanhood of women in order to strengthen the community of women
and men in church.

In this context we call for a scientific study of the Bible so as to give accurate interpretations to biblical texts.

5. At various church levels, to form committees of sensitized women and men who concretely suggest changes in the language, content and form of the liturgy, in rituals and symbols, so as to ensure that they are all inclusive.
6. To strengthen our understanding of the fullness of the image of God, transcending human conceptualizations and gender stereotypes.
7. To review the institution of the family so as to overcome the existing patriarchal conception and establish relationships based on mutuality and dignity of every woman, man and child.

To build the necessary infrastructures to offer sanctuary, legal help, counseling and support of various kinds to women facing public or domestic violence.

We call on the churches to refuse to solemnize marriages where a dowry is being given or taken, and we urge both women and men to take firm stands on the issue of dowry.

An urgent review of legislation relating to christian women (marriage, divorce, adoption, succession) becomes vital in this context.

We call for the striking down of all oppressive and outdated laws and for the working towards a uniform civil code.

8. To give a theological reinterpretation to human sexuality so as to inculcate in women and men considerations for their biological functions.

To eradicate the debilitating stigma of impurity associated with women.

To publicly condemn and protest against the debasing image of women used in the media and other means of communications.

9. To work for the liberation and full human dignity of women belonging to other religious minorities (muslims, parisi, etc.) and to disadvantaged groups, such as the women of tribal and other ethnic minorities.

In doing all this we work towards a theology of humanhood from the perspective of women living in India today.

Ref. I,C.M. FOCUS - February 1985.
Via di Villa Troili, 30
00163 ROMA, Italia.

BECOMING THE CHURCH OF THE POOR IN ASIA

Bishop Julio X. Labayen O.C.D.

(The significance and consequences of making an option for the poor were much discussed at the March 1985 SEDOS Seminar on Justice and Evangelization. In the following address Bishop Labayen spells out of his vision of what that option means for the Church in Asia. Much of what he says was said already at the recent SEDOS Seminar. It is interesting to see it repeated with such insistence by the Bishop. He concludes his address: "We the bishops of Asia believe: God is calling the Church of Asia to become the Church of the poor.")

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Like every bishop in the world, I have tried to understand my particular responsibility in our local church today. For our part, we in Asia are trying to understand what we, Asian bishops, have officially proclaimed since 1975 in our meeting in Manila: 'God is calling the churches in Asia to become the church of the poor'. We were delighted when we learned that our brother bishops of Latin America have made a *preferential option for the poor*. We feel that their option echoes our own call in Asia.

The little I understand leads me to think that this option, if we make it, is as full of unforeseen and profound consequences for the church and for us bishops as the decision of the early Christians to leave their Jewish traditions and milieu, and venture into the Greco-Roman world.

Some of the Christians in Jerusalem probably sensed there was more at stake than a few prescriptions of the Mosaic Law, but they had no way of knowing what their choice would mean for the church and human history. Could they have imagined their descendants discussing Christ the Lord in Platonic categories, or a man like Constantine? They went ahead because they believed Jesus was Lord and all peoples should have access to him. They definitely understood the Lord's injunction: 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation'. (Mk 16.16) It was the great ecclesiological decision in our history.

A decision to side with the poor is similarly bound to affect every aspect of our lives. How, and how deeply, we do not know. We are called to make it for a host of reasons - religious, sociological, historical - that mass one upon the other, and finally present the option for the poor less as a reasoned conclusion from some argument than a basic act of faith: it is the option Jesus, the Evangelizer, himself made. (Lk 6.20-21) Making it, one senses one has come home.

GOD IS AMONG THE POOR

The overriding reason we are for the poor is because God is with them. God - and his Christ - have already opted. My friend Father Samuel Rayan, and Indian Jesuit theologian, put this as follows:

It is in the struggle of the poor that God speaks and reveals himself. That is the stand the bible takes. It is different from the Constantine idea that God is in the wars of the rich. The privilege of the poor, then, is not a national or social factor; it is not even a moral factor. The poor are not privileged on the basis of race or virtue or learning. They are dear to God because they are victims of the system, reduced to nothings, underdeveloped by the mighty. (1 Cor 1.26-31; Mk 12.10-12) They are elected and the Word is addressed to them. So they stand close to God and organize the struggle. They and God through them are now inviting us to conversion (Vidyajyoti, March 1982).

We opt for the poor not because they are better than the rich; nor because they are holy and the rich are not; much less because they are the majority. We simply follow God's lead.

God's choices have always been arbitrary. Too bad for those who insist upon something more appropriate. Let us take the story of Elijah: God was not in the wind, earthquake or fire, but in the gentle breeze. (1 Kings 19.11-14) The privileged place for finding God is in the struggles of the poor. It has always been so. This act of faith in God's presence in the poor is as difficult to make as was that of a Thomas and Nicodemus, who were called to find the God of the covenant in a mortal man.

There are sociological reasons for siding with the poor - poor people's participation in decision-making has been advocated even by the United Nations General Assembly - but for the Christian the option for the poor is at bottom the option of Jesus. It is the option to search faithfully for God, today in the struggles of the poor: their struggles to cope with life's problems, with the awful truth that each day in my country, the Philippines, about 1,000 children die of malnutrition and infectious diseases, all of which could be remedied. God is found in the help they mutually give each other. He is found in their organized efforts to improve their lives prompted by their aspiration to full life.

Let me put it in another way. If the bible were being written today it would be about some poor people's struggle for land in some small country very little known to us. The inspired writers would describe God's love for these people and their leaders, and find God's hand in all that happened to them, good or bad. Little would be said of the superpowers, any more than was said of Rome and Egypt and in the past. Little would be said of the superpowers' problems or priorities, their visions and ideologies, their historical mission.

The poor will teach us. Theologians and pastors tell us it is the poor who will teach us about the God of Jesus Christ. It is they who will evangelize us. Father James Carney, an American Jesuit who is believed to have been killed by the Honduran Military in 1983, wrote:

The poor Christian peasants of Honduras have opened the Gospel for me. I did not know the real Jesus, the peasant of Nazareth, until I reflected on the bible with peasant Christian leaders here. I did not understand anything of the humble life of Mary, the peasant woman of Nazareth, until I contemplated the Honduran peasant women cutting firewood and carrying it home on their heads to cook with.

Father Carney is telling us we must learn from the poor - not so much what tenet of doctrine to believe as what to value and how to act as Christians today. In the past we drew our spirituality from different sources, including contemplatives - monks and nuns - like little Therese of Lisieux. Today we must sit at the feet of the poor.

THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE POOR

What is the meaning of the option for the poor? It means to look at the world - its reality and its history - through the eyes of the poor. And not just any poor, but the poor who have come to open their eyes to their human dignity and destiny, and are prepared to do something about them, if they have not yet taken their destiny into their hands.

I am not equating the world-view of the poor with the correct view, much less saying it is the 'mind of Christ'. There is sin and ignorance among the poor as well. What I am saying is the aspiration for a more just, a more human and fraternal world resounds more urgently and sharply from the hearts of the poor, the deprived and the oppressed who are the dehumanized victims of avarice and greed. Well did the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, inspired by faith in Christ, state in its opening lines: 'The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age, particularly those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ' (no.1).

THE PARTICIPATION OF THE POOR

Unless we wish to be the Pharaohs of today we must allow the poor to act as God inspires them to take part in the decisions that affect their future. This attitude holds true for both civil society and the church. In the scriptures God makes no distinction in this regard between the two spheres.

To this end, mechanisms are available in poor people's organizations and in our basic Christian communities. Such mechanisms have been born of our faith that God is among the poor. We encourage the growth of these people's groups and allow them a greater say in decision-making process.

Many in other fields agree with this procedure, among them social scientists, development planners and workers. I think we have all had

a similar conversion to the possibilities of people's participation after experiencing the failure of other approaches. After all the years of top-down planning and decision-making in the third World we have the same intractable problems as before - poverty, injustice, malnutrition, diseases, torture and meanness of life. Traditionally the church's planning and decision-making have also been from the top down.

After all the centuries it has been in Asia, it is still a tiny minority of about 2-3%, and an alienated, fearful minority at that. We do not have to say that all the decisions made in the past were wrong, but we may decide that such a system of planning and deciding is woefully inadequate. It simply has not worked effectively. And people's participation, particularly that of the poor who, with a sense of their human dignity, have taken their destiny in their hands, is an alternative well worth trying. The more we are acquainted with it, the richer its possibilities appear, the more reassuring its prospects as they unfold.

No government, communist or capitalist, that I know advocates genuine people's participation, much less the participation of the poor. They treasure their authority and are jealous of it. They believe the people, more so the poor, lack the wisdom to make wise decisions. Furthermore, the people are vulnerable and can easily be manipulated by the enemy. Therefore the people are not to be trusted. Consequently the government defends and protects itself from the people, its own base. It conveniently and arbitrarily rationalizes its attitude by professing its solicitude for the security of the state. Unfortunately, church authorities are no exception in their relationship to their base, particularly towards the poor.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE OPTION FOR THE POOR

What are the implications of the option for the poor? For us, they appear to me to be as follows:

First, we must admit that we are of the middle class and that our perspective is different from that of the poor. As a result, for as long as we do not share the perspective of the poor we can never empathize with them on the urgency and sharpness of their aspirations to justice, truth, freedom, fellowship, love and peace. The hazard we run here is that we fall into the luxury of talking detachedly of the problems of the poor, of forming committees to study them, of making plans for the poor that do not enjoy a high priority, of dilly-dallying in implementing them, and of taking comfort in the thought that at least we have done something for the poor. We remain insensitive to their plight.

Secondly, we have to open ourselves to the cries of the poor, and listen to them in order to learn from them. The temptation we encounter on this point is to think that we have nothing to learn from the poor, that their ignorance makes them an easy prey for communists, who will manipulate them, and that we must not trust them. Exactly the same attitude is assumed by dictatorial governments vis-à-vis their constituencies.

Thirdly, we can do no less than adopt the same attitude as that of Jesus Christ, the Evangelizer: to be open to all possibilities and forms of the coming of God's kingdom in real situations and developing historical processes, placing our full trust and hope in the God of the covenant whose dream for his people is frustrated in the actual plight of the poor, the hungry and the afflicted. This spirit of poverty manifests itself in a simple-style freely embraced for the sake of the kingdom. This voluntary poverty ensures just compassion, mercy, equitable sharing, passion for truth, justice and freedom, unselfish love. At the same time it is a powerful indictment and protest against those who live by the norms of their exalted prestige, unjust and merciless power, and accumulated wealth.

THE CHURCH OF THE POOR

The church of the poor is the church that has made a preferential option for the poor. It is the church that walks with the poor of Yahweh: the *anawim* those who are fervently expecting the coming of the kingdom of God.

We in Asia have been known for our preference for the middle way, sometimes referred to as the way of compromise. We are known to be peoples who avoid confrontation and conflict. But we must not forget that ten of the sixteen major wars in the 20th century were fought in Asia by Asians to gain or defend independence, or overthrow illegitimate governments supported by foreign powers.

If the church of the poor is intent on preaching against violence since it is not in keeping with the Gospel, what is it doing to forestall or avoid the incidence of violence? What steps is it taking in the face of violence that is institutionalized in systems and structures that are foisted on the masses of the poor? What is it doing about the abuses and indignities our people suffer, particularly the poor, the voiceless and the powerless, at the hands of oppressive governments and the repressive military?

Does Jesus' option for the poor mean anything to us? Is it getting the priority that it deserves in our task of evangelization today? Are we - the church - prepared and willing to follow Jesus Christ, our founder, as he walks with his poor the path of poverty and persecution?

To make a preferential option for the poor, to face the risks it involves - this is the socio-pastoral challenge today the church of the poor has to face.

We, the bishops of Asia, believe: *God is calling the churches of Asia to become the church of the poor*'.

Ref: Church in the World 19. Catholic Institute for International Relations,
22 Coleman Fields, London N1 7AF, England.

(The text has been shortened due to pressure of space).

THE COST OF WITNESS

*(A small selection from Documents received recently
at the SEDOS Documentation Centre).*

1. ST. JOHN FISHER

(This year is the 450th
anniversary of his death).

William Rastell, the printer, gives an eyewitness account of Fisher's execution which reveals some interesting aspects of Fisher's character. According to Rastell, Fisher was woken up at five in the morning of 22 June and told that he was to die at 10, whereupon he asked to be left to sleep a couple more hours because he had spent a disturbed night. Later, when they came to take him out, he asked for his furred tippet to go round his neck. The Lieutenant pointed out that he had only half an hour to live. "I think none otherwise," replied the bishop, "but, I pray you, yet give me leave to put on my furred tippet, to keep me warm for the while until the very time of execution."

Rastell gives a vivid picture of the poor old man stripped for execution: "a long, lean slender body nothing in manner but skin and bones. . .He seemed a lean body carcase, the flesh clean wasted away and a very image of death. . .death in a man's shape and using a man's voice." The bishop asked the people for their prayers and commended the King and the realm to God's mercy "and these words spoke he so distinctly and perceivably and also with such a strong and very loud voice that it made all the people astonished". John Fisher was a fine public speaker to the last.

He had taken a New Testament with him on his journey and as he went opened it and said, "O Lord, this is the last time that I ever shall open this book. Let some comfortable place now chance me whereby I, thy poor servant, may glorify thee in this my last hour." It fell open at John 17,3:

And eternal life is this:
to know you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

"And with that," Rastell records, "he shut the book together and said: 'Here is even learning enough for me to my life's end'."

Ref. The Tablet, 22nd June, 1985. 48 Great Peter St., London SW1P 2HB.

2. MISSIONARIES EXPELLED FROM BURUNDI

The following list does not include the names of civilians and Protestant pastors - nor the names of those who have been expelled or whose visas were refused since 11 May, 1985.

p. Schoofs Ward, padre bianco	suor Florizoone Germanie, CIM
p. Boudart Max, padre bianco	suor Mazenauer Christa, in.
fr. Peenen Albert, padre bianco	suor Solet. M. Joseph, FCh.
don Lorini Federico, Fidei d.	p. Cormier Julien, padre bianco
suor Hernandez Pilar, suora bianca	p. Ploton Bernard, padre bianco
suor Peeters Maria, annunciade	suor Rodriguez Cruz, visitazione
suor Gusago Elda, marista	p. Trybala Jean, carmelitano
suor Delorme, visitazione	p. Minelli Ugo, padre bianco
suor Masson, visitazione	p. Suarez Garcia, mercedario
p. Brichard Guy, gesuita	suor Mondini Francesca, marista
Galimberti Adele	Cooman, aux ap.
p. Quinn Bernard, lazzarista	suor Pollet Rita, suora bianca
p. Willems Joseph, s.s.s.	suor Limpens M. Cecile, suora bianca
don Tassano Giovanni, Fidei d.	suor De Marneffe Gaby, suora bianca
suor Roberto Luisa, dorotee ven.	Gerda, aux, ap.
p. Paganelli Dante, padre bianco	fr. Carbonez Dirk, padre bianco
suor Plante Michelle, suora bianca	p. André Comblin, padre bianco
p. Sibien J. Pierre, padre bianco	suor Marie T. Van Krunkelsven,
suor Lussier J., domenicana	dame de Marie
don Giuliani Giancarlo	suor Veronica Macamboni, dorotea ven.
suor Burza Zofia, CSE	Mariononi Guido, volontario SVI
suor Mariom Montserrat, comp. di	suor Garanzini Giuseppina, benedettina
Maria	p. Sabella Savino, francescano

Ref. Missione Oggi No.6, 1985, Via Aurelia 287, 00165 Roma
 Vede anche: Il Regno, Attualita No.531, 1985. Via Nosadella 6,
 C.P. 568, 40100 Bologna.

3. GUATEMALA - "A NATION OF WIDOWS AND ORPHANS"

Our visit to Guatemala in October 1984, along with staff members from the Catholic Institute of International Relations (CIIR) and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF), arose from a desire to see for ourselves how the Guatemalan Church was coping under difficult and, at times, tragic circumstances.

We went with an open mind and talked with many of the country's Bishops, clergy, religious and lay people. They all impressed us with their candour and their determination to fulfill the mission of the Church to its fullest extent. . .

Conclusions and Recommendations of the Report: From the testimonies we have received we have formed the following conclusions:

1. That murder, violence and violation of human rights continue in Guatemala and that responsibility for the vast majority of this rests with the military rulers of the country.

2. That the election for a new President in 1985 is unlikely to bring significant alteration to the present situation because there is no indication that the military intends to relinquish power or that the profound structural changes necessary will be implemented.
3. That the Roman Catholic Church in Guatemala is still a persecuted church, suffering and in danger. It is severely hampered in its mission to preach justice and human dignity because of military restrictions and intimidation. The reason for this can be summed up in an officer's statement related to us. "We will never forgive the priests because they have awakened the people".

Signed:

Maurice Taylor
Bishop of Galloway,
Scotland.

James O'Brien
Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster,
England.

4. HOW DO I LIVE "SOLIDARITY" WITH THE REFUGEES

(From a Report on the Refugees Situation in Rome submitted at the request of Msgr. Luigi Di Liegro of CARITAS, Rome, by Brother Joseph Jansen, SM.)

"I try to find private sponsors (in USA, Canada, Australia) for the refugees. Our Marianist communities in the USA, Canada and Australia have been most helpful in this regard. One Marianist community has "sponsored" over 25 refugees since 1982. Right now, the mobilization of private sponsor in Canada is a priority."

Every Friday, I fast voluntarily (water only) to be in solidarity with the refugees who frequently must fast involuntarily. I also forego daily supper; many refugees have only one meal a day.

Even after the refugees leave Rome, I try to accompany them during their integration in their new life. I do this by means of personal correspondence and with a monthly Ethiopian Newsletter."

Ref. S.M. 3 OFFICES, Marianisti, Via Latina, 22 - 00179 Roma - Italia.
No.18, April 24, 1985.

5. "THE SAME FATE AS THE POOR"

"Christ invites us not to fear persecution because, believe me, brothers and sisters, those who are committed to the poor must risk the same fate as the poor, and in El Salvador we know what the fate of the poor signifies: to disappear, to be tortured, to be captive, and to be found dead."

Ref. Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero quoted in The Same Fate as the Poor, Judith M. Noone, MM. Maryknoll Sisters, New York, 10545, 1984.

6. CONSTANT LIEVENS, S.J. THE APOSTLE OF CHOTA NAGPURBIHAR, INDIA

(With almost one million tribal Catholics, the region of Nagpur has the largest concentration of Catholics in the whole of North India).

It pained Lievens very much to see that poor tribal people were being systematically exploited and deprived of their land possessions by the Zamindars (Hindu Landlords). The poor had no voice; they had always to live in fear; they had no knowledge of legal procedures and stipulations and above all, they had no means of going to court for justice. Lievens decided to fight for their rights.

Between 1885 and 1888 he took numerous land cases to the courts, and to the great delight and benefit of the people, he won all of the cases for them. The news of the success of their court cases spread far and wide and people thronged to him with their grievances.

While analysing the plight of the tribal people, Father Lievens realized that illiteracy was one of the root causes of their misery.

He knew that without schools, the work of evangelization would not be lasting". And he opened schools at all Mission Stations and wherever he went, he encouraged the parents to send their children to school.

His Name and fame spread rapidly to distant places. Delegations of village headmen kept coming day after day to his hut at Torpa inviting him to their villages for instruction and baptism. Lievens literally baptized thousands with his own hands.

At his arrival in 1885 there were less than 2,000 Catholics in the entire region of Chota Nagpur; but they numbered 10,000 in 1886 and 65,000 in 1889. His goal in his own words was: the whole Chota Nagpur must be Catholic". Although that goal has not yet been realized, there are now eleven dioceses with their own indigenous Bishops, priests,

religious and nearly a million Catholics. And the educational network in these dioceses include 520 schools, 10 colleges and 30 training schools, educating, thousands of students irrespective of caste or creed. Education has done wonders in Chota Nagpur in religious, social and economic fields.

Nature took its toll on Lievens rather quickly. Seven years of hard work without proper food, rest and shelter impaired his health and he was called back to Belgium. On November 9, 1895 Lievens went to his eternal reward at the early age of 39.

Ref. *Missiones Tor*, June 1985, Vol.XII, No.80
Via dei Fori Imperiali, 1
00186 Rome, Italy.

7. NON-VIOLENCE

(Fr. Niall O'Brien was arrested on 6th May, 1983 together with two other priests and six lay leaders for the alleged murder of Mayor Sola and his companions in Negros, Philippines. It was two years before the group known as the "Negros Nine" were finally cleared and the case dismissed. The embarrassing "Frame-up" became the focus of world media attention).

Violence has a source, and that source is injustice. Violence is the fruit of the tree of injustice, and hate is its evil flower. If we sow seeds of injustice, we reap violence. If we want to remove violence we must first remove injustice. Injustice begets violence, and violence begets counter-violence. The cycle takes on its own momentum.

In proposing non-violence as a solution, one must be very careful to explain the terms. An earlier name for non-violence was pacifism, but pacifism seems to denote an absence of action and even a quiescence, and could even leave the door open to fatalism and the wrong use of the concept of 'This is the will of God' to which we are prone. On the other hand, though it too is a negative word, the reality of the non-violence movement is not at all negative. It is in fact an assertive, carefully planned struggle for justice, using the techniques of non-violence.

One of the great alternatives to non-violence which the human race has given birth to through much labour is the system of justice through courts. If we regard the Magna Carta as the starting point for our present system of law courts, then it has taken some seven hundred years of struggle - much of it two steps forward and one step back - to

reach our present level of justice in the courts. Courts are supposed to offer non-violent means of undoing injustice; in them, justice must not only be done, but it must be seen to be done. If it is not seen to be done, then the sense of injustice remains and the spectre of violence reappears.

Non-violence is a continent which we have just discovered; but we have not yet gone inland. During our attempt to build small Christian communities (in Negros) we evolved four basics which we found essential in this approach.

1. Truth: the truth is lethal against lies, the truth shines out, and it is feared by those who deal in lies; it has its own inner power; it rises out of the grave of the dead man to confront his killers.
2. Faith: faith is opposed to fatalism. To believe that good is more powerful than evil is ultimately to believe in God, whether you verbalise that belief or not. To believe passionately in the dignity of man is ultimately to believe in God. Conversely, to ignore and trample on the dignity of man makes you into a practising atheist, no matter what church you attend.
3. Imagination: Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, Saul Alinsky, the Berrignas, Cãmara, Romero - all have shown in our age a resourceful use of imagination and humour in their specifically non violent strategy to win the battle for human dignity.
4. Courage: Most oppressive rulers rule just by fear - the threat of the grenade thrown into the crowd, rather than the actual grenade. Fear is catching, and so is courage. Start showing courage even in the little things and suddenly one day you will discover that the king has no clothes at all.

Ref. Quoted from Seeds of Injustice: Reflections on the Murder Frame-up of the Negros Nine in the Philippines from the Prison Diary of Niall O'Brien SSC. The O'Brien Press, Dublin, 1985.