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The core theme of the coming Sedos Research Seminar will be the local Church. Around this theme the various topics chosen for the Seminar will be examined and in all of these the problems and opportunities involved in inculturation will be of major importance.

In this context, Karl Rahner's address on the theological interpretation of Vatican II opens up perspectives arising from the "de-Europeanising" of the Western Church and the growth of the local Church in post-Vatican Christianity. "This is the issue," he says in his address, "either the Church sees and recognizes these essential differences of other cultures for which she should become a world Church, and with a Pauline boldness draws the necessary consequences from this recognition, or she remains a Western Church, and so in the final analysis betrays the meaning of Vatican II". (p.331).

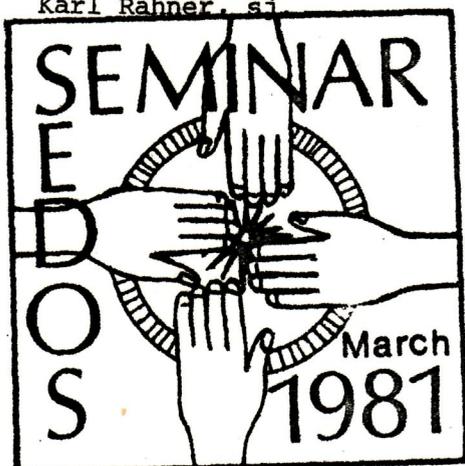
The Joint-Pastoral letter of the Bishops of Nicaragua is a courageous statement of the Bishops' attitude towards socialism in that country. "The heart of Jesus' message is the announcement of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom founded on the Father's love for all mankind in which the poor hold a special place. Jesus tells us that the kingdom means liberation and justice (Lk. 4:16-20) because it is a kingdom of life", (p.247). This is the touchstone by which the new socialist regime in Nicaragua will have to be judged, as was the previous corrupt regime which it replaced.

The meditation of Serge de Beaurecueil is not chosen for the topicality of its being written in Afghanistan, but for the depth of its insight into the Eucharist as the centre of the Church's life and the fountain from which flows all its strength.

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SEDOS - SERVIZIO DI DOCUMENTAZIONE E STUDI

TOWARDS A FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGICAL
INTERPRETATION OF VATICAN II

Karl Rahner, sj.

(This is the text of an address given by Karl Rahner on April 8, 1979, at an academic convocation in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at which the Weston School of Theology awarded him the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. The translation was made by Leo G. Donovan, sj, professor of systematic theology at Weston).

Introduction: The nature of the Council: If I am going to discuss here a fundamental theological interpretation of the Second Vatican Council, it will be helpful to make some preparatory remarks before turning to the theme itself. In speaking of a fundamental interpretation, I will mean one that is not imposed on the Council from outside but is rather suggested by the Council itself, so that fundamental nature and fundamental interpretation in this case will mean the same thing.

The presupposition for this fundamental interpretation is, of course, the conviction that despite all the historical contingencies which also accrue to such an event, the Council was not simply an arbitrary accumulation of individual events and decisions. No, there was an inner, essential connection among its individual occurrences; they were not interrelated simply by the formally juridical character of a council. In this respect, it is ultimately unimportant how clearly and thoroughly this fundamental conception of the Council was present or not in the explicit consciousness of its organizers.

The meaning and nature of events that have genuinely existential significance in the life of any human being always include more than the person objectifies and strives for in explicit consciousness. And this holds true, above all, for significant events in the history of the Church, which are directed in a special and singular way by the Spirit of the Church. If we look at the explicit intentions of John XXIII with respect to the Council, we cannot say much more than this: even after Vatican I with its "papalism", the Pope thought a council would be meaningful and opportune, and he wanted a "pastoral" council. But this by no means rules out the possibility of a fundamental theological conception that is deeper and more comprehensive.

I am seeking a fundamental theological interpretation, because, although I cannot discuss in any detail how theology and Church history are related, it is my opinion that Church history differs specifically from secular history: its precise goal is to describe the history of the Church's essence. In a relation of reciprocal interdependence, the Church's essence both supplies the hermeneutical principle for its history and, since it is essence in history, reveals itself through that history.

I. The Church's First Self-Actualisation as a World Church

Difficult though it be and perhaps only partially successful, still let me try to formulate in advance the basic idea with which our question is concerned, so that we do not lose sight of the connection among the individual observations and considerations that follow.

I say: the Second Vatican Council is, in a rudimentary form still groping for identity, the Church's first official self-actualization as a world Church.

The Church and European culture: This thesis may seem exaggerated; surely it needs further precision and clarification to sound acceptable. It is, of course, already open to misunderstanding, inasmuch as the Church was always a world Church "in potency" and that potency could only be actualized in the course of an extensive historical process whose origins go back to the beginning of European colonialism and the modern world-mission of the Church in the sixteenth century. Even today that actualization is not yet at its term. But one can consider the official activity of the Church in a macroscopic way and see clearly that despite the implied contradiction to its essence, the actual concrete activity of the Church in its relation to the world outside of Europe was in fact, (if you will pardon the expression), the activity of an export firm which exported a European religion as a commodity it did not really want to change but sent throughout the world together with the rest of the culture and civilization it considered superior.

Antecedents to Vatican II: In this light it does appear meaningful and justified to consider Vatican II as the first major official event in which the Church actualized itself precisely as a world Church. Of course, the event had antecedents such as the ordination of indigenous bishops (although this occurred extensively only in our century) or the withdrawal of European mission practices which had been cemented by Rome in the Rites Controversy in the East. Such antecedents should not be glossed over, nor their importance minimalized, but one must notice that they did not really have any such consequences for the European and North American Church as we begin to recognize at Vatican II. And for that reason they were really only antecedents of what we observe in Vatican II, even if only in an initial and tentative way, often overlaid by the earlier style of the European Church: a world Church as such begins to act through the reciprocal influence exercised by all its components.

This most general thesis on the fundamental understanding of Vatican II, as I have said, does not deny that the actualization of the essence of the Church as a world Church at this Council made its appearance only initially and diffidently. The existence of contrary tendencies should not be concealed.

"De-Europeanising" the Church: In the next few years for example, will the new Code of Canon Law being prepared in Rome avoid the danger of being once again a Western Code that is imposed on the world Church in Latin America, Asia, and Africa? Do not the Roman Congregations still have the mentality of a centralized bureaucracy which thinks it knows best what serves the kingdom of God and the salvation of souls throughout the world, and in such decisions takes the mentality of Rome or Italy in a frighteningly naive way as a self-evident standard?

Admittedly, such questions about the de-Europeanizing of the Church raise theoretical problems which are anything but clear. Must the marital morality of the Wamasai in East Africa simply reproduce the morality of Western Christianity, or could a chieftain there, even if he is a Christian, live in the style of the patriarch Abraham? Must the Eucharist even in Alaska be celebrated with grape wine? Theoretical hindrances to the actualization of the world Church as such, along with many other reasons, they help us to understand that the full official actualization of the world Church to appear at Vatican II in a relatively initial and different way. At Mass before the individual sessions, when the different rites of the Church were presented, one still could not see any African dances.

Finally, while the Church must be inculturated throughout the world if it is to be a world Church, nevertheless we cannot overlook the fact that the individual cultures themselves are today involved in a process of change to a degree and at a rate previously unknown. As a result, it is not easy to say what content bearing importantly on the future the individual cultures can offer for a Church that is meant to become a world Church in the full sense. Whatever we may say about these and many other questions, it is incontestable that at Vatican II the Church appeared for the first time as a world Church in a fully official way. In what follows let me first offer a broad demonstration of this thesis, then apply it to the question of epochs in Church history, and finally consider some of its more concrete implications.

II. A Council of the Whole Church: Demonstration of the Thesis

A. Membership of the Council: First, the Council was for the first time formally a Council precisely of the world Church. One need only compare it with Vatican I to see that this Council was a new event in a formally juridical way. Of course, there were representatives of Asian or African episcopal sees at Vatican I. But they were missionary bishops of European or North American origin. At that time there was not yet an indigenous episcopate throughout the world. But this is what appeared at Vatican II, perhaps not at all in proportion to the representation of the Western episcopate. But it was there. These bishops did not come to Rome as individual, modest visitors who had accounts to render and alms to bring home.

At Vatican II we have for the first time a gathering of the world episcopate not as an advisory body for the pope but rather with him and under him the final teaching and decision-making body in the Church. For the first time a world-wide Council with a world-wide episcopate came into existence and functioned independently. In point of fact, the importance of the non-western part of the total episcopate may still have been relatively modest. The repercussions of the conciliar process on the extraconciliar life of the Church may still be very limited, as the subsequent synods of bishops in Rome show. But this does not alter the fact that at the Council a Church appeared and became active that was no longer the Church of the West with its American spheres of influence and its export to Asia and Africa.

Under the appearance of an obvious and gradual development, something like a qualitative leap took place here, even though this world Church's new essence is masked to a considerable extent not only potentially but actually by characteristics of the old Western Church.

B. Decrees of the Council

The leap to a world Church can be further clarified by looking at the decrees of this Council. As for the use of the vernacular, the Council's Decree on the Liturgy may already be dated; but without it and without the Council the victory of the vernacular would be unthinkable. In secular terms, Latin had been the common cultural language for Western civilization, and for that reason it had been and with some procrastination remained the liturgical language of the Western Church. But Latin could not become the liturgical language of a world Church, since it was the language of a small and particular cultural region.

The victory of the vernacular in the Church's liturgy signals unmistakably the coming-to-be of a world Church whose individual churches exist with a certain independence in their respective cultural spheres, inculturated, and no longer a European export. It also signals, of course, the new problems of a world Church whose non-European local churches, for all their relationship to Rome, may no longer be ruled from Europe and its mentality.

In *Gaudium et Spes*, in an action of the entire Church as such, the Church as a totality becomes conscious of its responsibility for the dawning history of humanity. Much of the Constitution may be conceived in a European way, as far as details go, but the Third World is truly present as part of the Church and as object of its responsibility. The sensitization of the European Church to its world responsibility may move ahead only with painstaking slowness. But this responsibility, our political theology, can no longer be excluded from the consciousness of a world Church.

As far as the doctrinal decrees of the Council are concerned, those namely on the Church and divine revelation, it may be that they speak largely from a specifically European horizon of understanding and that they consider problems that are vital only for a European theology. And still we can say that these decrees strive for statements that are not entirely conditioned by the linguistic style of a Neo-Scholastic theology and can be made more easily understandable in the entire world. To make this clearer, we would have to compare these texts with the corresponding late Neo-Scholastic schemata that were prepared in Rome before the Council.

One can also indicate that the Council's teaching on the whole episcopate and its function in the Church as well as on the significance of regional particular churches makes or clarifies doctrinal presuppositions which are fundamental for the self-understanding of the Church as world Church.

It may well be that the Decree on Revelation, starting as it does with revelation in the Old Testament alone, with "Abraham", does not exactly propagate a concept of revelation that is easily accessible for African and Asian cultures, especially since hundreds of thousands of years between primordial revelation and Abraham remain unfilled.

But we can also say that doctrinally the Council did two things which are of fundamental significance for a world-wide missionary effort:

In the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, a truly positive evaluation of the great world religions is initiated for the first time in the doctrinal history of the Church.

Furthermore, even from an infralapsarian perspective (as the Scholastics say), the documents on the Church, on the missions, and on the Church in the modern world proclaim a universal and effective salvific will of God which is limited only by the evil decision of human conscience and nothing else. This implies the possibility of a properly salvific revelation-faith even beyond the Christian revelatory word.

As a result, in comparison with earlier theology roughly to our own time, basic presuppositions for the world mission of the world Church are fashioned which were not previously available.

The Declaration on Religious Liberty can also be seen in this perspective, since for all situations throughout the world the Church expressly renounces all instruments of force for the proclamation of its faith which do not lie in the power of the gospel itself.

Everyone knows how great an obstacle the ecclesial division of Christendom also constitutes for the spread of Christianity in all the world, in the so-called "mission countries". For that reason, whatever ecumenical activities the Council itself develops or approves and encourages must also be evaluated as contributions to Christianity's becoming a world religion.

In short: at least in a rudimentary way the Church at this Council began doctrinally to act precisely as a world Church. Under the still widely prevalent phenotype of a European and North American Church, we begin to notice, so to speak, the genotype of a world Church.

C. Epochs in Church History

But perhaps we can grasp even more profoundly this process of a world Church coming into being. So let us consider, secondly, the question of epochs in the Church's history. In writing Church history, people have puzzled again and again over a theologically appropriate division of the material. It is indeed quite clear that dividing European history into antiquity, Middle Ages, and modernity does not give us a theologically meaningful outline for dividing Church history. Here I am leaving aside, of course, questions about theologically appropriate subdivisions of Church history's major epochs. In addition, I am persuaded that, for history in general and especially for the history of the Church, the individual phases of chronologically measured history do not contain events of equal moment; rather, a chronologically limited time can still bear within itself a historically major epoch.

Three great epochs: With these presuppositions, I say: theologically speaking, there are three great epochs in Church history, of which the third has only just begun and made itself observable officially at Vatican II. First, the short period of Jewish Christianity. Second, the period of the Church in a distinct cultural region, namely, that of Hellenism and of European culture and civilization. Third, the period in which the sphere of the Church's life is in fact the entire world.

These three periods signify three essential and different basic situations for Christianity and its preaching. Within them, of course, there can be very important subdivisions: for example, in the second period, through the caesuras or breaks which occur with the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages and with the transition from medieval culture to European colonialism and the Enlightenment. In all this one would have to clarify the causes of these multiple and yet interrelated breaks. Nevertheless, I believe that this tripartite division of Church history is theologically correct, even if the first period was very short.

Jewish Christianity: This first period, Jewish Christianity, with the expanding influence which Jewish proselytism brought it, is in fact distinguished in its fundamental, characteristic, and unique quality by the fact that its human historical situation was that of the fundamental Christian salvation event, the death and resurrection of Jesus himself; this event was proclaimed within its own historical situation and not in one different from it; it was proclamation precisely in Israel and to it.

Gentile Christianity: On that basis something like a mission to the Gentiles would indeed have been possible. Consequently, we can see that it was not theologically self-evident for Paul to inaugurate the transition from a Jewish Christianity to a Christianity of Gentiles as such. Rather, this introduced a radically new period in Church history, a Christianity that was not the export of Jewish Christianity to the Diaspora but instead a Christianity which, for all its relationship to the historical Jesus, still grew on the soil of paganism. I know that I am speaking dimly and darkly. But I think the difficulty derives ultimately from the theological problems involved in this transition from Jewish to Gentile Christianity, problems that are by no means so simple as people think, theologically difficult problems still to be worked out correctly: it is not yet reflectively clear to us what Paul "brought about" when he declared circumcision and everything connected with it superfluous for non-Jews (and perhaps only for them).

However that may be, if we want to make, in fundamental fashion, a more precise and authentically theological division of previous Church history, then the proposed triple division seems to me the only correct one. This means that in the history of Christianity the transition of Christianity from one historical and theological situation to an essentially new one did happen once, and that now in the transition from a Christianity of Europe (with its American annexes) to a fully world religion it is starting to happen for a second time.

Of course, one can dare to make this assertion only if one considers that the transition from the ancient Gentile Christianity in the Mediterranean area to the medieval and modern Christianity in Europe is theologically less decisive than both the breaks with which we are here concerned. But that seems entirely justified, considering the unity of the Roman-Hellenistic Mediterranean culture and its transmission to the Germanic peoples - although I cannot show this in more detail here and now.

A two-fold theological question: If what I have said is more or less correct, a two-fold theological question arises: In what more precisely does the theological and not only the cultural historical **character** of such a transition, such a caesura or break, consist?

And what results if we apply the theology of this transition to the one in which we are living today, a transition for which Vatican II implies something like an ecclesiastically official beginning?

Theological cultural character of the transition? As for the first question, we can start by saying at least that it concerns an event of importance not only for the history of culture but for theology and the history of salvation. This seems to me to be evident in Paul. He proclaims abolition of circumcision for Gentile Christianity, an abolition which Jesus certainly did not anticipate and which can scarcely be cogently derived from Jesus' own explicit preaching or from the preaching about the salvific meaning of his death and resurrection. And yet for Paul this principle belongs to his gospel and means revelation in some sense. It is the interruption of a salvation-history continuity which a human being cannot undertake on personal authority alone.

Thus the properly theological question arises which Paul himself did not adequately pursue: What can still remain and must still remain from the Old Testament salvation history and from the Church, if circumcision could be done away with, one of the realities that pertained to the final substance of salvation existence for a Jew of that time, something that according to Paul could and in fact should have remained for the Jewish Christians of the time? This transition, for him, constitutes a genuine caesura or break.

We must furthermore consider that many other abolitions and interruptions of continuity in the history of salvation were connected with this change: abolishing the Sabbath, moving the Church's center from Jerusalem to Rome, far-reaching modifications in moral doctrine, the rise and acceptance of new canonical writings, and so forth.

And for the moment it does not concern me whether these turning points can be referred to Jesus or explicitly to Paul or happened somehow and somewhere in the apostolic age. Today, as a matter of fact, perhaps even in contrast to patristic and medieval theology, we do not have a clear, reflective theology of this break, this new beginning of Christianity with Paul as its inaugurator; perhaps that will only gradually be worked out in a dialogue with the Synagogue of today.

And so I hope no one will hold it against me if I cannot say anything beyond the suggestions already given. And yet I would still venture the thesis that today we are experiencing a break such as occurred only once before, that is, in the transition from Jewish to Gentile Christianity.

The meaning of Vatican II? Can one venture this thesis and through it determine the meaning of Vatican II in the sense that there the Church, even if only initially and unclearly, proclaimed the transition of the Western Church to a world Church in a way that had previously happened only once, when the Church changed from a Church of the Jews to a Church of the Gentiles? To repeat: I think one can and should answer this question affirmatively. Of course, this cannot mean that in content these two caesuras and transitions are simply the same. No historical event occurs twice. Nor would I contradict someone who is convinced that the break inaugurated by Paul also had characteristics of a formally theological nature which are not repeated, so that the transition to a world Church is really not comparable in every respect with the transition from the Christianity of the Jewish Jesus to the Christianity of Paul.

I also do not doubt that such transitions happen for the most part and in the final analysis unreflectively; they are not first planned out theologically and then put into effect, but are unreflectively realized through a finally hidden instinct of the Spirit and of grace that remains mysterious - even though the element of reflection borne along with the action should certainly not be disregarded or considered superfluous. But with these provisos I would want to affirm and defend the thesis I proposed.

Post-Vatican Christianity: Next I venture to affirm that the difference between the historical situation of Jewish Christianity and the situation into which Paul transplanted Christianity as a radically new creation is not greater than the difference between Western culture and the contemporary cultures of all Asia and Africa into which Christianity must inculturate itself if it is now to be, as it has begun to be, genuinely a world Church.

Today's difference may to some extent be hidden, inasmuch as a leveling layer of rational-industrial culture from Europe and the United States lies over these other cultures, so that the difference between our culture and the other cultures is veiled, and one might expect Christianity still to be well received throughout the world as a Western export ware wherever it coincided with the dubious blessings of the West. Antiquity did indeed have an analogue for this, namely, the Diaspora of the Jews with their proselytizing across the ancient world, on which foundation a Jewish Christianity apparently could also have been exported to that world.

But, prescindng from some minor exceptions, modern missionary history shows that Christianity as a Western export actually succeeded neither with the high cultures of the East nor in the world of Islam, precisely because it was Western Christianity and sought in that way to establish itself in the rest of the world, without risking a really new beginning or breaking with many continuities that seem self-evident to us. This showed in the different rites controversies; in the export of Latin as a liturgical language to countries in which Latin was never a historical reality; in the unquestioning way that Western, Roman law was exported through canon law; in the naive, unquestioning way that an effort was made to impose the bourgeois morality of the West in all its detail on people of different cultures; in the rejection of religious experiences of other cultures, and so forth.

This, then, is the issue: either the Church sees and recognizes these essential differences of other cultures for which she should become a world Church and with a Pauline boldness draws the necessary consequences from this recognition, or she remains a Western Church and so in the final analysis betrays the meaning of Vatican II.

Further Implications for the Church of the Future

If such a claim is made for the meaning of Vatican II, what are its further implications, somewhat more concretely? It is a third question, of course.

First of all, because in material terms the break, towards a world Church, naturally has or must acquire a completely different content than the first break, towards the Gentile Church of antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Then secondly, because it is an open and unclarified question whether and to what extent the Church in the postapostolic age still has the creative powers and authority that she had in the period of her first becoming, the apostolic age. At that time, in making irreversible or seemingly irreversible basic decisions which first concretely constituted her essence, she claimed such authority over and above what came to her directly from Jesus, now the Risen One. The open question is whether, during such historical breaks as the second one we are discussing, the Church can legitimately perceive possibilities of which she never made use during her second major epoch because those possibilities would have been meaningless in that epoch and consequently illegitimate.

Thirdly, because despite all modern futurology, no one can correctly predict the secular future to which the Church must do justice in the new interpretation of her faith and of her essence as world Church. To that extent, of course, Vatican II is only a very abstract and formal model of the task the Church as world Church is meeting.

But let us still try to say something about the image of the Church as world Church, about the task that is still to be addressed. This, I think, pertains to the theme we are considering, because a theological interpretation of the fundamental nature of Vatican II must in the last analysis be undertaken from its final cause, namely, from the Church's future, to which this Council committed itself.

A new Christian proclamation in a world context: None of us can say exactly how, with what conceptuality, under what new aspects the old message of Christianity must in the future be proclaimed in Asia, in Africa, in the regions of Islam, perhaps also in South America, if this message is really to be present everywhere in the world. The people in these other cultural situations must themselves gradually discover this and here, of course, it cannot remain a question of formally declaring the necessity of such other proclamations, nor simply of deriving them from an inherently problematic analysis of the special character of these peoples.

For this task, whose solution is not yet at hand and which does not really belong to us Europeans, it will be necessary to appeal to the hierarchy of truths of which the Council spoke and to return to the final and fundamental substance of the Christian message, in order to formulate from it anew the whole of ecclesial faith with the natural creativity that corresponds to the actual historical situation.

This reduction or return to the final and fundamental substance as the first step towards a new expression of the whole content of faith is not easy. In the course of it we will have to take account of efforts made in recent years to discover basic formulas of faith. But we will also have to ask a question which has scarcely been addressed: Is there a formal criterion for deciding what really can and what really cannot belong primordially to a supernatural revelation in the strict sense? If this task were fulfilled, we would have a pluralism of proclamations, in fact the authentic pluralism, which is much more meaningful than a pluralism of proclamations and theologies within the Western Church.

Since all human beings can in principle speak with one another and make themselves understood, these different proclamations would not be simply disparate realities. They could criticize and enrich one another. But each of them would still constitute a historical individuality, which would be ultimately incommensurable with every other.

Unity of faith in plural proclamations: A further question arises: How can a unity of faith be maintained and verified when you have plural proclamations? And how can the highest ecclesial body in Rome work for this, since the task is apparently entirely different from what the Roman authorities on faith have previously assumed within a common Western horizon of understanding?

It is also self-evident that a significant pluralism with respect to canon law (and other ecclesial praxis as well) must be developed in the great local churches--even apart from the fact that genuine progress towards ecumenical unity cannot otherwise be expected.

Quite often it has been observed that a similar pluralism of liturgies is needed, one that cannot consist merely in the use of different vernaculars. Granted, these are all formal, abstract statements which are scarcely expressive of the concrete form which the future world Church will take. But can more be said?

Significance of "pastoral instructions": Let me also draw attention to a characteristic of Vatican II that I have discussed elsewhere and cannot pursue here. At least in Gaudium et spes the Council unreflectively used a mode of expression that has the character neither of a permanently valid dogmatic teaching nor of a canonical regulation, but must rather be understood as the expression of "pastoral instructions" (Welsungen) or appeals. (This requires a theological treatment of official Church statements, a treatment which is not at all explicit now, since we have previously been familiar only with doctrinal statements and official Church regulations and orders.) Does this other sort of statement have more urgent significance for the future? Under what assumptions can such instructions be made effective? Once again I cannot go into these questions here, although from another perspective they would help to answer our question about the theological uniqueness of this Council.

Significance of "collegiality": Finally, it should be explicitly said or repeated: the Council was, with and under the pope, the active subject of the highest plenary powers in the Church, in all their usage and application. This is obvious, it was explicitly taught, and it was basically not disputed by Paul VI. But how can this highest plenary authority, borne by the pope "alone" and the Council, actually exist and be able to act in two subjects at least partially different? This has not really been theoretically clarified, nor is it apparent in practice what lasting and timely significance there is in the fact that the whole college of bishops is, with and under the pope, but really with the pope, the highest collegial leadership body in the Church.

The still timely significance of this collegial constitutional principle in the Church remained unclear into our time and once again was more repressed than not by Paul VI after the Council. Will John Paul II change anything here? In a true Church some such change is necessary, since a world Church simply cannot be ruled with the sort of Roman centralism that was customary in the period of the Piuses.

Conclusion

But let me conclude. All our considerations were supposed to be concerned with how the Second Vatican Council is to be interpreted theologically. I tried to interpret it as that event of Church history in which the world Church modestly began to act as such. I tried to make clear with a few problematic considerations that the coming-to-be of a world Church precisely as such does not mean just a quantitative increase in the previous Church, but rather contains a theological break in Church history that still lacks conceptual clarity and can scarcely be compared with anything except the transition from Jewish to Gentile Christianity. This was the caesura or break which occupied Paul, although one need not think that he reflected with theological adequacy on this transition whose protagonist he was. This is all I really wanted to say. Everything else is but dimly envisaged, and developed perhaps without the necessary systematic clarity. But I did want to draw attention to problems that have scarcely been noticed in previous theology.

Reference: Theological Studies, December 1979, pp. 716-727.

- end -

News Items

Earthquake in Southern Italy: Our deepest sympathy and prayers go out to the people in the South in their tragic suffering. We join with them and share their pain and loss.

New Superior Generals: Congratulations to Father Ferdinand Jette, omi, on his re-election as Superior General for a second term; also to Fr. Robert Gay, pa, on his election as Superior General. Both Chapters are still continuing.

Sister Maria Pia Teh: Sr. Pia, who has been responsible for the Documentation Centre of Sedos for the past two and a half years has been transferred and will be leaving us shortly. On 9th December she goes to take up an appointment in Pastoral Ministry in her native Penang, Malaysia.

We are grateful to Sr. Pia for her dedication to the work of documentation in Sedos. She will be missed by the staff here in the office and also by the many visitors whom she helped in their research work during the years. We wish her a safe journey and look forward to hearing from her in her new surroundings.

May God go with you Sr. Pia, We send you on your journey with an old Irish blessing:

Deep peace of the running wave to you;
 Deep peace of the flowing air to you;
 Deep peace of the quiet earth to you;
 Deep peace of the watching shepherd to you;
 Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.

Sr. Pia's new address is: Sr. Maria Pia Teh Saw Eng
 No. 544, MK 16, Ayer Itam
 Penang,
 W. Malaysia.

DEUX RITES POUR UN MÊME PAIN

- Serge de Beurecueil, op.

(From Afghanistan comes this meditation on the Eucharist. Almost a lone Christian in a population of millions, Serge de Beurecueil reflects on the Mass and the absence of a celebrating community. He looks back with joy on many years of daily celebration and tells us how he grew in humility in his aloneness. He reflects that atmosphere of the celebrations "rather resembled that of the Last Supper when, the Bread having been broken, they went out in silence towards the Cedron. The gospel notes that it was night...And they all, Jesus first, were afraid..." Ed).

Ecrire quelque chose sur le sens de la célébration eucharistique dans la solitude (qu'il s'agisse d'un désert quelconque ou d'un entourage sans aucun chrétien) m'aurait enthousiasmé il y a une dizaine d'années. Je l'ai fait d'ailleurs, avec émotion, dans un petit livre intitulé "Prêtre des non-chrétiens (1)".

C'était au temps où nous étions chez moi très peu nombreux et où je continuais à vivre selon le rythme de vie dite "régulière" que j'avais pratiqué pendant des années. Tout y était: Office trois fois par jour, Eucharistie vers le soir, Oraison avant le sommeil. J'avais besoin de justifier à mes propres yeux et à ceux d'autrui, la fidélité à ces "bonnes habitudes".

Pour ce qui est de l'Eucharistie, elle m'était apparue comme le prolongement et la sacralisation du pain, symbole de la vie, partagé avec les gens au cours de la journée. Se présenter à l'autel pour y présenter à Dieu les événements, les gens et les choses; les "consacrer" avec le Pain, communier aux Mystères au nom de tous, afin de retourner vers eux le lendemain, dans la vie "profane", rayonnant pour eux de grâces divines. Un peu l'action éminemment sacerdotale du grand-prêtre de l'Ancien Testament, pénétrant une fois l'an dans le Saint des Saints, au nom de tout le peuple, qui restait dehors...

Vision des choses capable de susciter l'enthousiasme, de stimuler l'attention aux autres, d'engendrer le don de soi à leur service. Aussi me garderai-je bien de contester la légitimité d'une certaine conception du sacerdoce et de la célébration eucharistique, dont j'ai vécu intensément pendant mes premières années en Afghanistan. Je dirai simplement que l'évolution de mes conditions de vie et le cheminement de mon expérience m'ont appris qu'elle comportait des dangers et des sous-entendus et que, en tout état de cause, elle ne devait pas être exclusive.

Les dangers? Celui de s'attribuer un rôle grandiose et irremplaçable, que personne ne vous a confié. Pendant des siècles, on s'est parfaitement passé de vous le voir remplir et l'Esprit-Saint ne vous a pas attendu pour agir dans le cœur des hommes! Celui de sous-estimer les voies mystérieuses de sa présence, en considérant comme "profane" la vie de millions d'hommes, comme à rectifier et à parfaire (par vous, évidemment!) leurs élans vers Dieu et la vie religieuse où ils s'expriment. "Heureusement que, enfin, je suis là, pour sanctifier tous ces pauvres gens! Car, moi, je sais, moi, j'ai le pouvoir de célébrer l'Eucharistie et je puis les y associer, par moi et à travers moi, sans qu'ils s'en doutent..." Moi et moi...Attention à la "richesse spirituelle" (le contraire de la pauvreté évangélique), ou tout simplement à la vanité, sinon à l'orgueil, parés évidemment des plus beaux et pieux atours!

(1) Serge de Beurecueil: Prêtre des non-chrétiens, Le Cerf, 1968.

Ei si c'était le contraire! La célébration eucharistique n'ayant lieu que lorsque moi-même, avec quelques autres chrétiens (les Petites Soeurs de Jésus, par exemple), en avons besoin pour alimenter notre vie, se trouvant enrichie du fait de tous les partages que nous impose notre destin. L'humble célébration où nous venons, en "pauvres", puiser la force de continuer la route, comme le prophète au désert. Ni lui, ni les Apôtres lors de la Cène, n'avaient des allures de grands-prêtres! "Heureusement que je suis là, pour que ces pauvres gens me sauvent, eux qui souffrent, qui prient, qui aiment sans doute beaucoup mieux que je ne saurais le faire! Et heureusement qu'il y a de temps en temps l'Eucharistie, pour m'aider à mieux partager, à vivre davantage dans l'Esprit de Jésus!" Autre conception, au moins aussi légitime que la première, et sans doute complémentaire.

Ici, quelques images me viennent à l'esprit, entre autres celle d'un brahmane officiant à Calcutta dans une chapelle privée, pendant que, dans la pièce à côté, le maître de céans attendait que ce soit fini en lisant son journal: le rite efficace par lui-même, parce que célébré dans les règles par l'homme idoine.

Deux titres de livres: "La Messe sur le monde", de Teilhard de Chardin, et un admirable roman: "Missa sine nomine", d'Ernst Wiechert: Messe sans aucun rite...grande eucharistie sur l'immensité du désert...vie transformée au long des années, en une Eucharistie transfigurante. Le P. Panigati me disait, à propos de cette dernière fête de Pâques: "Si tu ne peux pas venir concélébrer avec moi, ne t'en fais pas! Le repas partagé avec tes gosses, ce sera ton Eucharistie..."

L'évocation des Pères du désert et des Moines orientaux, ne se réunissant que les dimanches et jours de fête pour la Synaxe, qu'ils eussent jugé saugrenu de célébrer tout seuls...A l'inverse, Charles de Foucauld faisant des acrobaties pour avoir le bonheur de célébrer l'Eucharistie dans la solitude de son ermitage...Alors que dire, mon cher Joseph? Peut-être que la célébration solitaire de l'Eucharistie peut avoir une multitude de sens, tandis que pour certains, elle peut légitimement n'en avoir aucun (tout dépend de ce que l'Esprit, qui est "libre", inspire à chacun), que la théologie qu'on en peut faire est multiforme et jamais exclusive, qu'il ne faut pas la réduire à l'accomplissement d'un rite aussi sublime et divin qu'il soit, car l'Eucharistie s'étend aux dimensions de la vie, qui s'harmonisent et convergent vers ce geste que fit Jésus, un certain soir..

Et pourquoi ne pas croire, comme l'Ecclésiaste, que chaque chose a son temps dans la vie, au lieu de se crispier sur un mode unique de faire et de penser, "le plus parfait" (évidemment, et tant pis pour les pauvres types qui verraient les choses autrement!), auquel on devrait se tenir coûte que coûte, même s'il fallait que mort s'en suive?

Personnellement, je me suis nourri avec joie, pendant près de trente ans, de la célébration quotidienne de l'Eucharistie. Quand j'y séjourne, je me délecte dans la liturgie, sobre et priante, de mon couvent. Je me suis senti, célébrant au rite copte, au bord de la danse. Célébrer au rite byzantin m'a fait fondre le coeur. Ici, j'ai connu l'action "sacerdotale", solitaire, au nom d'un peu plus de quinze millions d'hommes sans un seul chrétien, puis l'humble recours, diversement espacé d'ailleurs, selon le besoin et les conditions de la vie, à l'Eucharistie.

Un simple rideau sépare de l'autel la chambre où je travaille et où nous dormons (à une dizaine parfois!), ce qui rend chaque parole, chaque geste à la fois liturgique et sacrilège (question de point de vue). En général, le vendredi, le rideau s'ouvre et le rite se déroule en très grande simplicité, assis par terre; parfois, au second plan, deux ou trois enfants musulmans écoutent et regardent, sans demander jamais d'ailleurs de quoi il s'agit. "Célébration du

pauvre", dont il appartient à Dieu seul de comprendre et de donner le sens, qui ponctue l'Eucharistie quotidienne et (je l'espère au moins) s'y répercute...

Naïf que j'étais, fêtant mes soixante ans, d'imaginer entrer dans "la paix du soir", sorte d'immense célébration eucharistique, fervente et calme, préludant au festin du Royaume!...En fait de paix et de béatitude, nous sommes servis! Et je t'écris dans la "tranquillité", plutôt lourde, de mon bureau d'un lycée à peu près vide depuis trois jours...les élèves désertant les écoles.

Si encore célébration il y a, l'atmosphère en est plutôt celle de la Cène, lorsque, le Pain rompu, les convives sortirent en silence vers le Cédron. L'Evangile note qu'il faisait nuit...Et tout le monde, Jésus le premier, avait peur...

Mais, s'il y a l'Eucharistie de la lumière, l'Eucharistie des ténèbres existe aussi, complémentaire. Deux rites pour un même Pain partagé...

Reference: SPIRITUS, Expérience et Recherche Missionnaires, Septembre 1980, Tome XXI.

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Coming Events

4th December - 4.00 p.m. Sedos office: Executive Committee and Seminar Steering Committee meetings.

5th December - 5.30 - Farewell Party for Sr. Joan Delaney and Sr. Pia
8.00 p.m. Sedos office.

9th December - 8.00 - Prayer of Intercession for Sedos Mission Research
11.30 a.m. Seminar '81. All are welcome.

(Program: 8.00 - 9.00 a.m. Concelebrated Mass in St. Peter's Crypt.

9.30 - 11.30 a.m. Prayer continues in Borgo Santo Spirito 3A.

12th December - 4.00 p.m. Meeting of African members of International Religious Institutes at Borgo S. Spirito.

CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT FOR A NEW NICARAGUA

(In their joint pastoral letter dated November 17, 1979, the bishops of Nicaragua declared, "Our people fought bravely to defend their right to live with dignity in a peaceful and just society. This struggle has given profound significance to the activities conducted against a regime that violated and repressed human, personal and social rights. As in the past we denounced this situation as one that was contrary to the demands of the Gospel, so now we wish to reaffirm that we accept the profound motivation of this struggle for justice and for life." Following are excerpts from the three main sections of their pastoral letter.)

I. Christian Commitment

We believe that the present revolutionary moment is an opportune time to truly implement the Church's option for the poor. We must remember that no historical revolutionary event can exhaust the infinite possibilities for justice and absolute solidarity of the Kingdom of God. We must state that our commitment to the revolutionary process does not imply naivete, blind enthusiasm, or the creation of a new idol before which everyone must bow down unquestioningly. Dignity, responsibility and Christian freedom are essential attributes for active participation in the revolutionary process.

During this process, as in all other human undertakings, mistakes may be made and abuses may occur. Many Nicaraguans have certain concerns and fears. It is our pastoral duty to listen to the anxieties of the people whom we serve and discern the reasons behind these concerns. We must report those that are caused by abuse or negligence and we must make certain that concerns arising from a lack of material resources and current conditions are not used demagogically.

The government has created channels that we believe will increasingly become more useful for collecting complaints about the revolutionary process. This creates the need for a dialogue on some concerns that we have heard and that we think are important.

a) Although the policy followed by the authorities has been that of avoiding executions or mistreatment of prisoners and appealing to the people not to take justice into their own hands, abuses have still occurred. These distressing situations have been caused by some local leaders. Our task will be to give national authorities the evidence of such abuse that we have received, confident that they will know how to correct it as the possibilities for effective control and national integration increase.

b) There is much talk about the disorder and even administrative chaos of the country, but we must remember that we are living in a time of creativity and of transition and that reconstruction is everyone's work, not that of just certain sectors.

c) Insofar as the freedom of political parties is concerned, it seems to us that responsible, active participation by a majority of Nicaraguans in our current revolutionary process is most important and should occur through the existing organizations for direct popular democracy as well as through organizations that will be created out of national dialogue. Various forces have contributed generously to the historic process and no one should prevent their continued contribution. Leading all these forces, the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional has clearly earned a place in history. In order to strengthen that position the

Frente's principal task is to continue calling on the whole people to make their own history through strong participation by the many in the life of the nation. This requires absolute faithfulness to the community of poor people on the part of the present leaders so as to maintain unsullied the principles of justice and the name "Sandinista" earned in the struggle for freedom.

Socialism

The fear is expressed, at times with anguish, that the current process in Nicaragua is heading towards socialism. We bishops have been asked for our opinion on the matter.

If socialism, as some people imagine, becomes distorted, denying people and communities the right to decide their own destinies, and if it attempts to force people to submit blindly to the manipulation and dictates of individuals who have arbitrarily and unlawfully seized power, then we cannot accept a socialism which oversteps its limits and attempts to take away the individual's right to a religious motivation in his life or his right to express this motivation and his religious beliefs publicly, regardless of his faith.

Equally unacceptable would be a denial of parents' rights to educate their children according to their convictions, or a denial of any other right of the human person.

If, on the other hand, socialism means, as it should, that the interests of the majority of Nicaraguans are paramount and if it includes a model of an economic system planned with national interests in mind, that is in solidarity with and provides for increased participation by the people, we have no objections. Any social program that guarantees to use the country's wealth and resources for the common good, and that improves the quality of human life by satisfying the basic needs of all the people, seems to us to be a just program.

If socialism means that the injustice and traditional inequalities between the cities and the country, and between remuneration for intellectual and manual labor, will be progressively reduced, and if it means the participation of the worker in the fruit of his labor overcoming economic alienation, then there is nothing in Christianity that is at odds with this process. Indeed, Pope John Paul II has just drawn attention at the UN to the concern arising from the radical separation of labor and ownership.

If socialism implies that power is to be exercised by the majority and increasingly shared by the organized community so that power is actually transferred to the popular classes, then it should meet nothing in our Faith but encouragement and support.

If socialism leads to cultural processes that awaken the dignity of the masses and give them the courage to assume responsibility and demand their rights, then it promotes the same type of human dignity proclaimed by our Faith.

Insofar as the struggle between social classes is concerned, we think that a dynamic class struggle that produces a just transformation of the social structure is one thing, while class hatred directed against individuals is another matter which goes completely against the Christian duty to be guided by love.

Our Faith tells us of the urgent Christian responsibility to subdue the earth and to transform the land and all other means of production in order to allow people to live fully and make of Nicaragua a land of justice, solidarity, peace and freedom in which the Christian message of the Kingdom of God can take on its full meaning.

We are further confident that our revolutionary process will be something original, creative, truly Nicaraguan and in no sense imitative. For what we, together with most Nicaraguans seek, is a process that will result in a society completely and truly Nicaraguan, one that is neither capitalistic, nor dependent, nor totalitarian.

II. Evangelical Motivation

On various occasions in the past, we have sought to address the situation of our country in the light of the Gospel. More recently, on June 2, 1979, we proclaimed the right of the Nicaraguan people to engage in revolutionary insurrection. Each time, we have relied on fidelity to the Gospel and the traditional teaching of the Church.

Announcement of the Kingdom of God

The heart of Jesus' message is the announcement of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom founded on the Father's love for all mankind and in which the poor hold a special place. Jesus tells us that the kingdom means liberation and justice (Luke 4:16-20) because it is a kingdom of life.

Our need to build this kingdom is the basis for our accepting and participating in the current process, whose purpose is to ensure that all Nicaraguans truly live. Our faith in this God moves us to emphasize what we have always preached but which has now moved urgently to the fore. To believe in this God is to give life to others, to love them in truth and to do justice.

The particular life which God wants for Nicaraguans can only be achieved by radically overcoming the selfishness and casting aside the self-interest which have festered in our country for so many years and have, we must tragically recall, caused the deaths of our brothers and sisters. Each of us must be made to live a life of love and justice, to forget about ourselves and to consider what we can contribute.

Evangelical commitment

To announce the kingdom means that we have to bring it into our lives. On that effort, the authenticity of our faith in God is staked, establishing what the Holy Scriptures call "justice and right" for the poor. It is commitment which tests our faith in Christ, who gave His life to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

There is no life of faith unless there is witness to it, which is given in our acts. Only then can the announcement through the word be understood and confirmed. In our commitment to help the poor and to fight against social injustice, our faith becomes truly productive, for others as well as for ourselves. By acting as Christians, we become Christians. Without such solidarity, our announcement of the Good News is but an empty phrase.

An evangelical movement of liberation implies a commitment to the liberation of our people. In the words of the bishops at Puebla, "Confronted with the realities that are part of our lives today, we must learn from the Gospel that in Latin America we cannot truly love our fellow beings, and hence God, unless we commit ourselves on the personal level, and on the structural level as well" (327). After a long and patient wait, our people have committed themselves to the struggle for their full and total liberation.

Liberation in Jesus Christ

Liberation in Jesus Christ encompasses the various aspects of human existence, because God wants people to live and to live fully. He thus created humanity according to a plan in which our relationships with nature, with our fellows and with God are linked closely together.

First is the relationship with nature, whereby human beings can satisfy their most elemental needs. Harnessing it through a planned economy to the benefit of humankind forms the basis for a just society.

There is also the relationship between individuals in society, which must be marked by fellowship implying genuine brotherhood and effective participation by all in the society to which they belong. For us today, this must be primarily the work of justice for the oppressed and an effort to liberate those who need it most (Puebla 327).

Yet, liberation also signifies a relationship with God. As children who accept and live in the light of His freely given love, we are inextricably linked to nature and to society. When we reject our fellow man, we reject God Himself. The act of love for the poor and oppressed is an act of love for the Lord Himself (Matthew 25:31-46).

Complete liberation encompasses these three mutually inclusive aspects. In neglecting one of them, we diminish the rights and the potential of the human person. In accepting the free gift of the Father, we are committing ourselves to the struggle for justice and the establishment of brotherhood. This, in turn, acquires its full significance in the acknowledgement of the presence in history of God's liberating love.

Social commitment

The Kingdom of God, the heart of Christ's message, is at the same time a requirement for social commitment which incorporates a critical judgment of history and refuses to deny change. It is open to human creativity and to the outpouring of the Lord's grace.

The situation in our country today offers an exceptional opportunity for announcing and for bearing witness to God's Kingdom. If, through fear and mistrust, or through the insecurity of some in the face of any radical social change, or through the desire to defend personal interests, we neglect this crucial opportunity to commit ourselves to the poor, urged by both Pope John Paul II and the bishops at Puebla, we would be in serious violation of the Gospel's teachings.

This commitment implies the renunciation of old ways of thinking and behaving and the dramatic conversion of our Church. Indeed, the day when the Church fails to present the appearance of poverty and to act as the natural ally of the poor will be the day she has betrayed her divine creator and the coming of God's Kingdom. Never before has Nicaragua been faced with such an urgent need to persuasively confirm this commitment to the poor.

The poor of whom Jesus speaks and who surround Him are the truly poor, the hungry, the afflicted, the oppressed and all those for whom society has failed to provide a place. Through this solidarity with the poor Jesus proclaimed His Father's love for all humankind, was persecuted and died.

III. Today's Responsibility and Challenge

The revolution requires us to undergo a profound change of heart. It also demands austerity in our lives. As Christians aware of the Lord's exhortation to poverty, we must be the first to accept, joyfully and generously, this period of austerity. We are certain that it will lead to a more fully human and fraternal way of life.

In this way we will learn, as John Paul II has maintained repeatedly, that peoples' fulfillment and the satisfaction of needs are not predicated upon abundance and still less on consumerism. The human person rather finds fulfillment as an individual from the solidarity which enables each to satisfy basic material needs and to create a higher level of culture, to labor more productively and humanistically, and to achieve a peace more receptive each day to spiritual progress.

At the same time, we appeal for a halt to capital flight and for increased repatriation and reinvestment. We call for more equitable international trade practices and fairer conditions for renegotiating Nicaragua's foreign debt, in the certainty that this will help alleviate the shortages and prevent much human suffering.

Freedom in our apostolic mission

We Nicaraguan bishops want no special privileges for the Church other than the ability to accomplish her evangelical mission of humble but valued service to the people. To do so, the Church desires only "that broad area of freedom that will enable it to carry out its apostolic work without interference; that work includes the practice of cultic worship, education in the faith, and the fostering of those many and varied activities that lead the faithful to implement the moral imperatives deriving from the faith in their private, family and social life"(Puebla 144).

The People of God must become revitalized through the basic Christian communities which create a growing sense of fellowship. The Church must learn and teach others to see things from the perspective of the poor, whose cause is that of Christ. By adopting the cause of all Nicaraguans as her own, the Church believes that she will be able to make an important contribution to the process which the country is now experiencing.

Reference: WORLD PARISH, Volume 20, Number 179, March 1980.

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Popular Missions

On the 6th of December when Pope John Paul II received the members of the General Council of the Redemptorists, whose special apostolate is the preaching of popular missions, the Holy Father exhorted them to give a new impetus to traditional missions, "which, when conducted in accordance with an adaptation conformable to the modern mentality, is an irreplaceable instrument for a periodic and vigorous renewal of Christian life". "St. Alphonsus, said the Pope, attached great importance to popular missions".

Reference: CHRIST TO THE WORLD, N.5, Sept-Oct. 1980 Vol.XXV.

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AN ECHO FROM MELBOURNE

Simon Barrington-Ward

(How often the Church fails to shine with that joyous freedom that is unconfined by weight of wealth or of institution. The division between rich and poor in the world grows deeper and our Churches often reflect that division to a tragic degree. Simon Barrington-Ward was at the recent Conferences in Melbourne and Pattaya. In this extract from that part of his Newsletter dealing with Melbourne, we catch a breath of the Spirit calling us continually in question. Ed).

A division between rich and poor runs right through the world Church--a division that would have amazed that vulnerable little flock whom Jesus, departing, prayed for and committed to his Father.

At Melbourne, Australia, last May I attended a meeting of the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. Gazing around the conference hall I was made sharply conscious of this contrast. Of the 600 faces about me the great majority came from areas in Africa, Asia and Latin America where hunger, pain and oppression have their roots in poverty. Near me were others from relatively wealthier countries which yet also suffer under oppressive regimes. There were Presbyterians from Korea and Taiwan, some of whose fellow-churchmen are in prison for their faithful witness, on behalf of ordinary people, for justice. Not far away was a young Baptist pastor from El Salvador who had been a member of the same ecumenical bible-study group as the murdered Archbishop Romero. As we talked, he revealed in a quiet, matter-of-fact way, that he might well be shot within the next year. Ahead of me was a veritable 'hatscape' of different Orthodox headgear. Some of their owners were constant reminders of Churches once powerful but now being refined by persecution and experiencing even in Russia the stirrings of spiritual renewal.

It was moving as all the voices soared up in the sung prayer "Your kingdom come, O God", which was itself the theme of the conference. But soon we were to hear less harmonious voices. They reminded us that we are entering the angry eighties, and the division between the rich and the poor that runs through our whole world opened up between us there at Melbourne. They were voices we would often rather not hear, voices of fierce indignation, cries of pain, anger and frustration, voices that spoke for the poor.

Increasingly we found ourselves in the grip of a deadlock in which the more that westerners strove to respond, the more they seemed to be distracted from those whose voices addressed them so bitinglly from a pit of desperation.

The keynote had been struck right from the outset in the biblical exposition given by Dr. Ernst Kasemann, the theologian of the conference. He re-interpreted with an apocalyptic fervour the battle of God's kingdom against the powers of evil. He set our whole study of the kingdom within the conflict of heaven and hell, the struggle of the kingdom of Israel with idols, the resistance of the saints of the Most High with the great beasts that rose out of the sea (Daniel), and the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus as a resistance movement against the demonic powers. Here he was, as it were, re-mythologising, seeing the demons as world-wide repressive economic and political structures, as western manipulation, as multi-national companies, as reactionary militarism.

He knew the evil of which he spoke: three years previously, to the very month and week, his own daughter who had been working among the poor in Argentina, had disappeared, later to be found murdered--it was presumed by the ruthless forces of oppression.

This was the language that set the tone for all that followed. The theme of the kingdom lent itself to a number of Latin-Americans who had come hotfoot from scenes of violent oppression and slaughter and danger, Simply to be there with us, some of them had laid their life and liberty on the line.

Gospel with a vengeance

As the anger seemed to mount in all the main sections, the topics shifted. The very subjects for at least three of the sections perhaps fuelled the fires: Good News to the poor, The Kingdom of God and this world's struggles. The Crucified Christ engages human power. In all these we seemed almost to lose sight of the Good News in our preoccupation with the bad news to the rich and powerful; to lose sight of the kingdom as we became immersed in this world's struggles; to lose sight of the crucified Christ as we grappled all too humanly with human power. We were faced with a picture of a world possessed....

In one small group, a Filipino member described the patronising attempt of a white assistant in a charity office to thrust upon her a coat that was manifestly not right for her. As she spoke, she began to weep, and this stung me, sparking off in my mind a kind of flashback of all the times when I had been patronising to those of other races, bringing home to me all the ways in which such hurtful 'superiority' is built into our whole western culture. Tears sprang to my eyes in answer to hers.

At the end, in our groups as (I believe) in others, came a final reconciliation which was genuine and deeply moving. The most intransigent melted a little and went to meet the others. There was a real humbling and mutual discovery that "what we need in the Church is a redistribution of pain". And a special moment for me came in the final period of worship when the Filipino woman met me and, taking my hand, said: "You have helped me; I now feel differently about it all."

At certain moments in our worship, too, the repeated refrain "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" became almost a singing in tongues, and the noble Orthodox liturgy caught us all up. But still there was always as yet an uncertainty, a lack of unity, as if we were still locked in our different bonds, uncertain of how to be loosed.

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Reference: CMS Newsletter, No. 436, October 1980.