

81/No. 4.

March 1, 1981

In this issue: There are three contributions which have a reference to the Sedos Research Seminar which opens here on 8th March 1981. They come from the Melbourne Conference in preparation for which, Tissa Balasuriya, OMI, wrote a short article on the relationship between proclamation and witness showing that there need be no contradiction between these two perspectives. We reproduce it here together with comments from participants in Asia, Latin America and Europe, all of which may be helpful to those who will spend ten days reflecting on the Future of Mission at the Sedos Research Seminar.

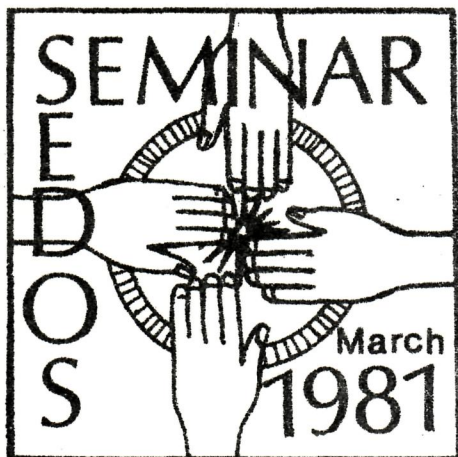
From Africa comes the second part of Jean-Marc Ela's address on the problems and opportunities encountered in a true Africanisation of the Church. The text is shortened somewhat due to pressure of space.

We are grateful to the Medical Missionary Sisters and to the Marianists for allowing us to share their reflections addressed to the members of their own Institutes, on new and experimental forms of community in which they are involved in Asia and Latin America.

The letter from a missionary in Africa is a poignant reminder of the situation in which, more and more frequently, those involved in proclaiming and witnessing to the life and message of Jesus, find themselves.

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
1. Sedos Mission Research Seminar.	61
2. De l'Assistance à la Liberation. Jean-Marc Ela.	63
3. Lettre D'un Missionnaire en Afrique.	69
4. Proclamation and Witness. Tissa Balasuriya, OMI.	71
5. Zimbabwe Appeal.	73
6. New Forms of Community: I. Kerala (India). Godelieve Prové, scmm-m. II. Latin America. Joseph Jansen, sm.	74
7. Signposts for Sedos from Melbourne?	78



Coming Event

Sedos Research Seminar
on the
Future of Mission
8th - 19th March 1981
at Villa Cavaletti.

SERVIZIO DI DOCUMENTAZIONE E STUDI

MAILING ADDRESS - VIA DEI VERBITI 1 - 00154 ROMA - TEL. 571350

SEDOS MISSION RESEARCH SEMINAR

MARCH, 1981

The Sedos Research Seminar will open at Villa Cavaletti on March 8th when ninety-five men and women from around the world will gather to study, reflect and pray about the Future of Mission.

Sedos holds short bi-annual seminars and from time to time organizes these residential seminars to make a deeper analysis of mission. The present Seminar replaces the bi-annual event which would normally have been held last Christmas and is the most ambitious study session organized to date by Sedos.

SEDOS, which stands for the Italian "Servizio di Documentazione e Studi" (A Service of Study and Documentation) has, curiously, no reference to Mission in its title but it exists only because of, and in service of, the Church missionary.

It may be a happy fault that the word does not appear for it is a fact of life and a sign of our times that the word "missionary" is being continually re-defined today. For many, and those not the least concerned over the past few decades with the reality underlying the word, it connotes inferiority, dependency and absence of maturity. Applied to a local Church it is commonly understood to infer that the Church has not yet come of age; it is an immature young Church as compared to the Churches of the old "authentic" Christendom.

As applied to persons, it may be understood in a complementary way to refer to the best in human service and generosity, or in a pejorative way, which is becoming more and more commonly expressed these days to the more unpleasant human characteristics of those who came preaching salvation in the wake of colonialism. A well written doctoral thesis published under the title "Servants of God or Masters of Men" by Victor Bonilla illustrates the latter interpretation to an embarrassing but well researched degree. Its very title sums up the dichotomy.

Sedos may be unembarrassed by the word in its title, but the reality remains and it is to study this reality, to meditate and pray about it that these hundred people will spend ten days at Cavaletti. The Seminar which has been in preparation for over two years will bring together resource persons from all continents to meet with an approximately equal number of representatives of the forty-five member Institutes of Sedos most of whose General Headquarters are here in Rome. The choice of such a group of participants was a conscious one as was the choice of topics suggested for the agenda. Both are the result of research carried out among all the Sedos Institutes.

At the Seminar, the academic conceptual theological approach to the future of Mission will be in constant dialogue with the other "reality", which is people. First there are those people among whom the message of Jesus Christ is being revealed, some of them, perhaps, for the first time. Then there is the whole people of God, having responsibility for making known to the world the message of God's love as revealed in Jesus Christ. There are the people who service the day to day work of planning, organising, administering and funding the Institutes whose members are engaged in Mission. There are the people who make up the Roman Congregations having special responsibility for mission within the Church's central organization at the Vatican.

And there is the supreme reality - the Person of Jesus Christ, the heart of the mission. It is about him that the whole Seminar is called together.

The Seminar will study the Mission of the Church as it is being lived today in various local Churches of the "six continents". Already in this statement there is room for questioning and analysis. Some consider the term "local Church" tautologous while others query the notion of "six continents" and others still ask for a refinement of the word "mission". Participants will need to refine meanings and make choices.

The local Church will be the focal point of the Seminar and the problems surrounding inculturation or incarnation of the gospel message in differing cultures and societies will be one of the key issues. By its very existence the Christian community is involved in a network of relationships with other Christians, with the members of other religious traditions, with secular society. Relationships with each of these categories involve the Christian community in a dimension of both giving and receiving. How these relationships have been lived out is the story of the past from which participants may learn lessons for the mission today.

Mission in the Church is the Mission of Christ and the dynamic reality of the continuity of Christ's mission is "the event" of the Word of God. Jesus appeared as the revelation of God in the concrete historical circumstances of the Jewish people and it was within the limitations and opportunities of that culture that the kingdom of God was announced. How to make present in any given culture this "event" is the challenge of mission today. It involves not only the hearers but also the preachers and the message and calls for a continuous process of transformation, conversion and dialogue by which the Christian community enters into relation with the larger, pluralistic society.

God wishes to save all mankind. Does he then act through other religious traditions to bring about the salvation of all men and women? The Seminar must address this question and also the question of whether other world religions accept or acknowledge the Christian understanding of what salvation is with its eschatological dimension? The terminology "anonymous Christian" which appeared to be a felicitous phrase when coined by Rahner is no longer acceptable.

The Seminar will also consider structures, both present and emerging. Within the universal communion of faith how can the missionary and religious institutes foster the deeper meanings of universality and particularity as they are being lived in the Church today; new forms of inter-Church sharing; co-operation between local Churches; the growth of Regional Churches? What have the Institutes to say about the dependence of some Churches for finance and personnel?

And what will the Seminar have to say in evaluating the specialized services of mission in the Church today which the missionary religious and international institutes themselves offer?

There is much to study, to discuss, to pray and reflect about. Pray that the Word of God may be with us during these days that we spend together in Villa Cavaletti.

- end -

DE L'ASSISTANCE A LA LIBERATION

LES TACHES ACTUELLES DE L'EGLISE EN MILIEU AFRICAIN

- Jean-Marc Ela.

(This is the second part of Jean-Marc Ela's address given to the Young Christian Students at their meeting in Dar es Salaam, Sept. 1980.

The language of "Africanisation" is often ambiguous he says. The real challenge facing the Good News in Africa is that the Gospel has to be involved in the conflicts that surround the struggle for human rights, exploitation of the feeble and the little ones and the abuse of power. That this abuse is exercised by Africans in place of colonialists does not excuse involvement by the Church in Africa and by her ministers.

As a comment on his address we are taking the unusual step of printing a recent letter of an European missionary in Africa. The circumstances he describes speak the anguish which is the lot of those who attempt to serve as Jean Marc Ela proposes. Ed).

IV. LES PIEGES DE L'AFRICANISATION.

Suite

On s'est aperçu qu'une présentation individualiste des problèmes du salut laissait le chrétien africain désespéré. D'où le besoin de recréer des petites communautés au sein desquelles les chrétiens retrouvent la sécurité de la prise en charge collective de toutes les dimensions de leur être...

Après une période où les "missions" n'ont été, le plus souvent, qu'une sorte de station-service pour les besoins religieux, l'Eglise est obligée de déplacer le centre de gravité de sa vie et de son action vers des communautés de dimensions réduites où la foi peut être vécue d'une manière concrète, à travers des engagements précis.

Le mystère chrétien vécu à l'occidentale peut désorienter l'Africain dans sa relation à Dieu, à ses frères et à l'univers. Quelque chose de l'Eglise se cherche là où la foi assume les valeurs africaines de communion et de solidarité pour les vivre, avec leurs conditions et leurs implications concrètes, dans le sens d'une fraternité élargie qui a un impact sur l'état de santé des relations humaines.

"Toute action pour construire nos Eglises, déclarent les Evêques africains et malgaches, doit s'opérer en référence constante à la vie des communautés..."

"Ainsi, "l'Africanisation" n'est possible qu'en référence à la vie des communautés de base. Rappelons les limites de ce projet dans les pays où une Eglise locale ne peut compter que sur un évêque indigène travaillant avec quelques prêtres ou religieuses du pays. Comment parler d'Africanisation dans une Eglise toute blanche, où le personnel expatrié s'efforce à peine, en dépit des exceptions

remarquables, d'entrer dans la mentalité des Africains, de suivre leur rythme et leurs pas?... A l'heure actuelle, constate Engelbert Mveng, il n'y a pas une seule Eglise locale qui ait un budget autonome, capable de faire face aux besoins intérieurs de l'Eglise sans faire appel à l'aide extérieure". Dans ces conditions, il paraît vain de s'épuiser dans une littérature de l'"indigénisation" s'il n'est pas possible de mettre en route une Eglise capable de marcher sur ses propres pieds...

Or la foi vécue en milieu africain serait une mystification dangereuse si l'Eglise devait se refermer sur elle-même, affrontée aux seuls problèmes de l'authenticité et de l'identité culturelles. Le langage de l'Africanisation est devenu terriblement ambigu. Ne sécurise-t-il pas les pouvoirs qui redoutent trop que les chrétiens d'Afrique, par les formes de solidarité et d'engagement avec les pauvres et les opprimés, en viennent à remettre en cause la globalité du système d'exploitation néo-coloniale qui s'est installé dans les nouveaux Etats, et dont profitent, précisément, les oligarchies en place?

"Vous allez au Congo? ironisait jadis Césaire à propos d'un ouvrage célèbre: respectez la Philosophie bantoue." Après les indépendances de drapeau, qui ne se traduisent, pour la majorité des Africains, que par l'obligation de la carte de l'identité et du parti unique, la théorie de la négritude a été récupérée dans certains pays pour légitimer une certaine pratique de l'assistance technique.

Le rythme des tam-tams et des balafons dans les Eglises d'Afrique ne sauraient nous mettre à l'abri des menaces que "l'arme alimentaire" fait peser sur les paysanneries écrasées par la dictature de l'arachide, du cacao ou du coton.

Ne sentons-nous pas le besoin de sortir des bibliothèques et des bureaux, vers un type de société où l'on voit l'intellectuel parmi les planteurs, l'universitaire parmi les illettrés, le médecin parmi les hommes de la brousse, le théologien ou le pasteur dans les villages, là où la faim, la misère et le désespoir deviennent un avenir qui ne débouche sur rien et jette l'homme sur la route de la révolte.

V. ASSUMER LES INTERROGATIONS ACTUELLES.

Trop d'obstacles empêchent les chrétiens d'Afrique de s'offrir en spectacle, de se regarder eux-mêmes avec les yeux des autres. S'il est bien vrai que nous n'avons pas à chercher notre avenir dans le passé des autres, nous ne devons pas oublier que, pour tout groupe humain, la culture n'est pas quelque chose qui a été fixé une fois pour toutes: c'est l'expression de la vie d'un peuple dans l'histoire, avec ses continuités et ses ruptures, ses tensions et ses défis.

Comment croire en Jésus-Christ dans un contexte où les pays nantis refusent de reconnaître aux peuples noirs un statut de sujet historique? C'est dans le monde de ce temps que nous avons à répondre à la question que nous pose Jésus de Nazareth: "Africains, pour vous, qui suis-je?" La réponse à cette question doit partir d'une situation historique dont il faut bien prendre conscience: "Voici que l'Afrique accède au rang..."

Comment exprimer notre appartenance à Dieu dans un continent qui ne s'appartient pas à lui-même? Devons-nous nous laisser enfermer dans un univers religieux à trois dimensions qui sont le péché, les sacrements et la grâce au moment où, sous couvert de coopération, des groupes économiques et financiers se disputent librement les terres, les plages, les mines de bauxite et de cuivre, de diamant, le commerce et le tourisme, sans oublier l'uranium et le pétrole, et, bien sûr la conscience même du peuple africain.

Pour quel espoir mobiliser les communautés de base lorsqu'un phénomène de recolonisation de l'Afrique, en développant le prolétariat dans les villes et les campagnes fera des capitales qui prolifèrent comme un énorme cancer, une redoutable poudrière?

L'attente de l'autre monde ne saurait nous détourner de ce qui se passe en Afrique, dans une conjoncture où l'on constate, observe Jean-Paul II s'adressant aux corps diplomatiques à Kinshasa, que "ce continent est, lui aussi marqué par des influences dirigées de l'intérieur ou de l'extérieur, sous couvert d'aide économique souvent, en réalité dans la perspective d'un intérêt qui n'a d'humanitaire que son étiquette".

On voit des prêtres parcourir des villages pour donner les sacrements le plus souvent possible au plus grand nombre de chrétiens possible. La vie de l'Eglise est ici essentiellement tournée vers le culte, les dévotions, la morale, le catéchuménat, les sacrements. On trouve rarement les ecclésiastiques parmi les paysans autour des problèmes de leur travail dans les plantations.

Une présence d'Eglise en milieu africain doit tenir compte du fait qu'aujourd'hui, les ruraux supportent le poids de la croissance plus qu'il n'en touchent les bénéfices.

L'Eglise ne doit-elle pas ré-examiner son attitude et son action en faveur des populations démunies dans un contexte où la prétendue modernisation rurale n'a pour rôle, la plupart du temps, que d'introduire le paysan dans les rouages du capitalisme qui l'achemine vers des catastrophes alimentaires? L'Eglise doit assumer les questions de l'Afrique des villages qui ne se réduisent pas à celles que présentent les croyances et les rites coutumiers incompatibles avec la foi chrétienne.

Au moment où tout est centralisé dans les capitales, les décisions concernant les structures de l'Etat étant rarement prises en fonction des besoins et de la situation de la masse paysanne qui forme la grande partie de notre peuple, l'Eglise doit-elle se contenter de l'extension des groupes de prière, et du développement des formes de dévotions et de piété héritée du XIX^e siècle européen?

La croissance des dépenses administratives, un développement rural généralement conçu comme la promotion des cultures d'exportation, la formation d'un monde rural réduit à n'être qu'un secteur de prélèvements financiers pour la consommation des minorités urbaines, bref, l'apparition des régimes africains fondés sur les intérêts d'une classe de fonctionnaires qu'il importe d'élargir le plus possible, ne constituent-ils le terrain privilégié de l'évangélisation de l'Afrique en mutation?

Nous ne pourrions plus lire l'Evangile ailleurs que parmi les masses paysannes qui sont aujourd'hui la classe la plus misérable, la plus exploitée et la plus sous-alimentée, supportant le poids de la croissance en augmentant les cultures d'exportation qui permettent la perception des impôts et la rentrée des devises, lesquelles reviennent, en fin de compte à l'Etat, c'est-à-dire à la bureaucratie dirigeante.

Si "le corps du Seigneur est fait des douleurs de l'Homme écrasé par l'injustice", l'Eglise doit travailler à devenir une force pour la libération du pauvre et de l'opprimé.

Elle doit s'engager dans la tâche de reconversion à l'Evangile pour actualiser en Afrique la protestation des prophètes contre les violations du droit, les spoliations des faibles et des petits, la violence et les abus du pouvoir.

Comment aider les villages à résister à la destruction et à la paupérisation en utilisant les marges de manoeuvre que leur laissent les différents pouvoirs généralement méfiants à l'égard de l'initiative paysanne? Si l'Afrique peut sortir de ses blocages en retrouvant "le chemin des villages", l'Eglise peut-elle évoluer en marge des luttes des masses rurales où s'actualisent les potentialités révolutionnaires de la paysannerie?

VI. UN CHRISTIANISME A PARTIR DE LA "PERIPHERIE" EST-IL POSSIBLE?

Sans doute, en Afrique noire, l'Eglise n'a cessé de se mettre au service des populations démunies par ses oeuvres scolaires, sociales et sanitaires. Mais il arrive aussi que là où des collèges et des hôpitaux ont surgi pour aider les pauvres, ils finissent par être seulement à la portée des familles appartenant aux classes dominantes.

Dans beaucoup de régions d'Afrique, les missions chrétiennes participent à de nombreuses activités d'animation et de vulgarisation en milieu rural. Est-on sûr que l'idéologie du développement assumée par les Eglises ne soit pas la reprise sournoise de l'ancienne conception des missions comme force "civilisatrice" faisant passer certains peuples de l'archaïsme à la modernité? Ce faisant, l'Eglise évite toute remise en question du système néo-colonial qui est, par définition, rapport-exploitation.

En s'imaginant être au-dessus des conflits socio-politiques et économiques, l'Eglise resterait dans le champ de l'impérialisme, rendant possible l'intégration de l'Afrique dans le système de la domination dont les peuples de la périphérie sont victimes.

A travers ses activités socio-économiques et caritatives, l'Eglise semble avoir assumé une problématique du "sous-développement" qui constitue, à maints égards, une mystification d'envergure dans la mesure où elle assimile ce phénomène à un retard. Il s'agit là d'une vision qui se place en dehors du mouvement réel de l'histoire, et de la dialectique des contradictions sociales, internes et externes.

Elle débouche simplement sur la politiques d'assistance et de "modernisation" se traduisant par un élargissement relatif du secteur capitaliste, au prix d'une aggravation des distorsions, des déséquilibres et de la dépendance, d'une "margin-alisation" et d'un appauvrissement plus poussé de nos masses populaires.

Après une période de l'histoire des missions où l'Eglise s'est compromise avec les puissances de l'argent organisant l'échange inégal, l'incarnation du christianisme en Afrique doit être interrogée en profondeur dans la perspective des pauvres et des opprimés.

Dès lors, l'Eglise n'a de sens que si elle devient le lieu où se fait entendre le cri de l'homme, à la suite de Jésus-Christ qui révèle le véritable nom du Dieu de l'Exode (13). Dans les situations où les riches oppriment les pauvres et s'enrichissent à leur dépens par les formes multiples de corruption qui sont la gangrène des classes dirigeantes en Afrique, n'est-il pas urgent de rappeler avec force qu'"opprimer le pauvre, c'est outrager le Créateur"? (Pr. 14, 31).

(13) Lire dans ce sens mon livre: Le Cri de l'homme africain, question aux Chrétiens et aux Eglises d'Afrique, Paris, 1980.

Autour de nous, des groupes majoritaires vivent des situations dont l'injustice "crie vers le ciel", comme le soulignait Paul VI dans son encyclique sur le Progrès des peuples. Comment vaincre la faim et les inégalités qui préoccupent aujourd'hui les Africains (14), et qui sont la conséquence d'une stratégie de domination? Par les oeuvres caritatives? Quelles réactions "évangéliques" appellent les situations de dépendance où vivent la majorité des populations d'Afrique? L'assistance ou la libération?

L'Afrique est récolonisée, la soumission au capital extérieur est plus grande que jamais sur le continent noir. L'Afrique est paralysée: des énergies sont étouffées et bloquées. L'Afrique martyre crie vers le ciel: il y a un autre avenir possible qui répond aux aspirations profondes des hommes et des femmes d'Afrique.

Cette réponse exige de nous un long combat pour l'homme africain: bandons nos muscles pour mettre "hors jeu" toutes les forces de destruction, tous les germes de mort qui empêchent l'Afrique de réaliser ses potentialités et de revivre, en plénitude. Il ne faut laisser subsister ici aucune illusion: c'est dans l'affrontement des contradictions internes de l'Afrique d'aujourd'hui que se construira la libération de demain.

C'est avec des hommes frustrés de leurs droits et réduits au silence par le terrorisme d'Etat, les menaces et les intimidations que l'Eglise doit faire corps, si elle est réellement le corps du Crucifié du Golgotha; il lui faut rentrer dans notre condition d'origine, à partir des situations et des efforts à travers lesquels se trouve le refus de voir se perpétuer la misère de notre peuple. C'est le sens du salut en Jésus-Christ, aujourd'hui, qui seul compte pour nous, dans les conditions de sous-humanité que des facteurs multiples et convergents imposent à l'Afrique.

Si Dieu se dit dans l'histoire, les absents de l'histoire de notre temps ne constituent-ils pas l'espace de révélation du Dieu vivant? Comment Dieu intervient-il dans le monde des hommes là où des jeunes investissent leur misère dans leurs études, subissant une série d'injustices dans un système de formation qui assure la reproduction des classes et des inégalités sociales?

Bref. La marginalisation croissante d'immenses couches de population n'apparaît-elle pas comme le lieu où se trouve et doit se préciser l'originalité de l'Eglise et sa mission en Afrique?

Si nous ne voulons pas livrer des milliers d'hommes à la dérive, dans les sectes multiples où s'opère la manipulation du croyable, si nous ne voulons pas les jeter entre les mains des démagogues horribles et débordés, qui répandent des idéologies aliéantes, il nous faut "libérer" le christianisme africain de la Captivité babylonienne où l'ont réduit les structures romaines qui pèsent sur les mentalités ecclésiastiques, les pesanteurs sociologiques d'une religion de l'au-delà, les formes de piété d'un christianisme en décomposition, l'apolitisme déguisé des missionnaires occidentaux, l'apathie massive, l'irresponsabilité et la cupidité intolérables du clergé africain, l'absentéisme du laïcat autochtone, l'inconscience ou l'infantilisme des religieuses africaines formées à l'européenne.

Depuis la traite des Nègres, l'histoire de l'Afrique est une histoire de la violence: elle est faite de tensions et de conflits. L'Eglise ne peut ici planer au-dessus de la mêlée, aspirant à la transcendance de l'Esprit: il lui faut retrouver le contact avec la terre africaine, non seulement avec ses religions et sa culture, mais avec les humiliations, la violence de l'impérialisme et du pouvoir, les résistances et ses luttes.

(14) Voir les enquêtes de Jeune Afrique, 12 mai 1980.

Les situations d'injustice et de domination de l'Afrique obligent l'Eglise à prendre conscience des rôles sociaux d'une foi et d'une théologie qui ne s'articulent pas avec les risques et les obscurités des luttes quotidiennes en solidarité avec les opprimés et les exclus de la société africaine.

Nous devons bien nous rendre compte, dans l'Eglise, que toutes les stratégies d'assistance laissent entière la question radicale des mécanismes qui engendrent et perpétuent la pauvreté et la misère.

Seule la compromission de l'Eglise avec les paysans dépossédés, les jeunes sans travail, les populations des bidonvilles, les forces sociales neutralisées et réduites au silence, peut manifester aujourd'hui que l'Evangile est réellement libérateur, annonciateur d'un avenir nouveau.

L'homme africain doit lui aussi, naître, et collectivement. Or, comme l'écrivait Paul VI, "l'Eglise a le devoir d'annoncer la libération de milliers d'êtres humains, beaucoup d'entre eux étant ses propres enfants, le devoir d'aider cette libération à naître, de témoigner pour elle, de faire qu'elle soit totale" (Lettre sur l'évangélisation dans le monde contemporain).

Notre Baptême et notre Confirmation ne nous impliquent-ils pas dans tout ce qui peut bloquer l'avenir de l'Afrique et menacer l'homme dans ses droits, la dignité de son existence?

l'adhésion au Christ subit ici une rude épreuve par cette situation où des dictatures sanglantes évoluent à l'ombre de la coopération internationale, les exemples de décolonisation réussie n'étant qu'une chasse gardée de l'impérialisme. Dans la mesure où ce système peut être considéré comme le principal responsable de la misère et de l'oppression dans les pays d'Afrique, quelles performances acrobatiques peut-on imaginer pour éluder les questions cruciales que cette situation pose à l'Eglise en milieu africain?

L'Eglise risque d'être le reflet de l'ordre établi, et de servir, en permanence, au maintien de cet ordre.

Pour se redéfinir à partir de la "périphérie", dans une solidarité effective avec un peuple de parias, l'Eglise d'Afrique doit opérer la rupture d'avec un langage de la foi qui manifeste l'oubli de l'homme concret embourbé dans l'histoire. Elle doit confesser Jésus-Christ dans le cadre de l'existence des pauvres, dans le coude à coude fraternel avec les accoucheurs de l'avenir et les combattants de la liberté et de la justice.

Aujourd'hui, Jésus-Christ, c'est l'opprimé. Il nous faut donc retrouver l'enracinement du Christ dans les conditions de vie des hommes d'Afrique et, à travers la crucifixion, retrouver le drame du Noir, chaque taudis devenant un véritable calvaire.

LE RÔLE DE LA JEUNESSE CHRÉTIENNE AFRICAINE.

Dans ces perspectives l'option de la Jeunesse chrétienne d'Afrique pour les pauvres et les opprimés apparaît comme la réponse de l'Evangile à l'immense clameur d'un continent. Il nous faut incarner cette réponse dans les lieux de tensions et de conflits de nos sociétés en nous rappelant que l'avenir appartient à ceux qui auront su donner aux générations actuelles les raisons de vivre et d'espérer. Alors, dans les matins neufs d'un monde nouveau, l'Afrique chantera sa dignité reconquise et sa liberté retrouvée.

Prends la route, mon frère pour tracer avec ton peuple les longs chemins de résurrection!

Reference: FOI ET DEVELOPPEMENT, Centre Lebre, 83/84 janvier-février 1981.

LETTRE D'UN MISSIONNAIRE EN AFRIQUE

(It is not customary to publish letters in our Bulletin but we believe that our readers will be interested in this communication, of recent date, which came to us through the courtesy of a Sedos Superior General. We print it in the context of Jean Marc Ela's article (see pages 63-68).

When we speculate about the future of the mission, and the response demanded of the Institutes involved in mission it is salutary to keep in touch with the women and men who are engaged personally in the actual day to day preaching of the word.

In the last issue of the Bulletin there was the meditation of Jon Sobrino on recent deaths in El Salvador: at our Sedos Latin American meeting held last week we were made aware of the obscenities perpetuated daily in Guatemala. In a telephone call this morning we learned of the assassination yesterday of Fr. Juan Alonso Fernandez as he went to offer Mass in a village in the diocese of Ouiché in that same country. He is the third priest of the Sacred Heart missionaries to be assassinated there, but that is only the tip of an evil campaign of systematic terror and repression which has killed tens of thousands of the people of God in some countries of Latin America in the past twelve months.

Conditions in Africa differ but here is an intimate insight into the anguish of a missionary in that country, shorn of all false heroics or sham, a man who wonders what to do but who "holds on". "I am convinced, he concludes, "that sooner or later we will have to make a definite declaration and clearly take the side of the poorest and the oppressed. We must do it. But perhaps we will be too late! We put it off till tomorrow; on every occasion we find another worry another fear to prevent us from speaking out clearly..." In the meantime he continues to face the unknown...Ed).

"...Comme le disait un confrère: Si nous continuons et risquons notre vie chaque jour, ce n'est pas parce que l'on est plus malins ou meilleurs que les autres, mais parce que Dieu nous garde dans sa main..."

"...Guerilla, politique, misères, partout où l'on regardait, cela donnait bien des tensions. On a beau être d'ur, on n'est pas de fer! Pendant le congé, (mon pays natal) m'attirait. Après tout, un homme est fait pour vivre en paix et chercher ce qui est paisible, ce qui est beau, ce qui est bon. J'avais terriblement peur de retourner ici. Je voyais venir de façon irrévocable la guerilla. Mais les Soeurs étaient là; la mission continuait; les gens vivaient dans la difficulté; l'Eglise était jeune... Je n'avais pas le droit d'abandonner tout cela.

Ce combat a gâté toutes mes vacances. Avec des jambes de plomb, je suis allé à l'aéroport et je suis parti! C'était bien comme je l'avais prévu; pire même!... Systématiquement, tous les villages, dans les environs, étaient attaqués et brûlés. Actuellement, 70% de notre région a été dépeuplée jusqu'à 4 km de la mission. Notre village, devenait une île. Autour de la mission, c'est plein de réfugiés... Tous les jours, nous pouvions nous attendre à une attaque... Il y a maintenant deux ans, les Soeurs sont parties et je restais seul. Souvent, je

vivais un conflit intérieur. L'un me disait: "Tu es fou de rester!" Un autre: "Tu es courageux!" Moi, je pensais tout simplement que je ne pouvais pas abandonner ces gens et la mission, car il y avait tellement de misère dans le peuple. Jour et nuit, ils étaient avec moi. J'essayais de leur donner à manger et à dormir, de leur donner des médicaments. Alors, pouvais-je partir? Et puis, le travail de l'Eglise continuait aussi. Le dimanche, le chapelle était comble. Il fallait baptiser, confesser... Dans les villages qui étaient encore debouts, des activistes essayaient de faire peur aux catéchistes. Seuls quelques-uns avaient le courage de continuer. Alors, à qui laisser nos chrétiens encore si jeunes? Je ne pouvais pas partir. J'étais le seul Blanc de toute la région à rester encore là.

Puis, internats et écoles de la mission ont été nationalisés. Deux semaines plus tard, c'était toute la maison. On me prenait tout, sauf ce que j'avais dans ma chambre à coucher. Tu peux t'imaginer ce que c'est! Le temps était mûr pour partir. Mais partir où? Dans mon pays natal? Ou bien, après tout, dans un des villages où restait une chapelle avec quelques petites chambres attenantes?... sans eau, sans toilettes, sans cuisine... J'ai chargé mes affaires, je les ai mises dans cette cabane. J'ai un lit, j'ai une armoire et je continue... Les gens viennent de nouveau ici... J'ai plus de cent enfants à la catéchèse. Si j'avais quelques bons catéchistes, je pourrais aller pour quelques mois (au pays natal). Mais je crois qu'une fois là-bas, je n'aurais plus le courage de revenir ici.

J'aurais pu te parler de religion, de politique, de marxisme, de ce que ça signifie "être homme", du Christ qui se faisait homme, de nous tous, toi et moi, qui sommes des hommes brisés, et de tant d'autres choses vraies. Malgré tout, ces dernières années, j'ai médité énormément; pas dans l'église, c'est vrai! mais le soir, tard... L'espérance est une grande vertu..."

"...Nous devons continuer à ramer contre le courant et essayer de tenir le coup. Je suis convaincu que tôt ou tard nous devons nous prononcer clairement et prendre définitivement le côté des plus pauvres et des opprimés. Nous devons le faire. Peut-être alors sera-t-il trop tard! On remet à demain; chaque fois on trouve une autre angoisse, une autre peur, pour ne pas parler clairement. Et la question devient de plus en plus difficile et compliquée... Qu'est-ce que la Congrégation veut faire après le Chapitre, avec son document sur Justice et Paix? Qu'est-ce que va faire notre propre Chapitre avec ses directives? On va bien parler, on va être bien d'accord que quelque chose doit être fait, et puis on n'aura pas le courage d'envisager les conséquences d'une protestation énergique. Est-ce que le Congrégation a le courage de risquer son personnel? On a peur de s'exprimer et de dénoncer carrément. Notre Congrégation devra se prononcer sur cela pour être authentiquement missionnaire..."

- end -

DOM HELDER CAMARA OF RECIFE, BRAZIL

"We have learnt that more important than working for the poor is working with the poor. They still ask us, "Father, Sister, what must we do?" But our answer is, "Do you think I am here to think for you, to speak for you? You have been given a mind to think and a mouth to speak." But Father, if we speak out we shall be crushed." "Yes, but only if you speak alone. Together with your entire community you are a force; a force not to trample the rights of others but to prevent others from trampling on your rights!"

Reference: INFO ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Volume 8, Number 1 - January 1981.

PROCLAMATION AND WITNESS

Tissa Balasuriya, omi.

(L'oeuvre de mission, est-elle d'abord la proclamation de Jésus-Christ, ou est-elle avant tout le témoignage de la vie sociale et publique? Y a-t-il nécessairement dichotomie? Cette question trouble les missionnaires Chrétiennes de toutes les églises. Les conférences de 1980 à Melbourne en Australie, et Pattaya en Thaïlande ont démontré les différentes approches des divers églises Protestantes. Tissa Balasuriya, OMI, directeur du Centre pour "Society and Religion" à Colombo en Sri Lanka a préparé ce rapport comme préparation de ce Centre pour la Conférence de Melbourne. Ed).

One of the present issues within the churches concerns the relationship between the "proclamation" of Jesus Christ and the witness of life, especially in social and public life. Some emphasize the announcing of the Lordship of Jesus. This is seen as the missionary command to proclaim the name of Jesus to the ends of the earth. Salvation is said to depend on such a proclamation which offers all persons the chance to know the saving message of Jesus. Others emphasize the need to actually live the values of the Gospel on the part of those who accept Jesus as the Lord. This is considered the test of one's faith and of the credibility of the gospel. Those who emphasize the proclamation of the name of Jesus are worried that the others who insist on social witness may be shy of the name of Jesus. Or they may be too earthly and not concerned adequately with the eternal salvation of souls. An even more damning charge is that they are materialistic or even marxist in their analysis of life and society.

On the other hand the second group is inclined to think that those who stress "proclamation" do not concern themselves adequately with the actual living of the Gospel demands, in the present-day world of serious exploitation of the weak poor by the powerful rich. They tend to suspect that the first group is too oblivious to the evils of the countries in which there is freedom to proclaim the name of Jesus, as long as their social evils are not contested.

The two different accents bring different emphases in the life of believers. The first group tends to value the growth of the Church, even quantitatively; the second group stresses the importance of the advance of the values of the kingdom of God in human societies.

One of the tasks of Melbourne is to sort out this apparent dichotomy. The problem has to be resolved both at the level of Christian thinking (or theology) and of Christian living. The divergences of thinking can be narrowed by a deeper analysis and reflection on the gospel as related to life's situations. But the convergence of the perspectives in action is more difficult because of the real life interests involved in the issue.

A deeper reflection on the life and message of Jesus shows that there need be no contradiction between these two perspectives. On the contrary they are positively inter-related. Proclamation of Jesus has to be not merely announcing of His Name, but rather of the full demands of His gospel. Jesus' mandate is to "go and make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to observe what I commanded". This proclamation is an invitation to discipleship, i.e., to love one another as

Jesus has loved us. It is a call to self-sacrificial love of the neighbour. Therefore, proclamation or evangelism, and building the Christian community by evangelization must be primarily an effort to increase love, sharing and justice among persons and peoples. Evangelism is credible only when it is both Word and deed - proclamation and witness. Since God's grace works through human mediation, our selfishness can be a counter-witness to the Gospel and the kingdom of God.

On the other hand, Christians concerned with social love and justice need not be in any way shy of the Name of Jesus Christ, for Jesus stood fearlessly for full human liberation of all persons from all forms of oppression. What they have to be wary of is a caricatured Jesus who is seen as unconcerned with the inhumanities of our society and the plight of the oppressed.

Today the challenge to evangelism to relate to human problems is immediate because of the world-wide nature of the sufferings of the masses of the people. This is a consequence of large scale robbery by the powerful; the resultant malnutrition and high mortality rates are a form of continuing genocide. It is often people of other beliefs who are subjected to such a fate by richer countries many of which are apparently Christian and from which missionaries go out to other lands to announce the gospel.

At the present stage of their historical evolution the Christian Churches are called to take a clear stand against such oppression - in the name of God in Jesus Christ who identifies with the oppressed. There can be no genuine and valid communication of Christian life and kingdom living by a compromising silence and inaction concerning continuing exploitation of the majority of the human race by a privileged few.

The gospel teaching is abundantly clear on this demand of the love of God and of the discipleship of Jesus. Today too the neighbour whom we are called to love is fallen among robbers as in the gospel parable. This is true within most countries and among the peoples of the world. An evangelizer who proclaims the word and announces the name of Jesus, but does nothing about this tragic social situation is like the priest and the levite who passes by the injured neighbour in Jesus' parable (Luke 10:30-37).

We need today to integrate evangelical witness in word and deed. Social action and Christian mission must be correlated in the depths of our faith as well as in the human situation. This can often result in options which bring down the opprobrium of the powers that be in society. But authentic witness to Jesus may leave no alternative discipleship. Obedience to God calls for a denouncing of injustice at all levels. Believers may then be a sign of contradiction to many who profit from the unjust relationships. On the other hand such witness is a ray of hope and a message of liberation to the oppressed. In this sense the Gospel is a judgement on the oppressor, for whom conversion is hard. For the oppressed the gospel is the Good News of God's concern and a call to human conversion.

Christian churches may find it difficult to disown or dissuade a type of evangelism that is done with much resources of the mass media, but which does not deal with the people's real problems in social life. Oppressors tend to willingly invite and subsidize such evangelists. A problem for the churches is to discern the genuine proclamation of Jesus, crucified and risen, that combines word and deed. The proclamation of a caricatured and disincarnate Christ is a mockery of God and humanity. It is bad both as witness as well as evangelism. It is a form of heresy that is unfortunately rather widespread today.

Such a presentation is not limited to one or other social order: capitalist, socialist, or non-aligned. In each context proclamation in word alone leads to complicity with the ruling powers. Such an evangelism may turn a blind eye to the

evils of one's own rulers, while attacking capitalism, communism, or corruption in other countries.

The real option is between genuine Christian witness and conformism, whatever be the social system. The cross is met mainly in witnessing within one's own situation and suffering the consequences of such a Christian obedience and discipleship. That is how Jesus suffered and the early Christians were martyred. This is why there are martyrs for the faith today in many areas of the world - whether they are in the so-called First World, Second World, or the remaining two-thirds world.

We hope Melbourne will help the churches to transcend this dichotomy and link mission and evangelism to both word and deed in our real life conditions.

Reference: INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF MISSION, Melbourne Reports and Reflections, Vol. LXIX Nos. 276-277, October 1980 - January 1981.

- end -

ZIMBABWE APPEAL

In the wake of the recent war of Independence the work of evangelization is continuing and in many cases re-commencing while the services in some of the more isolated Churches are being gradually re-established. Conditions vary greatly depending on the degree of war damage and remoteness from large centres of population. An immense work remains to be done. The Prime Minister, Mr. Robert Mugabe has asked for collaboration and help in the work of reconstruction of the country. Bishop Konstant has made known to us his concern for a concerted effort at reconstruction of the services which the Church can offer to the people.

Some Sedos members who were working in Zimbabwe in the past are now considering re-opening their work there in the near future, while others contemplate a first foundation. If you are interested in a sharing of information on resources and conditions, Sedos offers its services as a point of contact for such a collaboration.

Please telephone us here at the office or write if you are interested in such a contact.

DOM HELDER CAMARA

(At the close of his informal meeting with the Good Shepherd Sisters, Oct. 1980):

"For me, life has the form of a cross. There is no such thing as verticalism and horizontalism; both together form a cross."

"FOR ALL THAT HAS BEEN: THANKS;

FOR ALL THAT WILL BE: YES."

NEW FORMS OF COMMUNITY

(Beaucoup de rapports et revues viennent au Centre de Documentation de la part des divers membres de Sedos. C'est difficile de rendre la richesse des expériences qu'on y trouve. Les deux extraits qui suivent des Medical Missionnaires et des Marianists intéresseront ceux qui cherchent à savoir davantage sur les nouvelles formes de communauté en réponse aux interrogations de nos jours. Ed).

I. SMALL COMMUNITIES IN KERALA (INDIA)

Godelieve Prové, scmm-m.

After the Central Assembly on Institutions, I spent three more weeks in India visiting our sisters in Kerala, in the places and involvements which I had not seen before.

Among fisherfolk: After 5 and a half years in Poothura and 2 and a half years in Mampally, our sisters have come to know quite a bit about the daily life of the traditional fisherfolk; the men watching the surface of the ocean; toiling with boats, nets, different techniques for different types of fish during long nights at sea - the excitement when the catch comes in; the women buying the fish and getting off to the market to sell - the disappointment of no food, no money when all work was in vain. That narrow stretch of shore on which they live, harbors hope, life, dangers - no protection from the elements, no protection from the modernization of the fishing industries which threatens their very existence. It is only since two years the union of fisherfolk exists, and there is a slow but ever more conscious struggle to have their rights recognized, met and protected by proper laws. To be with them in this action for more total development for themselves and their children has been the main focus of our presence among them.

Among Islams: If the coastal fisherfolk are all poor latin catholics, descendants of those once baptised by Francis Xavier, in Erattupetta another small group of sisters has inserted itself among a strict Moslem community thus breaking the barriers of mutual prejudice. They work mainly towards the development of women and children. The women being illiterate - in Kerala with that high level of general education! - there was no incentive for the children to go to school, and any development within the Moslem community got stuck for lack of interest and understanding.

Among resettled: In Panakachira colony, all religions, all political parties, are represented among the 300 families who were picked up from the streets of different towns and dropped 'in the midst of nowhere'. These people, tough in many ways, politically more than aware, are undergoing no small transformation. In sharp contrast with the provisional shelters, houses are being built all over the colony: an expression of a deeper change as a new way of life, new values are slowly emerging. Those who were non-people before are being formed into a community.

A first assessment: Listening to our sisters in these places, I discovered that the move to this way of life, and to a different type of work, cannot be taken for granted nor be considered an easy spontaneous response

to 'what is new'. For most sisters the decision was one made consciously - at times at great effort, not counting the cost to self, really for the sake of mission and concern for those in need of healing, having less power to help themselves.

There is a completely different dynamic operating when we take the initiative to go out to the poor, to live among them in such a way that they can be at ease and at home with us. Our sisters had to overcome barriers between social classes, and between different religions. They had to overcome certain pre-conceived ideas, reservations that this might not be so fitting for religious women, that this might not be possible... The fact of trying this, and of taking the initiative is in itself a remarkable contribution to the development of church responses and activities in Kerala.

It is amazing also to discover how differently each of these four communities is shaped by the environment, the philosophy, the personalities and talents of the sisters involved. And yet, they have a lot in common. Looking back at my experience in Africa with our new beginnings in Abease and Kasanga, I even see factors common to both Sectors: these newer involvements seem to provoke certain questions that invite us to enter more deeply into the understanding of our mission as defined at Chapter. I know quite well that this brief experience in these few places is not enough to draw more general conclusions. Yet I would like to share with you some thoughts and questions which came to my mind and would be most happy if some of you would share your response to this.

Some reflections: A significant searching is going on in these new involvements. Our sisters are confronted with difficult choices. They have gone out in a great desire to enter into community with these people. At Chapter it was stressed again and again that we are to work not for people, but with people. It takes a lot of time to build up the kind of relationships we need to be "really with," to become "community with." On the other hand these sisters are full of enthusiasm and commitment to bring about change, to promote development and to search for wholeness in these particular situations. Deeply affected by the suffering of the people, can they wait until they are community with them...should they wait, and in the meantime see the suffering continue?

Either approach carried through exclusively is not helpful. The one may lead to a total identification where the need to search for change is blurred. The other may push for organization and development at a pace beyond the capacity of the people themselves - and thus leave their potential untouched and our sisters isolated from them.

This shows us the complexity of what looks simple at first: "to be an active presence of Christ, the Healer." Irrespective of the place, of the simplicity of the lifestyle, of the circumstances (institutional or non-institutional), effectiveness in our mission seems to depend on our openness to relate to the people, on our ability to expand our capacity to listen, to form community with them. At the same time this effectiveness seems to depend as much on our constant awareness that from the Gospel background, from our acquired skills and experiences we have insights to contribute which will lead to wholeness, to healing. Where both dimensions go together the people are helped to find an expression of that wholeness which fits them and unlocks their ability to care for one another.

Presence is at the base of our healing mission, and this presence is essentially a relationship in love. To grow in love means to grow in knowing Jesus, to reflect on his way of being, as a person, as Healer, dealing with individuals, with his disciples, with the crowds. He will always remain the foundation.

To grow in love also means to have patience with ourselves as we create new models. It means developing new aspects of accountability, new ways of evaluating and integrating insights given by all involved.

It can be difficult and complicated to love effectively, to have our activities modelled by that love which stimulates growth in ourselves and others. At the same time it is as simple as Mother's words: "IF YOU LOVE.."

Reference: SMM INTERCONTINENT, SMM-I, no.127, 26th January 1981.

II. COMMUNITIES IN LATIN AMERICA 1980

Joseph Jansen, sm.

(Extracts from a letter of the General Administration to the Provincial Administrations following the visit of Fr. Noël Le Mire and Bro. Joseph Jansen to some 32 Marianist communities of the Society of Mary in Latin America from mid-August to October 20, 1980.)

Evangelizing ourselves: I was particularly struck by the emphasis given to the first objective: evangelizing ourselves. There is a strong and steady current toward conversion. A serious question for a considerable number of Marianists in Latin America is: what does the radical following of Jesus of Nazareth require of me as a Marianist? Sabbaticals, renewal programs and interprovince (interunit) Encuentros have sustained and deepened this thrust for ongoing conversion. Slowly, and less effectively, this same disturbing question is reaching into the communities: what does the radical following of Jesus of Nazareth require of us as a community? Provincial and unit visitations, intercommunity reflection days and intercongregational encuentros help to keep this challenging question alive.

Evangelizing others: Each Marianist unit of Latin America has made some effort "to reach groups or strata of people to whom the gospel of Christ has not been preached, particularly the poor and the minorities" (G. C. 1976, 22). Since the General Chapter, a number of units have reached out by locating new communities in such areas. (The most recent "missionary" outreach in Colombia, for example, is the Marianist community animating half of a parish of 150,000 people in Perpetuo Socorro on the periphery of Bogotá).

Promoting Justice and Peace: It is difficult to live in Latin America - even for a short visit - and not be affected (and disturbed) by problems of injustice, oppression, marginalization, and dehumanization - different from one country to the next, but, nevertheless, real and pervasive. Our religious breathe this challenging reality; it is their daily bread. Often, they respond to dire needs with simple health clinics, food programs, facilities for the elderly, organizations for the youth, legal aid, help for the alcoholics, and above all, with education and evangelization. They are also involved in the difficult, long-range, up-hill struggle to change the unjust structures that cause or permit sub-human conditions. Frequently, a responsible laity (especially of the Movimiento Marianista), collaborates in this difficult task.

Forming and Animating Lay Communities: The flowering of Marianist lay groups in Latin America is not only impressive, it is challenging. In most countries, following the lead of Vatican II and its assimilation by Medellín (1968), the role of the laity in the Church is not only

accepted but energetically fostered. After the Latin American internalization of Evangelii Nuntiandi (Puebla, 1979), the ministries of the laity in the Church are even more valued, and incorporated in the evangelization thrust of most local churches. The Marianists in Latin America have responded to these movements with the basic reality of our own foundation: the forming and animating of lay communities of faith.

These communities of adults are, in spirit and in fact, ecclesial, lay, Marianist. They want to live their faith fully. They truly believe the Gospel is livable today, and they have committed themselves to be an evangelizing lay community in the Church-in-the-world. In Chile, these lay communities have grown to be autonomous, yet there is a close interdependence between them and the religious (SM and FMI). The lay are demanding of us what is proper to Marianist religious; while we, in turn, demand of the laity what is proper to them. Throughout Latin America, I counted some 45 lay communities of faith, each one numbering between 10-15 adults (married couples and young adults) and each one with a Marianist animator. There is also a considerable number of youth groups (ages 15-18) with the same fundamental spirit. These ecclesial, lay, Marianist communities focus on: spiritual growth (emphasizing prayer and spiritual direction), community spirit and evangelizing action.

Learning to: Serve from Those We Seek to Serve: Some of the promising developments mentioned above - the pursuit of personal and communitarian conversion, a new and more dynamic mission mentality, development of faith communities, the positive effect of National Conferences on religious life - all contribute in one way or another to a greater appreciation of the local people by the Marianists both Brothers and Sisters. It is encouraging to hear our Spanish, American, Japanese and Italian Marianists speak so warmly about the people they serve in Latin America.

It is even more stimulating to hear these same "foreigners" relate how much they have learned from the people they serve, how much they have been evangelized while evangelizing! This appreciation of and love for the people - simple people, often poor in goods but rich in faith, lacking in formal education but profound in human insight - is the sine qua non of every "missioner" and the key that opens untold treasures for the Church, the SM, and the country. In generously and joyfully offering our gift of God to the people of these different local churches, we, in turn, are enriched personally and corporately - and so is our charism. This is part of the hundredfold.

- end -

Reference: SM COMMUNICATIONS, Number 136, February 2, 1981.

THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM

Many Christians have recently been becoming more and more aware that if the Church wants to be faithful to the God of Jesus Christ, it has to rethink itself from below, from the position of the poor of this world, the exploited classes, the despised races, the marginal cultures. It must descend into the world's hells and commune with the poverty, injustice, the struggles and hopes of the dispossessed, because of them is the kingdom of heaven.

Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, Peruvian theologian.

Reference: MARYKNOLL, December 1980.

SIGNPOSTS FOR SEDOS FROM MELBOURNE?

(A special issue of the International Review of Mission gives Reports and Reflections on the recent Melbourne Conference. The Mission Research Seminar which opens next week here in Rome is a quite different kind of meeting but some of the following Reflections on Melbourne may serve as signposts indicating possible paths to follow and to avoid at the Sedos Seminar. Ed).

I. A FEW AFFIRMATIONS FROM A BRAZILIAN PERSPECTIVE

Joao Libanio

The Conference revealed a practical theology very close to our way of doing theology in Latin America. This arose from the concrete experiences of the various churches. We spent hours telling our stories of struggle, suffering, problems and hopes of many communities. Only then did we reflect on all this in the light of the revelation of God about the Kingdom. We thought that our reflection should produce proposals for action. Certainly this third step received little treatment and needs to be taken up in local communities.

This change of theological method provoked in many the feeling that there was no theology present--only politics. A number of people expressed this uneasiness.

A third consequence was that someone who had a story to tell became more relevant than anyone who only possessed good intellectual capacity. Therefore the presence of the Third World was a determining factor.

Even the great theological addresses of the conference ended up by not being discussed further. The questions raised by the Third World were the theme of discussion.

I was greatly impressed by the openness of brothers from the developed world. Even when some of the Third World brothers couldn't hide their resentment, there was on the part of brothers from the rich world a receptivity, a recognition of the situation of exploitation. The agonized question in the face of the power of the multinationals was "What is to be done?"

The global option by the churches for the struggle of the poor and oppressed seems clear. But there were warnings not to fall into hasty identification between the kingdom of God and any popular movement, which also has its limitations, its dose of sin.

As to the life of the church, there were two main tendencies: one, a growing sense of the value of the community of faith, such as the grass roots community; the other, the demand for greater flexibility in the institutions of the church, avoiding bureaucracy and structures of domination.

The voice of women was heard in a text they edited and communicated to the plenary. The churches were urged to take seriously the task of eliminating the discrimination against women that still exists in their midst. The conference itself showed this in the small number of women attending, though they owe nothing to men in their quality of leadership.

Finally, I would say that the conference managed in a masterly way the connection between theology and pastoral life, between the Word of God and human commitment, between faith and life. It seems that the type of conference that produces theology by theology is finished. Here, people were looking at life, at practice, at experience, at the joys and sufferings of actual churches. It had the effect of making many of the participants more aware as they shared one another's experiences of community. It will have for many communities the effect of legitimizing their struggle, and for others, so far not concerned, it will be a call to action.

Therefore, this Conference, meeting in faith and supported in the hope of the power of God, was for us one more sign of the kingdom of God.

II. AN ASIAN COMMENT

Asian voices were heard in Melbourne but they were rarely loud or persistent.

The upheaval in Korea happened when the Conference was in session. Two of the Korean delegates, both active in human rights struggles, had to return before the Conference concluded, because of developments in their country.

Concern was expressed in Melbourne over the struggles of people in Korea, Philippines and elsewhere. The fact that the amendment on Afghanistan was defeated does not argue any insensitivity on the part of those who voted against it. In fact it was an expression of genuine sensitivity; they were determined not to throw out the baby with the bath water. Though both the baby and the bath water need to be clearly distinguished, and explained to people, with patience and understanding.

But the focus of Melbourne was not on Asia.

The struggles of Asian peoples are far more diverse than the struggles of people in other parts of the world. Asian poverty is abysmal, and in that sense different from poverty elsewhere. Melbourne tended to lump all struggles and all deprivations together. It seemed to commend a particular model of struggle - the Latin American.

Related to this is an issue of theology. We have for long bemoaned the theological imperialism of the West. Liberation theology, born in Latin America and adopted and nurtured elsewhere, cannot now take the place of western theology in Asia. Not because we do not stand in need of liberation. Simply because the liberation we must have is from our captivities, and for such liberation we need other perspectives and other sensitivities.

Our captivities include the captivity of the traditional Christian understanding of other religions. We need liberation into dialogue, for the liberation we seek cannot be apart from the total liberation of all our peoples. This was stressed in the addresses of Philip Potter and Emilio Castro. However, it received little attention at the Conference itself.

The resurgence of religions is a reality of Asian existence. Islam and Hinduism, and Buddhism and Shintoism, are the overall context within which minority Christian communities here must live - often precariously - and witness to the Kingdom. Melbourne had little to offer to Asian Christians in their predicament of religious pluralism.

China and Indochina too are part of the Asian reality. On the challenges they pose and the opportunities for dialogue they offer, Melbourne shed little light.

Not that we can blame the world conference for these omissions. We can only blame ourselves. "Ask, and it will be given to you" - that applies to ecumenical meetings as well. For in Melbourne did not those who asked receive? (From Christian Conference of Asia News.)

"I HOPE THAT WE SHALL NOT TRY TO ESCAPE FROM THIS FUNDAMENTAL
QUESTION OF THE GOSPEL ITSELF..."

The exploration of the theme "Your Kingdom Come" has led us, sometimes in a very demanding and painful manner, to the serious consideration of the priority given in the preaching of Christ to "Good News to the poor". If there is some ambiguity in the term "poor" here, one must recognize that this ambiguity stems from the Gospel itself. It is true that the first beatitude in Matthew's Gospel says "Blessed be the poor in spirit". But it is also true that in the Gospel according to Luke the terminology is shorter and he refers to the poor in general. This Lukan version of the beatitude underlines in a painful manner the significance of this choice by the maledictions which follow the enumeration of the beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor; woe be to the rich because you have your consolation".

I maintain that in Melbourne we were finally confronted with this dialectic, with this ambiguity. It is true that one may be rich while being poor and be poor while being rich - this according to the dynamics of the Gospel. But I think that the Melbourne conference--even though recognizing that the Good News announced first to the poor does not exclude anybody, including the rich which most of us are, from the call to salvation did not want to escape from this fundamental challenge to our churches.

What we have carefully considered is the existential question arising from this paradox; the majority of those who assemble around Jesus Christ are recruited from among the well-to-do and that the majority of those whom the Good News has not yet reached are today among the poor of this world. Our generation has not finished wrestling with this. If I may advance a personal comment, I would say that it is probably because of this paradox and its intolerability that we experience today a spiritual crisis among the young generation of the western churches. I think that the younger generation woke up in the aftermath of the collisions provoked by World War II with the discovery that those who proclaimed universal love of the Saviour and the Good News to the poor were, in fact, on the side of those living off the work and blood of the poor,

I think it is this enormous paradox and spiritual challenge which is taken up by that particular dynamic of the Gospel which struck us in Melbourne and which we are trying to reflect back to the member churches of the Council. As for myself, I hope with all my heart that we shall not try to escape from this fundamental question of the Gospel itself concerning our personal life, our church life and even the life of the WCC with all the good reasons we can find to distort the demands of the Gospel.

Dear brothers, I too feel called upon to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the rich who are my fellow men and among whom I live. I do not think, however, that this can be done without posing to them the question of the rich/poor and asking ourselves the question: Does our Christian style of life really favour the proclamation of the Gospel or is it a major handicap in the missionary enterprise of our churches? It is this challenge which we raise; how it is worded is finally of little importance as long as we can really and profoundly confront ourselves through him who has chosen to reign on the cross and whose throne is the cross, with all that represents as a challenge to world power and to the power which we seek for ourselves - starting with that of money. (Taken from the response of the Rev. J. Maury during plenary discussion at WCC Central Committee