



December 15, 1980

Did John the Baptist begin to doubt in Herod's prison, to wonder whether, perhaps, he had made a mistake about Jesus? What he heard of the doings and sayings of Jesus was so different from his own trenchant call to penance before the coming of the Messiah. Was this Jesus really the Messiah, the one who was to come?

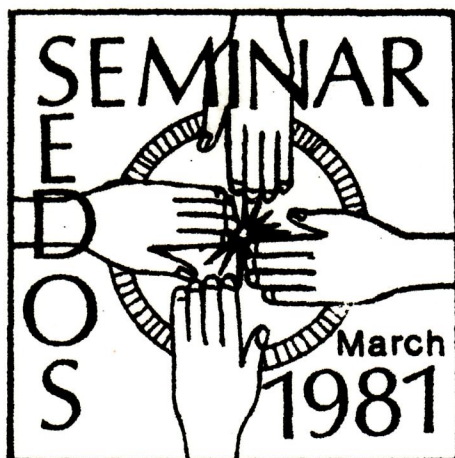
"Tell John, what you have seen and heard: the blind see again...the Good News is proclaimed to the poor, and happy is the one who does not lose faith in me".

Celebrating the birth of the Messiah we think of those in prison today, those who are suffering injustice and poverty for whom the words of the Gospel may be a consoling strength and we recognize also the possibility of doubt. Does he really still live and is his message really heard?

The senseless death of John long ago in Herod's prison is re-enacted today, maybe in the lives of those who are dear to us. John's belief in Jesus, that he really was there in the world of Herod surely sustained him in the last ugly hour of his prison life. May the Good News of Jesus and his living presence sustain all of us and may he in a special way sustain the hope and faith of those who are suffering injustice at this time of Christmas.

In this issue: There are two original articles dealing with development in this issue; one, a personal record of 'failure' leading the writer to a radical conclusion, the other presenting an overview of the difficulties inherent in applying the northern hemisphere concept of development to countries of the southern hemisphere. And there is an interesting account of the growth of monasticism in Africa.

To all our readers at this Christmas tide we send our good wishes for peace and joy.



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VINGT ANNEES DE DEVELOPPEMENT AU BANGLADESH

(Fr. Ferrari, President of Sedos, has made this article available to us following his recent visit to Bangladesh. The author, is well known to him. The article is a 'cri de coeur' from one who has contended for many years with the frustrations of development work and has discovered its shortcomings by the "via negativa". Is his conclusion the only valid one? Ed).

On discute souvent théoriquement des conséquences possibles de "nouvelles voies" de développement alors qu'elles ont été déjà essayées dans de nombreux pays du Tiers-Monde. Dans ces quelques pages je ne veux que livrer l'expérience acquise par des hommes ayant vécu et travaillé de nombreuses années au Bangladesh, raconter succès et échecs réellement arrivés.

Les projets qui ne marchent pas.

Le "relief", ou aide caritative.

"Qui me donne quelque chose sans rien me demander en échange est un imbécile ou un filou". Que cette philosophie soit vraie ou fausse peu importe, celui qui vit au Bangladesh doit la connaître car tout se passe comme si elle était vraie.

La première fois de ma vie que j'ai dû donner quelque chose sans rien demander fut après une de ces tornades qui détruisent périodiquement la moitié des huttes là où je dirigeais une école primaire fondée par mon organisation. Je venais à peine de sortir de l'école de bengali et j'étais le volontaire le plus innocent qui ait jamais mis les pieds au Bangladesh (alors Pakistan de l'Est). On me demanda de visiter la région pour décider qui méritait d'être aidé à refaire sa hutte. J'y allai innocemment et me trompai dans la moitié des cas. Mais ce dont j'ai honte encore aujourd'hui quand j'y repense, est d'avoir, la seule fois de ma vie, failli à mon principe: ne jamais donner sans demander.

Il ne me fallut pas six mois pour comprendre combien inutile et nuisible avait été mon travail. Les tôles des huttes avaient été vendues et remplacées par le chaume ordinaire. Tout début de coopération entre les gens des villages, comme par exemple les fonds collectifs de détresse, avait disparu presque partout. L'année suivante, quand une autre tornade ravagea les mêmes huttes, les derniers à se remuer pour les reconstruire, et les seuls à ne pas s'entraider, furent les villageois que j'avais aidés l'année précédente.

J'ai pu découvrir les autres désavantages de l'aide gratuite aux sinistrés ou aux pauvres en général, grâce à d'autres volontaires qui avaient fait ce travail sur une plus grande échelle. A cause du choix qu'on a du faire entre les pauvres l'inimitié et la jalousie augmentent parmi eux; les gens aisés qui n'ont pas reçu d'aide deviennent les ennemis des volontaires et commencent à les calomnier, rendant impossible tout travail ultérieur dans le village, parfois ils organisent des vols et même des assassinats. Je parle de choses qui sont arrivées.

Les projets communautaires.

Ce type d'aide plus rationnel devint à la mode dès qu'on eut compris que le "relief" était nuisible. Par projets communautaires je veux dire: routes, hôpitaux, dispensaires, pompes d'irrigation, canaux, bassins, courant électrique, etc.

J'ai participé à la direction d'un dispensaire dans mes temps libres de l'école. Les dispensaires et les hopitaux marchent bien et sont utiles aux pauvres tant que ce sont des étrangers qui les dirigent et qu'ils reçoivent des médicaments gratuitement ou presque. Dès que les médicaments se raréfient et que le directeur cherche un moyen de conserver l'institution dans l'avenir indépendamment de l'aide étrangère, le dispensaire devient une salle de consultation ordinaire pour ceux qui ont de l'argent, travail que les Bengalis savent mener mieux que nous, avec la seule différence que les médecins se font payer cher. De toutes façons le tort aux pauvres n'est pas bien grand, car ils ne vont pratiquement plus au dispensaire.

Quoi qu'il en soit le dispensaire dont je fus directeur à temps perdu eut un effet incontestable sur la région: les gens commencèrent à dépendre des médicaments étrangers les croyant bien meilleurs alors qu'ils ne sont que plus chers.

Il y a bien un travail dans le domaine médical qui vaudrait la peine d'être entrepris, travail qui ne coûte pas cher et rapporte beaucoup: la prévention. Mais la réussite d'une telle propagande dépend de la machine gouvernementale, laquelle ne s'intéresse pas eux pauvres. Essayer de commencer un tel mouvement sans que le gouvernement n'y ait aucun intérêt, et donc sans la collaboration des fonctionnaires, est comme essayer de faire le tour du monde à pied. En fait c'est un mouvement qui n'a réussi qu'en Chine.

Il y a une autre activité dans laquelle je crois et que j'ai essayé de démarrer dans les villages avec très peu d'argent: l'artisanat à la maison, comme les fabriques de cigarettes locales, le travail du jute, le tissage, la fabrication de nattes pour le marché local ou pour l'exportation. J'ai démarré moi-même toutes ces activités, ou les ai vues démarrées par d'autres plus experts que moi, et je les ai toutes vues mourir pour les raisons suivantes:

1. - manque d'un marché suffisant dans la région, ce qui obligeait à transporter sur des marchés éloignés, augmentant les frais. A cause de cela, seule une grosse entreprise qui a ses propres moyens de transport, la licence gouvernementale, la possibilité, de payer la police à chaque infraction (vraie ou supposée) aux lois, réussit à résister. Mais cela implique de mettre en jeu un capital important, avec ses conséquences d'exploitation des travailleurs, non défendus par aucune loi, surtout dans les villages.

2. - il n'existe aucun produit pour lequel il y ait un marché suffisant au Bangladesh, à part le riz. Tant que les pauvres n'auront pas à manger ils n'achèteront pas le reste. Tout travail de développement au Bangladesh doit commencer par un programme qui donne à manger aux pauvres des villages. Tout le reste est secondaire et en dépend.

Nous comprimes très vite cette vérité, et les actions suivantes tendirent principalement à augmenter la production agricole, comme y encourageait le gouvernement. Ce fut la période des pompes d'irrigation et du riz IRRI.

Un cas d'essai: Je n'ai pas beaucoup travaillé moi-même dans ce domaine, mais j'ai vécu deux ans là où un de mes amis a démarré et dirigé ce travail pendant cinq ans avec un dévouement sans égal et des moyens financiers considérables, et aussi une grande compétence. Le but était d'empêcher la désintégration d'un village de petits paysans acculés à s'endotter, à vendre leur petite parcelle et aller en ville, ou à mourir de faim. Si quelqu'un pouvait réussir à changer le sort du village, c'était lui.

De fait le village connu pendant trois ans des niveaux de production jamais vus dans le passé. Mais ni lui ni les autres n'avaient escompté les effets secondaires des années suivantes: le prix des terres proches des pompes doubla subitement, les quelques riches essayèrent par tous les moyens d'acheter la terre, d'un autre côté tout poussait les pauvres à vendre: après avoir remboursé les dépenses d'irrigation, les engrais, les insecticides leur gain n'était qu'apparent et diminuait d'année en année alors que le prix de l'essence pour les pompes, et des engrais augmentait et que la production diminuait du fait de l'épuisement des sols.

Dix ans après le début du projet, en dépit de toutes les tentatives de redressement, les pompes ne fonctionnent qu'au cinquième de leur capacité et les pauvres n'y ont rien gagné. Les riches ont agrandi leurs terres. L'investissement n'a jamais été remboursé. Tous les projets gouvernementaux du même genre ont connu le même sort, ou pire. Je ne parle pas de la dépendance aux engrais et aux insecticides, de la diminution du poisson dans les champs de riz qui était une des rares ressources des pauvres, et a maintenant disparu.

L'enseignement

Ma formation d'enseignant me poussa à croire que le manque d'instruction était une des raisons principales de la pauvreté au Bangladesh. Il est vrai qu'ici les illétrés sont presque toujours pauvres et que les pauvres sont presque toujours illétrés. Mais comme, contrairement aux statistiques officielles, pas plus de cinq pour cent des gens peuvent réellement lire et écrire, le fait que les illétrés sont pauvres ne signifie rien.

Mais il y a vingt ans personne ne doutait que la scolarisation soit un avantage pour les pauvres et une des composantes du développement d'un peuple. On ne doutait pas non plus que si on veut modifier les attitudes des villageois et les préparer au changement et au progrès, le moyen le plus direct est d'éduquer les enfants qui une fois adultes apporteront avec les mentalités nouvelles le progrès humain et social.

Une expérience avec des écoles: C'est avec ces idées et une passion d'amoureux que je créai et dirigeai cinq écoles primaires et secondaires de village. Ces écoles furent citées en exemple, elles avaient de meilleures résultats aux examens que les autres; des enfants qui ne seraient jamais allés à l'école eurent la possibilité d'apprendre à lire; quelques autres purent aller jusqu'au collège...et maintenant sont presque tous établis en ville avec un salaire bien supérieur à la moyenne, mais de façon générale ce sont des fils de familles aisées, qui seraient arrivés à la même position sans moi. Les pauvres sont restés en route, au début ou à mi-chemin.

Les villages que j'avais espéré faire progresser grâce à l'école n'y ont rien gagné. S'il y a eu quelque part changement de mentalités ce n'est pas grâce aux enfants mais par les adultes qui se rendent en ville. Et l'idée qu'ils en rapportent est que contrairement au village, en ville on peut aller au cinéma tous les jours...

Les raisons de l'échec: On crut aussi qu'une autre raison expliquait la faillite de l'école traditionnelle: les programmes semblaient faits pour préparer à des emplois de bureau au lieu d'aider la modernisation et le développement technique. C'est pourquoi nous créâmes trois écoles techniques, parmi les meilleures au Bangladesh. Après les avoir fait fonctionner à grande frais pendant dix à quinze ans, les organismes essaient à présent de les remettre au gouvernement. Qui n'est pas facile, car le gouvernement sait qu'elles sont une lourde charge. En fait nous avons du reconnaître qu'au moment de créer ces écoles nous avons mésestimé d'importants facteurs:

1. - Une école technique est dans la plupart des cas destinée à aider les villes, et nous savions qu'au Bangladesh aucun développement n'est possible, qui ne parte pas des villages. (Les écoles formaient des mécaniciens, électriciens, tourneurs...)

2. - Le Bangladesh a déjà atteint un niveau de développement technique supérieur à son potentiel économique et à la quantité de pétrole qu'il peut se permettre d'importer. Il y a vingt ans tous les transports de marchandises se faisaient par bateau à voile et à rame, sans essence. Aujourd'hui des camions les ont remplacés. On a introduit les tracteurs, complètement inutiles pour ne pas parler des appareils à air conditionné et autres équipements de luxe.

3. - Le Bangladesh a trop de gens pour lesquels développement technique veut dire perdre leur travail au profit de quelques privilégiés pouvant se payer les gadgets économiseur de main d'oeuvre. Combien de paysans, tisserands, femmes, sont sans travail à cause des tracteurs, métiers à tisser électriques, machines à décortiquer le riz...

4. - Former un mécanicien dans une école technique coûte au moins dix fois plus que la formation traditionnelle sur le tas. Ici tout mécanicien travaille avec un jeune apprenti qui se forme par la pratique en deux ou trois ans. Au contraire nous avons construit une grande école, l'avons dotés d'un équipement valant des millions de dollars, avons scolarisé des jeunes pendant trois ans, allant jusqu'à payer leurs frais de nourriture pour les plus pauvres...avec à peu près le même résultat, sauf que nos diplômés ne trouvent pas facilement du travail, en concurrence avec les apprentis déjà placés chez un patron.

Pour toutes ces raisons nous découvrîmes que les écoles techniques n'étaient pas la solution et nous eurent à repenser le problème.

L'éducation des Adultes

Petit à petit une idée devint claire pour moi et pour beaucoup d'autres: on ne transforme pas un village en instruisant ses enfants, mais ses adultes. Se fut l'époque où l'Université d'Etudes Sociales d'Antigonish au Canada commença à former pour le Tiers-Monde des dizaines et des dizaines de diplômés de la nouvelle doctrine de l'enseignement des adultes, des coopératives et des "credit union" (fonds d'épargne et de prêt).

Credit Unions: J'ai assisté à la naissance et à la mort de quatre Credit Union.

La grande idée est que la coopération est à la base de tout progrès humain, et que grâce à elle on parvient tôt ou tard à la prospérité. L'idée de coopération villageoise implique qu'il existe dans tout village une communauté, mais qu'elle n'a pas encore appris à travailler et à épargner ensemble, ce que nous allons lui enseigner. Les Credit Union que j'ai vu ou fait naître moururent de la façon suivante:

Les pauvres étaient peu intéressés parce que pour avoir des prêts ils devaient d'abord être capables d'épargner, ce qui était trop difficile pour eux, C'est pourquoi les réunions étaient peu fréquentées et l'idée d'un apprentissage à la coopération resta sur le papier. Même là où les gens se réunissaient les pauvres normalement ne pouvaient pas contribuer régulièrement au fonds commun et donc ne participaient pas. Les seuls à bénéficier de ces Credit Union furent les gens de la classe moyenne, c'est-à-dire ceux qui n'avaient besoin ni de moi ni du Credit Union.

La durée moyenne de ces Credit Union était d'un an ou deux, le temps nécessaire pour comprendre que les problèmes des pauvres ne sont pas résolus avec un prêt, et que toute activité entreprise avec le fonds commun ne produit jamais de quoi augmenter de façon significative le revenu quotidien de chaque membre. Je ne parle pas des cas très fréquents où les responsables de ces coopératives, choisis par les membres parmi les plus instruits et les plus habiles, utilisent pour eux le peu d'argent accumulé et ne se font plus voir.

Coopératives: En tout cas, parmi les nombreuses coopératives que j'ai vues ou dont j'ai entendu parler, on n'en trouve pas une seule dont les membres disent que grâce à elle les pauvres sont devenus moins pauvres. L'unique avantage qu'ils mentionnent parfois est que dans des moments difficiles elle les a aidés, mais leur problème quotidien est resté le même: qui mangeait une fois par jour avant continue de manger une fois par jour. Alors?...

Quels sont les résultats?: Il y en eut qui tentèrent de résoudre le problème en donnant de l'extérieur des prêts à des coopératives déjà formées. Les résultats furent de deux types:

1. - Les gens créaient la coopérative dans le but d'avoir le prêt et avec la quasi certitude de ne pas rembourser. Arrive alors ce qui devait arriver; les plus malins se divisent l'argent et tout finit là.

2. - La coopérative était réelle et fonctionnait depuis un certain temps, mais sans aucun profit pour les pauvres. Dans un quart des cas le prêt donna une nouvelle vie à la coopérative. Utilisé pour faire du commerce il fut remboursé l'année suivante après avoir permis un petit gain. Un mois après ils redemandaient le prêt. Dans les trois quart des cas le prêt détruisit la coopérative: les membres cessèrent d'épargner et ne surent pas gérer l'argent reçu dans leur hâte de devenir riches tout de suite, ailleurs les responsables ne résistèrent pas à la tentation...

En tout cas, parmi les dizaines de coopératives créées dans le but d'aider les pauvres à résoudre leur problème du riz quotidien, je n'en connais pas une seule pour laquelle un prêt ait été bénéfique. On dirait que les pauvres et les prêts ne vont pas ensemble. Quoi qu'il en soit, aucun prêt n'a jamais aidé un vrai pauvre à devenir moins pauvre, au moins au Bangladesh.

Conclusion

La mobilisation sociale des pauvres.

Même si on continue à faire des coopératives et des Credit Union au Bangladesh, petit à petit une autre idée s'est fait jour chez quelques uns d'entre nous. L'idée n'était pas neuve, elle était même si vieille que des gens de 70 ans me l'avaient répétée de nombreuses fois quand je leur avais demandé ce que je pouvais faire pour aider le pays. Leur réponse avait été claire et précise: donnez-nous la terre et le problème est résolu. Tout le reste est inutile. En d'autres termes ils voulaient dire:

Là où les pauvres n'ont en main ni le pouvoir ni les moyens de production et là où les privilèges des riches sont complètement liés à l'exploitation des pauvres, parler de coopération est une mauvaise plaisanterie. Il faut d'abord parler de lutte pour la justice. C'est ainsi que depuis lors on parle en termes plus ou moins voilés de réveiller les pauvres, de les réunir, de leur donner le courage de lutter pour obtenir le droit de vivre de façon humaine.

Depuis, les plus conscients des étrangers engagés ici ont commencé à travailler sous différents noms et différents prétextes dans le but de réveiller les pauvres pour obtenir une structure juste, c'est à dire pour changer le pouvoir des riches contre pouvoir des pauvres, ou mieux, de la majorité.

De jour en jour ce travail est devenu plus clairement politique et donc de plus en plus impossible pour les étrangers qui ne sont censés collaborer avec le gouvernement et la structure sociale du pays et seront expulsés dès qu'on aura découvert qu'ils luttent contre cette structure.

Le travail que nous faisons est même illégal, parce que nous recevons de l'argent sans passer par la filière du gouvernement et parce que au lieu de faire le travail que nous déclarons (alphabétisation, écoles...), nous en faisons un tout différent. Tôt ou tard nous serons expulsés.

- fin -

HUMAN LIFE AND DEVELOPMENT

AN OVERVIEW ON DEVELOPMENT

Robert D. Luckhart, omi

(The concept of development and its close relationship with culture is examined in this article which was presented in January 1980 at a Colloquium on Human Life and Development, in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The writer had in mind, the situation in South Asia but his reflections and conclusions are applicable to Africa, South America and other parts of Asia. Ed).

Presuppositions: This paper will proceed on the basis of three assumptions. Other assumptions will necessarily appear in the course of the paper, but these three underly it.

First, no acceptable definition of development is possible at the present time, nor is the effort to find such a definition worthwhile. The general and vague notion of improvement is adequate as a starting point.

Secondly, no single factor can be isolated as being uniquely decisive in bringing about our present situation or condition, and no single factor will be uniquely decisive in bringing about future development.

Thirdly - and this is related to the second assumption - development is best approached by situating it as a human process in a human context. The "overview" of the title points to this very broad and general context.

A self-imposed limitation can also be pointed out now, though other limitations will also become evident. Generally speaking the development with which the paper is concerned is development which is in some way conscious, planned, controlled. Consequently, the role of revolutionists, prophets, extraordinary religious leaders, and such like will not be dwelt on. Such men tend to appear on the scene quite unexpectedly; they cannot be predicted or foreseen. Nonetheless, their influence may be much greater in the long run than that of all the planners and developers.

Comprehensive Approach

Human situation: To approach development in a comprehensive way as a human process and problem in a human context is to recognize that it has all the dimensions of the human situation: physical, geographical, historical, cultural, emotional, intellectual, rational, philosophical, religious - the list could easily be extended. It is crucial at the outset to acknowledge it as a fully human affair, with no dimension of the human lacking in relevance. To see it in this way is to see its immensity. To fail to see it in this way - for example, to see it as a purely technical or scientific or economic matter, or simply as a question of more efficient planning or more money - is to fail to see it in its totality. And to fail to see it in its totality is to risk failure in achieving one's goals. And as we know, failure in this field easily leads to an increase in frustration, disappointment, disillumment and unrest. The arousal of unrealistic expectations creates a new set of problems when such expectations are not realized.

Experience and imagination: In turning our attention now to some of these dimensions it is well to remind ourselves that understanding comes from reflection on life as it is lived, that is on experience, on history, on what has happened and on what is. Experience is the starting point and ought never be left far behind. It is also the point to which return must be made. The life of real men and women ought never be far from our minds - men and women as they are, not as we would like them to be. It is true that it is a dangerous enterprise to impose on reality, to force on it our own understanding. Men have always dreamed dreams, but when they have tried to force their dreams to come true the result has usually been disaster - at times disaster only for the dreamer himself but often enough disaster for whole societies, and even for the whole world. Reflection must stay close to experience, to observation.

At the same time our understanding is not entirely a matter of reason: it can be greatly helped by imagination. The poet, the artist, and the novelist can be of immense value in helping us understand and interpret the world and the society we live in. In the realm of science and of philosophy, imagination also plays a leading role. Very often a turning point has come when someone has seen existing data and information in a new way. Discoveries, even in science, are as much a matter of putting known facts together in a new way as of finding out new facts, or of gathering more information. That is true in both the hard and soft sciences. There are people today who feel that our present-day problems are awaiting a creative thinker like Newton or Einstein for a solution - someone who will see something no one saw before and show us a whole new set of relationships. Those who feel this way seem convinced that the accumulation of data alone will not lead us very far. Creative imagination is called for.

The world we live in: One of the fundamental dimensions of our human world is constituted by the natural world we live in: its climate, topography, location, natural resources, and such like. These must be taken into consideration at every level, from the most local to the global. Limitations and possibilities begin here, and this world must be thoroughly explored. Though we are now able to control this world and to harness its energies to some extent, it remains a given, not of our making and so not fully under our control. It lays constraints on us, and has always to be taken into account and balances maintained.

History: In this area, as well as all others, it is plain that history is to a great extent a record of unforeseen and unintended consequences. We are grappling today with problems created in part by the actions of previous generations. Not because they acted with ill-will or malice, but simply because they did not or could not foresee what the consequences of their actions would be. Similarly, we will leave those who come after us with a set of problems created by

our own seemingly good actions. Who can say what these problems might be? If we knew what they were we would take steps to avoid them. By definition we cannot foresee them. In history, actions seldom have the results intended and always have results unintended. Here, then, is a first set of limitations: nature is limited, and it puts constraints on us; though it can be controlled to some extent, it cannot be bent any way we wish. And only time will tell what the results of our decisions will be. Our relationship with nature is complex, ambiguous and fragile.

A human process: Development is not limited to the natural world. It is a human process, carried out by men for men. It is man-made, it takes place in a human context, and it is subject to all the questioning men do about human affairs. It is subject to the limitations that come from the human environment, which is shaped largely by history and culture.

Experience reveals to us that each person has his own history which has shaped him, and shaped him in such a way that he cannot ignore it or shake it off, even if he wanted to. He cannot become someone quite other or something quite different just by trying. Moreover, very little of what he is, has he deliberately chosen to be; he has simply grown into it. So it is with families, groups, societies, nations. They have their history, by which they are what they are. The Italians are not Germans, nor could they be even if they wished. Chinese ways will not suit the English. Even systems of government and other institutions normally grow out of a situation. Each nation grows into a particular form of government, and though a form of government may be imposed, if does not find sympathy with the people, as a form, it will not last or it will not be good. It will remain imposed, foreign.

Significance of Culture

Each society has its culture, linked with its history, and that culture is not irrelevant to development, because development takes place in a cultural context, it modifies culture, and culture to a great extent modifies, and even controls, development. Development is a social phenomenon, whether it is perceived as such or not.

But culture is a complex affair. Its foundation, it would seem, is a set of values which in the early stages of history are simply there: in the ways of doing things, in the traditions, legends, stories, myths, rituals, superstitions, religion (s), institutions. Little by little they become more explicit, more conscious. They take a firmer shape, are given a name and become the object of reflection and discussion; and as they become more explicit philosophy takes them up. Eventually, the values are discussed, examined, criticized, challenged, defended, rejected, embraced. Such at least is the history of western thought and civilization, with its Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman roots.

This culture expresses itself in various ways; in laws, government, institutions, literature, art, traditions, norms, and customs. These too gradually pass from being just there to becoming explicit, conscious, and matters for discussion and choice. But here, as elsewhere, choices are generally made because they have to be made, under the pressure of circumstances. Parliamentary democracy truly emerged in England, it came to be; it was not planned long beforehand.

Political science: The sciences, too, emerged. They began as an attempt to understand how things are and how they work. The social sciences, too, were an attempt to understand man and society. Nature and society were already there, they pre-existed any effort to understand them. Gradually, understanding was seen as providing the possibility of controlling and changing,

and that is now considered an important function of science. But it is good to remind ourselves - particularly today, when so much thought is given to change - that government, for example, is not the creation of political scientists, but something which they study; just as water boiling at 100° C is something which the physicist observes and studies, not something which happens because physicists decreed that water should boil at that temperature. These are sober reminders for all engaged in development, or change; history and culture are already there.

Non-rational factors: In the world we know, it is obvious that men are motivated not only by explicit values and ideas. There are any number of non-rational factors at work in society, not to speak of the irrational and anti-rational. There are longings, yearnings, desires, drives, instincts and impulses, as well as thoughts, beliefs, information, knowledge and understanding. There are the stories men pass on from generation to generation, the myths they believe, the hopes they have, the rituals they take part in, the songs they sing, the games they play, and so on - a long list could be made. All these are part of the human scene. But not all that is human is thereby healthy and helpful. Men are capable of hatred, revenge, cruelty, fighting; they - that is, we - are capable of generating ideas that inflame, divide, create conflict, destroy. They can be blind, stupid, selfish, lazy. To so define the human condition as to leave these out is a serious error.

An integral part of the development problem is what men are - what history and experience have shown them to be. Yet we still find intelligent people proposing solutions which are based on leaving out of account this fact. We have the means of overcoming our difficulties, they say; what we lack is the will to do so; we are too selfish, too lazy, too unconcerned, or whatever. But is that not precisely the problem? We would have a peaceful world if all men were peaceful, a just society if all men were just, and so on. But how can we achieve or maintain peace when men are not peaceful? How can we have justice when men are not just? These are the questions - and they must be put in this form; otherwise we are evading the issue. Here again, we face limits and constraints on what we can do.

Culture and society: The culture of a society is embedded in society, and has considerable force. It cannot be ignored, though within limits it can be changed. But once again history and experience show that neither force nor exhortation is very likely to make much difference, at least not quickly. If we are unable to change ourselves into the person we would like to be, and unable to make other people into the kind of persons we would like them to be, by what magic can we change whole societies, made up of millions of people? And history shows, too, that policies which are aimed at making people good usually end up, if they are backed by power, in some form of totalitarianism; for in the end, the whole man must be managed. Cultures, of course, do change; in fact they must change, if they are to live. Properly understood and respected, they offer immense possibilities for development. Though culture is much more than a constraint, nevertheless it is a constraint and it conditions development.

Concept of Development

Of at least equal importance for an understanding of the relationship between development and culture is the fact that the concept of development is itself a cultural product. That is, "development" is first of all an idea, a mental construction, a way of looking at the world, an interpretation of it. It is not a law in nature but an idea and an ideal, closely linked with the ideas of progress and perfection.

Idea of progress: The idea of progress emerged in Europe (particularly in France) some two hundred and fifty years ago. Men looked back and saw that especially in the area of science their knowledge was superior to that of the

"ancients". There was nothing particularly new in this; what was new was the idea that mankind was now on the road to ever-increasing improvement. That is, these writers and thinkers looked back and then looked ahead, and the idea of progress was born. History was seen as linear, not cyclic. This idea caught on, and spread - an excellent example of the power of an idea. It eventually became a very important part of western culture. But it was - and is - an idea; an idea which had a beginning and has a history. It emerged from a culture and became part of that same culture. When such ideas last they are eventually taken for granted and are hardly questioned; in fact they are hardly noticed, except by some academics. And development is an offshoot of this idea of progress and its twin, perfection.

No sooner was the idea born than a host of practical questions arose: philosophical, ethical and religious questions. Questions about history, about destiny, about goals and means. Clearly, once the issue of improvement is raised, people start asking what improvement is, who will show the way, what is the way, what kind of society is a better society. So a great debate began, and it is still going on. Progress itself is no longer the issue, but: who is the person, which is the ideology or the party that will give us a better world? What kind of world is a "better" world? The development debate is part of that debate.

"Progress" and the West: This debate began in the western world, it emerged from western culture, it grew from certain basic values and assumptions of that world, and it was carried on in that world: a Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, Renaissance and Enlightenment world. Many events, especially of this century, have affected it, just as the events of recent years and months will also play their part in it. But it goes on, in some ways becoming fiercer. In such a climate it is impossible to maintain that development is no more than a question of science and technology. The moral or ethical dimension of development keeps raising its head.

In western society and culture there has been a long tradition of debate and discussion about ideas and values and - until recently - a broad consensus as to what those values are. The debate about politics, economics and development has, to a great extent, been about how to preserve and strengthen those values, not about the values themselves, which were considered beyond political and economic issues. There has been a strong conviction that prosperity and good government are helps, that they enable life to be lived, but that they do not tell us anything about the purpose of life or show us how to live.

Some values of western culture: For the purpose of this paper only some of the values embedded in the western cultural tradition need to be mentioned:

- belief in the autonomy of reason, and in the pursuit of ideas;
- belief in the uniqueness of the individual, born with inalienable rights;
- belief in the binding nature of freely-entered-into communities (as distinct from the family);
- belief in the need to protect the individual from the claims of the community by laws;
- belief in the value of work, as giving meaning to life;
- belief in the importance of material security.

Ideas such as these - others could be added - have been influential in western culture, and development has been measured by its ability to help or hinder these values. (It is worth noting that today, especially in the U.S.A., what has been called an "adversary culture" has emerged, spread to a great extent by the academic community, and at odds with the traditional values.)

"Development" a western idea: Considerable space has been given in these last paragraphs to insistence on the fact that development is historically a western idea, emerging from western culture because of factors which favoured its emergence, and becoming part of western culture. This insistence has been for a purpose: to raise the question of development and man in Asia. The line of thought followed from the beginning of this paper has been that development and culture are closely linked. The question must now be asked whether or not the idea which we have in Asia of progress and development is in fact a western cultural concept operating in an eastern culture. It seems to be such, but a full answer to the question cannot be attempted here. Still, the question cannot be ignored. It is far too important, as the first part of this paper has attempted to show. Many questions, in fact, suddenly emerge.

A borrowed concept: Is the concept of development a borrowed concept? If so, what will it do in an Asian culture, and to an Asian culture? Is it in harmony with underlying values and assumptions? Can the western concept of development ever be at home in Asia, which has its own rich history, traditions, religions - its own culture (s), so different from that of the west? Although historically it appeared in the west, could it have appeared in the east? These are difficult questions, but they have to be asked. If, for example, V.S. Naipaul's vision of India in his unnerving India - A Wounded Civilization is anywhere near the reality, then the western concept of development is not only alien, but probably useless, and possibly harmful. That does not mean that either the western concept is wrong or that India is wrong, but that it is a mistake to try to put the two of them together.

Development and Culture

If such is the case, can we say that there are cultures in which development as presently understood is impossible? Is there perhaps a basic incompatibility between the whole eastern ethos and western development? At the very least, is there a hasty borrowing of ideas which are alien? If so, what will happen, either to the culture (s) or the idea?

Basic values and dynamics: Given the close link between development and culture, it is important in any given society to try to determine fairly accurately the basic values and dynamics of that society, and to see if a concept of development cannot be fashioned from those values, from within that culture. What, for example, are the basic values of the religious traditions of Asia? What are their common values? Where do they lead? What are the common values - if any - of Asia, or - if that is too vast an area - of South Asia? Severe dislocation is likely to take place in Asia - in fact it is taking place - unless and until birth is given to an eastern concept of development, a concept which is an eastern cultural product. The kind of debate which took place in the west may have to take place in Asia as well, for such a debate is part of a process and probably cannot be dispensed with.

Asian criteria and standards: As an understanding of the tradition is gained, judgements have to be made about which elements of the tradition are helpful and to be encouraged, and which are hindrances to be discouraged. Such judgements ought to be made on the basis of Asian standards and criteria.

The purpose of such an exercise is not solely to reach a better understanding, or to preserve Asian culture as a museum-piece or a curiosity. Nor is it to compare eastern and western cultures in a spirit of rivalry, competition, or reaction. The purpose is practical: to discover where we are going, where we want to go, and the most effective ways to achieve what we wish to achieve; that is, the ways which have the greatest chance of succeeding. In such a context as

this, the categories true and false, even right and wrong are misleading and best avoided. It is preferable to speak of ideas and processes as being useful or not useful, helpful or not helpful, adequate or inadequate. This enables us to see that we are engaged in practical thinking. Just as an individual's history and present condition need to be taken into consideration in discerning what is possible for him in the future, in the same way and for the same reason a society's history and culture need to be taken into consideration in any attempt to shape the future.

An Asian concept of development?: Ideas and ideals have to become our own if they are to affect us and bring about change.

What is possible for one person or society is not necessarily possible for another. What is helpful in one context may be harmful in another. The western concept of development may be quite adequate and helpful in the western culture in which it was born, and far from adequate or helpful in an Asian context. Consequently, the generation of an Asian concept of development is of great practical importance.

It is worth noting that ideas can survive their usefulness and live for a long time after they have ceased to be helpful. When this happens what was once helpful becomes an obstacle and keeps us from discerning a changed situation and finding new ways of understanding. This is one reason why as many voices as possible need to be heard as we seek a new and Asian understanding of development. Philosophers, poets, novelists, social scientists, historians, artists, public figures, men of religion, - all these, and many others, must be listened to. And all must be encouraged in their pursuits. No voice should be stifled.

Challenge to development personnel: All this presents a considerable challenge to people working in the field of development. The demands made on them are many and only a few of them can be mentioned here.

Such people need to be in close touch with men and their culture - to be in touch with them and to have a great respect for them; to have the broadest possible vision of life as it is lived here and now by men and women in this particular society; to provide leadership and guidance; to discern the values and dynamics of societies so that growth may be from within, not forced; to recognize limits and possibilities; to look ahead and to plan, aware that there can be an excess of planning, which prevents or distorts growth; to try to maximise advantages and minimise disadvantages, aware that nothing is without disadvantages; to be modest, humble, questioning people, aware that development is not a matter of their determining what a society should be and then forcing it to become that, but of enabling it to grow in its own way. Helping, enabling, encouraging, supporting. These have a greater chance of succeeding than attempts to construct a society according to a predetermined blueprint. Development is definitely not a matter of one group of people deciding what is best for others.

Common understanding of values: There is much to be done, but from all that has been said up to this point one particular task seems urgent: to lay a solid foundation for development. That means forging a common understanding of common values, symbols, myths and meanings in Asia (or South Asia) expressed in a common language, and doing this consciously. Such a common understanding of shared values might even be thought of as a new "secular" religion, though it would not be in competition with existing religions or philosophies; it would neither suppress them nor supplant them. What the actual outcome might be no one can say, but the undertaking itself seems necessary and urgent. A foundation has to be provided, and it should be sound.

This "overview" on development must end here, though it is incomplete and sketchy, and leaves many questions hanging in the air. It can continue only through discussion. It has looked at the concept of development as intimately bound up with culture, and especially at the idea of development as itself a cultural product. More specifically, it has suggested that an Asian concept of development - one with an Asian shape and expression - needs to be generated on the basis of shared Asian values. It has recommended that a sound foundation for such a concept needs to be constructed. Now it asks: What do you think?
What can we do?

- end -

AFRICAN MONASTICISM

Fr. F. Plissart, osb

(The following are the main ideas taken from a paper received from Father F. Plissart, O.S.B., of the Monastery of Gihindamuyaga (Rwanda). It is dated 13th November 1979, and refers to the pan-African monastic session held at Abidjan from 2nd till 10th September, 1979.)

Introduction: This meeting brought together Benedictine and Cistercian monks and nuns, delegates of African communities. The 80 or so delegates who assisted were from 17 different countries and represented 48 monasteries in Black Africa; most of them were Africans.

The Abidjan session had the definite merit of enabling members to become more vividly aware of the following: sprung from the same African and Malagasy soil, every community, even the distant ones, sought after God in the same way; through a similar life of prayer and diversified activity, all were united in their inspiration, demands and efforts, in a deep and fraternal union. Abidjan however also wanted to deal with certain major questions which monasticism in Africa today gave rise to.

A preliminary remark needs to be made: there is not one Africa but several! This is true of one State with regard to another, it is also true within a single country. We must not forget that several of these countries are as large as half Europe...

1. Community Structures and African Values

Monastic foundations on African soil bring up the problem of their encounter with African culture and those typical values inherent in it. How is the monastic tradition going to bring the riches of its Western and millennial charism to the African Church and, while fully respecting the socio-cultural and original realities which it meets with in these new territories, to adapt itself to them. How can the particular spiritual contributions, due to St. Benedict, possibly acquire a greater fruitfulness from contact with various African values, which have some affinity with them? Foreigners may sometimes be in a position to promote and foster such research, but in the last resort it is African monks alone who will be capable of working out a living synthesis which is so much needed.

Among African values which favour monasticism, we can draw attention to the following:

- a spiritual vision of life, of every human being, of their present and future destiny, of their links with God, with the invisible and the spiritual world;

- a great feeling for the family: the family is the natural environment in which a man is born, grows up, acts and, while protected by it, contributes to its worth. Everyone feels closely related to a common ancestor; each one owes total devotedness to the life of the family and respect for the one who is in authority over it, as a representative of God;

- sense of solidarity: all are attentive to all that pertains to the community, its well-being, its reputation; all are ready to spend themselves for the life of this community;

- position and role of the father and chief in the bosom of the family: he plays the part of quasi-pontiff between the ancestors and the members of the family, while himself leading a truly interior life; from this comes the importance which is attached to what he says. He ensures coherence in the family and is the main guardian of its tradition.

- Sense of welcome and readiness to share: for an African hospitality is a basic duty and one of the chief means of ensuring friendship; besides, it is a welcome which is both material and spiritual: it could be dangerous to give someone advice without at the same time offering him food...

All the same are there no tendencies in the African mentality which could present an obstacle to monastic tradition worthy of respect?

- Is not the great desire to communicate by word of mouth, to multiply human contacts opposed to the value of silence on which the founder of the monks of the West set such store? Several people have pointed out that one is too ready to generalize in this matter. In many countries a person during initiation is taught to keep silent for several days; the chief gives an example of restraint in speaking, in order to reach mature decisions; young people in their family are trained to listen in silence before they speak... In any case, is the African the only one who likes to talk?

- In an African "athirst for fertility", can the consecrated celibacy of the monks be seen as a positive element? Is there not a risk that it will be interpreted as something belonging to those who are on the fringe of society, and even to those who are too coward to face up to the troubles of fatherhood? In the prevailing mentality, things are seen and felt quite differently from the way in which they are proposed in Our Lord's invitation to those whom He challenges. And yet this state in life is within the grasp of everyone: "They give life in their own way, establishing schools and dispensaries, speaking to God on our behalf and helping us by their very presence to lead better lives".

Yet despite all that is said, it will always be true that every culture and every individual needs a conversion in spirit and in truth. The change-over from African values to those of the religious life will always entail a qualificative jump and will necessarily transcend the real values that have been taken on.

2. Community Structures and the Continuing Presence of Europeans

In the very way in which it is set up, the monastic community is confronted with a major human problem, namely, that of life together of people of different backgrounds and cultures and even of different races, with the hope that goes with it that this life in common will take on a quality of true brotherhood and will last for life.

While a new house is being founded it is of course necessary for the foreigners, who are the founding members, to be present in the community. But afterwards? Should the Europeans leave or should they stay and remain in the background? Some of the replies underline the positive aspect of the continuing presence of the monks who were the founders. "When the African child grows up, he does not ask his father to leave. So let the European stay, on condition that he is humble and fraternal". - "In politics, Europeans have sometimes been obliged to leave, but in the Church this is not the case; Christ does not ask us to live separate lives. Obviously this calls for great efforts from the Africans, as well as from the Europeans". - "The real problem does not come from a difference in race but from the common life. There can be just as much friction between brothers of the same race. The presence of foreigners on the contrary can help us to look at the difficulties in a different way and can alleviate them. For both sides, the whole matter is lived out on the level of faith in Christ and of conversion of heart".

Other speakers brought out the fact that to succeed in this way one must not under-estimate certain preliminary factors, both spiritual and psychological. "Relations between parents and children change when the latter become adults. Similarly there must be re-adjustment in the relations between Africans and Europeans and this must be a determining factor when one assesses whether they should stay together or not. There is no general rule, each case must be examined on its merits".

- "In spite of all the good Europeans have done for us, it is better for them to go if they cannot re-adjust in this way. This adaptation is not so much a question of a style of life as of a deep-rooted attitude in the person and it is this alone which allows him to stay".

When in fact it happens - and it frequently does--then the community gives an astonishing witness of fraternal union, in spite of, or perhaps because of the racial and other differences; it is a simple but strong sign of the power of the Spirit of Jesus, a sign which announces his Kingdom.

3. Welcoming Community

In every monastic community, the function of welcoming people is a capital one. It is not to be seen as an activity which is given a place on the timetable along with other activities, or even as an activity with priority over the others, but as a completely spontaneous way of living, of being Christian. In other words a way of being open to others with the result that one's joyful convictions and interior life are allowed to radiate.

With the best possible effect and in a way best suited to every individual, hospitality must reach every category of person, especially the poor. Special mention must be made of the welcome reserved for those who arrive unexpectedly. Here African flexibility has a great deal to teach over-organized Westerners in their reaction, conscious or otherwise. "In an African context, a visitor is welcomed still more warmly if he arrives unexpectedly, for his coming is a great surprise! He will be received, not necessarily in comfort - for he does not expect that - but with concern and with no thought for the time given to him".

What attitude to adopt with regard to the relatives of the religious is a delicate matter, especially as they can at times really encroach. There arises here a sort of polarization: on the one hand, we have the words addressed to our Father Abraham: "Leave your country, leave your family", and on the other hand, there is the evangelical duty of being human and welcoming for one's own family. In the debates there were numerous shades of opinion in this matter.

4. The Monastery, Community of Prayer in the Local Church

Nine African Bishops sent letters on the occasion of this session in Abidjan. One or other of them wondered whether Africans were made for the monastic life. Were the monks and the Religious Sisters not going to be considered as too distant by our people who are used to having missionaries close to them? Do the monastic Orders not run the risk of accentuating the Western character of a Church which ought to be African? But another Bishop on the other hand recalled the fact that "monasticism is a rich evangelical gift which the Latin Church received from Christian Africa, with those characteristic traits which are due to its origin..."

Several state what they expect from monasteries established in their dioceses. This is a very embarrassing question - the monastic phenomenon is badly understood at times and monasteries present such different faces... This helps us to understand why pastors, who are over-burdened with urgent pastoral duties, multiply proposals for the apostolate and look to the monks for help in them. More than one reply from the Bishops accurately recaptures the primitive character of monasticism. Such was the Bishop who was glad to have a monastery in his diocese as a place where men are welcomed who are in search of God. This monastery is a community of prayer and it is complementary to the efforts which the diocese makes in the immediate apostolate: a necessary support, for the work of the diocese depends above everything else on the free gift of God. And the Bishop added that the monastery offers a living witness, for it is like a sign-post in the search for Gospel values.

On the subject of this delicate problem of a happy and flexible cooperation between diocesan authority and the monasteries, two remarks were made:

- the opportunity to draw up clearly a precise agreement between the two parties indicating on the one hand what monks, who are coming for the first time, feel called to be and what on the other hand the Bishop might ask of them; agreement which of course could be modified in the light of new factors;
- the wisdom to proceed step by step, taking into account the way a new foundation grows: it is prudent to allow monasteries still trying to establish themselves the time to find their feet.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion let us quote the words of an African layman at the meeting, Vice-Rector of a National University of a neighbouring State.

Our African societies are made up of animists, Christians and Muslims in very variable proportions. Christianity has not penetrated very deeply into that world: hence arises a crisis in prayer, with desertions taking place in the direction of various forms of atheism. Parochial communities very often do not make true prayer groups and in consequence our people thirst after other types of meetings, more fervent, more limited groups...

Our African societies are confronted by money, technology, efficiency, so many gods leading them towards new fears. Faced with all that, we are disconcerted by your monastic communities, but in a healthy sense; they have a message to give us, less by words than by the contagious example of a way of living and acting. They produce acts of confidence and of peace, antidotes against fear, and the breath they bring leads to praise and adoration.

These pages can reflect only very imperfectly the great amount of sharing which took place at Abidjan. All who took part felt the degree to which it was enriching and stimulating, in view of continuing in a clear-sighted way the effort to live a life which endeavours always to be more genuinely monastic and more authentically African.

Reference: PETIT ECHO, N.711, 1980/6.

- end -

SEDOS SEMINAR 1980

Fr. Gabriele Ferrari, sx

(En finissant la Prière d'Intercession pour le Séminaire Sedos prochain, qui avait lieu à la Crypte de St. Pierre et à la Demeure Jésuite au Borgo Santo Spirito, le 9 décembre le Père Ferrari donnait un résumé du travail préparatoire qu'on a déjà accompli et envisageait les dernières semaines préparatoires. Le Père Ferrari parlait en français. Ed).

The usual December Sedos Seminar is replaced this year by one day of prayer. Without the help of the Lord 'who builds the house' the Seminar can accomplish little and so we pray today for his blessing.

You are interested to know about the preparations which has been made. This work of preparation was initiated two years ago and since then has gone ahead. A detailed account of the present state of preparations drawn up by the Task Force will be sent to the Generalates with the December 15th issue of the Sedos Bulletin. Today I wish to give you a general résumé of the work that has been accomplished.

Forty-nine preparatory papers or reflections on specific mission topics have been received from resource people contacted in missionary situations in the different continents. The authors of these papers have been invited to take part in the Seminar and most of them will in fact be attending. Superior Generals or their representatives at Sedos will also be attending making a total of about one hundred participants which is the limit to available space at Villa Cavaletti where the Seminar is being held.

The Seminar will study mission of the future. It looks forward to the end of the century. It is clear that Mission is at a transition period, that there are many problems, many unanswered questions; there are also many signs of hope. We look to the Seminar as a basis of future help.

When the preparatory papers were processed it became evident that four central topics emerged and around these all questions coalesced. They were as follows: the local Church - its development and growth and its relationship to mission; the scriptural, theological basis of mission today; evolving relationships which affect mission today; the historical background of mission and missionary situations in different areas.

Is there a future for mission - for what we knew as the "foreign mission"? What are the relationships between mission and world religions, other Christian Churches, the Churches of Europe and North America, the local Churches everywhere, the central authority in Rome?

It is not possible to look towards the future without taking the past into consideration - in order to learn from it. We need to assess humbly and realistically what the situation of mission is today.

Four "working papers" are being prepared and will be sent to all participants in early January. They are relatively lengthy, for they contain the central points of the original preparatory papers. They are for study and reflection before the Seminar. I recommend all participants to study them carefully. Superiors General have much traveling and administrative work to contend with. Is the "mission today" not the central point of our journeying and administering? It

is essential that we have as clear an idea as possible of what we are about in mission today, otherwise we may be traveling in vain. If the Seminar helps us in this and clarifies our idea of mission and our understanding of it, it may affect considerably our methods and will have been well worth while.

The Seminar will last for ten days. It will be a time of prayer, study, reflection, exchange. It will be tiring work. We pray that as a result of it mission in the years ahead may be advanced to some degree and understood a little better. If it succeeds in doing this it will have achieved its aim. And so we thank all those who have worked so hard and collaborated so well in preparing for it and we pray for the guidance of God's Spirit during these final weeks and during the Seminar itself.

- end -

SISTER JOAN DELANEY, MM.

Sister Joan who is leaving Rome this week began her term of office as Executive Secretary of Sedos in September, 1976 at a time when it was passing through a difficult period due, not least to frequent changes of staff at the Secretariat.

Sister Joan brought a new vitality and a sense of direction and order to Sedos. She succeeded in establishing close personal contacts with the member societies and showed courage and tenacity in her initiatives. A notable contribution was the wide range of contacts which she established in different countries and continents with research centres and organizations having parallel interests to those of Sedos.

During her years in Rome she has endeared herself to many people. She will be missed, but no doubt we will remain in contact with her and her friends will rejoice to know that Sedos has invited her to return to Rome to participate in the Research Seminar on Future Mission in March 1981.

The staff here, and the members of the various committees who worked in close collaboration with Sr. Joan appreciated in a special way what she did for the organization and will miss her particularly.

All our good wishes go with you Sister Joan, as we thank you sincerely for your four years of dedicated service and for your friendship. May you go with God.

Sister Joan's address until 1st March will be:

Columban Sisters
Magheramore
Wicklow, Ireland

and thereafter:

Maryknoll Sisters,
Maryknoll, New York 10545, U.S.A.

Christmas Holidays - Sedos office closed from
23rd December - January 2nd inclusive.
The next Bulletin will be 15th January.

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