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*The illustrations in this edition are taken from the book:  
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P.U.L. - Mursia, 1999, Vatican City*



# Message of John Paul II for the UN Year of Volunteer Work

*Dear Volunteers!*

1. At the end of the year, that the United Nations dedicated to volunteer work, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation for your constant dedication, in every part of the world, in going to meet those who live in poverty. Whether you work individually or gathered together in special associations, you represent for children, the elderly, the sick, people in difficulty, refugees and the persecuted a ray of hope that pierces the darkness of solitude and encourages them to overcome the temptations of violence and egotism.

What makes a volunteer dedicate his/her life to others? First of all, the innate movement of the heart that inspires every human being to help his fellow man. It is a law of existence. A volunteer experiences a joy that goes far beyond what he has done when he succeeds in giving himself freely to others.

For this reason, volunteer work is a special factor that contributes to humanization. Thanks to the many forms of solidarity and of service that they promote and make concrete, volunteer workers make society more attentive to the dignity of the human person and his/her many expectations. Through their activity, volunteers come to realize that, only if one loves and gives himself to others, does the human creature reach perfect fulfillment.

2. Christ, the Son of God made man, communicates to us the profound reason for this universal human experience. Revealing the face of God who is love (cf. I Jn 4,8), He reveals to the human person that love is the supreme law of his being. In his earthly life Jesus made the divine tenderness visible, emptying "himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Phil 2,7) and "gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5,1). Sharing our earthly life unto death, he has taught us "to walk in charity".

Following in his footsteps in these two millennia, the Church has not ceased witnessing to this love, leaving an exemplary record thanks to the saints who left their mark on history. Among the more recent ones, I am thinking of St Maximilian Kolbe, who sacrificed himself to save the father of a family, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who consecrated herself to the poorest of the poor.

Through love of God and love of the brethren, Christianity releases all of its liberating and salvific power. Charity represents the most eloquent form of evangelization because, responding to corporal needs, it reveals to men God's provident and fatherly love, concerned for each one. It is not a matter of satisfying only the material needs of our neighbour like hunger, thirst, lack of housing, medical care,

but of leading him to a personal experience of the charity of God. Through volunteer work, the Christian becomes a witness of this divine charity; he proclaims it and makes it tangible with courageous and prophetic contributions.

3. It is not enough to help whoever is in material difficulty; it is necessary at the same time to respond to his thirst for values and personal spiritual solutions. The kind of help we offer is important, but more important than the kind of help offered is the heart of the one who gives it. Whether dealing with microprojects or great initiatives, in any event, volunteer work is called to be a school of life, especially for young people, contributing to educate them in a culture of solidarity and outreach, open to the free gift of self.

How many volunteers through courageous commitment to their neighbour come to discover the faith! Christ, who asks to be served in the poor, speaks to the heart of the one who places himself at their service. He makes them experience the joy of disinterested love, that is the fountain of true happiness.

I warmly hope that the *International Year of Volunteers*, the occasion for organizing many initiatives and events, may help society to promote the many forms of volunteer work that are the sign of growth in social awareness. Often, volunteers fill gaps and anticipate the presence of public institutions that must give due recognition to the works born of their courageous initiative and foster them without losing the originating spirit.

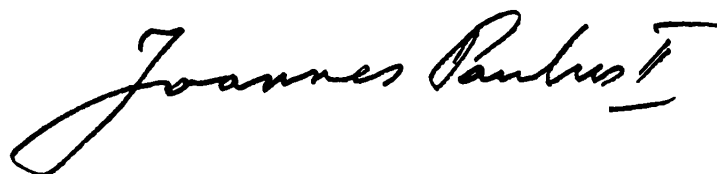
4. Dear Brothers and Sisters, who make up this “army” of peace spread over the face of the earth, you are a sign of hope for our times. Wherever situations of hardship and suffering appear, make bear fruit the hidden resources of dedication, goodness and heroism in the heart of the human person.

Making myself the spokesman for the poor everywhere, I want to say “thank you” for your steadfast dedication. Continue your journey with courage; do not let difficulties ever stop you. May Christ, the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10,30-37), be the sublime model to be imitated by every volunteer.

Imitate Mary, who going “in haste” to assist her cousin Elizabeth, became a messenger of joy and salvation (cf. Lk 1,39-45). May she teach you her humble and concrete charity and obtain from the Lord the grace for you to recognize him in the poor and suffering.

With these wishes, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, and all whom you meet every day in the course of your service to the human person.

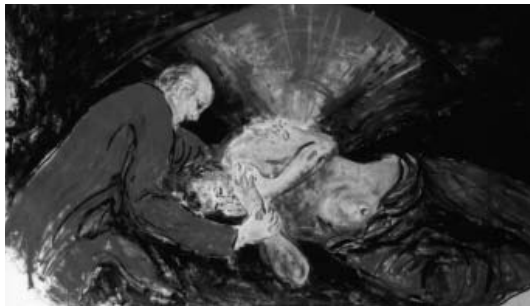
*From the Vatican, 5 December 2001.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joannes Paulus II". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J' and a distinct 'II' at the end.

## Prayer of the Voluntary Worker

*Lord, let me be everyone's friend,  
Let me be a person who inspires trust  
In those who suffer and lament  
In those who look for light far from You  
In those who would like to begin and do not know how to  
In those who would like to confide in someone  
But do not feel that they can.  
Lord, help me,  
So that I do not pass anyone by  
With an indifferent countenance,  
With my heart closed,  
With a hurried step.  
Lord, help me to become aware immediately  
Of those who are next to me,  
Of those who are worried and disorientated,  
Of those who suffer without showing it,  
Of those who feel isolated without wanting to be.  
Lord, free me from selfishness,  
So that I can serve You,  
So that I can love You,  
So that I can listen to You,  
So that I can welcome You  
In every one of my brothers  
That you make me meet,  
Amen.*

*Symposium  
on Catholic  
Voluntary Work  
in Health Care*



*‘Vade et tu fac similiter’*

*30 November-1 December  
2001  
The Vatican City*

# Address of Homage to the Holy Father

Most Holy Father,

We are deeply grateful to Your Holiness for this audience, which has been granted at the end of our international symposium on 'Catholic voluntary work in health care'. Many voluntary workers are present, and especially those who work in the world of health care and the sick, to whom they give their service of love. They have come from many countries and are joyful at your presence. They await the light of your words which will enlighten and strengthen their intentions to do good and they humbly beseech your Apostolic Blessing.

During the proceedings of the symposium we have investigated and dwelt upon the subject of voluntary work and received accounts of very rich experiences from different parts of the world. As always, our model has been Christ, the Good Samaritan. He is the real

model for all health care workers, but as regards voluntary workers we were very much struck by certain words that Your Holiness pronounced some years ago. You told us that in these voluntary workers 'works the compassion of the Father made visible in Christ, bearing witness to provident God in the world and living charity in truth'.<sup>1</sup> These are the footsteps of his figure and thus we were moved when observing, as Your Holiness stated, that 'the purity of their motivations makes them transparent; the breath of their hope makes them constant; and the humility of their charity renders them credible'.<sup>2</sup>

We thus think of the figure of the voluntary worker as a perfect expression of Christian hope, especially in the face of the illnesses that most disturb our world, such as AIDS, whose World Day we are celebrating today, in this year

which is dedicated to voluntary work.

May Your Holiness lead our voluntary workers in this admirable service of the Good Samaritan so that with your authoritative words, which have never been absent from us, and your Apostolic Blessing, their work will always be characterised by the virtue of hope.

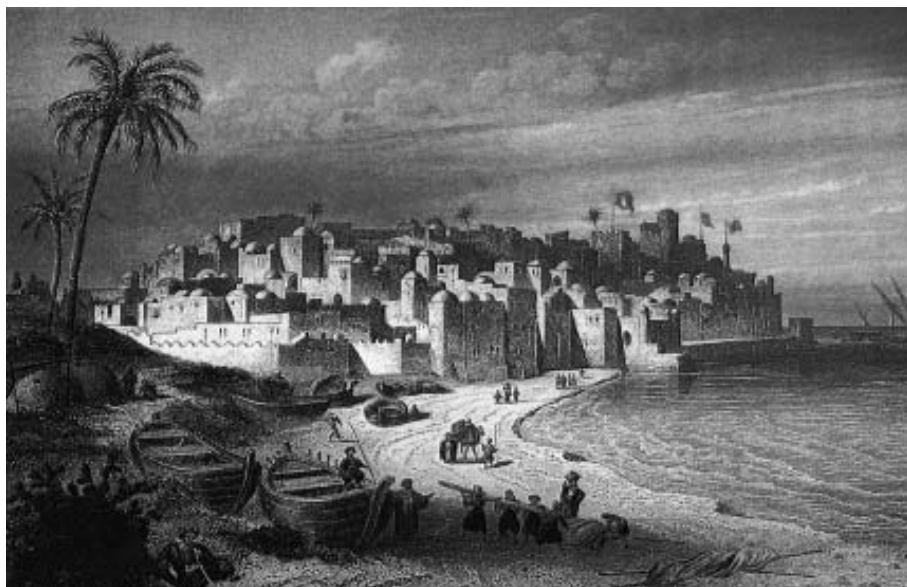
H.E. JAVIER LOZANO  
BARRAGÁN,

*Archbishop-Bishop Emeritus  
of Zacatecas,  
President of the Pontifical Council  
for Health Pastoral Care,  
the Holy See.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti, Incontri con i giovani nello stadio comunale: siete indispensabili per quello che potrete fare attraverso la fede nel Dio della pace, che si fa cultura e impegno di pace', Turin, 3 September 1988.

<sup>2</sup> 'Insegnamenti, alla Confederazione delle Misericordie d'Italia'.





# Solidarity to Solve the Grave and Urgent Problems of Humanity

*SPEECH OF JOHN PAUL II TO THOSE TAKING PART IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON 'CATHOLIC VOLUNTARY WORK IN HEALTH CARE'*

Most Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I extend a warm greeting to all of you at the conclusion of the International Symposium on 'Catholic Voluntary Work in Health Care' promoted and organised by the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care

My affectionate thoughts go first of all to Msgr. Javier Lozano Barragán, the President of your Pontifical council, whom I thank for his courteous words addressed to me on behalf of everyone. I greet the other prelates, the priests, the male and female religious, the representatives of states and government, the scholars, the researchers, as well as the numerous voluntary work associations, who, through their presence and scientific contribution, have wanted to honour this important demonstration.

Through each one of you I would like my grateful thoughts to reach all those voluntary workers, involved in a very large number of forms of solidarity, who work on behalf of the Church at the side of the poor and suffering.

2. This Symposium of yours, whose theme is the words from the Gospel, '*Vade et tu fac similiter* – Go thy way, and do thou likewise' (Lk 10:37), is to be placed in the context of the International Year of Volunteer Work, proclaimed officially by the United Nations. It constitutes, therefore, a valuable opportunity to reflect on voluntary service, which the Church has always strongly encouraged.

In a society which feels the influence of materialism and hedonism, the vitality of voluntary work is a promising sign of hope. The action of voluntary work brings out the value of solidarity, which is an irreplaceable contribution to responding to the deep hopes of the person and to solving the grave and urgent problems of humanity. Voluntary work is characterised specifically by its ability to bear witness to freely given love to one's neighbour, contributing in this way to bringing about the hoped for *civilisation of love*.

3. 'Go thy way, and do thou likewise'! As a model of reference for your action you have chosen, dear voluntary workers, the Good Samaritan, of whom the well-known gospel

parable speaks. This is a parable that is really eloquent, that calls on each believer and every man of good will to bear witness, personally, to love, especially towards those who suffer. Jesus is the outstanding model for Christian voluntary work. He 'came not to be served, but to serve' (Mt 20:28) and 'he impoverished himself for your sakes, when he was so rich, so that you might become rich through his poverty' (2 Cor 8:9). During the Last Supper, in the supper room, after washing the feet of his disciples the Master said to them: 'I have been setting you an example, which will teach you in your turn to do what I have done for you' (Jn 13:15). Following in his footsteps, voluntary workers bring to every person in pain the balsam of divine love.

In order to perform this mission faithfully, they should keep their gaze on Christ, because only from his heart comes that spiritual vigour that transforms experience. In our socially advanced modern societies, despite the provision of specific institutions to meet the needs of the poor and the suffering, the need for a 'supplement of the soul' which infuses hope into the bitter experience of suffering and pre-

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carioussness as well, fully respecting he dignity of every human being, is strongly felt. Institutions can certainly meet the social needs of people but none of them is able to take the place of the heart of man, his compassion, his love, and his initiative.

4. Thanks to God, very many lay faithful are today involved in a large number of forms of voluntary work. The Christian community, through their work, engages in a prophetic 'fantasia of charity', recalling the spirit of the early community of Jerusalem which 'offered...the moving sight of an...exchange of gifts, even to the point of holding all things in common, for the sake of the poor' (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 53)

May this always be your style of service, dear voluntary workers, especially when you have to look after the sick and the suffering. Ensure that your activities are a visible expression of that *charity of works*, by which the preaching of the Gospel, which is the first charity, does not run the risk of 'being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today's society of mass communications'! 'The charity of works', indeed, 'ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of works' (*ibid.*, n. 50).

And when you find yourselves engaged in common action for the sake of man with voluntary workers of different religions, or who declare that they are non-believers, see this opportunity as providential for the implementation of dialogue and inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. The defence and the promotion of life are not, in fact, the monopoly of anyone; they are, rather, a task entrusted to everybody.

Together, it is easier to fight and defeat the grave forms of injustice and acute poverty that offend human dignity; together, it is possible to offer a decisive contribution to the growth of civil society, whose institutions are often unequal to the request for help that rises from those in need. Together, one can create a more welcoming world.

It is, therefore, in the interest of the public structures themselves to encourage and sustain the activity of voluntary work, both that engaged in by individuals and that promoted by associations organised to quicken the pace of the path towards the construction of a solidarity-based society where justice and peace reign.

5. Your interesting Symposium ends today, a day rich in meaning, which celebrates the *World Day of the Fight against AIDS*. On this occasion, public opinion is invited to become aware of the causes and consequences of this grave illness.

Dear brothers and sisters who are sick with AIDS, do not feel that you are alone! The Pope is near to you with affection and supports you on your difficult path. The Church is at the side of men of science and encourages all those who work tirelessly to cure and defeat this grave form of illness. Following the example of Christ, she sees assistance to those who suffer as a fundamental component of her mission, and feels that she is called upon personally by this new domain of human suffering. Aware that every brother is a 'special way' for the welcoming of the Word, she bends down with love to every brother and sister afflicted by this evil.

Dear health care workers and dear voluntary workers! To you is entrusted the task of ensuring that those who are in pain feel the love and consolation of Christ. Through you may there sound out in the hearts of these suffering brothers and sisters of ours the invitation, full of love, of Christ: 'Come to me, all that labour and are burdened; I will give you rest' (Mt 11:28)!

May the Virgin of Consolation and Mercy with her maternal tenderness accompany you and sustain you at every step!

With such wishes, I most warmly impart to each one of you, to those who share your praiseworthy commitment and to those whom you serve and console in the name of Christ, a special Apostolic Blessing.



# Letter from the President of the Council of Ministers, Silvio Berlusconi, to H.E. Msgr. Lozano Barragán

Most Reverend Excellency,

I received your invitation with great pleasure, but it is, unfortunately, impossible for me to take part – as I would have very much liked to do – in your Symposium on voluntary work in health care.

I sincerely regret this, especially because I know how much importance this question has in the construction of a society in which the needs and the dignity of every man are fully respected.

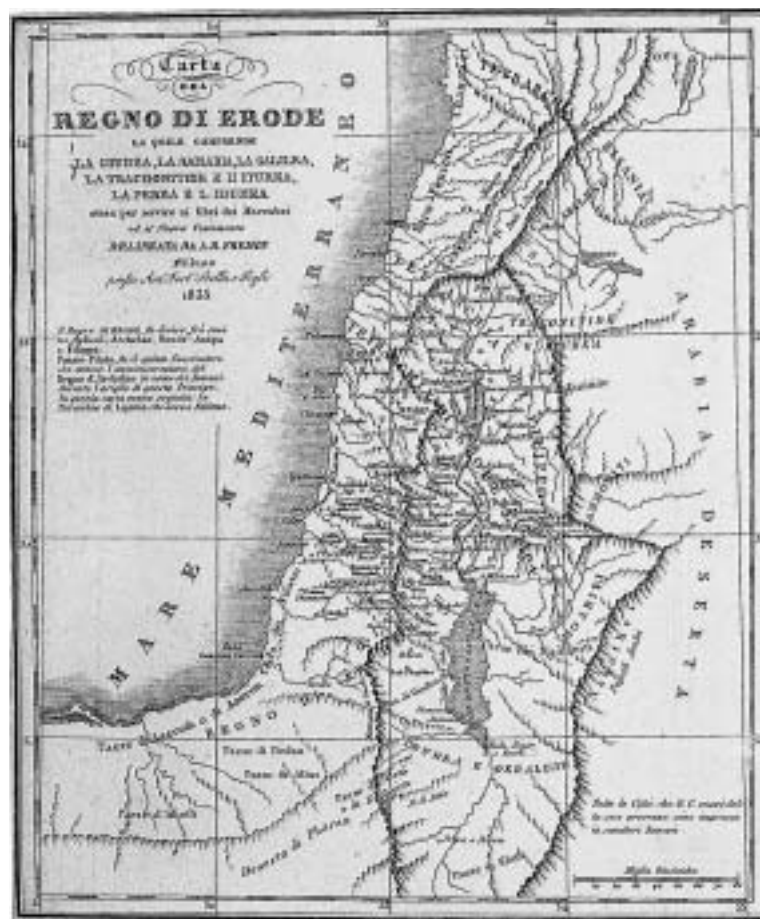
From the tasks of religious and moral assistance, from blood donors to those who work with love for the disabled and the elderly, to those who assist the terminally ill: where there is somebody who suffers we always find a voluntary worker at his or her side.

Voluntary work is certainly the highest expression of the civilisation of a country, the most eloquent testimony to the fact that the human feeling of brotherhood, generosity, in the end prevails over all forms of selfishness. And this does not take into account, in addition, that the time we give to those who suffer makes us richer in human terms: what we receive is much more than what we believe we give to others; indeed, in giving we discover the best part of ourselves.

I cannot but have great admiration, therefore, for those who dedicate their energies to the activity of voluntary work, often making up, as they do, for the failings of the public services.

In health care, in looking after the elderly, in supporting the disabled, we know that public structures are not always adequate to meeting the needs that exist; we know that prevention is often neglected, and above all that services directed towards the person are in short supply.

Notwithstanding the high costs borne by the state, the social services are in some cases



inefficient and above all else lack warmth and humanity, which are often more effective than an anonymous and bureaucratic service.

The role of the state in the field of social care, therefore, should be profoundly reformed, and this should involve facilitating and supporting all those organisations that are engaged in activity involving assistance and voluntary work. For some time the third sector has been an important reality not only from a social but also from an economic point of view. My government is committed to favouring a legislative and fiscal reorganisation of the whole of the non-profit making sector and a full utilisation of its potentialities.

To conclude: the world of voluntary work is an irreplace-

able presence, the most meaningful expression of the extraordinary moral and religious resources of our people, and a presence which achieves admirable results.

Personally, I have always had a 'full' idea of solidarity in the sense that it cannot be limited to 'giving a hand' but must become responsible for problems in their entirety, also changing at a deep level our way of living and of thinking about our relationships with other people and other peoples.

In this spirit and with this commitment, I would like to extend my greetings to all the distinguished speakers and participants,

Yours sincerely,

SILVIO BERLUSCONI  
President of the Council of Ministers,  
Italy





Friday  
30  
November

It is a great pleasure for me to be able to greet all of you, who have come here to take part in this International Symposium on Catholic voluntary work in health. During our meetings we will certainly find increasingly clear light to go on with this task that we have embraced.

In the Gospel according to St. Luke we read that Christ, when talking to a person who had invited him to a meal, replied: "When thou givest a dinner or a supper, do not ask thy neighbours to come, or thy brethren, or thy kindred, or thy friends who are rich; it may be that they will send thee invitations in return, and so thou wilt be recompensed for thy pains. Rather, when thou givest hospitality, invite poor men to come, the cripples, the lame, the blind; so thou shalt win a blessing, for these cannot make thee any return; thy reward will come when the just rise again" (Lk 14:12-14).

The voluntary worker, and especially he who provides service in the field of health care, is face to face with life itself, which is in danger, and with illness, and he is concerned about this not because he seeks something for himself but out of goodness, without asking for anything in return. He applies to his life what Christ stated in

this passage from the Gospels, and in this way he is like God the Almighty Father who created the world of His own free will, without being forced to do so, out of His goodness alone. The voluntary worker requires nothing from the person he cares for – he does everything freely, out of compassion. Free giving is something that we must defend strongly in the contemporary world, a world in which we are dominated by the approach of business: indeed, our relationships are located in a concealed or open way in giving as long there is a return. Free giving, in different fashion, is offered and this offering thus becomes a divine approach.

In this way, the Christian voluntary worker does everything for Christ, to be similar to Christ who redeemed us through his death on the cross, not because he had to pay a certain debt but because of a debt that we contracted and which he paid in a selfless way, out of pure love and compassion.

In this symposium, by examining the central subject in depth, we will listen first of all to His Eminence the Secretary of State who, in his prolusion, will illuminate us on 'Catholic voluntary work in health care'; there will then follow a survey on the doctrine of the Holy Fa-

ther John Paul II on the same subject. The following subjects will then be addressed: the biblical and theological foundations of voluntary work; from the Good Samaritan to the ecclesial community of the third millennium; various testimonies of voluntary work; voluntary work and the promotion of authentic solidarity; voluntary work and the AIDS emergency; various reports on the world of voluntary work and ordinary health care for elderly people, the terminally ill, and children, both in hospitals and rest homes, hospices or at home. These subjects will be addressed by people with great expertise – indeed, by people who are specialists in these areas.

We extend a most cordial thanks to all of them, as well as our most keenly-felt gratitude. And to all of you who will take part actively in this symposium during the various moments of discussion: many, many thanks.

And now it is an honour for me to invite His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Secretary of State, to speak.

H.E. Msgr. JAVIER LOZANO  
BARRAGÁN,  
*Archbishop-Bishop Emeritus  
of Zacatecas,  
President of the Pontifical Council  
for Health Pastoral Care,  
the Holy See.*



# Catholic Voluntary Work in Health Care

Dear members of this congress: in the celebrations of the International Year of Volunteer Workers proclaimed by the UN is placed the voice of the Holy See, which, through this meeting, seeks to give all of its support to this important initiative of the United Nations.

My paper will present a number of subjects for reflection on voluntary work as a resource for the mission of the Church, a tangible witness to charity, and an active presence for the defence of life in the field of health care.

## 1. Voluntary Work

### Associations: Christian Witness

The first year of the third millennium is offering us an opportunity to reflect on what could be the future of human civilisation, subject as it is to opposing tendencies, which on the one hand push us towards higher scientific advances, and on the other, make us fall into tragic explosions of violence.

Within this scenario there are people and associations that have chosen to work for the improvement of the quality of our history and for the development of civilisation – voluntary workers.

They have embraced the banner of mercy – there are very ancient and glorious associations which even have that name – and they seek to hear the cries of silence, the voice of those without speech, and the cry of the land in order to find an answer ‘as long as this is possible’.

Interpreting one of the most involving tasks of Christianity, voluntary workers have decided to place their own lives at the service of other people in order to construct a ‘civilisation of love’. Moved by religious faith or because they believe that a more civilised world is possible, they want to give a hand to anyone who is experiencing a situation of malaise and diffi-

culty. Beginning with the organisation of that creative micro-organism, the parish, or pushed forward by humanitarian movements, voluntary workers struggle against the deleterious consequences of racial discrimination, fight against social exclusion linked to a multiplicity of forms of poverty, and promote campaigns to defend the right to the defence of human dignity in every historical and geographical context.

Following the Christian vision of life, many are concerned with the ‘last’, who are the privileged of the kingdom of God.

The Church immediately perceived the force present in the voluntary work movement as a bearer of civilisation in care for the elderly, abandoned children, the chronically ill, the disabled, the homeless and immigrants. This is a presence that wants to create, and specifically in favour of the last, conditions of life that are more human, out of respect for God, the only Father of all men.

I realise that almost inadvertently I have pointed out the spheres of your service, the field of work of those amongst you who make courageous decisions to welcome the poor into your homes, to share the few financial resources that are available, and to accompany those who cannot manage on

their own. And there are so many of you!

When we reflect on the varying activities promoted by voluntary workers we suddenly feel a sense of admiration, but also a certain fear because one asks oneself how voluntary workers can carry out the tasks which society entrusts to them today. The Church, which has created and nourishes at her breast many associations, points to moral coherence and the promotion of Christian values as the inescapable point of reference and the inspiration of every social activity, as can be deduced from the encyclicals *Centesimus Annus* and *Evangelium Vitae* of the Holy Father, John Paul II. Strong because of they belong to this solid inner structure, Catholic voluntary workers through their action can give a soul to the civilisation of the third millennium and encourage the advance of everyone without us falling into the brutal dehumanisation to which so many wars have borne witness. Speaking about possible regressions, we should not, however, yield to pessimism because, as we can happily observe, today voluntary workers exist, and they have been defined as the ‘flower in the buttonhole’ of the ecclesial community for the new millennium.

The Church looks with hope



to voluntary work, which is the soul of solidarity and – independently of the possible and various interpretations of this phenomenon – is involved in spiritually guiding so many of her sons and daughters, by supporting their organisation, forming their consciences, and encouraging the exercise of free-giving in favour of one's neighbour.

## 2. Voluntary Work: Witness to Charity

Your activity, therefore, is an activity that seeks to radiate – in the world of suffering – the light and the warmth of the 'Gospel of charity' following on from the good news that has marked the two millennia of the Christian era.

In order to identify the characteristics of this unique message of love lived out down the centuries and in different contexts, I want to go over some of its salient stages with you.

The spring of this river of charity for our brothers and sisters is the Lord Jesus. Before returning to the Father, on the Mount of Olives he bid farewell to his disciples and assured them "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will receive strength from him; you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem and throughout Judaea, in Samaria, yes, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). From the early group of the Apostles to the Christian communities from the beginnings until today, this commitment, which marks out believers, has accompanied the life of the Church.

This witness, specifically because it affects the whole existence of Christians, led the Twelve to be the 'agents' of a deep human and social renewal. This is what happened at the beginning of Christianity and this is what is happening now and will happen for centuries to come. The saints, indeed, were, and are still, lighthouses of high spirituality and authentic humanity, and have faithfully followed the command of Jesus by spreading, through their lives, the gift of the love of God.

This was well understood by the early believing community which made of fraternal love a

rule of life and saw service to the poor as its constant endeavour. The book of the Acts of the Apostles tells us that 'there was one heart and soul in all the company of believers... everything was shared in common' (Acts 4:32), and adds in chapter 6 that the need to look after the poor and widows led to the creation of six deacons. These few references are enough to bring out the importance of witness to charity in the lives of the early Christians.

St. Basil thought that philanthropy was an integral part of the Christian vocation and for this reason he established a vast complex of charitable institutions, hospitals, orphanages and homes for the poor in Cesarea. I think that it is useful to recall that a Father of the Church such as Gregory of Nyssa, a close friend of St. Basil, wrote: 'the multitude of the unclothed and the homeless that our times have brought us is great. A large number of prisoners are in front of everyone's door. Foreigners, exiles, are not absent, and everywhere one sees outstretched hands, begging. For them their home is the sky; doorways and the isolated corners of squares are their lodgings. They are dressed in rags; their victuals are the good will of the compassionate. You who fast provide for them! Be generous towards the ill-fortune of your brothers! What you deprive your stomach of give to those who are hungry. Your giving is certainly not a loss. Do not fear: the fruit of alms will bud vigorously. Sow your gifts and you will fill your home with beautiful sheaves' (*Love for the Poor*, I).

These are words of a tormenting contemporary relevance and they push us to translate the love of God into service to the poor, who, as Jesus said, 'will always be with you' (Jn 12:8).

During the medieval period, the drawing up of an ethic that sprang from charity was very forcefully engaged in, and there were many foundations dedicated to those in need. We may cite, amongst others, the Order of the Trinitarians, founded by St. John de Matha (1213) for the redemption of Christian prisoners and humble service to

the poor. And one cannot forget the epic deeds of the mendicant orders founded by St. Francisco, St. Dominic and other saints.

In the Iberian peninsula, there lived and worked during the sixteenth century a former soldier of the army who, after his conversion, dedicated himself to the abandoned sick and poor people of Granada. He went round the city to collect alms with a large basket and two pans. This was St. John of God (1550), the founder of the Hospital Order of the Fatebene-fratelli. His motto was 'Do good brothers because of God's love for you'. And I cannot forget, in this lineage, another giant of love for one's neighbour – St. Camillo de Lellis (1614), the founder of the Order of the Ministers to the Infirm. In the words of Pope Benedict XIV, this saint gave rise to a 'new school of charity'. In his own words, his vocation was to serve poor sick people perfectly. I would like to emphasise that his action of charity began when he was a member of the laity – he was, in fact, 'the master of the house', a kind of bursar, of the San Giacomo hospital in Rome.

St. Vincenzo de Paoli (1660), in addition, can be seen as almost the heir of these two 'giants of charity'. Indeed, amongst the poor, the sick and the suffering of his France, he gave rise to a great movement of evangelisation based upon authentic witness to Christian love. Basing himself on de Paoli, the young Federico Ozanam (1853) – a member of the laity, a student, and now Blessed – at the age of only twenty gave rise to the first 'Conference of Charity', a movement destined to welcome members of the laity in order to bear witness to Christian faith through personal and generous service to brethren in poverty and need.

During the nineteenth century, in Italy, St. Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo became the symbol of the welcoming of poor and sick deformed people, those who were rejected by everyone.

Amongst the heroic figures of committed members of the laity, there was also Bartolo



Longo (1926), who built a real and authentic city of charity with nurseries, orphanages, hospitals and schools in the shadow of the Virgin of Pompei.

Together with the Blessed Bartolo Longo we remember Don Guanella, Don Orione, Padre Pio and the endless formation of male and female saints of charity who in many

times, two figures dear to Italians – St Francesca Saverio Cabrini and the Blessed Vanini.

The example of such forms of witness to charity must be for all believers a stimulus to live the present time in a prophetic way and should inspire voluntary workers to find increasingly new forms of solidarity in order to give back hope to the poor.



countries have kept alight the flame of hope and preceded the final victory of love.

I would like to finish this survey by referring to a woman who died a few years ago, small in body but gigantic in spirit – Mother Teresa of Calcutta. In the heart of the Church she remains an unforgettable witness to love that places itself at the concrete and unceasing service of our poorest and most marginalized brethren through the contribution of a very large number of voluntary workers. She was the mother of the poor because they, in her own words, are the favoured ones of Jesus. I accepted the honour of officiating at her funeral in Calcutta and in the great stadium of that city I saw a phrase of hers stand out: 'works of love are works of peace'. Through the daily hard work of her own hands, Mother Teresa crossed the boundaries of religious, cultural and ethnic boundaries, teaching that there is more joy in giving than in receiving. This is an excellent teaching for voluntary workers!

And how many other women have heroically dedicated themselves to suffering! We need only remember, in modern

### 3. Voluntary Workers in Health Care and the Defence of Life

In the last part of my reflection I would like to address two important aspects of the work of voluntary workers.

3a. The first concerns the specific character of service by Catholic voluntary workers.

We all know that the world we live in appears to be based more on criteria of economic success and productive efficiency than on the values of respect for human dignity and human life. Catholic voluntary workers in health care are involved in a battle of civilisation which concerns the very conception of life. By helping mothers in difficulty, children with often serious handicaps, and elderly people – both inside and outside public health care structures – they seek to implement authentic respect for every human life in any situation of difficulty in which it finds itself.

If we look at today's health care, confined between technological *performance* and managerial *efficiency*, we can ob-

serve that on the one hand the idea of the hospital-company is getting stronger, and on the other that health care outside hospitals is notably gaining ground.

Above all in the poorest areas of the Western world and in developing countries, the health care situation is so complex that without the help of voluntary organisations the existing evils would have much more serious effects. We may think here of the spread of the HIV virus and the attempts to care for those suffering from AIDS, which is destroying the lives of so many young people.

We can say the same about care for drug-addicts, the mentally ill, the elderly, the terminally ill, immigrants and refugees. For each of these categories, voluntary workers have invented suitable models of home-based care, night nurseries, kitchens to distribute hot meals, the collection and distribution of medicines and clothes, and clinics for free consultations.

The elderly, moreover, are increasing in number, but not all of them have enough money to live in a dignified way, and often they do not enjoy good health. For such people, voluntary workers have thought of places to meet, as well as home visits, to ensure that the so-called third and fourth ages are experienced as periods to be lived with intensity and dignity despite the fall in energy and the loss of autonomy.

3b. The other aspect which I would like to subject to the reflection of everyone is the relationship that exists in all the different kinds of action you engage in between the specific needs, and the overall health, of man.

In this sphere we can say that a form of voluntary work does not exist that is not directly concerned with the overall health of the whole human person. And the Catholic vision of health rises above mere physical well-being to involve mental equilibrium, the meeting of spiritual and religious needs as well, and an opening up to hope of a transcendent salvation upon which it is possible to base one reasons for living

or accept the natural end of earthly life.

From this typically Christian matrix is born the movement of voluntary workers in hospitals. Personal readiness to help and ethical coherence lead voluntary workers to be integrated into the tissue of public and private health care, as a result, as well, of the sensibility of civil authorities. Today Heads of State and Governments exhort citizens to belong to the complex field of health care, not only in order to make up for the failings of the system but also to complete its social mission.

The associations that come into existence to meet this need do not only use the free time of voluntary workers but allow men and women of all ages to dedicate their lives to helping the sick whilst also dedicating themselves to the duties of their own status or the commitments of their professional or home work.

As attentive observers of the voluntary work movement say, the originality of this phenomenon lies in the practice of care as the activity of a citizen who is fully integrated into society and sensitive to the bonds of solidarity that tie men together. Accompanying this spontaneous 'vocation' with adequate training, one can manage to sustain and help very many sick people who would otherwise be neglected, if not actually abandoned.

In the same spirit, voluntary workers work by accompanying the terminally ill. In the face of the abandonment to which many of them are subject, voluntary workers emphasise, through home-based care, the value of suffering by opening the hearts of those who suffer and their family relatives to hope in salvation.

The action of voluntary work, in addition, has allowed a clarification of the ambiguity of a concept of quality of life which is based at times solely on criteria of efficiency, given that the quality of human existence cannot be cynically reduced to parameters of well-being, exaggerated ideas of efficiency, and productivity. When a person, albeit suffering from an incurable illness, is freed from the anxiety of loneliness and the bite of pain, he or she can meet death with complete dignity and serenity.

Thanks to voluntary workers another step forward towards the civilisation of love has been made, with the involvement, as well, of many professionals, who today, in their protocols, include the action and the presence of voluntary workers as the protagonists of care.

#### 4. A Message of Hope

In conclusion, I would like on behalf of the Holy Father John Paul II thank all those who

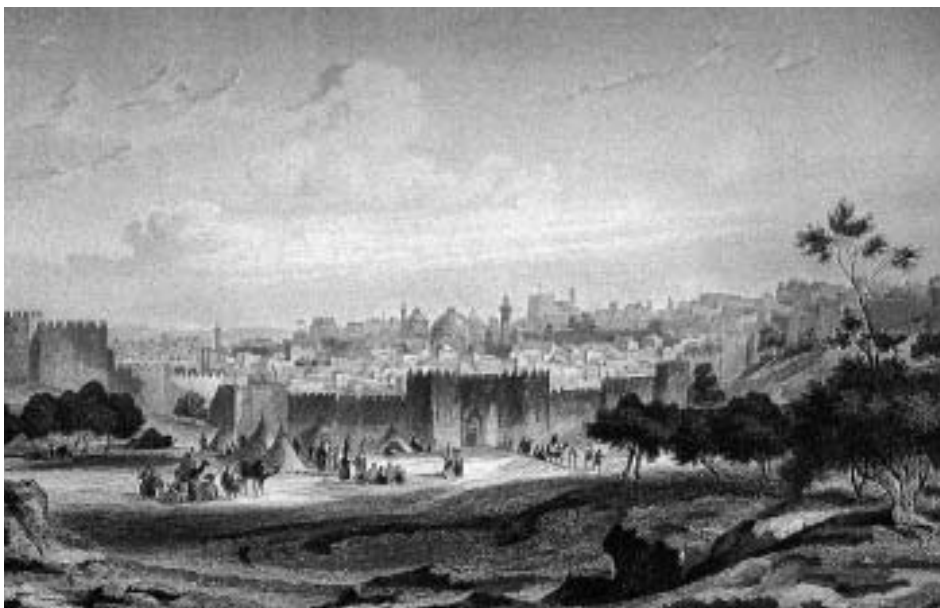
are active as voluntary workers in the various fields of providing care to those in need. By your material and intellectual help, your presence, and your projects, you give more than the service you offer. You bring hope and you stimulate your interlocutors to find the strength to overcome their momentary difficulties or weakness.

Your reward can be none other than the Suffering Christ himself in the sick that you care for with love, And so many times – let us employ the words of Mother Teresa – one receives more than one gives.

Today the Church remembers the voluntary workers of the whole world so that their work may be transformed into a message of peace between generations, religions, and populations, and so that, through them, the reasons for the disputes that lacerate the world may vanish.

In time of war the Holy See often asks that at least the humanitarian corridors be opened so that help can be brought to those who suffer. By analogy, faced with the evils of today, I am certain that voluntary workers, through their work, will be the builders of similar corridors of hope traversing the world of pain.

His Eminence Cardinal  
ANGELO SODANO,  
*Secretary of State,  
the Holy See.*





# The Magisterium of John Paul II on Voluntary Work

The subject of voluntary work is widely addressed in pastoral care in health because the contribution that it makes to the world of health care is really important. In this paper we will study this area by referring to what John Paul II has said about Christian voluntary work. Since 1979, His Holiness has dealt with this subject on more than a hundred and seventy occasions. We will summarise his thought under four headings: the premises, the personality, the characteristics, and the action of Christian voluntary work. I will deal with these headings by also adding a few brief comments.

## *Premises*

As Christians, we can choose voluntary work only on the basis of motivations linked to profound ethical and moral requirements.<sup>1</sup> Christian voluntary work, in addition, must have a capacity for dedication and loyalty in daily life.<sup>2</sup> In this way it gives meaning to life, retrieves the values of the family, of the community, of living together in a united way, of favouring development, social justice and peace.<sup>3</sup> It works against selfishness through an opening up of the will and the heart to the common good.<sup>4</sup>

One cannot be a voluntary worker spontaneously. Specific training is required.<sup>5</sup> To the enthusiasm of the initial impulse should be joined a gradual and patient pathway of training and perseverance.<sup>6</sup> We should notice how young people in this field are the most sensitive towards human needs.<sup>7</sup> In every case there should be an authentic motivation of one's own Christian action, a clear and determined will. Virtue is required and voluntary workers have to overcome selection and be helped in their activity.<sup>8</sup> Christian voluntary work does not proceed in a merely natural way but needs to raise love for man to the heights of the charity of Christ and thereby restore awareness of the dignity of each man and discover new paths which will be followed according to various

needs.<sup>9</sup> In this way Christian solidarity will be achieved.<sup>10</sup>

The Christian lives out his or her voluntary work as a freely-given gift to serve Christ in the same way as Christ himself served.<sup>11</sup> This is the free-giving of charity.<sup>12</sup> The multiplicity of forms of voluntary work come from the same source, namely Christ himself.<sup>13</sup>

## *Personality*

Voluntary work is a typical phenomenon of our times<sup>14</sup> and it offers us inexhaustible riches.<sup>15</sup> It is the fruit of the responsibility of the whole community<sup>16</sup> and is based upon perennial human and Christian values.<sup>17</sup>

Christian voluntary work is a force for social and political renewal that addresses emergencies, at the same time as it stimulates the authorities who are responsible for such sectors to remove the causes that have made it necessary.<sup>18</sup> At a more specific level, such voluntary work is an antidote to the crisis of meaning and values, and opposes selfishness and violence.<sup>19</sup> It introduces the challenge of witness, on which depends the future of the whole of mankind.<sup>20</sup> It is witness to love for one's brother and to loyalty to the Gospel.<sup>21</sup>

Christian voluntary work, which is a sign of charity, is deeply engraved in the heart of Christ and the Father, who sees it even though He acts without showing Himself.<sup>22</sup> Voluntary work and compassion amount the same thing – seeing Christ in a poor person.<sup>23</sup> It is the alive and constant preaching of the presence of Christ, who is always journeying with mankind.<sup>24</sup> It involves the radical approach required by the mystery of the redemption – to serve God following the example of Christ, until death. This is the kingdom of God, the path of Christ, which is very distant from the human criteria of power, strength and money.<sup>25</sup> The first incarnation took place with the '*fiat*' of a person; voluntary work achieves incarnation through the many '*yeses*' spoken to the Father.<sup>26</sup> In this way it takes part in the mis-

sion of the Church,<sup>27</sup> realising the great divine mystery according to the differences of each charism.<sup>28</sup> It is, therefore, an important expression of apostolate,<sup>29</sup> especially for the young people who take on its tasks by working amongst those of their same age.<sup>30</sup> It is the most fertile terrain for vocations that exists.<sup>31</sup>

Scientific voluntary work, and in particular voluntary work which acts in the field of ecology, is one of the most noble forms of love for one's neighbour that there is.<sup>32</sup>

The Virgin Mary, with her "here I am", is the icon of Christian voluntary work.<sup>33</sup> She is the model in which divine compassion shines forth – this is the meaning of Mary's visit to her elderly cousin, Elisabeth.<sup>34</sup>

## *Characteristics*

In order to become a Christian voluntary worker one has to be open with one's will and one's heart to the common good in order to achieve civilisation and brotherhood.<sup>35</sup> It is natural that a fundamental characteristic of such work is maturity.<sup>36</sup> An open life inspired by solidarity towards the poor and the young is necessary.<sup>37</sup> It should be discreet, generous, respectful towards people, well-trained by ethical principals in its motivations. And a method should be followed that has solid spiritual roots,<sup>38</sup> and is full of hope against indifference.<sup>39</sup> There should be freedom of initiative against selfishness.<sup>40</sup>

There should be that Christian who distinguishes himself or herself from other voluntary workers because of gospel-based motivations cultivated in prayer and education in openness to a possible final commitment to the consecrated life.<sup>41</sup> Poverty and chastity are his or her characteristics. Christian voluntary workers are simple and meek, and they cultivate the spirit of sobriety and of sacrifice.<sup>42</sup> Purity of motivation makes them transparent; the breadth of their hope renders them constant; and the humility

of their charity makes them credible.<sup>43</sup> They have great charity, patience and the capacity to give.<sup>44</sup> Federico Ozanam was a great protagonist of Christian voluntary work in its very large number of aspects and expressions.

### Action

The action of Christian voluntary work has many expressions and features. Let us now see how John Paul II describes such work: 'the Christian voluntary worker aspires to help and justice,<sup>46</sup> acts to modify the causes of suffering,<sup>47</sup> tries to provide new answers to emergent problems, especially those brought about by modern forms of marginalisation,<sup>48</sup> acts as a yeast within the social tissue (forms of compassion),<sup>49</sup> takes the side of those who have problems so as to help them to follow the path of authentically human liberation and advance,<sup>50</sup> and promotes the culture of life and authentic solidarity.'<sup>51</sup>

His or her endeavour is to make the culture of love grow and develop in the world,<sup>52</sup> provide help in relation to ancient and new forms of poverty,<sup>53</sup> and foster the service of welcome and reception by young people.<sup>54</sup>

The Christian voluntary worker, together with professional health care workers, builds up the health care family<sup>55</sup> and tends to make of human society a single community.<sup>56</sup> The recipients of his or her action are the sick, the disabled, the elderly, and the poor; he or she wishes to create a collective reality of love and service<sup>57</sup>. The Christian voluntary worker undertakes to integrate disabled people into ordinary life;<sup>58</sup> always places the person of Jesus at the centre of personal and collective decisions;<sup>59</sup> and implements the compassion of the Father that was made visible in Christ.<sup>60</sup> The Christian voluntary worker is a witness to loyalty to man and to Christ; works for Christ with the least of our brethren;<sup>61</sup> and his or her love is creative.<sup>62</sup> Giving occupies a primary position in the Christian voluntary worker to the point that he or she offers his or her own life. He or she offers his or her suffering as his or her most valuable contribution.<sup>63</sup> In this way, God reveals Himself as love, because the Christian vol-

untary worker bears witness to the presence of provident God in the world, and lives charity in truth.<sup>64</sup>



### Comments

#### Premises

Let us now turn our attention to the premises that in this field seem to us to be fundamental, that is to say the values that constitute the prerequisite for Christian voluntary work.

Without wanting to be excessive or pessimistic, we have to accept the fact that at least in certain areas of contemporary culture (and perhaps not only the culture of the West) we are face to face with a levelling of life. To speak of metaphysical values is like speaking about alchemy or science fiction. People are the declared enemies of all abstraction; they live in a world of the practical and everything else is seen as belonging to obscure epochs foreign to the domain of scientific experimentation.

In post-modern culture, reference is made to the fall of 'isms'. It is said that ideologies have given way to the concrete, to what is real, to the daily realities of life itself which is taken as it comes. It should be experienced and only subsequently can there be space for reflection, if this is something that actually interests anybody. The Christian voluntary worker does not agree with this approach. By involvement, he or she asks questions about the meaning of life – why serve the family? What is pain? What are suffering, death, and the community? What does liv-

ing together mean? What are development, liberation, and justice? The Christian voluntary worker is interested only in the value of life and what it is worth living for, and knows how to open his or her heart.

The path of the Christian voluntary worker begins with love for man. However, he or she soon realises that if such a concern remains at a horizontal level it is not sufficient – at the centre of things there will always be his or her person and others are left at secondary level. Only greater depth will allow the move to real charity and the realisation that to open oneself to the dignity of the persons of others means to open oneself to Christ, to the Lord. This means to worship, and there is only one who can be worshipped.

At the level of the tangible, in our information technology and audio-visual culture, where the image has a fundamental importance, there is to be found a point of encounter with the culture of words and images, both tangible and audio-visual, of the Word made flesh.

Perhaps because of a reaction to a feeling of emptiness, voluntary work today is very widespread. There is a search, implicitly or explicitly, for the value of things, and when secularism is defeated this flowers into Christian voluntary work.

#### Personality

I would like to emphasise in particular the reference of the Pope to the 'yeses' of the incarnation. In one of the texts that has been previously cited in this paper, the Pope expresses himself in the following way: 'I thank you for your presence and your participation and I wish to exhort you to follow on your road of voluntary work. To arrive it is necessary to be responsible. But maturity is required to be able to take part in the common good: Christ, in whom we share through the sacraments, and the whole of this human-divine mystery, is realised in fact in the Church. There the incarnation continues. The first is manifested through the 'fiat' of a person and is then realised in the very many 'yeses' directed towards the Father'.<sup>65</sup>

The Pope refers to the Marian 'fiat'. Mary is the icon of voluntary work and dedication. In her

'*fiat*' we hear the most original, strong and powerful '*fiat*' – that of the Word of God. 'Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God', as it is written of me in the roll of the book' (Heb 10:7).

The Word of God fully conforms to the Father in the Spirit and the mystery hidden in eternity is realised in time.<sup>66</sup> Beginning with Mary, this realisation took place in the subsequent '*fiats*' that established the Church.

Indeed, the Church is 'a multitude reunited by the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'.<sup>67</sup> It is the multitude that says 'yes' to the congregating voice that comes from the unity of the Trinity. For this reason, the Christian voluntary worker shares in the mission of the Church and realises the great divine mystery through his or her 'yes', open to service to the poor, according to the multiple forms of his or her charism. In this way he or she grafts onto the mystery of the redemption, and through the pathway of Christ builds up the kingdom of God. For this reason, he or she is sent as an apostle. He or she works for the unity of the human family and to this end carries out his or her service. In this way, the Christian voluntary worker represents Christ thanks to the love represented by the Holy Spirit, and full of this love he or she goes towards the Father, achieving with Christ redemption, liberation from sin, from death and from everything that accompanies the human condition (illness, poverty, and every form of need).

Thus the voluntary worker leads the whole of mankind back to the Father for Christ in the Holy Spirit. It is not rare for this to happen above all else in the consecrated life, and for the Christian voluntary worker to be the most fertile terrain for vocations.

### Characteristics

The Pope points out a list of virtues which are the characteristics of Christian voluntary work: openness, maturity, discretion, generosity, respect, hope, initiative, poverty, charity, chastity, sobriety, meekness, sacrifice, transparency, constancy, credibility, patience, and a wish to give. A phrase may be quoted which after a fashion

summarises all of these virtues: 'the purity of their motivations makes them transparent; the breadth of their hope makes them constant; and the humility of their charity makes them credible'.

Today the sense of the common good, the coefficient of civilisation and fraternity, has grown weak, especially if we consider this not only from the point of view of the limited horizons of our land or our homeland but from an international perspective. The so-called first world does not listen very much to those on whom it has conferred the title 'the third world'. Authentic Christian voluntary work is not a handful of alms given to the poor man who is lying at the door of a rich man but an opening of the heart to the international common good and rises above economic and cultural or racial calculations by achieving real solidarity.

The Pope lays stress upon the opening of the Christian voluntary worker to the consecrated life and then states that such a worker distinguishes himself or herself from other voluntary workers because of his or her Gospel-based motivations, which are cultivated in prayer, and because of a readiness to engage in a definitive commitment to the consecrated life.

Indeed, reflecting at a basic level, the priest is a Christian voluntary worker *par excellence*: he has chosen to serve Christ and his brethren in the most absolute and generous way, not for a period of time but for the whole of his life. Perhaps we should now renew the contents of the priestly vocation through the contribution of Christian voluntary workers.

### Action

We could point out the task that the Pope assigns to the Christian voluntary worker by summarising it in two phrases. In the voluntary worker 'the mercy of the Father made visible in Christ acts by bearing witness to the presence of provident God in the world and by living charity in truth'.

This action makes Christ visible and Christ is the compassion of God, Christ is the ultimate providence of God, Christ is the truth that we perceive in the

charity of the Spirit. This is what the Christian voluntary worker does. For this reason, he or she is the builder of the culture of love and at the centre of his or her choices is Christ. For this reason, the Christian voluntary worker wants to be present in cases of emergency, practises the provision of help and care without neglecting justice, and the liberation and the appreciation of man. For this reason, he or she wants to make the world into a single family and his or her love is creative.

The Pope speaks about ancient and new forms of poverty. One is not dealing here merely with marginalisation and material poverty but also and in a special way with an existential void that is experienced in secularism. People have everything that is material but are deprived of the meaning of life, which is retrieved in particular by the Christian voluntary worker who wishes to share it with other people. Here the aim is to emphasise the activity of Christian voluntary workers in new fields that are very demanding – the centres in which culture is formed. In the document produced by the Third Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, in Puebla, Mexico, the bishops speak about the evangelisation of the builders of pluralistic society. This is a very neglected field, primarily because of the difficulties encountered by evangelisation which arise because its organisation is rather complex in character. But how effective Christian voluntary workers will be, who, with due skill and expertise, work to overcome these new forms of marginalisation!

H.E. Msgr. Jayier  
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Archbishop-Bishop Emeritus  
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Council for Health Pastoral Care,  
the Holy See.

### Notes

The quotations are taken from the CD electronic text, UNITELM, Padua.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Udienza alla giunta e al consiglio regionale del Lazio', Vatican City, 2 May 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Alla popolazione del rione Scampia', Naples, 11 October 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. All'Angelus la meditazione sulle litanie del sacro cuore. Ai fedeli riuniti', Vatican City, May 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Ai vigili del fuoco volontari', Vatican City, 10 January 1985.



<sup>5</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Alle Caritas d'Italia: la parola di Dio nella testimonianza della carità', Vatican City, 20 September 1979.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. F. OSELLA, *La parola del papa ai sofferenti* (Rome, 1994), p. 178.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Ai vescovi piemontesi in visita ad limina: camminare al fianco dell'uomo singolo e della società di oggi per illuminare e guidare nella prospettiva del giusto progresso', Vatican City, 31 January 1987.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. All'Assemblea della FOCSIV: l'impegno cristiano esige il volontariato', Vatican City, 25 February 1984.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. F. OSELLA, *La parola del papa ai sofferenti*, p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Agli ammalati e ai volontari: Maria, primo e inarrivabile modello di volontariato', Florence, 19 January 1986.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Nella biblioteca privata. Visita del presidente della Repubblica Italiana', Vatican City, 10 April 1985; 'Agli operatori sanitari cattolici: creare forme di assistenza per testimoniare Cristo salvatore dell'anima e del corpo', Vatican City 31 October 1985; 'All'Unione dell'apostolato cattolico', Vatican City 2 November 1985.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Ai vescovi della Puglia in visita ad limina: la diocesi pugliese, ponte lanciato verso l'oriente cristiano', Vatican City, 20 December 1986.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Beata Vergine di Lourdes: un grido presente dal mondo della sofferenza: la vittoria dell'amore sull'odio, della pace sulla guerra', Vatican City, 11 February 1994.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Il messaggio per la giornata missionaria mondiale: la missione è la grazia per ogni Chiesa e condizione di rinnovamento', Vatican City, 30 May 1982.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Al movimento per la vita', Vatican City, 25 January 1986.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Alle Caritas d'Italia: la parola di Dio nella testimonianza della carità'.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Ai membri delle Piccole fraternità di Verona: aiutando l'uomo, le organizzazioni di volontariato diventano fermento di autentico rinnovamento sociale', Vatican City, 10 September 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Udienza alla confederazione delle Misericordie d'Italia', 15 June 1996.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Udienza alla confederazione delle Misericordie d'Italia'.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Le parole rivolte alle migliaia di ragazzi e di ragazze convenuti presso il Palazzetto dello sport. Un progetto di vita basato su Cristo per offrire una risposta alle sfide del secolarismo', Asti, 26 September 1993.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Incontro con i vescovi spagnoli di Tarragona-Oviedo: maggiore coscienza di essere Chiesa per rispondere alle sfide secolaristiche', Vatican City, 13 November 1991.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Benedetto e inaugurato il centro odontoiatrico della Caritas', Rome, 25 January 1989.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Ai giovani prima dell'Angelus, piazza s. Croce: giovani, umanizzate la terra', Florence, 19 October 1986.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. F. OSELLA, *La parola del papa ai sofferenti*, p. 178.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. L'omelia della messa per i giovani fedeli della Galizia: non abbiate paura di essere santi', Santiago di Compostela, 20 August 1989.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Visita pastorale del vescovo di Roma', Parrocchia di S. Prisca all'Aventino,

Rome, 21 February 1988.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Messaggio per la celebrazione della giornata missionaria: i laici assumano con personale responsabilità il compito dell'evangelizzazione', Vatican City, 7 June 1987.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti', parrocchia di S. Prisca.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Esortazione apostolica postsinodale: *Christifideles laici*', 30 December 1988.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Ai vescovi dell'India in visita ad limina: la Chiesa, specialmente in India, rende efficace testimonianza in forza del suo umile servizio verso chi ha bisogno', Vatican City, 6 April 1989.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Udienza all'assemblea plenaria del Pontificio Consiglio della pastorale per gli opera-



tori sanitari, sala del concistorio: il dono della vita è aggredito e rapinato in numerosi bambini condannati dall'odio e dal calcolo egoistico a non avere futuro', Vatican City, 1 March 1994.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Discorso agli scienziati durante l'incontro presso il Centro Ettore Majorana: scienza e fede sono entrambe dono di Dio e in lui trovano il loro principio di unità', Erice, 8 May 1993.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. F. OSELLA, *La parola del papa ai sofferenti*, p. 178.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Agli ammalati e ai volontari'.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Ai vigili del fuoco volontari: il volontariato, coefficiente di civiltà e di fraternità', Vatican City, 1 October 1985.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Visita pastorale del vescovo di Roma', parrocchia di S. Prisca.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Esortazione apostolica post-sinodale *Pastores dabo vobis*', Vatican City, 25 March 1992.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Udienza alla confederazione delle Misericordie d'Italia'.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Alla celebrazione di fine d'anno: non sono i beni materiali che fanno difetto alla città', Rome, 31 December 1990.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Alla cittadinanza e alle autorità: sostenere e difendere la famiglia per garantire il futuro della nazione', Lucca, 23 September 1989.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Alla popolazione del rione Scampia: non arrendersi al male! Il bene fa meno rumore ma compie prodigi', Naples, 10 November 1990.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Incontro con i giovani al Palasport: la chiamata di Gesù, un'avventura superiore alle altre', Genoa, 22 September 1985.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Incontro con i giovani nello stadio comunale: siete indispensabili per quello che potrete fare attraverso la fede nel Dio della

pace che si fa cultura e impegno di pace', Turin, 3 September 1988.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Alle famiglie religiose dei Fatebenefratelli e dei Camilliani: una missione per servire gli infermi e umanizzare i luoghi della sofferenza', Vatican City, 7 May 1987.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Le visite pastorali del vescovo di Roma', parrocchia di S. Saturnino in via Salaria, Rome, 12 March 1989.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Con il mondo del lavoro all'autodromo di Piorano: la forza più autentica di progresso è l'amore che si traduce in solidarietà operante', Modena, 6 April 1988.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Alle Caritas d'Italia'.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Udienza ai partecipanti alla conferenza internazionale promossa dal Pontificio Consiglio della Pastorale per gli Operatori Sanitari: i disabili hanno il diritto di essere accolti nella società e di diventare autentici protagonisti della loro esistenza', Vatican City 21 November 1992; 'Incontro con il Presidente della Repubblica Italiana: il discorso al Presidente della Repubblica Italiana, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro', Vatican City, 27 November 1992.

<sup>49</sup> JOHN PAUL II, 'Udienza alla confederazione delle Misericordie d'Italia'.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. F. OSELLA, *La parola del papa ai sofferenti*, p. 178.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Udienza alla confederazione delle Misericordie d'Italia'.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Udienza alla confederazione delle Misericordie d'Italia'.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Al nuovo ambasciatore d'Italia presso la Santa Sede: tutela della persona umana, difesa della vita, formazione dei giovani, recupero dei valori familiari nella sollecitudine della Chiesa per il bene della società', Vatican City, 17 March 1988.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Al sindaco e ai componenti della giunta del comune di Roma: valorizzare in termini nuovi le disponibilità di un volontariato capace di animare i servizi di accoglienza dei giovani', Vatican City, 7 February 1991.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. All'ospedale S. Camillo: la comunità sanitaria deve difendere e non stroncare la vita', Rome, 3 July 1983.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Ai rappresentanti della FOCSIV: volontariato senza frontiere al servizio della missione', Vatican City, 21 February 1987.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Alla parrocchia di S. Giuseppe da Copertino', Rome, 22 March 1987.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Ai membri delle Piccole fraternità di Verona'.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. F. OSELLA, *La parola del papa ai sofferenti*, p. 178.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Alla confederazione delle Misericordie d'Italia'.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. All'ospedale pediatrico G. Gaslini: sono qui per portarvi una carezza e confortarvi', Genoa, 22 September 1985.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Ai tossicodipendenti: per vincere la droga occorre l'impegno della società', Viterbo, 27 May 1984.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Udienza generale'; cf. 'Insegnamenti. Un mondo di odio e violenza: Maria ci insegna ad amare', 30 December 1987.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti. Udienza ai rappresentanti delle Misericordie ricevuti a conclusione del convegno internazionale svoltosi a Firenze: le Misericordie testimoni della cultura della carità', 14 November 1992.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, 'Insegnamenti', parrocchia di S. Prisca.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Rom 16,25; Ef 1,9; 3,5,9; Col 1,26; 2,2.

<sup>67</sup> Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 4, (BAC, Madrid, 1965).

# Voluntary Work: the Biblical and Theological Foundations

## 1. The Co-ordinates of the Subject of Voluntary Work

The task that has been entrusted to me is that of reflecting on the Christian motivation behind voluntary work and on its significance within the Church. In a general sense, we may say that voluntary work is directed towards expressing a different quality of social participation by treating the human person not as a space for theoretical exercises but as a planning model around which all forces should converge – there thus emerges a need and an ethical responsibility that does not confine itself to addressing suffering and marginalisation, and looking for the other person and welcoming him within a framework of solidarity, but which in addition opens up to an institutional level by requiring a change in society, its customs and its lifestyles. Voluntary work is rooted, therefore, in a wish to regain the meaning of life and to become a proposal for a new civil co-existence.

As such, voluntary work takes the form of an authentic cultural force: before producing services, it generates ideas and new beliefs; before committing time and energy, it generates a judgement of situations and history by involving its own existence. Far from being a commitment of free time and charitable readiness to help, voluntary work calls into play the basic perspectives of one's own personal and social view of life, of the world, and of man.

For this reason, voluntary work can at a theological level be located within the context of the Judeo-Christian understanding of the Covenant. Indeed, in this context, the experience of suffering, of the evil that expresses itself in the concrete condition of the poor (widows, orphans, the sick, the elderly on their own, etc.) and the oppres-

sion of people, is a contradiction of the Covenant with God and thus requires the commitment of man for it to be cancelled, and this in the name of the freedom of all the people of God and the dignity of man, who is created in the image and likeness of God.

From the outset, care for the poor was entrusted to voluntary workers. This was the practice during the medieval period as well, where it was to be found practised above all in connection with the monasteries and the mendicant and hospital religious orders. And as such, voluntary work has always been spontaneous and freely given action to help one's neighbour, the other person of one's daily life. Defined as such, one could say that it has also been a phenomenon that is as old as the world,<sup>1</sup> and practised within a family, a clan, a caste or peoples, it can be understood as group solidarity.

But the second half of the nineteenth century was a special stage in the development of voluntary work because it raised the social question in an acute way. Indeed, it was during this period that the encyclical of Leo XIII was issued,<sup>2</sup> a document which sought to formulate the social doctrine of the Church. And it was also during this period that states began to draw up their social systems and associations were created at a private level. At the level of the Church, various movements took on what the monasteries and religious orders had done during the medieval period and what during the modern period was performed by individual Christians and philanthropists and the associations that they founded. Of these associations we should remember: those for health, for the disabled, for care for the sick, for people on their own, for families in mourning (cf., for example, the so-called 'Le Misericordie'), the home-

less and the unemployed, the elderly etc.

One could, therefore, say that as organised action within the context of the experience of faith,<sup>3</sup> or as the social dimension of the responsibility of the Church,<sup>4</sup> voluntary work began to be structured towards the end of the nineteenth century and experienced an extraordinary development during the 1960s and 1970s. However, the phenomenon has been present in other ways throughout the history of Christianity. This development and this structuring took place with reference to the Jewish institution of 'care for the poor'<sup>5</sup> and the Christian concept of deaconry.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, the historical roots and biblical foundations of Christian voluntary work are to be looked for in the Christian understanding and practical expression of love for one's neighbour.

And it is against this background that we may locate voluntary work of a Christian inspiration. Indeed, for such voluntary work one's attitude towards another person is profoundly linked to an awareness of one's own Christian identity – identity and openness to the other person are instances in a single process. Here we encounter a primary element that characterises voluntary work – understanding of oneself and openness to another person; oneself as a gift. It seems to me that the difference between one way of being-for-another, that which involves taking care of him and closing him up in one's own 'fondness', and the Christian one, which seeks to promote the other person in his originality, is not to be found in generosity and commitment but in a different consciousness of oneself.

In his speech to the Federation of Christian Organisations of International Voluntary Work (FOCSIV) given on 31 January

1981, Pope John Paul II defined voluntary work as 'the sign and expression of gospel-based charity which is a freely-given and selfless gift of oneself to one's neighbour, especially to the poorest and the most in need'.<sup>7</sup> One is dealing, therefore, with a 'free service to help brothers and sisters in need', a service that is rooted in the wish to think and live one's faith within history and society, and which has its source in the imitation of the free giving of Christ to the Father and to men. Hence one can say that the identity of voluntary work of a Christian inspiration is today deeply marked by two facts.

The first is to be located in a globalisation that today is fundamentally economic in character and which is creating new forms of poverty, of the negation of the other person in relation to his otherness and dignity: neglected sick people, lonely elderly people, whole peoples, and countries and continents abandoned to their fate in their struggle for survival. The by now general awareness of the unacceptability of all this can generate, among other things, voluntary work as a form of friendship, of concern for the other person, and as sharing and solidarity with the other person. Such awareness is born from the urgent need to apply the Gospel to life and history. The knowledge that there is only one history, the history of salvation, must lead us to delineate in a clearer way the inspirational and dynamic character of the certainty that the kingdom of God has already been planted in this history (Mk 1:14-15).

The second is correlated with the first and is rooted in the social and historical character of Christian faith, which leads each and every Christian to be a witness to the Kingdom of God, thereby realising the missionary character of the Church herself. As John Paul II so well declared: 'It must be precisely this dimension of faith and charity that defines your option and confers a completely special imprint on your life project and your style of action as Christian voluntary workers... In this way your option of life will not be born from an existential void

with a view to achieving an escape, but will spring from a spiritual fullness and thus directed towards the building up of the Kingdom of God'.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, albeit within a special experience, voluntary work takes on 'as its own the task of evangelisation that belongs to the whole of the Church'.<sup>9</sup> Here we find expressed the ecclesial and missionary character of voluntary work which thereby becomes a sign of the vitality of the Church in her journey for men.

In its option for God and dedication to suffering men, voluntary work thus becomes a sign of a Church that is interested in the totality of man and his history, of the interdependence between kingdom and history, and which contributes 'a great deal

thought of in theological terms as being within a relationship of free giving. In order to establish its bases, we need to have in our sights the experience of the intra-Trinitarian and ecclesial family.

## 2. The Theological Christological Foundation of Voluntary Work

The words with which God revealed Himself to Moses, and which indicated the characteristic of those who must be holy like their Father in heaven, was a programme which expressed its own essence – Jehovah – which means 'I will be there as He who will be there', that is to say 'I am for you in the present and in the future a



to making the family of men and its history more human'.<sup>10</sup>

In these reflections I will try in the first instance to call to mind the rooting of voluntary work of a Christian inspiration in the understanding of Christian identity as a gift, as openness to others (II). Then I will reflect upon the nexus that exists between voluntary work/solidarity and freely given service (III). Lastly, an attempt will be made to bring out the missionary and ecclesiological character of voluntary work (IV). The reflections that follow, therefore, are guided by the fundamental idea that voluntary work is based upon a relationship free from every kind of search based upon interest and advantage. It places the value of the person at the centre of things and as such can be

caring God, who will be concerned about you, who will take care of you' (cf. Ex 3:14). God is God for man and humanity. The two tables of the Law of the Decalogue clearly show that the 'yes' to God moves through the 'yes' to man and his fundamental rights: whoever destroys humanity or allows humanity to be destroyed by another destroys the covenant with God.

Thus one can well understand why the Psalms often emphasise the fact that 'only he who has clean hands and a pure heart can ascend to God' (cf. Ps 15; 34). The Prophets also returned unceasingly to this central theme, which is at the heart of the relationship between God and man, and also to God's care and concern for man. Whether they were Amos, Isaiah or Jere-



miah, all of them invited men not to forget or neglect this prohibition of God: 'they do not defend the fatherless and the widow's cause does not come to them' (Is 1:23). And the Prophet Micah describes the existence of man before God in the following way: 'to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God' (Mic 6:8).

The concrete meaning that this sense of fraternity must have in Israel is specified in the Book of Leviticus: 'When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt' (Lev 19:33-34). The face of the other person, especially of another person who is suffering, thus becomes the way to gain access to God.<sup>11</sup> It is in this tradition of faith that Jesus is to be located.

The very name of Jehovah indicates that God saves. In Jesus there is thus manifested in a new way the concern of God for man and the world. He reveals Himself through his salvific action for man. The New Testament at a basic level tries to arrange and to narrate this concern of God (cf. the various healings carried out by Jesus, cf. Lk 5:12-26). It is from this action of God in relation to man that the Christian also draws his identity and the norm of his action: the love of God is manifested in love for one's neighbour (cf. Mt 22:39) and on the last day what will count will be the capacity that we will have shown to love the anonymous person, the marginal person (Mt 25:31-36) who finds his expression in the story of the Good Samaritan, which brings out the fact that one becomes a neighbour by taking care of those who are ill-treated and lack care (Lk 10:25-37). Even in the context of his crucifixion and death, Jesus established dedication to the other person as a principle of Christian self-understanding (see, e.g., the washing of feet, Jn 13:4-11). The hymn to love (I Cor 13 and Rom 5:6-8) also talks about the primary importance of love for one's neigh-

bour and its foundation in the love of God for man.

In order to give a concrete content to this love, St. Paul organised a collection to help the community in Jerusalem. One can speak here of the deacons being entrusted with taking care of the poor as being a concrete expression of the concern of the community for man (Act 6), and we can say the same about when the deacon was entrusted with taking care of widows (I Tim 5:9-16). John describes this characteristic of the Christian in a simple and full way when he writes: 'A man cannot trace his origin from God if he does not live right, if he does not love his brethren' (I Jn 3:10; 2:21; 3:7).

From what has been said so far in this paper, it is clear that the love of God is not conceivable or even credible without love for man. The Christian life is the proof of the love of God for man through the concern of the Christian for man in his daily life precisely where there is an attempt to carry another's burden. This awareness has always been present in the history of Christianity.

Vatican Council II, which defined itself as a pastoral council, emphasised in a particular way the social dimension of Christian faith and also described the large domain in which Christian voluntary work can be practised: 'Wherever there is someone who does not have food or drink, clothes, a home, medicines, a job, education, the means needed to lead a really human life, there Christian charity must search for such people and find them, console them with attentive care and raise them up by providing help' (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8). The Council goes beyond this and also expounds the modalities of the exercise of this concern: 'the duties of justice should be performed first of all because what is due because of justice is not offered as a gift of charity; not only the effects should be eliminated but also the causes of the evils; help should be governed in such a way that those who receive it are gradually freed from dependence on others and become self-sufficient' (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*).

From the Council it thus emerges that voluntary work is not a search for oneself but a search for the other, for the fulfilment of the other, for his good. It is not even a substitute for the state as regards its duties to take care of its citizens, that is to say to be really a welfare state. Here we find two fundamental elements that characterise voluntary work: the spirit of detachment, of not searching for oneself, and thus the selflessness of the commitment, on the one hand; and on the other hand, the fact that this commitment meets the principle of subsidiarity.

The Council thus entrusts the lay faithful with the following task: 'the lay faithful, therefore, should greatly esteem and support, according to their capacities, private and public charitable works and initiatives involving social assistance, of an international character as well, by which effective help is brought to individuals and peoples who are in need, co-operating in this with all men of good will.'<sup>12</sup> In this task, the Church opens to the world and takes upon herself the miseries and the hopes of the world (cf. *GS* 1), and she does not seek to exclude anyone from her concern: 'the Church surrounds with affectionate care all those who are afflicted by human weakness, indeed she recognises in the poor and the suffering the image of her poor and suffering founder, she strives to relieve their poor state, and in them she seeks to serve Christ' (*LG*, 8). She thus rejects every form of indifference towards others. The other person becomes the measurement of her loyalty to her Spouse: 'when you did it to one of the least of my brethren here, you did it to me' (Mt 25:40), or again: 'He has seen his brother, and has no love for him; what love can he have for the God he has never seen?' (I Jn 4:20) This is the strange condition of the God of Jesus who seems to receive a face through the face of the least, of those who in the eyes of society do not count because they are physically or mentally weak, because they are poor.

And thus in the face – and in many contemporary faces – of Jesus reduced on the cross to a

person without a face, to a non-subject, to an object of derision (Is 52:14), to a slave, to an abandoned person, to a sick person whom nobody wants to take care of, there is manifested the face of God. Invisible God makes Himself visible in the cry that our suffering neighbour sends in our direction. Thus the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig is right when he says that 'faith does not amount to affirming that God exists, but involves making Him exist'.<sup>13</sup> It is not the case that the existence of God depends on our action – for us His revelation is a matter of the freely given – but it is in our action that faith gives Him a concrete face.

In the face of another person who suffers an imperative presents itself to me, a commandment that I cannot ignore. This is not an abstract imperative, a general imperative such as that espoused Kant, but a biblical commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill' (Deut 5:17), which could also be understood as not allowing your brother to die. This commandment is illustrated in the dialogue between God and Cain: 'Where is your brother?' – 'Am I my brother's keeper?' (Gen 4:9). Cain believes that in this way he can escape his responsibility towards his brother, but God places him face to face with his responsibility. Thus in Genesis, this time, however, addressing Noah, God says: 'of every man's brother I will require the life of man' (Gen 9:5). The face of God, therefore, is in another person who is defenceless, without protection, and naked,<sup>14</sup> and it solicits the commitment of my will, my mind and my body.

Another person, therefore, becomes a provocation for my selfishness, which, indeed, would like to eliminate him, to forget about him in order to be absolute, given that the face of another person is the bearer of the commandment of God that I would like not to be applied to me. It is here that the note of Emmanuel Levinas is pertinent when he connects worship and relationships with another person.<sup>15</sup> Worship renders glory to God in proportion to it also being education of the instincts and the will to bend to the

needs of our weak and powerless neighbour with a view to upholding his rights. It is this dynamism of our heart towards communion with God that is at the base of the commitment of Christian voluntary work. Indeed, as has already been observed, communion with God necessarily takes place through solidarity with one's suffering brother or sister.

### 3. Voluntary Work as an Expression of the Friendship-Concern of God in Relation to Man

It is in this communion with, or being anchored in, God, that voluntary work finds its energy and meaning: that of communicating to another person what is at the very base of our Christian life – the communication of the experience of the love of God communicated to us in Jesus Christ: 'Silver and gold are not mine to give, I give thee what I can. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk' (Acts 3:4-8). And it is from this experience that there springs our generosity towards, and solidarity with, those people who suffer. This becomes in turn a guiding compass in our understanding of the world and human events, and as such a testing ground for the salvific value of our faith.

Indeed, for Christian faith the whole of history is understood as a dialogue, as a history of the covenant between God – who reveals His love in a historical setting – and man who decides in a historical setting for faith or non-faith. It is in history that the salvation of man is played out. It is only where man commits himself to God and His revelation that salvation reaches man in an effective way and that revelation becomes salvation. It is thus within our history that our salvation is played out.

Now this history reached its eschatological fulfilment in the God-man, Jesus Christ. In his style of life he revealed the way to man: a life carried out according to the golden rule – 'Do to other men all that you would have them do to you; that is the law and the prophets.'<sup>16</sup> This rule takes up the formula of ac-

tion of Matthew 5:17: 'I have not come to set aside but to bring to perfection'

In Jesus is revealed the figure of a man who becomes realised only in a relationship with another person, a relationship that manifests a justice that goes beyond every form of justice (cf. Mt 5:20) because it is based on a relationship of love, even with one's enemy. Indeed, this relationship is measured beginning with the way in which we form a relationship with those who are hungry and thirsty, with foreigners, with the homeless and those without clothes, with prisoners, and above all else with sick people (Mt 25:31-46). Christian theology has thought about this paradox of the 'exchange of places' within the context of the doctrine on salvation and redemption, employing the model of the '*admirabile commercium*'. This doctrine is aware of the mysterious and intimate tie that exists between 'esteem for oneself' (love for oneself) and concern for others. Such a tie is based upon the unity that exists between the 'irreplaceable nature'<sup>17</sup> of people and the reversibility of roles. This tie brings out the element of free giving that characterises voluntary work.

The Fathers of the Church laid especial emphasis on free giving as an element which is characteristic of the Christian life. This can be seen in their interpretation of the words of Christ: 'If any man has a mind to come my way, let him renounce himself, and take up his cross, and follow me' (Mt 16:24). The renunciation of the search for oneself, that is to say detachment, should here be placed in a Christological context. One may observe that each of the synoptic gospels tries to bring out an aspect of these words of Jesus. For Matthew, Jesus is addressing his disciples; for Mark and Luke, he is addressing the crowd (Mk 8:34-9, 1; Lk 9:23-27), that is to say one is not dealing with a condition of life of only a few chosen ones but the condition of life of each and every Christian. Luke places further emphasis on the daily carrying of the cross. The exegetic interpretation of this sentence brings out, in fact, the



Christological foundation of voluntary work.

In the opinion of Schweizer, in this passage from the Gospel Jesus refers to the freedom that must characterise his disciples – ‘a freedom from oneself and from all form of security, whether material or expectation of a heavenly reward, because the accent is no longer placed on one’s own self; a freedom, therefore, that is possible only where man abandons himself totally to God.’<sup>18</sup> The Fathers of

template earthly reality beginning with a relationship with God. For Augustine as well, the invitation to renounce oneself refers to love.<sup>23</sup> The same is true of Gregory the Great,<sup>24</sup> who saw the purpose of self-renunciation as life in Christ.

For Thomas Aquinas, man must love himself<sup>25</sup> where love is understood as friendship, that is to say caring about someone<sup>26</sup> and as a unifying force. For this reason, in the opinion of Thomas Aquinas, the love with

that mutual exchange that is established by them around this shared common good, bringing about thereby what Aquinas calls *conversatio* (*cum versari*: living with), a certain form of common life in which Aquinas perceives the existence of the essence of friendship.

To understand this communion, the Christian can use the example of the ‘*communio sanctorum*’. This Latin phrase has two possible meanings: *sanctorum* can be the genitive plural of ‘*sancti*’ (saints, that is to say the faithful, as is the case with St. Paul – cf. Eph 2:19), and thus one is referring to the communion that exists between the faithful; but it can also be the genitive plural of ‘*sancta*’ (holy things) and the phrase would then mean communion with holy things (the sacraments, grace, and God Himself). This latter meaning is at the base of the former. And because Christians take part in holy things, realities that are common to them all, they can form the communion of saints which gathers around the Holy Spirit. The good around which friends gather itself has a central place in the definition of friendship.

For this reason, Aquinas discerns three kinds of friendship: that based on interest and which gathers together people who want to achieve the same goal; that based upon pleasure, a pleasure that is sought together and which people give to each other; and lastly, friendship based on virtue. For Aquinas, the first two forms of friendship are fragile because they always run the risk of falling into avidity, into selfishness. Real friendship for Aquinas is friendship based on virtue. Although it is important to know the common good that is at the base of the communion of friends, we also need to know how to recognise and to identify the good that forms the foundation of friendship.

At the base of friendship with God, the foundation of charity and Christian voluntary work, is the fact that God communicates his blessedness: ‘the God who has called you into the fellowship of his son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful to his promise’ (I Cor 1:9). Charity is



the Church interpreted this passage in a very rich sense with regard to the understanding of voluntary work.

The interpretation advanced by Origen takes the ‘martyr’ as the central key of understanding. In his view, the passage works to free us from the fear<sup>19</sup> of totally dedicating ourselves to Christ and thus to another person rather than looking to our own interests, to our own self. Origen perceives the *Magna Carta* of the Christian life in this passage.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, for Origen the whole of our thought and speech must be such that we renounce our self, we come down from our centres so as to make space for another person. This is the path by which to bear witness to Christ.<sup>21</sup> The aim is to come to consider the other person as ourselves and this is possible if we faithfully follow Christ.

For Basil, this was real freedom, which in turn was the transposition of our human heart into heaven so that we can say: ‘our homeland is in heaven’ (Phil 3:20),<sup>22</sup> live beginning with God, and therefore con-

which we love ourselves is an internal law and a root of friendship.<sup>27</sup> In his commentary on St. Matthew, Aquinas emphasises, however, that the perfection of love lies specifically in renouncing things that belong to one, of one’s own will, out of love for another person, and finds in martyrdom the perfect expression of love, of humility, and the giving of oneself.<sup>28</sup> In discussing Aquinas, we can therefore say that the elements employed to form a basis for voluntary work can be grasped through his conception of friendship.

For Thomas Aquinas, friendship requires communication, a relationship.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, in his view, benevolence is based upon communion. To understand this concept advanced by Aquinas, we perhaps need to pass through the Greek concept of *Koinonia* found by Aquinas in Aristotle. This is first of all a community of persons who are in communion and who gather around a good that is common to them. It refers at the same time to the active communication that exists between people,

nothing else but love based on this communion with God. Charity is a certain kind of friendship with God and man.<sup>30</sup> For this reason we find written: 'he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him' (1 Jn 4:16). It is the Holy Spirit who makes us capable of this friendship with God. He, in fact, introduces us into the family of God and places us so to speak on the level of God, but it is in heaven that this friendship with God will find its perfect realisation.<sup>31</sup> Charity, therefore, is not any kind of friendship but the love with which God is loved as a subject of our blessedness. In other terms, God wants us to be happy with the happiness that He Himself is happy. Charity is thus associated with the good that is already possessed amongst the three persons of the Trinity, with their very life, with their happiness, and makes us share in their ineffable eternal exchange.

In thus putting God's love for us as the foundation of our love for Him, Aquinas presents our love for our neighbour as based upon such a love for God. We love our neighbour on the basis of the love that God has for us.<sup>32</sup> To say that God is the very reason for love of one's neighbour does not mean that one's neighbour should not be loved for himself, but rather that we can love him only within the horizon of the love that God Himself has placed in our hearts. Levinas expresses this point very well when he affirms that the referring to the Other in absolute is a call to keep watch, a watch that is responsibility towards one's neighbour,<sup>33</sup> that is to say placing ourselves in a state ready to help another person. For this reason, we can define the response of man to the friendship-love of God in relation to Him as a movement towards one's neighbour.

This responsibility towards one's neighbour is nothing else but moving out from one's own indifference in the face of the cry of a suffering brother. I cannot escape or hide in the face of the suffering of another person in his nakedness, who is without a refuge or protection. My responsibility towards him means becoming aware of this cry and trying to understand it.

This means keeping watch: 'Keep watch, therefore, because you do not know the day the Lord will come' (Mt 24:42). To be a neighbour to another person means my responsibility towards him, which prevents me from answering like Cain: 'Am I my brother's keeper?' To be a neighbour means to be one's brother's keeper.

Universal brotherhood is the name of this responsibility towards one's neighbour. Indeed, when Abraham intervenes on behalf of Sodom (Gen 18:27) he defines himself in front of God as 'dust and ashes', placing himself in solidarity with everything that is dust and ashes, and even Moses asks humbly: 'What are we?' (Ex 16:7)<sup>34</sup> It is on this becoming aware of our common human condition and the need to live in front of God that our fraternal responsibility is based. To live this life '*coram Deo*' thus becomes being directed every day towards keeping one's gaze fixed on, and attentive to, the needs of those whom God calls us to love. Our gaze fixed on God thus directs us towards our neighbour.

This friendship of charity finds an exemplary expression for St. Thomas Aquinas in the family. This is the place when love is experienced for the first time and where it should be intense, stable and strongest. This lowering down of love of the friendship of charity into a natural entity allows us to discern various aspects of love. It can be conjugal, maternal, paternal or filial, but it is the family which is always the place where we experience love with a special tenderness. For this reason, Aquinas also speaks about friendship with God in terms of a familial exchange between God and his friends. With this location of friendship in the family context we are thus led back to the ecclesiological foundation of voluntary work.

#### **4. Voluntary Work as an Expression of the Church as the Family of God**

The free giving which characterises voluntary work is demonstrated best within a

Church that understands itself as a family.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the conjugal or family relationship is fundamentally characterised by free giving. Each member is irreplaceable and cannot be exchanged with another member, but at the same time each member performs different roles for the benefit of all the members of the family. In love, in fact, it is not so much reciprocity that is of primary importance but giving. It is not his merits or qualities that render the other person worthy of my love – he is worthy solely because of the fact that he is he. His value as a person is absolute for me. Thus in the family every member acts spontaneously not only because of the role that is his, but for the good of all the members of the family. The concept of reciprocity is not a fundamental law; indeed, it is a sign of fear, of the protection of one's own rights and interests and thus always runs the risk of falling into a pure legalism. What really characterises the family is the spontaneity of its relationships, their free giving. One acts and one is involved for the good of all the members of the family, of the other person as such.

To express this free giving, the Fathers of the Church employed the parable of the prodigal son, and tried to distinguish between mercenaries who act in the hope of reward and children who act in a selfless way solely out of love for God.<sup>36</sup> Clement of Alexandria, when speaking about the three stages of the spiritual life, discerns 'a first level, which is that of being moved to do justice out of fear of punishment; a second level, which is that of the hope that moves us to act out of a wish for better goods; and lastly, the level of charity which ensures perfection'.<sup>37</sup> Of these three motives for action, that is to say fear of punishment, hope for a reward, and charity that acts only to please God, the last is the one to which Clement often returns.<sup>38</sup> Good should be desired for what it is in itself, independently of any reward.

For his part, St. Augustine emphasises the fact that 'even if in a paradoxical way there was no hope of a great good, blessedness, we must persevere voluntarily through the difficul-

ties of the present struggle, rather than allow the vices to dominate within us'.<sup>39</sup> One may here remember the invitation of St. Gregory the Great to see our image in our neighbour: '*Recte enim species nostra dicitur proximus noster quia in illo cernimus quid ipsi sumus*'.<sup>40</sup> If such great care is directed towards our neighbour this is because he is the face of God, a member of the same family of God.

One of the reasons behind this love which leads to selfless commitment is membership of the mystical body of Christ: 'we love the others like are own parts'.<sup>41</sup> The image of the mysti-



cal body allows us to perceive the point to which this real identification of Jesus Christ with our neighbour (the other person) arrives: 'you are Christ's body, organs of it depending upon each other' (1 Cor 12:27). The image of the body does not cancel the singularity of each member but bases it in the relationship. It is in union with Jesus that our relationships with our neighbour are transformed and placed on another plane. St. Augustine expressed this point well: '*Et erit unus Christus amans seipsum*' (it is Christ himself that one loves'.<sup>42</sup>

Given that every believer is a member of the body of Christ and that each man is the image and likeness of God, the Christian cannot but feel himself called upon to give to each man this sublime dignity every time that such dignity is downtrodden. In voluntary work there is thus expressed the mission of

the Church as a manifestation of the love of God in history. In voluntary work the Church manifests herself as a sign and sacrament (LG, 1) of Christ, in whom is revealed the real face of man (GS, 44:22). Along this trajectory of an ecclesiology of communion is placed not only the figure of the bishop but also every individual Christian who makes of the Gospel a choice of life and a commitment to transform society, as is said in the letter to Diognetes with its statement to the effect that ever Christian must be Providence for the other person,<sup>43</sup> thereby bringing out the sacramental character of the Christian. Vol-

untary work is to be located in this domain of witnesses to the faith in the silence of the suffering people of every day.

Placing voluntary work in this Christological and ecclesiological context brings out its transcendence in relation to everything that could simply be mere humanism and social activity directed towards making up for the failings of the state, and roots it specifically in the interior of the Christian identity, which is fundamentally characterised by concern for the other person – the sign of the love of God and thus an anticipation of his Kingdom.

#### **Conclusion: the Kingdom of God and the Missionary Character of Voluntary Work**

In conclusion, we can say that in Christian voluntary work is to be found gospel-based

faith which manifests its public character. Faith cannot be confined to the privacy of a person's interior; it cannot be satisfied with being a private faith. If it is a relationship with God, the Other Person in absolute, He is reachable only through the absolute mediation of the other person met on the path of life. The needs of the poor of Jehovah cannot be foreign to him. And it is in this encounter that there is a foretaste of the encounter towards which faith moves – communion with God. It was for this reason that the Scholastics declared: '*fides incohatio vita aeternae in nobis*'. In the act of solidarity towards those who suffer is revealed, in a particular way, something of the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is announced in the anonymous discernment of God in suffering men or in victims, whatever the causes for their fall (Mt 25:31-46). In our concern for such people, voluntary work becomes a critical point in society (which asks of the state not to neglect its duties and not to leave to subsidiary institutions what it itself should do) and a point of departure by which one judges every project for society. The Kingdom of God refers to the *eschaton*. Now, the Christian *eschaton* is first of all an excess (surplus) because of the advent of the Other, the God of Jesus. This advent is more than an ethical value and leaves a mark within the existence of believers.

Indeed, faith that expresses itself in voluntary work is an unconditional giving of oneself to the Other without any type expectation of any kind of reciprocity; it is the pure expression of free giving, of pure gift. Hope places the path of faith in a future of which we are not the masters but which is in the hands of the Other, who takes care of every man. In faith which works in charity we experience the God of Jesus as a God who draws near to every man without any repulsion and see that every human face refers back to original Love. These three theological dimensions (faith, hope and charity) bring out in a more effective way the free giving of voluntary work lived in faith. It bears



witness to the fact that it is far from every kind of utilitarianism and opportunism. The event of God is present where His free giving (grace) generates faith, hope and charity; and thus in the full opaqueness of this world His Presence can begin to well shine forth.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lk 10: 25-37 and Hans Scherpn-er, *Theorie der Fürsorge* (Göttingen, 1962), and as such voluntary work is even outside the Judeo-Christian tradition.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. LEO XIII, *Rerum novarum*, 15 May 1891, in *DH* 3265-3271 (AAS, 23, 189-1891, 643-652).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. GERHARD NOSKE, *Die beiden Wurzeln der Diakonie* (Stuttgart, 1971), pp. 43-84; cf. Siegfried Müller and Thomas Rauschenbach (eds.), *Das soziale Ehrenamt* (Weinheim/Munich, 1988, 1992<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>4</sup> PAUL PHILIPPI, 'Diaconia. Über die soziale Dimension kirchliche Verantwortung', edited by Jürgen Albert (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1984, 1989<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. ZEDAKA, *Jüdische Sozialarbeit im Wandel der Zeit* (Jüd. Museum der Stadt Frankfurt a. M., Frankfurt a. M., 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. GERHARD K. SCHÄFER and THEODOR STROM (eds.), *Diakonie – Biblische Grundlagen und Orientierungen* (Heidelberg 1990, 1994<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>7</sup> JOHN PAUL II 'A servizio della fraternità universale, n° 1, discorso alla Federazione degli Organismi Cristiani di Servizio Internazionale Volontario (FOC-SIV) del 31 gennaio 1981' in *La Traccia*, Vol. II, n° 1, 1981, pp. 65-66, p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, n° 1, p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> AG 23.

<sup>10</sup> GS 40.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. GIANNI BARBIERO, L'Asino del nemico. Rinuncia alla vendetta e amore del nemico nella legislazione dell'Antico Testamento (Es. 23, 4-5; Dt 22, 1-4; Lv 19, 17-18) (Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome, 1991), p. 202.

<sup>12</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8. The text refers to two texts: to the allocution of Pius XII, 'Pax Romana M. I. I. C' 25 Apr. 1957 in AAS, 49, 1967, pp. 298-299 and to the allocution of John Paul II to Food and Agriculture Organisation (F.A.O.), 10 Nov. 1959 in AAS 51, 1959, pp. 856, 866.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted by S. MOSES, 'Révélation et dialogue chez Franz Rosenzweig' in *Revue de Science Philosophique et Théologique*, 61, 1977, p. 518.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. EMMANUEL LEVINAS, *Difficile liberté. Essai sur le judaïsme* (Paris, 1963, 1983<sup>3</sup>), pp. 22-24, 37, 15-17.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. EMMANUEL LEVINAS, *Difficile liberté. Essai sur le judaïsme* (Paris 1963, 1983<sup>3</sup>) pp. 345-349.

<sup>16</sup> Mt 7, 12. On the universality of this rule see LEONIDAS JOH PHILIPIDES, 'Die "Goldene Regel" religionsgeschichtlich untersucht', Diss., Leipzig, 1929. For the determining role played by such a rule in modern theories of Justice see J. RAWLS: V. KOHLBERG, 'Justice as Reversibility' in *Essays on Moral Development*, vol. I (San Francisco, 1981), pp. 409s.; and C. THEOBALD, 'La règle d'or chez Paul Ricoeur. Une interrogation théologique' in *RSR*, 83, 1995, pp. 43-59.

<sup>17</sup> PAUL RICOEUR, 'Soi-même comme un autre', *op. cit.*, p. 226. Cf. Christoph Theobald, 'Points de départ de la christologie' in Joseph Dore and Christoph Theobald (eds.), *Penser la foi: recherches en théologie aujourd'hui (Mélanges offerts à Joseph Moingt)* (Paris, Cerf, 1993), p. 910.

<sup>18</sup> E. SCHWEIZER, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Göttingen, 1967), p. 99.

<sup>19</sup> Origen, *In libr. jud. Homil.* IX, 1, in *PG* 12, 987.

<sup>20</sup> Origen, *Export. Ad mar.*, in *PG* 11, 577, 580.

<sup>21</sup> Origen, *In Mt. 12* in *PG* 13, 1037. cf. *ibidem*, 1040; cf. Irenaeus, *Ad. Haer.* III, 18, in *PG* 7, 935.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. BASIL, *Grande Regola* 8 in *PG* 31, 933s. cf. HANS URS VON BALHASAR (ed.) *Die grossen Ordensregeln (Lectio*

*spiritualis* 12) (Einsiedeln, 1974), p. 78. cf. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Hom.* 55 (56) in *PG* 58, 541 (Homelies on Matthew).

<sup>23</sup> AUGUSTINE, *Sermo*, 96 (on Mk 8: 34) in *PL* 38, 584.

<sup>24</sup> GREGORY THE GREAT, *Moralia* XXXIII, 6 and *Hom.* XXXII on Lk 9:23 in *PL* 76, 1233.

<sup>25</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* II-II, q. 25, a. 4.

<sup>26</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I, q. 9, 20, a. 1.

<sup>27</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* II-II, q. 9, 25, a. 4.

<sup>28</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Ev. St. Mt. Lect.*, ed. Marietti, n° 1408s.

<sup>29</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* I, q. 20, a. 2, ad 3.

<sup>30</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* II<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 23, a. 1; cf. I<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 65, a. 5.; cf. *idem*, *Som Con Gen.* IV, 21-22.

<sup>31</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* II<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 23, a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>32</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.* II<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 23, a. 1, ad 2.

<sup>33</sup> EMMANUEL LEVINAS, 'Gott und die Philosophie' in Bernhard Casper (ed.) *Gott nennen. Phänomenologische Zugänge* (Karl Alber, Freiburg/München, 1981), pp. 81-123, p. 105.

<sup>34</sup> This is the meaning of universal brotherhood that we find in Dostoevsky when he says: 'each one of us a debtor to others for everyone and everything, and me more than others': F. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamzov*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 63.

<sup>36</sup> AMBROSE, *In Lucam*, cap. 15, libr. 7, n. 220 in *PL* 15, 1758; cf. JEROME, *Epistola 21 ad Damasum*, n. 14 in *PL* 22, 386; the Venerable Bede, *In Lecam*, cap. 15, in *PL* 92, 523-524.

<sup>37</sup> CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Strom.* IV, 7 in *PG* 8, 1264 C-1265 A.

<sup>38</sup> CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Strom.* IV, 6 in *PG* 8, 1211 A; IV, 18, 1320 B; IV, 22, 1345 BC e 1348 A; VII, 2, in *PG* 9, 409 A; VII, 11, in *PG* 9, 492 E-493 A.

<sup>39</sup> AUGUSTINE, *De civ. Dei*, lib. 21, cap. 15 in *PL* 41, 729.

<sup>40</sup> GREGORY THE GREAT, *Mpral.* Lib. 6, cap. 35, n. 54, in *PL* 75, 758.

<sup>41</sup> Origen, *In Cant.*, lib. 3, in *PG* 13, 156 BC; Ambrose, *In Psalm.* 118, Sermo 8, n° 53-54 in *PL* 15, 1317.

<sup>42</sup> AUGUSTINE, *In epist.* 1 Jo., tr. 10, n° 3 in *PL* 35, 2055.

<sup>43</sup> *To Diognetes*, X, 6.



# Only Neighbours Enter the Celestial Kingdom

*'Devotion cries: "Michelet come out of the Church!" It is true, although this alone is something that devotion has not seen, That behind the church there is man asking for help, Who is dying, and to prevent him from dying for loss of blood We have to tear our cassocks and make bandages to bind up his wounds.*

*And the Pharisee passed by on the other side...*<sup>1</sup>

The gospel parable of the Good Samaritan speaks about the spiritual life, without which the world would lose its balance; closed up in the objectivity of causes and effects it would not have meaning. The meaning of the world is freedom, that is to say the person, and the person is love. Everything begins with that act of Freedom-Love which is the act of creation. At the same time, everything tends to this act, hoping to be able to be saved. Thus there is only one song in the Freedom-Love which is the Beginning and the End of the world, because to speak about the Beginning and the End in any other way is impossible.

The gospel parables are this song. They speak about the dramatic event of the gift of freedom to man. Opening up to this gift, man exists in this world but does not belong to it. Guided by the desire for something greater than everything that has been created hitherto, he leaves the world and even himself and goes beyond the places that his reason and his will can reach. On this road, freedom takes him and transforms him, revealing to him his own name and his composition – Love. There is nothing strange in the fact, therefore, that St. Augustine answered the question *'Quid sit veritas'* with the answer *'Vir qui adest'*. Truth is the Person who communicates himself to man in a way proportionate to how he communicates himself to those who ask him for a crumb

of faith, hope and charity. In these three acts that link a person to another person is revealed to men that Freedom that makes them – if one can express the point thus – neighbours to each other.

The covenant with the personal God, who is the God of everyone without exception, obliges man to constantly extend his covenant to others. He should not circumscribe it with ethnic, political, economic or other kinds of constraints. A covenant circumscribed in such a way blocks the spiritual life of man because it blocks his desire for God. Spiritual paralysis makes men incapable of what Norwid calls 'moral union', without which in society 'there are not even parties' and those that do exist 'are like gangs or polemical camps whose fire is discord and whose reality is a river of words'.<sup>2</sup> Polemical morality does not know man. The more it is immersed in learning the less it knows him. Erudition knows nothing of the fact that freedom is the meaning of the world and that man is the wish for this meaning.

It was precisely a lawyer who asked Christ: 'Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' (Lk 10: 25ss). This question, which was correct from the point of view of scholarship, which was still divinised by the moderns just as the Law of the Jews was divinised, draws away from that drama which is the human person. The lawyer does not ask about the truth of eternal life but the technique by which it can be obtained. He anthropomorphises the Promise of freedom. He bends faith, hope and love, which this Promise awakens in man, to his own 'polemical camp'. In the 'fire of discord', in the 'river of words', faith, hope and love yield to the technique of how to engage in faith, hope and love according to contemporary interests and needs. This means that the gift of freedom itself has been eliminated by the production of freedom. That great producer, the *cogito*, every day offers a new

form of happiness, a new form of freedom that is easier to use.

The evangelist says that the lawyer put Christ 'to the test'. What test? Technical questions require technical answers from each of which there can emerge some formal error. Perhaps the lawyer wanted to demonstrate to Jesus that his thought and teaching, like the thought and teaching of the learned, were based upon arguments subject to the criterion of a formal correctness that in reality can never be fully attained.

The lawyer should have understood that Christ was not providing a definition of man or even a rule for behaviour. His doctrine in itself had nothing to do with erudition. It did not grow because of the quantity of its concepts but because it demonstrated to man how irrevocably marked he was by that gift of Freedom which is God. Christ simply revealed himself and man by 'doing good and curing all' (Acts 10:38). In the force that he emanated from his presence, he revealed the meaning of the world to others, something that could not be obtained by scholarly erudition. What Jesus had said to his disciples had certainly reached the ears of the lawyer: 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see; I tell you there have been many prophets and kings who have longed to see what you see, and never saw it, to hear what you hear, and never heard it' (Lk 10:30-34). The lawyer undoubtedly also knew the criticisms that Jesus had levelled at the Pharisees who scrupulously observed the Law to the letter: 'You are always courting the approval of men, but God sees your hearts; what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in God's sight. The law and the prophets lasted until John's time: since that time it is the kingdom of heaven that has its preachers, and all who will, press their way into it' (Lk 16:14-16). 'Woe upon you, you lawyers, for taking away with you the key of knowledge, you have neither entered yourselves,

nor let others enter when they would' Specifically after this rebuke, the lawyers 'lay in wait for him, hoping to catch some word' (Lk 11:52-53). The presence of the person for the person is light. Scholarship does not know how to read this presence and precisely for this reason it locks itself up in letters, cancelling the traces of this presence from them.

Christ corrects the question of the lawyer in a sensitive way, and that question was: 'Master, what must I do to obtain eternal life?' Jesus does not rebuke him for his ignorance and does not load him with erudite arguments, Life, in fact, and even more eternal life, is not an object that can be understood through industry by one's own reasoning and one's own hands. The lasting happiness that man desires embraces him in a way that is proportionate to how he himself comes to the other person and converts himself to that person with faith. Christ, therefore, sensitively introduces the lawyer to this coming of the person to the person, and enters into dialogue with him.

Every dialogue begins with a question which in substance asks for a gift. 'What's the time?', I ask my neighbour. His answer, if he is present in it for me, emanates a light around us that draws from the shadows the truth of our persons in this world. With this light, freedom reveals itself and by enveloping the whole world makes it beautiful and manifests its transcendent meaning. If there were no questions, the world and our lives would not be beautiful.

Jesus then asks the man what the man already knows. He wants to receive from him something so that in turn he can give him what he, Christ, knows. Only he who knows who to give also knows how to receive. With the request for some water, 'Give me some to drink!' (Jn 4:7), Jesus introduces the Samaritan woman into the dialogue of gifts in which she returns to herself marked for always by the gift of freedom, and ceases to be an object possessed by others. To the lawyer who asks him how he can obtain eternal life, Jesus asks something that the lawyer already knows: 'What is it that is written in the law? What is

thy reading of it?' (Lk 10:26). In his answer, the lawyer quotes the text of the Book of Deuteronomy (6:5) and Leviticus (19:18): 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with the love of thy whole heart, and thy whole soul, and thy whole strength, and thy whole mind; and thy neighbour as thyself'. Then Jesus says something that places their dialogue on another



plane: 'Thou hast answered right, he told him; do this, and thou shalt find life'. (Lk 10:26-28).

The eyes of learned men who are held back by the scholarship of their learning do not see what is substantial in the words of Scripture: the presence of the Person. Their objectifying thoughts condemn them to keep quiet about God and this is because God is not an object. Not knowing the Word by which God speaks to man, they do not know the Love that God is and to which He calls man. Learned men do not know this appeal. For this reason, the commandment to love God brought out by the words of Jesus, 'Thou has answered right... do this, and thou shalt find life', puts them in a state of embarrassment. The followers of scholarship understand what loving those beings who take the measurable forms of objects means. Indeed, they know how to calculate reactions to the body, to money or to a quotient of intelligence. But they do not understand what loving God totally, and loving one's neighbour as oneself, means. This is because scholarly thought says nothing that is essential about the person.

Is it possible for man to love his neighbour as himself? Man does not love himself in the same way as he loves objects. At times he even despises the measurable objectivity of his own being, but despite this fact he does not cease to love it and he wants to raise himself higher. In love for one's neighbour is it possible to raise oneself above his objectivity, which often

shouts out and more than once generates a sense of disgust?

Wanting to 'prove himself blameless', the lawyer asks Jesus: 'And who is my neighbour?' (Lk 10:29). He asks about his neighbour in the same way as he asks about the objects with which and for which he makes other objects as he wishes. He asks what kind of an object a man must be to be his neighbour. His ethical activism selects man. While he condemns his 'neighbours' to life he condemns 'foreigners' to death.

For the Jews, 'neighbours' were the members of the Covenant that God had made with their fathers, but without doubt Christ sowed a doubt in their minds by recalling the fact that sinners and pagans also love those who love them (cf. Lk 6:32-33) and that God does not divide men into 'those who belong to him' and 'outsiders' (cf. Mt 5:45). If God were to divide men in this way, love would be at the same time hatred, and freedom would be slavery. In addition, experience tells us that what separates us from 'outsiders' separates us from those 'who belong to God' and in the end also separates us from ourselves. Those who do



not love their enemies sooner or later will hate their friends. Indeed, they will become their own enemies.

In addressing himself to the question about 'neighbours', Christ narrates that event that is the parable. In the parable of the Good Samaritan there takes place the drama of which we are the actors, and the actors every day. 'A man who was on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho fell in with robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. And a priest, who chanced to be going down by the same road, saw him there and passed by on the other side. And a Levite who came there saw him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan who was on his travels, saw him and took pity at the sight; he went up to him and bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine into them, and so mounted him upon his beast and brought him to an inn, where he took care of him. And next day he took out two silver pieces, which he gave to the inn-keeper, and said, Take care of him, and on my way home I will give thee whatever else is owing to thee for thy pains' (Lk 10:30-35).

Every man finds himself in the situation of that man who 'on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho... fell in with robbers'. They have wounded his body and his spirit. Evil has stopped him and interrupted his journey; the spiritual life of this man has experienced a paralysis; in him doors have closed in front of the gift of freedom; his personal dignity has undergone a deformation. Evil has derided the poverty of his 'I am', bending him towards 'I have', and this has weakened the man's obedience to truth and has made him inclined towards lying.

However, not everything within the man has been eliminated. The desire to live keeps him alive, despite everything, according to that truth that evil has not been able to cancel from his Memory. 'Half dead' from his wounds, he implores those who pass by to stop and to pour charity, faith and hope on those wounds, through their presence.

Each one of us is attacked and wounded by evil, but at the same time each one of us passes by other 'half dead people'. In

the depths of our desire to wish notwithstanding everything, each one of us hears the call to stop and to be present of those who, after being wounded by evildoers, are beside us on the road that leads from Jerusalem to Jericho. What does the word 'neighbour' mean in this kind of situation?

In the parable, the priests and the Levite do not stop at the side of the man who needed their help. It may be presumed that they were going to Jericho to celebrate religious rites in the temple. They cast a glance at the wounded man and passed by on the other side. The treatment of the wounds of people in dire circumstances was not a part of their offices. In addition, the law that defended their purity as priests and Levites, understood in a shallow way, prohibited them from touching corpses. But if one does not touch a 'half dead person', running the risk thereby of being contaminated by his blood, how can that person be distinguished from the person who is 'totally dead'? Deciding about such a risk can only be taken by a person who loves another person as himself, that is to say by a person who, with his own wish to be despite everything, embraces another man precisely when that man is about to meet his death. Only violent people know existential truth because only they are able to penetrate it.

The priest and the Levite work in a calm and effective way. In order not to be bothered they are not present, not even for each other. For their lives, which have been made functional, the presence of the person for the person has no importance. Indeed, compassion for, and suffering with, a man who asks for a little kindness means for such people a loss of time and energy. They do not stop near to those who do not function with them. They believe that their conduct is justified by the dead need to reach some place or other in time. Their dead eyes do not see that the truth, which is entrusted as a task to man and is the meaning of life, comes not in Jericho but in that event which is the encounter with another man and that gift of love that the system can neither plan nor foretell.

There is no difference between the inn-keeper and the priest and the Levite. We do now know if the inn-keeper belongs to the same Covenant that they belong to. We can only be certain that, like them, he is hindered by his functions, although there is a difference: these functions are dictated by the desire for money. He helps the wounded man, but he is paid to do this.

In the parable, therefore, we have three figures who have been made slaves by the totalitarianism of functions. The Samaritan alone is free.

He is going to Jericho as well. He passes the same unfortunate man. 'When he saw him he felt pity for him'. He did not ask whether he was a Jew or a Samaritan. If he had been a Jew, the Samaritan, for him, would have been an 'outsider' and this because he worshipped God in another way. For him, personally, that poor man was an enemy – this, indeed, was how the Samaritans saw the Jews. But the emotion provoked by the sight of wounded humanity led the Samaritan to go beyond religious, ethnic and political differences. In the suffering of the other person was revealed to him the unlimited greatness of the truth about man and it was this greatness and not his thoughts that moved him. The Samaritan was distant from sentimentalism. The officials were different: they were moved solely by their own accounts of suffering and only in... Jericho.

Man is moved when faced with the man who says: 'From the depths I cry to you... hear my voice!' (Ps 130:1-2); he is not moved, however, by his functions. These at the most can surprise him at that moment. The moved Samaritan feels compassion for the wounded passer-by whom he does not know. The Samaritan co-suffers with him. The wounds of the poor man become his wounds. In these wounds these two people grow together within a whole, they *con-crescunt*, thanks to which their mutual knowledge and their actions become *con-crete* (from the Latin *con-cretum*, the past participle of *con-crescere*). The truth of their humanity takes place within them, in their shared suffering, becoming for them evi-

dence that requires from them the mutual fraternal care of each other. On the basis of this truth, known by both of them, the Samaritan and that 'a man' make up a society that is free of prejudices and in which functions are not of primary importance.

The Samaritan who experiences compassion does not direct himself according to the formalism of thought about himself and other people. He does not follow his own thoughts but that 'half-dead man' and he reaches him at an increasing pace. To a certain extent, he abandons the interests that he has in Jericho and runs the risk of losing something there. He frees himself and this allows him to draw near to the man who is asking for help. The Samaritan turns to, indeed converts to, the 'I am' of the other man, and the other man, leading him, reminds him of what it means to be a person. Specifically for this reason, the Samaritan does not change the existing structures – he changes himself. The change in structures is a consequence of the change in man. In converting himself, the Samaritan does not abandon his own 'I have', yet he does not connect with it to grow. He and his 'having' do not become *concretum*. Freed from the 'having' that ties him to Jericho, the 'I am' of the Samaritan reveals itself and becomes itself in serving the 'I am' of the man who has been attacked by evil. Their cry, 'I am you and you are me', has a divine ring because it is 'in the image and likeness' of the cry that constitutes the Trinitarian life of God. In other words, the communion of persons begins with compassion, and this has nothing to do with the specific associations of possession.

The 'I am' of the Samaritan watches over things. In his travelling bag he carries oil, wine, and bandages to bind up the bodies of wounded people. And in his heart he carries compassion, with which he binds up the wounds of their souls. It is no accident that Christ used this parable of the figure of the Samaritan. In Hebrew the word 'Samaritan' (*shomeroinin*) means 'steward'. During the period of exile in Babylonia of the people of Southern Palestine, the inhab-

itants of the northern part of the country thought that they had been entrusted with the stewardship of the real faith. Indeed, they saw themselves as the 'Samaritans' of the faith.

The caring compassion of the Samaritan does not end with an act that is engaged in only once. He offers his own time and his own goods to the man in need. After attending to his wounds he takes him to an inn, pays for him and for himself (two silver pieces), and promises that he will return and refund the inn-keeper for any expenses, if this should prove necessary. He promises the wounded man that he will return and the wounded man with his own hope promises the Samaritan that he will wait for him. In the connection of the promise of the Samaritan with the hope of the wounded man is born an interpersonal covenant without which all other covenants would be only a 'river of words'. The loyalty of the free Samaritan frees the poor man from the inn-keeper, who is a functionary, and the hope that he gives to the Samaritan makes him into the Promised Land. A new life and new happiness begin within both of them when they say to each other: 'with all my soul, with all my strength, and with all my mind', 'I am you and you are me'.

The covenant of the compassionate promise and the trusting hope is not to be found in an object that is bought and possessed once and for all. The promise and the hope ally with each other again every day, and were this not to happen they would no longer be a promise and a hope. Their covenant takes place. It takes place in a dramatic fashion both in the Samaritan and in the poor wounded man. At times, indeed, the promise and the hope 'dissolve' each other. Then both fall victim to those formal structures that work for the mutual exploitation of men, who are made fragile by aggressive evil. Both of them behave as though they were 'dissolved'.

'Which of these, think thou, proved a neighbour to the man who had fallen in with robbers?' The lawyer replied: 'He that shewed mercy on him'. Jesus then said to him: 'Go thy way, and do thou likewise' (Lk

10:36-37). The lawyer must have realised that Christ had overturned his scholarly vision of life. Man should not look for his neighbour amongst other men. He himself must become a neighbour to them. The question 'who is my neighbour?' must give way to the question 'Am I a neighbour to others?' In directing the question to who his neighbour is, man asks a question about his own holiness. Holy Scripture speaks specifically about this with the words of the Commandment: 'love thy neighbour as thyself!) (Lev 19:18).

For a man, the way to true life is another man. His Samaritan-like presence for others, which contains nothing in it that is akin to performing a role, leads them back to life. 'Lord if thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died' (Jn 11:21), Martha says to Jesus, the same woman who had complained to him about her sister, who, instead of helping her, remained seated to listen to his words. The presence of the person removes from misery those who do not have anyone to turn to. The covenant is the negation of misery. Only the person can bring back the person to health; the person is the happiness of the person. Happiness penetrates those who follow each other in a reciprocal way – when, that is to say, everybody is at one and the same time a promise and a hope, a merciful and poor Samaritan who begs for help. In the dialogue between the promise and the hope, they each carry each other's burdens and thus follow the law of Christ (cf. Gal 6:2).

We must, therefore, with care and in a way that follows the Samaritan, turn our ears to where this call comes from: follow me! *Sequere mi!*, in this direction there is happiness. This alone man can do, the rest is grace. But this turning of his ears, also, is not something that is easy for him. The temptation to make happiness the object of his own actions, and the temptation to reduce the question of 'a neighbour' to a matter of personal choice, obscure for him the truth that man is sent to others and that, therefore, his mission is to be a neighbour to others, by which, indeed, his being is irrevocably marked.



The appeal of the 'half-dead man' who calls on passers-by to be his neighbour penetrates inside them and it rings out in a harmonious way coinciding with the voice of conscience. In calling them to work formed by love, and to love that is fulfilled in work, the appeal of the man attacked by evil and the voice of conscience introduce those who follow the way of life to the very act of the creation of man. In this act, indeed, God joins love with work and in this totality shows to man the personal identity that is entrusted as a task to his love and work: 'Be

son, only God can point out to man the way that leads to His House. However, he should with an act of pure freedom – a 'voluntary act' as C.S. Lewis says – enrol in the ward of the 'half dead'. He should not only set off on the way where man is to be found but also place himself next to him and with him; indeed, more than this, he should implore a drop of oil and wine from passers-by that the man learns above all else to ask. The parable of the Good Samaritan is the song of the need of God to descend from the City on the hill – His Jerusalem; it is

The wounds that exhaust man have covered him to such a point that even he, the Son of God, is forced to ask passers-by for a little oil and wine of the merciful presence. In becoming man, he entered to such an extent into the acute poverty of the human condition that 'many were amazed at him' (Is 52:14). 'His nature, is from the first, divine, and yet he did not see in the rank of Godhead, a prize to be coveted: he dispossessed himself, and took the nature of a slave, fashioned in the likeness of men, and presenting himself to us in human form; and then he lowered his own dignity, accepted an obedience which brought him to death on a cross (Phil 2:6-8). 'Jesus will search out company and comfort from men... But he will not receive them because his disciples will sleep. Jesus will be about to meet death until the end of the world: there should be no sleep until that moment... Do you want to always cost me the blood of my humanity without shedding tears'.<sup>3</sup> Can you not shed even a tear 'in the image and likeness' of the blood shed by my body?

Every day, tired by the journey, Christ sits beside a Jacob's well and waits for one of the passers-by to give him a little healthy water. 'Give me to drink!' he asks the Samaritan woman, without paying heed to the fact that in this way he is coming into conflict with the Jews, who, instead, exclude her from their covenant with God. She even asks him in amazement 'How is it that thou, who art a Jew, dost ask me, a Samaritan, to give thee to drink?' (Jn 4:6-9). The Samaritan woman gives him water to drink and he gives her everything: he restores to her that holiness which is freedom. Now, she, too, 'going down' to her own city, will make herself a neighbour to others 'in the image and likeness' of the Good Samaritan, who says to everyone: 'Go on they way, and do thou likewise!'. Now she, too, sent by the Samaritan, will care for the wounds of those who are attacked by evil.

Making oneself a neighbour to another man means to watch with Christ. 'My soul, he said, is ready to die with sorrow: do you abide here, and watch with



fruitful... fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen 1:28). The call that comes from another man and the voice of conscience awaken man to life. When man breaks this whole, when, that is, he loves without working and works without loving, the voice of conscience and the voice of he who asks for help became the pained voice of the 'half dead' identity of his person.

We are all 'half dead'. On the road on which evil has waylaid us and wounded us, is there someone walking who is in the full sense of the term a Samaritan?

Let us not forget that Christ, through the parable of the Good Samaritan, answers the question of the lawyer about the way to be followed to obtain eternal life. The parable teaches us that this way, although it is not the same as the road that leads to Jericho, begins on it and man builds it on that road.

Another person is the life of the person. The eternal life of the human person can only be the Person of God. For this rea-

a song about the Mystery of the Incarnation. It is significant that Christ responded to the accusation made by the Jews, 'thou art a Samaritan, and thou art possessed', by denying only the second part of the accusation: 'I am not possessed... it is because I reverence my Father that you have no reverence for me' (Jn 8:48-49). From the context it follows that Christ saw himself as a 'Steward', a 'Samaritan', of what he had seen in the house of the Father (cf. Jn 8:38ss), and there he saw Love full of Work and Work full of Love 'in the image and likeness' of which, man is created every day (cf. Jn 1:26 and 28).

Christ, the Son of the living God, makes himself a neighbour to man in order to vivify him with the divine Presence after the mysterious and tragic experience of sin. After taking on himself in his own Divinity all that is human, with the exception of sin, he does not hold back from linking his own Divinity with the humanity of the human person afflicted by evil.

me?' (Mt 26:38), Christ asked Peter, James and John in the garden of Gethsemane. But they did not make themselves his neighbour. Jesus did not fail to express his sadness to them, brought about by their absence. 'Have you no strength, then, to watch with me even for an hour? Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation' (Mt 26:40-41). Peter, James and John passed by Christ when he was about to meet his death in the same way as the priest and the Levite also passed by. Not moved by his suffering, they went on sleeping at a time when he very much wanted someone to feel com-passion for him. If the Father were not merciful...

Where men pass by with indifference, like the priest and the Levite did, societies are very impoverished. Like 'gangs and polemical camps', very impoverished societies are to be defined by their negation of other societies, seeing such negation as their freedom. It is not easy to make oneself a neighbour to other people in a very impoverished age, which this post-modern age is. The great poverty of this time comes from the fact that the shadows of truth have been placed amongst men, that is to say, lies. With these, the *cogito* covers the eyes of man so that he cannot see the men who ask beneficial com-passion from him. There weakens in him that memory of having been sent to them. To become a neighbour to others has for him become just one of many options. In not answering the call of others, he lives irresponsibly,

and this makes him fall into loneliness. He does what he himself thinks and thinks what he himself does. He has nobody to go to, and this is his great poverty and the great poverty of that period of time during which he travels down the road that leads to Jericho.

Will the third millennium be a very impoverished time? Everything depends on whether in the society of the third millennium there are Samaritans who know how to have compassion for, and know how to co-suffer with, other people, thus ensuring within that society that the indifference of priests and Levites does not end up by having the last word. It is the quality of the presence of the Church in society that will decide if the third millennium is to be a very poor time or not. Without doubt, the Church is in society because of the presence within her of the Good Samaritan, who is Christ coming down from the City on the hill. The presence of Christ makes men ready to be moved and to co-suffer, without which society becomes transformed into a mass led by priests and Levites who, 'absorbed'<sup>4</sup> by their interests in Jericho, pass by with indifference, and at times even with hostility, at the side of the 'half dead' man. This presence, however, can disappear of the tears of disciples is not mixed with the blood of the Master.

'Sleep and take your rest thereafter: as I speak the time draws near when the Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us

go on our way; already, he that is to betray me is close at hand' ((Mt 26:45-46). This is the situation characteristic of a very impoverished time. The disciples are weighed down by sleep, and only Christ watches. He enters their very poor time and heals the wounds that have been inflicted by evil that betrays. The more their time is very poor, the greater within it is the Samaritan presence of Christ. This presence frees them from that presence of the priests and Levites which is in every man, and by which they contradict the Church and society.

In the evening of life we will be judged not on the basis of the fact that we have reached Jericho but on whether we have made ourselves a neighbour to the others on the road that leads to Jericho, that is to say whether we have lived 'in the image and likeness' of the Samaritan who 'went about doing good, and curing all' (Acts 10:38). We will be judged according to whether or not we have allowed the Freedom of God to come forward in us, that God who, in the act of His creation, revealed Himself to be Love and Work, and in the act of His Son which healed the wounds of the creation, showed Himself to be Mercy and Healing.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> C.K. NORWID, 'Fraszka(!)/II', in *Pisma wszystkie*, I, Warsaw, 1971, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> C.K. NORWID, 'G is niedawno do wychod-tw polskiego przyby-ego artysty', in *Pisma wszystkie*, VII, Warsaw, 1973, PIW, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> B. PASCAL, *Thoughts*, 736 (The Second Mystery of Jesus)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. note 1.

# Serving the Least Amongst us: the Experience of an AIFO Volunteer Medical Doctor in the Province of Nampula, Mozambique

## Curriculum

Following a 'missionary ideal' embodied in Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and after medical studies and a specialisation in infectious diseases carried out and finished with that perspective in mind, I worked for a year in Guatemala (1994-5) as a voluntary medical doctor in a clinic run by a Dominican mission. I then worked in Angola (1997) where I engaged in feasibility studies for health care projects in war zones for the CUAMM. Subsequently, in Tanzania (1998), I worked as a clinical specialist in infectious diseases in the paediatric ward of a rural hospital in the province of Iringa. This was once again for the CUAMM. I then worked in Mozambique (1999-2001) as an AIFO medical doctor in Nampula where I followed the leprosy and tuberculosis programmes and supported the basic health care programmes, in addition to engaging in small initiatives of a socio-health care character, together with the missionaries in the local area.

## Activity in Mozambique

This involved support for the national leprosy and tuberculosis programme in the province of Nampula, as well as participation in basic health care programmes. I was also engaged in the provision of health care in the civil prison of Nampula. The micro-projects I took part in were: the ADEMO (Associação Deficientes Moçambicos), AIDS (the Acquired Immunodeficiency System), and 'Wheelchairs'.

## Leprosy/Tuberculosis

Leprosy remains a problem for public health in Mozambique (14/10,000 against 1/10,000, WHO 2000). Despite

the forms of treatment used to cure Hansen's disease, this illness is still extremely widespread, even in its most advanced manifestations (grade 2 deformities).

At the same time the situation of tuberculosis continues to be dramatic and there has been an increase in the number of cases of this illness parallel to the spread of AIDS (at the present time 16% of the population are affected by this malady).

As an AIFO medical doctor, I was engaged in the activity connected with the study-planning of measures for the leprosy/TB programme; activity directed towards the *training* of medical doctors, nurses, and voluntary workers; the *supervising* of districts for the monitoring of activity, visits to patients in very difficult situations; and health care education. This supervision allowed close contact with people in the villages and allowed us to discover the simplicity of their values and of their lives, the reality of poverty where 'poverty means nothing'. A *rehabilitation project* was considered in order to favour the surgical and physiotherapeutic rehabilitation of patients with leprosy who had reversible injuries and for other kinds of disabled people (for example those mutilated by war wounds). This project should commence at the beginning of 2002.

## Prison

My activity of providing health care to prisoners in the civil prison of Nampula began after access was granted to the prison because of the need to identify those suffering from tuberculosis within the penitentiary. Shocked by the conditions of extreme precariousness in hygiene and health care terms that were to be found there, the AIFO granted me funds to set up a small 'health

corner' (a very small clinic) inside the prison. This small budget also allowed the purchase of drugs and medicines, and the heads of the prison assured me that there would be a subsequent provision of such materials as well as the employment of a nurse. In this way continuity over time and self-sufficiency were guaranteed. For me this was a new and beautiful human experience which allowed me to know about the realities of the prison from inside its walls. The young men who were in the cells were there in 80% of cases because of acts of petty theft; they had to wait for a trial for years (even 2-3) only to then discover that were given a prison sentence lasting a few months.

In the prison there were situations like those to be found in a concentration camp – there were numerous cases of malnutrition and above all examples of the violation of human rights by the police in their treatment of the prisoners. The denunciation of such a reality was perhaps imprudent and from certain points of view dangerous as well – the risk was that one would be expelled from the country. A broad plan was then studied (by the MLAL and the AIFO together) of a social character which involved engaging in work activities (agriculture, pastoral farming), courses in literacy and professional courses, with a parallel integration of these young men into society. This will be a MAE project which should begin at the beginning of 2002. Personally, for me this was an experience which reached its high point during the Christmas celebrations when a chicken lunch was organised for all the prisoners (the AIFO bulletin, December 1999).

## Micro-projects

Other small activities were



engaged in as part of joint-action with the ADEMO, a local non-governmental organisation of war victims, people who had been struck by polio, and mine victims, which makes sandals for lepers. In January 2001 a training course for cobblers was held so as to improve the quality of the sandals. Another Combonian-AIFO initiative was the micro-project 'wheelchairs of happiness' which received funds from private friends (Chicago): wheelchairs were bought for handicapped people who lived on the streets. There was also a project involving the 'Amigos SIDA': a group of voluntary workers was created, including AIDS victims, who were taught about the illness in order to sensitise the population by providing their witness and sharing their knowledge about the affliction. A fund was set up for families who experience the difficulties of this illness and have major economic problems in order to help them in the purchase of (essential) drugs and medicines and in situations of emergency.

### Questions

To speak about 'voluntary work' is to deal with something that is very complicated and beyond my expertise. In my daily life I constantly ask myself and wonder whether we are doing everything that is possible as individuals, as a country, and as a Church. I ask myself how much our solidarity is real and how much it is merely apparent, how much it is selfish. Often I ask myself if my involvement and that of others like me or like you who work in the field of co-operation in favour of the so-called developing countries has a meaning, if it is useful and for whom. To be a voluntary worker is a challenge which is not in the least easy and which is often discouraging. The impact of certain realities of extreme poverty, of illnesses that are scourges such as AIDS which when seen on the ground appear to have no prospects of being countered, generates despair and produces pessimists. But experiences

such as the one I had in that prison (a mega-project from a micro-project), the results that are gradually being achieved in the field of leprosy, or the emotion produced by the wheelchairs of happiness, are encouraging and generate trust and hope. But perhaps the most encouraging aspect and from certain points of view the most meaningful and true, is the realisation that consciences change and develop.

The sensitisation of people gives its fruits, and on this point I would like to take advantage of this occasion to present the Charter of Peoples for Health, which was signed in December in Gonoshasthaya Kendra in Bangladesh when 1,453 participants from 92 countries met to discuss health as a right, as a matter of justice, and applied pressure so that the (utopian?) goal of the World Health Organisation, 'health for all by the year 2000', which was not remotely reached and drawn near to (please forgive the notes of pessimism), would be placed in the right point in the agenda for development. It is certainly the case that health is a right, but it is also and above all else an economic and political question. If the interests of the powerful are not challenged, if the political and economic priorities are not changed, healing a person suffering from leprosy will be to no avail if he or she then dies of AIDS or tuberculosis...or even worse of malnutrition...The Charter of Peoples for Health launches the challenge of

*health as a right*, asking everyone, the World Health Organisation, non-governmental organisations, and all of us, to take the side of the least amongst us. The AIFO is promoting this Charter and asks all of us to subscribe to it.

To conclude this paper, despite doubts and questions I have never thought of changing the decision I made: what I do I like doing, it makes me feel good, it makes me feel useful, independently of the fact that I am up to it or not. To be a voluntary worker for me is not only a question of 'heart' or a 'good heart'. For me it is also a question of justice, of solidarity, which is not a matter of pity but of compassion. Respect for the dignity of man or of the poor requires a struggle which at times is also an angry one, but this does not mean that it should be violent. It should be a strong struggle in which one believes. Quite apart from whether one is a believer or not, whether one is religious or not, I believe that to love one's neighbour as oneself is to recognise who this neighbour is and to be with him or her forever. This is one of the many ways to love God. It is what I chose. In a world in which war and hatred continue to be declared, to be on the side of the least amongst us through voluntary work is a cry of peace and love which does not surrender.

Dr. VINCENZA LORUSSO,  
AIFO Voluntary Worker in  
Mozambique.



# The Witness of a Voluntary Worker Who has Worked for a Long Time in Somalia Serving those Most in Need

My name is Analena Tonelli. I was born in Forlì in Italy on 2 April 1943. I have worked in health care for thirty years but I am not a medical doctor. I graduated in law in Italy. I have a qualification to teach English in Kenyan high schools. I have certificates and diplomas in the control of tuberculosis from Kenya; in tropical and community medicine from England; and in the care and treatment of leprosy from Spain. I left Italy in January 1969. Since then I have lived serving Somalis. These have been thirty years of sharing. In fact, I have always lived with them, apart from small interruptions spent in other countries which I could not avoid. I decided to be for other people – the poor, the suffering, the abandoned, the unloved – when I was a little girl and this is what I have been and will continue to be until the end of my life. I wanted to follow only Jesus Christ. Nothing else interested me so strongly: he and the poor in him. For him, I chose radical poverty, even though poor like a real a poor person, the poor of which my days are full, I could never be. I live at the service of others without a name, without the security of a religious order, without belonging to any organisation, without pension payments being paid on my behalf for when I am old. I did not marry because this is what I chose with joy to do when I was young. I wanted all of myself to be for God. I have friends who have helped me and my people for thirty years. Everything that I have done I have been able to do thanks to them, above all to my friends of the Committee for the Fight against Hunger in the World based in Forlì. Naturally, I have other friends in other parts of the world. It could not be otherwise. The needs are great. I thank God for having given them to me and for continuing

to give them to me. We are one thing in two breaches that are different in appearance but the same in substance – we are fighting to ensure that the poor can be raised from the dust and freed, we are fighting so that all men can be one. I left Italy after six years of service to the poor in one of the slums of my city of birth, the children of the local founding hospital, the mentally handicapped children and the victims of major traumas of a family home, and the poor of the third world, thanks to the activity of the Committee for the Fight Against Hunger in the World, which I had helped to establish.

I thought that I could not give of myself totally if I stayed in my own country: the boundaries of my action seemed to me so tight, so suffocating. I soon understood that one can serve and love everywhere, but by now I was in Africa and I felt that God had brought me there and there I stayed with joy and gratitude. I left committed to ‘crying out the Gospel with my life’, following on from Charles de Foucauld, who had ignited my existence. Thirty years later I cry out the Gospel with my life alone and burn with the desire to continue to cry it out until the end. This is my basic motivation, together with an unconquerable passion, which I have always had, for those who are wounded and reduced without deserving such a fate, beyond considerations of race, culture and faith. I try to live with extreme respect for ‘those’ that the Lord has given me. Where possible I have adopted their style of life. I live a very modest life in my housing, my food, my means of transport, and my clothes. I spontaneously abandoned Western habits. I have looked for dialogue with other people. I have given care, love, loyalty and passion. I hope the Lord will forgive me if the

words I have spoken are on too great a scale.

I have almost always lived with the Somalis, first with the Somalis of the North-West of Kenya, and then with the Somalis of Somalia. I live in a world that is rigidly Muslim. The only friars and sisters who have been present in Somalia, who were there from the times of Mussolini until the civil war which broke out eleven years ago, were accepted exclusively to provide religious assistance to Italians. I lived for fifteen years in Borama in the extreme North-West of the country on the border with Ethiopia and Djibouti. There, there was no Christian with whom to share my time. Two times a year, roundabout Christmas and roundabout Easter, the bishops of Djibouti came to say Mass for me and with me. I live alone because the companions of my journey, who together with the poor made my life heaven on earth during my seventeen years in the desert, left me after I was forced to leave Kenya. That was in 1984. The government of Kenya tried to commit genocide against a tribe of nomads who lived in the desert. They wanted to exterminate fifty thousand people; they managed to kill a thousand. I managed to prevent the massacre from being carried to its completion. For this reason, I was deported a year later. I kept quiet about the young ones that I had left at home and who would have been punished if I had spoken out. However, the Somalis spoke with one voice and struggled to ensure that light was thrown on the truth about this genocide. Sixteen years have gone by and the government of Kenya has publicly admitted its responsibility, has asked for forgiveness, and has promised compensation for the families of the victims. The newspapers and the BBC spoke

at length about my role. And today Somalis who felt rancour towards me now accept me and have become my friends. Today they know that I was ready to give my life for them, that I risked my life for them. At the time of the massacre I was arrested and brought before a military court. The authorities, all of them non-Somalis, all Christians, told me that they had arranged two ambushes which I providentially avoided, but that I would not have escaped another. Then one of them, a Christian, asked me what had led me to behave in that way. I replied that I did it for Jesus Christ who asks us to give our lives for our friends. On more than one occasion during the course of my long life I have seen that there is no evil which does not see the light of day. What matters is to go on fighting as though truth was already upheld and wrongdoing was not able to touch us and evil was not triumphing. One day good will shine forth. We ask God to give us the strength to wait, because we may be dealing with a long wait – even until our deaths. I live waiting for God and I understand that waiting for the things of men weighs on me less than on other people.

I live deeply immersed amongst the poor, the sick, and those who nobody loves. I am largely concerned with the control and treatment of tuberculosis. I went to Kenya as a teacher because that was the only work that, at the beginning of such a new and strong experience, I could do without causing anyone any harm. Those were times of intense preparation of lessons in nearly all subjects, because there was a lack of teachers, of studying the local language, culture and traditions, and of intense involvement in teaching out of the belief that learning is a force for liberation and growth. The students, many of whom were of my age or a little younger than me, had gone to the headmaster when they learnt that a female teacher was about to arrive and assured her that they would have prevented me from entering the classroom, turned out to be very committed and motivated. The

results were so good that various students of that time now fill splendid positions in the various Ministries of the government, in private activity in the country, and often the news comes to me that all the students of the North-East of those times say that they were my students and that I was their teacher – something, of course, that is true.

I remember that almost immediately after my arrival I fell in love with a child who was ill with sickle cell and hunger – those were times of a terrible famine. I saw many people die of hunger. During my life I witnessed another famine, ten months of hunger, in Marca, in the South of Somalia, and I can say that those experiences were



so traumatising that they threatened my faith. I brought fourteen children who were dying from hunger to come and live with me. I immediately gave my blood to that child and begged my students to do the same: one of them donated some and then many others followed suit, thereby overcoming the resistance of the prejudices and closures of a world that in my eyes at that time seemed to ignore any form of solidarity and pity. And this was perhaps my first experience of the fact that in a Muslim context as well love generates love. But my first love were those who suffered from tuberculosis, the people who were the most abandoned, the most rejected, the most turned away of that world. Tuberculosis was widespread in Somalia for centuries. It is thought that almost the

whole of the population was infected. Providentially, only a few of the people who are infected develop the illness during their lives. I was in Wajir, a desolate village in the heart of the desert of the North-East of Kenya, when I met the first people suffering from tuberculosis and I fell in love with them and this was a love that has lasted my whole life. Those with tuberculosis were in a ward for hopeless cases. What most broke one's heart was that they were abandoned, and that their suffering was accompanied by no kind of comfort. I did not know anything about medicine. I began to bring them the rain water that I had gathered from the roof of the fine house that the government

had given me as a teacher in a secondary school. I went with canisters full, emptied them of the very salty water from the wells of Wajir, and filled them with fresh water. I was given sorts of orders by people who were apparently disturbed by the clumsiness of a young white woman whom they wanted to get rid of as soon as possible. Everything was against me. I was young and thus not worthy of being listened to or worthy of respect. I was white and therefore despised by that race which thought itself superior to everyone else: whites, blacks, yellows, or the members of any other nationality. I was a Christian and therefore despised, rejected, and feared. Everybody at that time was convinced that I had gone to Wajir to proselytise. And I was not married, something that



was absurd in that world where celibacy does not exist and is not a value for anybody; indeed, it is to a certain extent an anti-value. Thirty years later, because of the fact that I am not married, I am still looked at with compassion and contempt throughout the Somali world by those who do not know me well. Only those who know me well say and say tirelessly that I am a Somali in the same way that they are and that I am an authentic mother of all the people I have saved, healed, and helped, thereby ignoring the reality that I am not a natural mother and never will be. I immediately began to study and to observe, and every day I passed with them, I served them on my knees. I was beside them when they turned round and did not have anybody to take care of them, anybody who could look them in the eyes, anybody who gave them strength.

After a few years, in the TB Manyatta (village) each sick person who knew that they were about to die wanted only me next to them so that they could die feeling that they were loved. I began to supervise the patients' treatment after they were discharged from the hospital. The fact became known about. Treatment carried on and completed in the desert did not exist. They were all defaulters – at the rate of 100%. In 1976 I was asked to become the head of a project of the WHO to deal with tuberculosis in the nomad population, a pilot project for the whole of Africa. I was asked to invent a system to ensure that the sick people received the anti-tuberculosis treatment every day for a period of six months. In fact, for the first time in Africa short-term treatment was given to an open number of sick people, treatment that allowed a cure for a period of six months, where up to that time a period of eighteen months of medicines taken every day had been necessary. That was in September 1976. I decided to invite the nomads to come to a piece of the desert in front of the Rehabilitation Centre for the Disabled where I worked with my companions who over the years had come to work with me, all

of whom were women and voluntary workers, and all of whom worked for the poor and for Jesus Christ. Together with them I had created a centre where they helped in the rehabilitation of polio victims of the desert of the north-east for a period of ten years. We were a family. Together with the polio victims, we took in especially pitiful people to treat and rehabilitate, in particular blind, deaf, physically and mentally handicapped people: the children grew up with us full-time mothers and I am still for them today a constant point of reference. Meanwhile the nomads began to come with their tents tied down on the backs of their camels.. They took down the canvasses, the bent frames and the ropes and built a tent. For six months the taking of medicines was closely supervised each day. A diagnosis was carried out solely with the examination of sputum through a microscope. The administration of the medicines was absolutely regular – something that was almost a miracle for Africa. At the end of six months the camels arrived and the whole caravan and the cured person returned to the desert. This policy, called by the WHO 'the directly observed therapy short chemotherapy' has since become the world policy of the WHO for the control of tuberculosis in the world and is applied in many countries of Africa, Asia, America and Europe, as one of the best instruments by which to guarantee the compliance of the sick person with the treatment, without which there would not be authentic recovery and the curse of tuberculosis would continue to expand throughout the world and increasingly in the most tragic form – that of resistance to anti-tuberculosis medicines.

TB Manyatta was a great adventure of love, a gift of God. It was thanks to TB Manyatta, and only in part thanks to the Rehabilitation Centre, that the handicapped count less than those suffering from tuberculosis in my world, that people began to say that perhaps we, too, will go to heaven. For five years they had thrown in our faces that we would never have gone to

heaven because we did not say 'there is no God other than God and Mohammed is his prophet'. Then a very serious event occurred which put our lives in danger and then people began to say that we would certainly also go to heaven. Then we began to be taken as an example. The first to do so was an elderly chief who cared a great deal for us. "We Muslims have faith", he said one day, "and you have love". It was like a great thaw. People increasingly said that they ought to behave as we did, that they ought to learn from us to care for other people, and in particular for the most sick, the most abandoned. Seventeen years later, immediately after the massacre of Waggalla, an elderly Arab stopped me in the middle of one of the main streets of that poor village. He was greatly moved because his friends were amongst the dead, because he had seen me being beaten while I was burying the dead, because he had been afraid and had done nothing to save his people whereas I had dared to and had risked my life for people who had become my people. He cried out, because he wanted to be heard by everyone: "In the name of Allah, I say to you that if we follow in your footsteps we will go to heaven".

In Borama, where I now live, the people constantly pray for my conversion to Islam. In other places as well that I have been the people at a certain point have begun to pray for my conversion to Islam. They spoke about it often to me with sensitivity. Always adding that anyway God knows and that I will go to heaven even though I remain a Christian. They do not want me to feel offended. And then they try to make me feel 'assimilated' by them, and very near to them. They tell about every 'hadith' in which the Prophet Mohammed, following in the footsteps of Issa – Jesus – ate with lepers from the same dish, had compassion for poor people, and showed love towards the least. I returned to Italy for a month last June. I had been away for many years. For my people down there in Somalia it was a great event. Many feared that somebody or something would have stopped

me from coming back. They felt great joy on seeing me again. And the most loved sheik, a sheik who has been and still is the teacher of the Koran for all the other sheiks of the area, immediately came to my office and told me that while I was in Rome – for them it is almost as though there is only Rome in Italy – they were happy and shared my pilgrimage in their thoughts and prayer because this was an authentic pilgrimage. Sheik Abdirahman, rightly proud of his knowledge, repeated to me that they knew that some of the disciples of Issa – Jesus –, their great prophet, are buried in Rome. To visit the places of martyrdom is one of the pilgrimages that every Muslim wants to carry out during his or her life. And thus it was that they felt that it was they who had sent me on this pilgrimage and they waited for me to tell me about it and share it with them. In a very broad sense this is what dialogue with the other religions amounts to. It is sharing. There is almost no need for words. Dialogue is life lived better; at least I live out dialogue in this way – without words.

I was saying that tuberculosis is a scourge of the Somali world. Just think that in Borama, a centre which has fifty thousand inhabitants, we have diagnosed and treated one thousand five hundred people suffering from this illness each year, almost all of whom had positive sputum, above all during the early years. We now have the problem of AIDS. For three years now we have been seeing people with TB and AIDS, but the problem is spreading. We got down to eight hundred cases last year but the presence of HIV is rapidly on the increase. In a country like Somalia, in which tuberculosis is endemic, tuberculosis is the first opportunistic illness developed by people suffering from AIDS. We are working very intensely to ensure that the population becomes aware of the problem and fights both internally and externally to make sure that patterns of behaviour change and that the spread of AIDS is checked. I began five years ago

with thirty beds and an increasing number of huts for the seriously ill who could not obtain a bed in a ward, until I had more than two hundred. Today I have two hundred beds, eight wards built by UNHCR for our people, a laboratory built by UNDP and almost one hundred huts for those sick people who cannot find a place in their own village – some come from far away, from Ethiopia, from Djibouti, from other parts of the country; others are rejected by their families because of the stigma attached to the illness. Tuberculosis is a part of the people, it forms part of their history, and part of their struggle for existence. And yet tuberculosis is a stigma and a

we have opened schools for the patients and their friends – a school to study the Koran, a school to teach literacy, and a school to teach English. I have been involved in schools for thirty years – I organise them, I build them, and if necessary I finance them. A creature able to live in God is certainly an event of grace. There remains, however, the reality that with education man flowers more easily in a creature who is capable of living in God, his creator and provider of every good. Sick people come to us as wounded, suffering, frightened, beaten and unhappy beings. After the first weeks of care and treatment, as soon as they feel better, they want to flee and go



curse, the sign of a punishment sent by God because of a sin that has been committed, whether openly or in a hidden way. Every day the struggle to free people from ignorance is continued in Borama – from stigma, from the slavery of prejudice. Still today we witness people who choose not to be diagnosed, treated and cured, and thus choose to die so as not to admit in public that they are afflicted by tuberculosis. This fight is carried forward by our staff primarily at a personal level. With the DOTS system we see all the patients every day, every day we speak to them, every day we deal with their small and large problems. Every day we discuss with them what keeps them slaves, unhappy, and in the dark. And they become free, happy, and they are increasingly in the light. In the TB Centre

back to the bush, to their camels, to their goats, to their fields of millet. In the 'school' of talks with the staff that take place every day, in the schools to teach literacy, the Koran, and English, they gain in trust, understand the reasons why they have to finish their treatment and take their drugs and medicines under supervision, they no longer suffer, they are no longer afraid – it is possible to recover from TB and become strong, stronger than their family relatives, their friends and acquaintances. Once they have been cured, TB does not spread to their children, to their wives. Before they did not know how to read and write, they knew almost nothing about their religion, now they know, they know it in translation, they learn to understand and to appreciate the universal values of good, the truth, and peace, of



giving oneself to God: 'Allah has given, Allah has taken away, blessed be the name of Allah'. They learn to face up to physical suffering and death, and not to fear them, not to reject them, to accept them. Allah exists! Allah knows, meets, guides. We speak about this together every day, we console each other, we find strength and trust in this awareness that is acquired and reacquired and won every day. And their lives change. And our lives change into an increasingly deep awareness, into an ability to live in the presence of God that is increasingly authentic.

After six months there are patients who ask to be admitted in order to go on attending the Centre so as to complete a school course, their study of the Koran, and all of them feel that they are teachers and with pride show the others their achievements, their progress, and their growth in human dignity. In the meantime I share my life, I deal with all the aspects of their care and treatment. Every day I study medical works in order to learn how to cure them, in order to keep up to date. I look for male and female nurses and search for funds because I do not have access to the funds for the NGOs given that I am a person on my own without an organisation. I serve the sick people on my knees. I give many hours of lessons to the nursing staff to make them more sensitive, more attentive, more capable of care, and more capable in a professional sense. And it is thanks to this sensitive, attentive, caring staff that at the TB Centre we also have a clinic for epileptics and for people who are mentally disturbed. They bring them to us in chains, dirty with their excrement, often shouting. After a few days of treatment and care we free them from their chains; they begin to wash and gradually they come to take their drugs and medicines without the people who accompany them. Slowly, they flower into normal people. And it is thanks to two obstetric nurses on my staff and two sheiks – the most loved and respected who work closely with us – that we are engaging in a campaign in the

region to eradicate the mutilation of the female genitals and infibulation which in our world are practiced at the level of 100%. And it is also thanks to our staff that we have an eye camp twice a year. A team of eye specialists, friends of many years standing, come to the Centre. Over a period of four days they operate on an average of three hundred and thirty blind people, who suffer for the most part from cataracts, using an intra-ocular lens. During the last camp, which was held in August, they surpassed themselves. They restored sight to four hundred and fifty blind people. The people are infinitely grateful for this service. We fill Borama with flags: 'I was blind and now I can see' – our John the Evangelist, but they do not know this.

But let us turn to the school for deaf children. Four years ago, the first Kenyota Somali who had been deaf from birth, whom I had brought to school to receive a special education for deaf people in Kenya when he was four years old, and was now a man, came to visit me in Borama after an event-filled journey of almost a month's duration through Kenya and Ethiopia. He was suffering from love sickness and had felt the need to speak to me because in a certain sense I had been his mother and had helped him to become engaged. He immediately decided to stay and together we set up a school for deaf children. A school for deaf children had never been opened, nor one for blind children or mentally handicapped children. University professors did not believe that it was possible to educate a deaf child until they saw our school. Nobody thought it was possible. Today, everybody knows that a deaf child can do everything except hear, that he can feel everything, and that he can understand everything. It is certainly the case that one is dealing here with a long journey but perhaps we can now already see a light which is a little less pale. In the distance there is a light which is so bright that it can make your heart explode with joy and gratitude looking forward to a day that is not so far off, a new

earth and a new heaven. In our school we began with three deaf children, then five, then eight, then twelve, and today we have fifty-two. We began to teach in a room in a small house that I rent in Borama, and then we built another room in the courtyard of that small house. In the meantime, some physically handicapped children, the victims of polio and wars, came to beg us to take them into our school because they were afraid about attending schools for normal children. Our world is a hard one – the world of the strong. There is no space for the weak. We decided to take them in, we told them that when they had gained confidence in themselves, the fact that they knew like the others and knew better than the others would have inevitably given them the strength to rise up and to feel like the others, and that we would have then paid for them to attend normal schools. We employed an excellent teacher for them. In the meantime, the first TB children had been cured and discharged, and after learning how to flourish in the schools of the TB Centre they wanted to go on learning. However, many of them did not have the money to pay for the school fees. And thus it was that we decided to place them in the classroom together with the handicapped children. In the meantime, people spoke increasingly about us, about the miracles that were occurring in our school. And thus it was that the High Commission for Refugees offered to build a real school for us. In 1998 we built four classrooms, an office for the teachers, a small storeroom, and bathrooms. Then our friends of Forlì built two other classrooms, and some English Protestant friends whom we had met because of a series of providential circumstances, humble and generous people, who ask me not to send too many details when I provide an account of how I have spent their money, who say that everything is going well, that everything is fine, that everything is the gift of the Lord, built three classrooms and two bathrooms, and then once again our friends from Forlì built an-

other classroom. On the piece of land that the community gave us there is still room for another classroom.

Over the last two years we have taken in thirty children belonging to a clan despised by the Somalis – they work in iron, in leather, are barbers, and are hunters of small game. They have never sent their children to school. They are ghettoised, their girls do not marry boys from other clans and their boys do not marry girls from other clans. They are in rebellion against God and men because of their status of being the rejected, the despised and the marginalised. They are great workers. Many of them were ill with TB and thus they had the opportunity to go to the school in the TB Centre, and to savour the beauty, the greatness, and the joy of learning, of understanding, of growing, of developing, and of becoming free. And thus it was spontaneous for them to ask us to agree to educate their children, children who for centuries had begun to work when they were still children and encounter trials like no other children encounter trials, and earn their daily rice with the sweat of their brows. It then happened that some intellectuals and then some rich people came to beseech us to accept their children in our school because it is a serious school, because in our school there is discipline, and because our teachers are committed, love teaching, love children, and are well trained. And we decided to accept them. There are only a few of them. Today the school is a wonderful mixture of children from every background, with all kinds of personal histories, of every kind of capability. The deaf children naturally study in separate classrooms made up of a few children but during playtime the deaf children and the ‘normal’ children are together and this is one of the most encouraging, most consoling experiences, and the one most able to give hope of a world in which men will want to be and are one. This *ut unum sum* has been, and is, the loving agony of my life, the torment of my being. It is a life that I fight for and that tortures me,

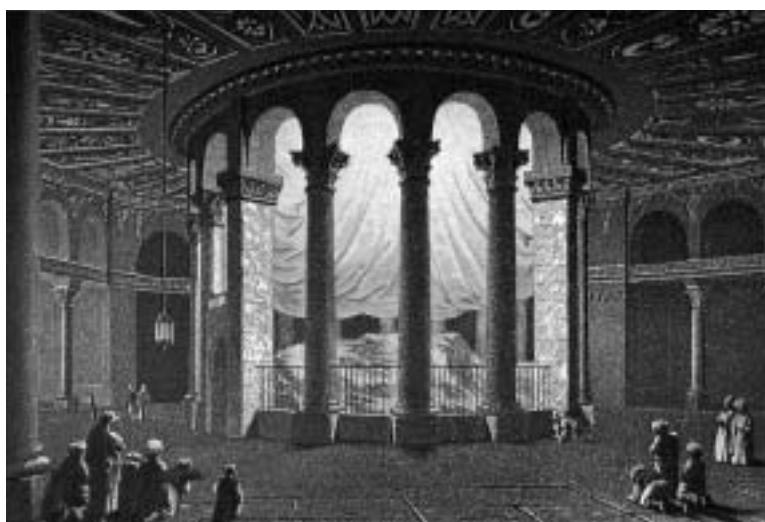
as Gandhi said, my great mentor together with Vinoba, after Jesus Christ; a life that I fight for – I, a poor thing – to be good, to be truthful, not through violence but through thoughts, through words, and through action. Every day in the TB Centre we work for peace, for mutual understanding, to learn together to forgive. Oh, forgiveness! How difficult forgiveness is! My Muslims encounter difficulty in appreciating forgiveness, in wanting it for their lives, for their relationships with other people. They say that their religion is so *fudud*, that it makes so few demands. God asks man, they say, to forgive, but then if man is not capable of this, well, God is forgiving. Every day we fight to understand and make it understood that blame does not lie only on one side but on both sides; we reason together and strive to see everything that is positive in the other person. We look each other in the face, in the eyes, because we want truth to be done. My staff has learnt to laugh at their limits, at their baseness, at their ‘monetary’ mentality, at the harshness of their hearts, at the thirst for revenge when they are wounded. These are all things that make forgiveness very difficult. It is certainly the case, they say, that Allah does not want this, even though Allah is infinitely merciful. I, for my part, for many years have learnt or better have understood in the depths of my being that when there is something that is not right – misunderstandings, attacks, forms of injustice, enmities, forms of persecution, or divisions – certainly the fault is mine, certainly I have made some mistake. At the feet of God, the search for my faults is easy, it does not take any time, it makes me suffer but not very much, because it is so beautiful and great to recognise one’s faults and fight to ensure that the blame is cancelled, so that mistaken forms of behaviour are changed, so that in every relationship with other people my approach becomes positive. Our purpose on earth is to make live. And life is certainly not condemnation, a *ius belli*, accusation, vengeance, putting one’s finger in a wound, pointing out the

mistakes and the faults of other people, hiding our faults, impatience, ire, jealousy, envy, a lack of hope, and a lack of trust in man. Life is always hoping, hoping against every hope, throwing our misery behind us, not looking at the poverty of others, believing that God exists and that He is a God of love. Nothing worries us and we always go forward with God. Perhaps this is not easy, indeed it could be a titanic task to think this way. In many ways, faith is such darkness, this faith that above all other things is a gift, and a grace, and a blessing. Why me and not you? Why me and not her; not him, not them? And yet life has a meaning only if one loves. Nothing has a meaning outside love. My life has known so many, indeed so many dangers; I have risked my life so many times, and then so many times again. For years I was in the middle of wars. I have experienced in the flesh of my own people, of those that I loved, and thus in my flesh, the wickedness of man, his perversity, his cruelty, his unfairness. And I came out of this experience with the rock-solid belief that what counts alone is to love. If God did not exist, only love would have a meaning, only love frees man from everything that makes him a slave, in particular only love allows him to breathe, grow, and flourish; only love ensures that we are no longer afraid of anything at all; that we turn the other cheek which is not yet wounded to the mockery and thrashing of that person who hits because he does not know what he is doing; that we risk our lives for our friends, that we believe in everything, that we bear everything, that we hope. And thus our lives become worthy of being lived. And thus our lives become beauty, grace, and blessing. And thus our lives become happiness even in suffering because we live in our flesh the beauty of living and dying. I strongly feel that all of us are called to love, and thus to holiness. The poor woman of Leon Bloy who wanders from door to door, a beggar: “there is only one kind of sadness in life, that of not being saints”, she con-

stantly repeated. I love to think the following: there is only one kind of sadness in the world – that of not loving – which is after all the same thing. It is certainly the case that we must free ourselves from so much rubbish. But there are practical methods, there are paths, there are clear signposts, there is God in the cell of our souls who is calling us. However, this voice is small and silent. We must listen, we must keep

fight our battle, every day above all against what keeps us slaves inside, what keeps us in the dark. We left that place and felt immediately ignited with renewed love for all those people whom the Lord had placed on our path. At times we confided with each other; most of the time we kept silent. But the faces of my companions were so beautiful, so luminous, that they told me everything that modesty prevented them from

is a requirement of my character. But it is certain that in them I see him, the lamb of God who suffers in his flesh the sins of the world, who takes them upon his shoulders, who suffers but with great love. Nobody is outside the love of God. I have blamed myself a thousand times for having agreed to come here and speak to you about my life; I was weak and accepted the opinion of my friends who are convinced that at this point in my life, forty years later, it is a good thing to share the gifts of God with other people. But if this ‘putting me in public’ could help someone who does not believe, someone who does not have within themselves this extraordinary reality – that God loves every man, from the most worthy of love in the eyes of men to the most rejected and despised, to the bad man, to the criminal – then I would bend down and give a blessing because He who is powerful has done great things in me. The man who is not good, the man incapable of forgiveness, the man who loves to wound, the man who wants vengeance, the false man, are not bad men, incapable of forgiveness, false necessarily. They are that way because they have not encountered on their paths a creature capable of understanding them, loving them, and taking on their faults. “Have you done wrong? I will pay in your place”. This is what Gandhi said, This is what Jesus Christ has been saying for two thousand years. Who knows why we men have been so deaf? Certainly, his voice is often small and silent, but then he is in the cell of our hearts and it should not be so difficult to go down there and live with Him. Words? No. Truth! Reality! Certainly, for most of us humans it will be, and it is, necessary to create silence, quiet, to turn off the mobile phone, to throw the television out of the window, and to decide once and for all to free ourselves from the slavery of what appears to be and what is important in the eyes of the world, but which counts for absolutely nothing in the eyes of God, because they amount to non-values. At the feet of God we find



quiet, we must create a place of quiet, which is separate, even though often of necessity near to other people, like a mother who cannot be too distant from her children. Indeed, in order to love it is not always enough to have a heart, feelings, and a thirst for God. It is a part of the experience of everybody to decide to place oneself at the service of the poor, who are not easy to love, and that the heart of man, even of those who give of themselves, can in a mysterious way be very hard. At Wajir we were a community of seven women, and all of us, albeit in different ways and to a different extent, had a thirst for God. We understood that when we were losing or about to lose the meaning of our service and the ability to love, we could find our lost possessions only at the feet of the Lord. For this reason, we built a hermitage and we went there for a day or a few days or for even long periods of silence to place ourselves at the feet of God. There we once again found balance, quiet, long-sightedness, wisdom, hope, and the strength to

telling me about with words. During the course of my life there have been other hermitages, other silences, the word of God, great books, great friends, so many and so many again who have inspired my life, above all members of the Catholic faith: the fathers of the desert, the great monks, Francis of Assisi, Chiara, Teresa of Lisieux, Teresa d’Avila, Charles de Foucauld, Padre Voillaume, Sister Maria, Giovanni Vannucci, Primo Mazzolari, Lorenzo Milani, Gandhi, Vinoba, Pina and Maria Teresa. But at the centre there has always been God and Jesus Christ. Nothing that is outside God, outside Jesus Christ, really matters to me. The least, yes, the suffering, I go crazy about, I lose my head over these embers of wounded humanity, and the more they are wounded, the more they are ill-treated, despised, without a voice, of no importance in the eyes of the world, the more I love them. And this love is tenderness, understanding, tolerance, absence of fear, and audacity. This is not something to be praised. It



again every lost truth, everything that had fallen into darkness becomes light, everything that was a storm becomes still, everything that seemed a value but is not a value appears in its real clothes and we reawaken to the beauty of an honest, sincere, good, life, made up of things and not appearances, invested with good, open to other people, in an omnipresent very strong tension towards making men one.

The time has arrived to come to the end of my paper. I have given a lot to the Somalis. I have received a lot from the Somalis. The greatest value that they have given me, a value that I am still not able to live out, is that of an extended family, as a result of which, at least within the clan, everything is shared. The door is always



open and welcomes the most distant member of the clan. The meal table is always shared. What has been prepared for ten people will be shared with anybody who comes to the door, and with the greatest naturalness. There are not, and there will not be, recriminations, complaints, and forms of pretending to be a victim. To share with one's brethren is the most natural thing in the world. In my world, in Borama, unemployment is the great scourge. Some people have never worked in their lives because they have never found a job. And thus it is that those few who work are 'forced' to share the fruit of their labours with twenty to thirty other people

who do not work. But such people do not live this as a 'constraint'. They live it with naturalness. Down there sharing is a part of existence. And then their prayer five times a day where what you are doing, even if very important, is interrupted to give time and space to God. Ever since I have been with them, for these thirty years I have tormented myself at the fact that in our world we do not stop working, get up if sleeping, interrupt any talk to be silent and remember God, something which is done better with others, to acknowledge that we come from Him, we live in Him, and we return to Him. But the most extraordinary gift, the gift for which I thank God and them forever and for always, is the gift of my nomads in the desert. They are Muslims and they have taught me faith, unconditioned self-abandon, surrender to God, a surrender that is not in the least fatalistic, but a surrender that is solid and rooted in God, a surrender that is all trust and love. My nomads of the desert have taught me to do everything, to be everything again, to work completely in the name of God. '*Bismillahri Rahmani Rahim*': in the name of God Almighty and Merciful. People get up in the name of God, they wash, they clean their homes, they eat, they work again, they study, they talk, they do a thousand everyday things, and finally they go to sleep – all in the name of God. The custom of the name of God being repeated constantly that had already upset and fascinated my life as narrated by a Russian pilgrim before me departure, permanently transformed my life. I thank my nomads of the desert for having taught me this. And then life has taught me that my faith without love is useless, that my Christian religion does not have a series of commandments, but only one; that it is no use building cathedrals or mosques, that services and pilgrimages are of no use, that the Eucharist which scandalises atheists and the other faiths includes a revolutionary message: "this is body made bread so that you also become bread at the meal table of men, because if you do not make

yourself bread you will not eat bread that saves you but will eat your sentence". The Eucharist tells us that our religion is useless without the sacrament of mercy, that it is in mercy that heaven meets the earth. If I do not love, God dies on earth; I am the cause of God being God, says Silesius; if I do not love, God does not have epiphany because we are the visible sign of His presence and we make Him live in this hell of a world where it appears that He is not present, and we make Him live every time that we stop at the side of a wounded man. In the end, I am really capable only of washing the feet of the abandoned in all the meanings of that word, of all those people who nobody loves, of those who, mysteriously, are not in the least attractive in any way in anybody's eyes.

Luigi Pintor, a so-called atheist, wrote one day that there is nothing more important in life than bending down so that somebody else, clinging to one's neck, can get up. That is the way it is for me. And in kneeling down, so that by clinging to me they can get up and go on their way, or even walk where they had never walked before, I find peace, a very strong charge, the certainty that everything is grace. I would like to add that the least, those without a voice, those who count for nothing in the eyes of the world, but matter a very great deal in the eyes of God, His chosen ones, need us, and we must be with them and for them, and it does not matter at all if our actions are like a drop of water in the sea. Jesus Christ never spoke about results. He spoke only about loving us, about washing each other's feet, and about always forgiving. The poor are waiting for us. The ways of serving are infinite and left to the imagination of each one of us. We are waiting to be instructed in the field of service. We are inventive. And we will live new heavens and a new earth every day of our lives.

ANNALENA TONELLI,  
Member of the Committee  
for the Fight Against Hunger  
in the World.



# The Misericordie at the Service of the Sick

Taking the history of humanity in its entirety, the attainment of social rights has been recent and is now far from being universally recognised. Acquired only by the citizens of developed countries, such attainment is still far from being at a satisfactory level for everyone and it is not spread in a uniform way.

In addition, this attainment is not yet irreversible. The advance of certain social indica-

the organisation of confraternities that helped not only local people in their specific areas but also people who were travelling, that is to say pilgrims.

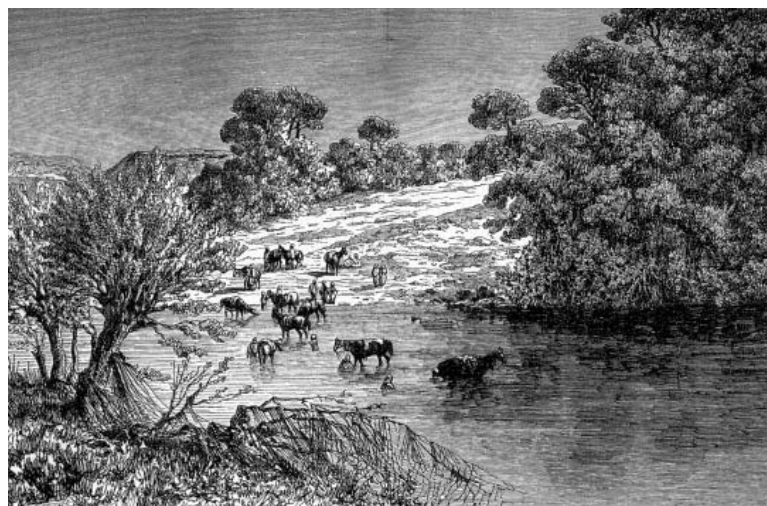
The deterioration in such situations, both because of the numbers of people involved and the seriousness of their condition, required a reorganisation of health care services, and this was especially the case in Italy. We came to

deprived the fields of their labour force, that is to say of the younger men, and thus deprived families of resources and their means of economic support.

The high number of shipwrecks, together with the fact that many people involved in the project of colonisation in the new world did not return to their homeland, caused grave situations of social distress: widows, orphans and abandoned people increased in number in broad sectors of the Portuguese population and such people were not able to maintain themselves in an economic sense.

In such circumstances, mass movements of migration towards the great urban centres took place as people strived to obtain better standards of living and ways of life. Lisbon itself was invaded by crowds of poor and hungry people, with all the consequences that flowed from this: the forms of crime and violence associated with families in crisis, unemployment, and acute poverty that epochs marked by great transformations bring with them.

In the face of this situation, Queen D. Leonore, the widow of King D. João II, could not remain indifferent. She acted as the regent of Portugal during this period, and later became a Clarissan nun in the convent of the Mother of God, which she herself had established in Lisbon. Compassionate and sensitive to suffering, she herself had been the victim of cruel family tragedies. Inspired by her confessor, Frei Miguel Contreras, and after learning about the existence of a confraternity in Florence which invoked the protection of Our Lady of Mercy, she believed that the time had come to create an institution able to deal with the very serious so-



tors, even though positive in itself, creates pressures on social systems which could weaken this advance.

This premise seeks solely to emphasise that for many centuries citizens had to face all the events and misfortunes of which they were the victims on their own. The profound stratification of society, together with the scarcity of available resources, brought about situations of enormous suffering in both individual and collective terms, above all as regards forms of illness, epidemics, and hunger.

During such periods it was the task of the Church, through her action of developing the practice of charity, to give relief to such suffering through

know about this in Portugal thanks to the impact of a Portuguese institution with its headquarters in Rome, diplomatic relations with Portugal, and the role played by Cardinal Alpedrinha and the Portuguese, D. Jorge da Costa.

The fifteenth century in Portugal was an epoch when the country experienced contrasts. On the one hand, there was a great increase in wealth thanks to the discovery of new lands, whose natural resources strongly contributed to the political, financial and economic strengthening of the country. On the other hand, the reality of these geographical discoveries required a great effort on the part of society: the recruiting of the crews for the ships

cial problems that people were having to struggle against.

At that time, Our Lady of Mercy was often prayed to for protection against epidemics which raged in a regular and cruel way because of the precarious sanitary and hygienic



conditions of the time.

Queen D. Leonore, however, was aware that her protective hand could have a broader influence than that of the institution of mercy of Florence. She thus conceived of an institution which had more ambitious objectives – fighting the social plagues of the time in a way that we would today describe as ‘integrated’. She thus drew up a statutory objective made up of the fourteen works of mercy consecrated in the Gospel according to St. Matthew: seven were spiritual and seven were corporal and they were as follows:

#### Spiritual Works:

- teaching simple people;
- giving good advice to those who have asked for it;
- punishing in a charitable way those who err;
- consoling disconsolate people;
- forgiving those who have erred;
- bearing insults and offences with patience;
- praying to God on behalf of the living and the dead;

#### Corporal Works:

- serving and visiting prisoners;
- healing the sick;
- clothing the naked;
- giving food to the hungry;
- giving drink to the thirsty;

- giving hospitality to pilgrims and the poor;
- burying the dead.

All these works had to be practiced ‘when this was possible’.

Thus in 1498 the Misericórdia of Lisbon was founded, and this institution was approved by Pope Alexander VI in his Bull Cum. Sit Carissimas of 23 September 1499, in which, indeed, the initiative was praised. This papal Bull can now be found in the Vatican archives.

The statutes of this new institution was given a name full of significance, that of ‘commitment’. This was to underline the responsibility to be borne by those who directed this institution and the naturalness of the agreement that united the members of this body.

This fact takes on an even greater importance during a time such as ours when people seem more concerned about their rights than about their duties. In addition to the objectives of the statutes, the ‘commitment’ contained detailed instructions regarding its implementation. Even though none of the original texts has actually come down to us, one should not forget a directive which appeared in the version of 1618. In this directive, a brother has to have the necessary financial means by which to serve the confraternity without thereby becoming poor himself’.

What an extraordinary lesson for our times!

Although basing itself on the Italian institution, the Misericórdia of Lisbon was the first of those to be subsequently established which had such a broad vocation. This allowed it to grow and to live for a long time down the centuries, providing it also with an ability to adapt in order to meet the specific social needs of each epoch and each place. And this is still the case today.

The fact that it was founded in a country which was experiencing the high-point of geographical discoveries, and within a power that was administering vast territories, al-

so allowed it to export its own institutional model, thereby giving rise to similar institutions of mercy throughout the world, many of which are still active today. Indeed, such institutions are present in West and East Africa, in Asia from India to Japan, and from China to the Philippines and on to Indonesia and Timor, as well as in South America.

I cannot but call your attention to the lucidity of the leaders of that time who once again showed that they were ahead of the times. Indeed, if we observe the flags of the Misericórdie of the various regions we can see that the mantle of Our Lady of Mercy, in addition to those groups traditionally involved, also involves people of different races, a fact which constitutes an evident consecration of the principle of non-discrimination.

Special reference should be made to Brazil. The fact that such a small people as the Portuguese was able to colonise such a vast country as Brazil still provokes puzzlement. The Misericórdie contributed without doubt in a major way to this colossal endeavour. In fact, because of the concerns of their work and the forms in which such work was practiced, they were given the name of ‘Holy Houses’ by the people. This was the case in Portugal and also in those territories that were under Portuguese administration. One can well understand the political importance of such institutions in ensuring that the governed populations accepted the governing power.

Given that they still number more than a thousand, to be exact about 1,2000, it is easy to grasp their importance in a country in which the public welfare structures are weak, in which social inequalities are an objective fact, and in which, for this reason, actions of mercy are needed to meet the requirements of the poorest of the poor.

In addition to the breadth of its objectives, the Portuguese Misericórdia is different from its Italian counterpart for other reasons as well. To cite the

most significant, and with the help of the historical research carried out by Carlo Dinis da Fonseca and Magalhães Basto, we may point to the following such elements:

- in the Misericórdia of Florence which was made up of seventy-two brothers, thirty had to be priests; in that of Lisbon there were a hundred brothers and they all had to be members of the laity;

- in the institution of Florence the governing bodies were chosen by lot and contained both priests and members of the laity; in the institution of Lisbon they were chosen by vote, and the elected members had to be drawn equally from the working classes and from the well-off classes;

- in Florence visits were carried out by four visitors, nurses and priests; in Lisbon the visit was carried out by the members of the confraternity themselves;

The most important differences between the institution of Portugal and that of Florence, therefore, were:

- the secularisation of the Portuguese institution, a fact which enabled it to involve ordinary people, and not only members of the Church, in active initiatives designed to solve social problems;

- the mixing of members of different social classes in the leadership of the Portuguese institution, a fact which enabled it to overcome social inequalities and unite the action of everyone on behalf of the poorest of the poor;

- the democratisation of the mechanism by which the governing bodies were chosen in Portugal.

Down the centuries, these characteristics ensured that populations felt that the Misericórdie were their own; that such institutions were esteemed and appreciated; that they increased in number; and that they were able, because of their prestige, to bring together the generosity of people, especially the richest and/or those who did not have descendants, who uses their goods to pursue and achieve the ends of these institutions.

Furthermore, emphasis should be laid on the form of association of the members of the institution, which was based on the principle of serving the institution because one was not in a state of need – hence the real spirit of organisation that we uphold and promote today.

Hence, also, the value of remembering this institution and the importance of providing it with international visibility during this International Year of Volunteer Work.

More than five centuries after the creation of the first of these institutions, their existence is still justified and, in addition, its efforts are called for in new spheres of action and intervention.

The Misericórdie have re-

sisted all the vicissitudes of history and have known how to find new forms by which to implement their calling, even after the period which followed the democratic revolution in Portugal of 25 April 1974, when the nationalisation of this institution's health care structures was carried out.

New areas of action have appeared during this age, when inequalities in opportunities have become increasingly evident, and when imaginative and integrated forms of action have been required in order to mitigate the forms of social and family breakdown which have taken place in situations of poverty, unemployment, illness, drug-addiction, and the unsolved problems encountered by public structures





in relation to the terminally ill or the integration of immigrants.

The breadth of its objectives and its presence throughout the country have given the Misericórdia of Portugal a versatility which has enabled it to adapt itself to every time and every place.

But from my point of view it is really important to relaunch this kind of institution in all the former Portuguese colonies, where there are very grave situations marked by a failure to meet basic needs, situations which are made worse by wars, by the continuation of conflicts, and by a lack of minimum structures as regards public services.

And this is the case not only in these lands! I would say that in other countries the presence of these institutions is necessary: their spread, indeed, is one of the objectives of the International Confederation of the Misericórdie, which unites the institutions of this kind throughout the world and whose headquarters is in the country which holds the temporary presidency.

This Confederation includes the European Union of Misericórdie, which has its institutional headquarters in Flo-

rence and its operational headquarters in the country which holds the temporary presidency – at the present time that country is Portugal. And it also includes the Confederation of Italian Misericórdie (which are more than six hundred in number), the Union of Portuguese Misericórdie (398 in number), the Confederation of Brazilian Misericórdie (about 1,200 in number), and the National Association of Misericórdie of Spain (fourteen in number), as well as those that exist in various other countries, such as France, Luxembourg, Angola, Mozambique, São Tome, India (Damão and Diu), Macao, Timor, South Africa, and the various countries of the CSI (the Community of Independent States).

This choice at the level of organisation, based on the spirit of doing good, of generosity, and of solidarity, contains all the ingredients designed to carry out an effective mission in many of these countries, in a way distant from the mechanisms of power and such as to ensure that the action that is taken really reaches those at whom it is directed.

To conclude, I would therefore say that the model of the

Misericórdia of Portugal exalts the spirit of voluntary work in that real sense which this congress and its President wish to promote. It constitutes an always flexible and innovative way of responding to the challenges of the contemporary world in developed countries. It has enormous potential as regards solving the basic problems of developing countries and communities.

There therefore exist institutions which were certainly established in the past but which, in fact, have a vocation for the future. This is because they are based on: a spirit of doing good; concern with the more serious problems of our time and the concentration of the efforts of everyone, without class distinctions or distinctions of any other kind, in order to solve them; a lack of interest in material reward; the humanity of contacts with those people towards whom their action is directed; and the upholding of the dignity of the human person and the promotion of his or her growth and development.

Dr. MARIA DE BELÉM  
ROSEIRA,

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Portugal,  
Lisbon, Portugal.*



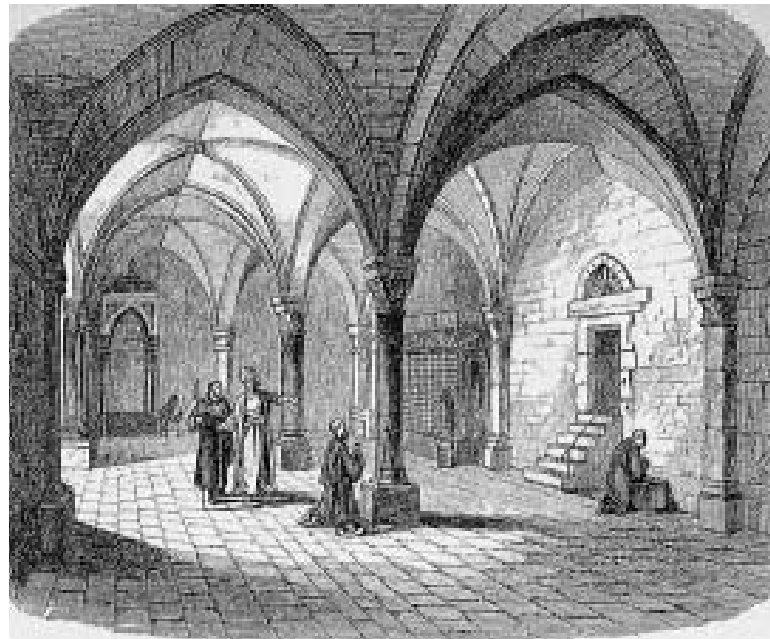


# The Role of Civil Institutions in the Promotion of Voluntary Work

The American psycho-sociologist, J.L. Pearce, wrote that 'the motivations of voluntary workers are stable in all countries and all ages'. The International Year of Volunteer Workers, called for this year by the United Nations, could support this statement given that the whole planet is a heterogeneous context in which so many people of good will come forward who wish to offer a part of their lives to 'doing good'.

I think that I would express some reservations about an idea of voluntary work that places on the same plane the cultural, ideal, socio-economic and political forms that voluntary work takes under different skies. To confine myself to the movement that I can here legitimately represent, that is to say the International Red Cross Movement and the Red Crescent, I ought to say that for us a debate has opened up on the recruitment of voluntary workers, not least because they are the principal instruments there are for the carrying out of our activities in favour of the most vulnerable.

From a recent survey carried out by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, it emerges that over the last decade the number of voluntary workers active in the Red Cross and the Red Crescent has decreased by 50%. Since 1990, indeed, they have fallen from 220 million to 105 million. Even though it is practically impossible to make an exact estimate of the number of voluntary workers now active in the world, the fall has been notable, and given that the contribution of such people is of fundamental importance in the realisation of our services within the community, our movement is drawing up new strategies for the sector of associations. But this withdrawal is not confined to the Red Cross alone. Instead, it reflects a general trend that affects a multi-



tude of volunteer organisations, whether they are religious, trade union, or humanitarian in character. This phenomenon springs from a combination of social and political factors, amongst which we may cite the strengthening of individualism, the disappearance of a system of collective voluntary work, and, in addition, the development of a concept of voluntary work that has shifted from seeing it as civic duty to viewing it as a free time occupation.

Despite this development, the International Red Cross Movement continues to believe in the force of the spirit of solidarity – the world that surrounds us may change but we continue to hope, our mission continues in the same way and with the same force. At this sensitive moment above all else, there is a real need for voluntary work animated by the desire to provide mutual support and help.

The United Nations, in proclaiming the International Year of Volunteer Workers, like the nations of the world that have introduced laws to encourage voluntary work, voluntary associations and the non-profit making sector, have demon-

strated interest in a social phenomenon that has been developed, and is interpreted, in different ways in different countries.

A socio-political fact of by no means small importance should be emphasised, almost as a premise for the subject of this paper – that voluntary work manifests itself with greatest force in basic terms in democratic and pluralistic systems.

The second factor which defines the context of voluntary work is the extent to which the state, even in democracies, expands its organisational and managerial power into those sectors which most directly affect the life of every citizen.

Voluntary work in a general sense, in relation to public institutions, can express dissent, integration, complementariness, subsidiarity, and otherness.

These relational models shape the various normative systems that govern the relations between voluntary work movements and institutions.

I would like to emphasise that we are dealing here with organisations and not with individuals. Indeed, personally, I consider the decision of indi-

viduals to work in favour of third parties – whether individuals or institutions – a life choice, and thus ‘to be concerned’ about others and to share in their needs corresponds to acts of charity for the Christian and to acts of civic duty for the citizen.

Our Constitutional Charter, indeed, refers to the duty of every citizen to engage in participation, to ‘carry out, according to his or her own possibilities and his or her own choice, an activity or a function that works towards the material or spiritual progress of society’ (article 4).

A voluntary work movement, instead, needs to become relevant and visible so that its message, written into the objectives that motivate it, can become recognisable and known about. For this reason, ‘institutionalised’ voluntary work is voluntary work that expresses itself through structured associations and organisations which have statutes, representatives, finance and a ‘social reason’ – that is to say, goals.

We can ask whether pure voluntary work can exist without organisation.

But what does ‘pure’ mean? Perhaps it means ‘spontaneous’. A dose of spontaneity can certainly be attributed to each person who is committed to voluntary work, but his or her spontaneity should be more properly defined as self-determination, in the sense that we have before us a spontaneous decision that comes from personal motivation and is not something compelled from the outside. For this reason, it is not spontaneity in the sense of approximation and superficiality.

The decision to become involved is followed by a continuity in which the chosen activity is engaged in, and which is often preceded by a specific training that leads to the acquisition of a functional competence in relation to the goals that are to be pursued.

‘Pure’ in the sense of being without norms? Anarchy is not something that applies to the voluntary worker, who obtains from the synergy of the various functions interpreted by ‘colleagues’ within the association

an actual increase in his or her value or which make him or her feel that he or she is taking part in a project. Norms relating to conduct in order to give a purpose to activity and to have human and material resources are indispensable in the achievement of goals.

‘Pure’: because not connected to, and even more not dependent upon, political power and the power of institutions.

In this sense, a clarification is required. Often an association is born because of ideological choices and thus it is possible to trace it back to some kind of political connection. Whatever the case, the ideas and impulses of voluntary work are to be encountered in the actual creation of political parties and movements as well.

If, instead, one observes the modalities of the action of voluntary workers in society, connections with institutions, albeit in a way that is conditioned by factors of subordination, may be required if the chosen activity is to be engaged in.

There is a multiplicity of spheres of action but nearly all statistics agree that over a half of the action of voluntary work takes place in services to people and in particular in health-care services and services providing help and assistance. There thus arise cultural, sports, ecological, and civil protection associations, as well as others of this general kind.

Voluntary work certainly does not cover the institutions that are its counterparts (social centres, the no-global movement etc.).

However, there is a host of associations and foundations that supplement the services offered by the state which have more soul and thus bear witness to a dimension of life given freely under the banner of nearness and charity. Lastly, there are the voluntary work associations and non-profit making bodies that in some sectors take the place of the state and its various expressions or interpret subsidiarity in a better way than the state does.

These forms of voluntary work attest to those human and civil values that are indispensable in the growth of society, which is enriched by solidarity-

inspired approaches that reduce forms of social discrimination, improve services, and contain costs.

Such voluntary work needs the state in the same way as the state needs that array of voluntary workers who have decided to demonstrate the side they are on: not profit but free-giving, not selfishness but altruism, not individualism but solidarity.

The Italian Red Cross, as an auxiliary of the public authorities, flanks the state in all its activities involving prevention, education, health care, and social protection, with specialised voluntary work.

An ordered and pluralistic society cannot but be interested in having within itself, and indeed strengthening, the array of such citizens.

The promotion of voluntary work, therefore, cannot but involve legislation that favours its activity. In Italy, at the end of the 1990s, various laws were approved that bore upon both the sectors of action and the organisational models that this paper has already referred to in its theoretical outline.

Law n. 266 of 1991 was a milestone for the world of voluntary work. This was a consolidating Act on voluntary work in which was recognised ‘the value and the function of voluntary work activity as an expression of participation, solidarity and pluralism, promoting its development, safeguarding its autonomy, and encouraging its original contribution to the achievement of goals of a social, civil and cultural character’.

Then there was Law n. 438 of 15 December 1998 which disciplined and financed the activities of associations engaged in social work, and finally Law n. 383 of 7 December 2000 which disciplined and promoted associations engaged in social work, as well as establishing a National Voluntary Work Observatory and setting up a national fund for the world of voluntary work associations.

The most widespread instruments to regulate co-operation between voluntary work and public institutions or private bodies are special agreements and contracts. In this case, one is dealing with adapting one’s

own *modus vivendi* to criteria established by the other party. Does this constitute a limitation for voluntary work? In an absolute sense one can argue that in this way voluntary work is not accepted and that it is recognised only if it meets certain previously established conditions. In reality, when a service is directed towards citizens, who are the bearers of rights upheld by the state, it must respect those criteria and standards that must be guaranteed to citizens. It is thus the contracting party which requires a pre-established service through a special agreement or contract.

A further criticism may arise: that the work itself can change the composition of the association and transform voluntary workers into semi-employees who receive a repayment of their expenses of such high levels that the services that are provided alter the market because of the low costs involved.

This objection often turns out to be correct and for this reason vigilance in two forms is required. As regards the state, a blurring of lines should not be encouraged between the non-profit making sector and voluntary work; and with regard to voluntary workers, they should not retreat from the prerogative of freely-given testimony to their feelings towards life, their neighbours, and society. The promotion of voluntary work precisely involves not bridling it but allowing it guaranteed spaces for a forceful role defined solely by the limits of legality (article 2 of the Constitution).

Objectives, continuity and training are the specific prerogatives of 'pure' voluntary work that acts within a climate of real subsidiarity. Such voluntary work acts with society at the side of citizens and institutions in order to demonstrate an operative capacity under the banner of optimism both of reason and of the will: what each person – together with those who think like him or her – can do without (and not against) the state and its institutions, he or she does from the heart and with intelligence governed by what he or she believes in order

to improve his or her own life and the community in which he or she lives.

Many surveys have been conducted into voluntary work. The most recent are: the first census of non-profit making institutions and companies carried out by ISTAT (1999); the second sample-based survey



carried out by FIVOL (1995); and the third sample-based survey carried out by EURISIKO for the IREF.

Let us now examine the most recent survey: that based upon 221,412 non-profit making institutions. This census revealed that half of these institutions are located in Northern Italy and about two thirds are principally engaged in activity in the sectors of culture, sport and recreation. 55.2% have been established over the last decade, a reality that confirms the novelty of this phenomenon. In 91.3% of cases these are associations, of which 61,313 are recognised and 140,746 are not recognised. 3,008 foundations and 4,651 social co-operatives are also active and although they are less numerous they play a very important role because of the activities they engage in, the number of employed people that they use, and the economic level and weight of their initiatives.

These three surveys, although they utilise different definitions of what voluntary workers are, can help us to grasp a first set of salient phenomena.

Although on the one hand the number of voluntary work

associations has increased, on the other there has been a notable fall in the number of the members of such associations. In particular, there has been a fall in the membership of organisations in the north of Italy, and especially in the north-west of the country, most notably in Lombardy. It is possible that

these variations in levels of decline are linked to the greater impact of the developments in the market and employment throughout this region.

On the other hand, in the centre of Italy these associations are undergoing a rapid growth and this should not be separated from the fact that such associations have earned the respect of Italians because of the help and care they have provided to a multitude of refugees and illegal immigrants who have come to our coasts because of the crisis in the Balkans, the persecution by the Turks of the Kurds, or the chronic poverty that exists in some countries of the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

I think that it is equally important to point out, however, that the north of Italy has a higher concentration of voluntary workers compared to the south. It cannot be excluded that this phenomenon is closely connected to the phenomenon of unemployment. A person whose first thought is to find a job that will allow him to live, and his family to live, with dignity, does not have the 'courage' to become involved in other activities which are not paid and which 'distract' him. The more the level of employ-



ment is raised, the more the ability to dedicate oneself to others also increases.

One further fact is worthy of comment: voluntary work is made up more of men than women. From a survey carried out annually by voluntary workers of the Italian Red Cross, a specific phenomenon is evident – moving from the north to the south of Italy the number of male voluntary workers diminishes and the number of female voluntary workers increases.

Perhaps the explanation for this should be looked for in a careful analysis of how voluntary workers are 'recruited' and how voluntary work organisations work with institutions.

Although there is a hidden grey market of voluntary workers, it is evident that stable employment makes them come out into the light of day, and in the same way where unemployment is chronic 'voluntary work' can provide 'submerged' workers for the special agreements of voluntary work associations, which, indeed, cannot cover all services with voluntary workers alone.

The pathology, therefore, must be combated so that authentic voluntary work is promoted. There are many ways by which work in the third or non-profit making sector can be increased.

I see the non-profit making sector as an instrument for very

flexible professional training because of the fact that those people who choose it are not concerned so much about pay but are more encouraged by diversified working days which are more suited to personal or family needs. This characteristic is very significant for a 'humanised' organisation of work and for this reason is more suited to women.

The phenomenon of work in the non-profit making sector is gaining ground. One need only observe that fifteen million Italian citizens belong to this sector, and eighty-five million Europeans. It is for this reason that economists, especially recently, have directed their interest to non-profit making institutions.

At the beginning of the 1990s, some critics argued that behind voluntary work there were latent forms of undeclared work, fiscal evasion and exploitation, and at the same time trade unions protested about this reality and expressed their doubts about the quality of work. They argued, in particular, that jobs in the non-profit making sector were often poorly paid, precarious, and involved exploitation. They argued above all else that if non-profit making organisations were more competitive than profit-making organisations, this was due in the main to the fact that they paid less and made use of more staff.

This overly simplistic thesis does not take into account the fact that the reduction in costs is brought about by higher levels of productivity which in turn are created by a more efficient organisation of work and above all else by a greater use of voluntary workers. Things should certainly be so organised that the social companies of the non-profit making third sector become an instrument for the reduction of the costs of social care services. This can be achieved, above all else, by developing a culture of partnership between the state and the non-profit making sector.

Recent data bring out that in the non-profit making sector it is primarily women who are employed, as well as people who belong to ethnic minorities, and this is another reason why this sector is different from the world of more traditional work.

But I believe that the moment has come for the non-profit making organisations, and more generally the world of voluntary work, to open their doors to young professionals who demonstrate an authentic interest both in their own work and in the achievement of goals that are connected with human solidarity.

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and European Red Cross*





# St. Benedetto Menni: An Example for Voluntary Workers

## 1. Presentation

I think that it would be appropriate at the outset of this paper to provide a brief biographical survey of the life of St. Benedetto Menni. Angel Hércules Menni was born in Milan in 1841. He was the fifth of fifteen children and received a careful Christian upbringing from his parents.

In 1860, after an experience as a voluntary worker helping the war-wounded during the war of Italian independence, he entered the Order of St. John of God. In 1866 he was ordained a priest. In that same year his Superior General, Giovanni Maria Alfieri, sent him to Spain with the approval of Pius IX to restore the Order, which had become practically extinct chiefly because of the results of previous anti-clerical policies that will still be operating during that period. His role was of determining importance in the restoration of the Order. In 1881, together with Maria Josefa Recio and Maria Angustias Giménez, he founded the Congregation of the Hospital Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the care of the mentally ill, who at that time were not cared for and were marginalised.

In the vicissitudes of his life we encounter constant descriptions of voluntary actions and responses to the urgent needs of society and to those human problems that called upon his hospital apostolate: he helped the wounded of both sides during the third Carlist war (1872-1876), he helped those afflicted by the cholera epidemic of 1885, and he engaged in an infinite series of selfless and generous actions which bore witness to an exemplary readiness to receive and help. St. Benedetto Menni died in Dinan, in France, in 1914.

On 23 June 1985 the Holy Father John Paul II beatified him and on 29 November 1999 inscribed his name on the roll of saints.



Today the Church recognises in Menni an exemplary Christian because of the faith, the hope and the charity that he demonstrated, as well as a religious loyal to the charism of St. John of God.

## 2. Benedetto Menni the Voluntary Worker: an Evangelising Generosity

I will begin this paper with an account that seems to me to be interesting for two reasons: firstly because it illuminates the experience of St. Benedetto Menni as a model for voluntary work and secondly because it evokes a gospel passage which provides an example to follow for those who work in, or are connected with, the field of health and health care. 'The story tells of a monk called Demetrius who one day received an imperative order. He had to meet God on the other side of the mountain where he lived, and he had to do this before the sun set. The monk set off rapidly towards the mountain. But half way along the route he met a wounded person who asked for his help. Without stopping, the monk told him that he could not stop because God was waiting for him on the other side of the mountain, and

before the sun set. He promised him that he would return after he had met God. And he went on his way. Hours later, when the sun was high in the sky, Demetrius reached the summit of the mountain and from there his eyes sought out God. But God was not there...' In this quest, Demetrius had met the wounded man in need of help.

St. Benedetto Menni, from an early age, was a person always searching for something. His life as a follower of Christ was marked by two constants: the search for the will of God and for encounter with sick people.

His first work as a voluntary worker that we have evidence about was when he was eighteen and was a stretcher-bearer for the wounded at the battle of Magenta, taking them from the central railway station in Milan to the hospital of the Fatebenefratelli (1859). He had followed spiritual exercises in which his Christian vocation was clear and in this experience as a voluntary worker he discovered the call of God to the hospital life. A little time after his arrival in Spain to restore his religious Order, the third Carlist war broke out and he hurried with his brothers of the Order to help the wounded of both sides. When he was engaged in his

work of restoring his Order and founding a religious Congregation, an epidemic of cholera broke out and ravaged the Spanish population. He proceeded to organise groups of his religious brothers and sisters to take care of the sick.

Generosity towards other people was a constant response in his life and his great reward was the joy of being able to serve. Menni was a happy man despite the difficulties that he encountered in his life, and he even felt happy to suffer for Jesus Christ.

What should be said to the world of voluntary work of today in order to present St. Benedetto Menni as an example to be followed? Simply that generosity is a value that makes us stop and take care of the wounded man who has been encountered on the road. In ad-

dition, we should be aware of the great reward that stopping and looking after one's brother actually brings. Benedetto Menni lived out this experience in a radical way and repeated on many occasions the following statement: "How many thanks should be given to the Lord for having called us to His holy service!"<sup>1</sup> In our society, voluntary work can be the activity of that person who, by giving and receiving, offers through his or her witness small and alternative lights to those who at times lose their way in the living out of human values. He or she can also be a light for those people who promote a technological and aggressively capitalistic culture and leave the rights of human beings to one side, and for those who, in

the hurry to have, to consume, and do other things, are no longer aware of the reason for their existence.

Benedetto Menni did this with a counter-culture language of gospel-based love, fraternity, and the welcoming of the sick and the marginalised. He was himself an evangeliser through his great generosity and was the Good News for the men and women of his time.

### 3. St. Benedetto Menni the Voluntary Worker: Dimensions of Christian Love

St. Benedetto Menni can be an example for Christian voluntary work because of the process of illumination, interaction and witness that he gave, beginning with the key dimen-



sions of Christian love. Referring to certain texts from the New Testament, we can well analyse his experience as a voluntary worker. This was an experience of love that had a face, an experience with a sense of communion, passing from great declarations to small actions, and, in addition, with strong witness to charity.

*An experience of love that had a face*

'If a man boasts of loving God, while he hates his own brother, he is a liar. He has seen his brother, and has no love for him; what love can he have for the God he has never seen?' (1 Jn 4:20).

This reference from the New Testament reveals to us that the

life of St. Benedetto Menni was a response to a call to love God and his neighbour. His motivation was his love of God, which led him to share this love with his brother, in whom he recognised God Himself. The religious experience of Benedetto Menni was present within him and vital. His faith was not theoretical but practical and was expressed in social action and relations.

For believers, faith in God and the awareness that we have been sent to proclaim the kingdom to men are two important keys by which to sustain a voluntary work experience, in which we respect those who for other reasons to our own take part in different voluntary work organisations, given that voluntary work is not a matter of one denomination or religion.

St. Benedetto Menni went beyond human solidarity. In his actions of voluntary work he drew near to his neighbour starting from an experience of fraternal love. He knew that he was a loved son of God and for this reason he felt that he was a brother to other men. The phrase from the book of the Acts of the Apostles 'they had one heart and one soul' (Acts 4:32) explains very well another characteristic of the voluntary work of St. Benedetto Menni. He did not act in his name but felt that he belonged to a body whose head was Christ and whose limbs made up the Church. He defined himself as an ecclesial channel of merciful love for those who suffer.

In his role as a voluntary worker was to be found communion with the Church and with his Order. He thus asked the permission of his Superior General, Giovanni Maria Alfieri, to prepare himself together with his religious brothers to help the wounded of the third Carlist war. His Superior General replied: 'To our very dear M.R.P. Benedetto Menni, General Delegate of Spain: by this letter we order you to hasten, not only with the religious that depend upon you but with every kind of means that you can obtain, to alleviate this poor Spain, comforting, caring for, and helping all those who present themselves to you, without any party distinction, solely out

of love for our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom alone you will obtain, O beloved religious, the prize, just as it will be obtained by those who by work and succour help you in this work of charity, engaged in out of obedience, with the blessing of our most Holy Father Pius IX.<sup>2</sup>

In dealing with the various urgent needs that required hospital voluntary work, Menni could count on the exemplary readiness to help of his religious brothers and sisters. He himself was moved by the very generous responses that many of them gave to him, even though they were risking their own lives. Some Fatabene-fratelli died in the war hospitals and many of his religious brothers and sisters fell victim to cholera.

Beginning with the perspective of communion, we should concentrate on two exemplary and very topical aspects that St. Benedetto Menni bore in mind during his activity as a voluntary worker:

- the ecumenical meaning of voluntary work so as to work with other associations when society has urgent needs. His links with the Red Cross, various public institutions, and members of the laity of other denominations and ideologies, speak of openness, dialogue, and respect in order to help those in need.

- The experience of team work with the members of his Order, of the Congregation that he founded, and with members of the laity moved by solidarity to take part in this sphere of activity, was the second model of his voluntary work. His human and organisational capacity to supplement and enrich his project of receiving and helping people by employing members of the laity was a sign of communion and apostolic effectiveness for which today we should be grateful.

*Passing from great declarations to small actions*

The Gospel according to St. Matthew tells us: 'Come, you that have received a blessing from my Father...For I was hungry, and you gave me food, thirsty, and you gave me drink...(Mt 24:34ss). Christian

love humanises by beginning with the most simple forms of solidarity-inspired relations and actions. In addition to being an organiser of voluntary workers, Menni was a voluntary worker with concrete tasks who was involved in activity to help the wounded. At all times during his life he was aware of the fact that the approach of a Christian is not that of theory but rather a matter of witness.

We know that St. Benedetto Menni worked as a nurse on the battlefields and that he was specialised in emergency operations and in treating bone fractures. On the battlefields he organised evacuations, looked after the sick, administered the sacraments, helped men to die well, and when necessary he also buried the dead. His life was full of concrete and sensitive details connected with the sick people that he met on his journey. His life involved suffering and was lived out in fighting for people's rights.

Today we complain about great promises that are not kept, about ineffective speeches, about a culture of words that lacks life and witness. In this context, the Christian voluntary worker is not a subject of great declarations but of small actions which gradually improve the society we live in.

The Christian who stops at the side of the sick man has shown that in his heart there is the wish to heal life and reduce suffering. The work of healing that a voluntary worker can engage in has specific contributions to make: accompanying people who are alone, visiting them, listening to them, helping them at a religious level, promoting health, improving health care, defending the rights of sick people, promoting care for the weakest members of society, condemning forms of injustice and abuses, facilitating a more real reintegration of sick people into society and the Church, helping the family relatives of sick people...

*And, in addition, with a strong witness to charity*

In his gospel, St. Matthew has Jesus speak the following words: 'You have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thy enemy.

But I tell you, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute and insult you, that so you may be true sons of your Father in heaven, who makes his sun rise on the evil and equally on the good, his rain fall on the just and equally on the unjust. If you love those who love you, what title have you to a reward? Will not the publicans do as much? If you greet none but your brethren, what are you doing more than others? Will not the very heathen do as much? But you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:43-48).

In his work as a voluntary worker, St. Benedetto also suffered the envy and enmity of a number of people but charity enabled him to remain within the dimension of forgiveness. In contemplating him, we experience an invitation to selfless giving and the deeply rooted nature of Christian love.

Don Nocasio Landa, the Inspector General of the Red Cross in Spain, wrote the following words to Benedetto Menni: 'My lord and with all my respect: very much delayed, because the post was blocked, I received yesterday night your esteemed letter of the twelfth. It seems to me that the great animosity towards you, political passions, have not respected that beneficial man who established a refuge for the abandoned and who sought to convert rickety and scrofulous children into strong workers, who, indeed, without such help would have been unsuited work. God has kept you under His protection and for this reason you thank Him, and I send you my best wishes. I enclose the credentials so that at any time you can use the arms of the Red Cross, which I offer you with so much pleasure, because you have demonstrated your hospital vocation. If you want, and the possibility of so doing, to join with other beneficial and charitable people in that city, you can also found a committee...'.<sup>3</sup>

We, who know deeply about the life of Menni, also know how his life was troubled by enmity and destructive criticism and how his ability to forgive and accept such suffering was exemplary.



#### 4. Father Menni: a 'Prophet' of the Dignity of the Human Person

St. Benedetto Menni is a reference point for the struggle for the dignity of the person and this is an important contribution to society and voluntary work today. Vigorous charity, such as that as was possessed by Menni, is a voice that invites us to defend the rights of those people who are downtrodden; invites us to make a preferential option in favour of the marginalised; and invites us to engage in the promotion of a culture of solidarity and peace.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights argues that 'all men are born free and equal'. The Christian, together with these rights which he knows he has, recognises and promotes in a special way the fragile rights of the weak and those who do not have a voice to claim and uphold their rights.

If we contemplate the life of St. Benedetto Menni, we realise that the fight for the rights of the mentally ill transformed him into a strenuous defender of the rights of the most marginalised. This defence, based upon the fact that he was believer, had a dual basis: respect for the dignity of the person and the defence of his or her rights.

##### *Respect for the dignity of the person*

St. Benedetto Menni saw his own existence as a gift received from God and this necessarily led him to offer himself as a gift to others, in the belief that another person is also a gift of God both for himself or herself and for others.

Jesus Christ, his reference model, showed to Benedetto Menni and renewed for him the greatness and the dignity to which human beings are called.

Don Nicasio Landa, the Inspector General of the Red Cross, attested that in 1876 'the presbyter Don Benedetto Menni, after the last civil war broke out, went to the theatre of war, and consecrated himself to continually providing spiritual and physical help and aid to wounded people in hospitals without reference to their origins and with equal Christian love and

charity for those on both sides, thereby gaining the blessing of many unfortunates and deserving the gratitude of the whole of mankind...'<sup>4</sup>

The whole of his hospital life was invested with this sense of respect for the person, of care for health, of overall assistance that embraces the whole of the human being, and of a conception of life and health which saw them as precious goods entrusted by God.

Benedetto Menni's respect for the dignity of the person, during the final stage of his life as well, is demonstrated by the words of a hospital worker who was a witness to his dedication during the Carlist war: 'To inspect the services and ensure that they were provided in a better way, Father Menni rode a horse to go from one part to another giving due orders. It was admirable to see him in the scrub, along the cliffs, and over the rocks riding over the snow of the glaciers, on the rims of abysses with his flying white flag followed by some of his brothers who helped him in his difficult task of beating off flocks of crows and collecting rotting corpses in order to give them a Christian burial... I often saw him accompanied by one of his brothers in the middle of rifle-fire or cannon shells, without worrying about the grave danger he was in, to help the wounded, care for them, give them comfort, administer the sacraments to them, prepare them for a good death, and to transport the wounded from the battlefield to the hospitals'.<sup>5</sup> We can deduce from this biographical account that taking care of the wounded did not stop at taking care of their bodies but embraced other aspects of the person, such as accompaniment and human, moral and spiritual help in the personal realities of life. St. Benedetto Menni knew how to restore initiative and voice to those he met on his way who were wounded and miserable.

His witness transformed and called the soldiers of the war, and this to such an extent that some of them wanted to join his cause, leading Menni to ask Charles VII's authorisation to allow a large number of the soldiers to become candidates for entry into the Order of the Fatabenefratelli.

##### *The defence of the rights of the person*

Human dignity requires respect for the singular, original and specific nature of persons as unique, never to be repeated and free beings, as subjects open to transcendence and called to fulfil themselves to the full.

Once the Carlist war was over, St. Benedetto Menni went back to attending to the restoration of his Order. The war had brought him to Escoriaza (Guipúzcoa) where he founded a hospital Institution. The beneficial ends that Menni wanted or had in mind for this Institution are very moving. He envisaged it helping: the mentally ill of various villages who were shut up in prison without anyone taking care of them; war invalids; and abandoned or orphaned children.

His sense of gospel-based justice meant that he stopped on the road and made himself the voice of those who had lost their voice in history because of the selfish interests of others. This called him to be a witness to solidarity and peace at the side of the wounded on the battlefields of Milan and the north of Spain. This sense of gospel-based justice made him constantly persevere with public institutions for the rights of the alienated, of orphans, and of invalids. This sense of gospel-based justice led him to establish a Congregation for mentally-ill women who at that time were still marginalised and less looked after than men. This sense of gospel-based justice led him to organise groups of his religious brothers so that in situations of cholera they could help the very poor and the least looked after members of the afflicted population. With a clear sense of gospel-based justice he implemented the preferential option for the poor, who, by right, claim our solidarity.

#### 5. Conclusion

In the statutes of our Association of the Hospital Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a voluntary worker is described as a person who freely commits himself or herself, in a freely-given and responsible way, to



care in an overall way for those people helped by the Hospital Mission through organised activity; at the same time being a part of the hospital community, taking part in its mission, and being a sign and a yeast of the values of a more human society.

This description can be applied almost literally to the life of St. Benedetto Menni as a voluntary worker. It should, however, be observed that the life of Menni has a much broader and deeper exemplary character than that of any other Christian in the world of health and health care. This is what I have wanted to express during the course of this paper. It is in this spirit that the Superior Generals of our Congregation and our Order, Maria Camino Agós and Pascual Piles, asked the Holy Father John Paul II, in this year proclaimed by the United Nations the International Year of the Volunteer Worker, to proclaim Benedetto Menni the patron saint of voluntary workers. They also base themselves on the words that His Holiness addressed to pilgrims on the occasion of the canonisation of Benedetto Menni: 'St. Benedetto discovered his own vocation specifically when he engaged in his tasks of voluntary work in Milan. This service enriches your lives and develops the capacity for self-giving and solidarity-inspired welcoming of one's neighbour, and especially of those who suffer...'

The Cardinal of Milan, Carlo Maria Martini, wrote the following in the preface to the

book 'Il prezzo del coraggio. San Benedetto Menni...' ('The Price of Courage. St. Benedetto Menni...'): 'Another aspect I would like to emphasise is the scale of the voluntary work that recurs throughout the whole of his life. Not only did it lead him to decide for his vocation but it was also the key to the project of the restoration and the foundation'.

We have also seen that his style as a voluntary worker brought forth vocations in the war context.

The legend of Demetrius, with which I began this paper, finishes in the following way: 'Demetrius reached the summit of the mountain and his eyes began to search for God, but God was not there. God had gone to help the wounded man who a few hours previously Demetrius had met on his journey. There are those who say the God was the wounded man who asked him for help'.

St. Benedetto Menni would not have gone to the summit of the mountain because he would have stopped and taken care of the wounded man. There, in those other summits of charity and Christian love, he discovered the face of God. He used to say, referring to the sick, that "the more unfortunate people there are, the more the living Jesus is represented". God granted to him the grace of experiencing his Horeb in the people that he entered into relationships with, especially the sick and the invalid. He was a voluntary worker of the 'es-

cogidos'. His witness is not only exemplary because of the good he did to so many people but also because of the quality, the meaning and the happiness of his life, which was dedicated to the Kingdom.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lettere del Servo di Dio P. Benedetto Menni, O.H., alle Suore Ospedaliere del Sacro Cuore di Gesù da lui fondate (1883-1993) ('Letters from the Servant of God P. Benedetto Menni O.H. to the Hospital Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a foundation that he established (1883-1913)' (Rome, José Gonzalez Editore, 1975), letter 475.

<sup>2</sup> 'Historia de la Restauración de San Juan de Dios en España', by P. Juan Ciudad Gomez, interprovincial archive, transit home of St. John of God, Granada 1968 chapter IX, p. 20 (Letter – Obedience to the Superior General of St. John of God, care for the war wounded).

<sup>3</sup> 'Historia de la Restauración de San Juan de Dios in España', by P. Juan Ciudad Gomez, interprovincial archive, transit home of St. John of God, Granada 1968, chapter IX, p. 119. Certificate by D. Nicasio Landa on the authorisation of P. Menni and the religious of the Order to use the emblems of the Red Cross.

<sup>4</sup> 'Historia de la Restauración de San Juan de Dios in España', by P. Juan Ciudad Gomez, interprovincial archive, transit home of St. John of God, Granada 1968, chapter IX, p. 122.

<sup>5</sup> 'Cardidad y Patriotismo. Reseña histórica de la Orden Hospitalaria de San Juan de Dios', written to mark the fiftieth anniversary of its new flowering in Spain (1867-1918) by Luciano del Pozo, chronicler of the Order. The General Archive of the Hospital Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.



# In Order to Globalise Solidarity Let us Make Knowledge a Matter of Solidarity

## The Experience of the Solidarity Network of Health Care Workers

To live again the role of the Good Samaritan as a voluntary worker in pastoral care in health means 'to see and feel compassion for the pain of the sick person and to draw near to him'; it means to repeat the work that Jesus carried out for sick people. 'Who else could be the Samaritan if not the Saviour?', Clement of Alexandria asked himself.<sup>1</sup>

Aware of this vocation, and as men and women who live in the twenty-first century, we must know that it is not enough to be satisfied with such conduct alone because we are face to face with new challenges that will require our action, and in relation to which John Paul II has proposed the globalisation of solidarity and the ability to invent new forms of co-operation.

We are a part of a new civilisation, created from the starting point of a society of knowledge. The material wealth of individuals and nations 'does not lie now in physical capital but in human imagination and creativity'.<sup>2</sup>

This society employs the technological revolution in communications to transfer in unlimited forms, and to any part of the world, financial and intellectual capital, thereby creating a whole host of commercial networks. This phenomenon is the basis of what we call 'globalisation', 'a phenomenon that is progressively manipulated by the great economic corporations that in this way exercise an increasing control over the conditions in which users can gain access to those ideas, knowledge and techniques that are decisive'.<sup>3</sup> According to this *schema*, those people who cannot gain access to knowledge and the use of new technologies are left to lengthen the enormous list of the 'excluded'.

This phenomenon of 'exclu-

sion' is progressively affecting most of the populations of developing countries, where 90% of births take place within families who have an income of less than two American dollars a day and which for the most part do not have the most elementary medical care. The population of these countries, in turn, makes up 82% of the world's population.

This grave imbalance is at the root of the multiplication in the number of civil wars and regional wars, with the increasing phenomenon of millions of refugees and the explosive growth in the number of illegal immigrants in industrialised countries. These processes produce an enormous challenge for public health care policies both in developing countries – with increasing preventive reductions within policies of adjustment favoured by international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund – and in advanced countries, which are experiencing the crisis of the welfare state and the appearance of 'excluded' minorities.

At the same time, our society is undergoing an exponential growth in knowledge about illnesses and the processes needed to cure them. This growth is to be ascribed to the major advances in genetics which will, indeed, make our century the 'century of biotechnology'.

Thus we are faced with the paradox of having a mass of unprecedented knowledge to help sick people but which, because it is left solely to the mercy of the dynamics of the 'market economy', is only available to the minority which can pay for it.

Medical knowledge has become globalised and has allowed millions of health care workers throughout the world to acquire great capacities. They, too, however, feel that they are locked up in the perverse dynamics of supply and demand which transform patients into mere customers.

Faced with this panorama, is there a new form by which to fight against this kind of exclusion? A new reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan tells us that there is.

In this parable we can see that not only does the Samaritan draw near to the wounded man but he also 'bound his wounds and poured oil and wine on them' (Lk 10:34). This was the most appropriate action from a medical point of view during that historical period and in that situation. The Good Samaritan employed knowledge as a healing element. If he had not done this, the wounded man would have died from loss of blood. But even more prophetic for our times was the fact that 'he took him to an inn and took care of him. Next day he took out two silver pieces, which he gave to the inn-keeper, and said, take care of him' (Lk 10:34-35). He provided his own co-operation and got into contact with a person who had other instruments. He knew about the place, the inn, to complete the treatment of the wounded man, and about who could take care of him with the same charity and commitment – the inn-keeper. If the Good Samaritan had not acted in this way, the wounded man would have died despite the action he had taken.

This parable shows us the first 'network of solidarity in pastoral care in health' in history and makes a very strong call upon us. In the twenty-first century can we be part of a pastoral care in health that is not 'communion' with those who have specific forms of knowledge about health and who complete what we possess? Can we carry out our voluntary work in an isolated way or with our group or association without being 'connected', without being on line, with all the other health care workers of good will, with 'new innkeepers', in a spirit of communion and co-operation? Is this not perhaps now the time to

engage in a new 'way of imagining charity'?'<sup>4</sup>

With this question, in 1995, together with another three medical doctors from Buenos Aires, in Argentina, we began to share our concerns generated by being aware of the fact that when our patients asked for help which went beyond our specialised fields of knowledge we could only suggest a consultation within the public health system, with the high probability that this would be late in coming or not arrive at all. In order to remedy this situation, we decided to exchange data so as to ask for mutual help when our patients needed it. The result was so encouraging, both for the patients and for us, that we decided to create 'a solidarity network of health care workers' open to all those (Christians or otherwise) who accepted in a spirit of solidarity to give selflessly of their knowledge in order to solve the problem of a patient for whom help was asked from another member of the network.

To this end we drew up an explanatory booklet with three basic objectives which continue to be the following:

- To be concerned not only with the physical condition of the patient but also with his or her psychological and spiritual state. Thus a member of the network has to identify serious and worried patients in his or her work so as to build a bridge between them and a priest, rabbi or pastor according to the creed of the sick person, thereby fulfilling the commitment to establish a 'spiritual' consultation.

- To defend life from its conception and not to engage in any practice that goes against life, like, for example, the use of any abortion-inducing technique or device.

- To selflessly give of all the knowledge that one possesses, trying to solve the problem both of the excluded patient and the person who has not been able to solve his or her problem in the conventional health service. The request for help, which always take place between colleagues, involves a dual challenge: it is connected with solidarity because it transforms 'your' patient into 'our' patient, and it is connected with

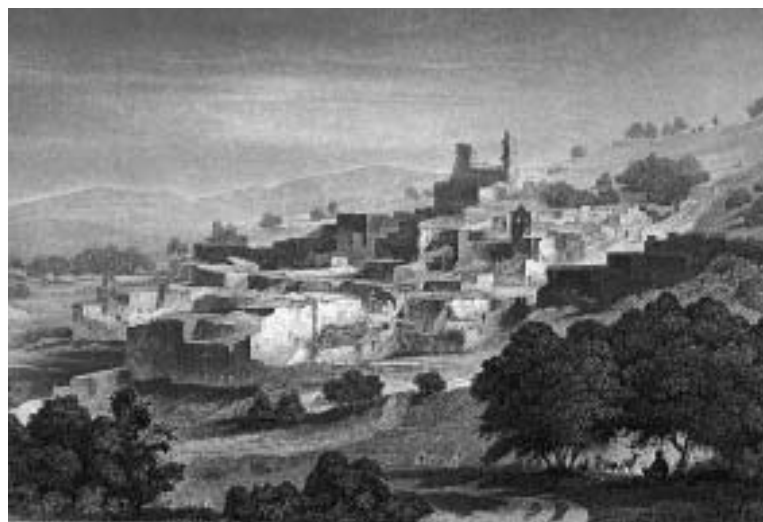
professional knowledge because efforts should not be abandoned until the problem is solved, as a result of which our knowledge is not enough and we have to invite other colleagues to help us and encourage us to join the network.

If a colleague accepts these objectives, he or she fills in an enrolment form with all his or her data and these facilitate a consultation. These data are fed into a general database and are arranged according to the branch of specialisation. This is then distributed in the form of an electronic disk or booklet to all the members so that all of them have the data of the other members of the network.

At that moment we had already discovered the wonderful qualities of being moved by solidarity as regards knowledge and by working through the network: the network strengthens you and grows the more you use it; using the imagination of professionals, it is possible to overcome the limitations of the official health system; and a 100% gospel-based experience is a daily occurrence: through the network we can

and only one colleague has not performed his solidarity-inspired duty. Thus in 1996 we began to be a part of pastoral care in health in an imaginative way. Those responsible for pastoral care in health accepted the form of work engaged in through the network by ensuring that the objectives of the work that was done were in line with the principles of the Gospel. In the same way, those responsible for the network have published small booklets containing information for non-medical voluntary workers in health care so that they can ask for help for patients through the network.

In 1998 there were members of the network in all the provinces of the country. We thus grouped them together into regions, headed by a head co-ordinating medical doctor in the principal city of that region. Thus every member has all the data of the professionals belonging to the network of his or her region and can thereby work and communicate in a way moved by solidarity. If a person, despite this information, cannot solve a problem,



ask for much more help than is asked from us.

At the end of 1995 the network had four hundred members (a number that doubles every 6-7 months).

Through the practice of the spiritual consultation, the confessions and communions engaged in by patients belonging to the field of intensive care has gone from 15-20% to over 80% of the population. 1,800 patients have already been treated

he or she can contact the regional co-ordinator and him gain access through by telephone, fax or e-mail to the data of the network at a national level.

Since its creation, the network has required a minimal infrastructure. Since 1996 we have had a general co-ordinating office and an executive secretary inside the Department for the Laity of the Bishops' Conference of Argentina. At





this office there are voluntary workers who up-date the database and send it to the members. 95% of the consultations take place in a decentralised form between those who within the network, and the remaining 5%, the most complex cases, are dealt with by the general co-ordinating office which can call on the help of an *ad hoc* team to solve them.

By now, more than 4,700 health professionals, with over seventy forms of specialisation, have adhered to the network, working in 'communion' throughout Argentina. To this should be added the thousands of non-medical voluntary workers in health care who ask for help through the network and who in turn back up the work of the professionals. Today, more than 80% of pastoral care in health in Argentina is done through the network. Thus this year more than 80,000 cases of patients 'excluded' from the official health service have been solved and through solidarity-inspired 'knowledge' these people have been reintegrated into that service.

Since 1999, hundreds of consultations arrive at the general co-ordination office by telephone or fax because of the spread of the network through the media. But this challenge has been met by channelling every consultation to a member of the network who then 'adopts' the case and shares it with the other members according to the needs that arise.

'Solidarity-inspired networks' are not only instruments for 'communion' outside the

Church; they also generate communion within the Church.

The solidarity-inspired network of health care workers works with the Caritas of Argentina. The network, as the agency principally responsible for professional help, and Caritas, as the organisation which is qualified to obtain medical materials or economic resources when these are needed to support the process of treatment, work together always in an inter-relationship. From such mutual co-operation has arisen the need to communicate with other non-governmental institutions that work in a solidarity-inspired way in the field of health and health care and in the other social areas. This process now underway is a concrete manifestation of 'solidarity, the fruit of communion'.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, in 2002, we began a programme of co-operation between the health care network and the parishes of the various dioceses of the country. Thus every parish and parish community have sent or will send one or more health care workers from their parish (a medical doctor, a nurse, a social worker, etc.) to belong to the network.

When the problem of health of an 'excluded' person belonging to that community arises, the agent who has agreed to take part is consulted so that he or she can assess the case and involve that person in the network. Each of these parishes thus does not have only one health care agent but instead has available from eight hundred to a thousand. This experi-

ence has revolutionised the role of parishes in marginalised communities in Argentina.

Social phenomena of great impact began to develop beginning with the creation of the solidarity network of health care workers. One such phenomena, in imitation of the existing network, is that other such networks have been created in Argentina, such as those for children and adolescents, for support for small economic entities, for social communication and educational direction. All of these networks are well underway and have a similar capacity to transform existing realities.

Another such phenomenon is to be found in the fact that specifically because of its nature and dynamics, the growth of these 'solidarity networks' leads necessarily and gradually to the practical modification of unjust social structures ('structures of sin') because they 'disturb' the natural flow of information and provide help, and have the further advantage of being carried out by the committed Christians and other 'men of good will' who perform their tasks within these same structures.

There are a large number of examples of such an ability, from sharing health programmes created for groups of medical doctors belonging to the network and intended for parts of the population at high risk (pregnant adolescents, malnourished children and the homeless) to the creation of a medical programme for the building of day clinics for patients thought to have high-risk pathologies. Such initiatives do not increase costs for the public system. This last project, which has been accepted by the Ministry of Health of Argentina, will be the work of the public system and the network will be the creative body ('the donor of knowledge'): a clear example of subsidiarity and interaction between the state and civil society. It is thought that this programme will benefit 500,000 patients each year, that each year 30,000 to 50,000 hospital admissions will be avoided, as well as 5,000 to 7,000 deaths, through the simple organisation of existing resources, and that above all else 'professional



knowledge will become solidarity-based' by providing it with a channel of expression through the network.

Lastly, we have observed the innate tendency of these experiences to become globalised, given that we use the exchange of knowledge, which itself is something that is globalised. Although the 'health care network' is much more than an 'internet of good' because it really is a 'human network' of solidarity-inspired hearts and minds, the Web is the most favourable instrument for a solidarity-inspired exchange because it allows us through our site [www.redessolidarias.org](http://www.redessolidarias.org) to reproduce between colleagues of different countries the communication and consultation that already exist between Argentinian professionals.

We have discovered that in this way we can turn in a broad variety of cases to the help of specialists with whom our patients would never have come into contact, we can lessen the differences in medical care that exist between our countries, and we can even transfer medical technology to those places where it is really needed.

There are groups that are beginning this kind of network in Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, the United States of America, and Spain. By now each group is made up not only of its local members but is also in communion with its 4,7000 voluntary brothers and sisters in Argentina and other countries.

However, we are far from having reached the limit of these possibilities, which, indeed, challenge our solidarity-inspired imagination. Is there a country or institution that does not have pain to share or does not possess knowledge about health care that it can give? Certainly, the answer is in the negative.

Today, thanks to the communications revolution, it is possible to meet and 'get connected with' all the 'Good Samaritans' and the 'solidarity-inspired innkeepers' of the world, and in a spirit of communion to exchange knowledge with the aim of helping all those who suffer and who we increasingly meet on our paths.

This, then, is our invitation: to form a 'global solidarity network of health care' through

which to offer, in a humble way, our energies and our co-operation.

I strongly believe in the prophetic call of the Holy Father that we should 'globalise solidarity', and I also believe, with the same force, that we must 'make knowledge a matter for solidarity'.

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of the Bishops' Conference  
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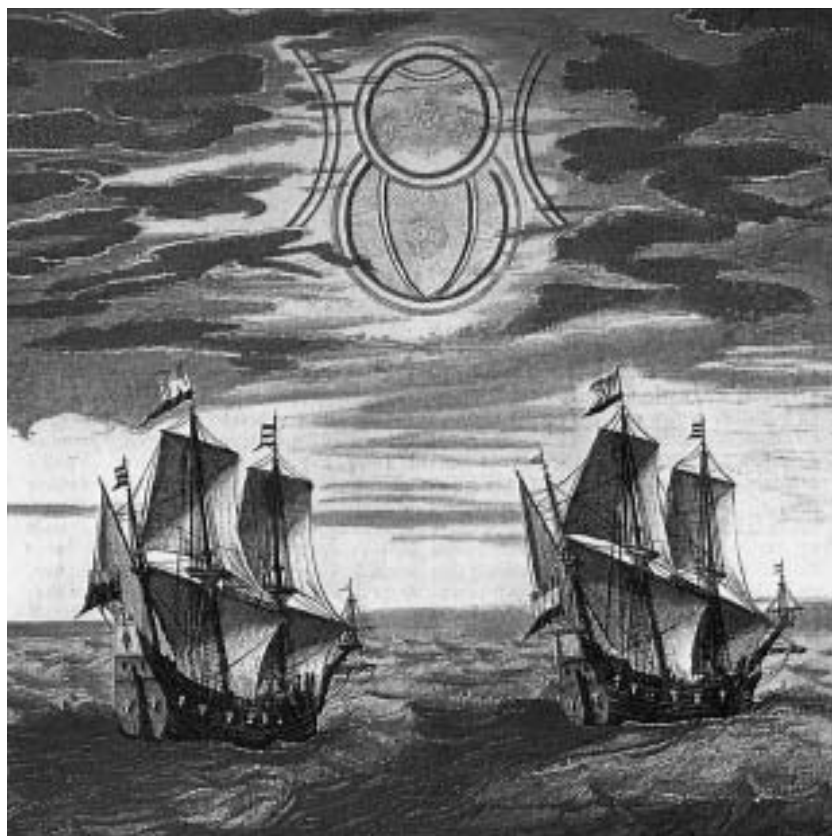
<sup>1</sup> CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Quis dives Salvetur* 29: 969,633.

<sup>2</sup> JEREMY RIFKIN, *L'Era dell'Accesso* (Editoriale Paidós, 2000), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 6 January 2001, 50.

<sup>5</sup> Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, 22 January 1999, 52.



# Voluntary Work and the AIDS Emergency



Saturday  
1  
December

## Premise

Before beginning the subject that I was called on to talk on here today, I would like to thank warmly H.E. Msgr. Lozano, the President of this Pontifical Council; H.E. Msgr. Redrado, the Secretary of the Dicastery, and Rev. Felice Ruffini, its Under-Secretary, with all of whom, for four years by now, I have been working on the subject of HIV-AIDS. Last but by no means least, I would also like to thank all those present at this conference and those taking part in this World Day in particular, because of its special importance.

When the title of this paper was entrusted to me, I have to admit that I felt charged with a great responsibility, but at the same time I felt that this was an extraordinary opportunity to maintain the high-level of international attention paid to the question of HIV-AIDS as well as to emphasise the incisive and at times determining action of thousands of both lay and religious voluntary workers, whether health care workers or others, who are involved in the world of providing assistance, care and accompaniment to those who are suffering from AIDS and their families.

As you yourselves can observe, the subject is rather large and its exhaustive treatment would require more time than has been granted to me. For this reason, I will try to focus on those key aspects that in my experience of studying the subject can provide us with an overall picture of the subject of voluntary work and AIDS.

## The Statistics on the Spread of HIV-AIDS in the World

On the basis of very recent estimates relating to 2001 which have just been published by UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV-AIDS, there are in all 40 mil-

lion people who live with HIV-AIDS, both adults and children. 95% of these people live in developing countries and of these over 70% live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Only 3% of the rest of such sufferers live in the Western world (North America, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand). There are in all 2.7 million children under the age of fifteen who live with HIV-AIDS. There were 800,000 new cases of infection and 580,000 children died of this malady in the same year. The incidence of the virus, or rather the new cases of infection that were detected during the course of 2001, were estimated to be in all 5 million (both adults and children). To make the picture clearer, we could also say that each day 14,000 new cases of infection are detected. Of the 5 million new cases, over 95% live in developing countries (more than 70% in Sub-Saharan Africa) and a little more than 1% live in Western Europe and overseas – 14% are children (as has already been observed); 86% belong to an age band which goes from 15 to 49 years of age, a fertile age given the reproductive life of the human person and a productive age from an economic point of view given involvement in work activity. Over a half of these are between 15 and 24 years of age, and a little less than half of them are women. About 3 million people are estimated to have died from AIDS in 2001, of whom 80% were in Sub-Saharan Africa and less than 1% in the Western world. Since the appearance of the virus until today more than 21 million people have died from it. At this point we should mention the orphans: it is calculated that about 13.2 million children have become orphans as a result of the death of one or both of their parents – over a half of these children live in Africa and every day they undergo

hunger, privation and a state of abandonment.

It is clear, therefore, that today people go on dying of HIV-AIDS but it is equally clear that one can also live with this terrible illness thanks to new antiviral forms of treatment which slow down its advance and effects. However, this is still something that is the privilege of the few, indeed I would say of the very few. The debate underway about a new set of rules regarding the 'intellectual property' on the patenting of new pharmaceutical products is well known about. I think that the time has come to make a new social pact which will open up the way to a new era in the relationship between pharmaceutical companies and society, a pact based upon the ethical and moral imperative of guaranteeing that scientific progress works to the benefit of everyone, and above all to the benefit of the poorest of the planet, and which ensures that the costs of this are borne by the richest countries of the world. In Africa, and in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, people continue to die of AIDS. Very few Africans have access to forms of medical care linked to HIV-AIDS, such as drugs and medicines for opportunistic illnesses, which, as is well known, are the factors which most favour the emergence of seropositive situations. Even less Africans have access to anti-viral drugs and medicines.

But people do not die of AIDS only in the continent of Africa. There are certain geographical areas where the incidence of the virus is increasing at a growing speed. I am referring here to the situation in the Caribbean region and the countries of the former Soviet Union, in particular the Russian Federation and the Ukraine. There is also the continent of Asia where prostitution and drug-addiction act as accelerators and favour the spread of the virus. On 13 November 2001,

during the first national conference on AIDS/HIV held in Peking, the Minister of Health of China gave the first estimates of the phenomenon in that country – at the moment there are 600,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in China. However, the rapid increase in new cases of infection in sub-populations in various parts of the same country leads to the conclusion that the number of people suffering from HIV/AIDS will increase rapidly in the months to come.

### **The Routes of Transmission and the Factors that Favour the Spread of the Virus**

In dealing with the subject of the transmission of HIV/AIDS, one has to take into account the special social and cultural factors that influence and sustain the transmission of the virus in countries and contexts that are different. A large number of economic, political and social factors shape the overall configurations of this illness – from extreme poverty to wars, and on to migratory movements, examples of sexual abuse, prostitution, drug-addiction, alcoholism, and the fact that young people do not have prospects and hopes for the future. HIV/AIDS is a violent expression of the 'social injustice' that is present on the world horizons, but it is also a symptom of the dissolution of certain basic values connected with human dignity. As long ago as 1989, the Holy Father, in a speech to those taking part in the international conference that this Dicastery dedicates every year to emerging subjects and which in that year was with great foresight dedicated to the subject of AIDS, pronounced the following words: "We are not far from the truth when we say that in parallel with the spread of HIV/AIDS a sort of immunity deficiency at the level of essential value has expressed itself, which cannot but be seen as an authentic pathology of the spirit".

What, therefore, are the accelerating factors working for the spread of HIV/AIDS?

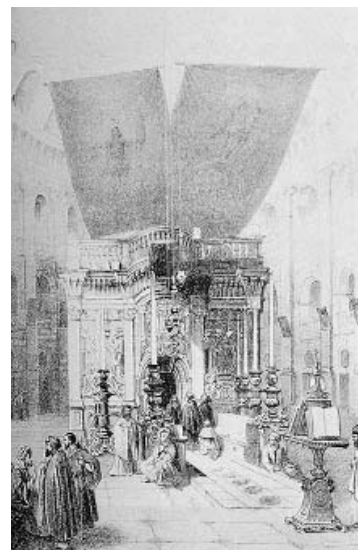
First of all there is the factor of poverty, which pushes peo-

ple to the margin of society and excludes them from the spheres of social relations or rather from the principal areas of socialisation such as schools and the world of work. Poverty affects the ability of man to receive an education, to obtain training, and to have prospects and horizons of fulfilment. This involves a serious injury to the person at the level of his dignity as a man and it relegates him to the margins of society and exposes him to forms of behaviour that are at risk such as prostitution and drug-addiction. In addition, the perception of social injustice which is experienced, and experienced passively, involves a weakening of those basic values that uphold community in many traditional societies – their foundations are undermined and these societies are made vulnerable. But we should also say, and especially here, that poverty is also the fruit of inadequate policies and corrupt administrations – we know so many cases of countries that are rich in resources, oil, precious stones, but which are in a state of dependency on the so-called rich countries with which they contract debts in the search for economic supports. This is a system that strangles the poorest countries which, in order to obtain loans, have to accept conditions that adversely affect their cultures. It should be remembered that the culture of a people should also be respected and defended because it is an important vehicle of information and communication and this characteristic should be seen as a source of wealth and not a barrier (C.O. Airhihenbuwa, 1995).

In order to tackle poverty and hunger, huge numbers of people leave their own villages and families for periods which are often very long. Flourishing mining industries managed by Western multi-nationals attract manual labour not only from the rural areas in which they are situated but also from neighbouring economies where work opportunities are limited and wages are lower. 'Mobility' is thus one of the factors that characterises the world population. But how do these migrant populations live? They live in loneliness, in dormitory towns

built in the areas near to mining works. They work hard and every day they risk their lives because of the lack in their places of work of minimum safety standards. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that in these places prostitution and drugs abound. But that is not all. We could talk about wars and the lives of the young soldiers of Rwanda and Cambodia. They are used to living day by day and they are conscious of the fact that their lives can finish at any moment. As a result, AIDS frightens them no more than any other disease. And what can be said about life in refugee camps where young women are raped or forced to trade in their own bodies? And what about the young Asian girls sent off to work in prostitution by their own parents in order to earn food for their families?

I would like here to refer to the 'Note' for the Bishop's Conferences on 'The Repro-



ductive Health of Refugees' which was recently issued to the press and which had been prepared by the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care, the Pontifical Council for the Family, and the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. In this work there is a strong appeal to the promotion of the education of young people in favour of responsible procreation and respect for the dignity of their bodies, and this is seen as 'real prevention against this epidemic'. But this is not all. Another social factor that con-



tributes to the silent and slithering spread of this virus is the stigma and prejudice that it involves. This is something that favours the perpetration of very grave episodes of discrimination towards people who are seropositive. It is difficult to measure this stigma – people with HIV encounter it in rejection by their relatives and friends; in the maltreatment of their children at school or the loss of their jobs on the grounds of a banal pretext. Such stigma and fear inflame the spread of HIV/AIDS and place a real obstacle in the way of prevention and treatment. But how should we fight this enemy which sees us act against our own brothers and sisters? We need to combat this culture of separation and exclusion with information and by bearing witness to a new culture of solidarity and human brotherhood.

And at this point I would like to deal with the question of voluntary work. Voluntary work is the 'front line' of action against HIV/AIDS and this is demonstrated by a series of programmes and implemented initiatives, especially where acute poverty is most devastating. Although it is the case that at the root of voluntary action in favour of people sick with HIV/AIDS there are constituent elements that can be extended to its every form of expression, nonetheless we have to distinguish between the ways in which voluntary work is carried out in the West and the ways it is carried out in developing countries where the overall framework onto which voluntary work is grafted is complex from a psychological, organisational and operational point of view. In the Western world, voluntary workers work in various ways in hospitals and in communities for drug-addicts which have opened their doors to receiving seropositive people or sick people. They also work in providing home-based help and in family homes. This is hard work which involves the whole of the individual.

It is well known that 'taking care' of a patient suffering from AIDS is a very complex operation. It involves building up a sort of 'therapeutic alliance' between the various professional

and non-professional figures involved (medical doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, pastoral workers and voluntary workers) all of whom have the aim of treating, caring for, and accompanying the sick person and establishing a 'relationship of health' with him. This relationship of health should never be 'exclusive'. Each person should make their own contribution to the overall project just as in a mosaic each piece contributes to the final result but at the same time needs all the other pieces. The voluntary worker is an especially important figure in this relationship of health and in addition is a point of reference not only for

voluntary work take on a more operational character. The voluntary worker is a person who helps his neighbour, the person suffering from AIDS who is abandoned and left alone in his hut by his own family and who is heading for an inexorable death. The voluntary worker is a person who repairs the roof of the hut when the rainy season draws near. The voluntary worker is the person who offers the only forms of care and treatment that are available. The voluntary worker is the person who takes care of small families of orphans, families in which children aged only ten are left alone to take care of their younger siblings. *In these*



the patient but also for his or her family. We should not forget that in this illness the suffering of the patient is joined by the suffering of his or her family relatives who are often the victims of forms of social exclusion and marginalisation.

You should realise, therefore, that voluntary work takes place in contexts, such as those that reign in developing countries where hospitals are almost non-existent, where minimum hygienic conditions are not even guaranteed, where there is a shortage or absence of drinking water, where essential drugs and medicines are not forthcoming, and where there are no publicly organised health services. In a few words: where the right to health is a daily wager. In these contexts, urgency and need require the voluntary worker to make up for the structural failings of 'shadow health services' and to make

*places the voluntary worker is the light that breaks the light of suffering and indifference.* Today there are many realities in the developing countries which are working in this direction, and indeed increasingly so, with the co-operation of voluntary workers down on the ground. This is the greatest result of these programmes. The witness of members of the laity and members of religious orders who work in these countries slowly helps the local people to overcome fears and prejudices that distance rather than unite, which hinder prevention rather than promoting it.

I will give one example from many – that of the Catholic diocese of Ndola in Zambia where from 1988 onwards a programme of home-care has been implemented which has sought to provide a basic level of care and support to anybody who is afflicted by HIV/AIDS and tu-

berculosis. So far this programme has reached twenty-three cities and benefited about four hundred thousand people. All this has been done at a reasonable cost but above all thanks to the key role played by five hundred voluntary workers, in the main part women, from the rural communities themselves, who are committed to helping their neighbours in the face of this dual epidemic. In our Western societies this could appear to be something taken for granted, but this is not the case in African societies where AIDS is still experienced with great fear because it has an absolutely devastating impact on the family, because it cannot be cured, because it is transmitted through the transmission of life, which has a sacred value and together with health is the primary condition of man, and because it leads to an early death and such a death is something that is tragic in African society. Such a death deprives individuals of their 'spiritual re-vivification', something that can take place solely through having a large number of descendants. AIDS, therefore, acts to undermine the ideals of harmony and of balance.

It is often said that voluntary work is special 'witness to human solidarity', but I think that it is advisable to ask ourselves about the deepest meaning of the concept of solidarity. At the base of solidarity there is something that links people together and they are not linked together by what they 'have' but by what they 'are'. Thus because every man is a person and has a natural personal dignity, the foundation of solidarity lies specifically in the 'dignity of the person'. The person, in turn, is a 'relational' being by nature and relates to others in line with two principal dimensions: that of *being with others*, or communion, and that of *being for others*, or giving. I would like to direct your attention to being for others, that being for others that can also be understood as a categorical imperative of the 'ethics of duty' of Kant, as a universal imperative, valid for all men quite apart from their religious confessions or loyalties, and which finds a basis, its motivations and its primary

contents in those who believe in Christ. From Catholic voluntary workers, especially those who work with people suffering from AIDS, Christ does not ask for general being with others but asks for a being for others that he himself testified to through his life by embracing the suffering of the Cross to achieve the salvation of the whole of mankind, and by coming to the aid of the least and the most in need. This is the deepest meaning of pastoral care for those who are sick and the suffering.

Voluntary work directed towards the struggle against HIV/AIDS – an illness which strikes the *last of the last* – is the mouthpiece of a humanity that is trodden on and humiliated. Voluntary work, by its action, is *the fundamental instrument of peace amongst peoples*; it is the vivid and concrete witness of the brother who draws near to his brother, helps him, and supports him so that they can return together and take up their journey. But it also refers to the person who restores to a sick man his ability and courage to be for others, to feel that he plays an active part in the relationship of help and that he is a 'protagonist'. No worker more than the voluntary worker experiences the condition of his brother in difficulty with such a special closeness. The Catholic voluntary worker, and in a special way the Catholic voluntary worker active in the field of care for people suffering from HIV/AIDS, working in synergy with all the professional figures who are involved in care for the patient, has a specific mission to perform: he must be an authentic witness to humanity, that Christian humanity that links us all together, and in whose suffering can be encountered the suffering of the cross of Christ. Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said during a speech: "the greatest suffering is being lonely, being unwanted, being unloved, just having no one". In these countries where often there is not poverty but acute poverty, human beings experience this hopelessness every day.

The voluntary worker who freely gives his time to this service also gives hope to these

people, the hope that they will no longer be alone, that they will have someone who loves them, who surrounds them, who makes them feel that are still able to give something and do not only to receive, who restores to them that human dignity which has so wrongly been denied to them. But this mystery, the ability to give of oneself, is not and cannot be completely human – the suffering person often realises that behind that giving there is something greater which moves towards him to comfort him. Behind that extended hand there is Christ who consoles, supports, and encourages, that Lord God who never abandons us. *For this reason, today, voluntary work is a light, an authentic and concrete hope that a world of peace will be built.*

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I am taking the place of the International General President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Dr. José Ramón Díaz Tooremocha. My name is Francesco de Barberis and I am one of the 600,000 brothers and sisters of our society.

Yesterday I learnt a great deal and I was struck by how much good is done in the world under the banner of 'voluntary work'.

The Holy Father has defined 'voluntary work' with a happy phrase: it is 'above all else a question of the heart, of the heart that knows how to open to the needs of our brethren'. In this way the Pope clarified the nature of the implementation of the second commandment of love, as confirmed by Jesus: 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Mt 22:29; Mk: 12:31-32; Lk 10:27). For a committed Christian, this is a commitment to be followed with joy.

Voluntary work was already being implemented as a 'question of the heart' during the seventeenth century by St. Vincent de Paul. In the nineteenth century his disciple, the blessed Frédéric Ozanam, saw such work as a 'choice of lay life'.

On 23 April 1833, in Paris, the first Conference of St. Vincent de Paul was created by a professor and six students of the Sorbonne. Amongst these people, one person in particular stood out as the planner and animator of what would become the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. His name was Frédéric Ozanam.

Ozanam gave the society a revolutionary character compared to the other associations of the time, which he accused of practising the 'charity of a glass of fresh water', whereas he thought that it was necessary 'to put one's hands to the roots of the evil and with wise reforms reduce the causes of acute public poverty'.

These six young people, when they established the first conference, did not really know

how to begin, but they found a 'mother' in Sister Rosalie Rendu of the Daughters of Charity (who is now undergoing the procedure of beatification) who gave them St. Vincent de Paul as their 'father'.

The female branch was born in Bologna in 1856.

After the Second World War, the need was felt to work together. In order to solve the problem, His Holiness Pius XII was approached and he observed: 'today women and men study together, they work together; why cannot they engage in charity together?'

The second article of our society reads as follows: 'no work of charity should be seen as being extraneous'.

In 1995, in response to an initiative taken by Rev. Robert Maloney (the Superior General of the Congregation of Mission), *and in order to serve poor people in a better way*, the Family of St. Vincent de Paul was formed. It was composed of the Fathers of Mission, the Daughters of Charity, the Association Internationale des Charités (AIC), the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and other associations who base themselves upon the ideas St. Vincent de Paul.

I will present only a small sample of the experience of our 132 national councils so as to remain within the time limit that has been given to me.

## Colombia (South America)

We are experiencing a crisis of values because a small number of people own great sums of capital (in large part accumulated through the drug trade) at the same time as a majority of the population does not have essential economic resources because of the high level of unemployment. As a result, families have to deal with the major problems connected with finding jobs, housing, food, health, education etc.

The government does not carry out its tasks and thus it is the private sector that has to take care of, and protect, those in need.

Our society, with its seven hundred conferences, which are supported by the ecclesiastical hierarchy and by religious communities and was established to protect poor people, does what it can to provide help and care.

Despite the efforts that have been made, elderly people, children beggars, vagabonds, alcoholics and drug-addicts still remain on the streets.

The more followers of St. Vincent there are, the more we will be able to look after a greater number of poor people.

The compassion of God is infinite and the creativity of the heritage of St. Vincent de Paul needs to grow continuously.

## India (Asia)

### 1. The Poor

Our main work in India involves adopting poor families, visiting them regularly, and providing them with help of both a material and spiritual kind. We have adopted 31,194 families.

### 2. The Adoption of Students

Each conference adopts at least one student so that he or she can receive an education. In this way, 3,021 students have been adopted and the adoption programme is still underway. In addition to this, support is given to other poor students. Last year, the number of students that were helped was 51,543.

### 3. Abandoned Elderly, Poor and Sick People.

Our society in the main manages the following institutions: homes for elderly people (10); homes for poor people (1); homes for disabled people (1); homes for lepers (1); homes for people afflicted by AIDS (1);



eye hospitals (1); clinics (3).

At a conference level, medical and eye mobile clinics and blood donation centres.

The members of our society regularly visit sick people and the elderly in their homes or in hospital. Last year there were 2,957,176 such visits. Last year 51,543 people received medical assistance.

#### 4. The Unemployed

I will now list some of the systems that we use to mitigate their problems:

- support for education;
- we manage seven centres for industrial training within various councils in order to provide professional training;
- within various conferences hundreds of courses are given to provide training in computers, typewriting, stenography, tailoring, embroidery, techniques for packing clothes, weaving by hand, machine weaving, carpet weaving, basket making, nursing and home-based care, etc.

#### 5. Alcoholism, Drug-addiction etc.

Seminars and work-days are organised to make young people and the members of the community aware of ways by which they can combat the following evils: alcoholism, drugs, prostitution, abortion, AIDS etc. It is above all the young people of our society who undertake these initiatives. So far measures of a curative kind have not been implemented.

### Ireland (Europe)

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the sole and largest provider of housing, shelter and social accommodation in Ireland. For vagabonds and the homeless there are twelve hostels and for elderly people there are fifty programmes to provide community housing.

#### 1. Drug-addiction

This work involves very great difficulties. Dublin has a centre where young people can obtain news and advice and where families can go to receive support.

#### 2. The Elderly

The elderly are visited, holidays and parties are organised, visits to barbers and hairdressers are arranged, and help is provided in filling out forms and similar documents.

#### 3. Children

In this sphere we organise summer camps, friendship and being listened to during holidays, as well as nursery schools for poor families.



#### 4. Sick People and Prisoners

Sick people are visited and friendships are formed with them – we help them through the writing of letters, the distribution of newspapers, washing etc. All the prisons of the country are visited and prisoners are offered support and friendship. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul manages two family centres at two prisons; *there are places where children can play with their parent and his or her family can stop and talk and have a cup of tea.*

The Irish Society of St. Vincent de Paul has signed a twinning agreement with the Societies of St. Vincent de Paul of Africa and seeks to encourage and support by financial means the projects promoted by the individual Societies of St. Vincent de Paul that are located in that continent.

### Italy (Europe)

The Italians have the defect of being individualists, people who want to work on their own, but they also have large hearts.

Despite this propensity, the Italian national council is trying to stress through home visits that red thread that connects individual forms of poverty to the social processes that create poverty and marginalisation, and to intervene by trying to stop these processes and where possible neutralise them. This is the task of the Department of Social Policy of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a structure which arose to promote suit-

able initiatives of social policy that follow the ideas of our founder. The path is not easy but it is obligatory and requires the courage to change.

Naturally enough, the capillary work of bringing the love of God to poor people in their own spheres of life continues. For the homeless, whose domain is a heap of cardboard, a night service has been set in motion in Rome to provide help and food in the railway stations and in other places where such people are to be found. At the present time we are strengthening the socio-health care structures in various regions that take in tramps, the homeless, those who have been discharged from prison, and foreigners. Some structures are now being built in order to contribute to the work of the humanisation of Italian cities. The last of these is at its final stage – the project of primary accommodation 'La Casa de Angela' in Vittorio Veneto, which seeks to promote the integration of immigrants in terms of housing and work.

At the wider level of the promotion of a culture of concern

with people, and having observed that loneliness is a constituent element of so many forms of relational and economic poverty present in every generation, the Italian Society of St. Vincent de Paul has this year promoted a national day centred around the theme: 'freeing man from forms of loneliness'. This national day seeks to sensitise public opinion about the consequences of loneliness, whose effects are to be seen in so many episodes of news, and to collect funds to allow us to engage in suitable initiatives of help and care.

The Italian Society of St. Vincent de Paul is very convinced, as Federico Ozanam said, that 'charity should never look back but should always look forward, because the number of its good deeds is always too small and because the forms of misery both present and future which have to be reduced are infinite'.

## Holland (Europe)

### 1. Tramps – the Homeless

There is an increasing recognition of the need to increase the projects for tramps and the homeless. Their need for help is constant. A pilot survey is being carried out on the homeless and young tramps. At the present moment, in order to address this emergency, in addition to managing a number of homes for tramps and giving them food and clothes, we are developing the following initiatives:

#### - The 'Brotherhood Project'

Young people who belong to our society approach people of the same age who are homeless in a spirit of brotherhood and draw near to those young people who encounter difficulties in managing on their own.

#### - The 'Homeless' Project of Amsterdam

This is a home for the homeless where such people can meet voluntary workers trained *ad hoc* and with whom they can talk. They can also relax, have a shower and a change of clean clothes.

#### - The Den Bosche Project for the Homeless

This is a day home for

tramps and vagabonds where meals at a low price are offered two evenings a week.

#### - The Maatijdsproject in Haarlem

In the heart of this city there is a restaurant called 'Vincent' where tramps and vagabonds can have meals at a low price.

### 2. The Young People's Initiatives Project

This involves an attempt to spread within today's young people the same enthusiasm that animated the six young people who founded our society. Young people are encouraged to take part in the work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and to offer their help and assistance at a local level to solve the problems connected with the world of young people and thereby bring about the adherence of new members.



### 3. The Free Time Project

We organise summer camps for children and poor families (this has been going on since 2000) together with other social organisations in Holland.

### 4. The Permanent AIDS Council

This promotes special projects for seropositive people and those suffering from AIDS in order to achieve a better understanding and acceptance of these sick people on the part of the Catholic community.

### 5. The India and Slovakia Committee

This promotes the development of, and support for, twinning with these two countries, as well as the organisation and intensification of the collection of funds.

### 6. The Project for Elderly People

In this project elderly people are encouraged to take part in the work of the society and in those organisations dedicated to elderly people.

### 7. The Project against Poverty in Holland

This project involves the provision of material help for the increasing number of families and individuals affected by the so-called 'new poverty'.

### 8. Leegeld

This is a project promoted at a local level by our conferences and councils to help parents of children of the school age who are in conditions of economic difficulty. This is a need closely connected to the phenomenon of the various forms taken by the so-called 'new poverty'.

### 9. The Minorities and Refugees Project

### 10. Second-Hand Shops

This project involves shops selling second-hand clothes and furniture which are run by voluntary workers without any administrative costs. These shops are of great help to the poorest sectors of society.

*If anybody is interested in receiving further information on these initiatives, they are asked to write to the National Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of the Netherlands, Geestbrugweg, 128 – 2281 CS Rijswijk, the Netherlands.*

## Scotland (Europe)

Our society works in different areas of decay in the city.

### 1. Vagabonds, Tramps and Drug-addicts

We have help centres in the largest cities for such people. Those who are helped can receive food and a change of clothing in a friendly atmosphere.

### 2. Sick People and Invalids

During the course of the year 2000 we:

Made 51,094 visits to in-

valids confined to their homes.

Held masses at a local level and to mark feasts of St. Vincent de Paul.

Administered Holy Communion to sick people and the elderly in their homes and in hospitals.

### 3. *Unemployed People in Low Quality Housing*

The national council of Scotland believes that having suitable housing is a right that should be guaranteed to all people. It is investigating at a detailed level the problem of housing that does not meet minimum requirements, as well as the conditions of poverty experienced by many people in Scotland.

### 4. *The Receiving of Refugees and Exiles who are not of the Christian Faith*

We are working with other organisations in the creation of a network of services for people who seek political asylum. This is based around three main points:

- The creation of reception centres.
- Combating the negative attitudes that are held towards such people.
- The planning and provision of specialist and on-going services to meet the individual needs of people who are seeking political asylum.

### *Uganda (Africa)*

In addition to our routine work – home visits, hospital visits, and prison visits – we have extended our services to the various categories of people who live in zones affected by the civil war in the north and west of Uganda. Murders and torture are perpetrated on members of the civilian population; there is also pillaging and the burning of houses and farmhouses. Children are kidnapped in the north of Uganda and taken to Sudan. These children are subjected to terrible torture in order to change them into terrorists or assassins who then attack their own countrymen. The girls are forced into early marriages with soldiers and rebels. The less fortunate are sold as slaves to Arabs to work in the various farms in Northern Sudan.

Recently, Uganda and the Sudan have sought to end their contrasts and have signed agreements. As a result, the kidnapped children run the risk of being killed by Ugandan soldiers because they are seen as rebels. *The challenge that faces the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is to address and then solve this problem.*

The second problem is that of the more than 466,000 people who constitute 50% of the population of Acholi. These are refugees who live in shanty

towns and in situations of extreme suffering. Many of them are the parents of kidnapped children who are now seen as rebels. They have to experience incredible suffering and forms of frustration. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, in addition to providing services in other refugee camps, is trying to add to what is offered by non-governmental organisations. *But this is not enough.*

To be involved in a Conference of St. Vincent de Paul means *to work together along a path of faith that stimulates people to fight evil with charity. Such behaviour gives hope and improves those who receive and those who give.*

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul arises from young people and helps them to maintain the same spirit over time. But there are also elderly people. At times you see them in the streets, seated on benches to discuss the 'latest news'. In order to live out the third age with serenity it is useful to be involved in voluntary work or better to join a Conference of St. Vincent de Paul and work with it, offering young people one's experience and regaining vitality through their presence.

Dr. FRANCESCO  
DE BARBERIS,  
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Italy.*





Who are refugees, where do they come from, why are they forced to flee their own homes, what are the problems that they encounter in the countries where they find asylum, and what should be done to solve these problems? These are questions that call upon and touch the consciences of believers.

The subject of forced migrations is absolutely enormous and covers and intertwines with very varied areas of knowledge and human life: from the relationship between globalisation and migrations to the process of the integration of foreigners into a society, and on to dialogue between religions, to give only a few examples.

It is not possible to address subjects of such importance in a single paper and so I hope you will forgive me if I neglect certain subjects whose importance of course I do not underestimate, in order to concentrate, instead, on certain points of reflection that I will now refer to briefly by way of an introduction to my paper.

For example, the definition of who a 'refugee' is, something that is often interpreted in a restrictive way, is codified in article 1 of the Geneva Convention of 1951. And the journey made by people who are forced to flee from their own countries, which makes the distinction between an economic migrant and a refugee increasingly artificial given the very great complexity of the situations from which people flee.

The situation of the reception and acceptance in the Western world of refugees seems to me one that is characterised by an attitude of suspicion and increasing hostility, and this is a reason why we need a clearer perception of the need to make the voices of the refugees themselves heard in order to change an attitude that runs the risk of lowering our guard on the human rights front. The events of 11 September 2001 have increased concern about

reactions against migrants. Not knowing whom to blame or what to do, people could blame refugees and treat them with even greater suspicion.

The position advanced by the social doctrine of the Catholic Church is different. This defines as a *de facto* refugee anyone who flees from their own country because of conflicts, human disasters, the violation of human rights, environmental disasters etc. This is a position which the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) shares and puts into practice at a concrete level.

It is thus necessary to plan and create cultural work and initiatives side by side with, and in support of, the work and activity of help and aid in order to create a different way of perceiving the phenomenon of forced migrations as part of an attempt to modify the observation point of the phenomenon itself. The focus should no longer be on the problems caused by a foreigner who arrives in a country but rather on the causes of his or her flight and the dignity and value of every man and the right of every person to live his or her own life in conditions of freedom and security.

Lastly, I will dwell on the mission of the JRS – to accompany, to serve and to defend the rights of refugees and evacuees, and on how this is done at a practical level, employing as a concrete example the Centro Astalli, the Italian headquarters of the JRS.

The Geneva Convention of the United Nations of 1951, in article 1, established who has the right, through procedures that are generally long and complicated, to the status of a refugee and identified five cases in which a well-founded fear of persecution gave the right to acquire such a status: persecutions for reasons of race, of religion, of nationality, because of membership of a specific social group, or because of political opinions.

A pillar of international law, the Convention was signed and ratified by 140 nations. Unfortunately, in most of the countries of the Western world it is interpreted in a restrictive way, to the point of being used more as a form of protection by states in order to limit the number of admissions of people who flee from forms of persecution than as an instrument to protect such people.

We should never forget that every individual, according to article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has the 'right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecutions in other countries'. In article 33 of the Geneva Convention the principle of *non-refoulement* is also upheld, according to which 'no contracting state can expel or send back a refugee to the frontiers of places where his life would be in danger'.

However, those people who during their lives have not been refugees must approach the subject with great care and great respect in order to avoid the risk of judging unfavourably the reasons for the flight of those who are forced to leave their own countries. This becomes even more important when we come to the distinction between political refugees and economic migrants. Most of today's refugees flee from situations that are very complex and where their lives are endangered by a multiplicity of factors which renders difficult the distinction between poverty, hunger, political oppression, armed conflict and other forms of violence. For many people, these realities mean incredible psychological and physical forms of torture over time. The person who flees from such a situation is often defined as being an 'economic migrant'. This is an artificial way of approaching the subject which is an expression of those who use it to justify the hard treatment envisaged for foreigners rather than taking into account the ter-

rible conditions from which such people flee.

The word 'refugee' is always accompanied by another, and that word is 'protection'. A refugee is a refugee because he or she flees from persecution within his or her state and asks another country for protection. The first need of any refugee, which indeed includes all the others, is to be protected: protected at the end of a journey which in most cases is indescribable from the point of view of difficulties, forms of suffering, and deprivation; protected from the psychological consequences which follow the trauma of abandoning one's own land and in many cases one's own family, one's own job, and one's own friends; protected from the feeling of guilt that one 'is alive' when others may no longer be; and protected from new violations

Arrupe, the Father General of the Society of Jesuits and the founder of the JRS includes all the people forced to abandon their homes because of conflicts, violations of human rights, humanitarian disasters etc. The social teaching of the Catholic Church sees all these people as *de facto* refugees, given the involuntary nature of their emigration and the violence of its causes (*Refugees: A Challenge for Solidarity*, 1992). Fortunately, therefore, Catholic social doctrine adopts a broad definition of the term 'refugee'. And while the needs of refugees differ according to their countries of origin or the countries where they seek asylum, or because of the reasons for their flight, the pastoral and human response of the JRS remains always the same.

During the twenty years of the activity of the Jesuit

punishes refugees in a dual way. They have to pay cash in order to enjoy their fundamental right of asylum, and as a result they are often seen as being 'illegal'.

The common attitude and the general climate are, in general, marked by suspicious hostility. The first doubt in people's minds is that behind the request for asylum there is economic migration and that the 'pseudo-refugee' is not forced to flee because of persecution but has moved solely to improve his or her conditions of life. The request for protection is thus often seen by public opinion as a mere excuse to enter Western Europe and stay there, at least for a certain period of time. This attitude runs the risk of lowering our guard as regards the defence of human rights. A culture of diffidence can make us deaf to the sincere cry of the request for protection.

Following the tragic events of 11 September, diffidence has been transformed, in an increasingly tangible way, into fear of anybody who is a foreigner, and even more if that foreigner belongs to the Muslim religion. But in reality this has only made more extreme a common feeling which was already present and had been created by a long and inopportune campaign by the mass media who ensured that in the collective imagination the subject of immigration is connected almost entirely with criminality. And this has taken place without asking who the refugee in front of one actually is – a student, a worker, a refugee, or a person asking for asylum. It is feared that such people have come to steal work from our young people, that their presence will be a threat to our well-being, that they will bring diseases with them etc. Having worked for the last seven to eight years in the world of immigration, I have heard almost everything. Immigrants are a sort of lightning rod which attracts all the collective tensions and fears. In basic terms, the mass media, politicians, public opinion and in a way all of us have a cyclical need to create monsters who meet our need to solve the contradictions of the world we live in in a rapid way.



of one's own fundamental human rights. One should never forget that for refugees, Rome, Italy, Europe and a refugee camp are merely the last stage of a journey marked by pain, desperation, and death. They have a history to tell and have a need that is of primary importance in terms of their other needs – that of being listened to. To listen to another person means to acknowledge the human being that is in that person, the person with his or her own dignity, which is often the only wealth refugees manage to bring with them from their flight.

The mission entrusted to the Jesuit Refugee Service by Rev.

Refugee Service and the Centro Astalli, the profile and the needs of refugees and displaced persons have changed enormously. The number of conflicts of an ethnic or religious character has increased, and thus the number of victims has also grown. In addition to this, today migratory pressure is a dominant feature of the relationship between states. But despite the growth of the global market, in which states have great freedom of trade and commerce, nations are placing increasing limitations on the movement of people. In this context there is an increase in criminal trafficking in human beings, a phenomenon which

Thus if one can find a category of people or even an ethnic group that is responsible for the evils of the moment, we all become more serene because we have identified the enemy who has to be destroyed.

At the moment this enemy is the foreigner who has an irregular legal status, the *sans-papier* or worse the illegal immigrant, who cause fear and worry on the part of public opinion, which, not understanding the reasons behind irregular immigration or the various situations which lead individuals to remain irregularly within a state (the end of their residence permit, the denial of the status of a refugee), reacts by calling for increasingly hard political measures which, unfortunately, increase the role played by criminality in the whole process. Irregular immigration is not an abstract problem – we are dealing here with real men and women who have personal histories, a reason for being here, a whole baggage of hopes and fears, projects and goals.

It seems that one of the frontiers of work with migrants in Italy today operates through information and the formation of public opinion. The discussion about the receiving and the integration of foreigners should not concern a few ‘experts’ but a far wider spectrum of the sectors of society.

With the team I work with I have made the decision to invest in that sector. We have begun to have systematic encounters with students, teachers, voluntary workers, and parishes during which refugees and immigrants themselves are the protagonists. Allowing them to speak, ensuring that they are the principal actors and not mere recipients, they propose something to us about which we can reflect and provide us with information that we can acquire. And then there are contacts with the press and the mass media in general, the publication of texts, conferences, and initiatives designed to spread ideas and information. By now this is an integral part of the work of any voluntary work association that works on behalf of refugees and immigrants.

I think, in addition, that we

should lead people to reflect on the fact that for reasons that have got nothing to do with us we are born in a certain part of the world and that others, for no fault of their own, belong to poor peoples and lands. And people should also think that nobody should be denied the right/duty to strive for a dignified and honest future for himself and his family. If in the name of the defence of the values of one’s own culture one denies someone, whomsoever he or she may be and whatever part of the world he or she may come from, the right to live in a dignified way, then I wonder what values and what culture we are really talking about.

People forced to migrate, in general, are not seen in a favourable light by public opinion unless there is a crisis – such as that of the Kosovo or the more recent crisis in Afghanistan – which turns on the lights and the mirrors of the mass media. This is temporary attention and anyway linked to the emergency of the moment. But by now the people who are asking for asylum and protection, even in Italy, can no longer be classified as an ‘emergency’. They are a ‘normal’ phenomenon of today’s world. And like any normal phenomenon they need rules, long-term strategies, and methodologies in order to be dealt with in a serene way. For some time, although many people have not realised the fact, the illusion of ‘zero immigration’ has collapsed. We thus need a policy towards migration, and it seems that the European Union is making great steps in this direction, that takes into account above all else the needs of those who are forced to abandon their countries of origin. It is certainly the case that the policy of the states of the European Union of ‘zero immigration’ has had as a result that of making the request for asylum almost the only way of directly entering the territory of the Union. The data are dramatic: in the last ten years about 4.4. million people have asked for political asylum in Western Europe. Only 20% of these people have been granted the status of refugees. We do not have precise data on the

number of voluntary repatriations or expulsions but it is generally acknowledged that a large number of foreigners continue to live in Europe in conditions of illegality. Measures to regularise their position are one of the practical possible responses, and this would be to recognise a situation that exists. It is certainly the case that this is not the complete response because it does not address the reasons why irregular immigration exists. A real response would involve solving the defects and failings of our legal systems in the spheres of asylum and immigration.

In 1980 Rev. Arrupe, when founding the Jesuit Refugee Service, clearly set out its mandate: to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and displaced persons. Rev. Arrupe created the JRS to deal with the crisis of refugees from Indo-China, the boat people, with the idea of establishing a service for a short period of time. But since then the number of refugees in the world has doubled and reached the figure of 50 million people who have been uprooted from their own countries. However, the style of service of the JRS has not changed over time – it is a service which is both human and spiritual. It aims at the long-term good of refugees, even though it does not in the least underestimate their most immediate and urgent needs and requirements. Of primary importance in our mandate is accompanying the refugees, and here I would like to refer to the words of a worker of the JRS who explained with simplicity the meaning that we attribute to this verb: “the choice of being with refugees can often mean to be the companions of people who in other contexts we would have avoided. It can mean living and being with people who are the victims of violence but also with those who have been responsible for such atrocities. It means being present and witnesses to hope in hopeless situations”.

Of great importance in understanding how and where the JRS works is knowledge of the criteria, the very foundations, of the activities of this organisation, which are taken from



the Constitutions of the Jesuits, written by St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits:

Look for the greatest and most universal good.

Serve where there is greatest need and where others are not present.

Serve where we can make the most significant contribution.

The Centro Astalli, the Italian headquarters of the JRS, has been working for twenty years and offers a multiplicity of services and activities. This centre is directed above all towards those who ask for political asylum and towards refugees, but it is also ready to help immigrants who are in situations of difficulty. We offer services of 'first acceptance' (primary help for people who have recently arrived in Italy) and 'second acceptance' (help in integrating people who have been in Italy for some time).

One cannot neglect the implications involved in the discussion on immigration for the Christian conscience. A community of believers that works for immigrants can find an enormous source of inspiration

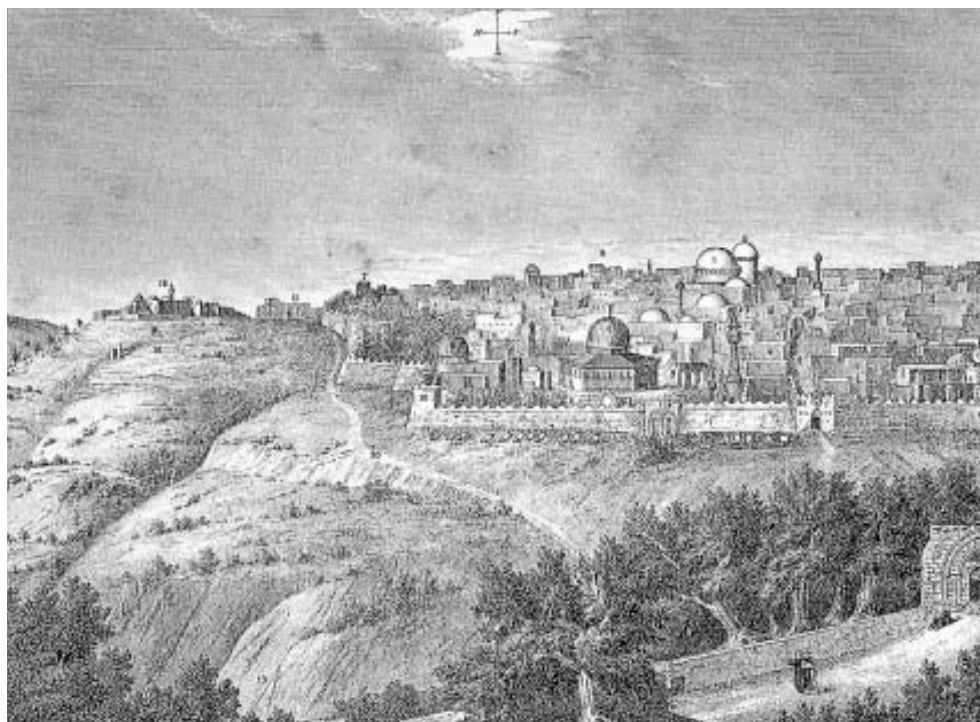
in Holy Scripture. The foreigner evokes very many spiritual dimensions in the Old and the New Testament. Moses was a foreigner for the people (an Egyptian and Madianite) yet he was a channel for the revelation of God. Once the Israelites had reached the Promised Land they had to treat foreigners in a great spirit of sharing, and this in memory of their own condition of foreigners in the land of Egypt. Foreigners, like orphans, widows and the children of Levi (the priests) made up the category of the poor, those 'without land', which the community had to always help if it did not want to risk the vengeance of God, who would, indeed, give the land to others. And so things go forward until the pilgrim foreigner of Emmaus and the Letter to the Ephesians, where we read: 'you are neither foreigners nor guests but fellow-citizens of the saints'.

Specifically because (Italian) society as a whole has great respect for immigrants, Christians should be present in this sphere. Here the words come to mind of St. Paul when he begins his appeal in his letter to

the Romans: 'you must not fall in with the manners of this world; there must be an inward change, a remaking of your minds, so that you can satisfy yourself what is God's will' (Rom 12:1-2).

Immigrants and refugees speak to us about hope. The fact that they have faced up to a journey which probably threatened their very existence, that they have sold everything they had in their own countries, that they have fled from threats and persecution, that they want to begin again in a context that is completely new and unknown – all this speaks to us about hope. I would like to say once again to all of us what hope is, illiterate as we are in relation to this virtue. We who have more or less everything at a low price, shake deeply when we come into contact with so many immigrants who have to acquire everything, placing their lives at stake and everything they have, every time.

Rev. FRANCESCO DE LUCCIA  
S.J.,  
*Director of the International Centre  
'Jesuit Refugee Service',  
Rome, Italy.*



# Major Disasters: Earthquakes and Floods

## 1. Caritas - Background and motivation

### 1.1 What is Caritas Internationalis (CI)?

CI now has 154 national members working in relief, development and social welfare in 198 countries and territories. The number of members and their reach make CI one of the world's largest humanitarian networks (third after the UN and the Red Cross/Red Crescent systems). We are rooted in the Catholic Church, but reach out to all in need regardless of politics, religious belief or ethnicity.

Caritas, unlike most non-governmental organizations (NGOs), is always an indigenous organization with a long history of presence and accomplishments, and a firm place in the future of individual countries. Caritas also enjoys the trust that the people have in the Church which makes it a trustworthy source of assistance and support, especially in disasters. The long-term presence and capillary nature of Caritas makes it an instant and ideal distribution system during disasters.

Caritas aims to create a more just society by working with the powerless, the homeless and the hungry, with refugees and the displaced, and with the marginalised in nearly every country in the world. Caritas responds to the acute human needs resulting from major disasters.

### 1.2 Why CI Responds to Disasters?

CI members have a moral mandate to respond to the needs of victims of disasters in order to save lives and help the victims live in dignity.

CI members can be viewed as a family – a family of soli-

darity. And, expressing solidarity with the people affected by disasters means to feel genuinely concerned about what happens to them and, in a sense, to share their lot.

More importantly, we are concerned about the situation of the victims of disasters and help them because we see in them the suffering Christ. We react as if we ourselves were affected, because for Caritas, it is difficult to accept that the needs of even a single person resulting from a major disaster could be neglected regardless of his social/economic background, ethnicity or religion.

As a socio-pastoral expression of the Church, Caritas takes its inspiration from the Holy Scriptures and the social teaching of the Church. Through the action of our members, we wish to be, in the evangelical sense of the term, committed and resolute witnesses who contribute to building the Kingdom of God, justice and peace through assistance to those affected by disasters (among other types of assistance for the needy). We mobilize ourselves and

our constituents in this direction which implies daily effort in favour of the professionalization of our member organizations in terms of emergency response, and education of the constituents regarding the needs of the victims and the sharing of resources with them.

As mentioned earlier, Caritas is a family of solidarity. However, our solidarity does not simply mean giving food, water, shelter etc. to the victims of disasters. Our concept of solidarity means above all giving the victims tools so that they can deal with their own lives again. Through its initiatives during and after major disasters, Caritas contributes to the rehabilitation and development of the affected communities which means the development of cultural, social, economic and political aspects of life with direct involvement in the process whenever possible.

In this context, members of our Confederation heed the words of Pope John Paul II who – in his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Inuente* – calls for a new creativity in charity: Now is the time for a new creativity in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective, but also by getting close to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout, but as a sharing between brothers and sisters.

### 1.3 CI Mechanisms for Responding to Major Disasters

Caritas is constantly trying to improve its efficiency and coordination in responding to major disasters. The CI Executive Committee, at its meeting in Rome last June, approved a set of new mechanisms that govern the actions



of all members when a major catastrophe occurs.

In the context of CI's response, a major disaster is defined as a situation where there is a substantial loss of life, great human suffering and distress, and large scale material damage including damage to the environment. It is a situation with which the affected member cannot cope and needs assistance of others.

When disaster strikes, the CI General Secretariat forms an *Emergency Response Support Team* (ERST), composed of experts from various regions of the Confederation who, within 48 hours, should be at the disaster zone to assist the local Caritas or Church in planning out the Confederation's response and to help in whatever way they can.

After the immediate emergency phase is finished, the Caritas in the affected country can choose from a menu of options to deal with the rehabilitation and development phases including: the provision of a consultant; of a Confederation-wide *Solidarity Team for Emergency Partnership* (STEP) which would help build the capacity of the local Caritas to deal with longer-term reconstruction programs; of a "liaison agency" or of a country group and other types of accompaniment. We have also established an International Cooperation Committee (ICC), composed of all seven regions of the Confederation, whose tasks are to review the mechanisms put in place in major emergencies, act as arbitrator in case of discord, and review the application of humanitarian standards, such as the Sphere Project.

## 2. Earthquakes and floods – effects on lives and livelihood

### 2.1 Earthquakes

Earthquakes belong to the deadliest natural disasters. They are unpredictable, often large-scale, resulting in thousands of dead, injured, and homeless, as well as in destroyed infrastructure. For ex-

ample, last January's earthquake in El Salvador left about 2,700 dead and thousands of homeless, while in the earthquake in India in the same month more than 30,000 lost their lives and millions were left homeless. There has been a clear increase in the damage caused by earthquakes of late due to rapid urbanization in the world. Some of the loss of life/damage is due to greed and disrespect for construction norms.



#### 2.1.1 CI's response

Although earthquakes are unpredictable, well prepared communities may be able to better mitigate them. This also applies to other natural disasters including floods. The vulnerability of populations to disasters is predictable in most areas where Caritas works, and the various countries' proclivity to disaster even more so. While the human cost – loss of lives and livelihood – is paralleled by a steep financial cost, a relatively modest investment in disaster preparedness may yield substantial returns.

As a result, Caritas focuses on improving community and international preparedness rather than on reactive responses to disasters which are usually short term, sometimes short sighted, and often "expatriate". Our programs which aim to protect vulnerable individuals and communities include:

Preparedness – improving capacity to respond through training, organization and

equipment and through setting up early warning systems,

Mitigation – reducing a disaster's impact on communities and their environment, and

Prevention – reducing or eliminating community vulnerability to disaster and strengthening capacity to cope in a crisis.

These themes are included in our training programs and we are trying to integrate them into development projects, especially in high risk areas. It should be noted that Caritas' strength is in rehabilitation and reconstruction due to its long term presence in the countries affected by disasters.

CI's response is always immediate and generous, however the effectiveness depends on the location of the earthquake and access to its victims – for example, relatively easy access in El Salvador, India, Turkey, but very difficult if not impossible access in Iran and Afghanistan.

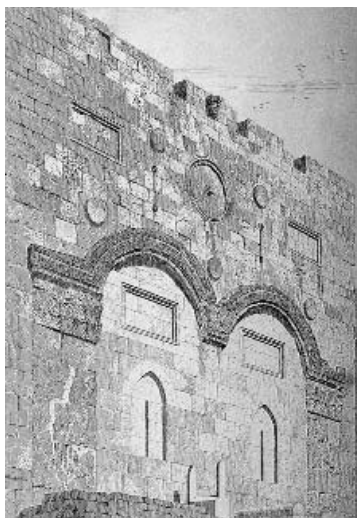
The attached statistics (Tab.1) re: CI's response to earthquakes 1995 – 2001 show that we launched 21 appeals for assistance valued at US \$33.783.368 (6.14% of the total value of requests for the period), and received \$24.148.001 (7.17% of the total contributions received for the same period). Most of the funds raised for responding to earthquakes has been spent on rehabilitation and / or construction of houses and community facilities, viz. schools.

### 2.2 Floods

I quote from Caritas Cambodia's request for assistance, August 30, 2001:

*"The year 2001 may be as difficult as 2000 in terms of the misery of the Cambodian people as a result of natural disasters such as floods. The water level of the Meckong River in northern Cambodia has risen. This rise has caused flooding in the provinces of Kratie, Kompong Cham, Kandal and Prey Veng. As of today, 24 people have died. A preliminary damage survey estimates a loss of property to the tune of \$15 million. 380,000 people have been forced to abandon*





*their homes and 74,000 have faced food shortages as a result of the flooding. Many roads and bridges in Kompong Cham, Kandal and Prey Veng provinces have been damaged. Rice crops, secondary crops and animal stocks have been affected. 18 people have died in Kompong Cham province alone.*

*Authorities are concerned about the threat of increased flooding. The high water level is expected to remain for several months. Last year the worst flooding in decades killed hundreds and caused tens of millions of dollars of damage. It is feared that the rains will continue in northern Vietnam and the Meckong River will swell again causing more flooding in Cambodia."*

#### 2.2.1 Increase in Flooding and its Impact

Recent years have seen a clear increase in heavy rains and extreme hurricanes (e.g. "Mitch") resulting in catastrophic floods and landslides. And, due to global warming, wet areas get wetter and dry areas drier.

The extreme weather changes resulting mainly from global warming are with us to stay and we need to adapt to them as well as to 'fight' them. The accumulation in the atmosphere of polluting gases, viz. carbon dioxide, from burning fossil fuels, is trapping solar energy at particular wavelengths close to the earth's surface. This phenomenon is called a 'greenhouse effect'.

How fast the warming continues will depend on how quickly the world can bring emission of greenhouse gases under control. (As carbon dioxide stays in the air for at least a century, we need to reduce the gas emissions by more than half just to stabilise temperatures at existing levels.) The warming of the atmosphere will increase evaporation rates resulting in intensification of storms/floods in coastal regions and drying out of continents' interiors causing drought and desertification.

This trend will impact negatively on lives and livelihoods of tens of millions of people, particularly those that Caritas is helping. In practical terms, this will result in the general reduction of crop yields in most tropical and sub-tropical regions, decreased water availability in water scarce regions, and increase in diseases such as malaria and cholera and risk of flooding.

In fact, the most widespread direct risk to people from climate change is flooding and landslides, due to higher rainfall and a rise in sea level. For example, this century could see a half meter rise in the sea level, meaning disappearance of low lying but heavily populated areas of countries such as Bangladesh, Egypt, (the Nile Delta), Eastern China etc. In summary, one can say that today's natural disasters are partly caused by man, and they are almost always aggravated by man (via action or inaction).

#### 2.2.1 CI's Response

Given Caritas' mission, our members are in the forefront of responding to these disasters. It should be noted that about 90% of disaster victims

live in poor, third world countries, often dislocated by war and the collapse of government. These countries are the most vulnerable to climate change due mostly to demographic pressures resulting in settlements in flood-risk areas or unstable terrain subject to landslides. They also suffer most due to the existing level of poverty.

Although some of our responses remain within the emergency relief framework, we are working hard on prevention (which is a "poor man's insurance") in a similar way described under "earthquakes" above.

The attached statistics (Tab.1) show that between 1995 and 2001, we launched 98 appeals re: flooding requesting US \$118.060.906 (or 21.46% of the total requirements for the period), and received \$82.345.042 (or 24.46% of the total contributions).

#### 2.2.3 Future

With climate change, more and more people may be exposed to not one, but a multitude of major disasters during their lives resulting in their possible marginalisation. Caritas plans to work on the local level by helping communities manage these risks and supporting them materially, while raising awareness of the issues at the international level through advocacy. We also try to influence political and social developments so as to prevent corruption, greed etc., and to strengthen civil society in general.

Dr. KAREL ZELENKA  
Head of International Cooperation  
Department  
CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS

**Tab.1 - Summary 1995 -2001** (until: 21/09/01)

Total appeals	Floods		Earthquake	
N <sub>i</sub> Appeals: 483	N <sub>i</sub> Appeals: 98		N <sub>i</sub> Appeals: 21	
Budget	550.135.928	118.060.906	(21,46%)	33.783.368 (6,14%)
Contributions	336.658.003	82.345.042	(24,46%)	24.148.001 (7,17%)

# Voluntary Work in Wars and Conflicts

It is a great honour for me to have the opportunity to be invited to talk to this expert forum about the prospects for the Emergency Corps of the Order of Malta to engage voluntary organisations in wars and conflicts.

Please allow me a few words about ECOM. ECOM stands for The Emergency Corps of the Sovereign Military Order

the Vietnam war. Officially, ECOM as a supranational organisation started with the disasters in Rwanda and in the Congo in the mid-nineties. We have been working in nearly all countries afflicted by the Balkan wars since 1996, and in Southern Sudan since 1998. We have had some experiences in war-afflicted areas or during armed conflicts, and I

crisis began in March 1999, we were among the first organisations to be present in the area. This short list shows that wars and military conflicts are one of the scourges of humanity and hence among the greatest challenges for aid organisations. Operating in places of war-afflicted areas, wars between nations, and even more of armed conflicts between rival parties within a nation, subjects the aid organisations and their staff to additional impediments and dangers. Experience shows that armed conflicts show little consideration for humanitarian issues. The helpers must react accordingly: they must find their way to provide help between the parties. The danger of getting caught in the crossfire or of being torn between the different parties' interests is great. Whilst the need for aid is growing, the dangers to helpers are increasing as well.

In recent years extensive reporting in the media has led to a rapid increase in the awareness on the part of society about people in peril. Television brings images of hardship and misery right into our living rooms. No one can escape from these impressions. Consequently, the number of people who want to help has risen considerably. Many choose to make *donations*, making it possible for aid organisations to provide help in their name. However, this kind of aid is not enough for *some*. They feel challenged to make a personal contribution, i.e. by working for aid organisations for a limited time, usually for low pay. Is this a good thing? The aim of my paper is to illustrate the challenges that volunteers are faced with working in regions of war and conflict, the demands on the organisation and the helpers, and how ECOM deals with this as an interna-



of Malta. ECOM – or ECOM, as we call it in its short form – is the Order's instrument for humanitarian aid worldwide. All ECOM activities are based on the Order's principle of "*obsequium pauperum et tuitio fidei*". Actually today, according to the specific needs of possible disasters, more than 10 member associations of the Order of Malta can participate in international relief operations, each according to their means and their capacities. The ECOM headquarters are co-located with the Malteser Foreign Aid Department in Cologne, Germany.

ECOM is a voluntary organisation whose members became active in acute relief operations in war and conflict-affected areas – through its different members – in 1966 and the late seventies during

feel very pleased to share some of them with you today. ECOM members, like Malteser Germany, are active in more than 30 countries in 4 continents today, providing help in rehabilitation and development projects.

## Introduction

I was asked to speak on the subject of "Volunteer Services in Wars and Conflicts." Since 1966, ECOM members have been active in international relief operations in war-afflicted areas in the world. We started our work during the Vietnam war. ECOM was active in Rwanda and in the Congo. In 1992 we started to be active in the Balkans, and in 1998 we developed programs in Southern Sudan. When the Kosovo

tional aid organisation with a volunteer structure.

## Main section

Please let me clarify one thing from the start: it is not a question of *whether or not* aid organisations should provide humanitarian aid during wars or conflicts. There is no question. You will certainly agree that in times of war humanitarian aid, especially in times of war, is *more important than ever*. Wars and other armed conflicts involve the civil population more and more. Their needs are given second or third rank priority by the warring parties. Just think of the cynical way that civilian victims are played down as “collateral damages.” Appropriate aid organisations must be there, in particular in wars and conflicts, and provide help. That is their mandate; that is what they are prepared for.

The question we should be asking is how humanitarian aid can be designed so that it fulfils its purpose and at the same time protects the helpers.

Human rights, as laid down in the four Geneva Conventions, obligate the warring parties to *protect civilians*. This includes ensuring that everything is done to keep the effects of military conflicts on civilians as minimal as possible. As I see it, this also includes permitting humanitarian aid from outside and protecting the helpers. Unfortunately, these rules apply only for wars between nations; they provide only little or no protection in other armed conflicts. This is a *gap that must be closed!*

The helper will additionally be increasingly confronted with the question of whether the fighting parties are willing to grant aid the necessary *space* and hence, in certain cases, renounce their military advantages. Helpers are massively impeded in their work again and again. The war in Afghanistan has shown us repeatedly what kinds of problems aid organisations have to battleface. Simply when it is a question of winter and the fighting has stopped in many

places, and still there is no free *access to the needy*. Just when access became possible from the north, the victors charged road tolls for aid transports. Warehouses with humanitarian aid goods were confiscated or released for looting. Many other examples could be mentioned.

In other places attempts are made to *instrumentalise* humanitarian aid for war. In this context I am thinking of the example of *Southern-Sudan in 1999*, where aid organisations were required to sign a MOU that would in fact have meant to “give up their neutral status and to co-operate with the SPLA or the organisation would be expelled from the country.”



These problems are not new. The international aid organisations have long been familiar with them and prepare themselves and their staff for them extensively. The development of the *Code of Conduct of the ICRC* was *one* answer to the question of how to deal with the topic. As an example, allow me to point out how important it is to strictly comply with the principle of neutrality. Neutrality is often not only a guarantee for the efficiency of the aid provided, but is often *the only guarantee* for the helpers' safety.

In wars and conflicts the demands on aid and hence on the helpers themselves are many times greater in wars and conflicts than in the the case of natural catastrophes. Most of

the problems that aid organisations have to cope with are laid on the shoulders of the helpers. This is not only because of the lack of legal security. The experiences in Africa in the mid 1990s showed the global public to a frightening extent how difficult it is to take care of people who are constantly on the move fleeing from war. In unclear situations the movement of refugees can only be vaguely anticipated. Rumours or even panic among refugees, for example after massacres, or rumours, make things even worse. The helpers are also unable to escape from these stressful impressions as well. They must always have an extra reserve of energy to master their own fears.

*Of course, the quality of the aid must not be allowed to suffer from all of these precautions. Aid is not an end in itself for the helper, but must always be oriented towards the needs of the people in peril. Aid organisations that wish to provide aid efficiently in war and conflict zones must always remain aware of this challenge.*

What are the resulting consequences for management of aid operations in wars and conflicts? I would like to point out only 10 major topics in order to mark the range of possible consequences for the providing of humanitarian aid in times and areas of war and armed conflict.

The quality of the aid has the highest priority. The relevant international standards drawn



up and generally acknowledged – for example, the Sphere Project – are the measuring rod. Whoever jumps in under this rod is not in the right place to help.

Humanitarian aid in regions of war and conflict must always be professionally managed and directed. Technically speaking, it must fulfil the same demands as the other parties on location – the military. This usually means being organised to organise its work as precisely as “general staffs” do.

*Well thought-out, risk-conscious action plans and implementation ensure the efficiency of the aid and the safety of the helpers.*

The growing need to protect the helpers must be met, for example, with an intensified, if possible overlapping, form of communication. Operation management that, for instance, is unable to permanently and reliably invalidate rumours will soon lose the trust of its staff. Aid suffers from this.

As with every type of planning – always based on the task – all *accompanying circumstances* must be used to judge the situation. *Security planning* must be a fixed element of operative plans. These plans must be adjusted to the changing situation *regularly*, and their results must immediately be made available to the helpers working on the spot. This also includes knowledge about the time at which aid must cease. For ECOM, this means that we retreat when we are in danger of becoming victims of war ourselves. It seems important to me to stress that calling retreat at the right moment is not a sign of weakness. In many cases other organisations – like for example the colleagues of the ICRC equipped with its special mandate or the diplomatic representatives of the sovereign Military Order of Malta of the global community – can still provide effective aid when most other organisations must give way. In history the diplomatic representatives of the sovereign Military Order of Malta have done so as well.

The success of aid *sinks or swims* with the choice of staff. Providing humanitarian aid in

regions of war means literally standing on the front lines. The helpers working in this environment must be extensively prepared for their task and for the situation in which they find themselves. *Good will alone* is not sufficient here. *Hence it is senseless to send inexperienced helpers to war zones.* But please note that I am not saying that volunteers have no place in such situations. Just as fire departments and rescue services are often made up of volunteers, this applies as well to humanitarian aid. And just as it is undisputed among fire fighters and rescue workers sent to work that the prerequisite for service is that they had extensive and proper training – usually with demanding examinations at the end! – the same should apply to humanitarian helpers. They must be *professionals*. Lack of experience endangers aid and endangers the helper himself. The choice of staff must take this principle into consideration.

The choice and preparation of staff must be made with great foresight. In a concrete disaster there will normally not be enough time for sufficient training of inexperienced helpers.

The helpers must *routinely* master their business. *Routines* are a tried and tested means of compensation for the loss of energy resulting from special situation-related burdens. Routines grow often from many years of *experience*, which volunteer helpers who are insufficiently or not at all prepared often do not possess.

Helpers must be *psychologically stable*. Especially in risky situations that threaten the helpers themselves, they must invariably possess the necessary self-control and cold-bloodedness to take proper action. The helpers must be conscious of the constant threat and know about the resulting consequences of their actions, as well as their ability to perform. They need a *well-developed feeling* for safety.

Often, due to their personal psychological make-up, helpers tend to *repress the feeling of being in danger*. This repression mechanism carries the greatest

threats. Fear is necessary; it sharpens the senses. Humanitarian aid needs courage. Courage does not mean blindly ignoring the dangers, but overcoming them while recognising them. Good preparations and comprehensive experience are also needed for this.

How does ECOM you may ask yourselves, as an SMOM organisation, deal with these challenges?

The answer is brief: just like any other organisation.

Top priority is given to the *quality of the aid*, both in the *sum* as well as in the manner of *implementation*. The applicable quality standards are an element of our service policy.

Our aid is non-partisan and neutral. We respect the dignity of those needing aid as well as the sovereignty of the guest country in which we are acting, even in times of war when these aspects are evidently in dispute. Our task is Christian-motivated aid, but not Christian missionary work.

The *quality of the aid* has priority over the *urge of the helper to aid*. Based on the requirements in war regions that I have described already, ECOM only dispatches staff that are *extensively prepared* for the task. This includes sufficient psychological stability.

In most cases helpers who wish to make themselves available for crisis work are *prepared* for their tasks in carefully harmonised training courses. Individual meetings are used to attempt to bring *aptitude and inclinations* in line. This is not always academically possible. We therefore have the goal of gradually guiding the helper to the required degree of professionalism through *targeted participation in different missions*.

Each operation is preceded by an in-depth *briefing*, in which the teams are attuned as comprehensively as possible to the concrete situation they will encounter in the field.

Those helpers in particular who are not always active in the humanitarian field require *supervision* before, during and after the operation. As a Christian organisation, we understand this wherever possible as

supervision by priests as well.

In this context I would like to bring up a last point, which is always cause for debate: the question of the need for *advocacy*. To what extent must an aid organisation announce injustices experienced, war crimes or similar? Do we have the right or the obligation to point out injustice if we know that this could put our aid for the concretely needy at risk? Or should the news be given priority over aid in some cases? I do not wish to take up the discussion here, but merely clarify our position. Following the premise of the Order, ECOM, under strict application of the rules laid down in the Code of Conduct, has decided to give priority to aid. We know that we can only take this stance

with good conscience because the colleagues of other organisations are especially dedicated to the task of advocacy.

Allow me to briefly summarise what I have pointed out:

Humanitarian aid in war and conflicts is one of the *most difficult tasks imaginable*, and yet many people still volunteer to face it.

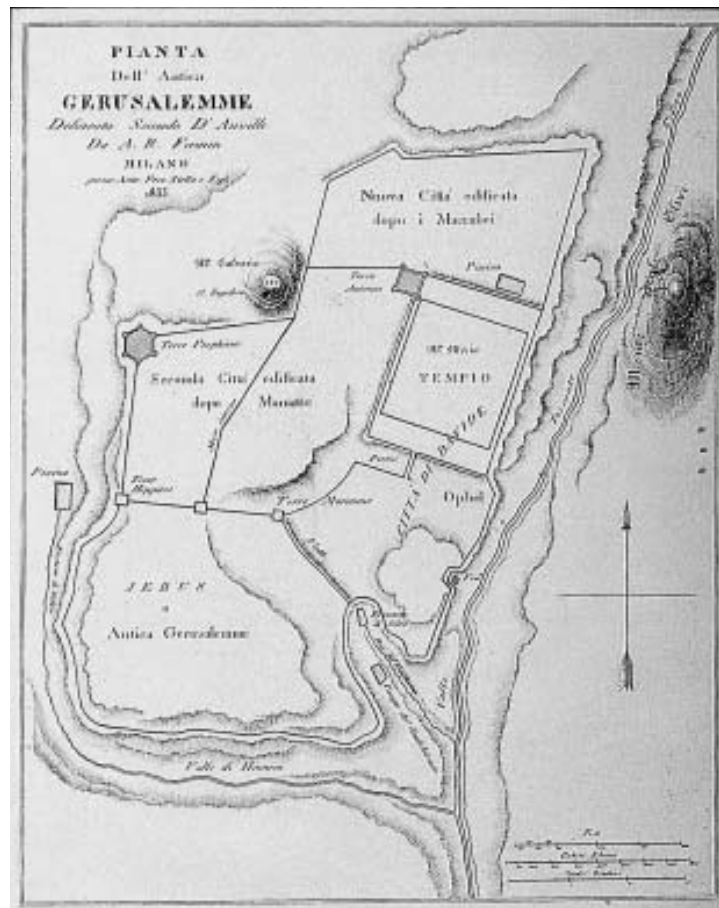
Humanitarian aid is a *necessity*, not a *luxury*. It is often the only chance for survival for those afflicted by war. In spite of many efforts, aid often moves within an *area not completely covered* by international law. Therefore, the *further development of international humanitarian law* is of high importance.

Humanitarian aid, which acts according to need and in

the end places the interests of the needy in the foreground as the only valid criterion, must meet the *highest professional criteria*. In war, the humanitarian helper must possess not only *proven professional skills* but also a *combination of additional qualifications* which make his or her service possible. Only well prepared helpers may be put into action if aid is to be efficient. *Wars are no training ground for inexperienced helpers*. Humanitarian aid in wars must be provided by absolute professionals in order for them to live up to the duty. Only then can we completely fulfil our Christian duty.

INGO RADTKE

Secretary General of the  
Emergency Corps Order of Malta



*The Tenth World  
Day of the Sick*



*Sanctuary of  
Our Lady of Health,  
Vailankanni, India*

*11 February 2002*



# The Celebration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick

*THE CELEBRATION OF THE TENTH WORLD DAY OF THE SICK,  
WHICH WAS HELD ON THE THEME 'FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS,  
THE DIVINE PERFORMER OF MIRACLES, WHO CAME INTO THE WORLD  
"THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE, AND LIFE IN ABUNDANCE (JN 10:10)"'  
VAILANKANNI, TAMIL NADU, INDIA, 11 FEBRUARY 2002*

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The Tenth World Day of the Sick was solemnly celebrated at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Health in Vailankanni in India, known as the 'Our Lady of Health'. The choice of this Marian sanctuary in Northern India was no accident. As the Holy Father observed in his message for this World Day: 'Vailankanni does not only attract Christian pilgrims but also many followers of other religions, in particular Hindus who see in Our Lady of Health the caring and compassionate Mother of suffering mankind. In a land of ancient and profound religiosity which India is, this sanctuary dedicated to the Mother of God is really a point of encounter for the members of different religions and an exceptional example of inter-religious harmony and exchange'. 'Following in the footsteps of Jesus, the divine performer of miracles, who came into this world that they may have life and life in abundance' (Jn 10:10) was the theme of this Tenth World Day of the Sick, in part in order to place emphasis on the taking of a clear decision in favour of the culture of life and a total commitment to the defence of life from conception until natural death.

The following two prelates were part of the pontifical mission led by H.E. Msgr. Javier Lozano Barragán, the President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care and the Special Envoy of the Holy Father to the Tenth World Day of the Sick: Rev. Alex Vadakumthala of the Archdiocese of Verapoly, the Executive Secretary of the Commission for Pastoral Care in Health of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, and Rev. Vincent Arackal of the Diocese of Calicut, a collaborator of the Ministry. The pontifical mission

was joined by a delegation of twenty-five people, and this delegation was made up of the Bishop-Secretary Msgr. José L. Redrado O.H., Officials of the Ministry, prelates, priests, members of religious orders and members of the laity who have always been involved in pastoral care in health, from Mexico, Africa, Italy, Spain, France, Portugal and Switzerland.

The salient characteristic of the celebration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick was the involvement of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, and the Episcopal Commission for Pastoral Care in Health of India. This convergent co-operation made possible not only a suitable preparation and celebration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick but also gave force to its special sensitising power in relation to increasingly vast areas of the faithful and religious and lay institutions involved in the field of health and suffering.

## The Long-term Preparations for the World Day

Announced and convoked by the Message of the Holy Father, the celebration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick was the object of a large number of preparatory initiatives. It should be remembered that this Pontifical Council was responsible for a capillary diffusion at an international level of the Message of the Holy Father through the bishops entrusted with pastoral care in health and through means of communication (Internet, the press, interviews with Superiors, etc.), as well as the preparation of the official

manifesto of the World Day and its various associated documents etc. Radio Vatican broadcast live the principal initiatives connected with the celebration. In addition, the President of the Ministry, H.E. Msgr. Lozano, and the Bishop-Secretary, Msgr. José L. Redrado, went in the month of October 2001 to Vailankanni to personally follow the preparations for the World Day and to meet organisers belonging to the local Church.

## The Celebration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick

The salient moments of the celebration which marked out the ninth and tenth of February, culminating in the solemn concluding celebration of the World Day of the Sick on 11 February, were: prayer, study, and visits to a number of hospitals and significant places.

1. *Prayer.* Over 40,000 pilgrims, amongst whom were sick people and those who accompany them, from Tamil Nadu and other States in India, as well as from various nations of the world, and in particular from the continent of Asia, took part in various events and celebrations which had been prepared with care and were engaged in with due solemnity. On Saturday 9 February, in the early afternoon, the solemn inauguration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick took place, during which the Special Envoy of the Holy Father, H.E. Msgr. Javier Lozano Barragán, blessed the 'Temple of Inner Healing' – the Chapel of Worship and Reconciliation', a monument erected to remember the Tenth World Day of the Sick. After this event, the concelebration of the Eucharist

was held, presided over by H.E. Msgr. Cyril Mar Baselios, the Archbishop of Trivandrum and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. At the beginning of this solemn concelebration a letter was read from H.E. Msgr. Thumma Bala, the Bishop of Warangal and President of the Episcopal Commission for Pastoral Care

was held during which H.E. Lozano, the Special Envoy of the Holy Father, gave an official greeting to the Indian people, especially to the sick and infirm, and communicated the warm greetings and blessing of the Holy Father. Also present were: H.E. Msgr. Devadass Ambrose, the Bishop of Thanjavur, in whose diocese is lo-

ing message emphasised the commitment of everybody to the culture of life.

The most significant moment of celebration was the solemn concelebration of the Eucharist on Monday *11 February* in memory of the Blessed Virgin of Lourdes, presided over by the Special Envoy of the Holy Father for this day, H.E. Msgr. Javier Lozano Barragán, President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care. At the side of Archbishop Lozano were twenty-five prelates, amongst whom Archbishops and bishops from the continent of Asia; Cardinal Ivan Dias, the Archbishop of Bombay; H.E. Msgr. Cyril Mar Baselios, the Archbishop of Trivandrum and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India; Archbishop Lorenzo Baldisseri, the Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal; H.E. Msgr. José L. Redrado, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care; H.E. Msgr. Ambrose Devadass, the Bishop of Thanjavur, in whose diocese the Marian sanctuary of Vailankanni is situated; H.E. Msgr. Thumma Bala, the Bishop of Warangal and President of the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Bishops in India for pastoral care in health; the bishops who had come from the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, as well as a number of Officials of the Pontifical Council and about a hundred priests belonging to the Syro-malabrese and Syro-malankarese Latin rite involved in the field of pastoral care in health who had come to Vailankanni for the celebration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick.

The concelebration of the Eucharist was solemn and dignified. Thirty-five thousand pilgrims took part, amongst whom were sick people together with those who accompany them. These sick people, at the feet of Our Lady of Health, renewed their offering of their suffering to God for the peace of the world. Also present were the leaders and representatives of international associations and federations of the world of health and health care: medical doctors, hospital chaplains,



in Health of India, as well as the letter from the Holy Father by which the Holy Father appointed Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán, the President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care, his Special Envoy to the celebration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick. This was followed by a long applause by the assembly which had gathered together in prayer. Once again the words of the Holy Father touched the hearts of men and projected the future of the Church, which is called upon to defend the value of life, from conception until its natural sunset. Then there was the first greeting in the name of the Holy Father given by Archbishop Lozano. At the concelebration, in addition to the Special Envoy of the Holy Father, the following were present: H.E. Msgr. José L. Redrado, Secretary of the Ministry, a large number of Indian and Asian Archbishops and bishops, civil authorities, and a very large number of the faithful, amongst whom sister Nirmala Joshi, the Superior General of the Missionaries of Charity. After the concelebration of the Eucharist had taken place, the ceremony of inauguration

cated the Sanctuary of Vailankanni; His Eminence Cardinal Ivan Dias, the Archbishop of Bombay; Dr. C.P. Thakur, the Minister for Health of India, who summed up in three slogans the commitment of his Ministry to promote, treat and prevent; Dr. Jeevanandam, the Minister for Agriculture and Tourism of the State of Tamil Nadu; as well as another three members of the Indian parliament. The prelates who spoke expressed their hope and wish that this day of communion and solidarity would be lived near to those who suffer in loyalty to the Spirit of the Lord and the Virgin of Health of Vailankanni. The inauguration ceremony ended with a cultural programme. On Sunday *10 February* the solemn concelebration of the Eucharist was presided over by H.E. Msgr. Lorenzo Baldisseri, the Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal. The Eucharistic procession organised by the Catholic nurses of India was very evocative. This took place at the end of the Sunday events and was led by Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil C.Ss.R. the Archbishop of Ernakulum-Angamaly, who in his conclud-

male and female members of religious orders, students of faculties of medicine, as a well as a representative of the religious of the FERS of Spain.

In his homily on inter-religious dialogue, H.E. Msgr. Javier Lozano, when searching for the answer to the question about the definitive meaning of suffering, wanted to recall the words given by the Holy Father to us in his Message for the Tenth World Day of the Sick: 'Although the Church believes that in the non-Christian interpretations of suffering there are many valid elements, her understanding of this great human mystery is unique. "We must turn our gaze towards the revelation of divine love, the ultimate source of the meaning of everything exists" (*Salvifici doloris*, n. 13)'. The Risen Christ is the answer to illness, pain, suffering and death. If we preach the Risen Jesus Christ – the Special Envoy of the Holy Father continued – this is solely because we are convinced that he is the answer even in 'extreme situations', those in which life must be valued in a most serious way: death, illness, suffering.

A very touching moment during the celebrations was the administration of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick to a group of sick people by the Special Envoy of the Pope, Archbishop Javier Lozano, Archbishop Lorenzo Baldisseri, the Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal, and His Eminence Cardinal Ivan Dias, the Archbishop of Bombay.

2. *Study*. On Saturday morning, 9 February, in the auditorium of the Marina centre at the sanctuary, there took place a meeting of the bishops responsible for pastoral care in health and the members of the national commissions and Asian commissions on the subject to reflect upon the theme: 'national episcopal, diocesan and parish organisms for pastoral care in health' and to come to a primary 'conclusion' about the service that the Church renders to man in the continent of Asia in the various places of pain and care.

After the greeting given to

all the participants by Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán, the President of the Ministry and the Special Envoy of the Holy Father to the Tenth World Day of the Sick, who presided over the proceedings, H.E. Msgr. Thumma Bala, the Bishop of Warangal and the head of the Bishops' Commission for Pastoral Care in Health



in India, and H.E. Msgr. Lawrence Khai Saen-Phon-On, the Archbishop of Thare and Nonseng, the head of the Bishop's Commission for Pastoral Care in Health in Thailand, also spoke. Msgr. Tumma Bala observed that in India there are 3,097 health care institutions and 7,900 primary schools and universities with one million seven hundred thousand young people who are being trained to enter the world of suffering. A few statistics, said Msgr. Thumma Bala, are enough to have an idea of the complex world of pain: four million people afflicted with AIDS and 40,000 deaths from this disease every year; 14 million deaf and dumb people; and 500,000 lepers. In addition, he placed emphasis on the strength of the Church in charitable and social work: over 27% of initiatives at the service of all are managed by the Catholic Church, which thereby bears witness to Christ, the Divine Performer of Miracles. The other prelates representing the various bishops' conferences who spoke emphasised not only the numerical presence but above all the importance of the witness made by believers in Christ, called to

express that witness through an *ecumenicalism of works* that builds and constructs, as well as leaving signs in people's hearts. Stress was also placed on the need for co-operation and mutual help between the bishops' conferences of the continent of Asia in order to carry out in an increasingly effective fashion the mission of

the Church in the field of pastoral care in health and suffering.

On Sunday 10 February a conference was held on the subject 'in the footsteps of Jesus, the Divine Performer of Miracles: "The Kingdom of God is near... heal the sick" (Mt 10:8)' in order to re-examine the role and the task of health care structures, hospitals and health care personnel and staff. The conference was chaired by Rev. Alex Vadakumthala, the executive secretary of the Episcopal Commission for Pastoral Care in Health of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India.

About two thousand participants were present and these had come from the whole of India and from Mexico, Africa, Italy, Spain, France and other countries of Asia. They followed the various papers and communications of the conference with great interest. In addition to the Vatican delegation led by the Special Envoy of the Holy Father, H.E. Msgr. Javier Lozano Barragán, the following also took part in the conference: His Eminence Cardinal Ivan Dias, the Archbishop of Bombay, H.E. Msgr. Thumma Bala, the Bishop of Warangal



and the President of the Episcopal Commission for Pastoral Care in Health in India, the presidents and the representatives of international Catholic associations and federations of the world of health and health care – medical doctors, pharmacists and nurses, hospital chaplains, male and female members of religious orders, male and female nurses, and students of faculties of medicine. The presence of personalities from the world of Indian learning and culture was also noteworthy.

H.E. Msgr. Oswald Gracias, the Archbishop of Agra and the General Secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, gave a speech of welcome to the participants.

The Special Envoy of the Holy Father, H.E. Javier Lozano Barragán, inaugurated the proceedings of the conference with a prolusion on the subject 'in the footsteps of Jesus, divine performer of miracles: healing in the gospels'. In re-reading the twenty-one most significant passages of the Gospel which show Jesus as a divine physician and performer of miracles, Archbishop Lozano stressed that Jesus came first of all to proclaim the Kingdom of God – the miracles are specifically the announcement of the Kingdom of God fulfilled in the Resurrection of Christ. In expounding what is said in the gospels, Archbishop Lozano exhorted those who worked in the world of pastoral care in health to dedicate themselves not only to the body of the sick person but above all to his or her spirit.

After this prolusion by the President of the Ministry, comments were made on it which were all directed towards making a valid contribution to the subject of the World Day.

Mr Richard Lai, the President of the International Federation of Catholic Nurses and Medico-Social Assistants (CICAMS) of Malaysia and Sr. Nirmala Joshi, the Superior General of the Missionaries of Charity of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, presented the participants with their experiences which were directed towards bearing witness in a globalised

world to the specific character of their vocations and their missions. The subject of 'Christian hospitals in a changing scenario' was addressed by Cardinal Ivan Dias, the Archbishop of Bombay; Prof. Lorraine D'Souza of 'Fr. Muller's Medical College' of Bangalore spoke on the subject 'health care as a task of the community'; and Rev. Thomas Kalam, the Director of the National Academy of St. John for Medical Sciences, spoke on 'health care and the poor: an Indian experiment'.

During the afternoon session the following subjects were focused on: 'the spirituality of health care workers (H.E. Msgr. Anthony Soter Fernandez, the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur and President of the Bishops' Conference of Malaysia); 'health care and emerging questions' (Dr. Eustance J. De Souza of the Centre for Bio-medical Ethics of the FIAMC, Mumbai); and 'the identity of the Christian health care worker' (Dr. François Blind, Secretary General of the International Federation of Associations of Catholic Doctors (FIAMC), France).

The day of study and reflection ended with a number of suggestions and proposals to be made to the bishops' conferences of the continent of Asia. One of the tasks of these bishops' conferences is also that of improving the presence of today's Good Samaritans in the vast field of health and suffering, which is always a privileged place for the effective evangelisation of the continent of Asia.

3. *Visits to hospitals and significant places.* On 7 February, in response to an invitation extended by H.E. Geevarghese Mar Timotheus, the Bishop of Tiruvalla of the Syrian-malankarese, H.E. Msgr. Javier Lozano, accompanied by Rev. Vincent Arackal, a collaborator of the Ministry, blessed and placed the 'first stone' of the Pushpagiri Institute of Medical Sciences and spoke to the health care workers who were present on the subject of 'health as harmony, medicine as a profession'. Oth-

er Syrian-malankarese bishops were also present.

On the morning of 11 February, Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán, accompanied by H.E. Lorenzo Baldisseri, H.E. Msgr. Devadass, the Bishop of Thanjavur, in whose diocese is located the sanctuary of Vailankanny, the Secretary of the Ministry, H.E. Msgr. José L. Redrado, Rev. Gianfranco Grieco of the *Osservatore Romano*, Msgr. Jean-Marie Mpendawatu, Msgr. Krzysztof Nykiel, Msgr. Antonio Soto, all Officials of the Ministry, and Mrs Isabel Biondi, collaborator of the Ministry, inaugurated the World Day with visits to the hospital of Arokia Matha and the Mother Teresa Centre for disabled children. The Special Envoy and the Apostolic Nuncio comforted the sick people, bringing them the blessing of the Holy Father and administering the sacrament of the anointing of the sick.

In the afternoon of the same day (11 February), in response to an invitation extended by H.E. Msgr. Peter Remigius, the Bishop of Kumbakonam, Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán accompanied by Msgr. Antonio Soto, Official of the Ministry, went to Kumbakonam to visit a leper hospital and brought a special blessing from the Holy Father to the one hundred and twenty brother lepers in various stages of the illness including its last stages. These lepers were not only Catholics but also Hindus and Muslims. In greeting those present, H.E. Lozano emphasised the redemptive value of suffering and the silent work that so many people engaged in as 'the poor amongst the poor'. In addition, the President visited the sanctuary of Our Lady at Puddi where he bestowed the blessing of the Holy Father. On 12 February another hospital was visited by the Vatican delegation led by H.E. Msgr. Lozano – the Child Jesus Hospital of Tiruchirappalu of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary who have six provinces in India. After the solemn concelebration of the Eucharist, presided over by the Special Envoy of the Holy Father, the delegation visited a

number of wards of the hospital and met patients, the medical staff and personnel and the religious who for sixty years have served with joy and love those who suffer.

On 13 February, Ash Wednesday, H.E. Msgr. J. Lozano, President of the Ministry and Special Envoy of the Holy Father, together with the Secretary of the Ministry, H.E. Msgr. José L. Redrado O.H. and other members of the Vati-

prelate spoke with disdain of the discrimination practiced by Hindus towards Catholics. In the late-afternoon the Secretary of the Ministry visited the hospital and other structures for the elderly administered by the Fatebenefratelli as well as the nursing school, and then presided over a celebration of the Eucharist in which the religious community of the Fatebenefratelli, the sisters, and also the patients took part.



can delegation, went to the parish of the Salesians of Our Lady of Lourdes in Madurai. Archbishop Lozano, in the presence of thousands of the faithful, presided over the solemn concelebration of the Eucharist of Ash Wednesday. In the afternoon the Bishop-Secretary, H.E. Msgr. Redrado, visited the St. Mary of Leuca hospital, the Catholic hospital of the Sisters of the Daughters of St. Mary of Leuca, where he was able, while meeting the patients and the community of religious, to observe how the world of health and suffering is evangelised today in India.

On 14 February the delegation went to Kottayam and after a solemn concelebration of the Eucharist in the Good Shepherd Carmelite monastery, and a brief visit to the cathedral which had also been visited by the Holy Father during his first visit to India on 8 February 1986, the delegation was received by Bishop Peter Thuthikonam who remembered with gratitude the work of the European bishops who had been his predecessors. In his speech of greetings, the Indian

In the morning of 15 February, before leaving for Alapizha and Chocin, Archbishop Lozano and the diocesan bishop went to the place where the hospital that should come into being in the area of Kodimatha-Vembanadu will be built. In the afternoon of the same day (15 February), H.E. Msgr. Javier Lozano, accompanied by H.E. Msgr. Daniel Acharuparambil, the Bishop of Verapoly, and other members of the Vatican delegation such as H.E. Msgr. Redrado, Rev. Gianfranco Grieco, Msgr. Jean-Marie Mpendawatu, Msgr. Krzysztof Nykiel, Msgr. Antonio Soto, Rev. Bernhard Grasser and Dr. Renzo Paccini, went to the diocesan hospital to preside over the solemn concelebration in the great chapel of the hospital, and to bless the new emergency and dialysis sections of the hospital. This is a hospital structure which has four floors, 500 beds, 64 medical doctors, and 184 nurses, of whom 75 are female religious.

On Saturday morning, 16 February, the Special Envoy of the Pope presided over a Holy Mass in the cathedral

dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi in honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. After the solemn concelebration of the Eucharist the delegation visited the Syrian-malabarese church. To welcome the group was the Auxiliary Bishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly, Msgr. Thomas Chakiath. Then, President H.E. Lozano, accompanied by the Bishop-Secretary Msgr. José L. Redrado, Msgr. Antonio Soto, Official of the Ministry, and Rev. Gianfranco Grieco of the *Osservatore Romano*, visited the Hospital of St. Theresa of Lisieux. This hospital has 1,000 beds, 100 medical doctors, 350 nurses and 200 female religious from twenty-seven congregations. 30% of the patients are Muslims. A moment of strong emotion took place at the meeting with Rev. Thomas Manajcaly, aged 38. A number of Hindus had shot him on 2 February 2001. He had been operated on three times but he still could not walk. In the name of the Holy Father Archbishop Lozano gave him a special blessing. Before leaving for Rome the Vatican delegation visited, and prayed at, the tomb of the Apostle Thomas in Madras (Chennai) and sung the Creed to demonstrate that the celebration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick had been above all else a pilgrimage of faith in Christ, the Divine Performer of Miracles.

The visits to the temples of Tanjore and to the Sri Meenakshi Temple of Marurai in the State of Tamil Nadu, the morning visit to the national park of Periyar, and the walk in the coffee, tea and rubber plantations also gave to this 'Indian pilgrimage' a historical and cultural appeal which was of a completely special character.

The Vatican delegation led by the Special Envoy of the Holy Father, H.E. Msgr. Javier Lozano Barragán, reached Rome in the late afternoon of Sunday 17 February.

The logistical and transfer services, organised by the Under-Secretary of the Ministry, Rev. Felice Ruffini M.I., with the active collaboration of Rev. Alex Vadakumthala, the Executive Secretary of the Episcopal Commission for Pastoral Care

in Health in India; Rev. Vincent Arackal, collaborator of the Ministry; and Mrs Alessandra Ciattini and Mrs Emanuela Milana, Officials of the Ministry, made the various moments of this many-faceted participation in this celebration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick comfortable and impeccable.

### Conclusions

1. The good preparations for the World Day and its effective celebration should be emphasised.

2. When taking part in the days of study and prayer, it was possible to observe the hospi-

tility and the welcome of the Catholic Church in India.

3. Despite many economic difficulties, it is possible to observe that there is a positive development in pastoral care in health in India.

4. The participation of the various groups took place with an immediate integration into the celebration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick.

5. The spirit and the enthusiasm of the celebration of this World Day certainly remain, and they will lead to greater attention being paid to the sick and the suffering who are and remain the way for the Church. At the dawn of the new millennium, it is more urgent than

ever before that the Gospel of life is proclaimed and that the dignity of the person who suffers is reaffirmed.

6. The Message of the Holy Father, his love for the sick and the suffering, remain an invitation to everyone, and especially to the sick of every age and condition, to abandon themselves to the paternal arms of God. It is also an invitation to be always the custodians and witnesses of the Gospel of life, doing good to those who suffer and doing good also with our own suffering.

Msgr. KRZYSTOF NYKIEL,  
*Official of the Pontifical Council  
for Health Pastoral Care*





# Letter of the Holy Father Appointing H.E. Msgr. Javier Lozano Barragán his Special Envoy to the Celebration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick

*ON 25 JANUARY 2002 THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II APPOINTED  
H.E. MSGR. JAVIER LOZANO BARRAGÁN, THE PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL  
COUNCIL FOR HEALTH PASTORAL CARE, HIS SPECIAL ENVOY  
TO THE CELEBRATION OF THE TENTH WORLD DAY OF THE SICK.*

To Our Venerable Brother, Javier Lozano Barragán. Archbishop Emeritus of Zacatecas, President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care,

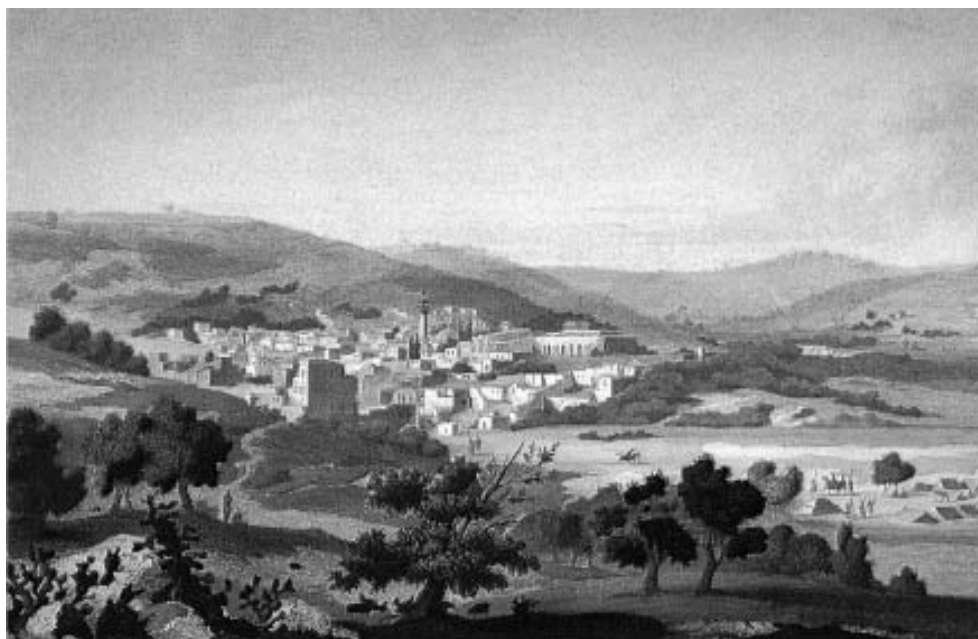
Jesus Christ, real God and real man, the Divine Physician, came amongst men 'so that they may have life, and have it more abundantly' (Jn 10:10), and sent out his disciples 'to heal the sick' (Lk 9:2).

At the beginning of the Third Millennium of the Christian era, whereas various regions have witnessed a succession of technological advances, the number of men who are oppressed by very grave suffering, by poverty, by hunger and by other evils in the world has increased. Certainly, these constitute the greatest challenge that faces all Christians, and at the same time this is an opportunity to imitate the approach of the Good Samaritan,

whom the Lord Jesus himself presents to us in the Gospel as an authentic example of charity.

The Catholic Church, which for some years now has commemorated the World Day of the Sick, has this year decided, rightly, to celebrate it in India, in the famous Sanctuary of Vailankanni dedicated to Our Lady of Health, known as 'the Lourdes of the East'. For us this event is a very good opportunity to analyse pastoral subjects for the benefit of the sick and to pray for all sick people.

We admire, with immense joy, the great number of men and women, of different religions and cultures, who in every part of the world, with patience and solicitude, take care of all kinds of sick and poor people. We wish to encourage them and in a special way to remember here at least two great women who



are very much loved in India and who for very many years heroically served sick and dying people: Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the founder of the Missionaries of Charity, and the blessed Mariam Teresa Chiramel Mankidiayan, the founder of the Congregation of the Holy Family, who with profound joy we raised to the honour of the altars specifically during the Year of the Great Jubilee.

Convinced of the importance of this event, we wish to express our charity and presence in the spirit amongst all those who have assembled there or in some way are taking part in the celebration. For the same reason, we decree the sending of an esteemed man who is to represent our person and to express our benevolence. With trust we turn to you, Venerable Brother, who by your daily activity in the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care bear witness to your diligence, and by this Letter we appoint you our Special Envoy to the above-mentioned celebration.

On our behalf you will preside

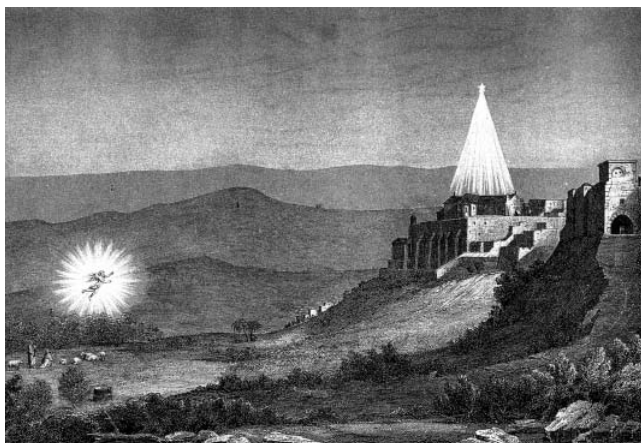
over the liturgical celebrations, and you will bring our affectionate greetings to everyone. You must exhort people to a humble and constant devotion to the Mother of God so that in this way She will implore divine grace, in particular so that medical doctors and the other agents of the world of health and health care may be the defenders of human life, whose only source and end is God (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 35).

Venerable Brother, while we entrust your Mission to the Immaculate Virgin, we implore her to look with goodness to her children gathered together there and all the sick of the world, filling them with abundant spiritual consolation.

With all our heart we impart to you our Apostolic Blessing, which you will lovingly extend to the beloved pilgrims and to all those who take part, in any way, in this event.

Given in the Vatican Palace, the fifteenth day of the month of January 2002, the twenty-fourth day of Our Pontificate,

JOHN PAUL II



## Faith Opens Sickness to Life

*SUNDAY ANGELUS: 10 FEBRUARY, THE HOLY FATHER SPOKE ABOUT THE WORLD DAY OF THE SICK, OBSERVED ON 11 FEBRUARY*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Tomorrow is the liturgical memorial of the *Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes*. A powerful beacon of hope was lit in the small Pyrenean city, particularly for those suffering in body and spirit, when on 11 February 1854 Our Lady appeared to St Bernadette in the grotto of Massabielle, asking that it become a place of pilgrimage and prayer.

### World Day of the Sick on 11 February

For ten years now, this Marian feast has been associated with the observance of the *World Day of the Sick*, a suitable occasion for the ecclesial community to come close to sick persons, invoking for them the support of Mary who brings comfort and light to all. This year, the heart of the World Day of the Sick, will be *Vailankanni*, in southern India,

where we find the *Shrine of "Our Lady of Health"*, called "the Lourdes of the East", and the goal of numerous pilgrims. We also entrust to the heavenly protection of the Mother of God people of the Hindu and other religions who willingly go to that Christian shrine.

In spiritual union, a special celebration will be held tomorrow afternoon in St Peter's, at the end of which I will have the joy of meeting the sick, health workers and volunteer associations present in the Vatican Basilica.

### **Power of the Father, the Son and the Spirit gives Life**

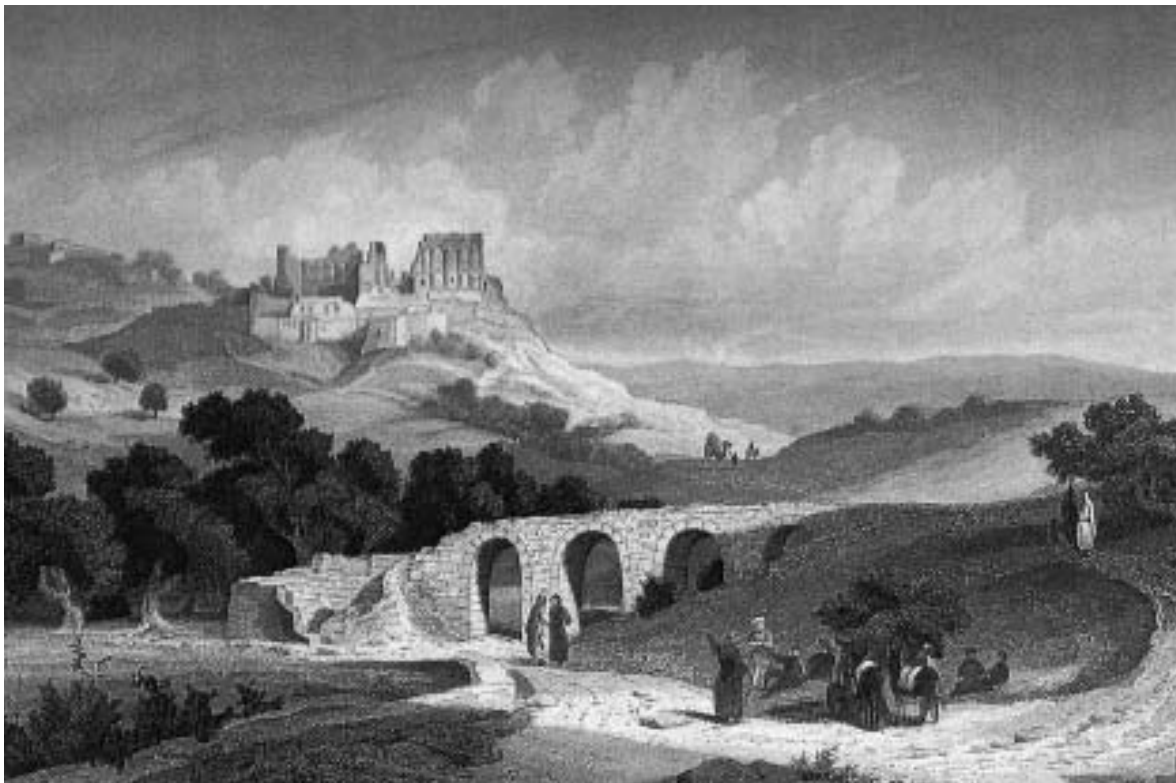
2. "*That they may have life and have it more abundantly*" (Jn 10,10). These words of Jesus, that we read in the Gospel of St John, are the theme of this year's World Day of the Sick. They recall the *fundamental outlook of Christian faith* that, even in the experience of sickness and death itself, *is always open to life*. The believer knows he can count on the power of God the Father, of the Risen Christ and of the Spirit of life. This

prospect gives substance to the dedication of all those who in a multiplicity of ways lovingly take care of the sick and the suffering: doctors, nurses, researchers, pharmacists and volunteers. I wish to express my most cordial appreciation to all these servants of human life, among whom are many consecrated persons.

### **Suffering United to Christ can be Salvific**

3. I want to remember especially beloved sick persons in every part of the world. I assure them of my spiritual closeness, reminding them that *Christ assumed human suffering and made it an integral part of his mystery of salvation*: salvificus dolor (saving suffering). By uniting themselves with faith and love to the passion of Christ, the persons who suffer share in his victorious struggle over evil and death, as the witness of the saints shows.

Let us pray that the Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, may assist with her protection those who suffer in body and spirit, and sustain all those who lovingly take care of them.





# Health is a Gift of God; Suffering has Value

ON THE EVENING OF 11 FEBRUARY AT THE END OF THE MASS FOR THE SICK IN ST. PETER'S BASILICA, THE HOLY FATHER GAVE THE FOLLOWING ADDRESS

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I address a heartfelt welcome to all of you gathered here, in St Peter's Basilica, at this now traditional date that brings together many pilgrims of the Roman Organization "Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi" and UNITALSI, and makes us relive the intense spiritual atmosphere of Lourdes.

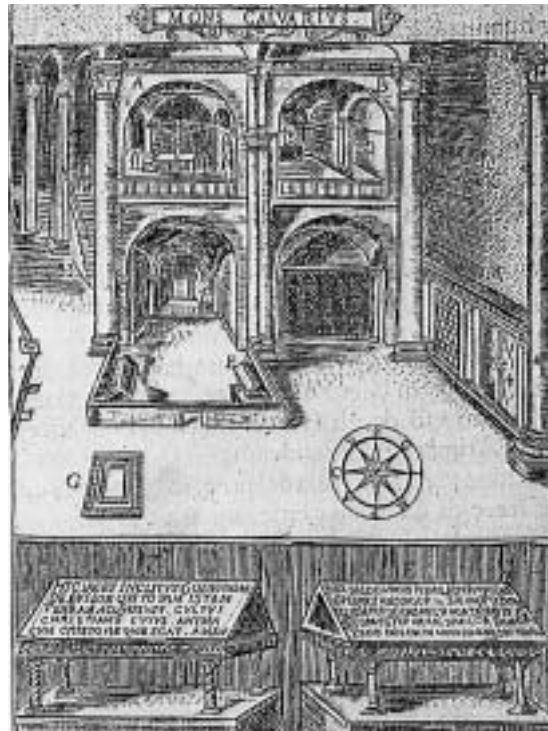
**Every year we dedicate 11 February to prayer for the sick, for their physical and spiritual healing**

I greet Cardinal Ruini, Vicar of Rome, who presided at the Eucharistic concelebration and the bishops and priests who are with him. I greet the directors of UNITALSI and of the "Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi", that promoted and organized this moving event. I greet you especially, dear sick people present here, and those wanting to be here who have been prevented from joining us this evening. I greet you, health-care and volunteer workers, priests, religious and lay people who carry out an unselfish service in this most important field that is the health-care apostolate.

We meet with joy today, when the Church is celebrating the Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes. Associated with this feast for ten years is the celebration of the *World Day of the Sick*, whose "heart" this year is in the Shrine of "Our Lady of Good Health" in Vailankanni, India, known as "the Lourdes of the East". I send a cordial greeting to all those who are assembled there with my Envoy, Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán, President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care.

## Pro-life Mandate in the Words of Jesus

2. The theme of the Tenth World Day of the Sick is taken from Jesus' words: "*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly*" (Jn 10,10). They are an invitation to adopt a clear pro-life stance and a sincere dedication to the defence of life from its conception to its natural end. Human life is a gift of God and should be lived as such, even in the most critical situations. In this regard, how effective is



the witness of many persons, some of whom are present this evening, who despite being nailed to their beds by illness for years, are full of serenity because they know how precious their contribution of suffering and prayer is for the Church. I pray to God that today's celebration may be an occasion that brings every sick person extraordinary physical and spiritual relief, and I ask the Lord that it may offer to all those who are well and those who are sick, the chance to understand much more the saving value of suffering.

## Christ redeemed human suffering

3. It is right to fight sickness because health is a gift of God. At the same time, it is also important to be able to interpret God's plan when suffering knocks at our door. For us believers, the key to the interpretation of this mystery is the Cross of Christ. The Incarnate Word himself met our weakness by taking it fully upon himself on Golgotha. Since that moment, suffering has acquired a meaning that makes it extremely valuable. Since that day, pain, in all its manifestations, has acquired a new and special meaning because it becomes participa-

tion in the saving work of the Redeemer (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1521). Only if they are united to his sufferings, do our own acquire full meaning and value. By the light of faith, they become sources of hope and salvation.

### Need for Good Samaritans

4. The *World Day of the Sick* reminds us, then, that beside every suffering person there must be a brother or sister motivated by charity. Like the *Good Samaritan*, of whom Jesus speaks in the well-known Gospel parable, every believer is called to offer love to all who are suffering. Never “pass by”! On the contrary, he should stop to bend over the person who is crushed, suffering, and alleviate his burden and difficulties. This is how the Gospel of consolation and charity is proclaimed; this is the witness that the people of our time expect from all Christians.

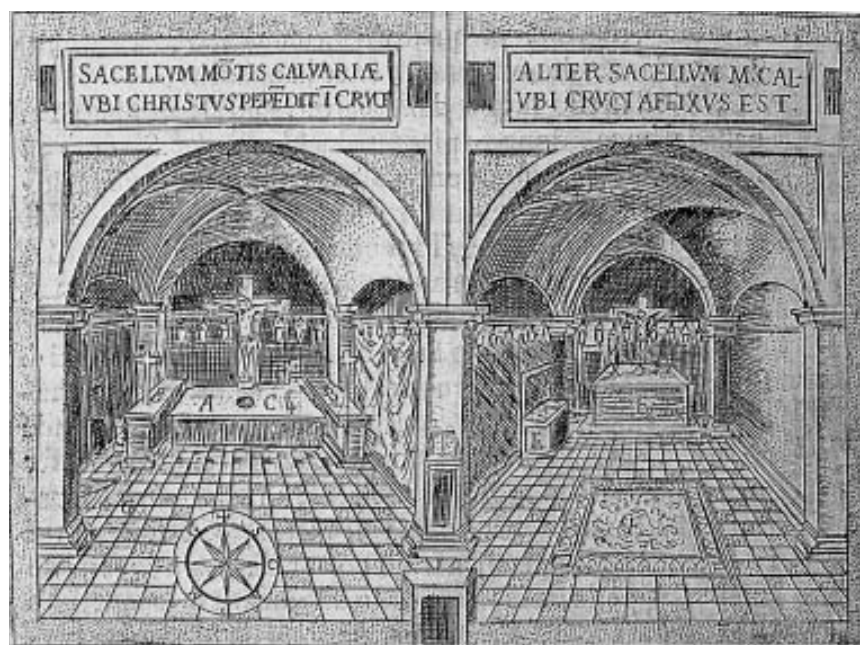
### Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

In this regard, I am pleased with the

“Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi” and UNITALSI for promoting an important pilgrimage to the Holy Land for “the physically challenged” and “peacemakers” to the places that witnessed the human events of the Redeemer and are now unfortunately disturbed by so much violence and bathed in blood. The pilgrimage that will bring Italian disabled people to meet the disabled of Jerusalem and Bethlehem is an eloquent act of solidarity among people with handicaps, and at the same time a message of hope for all.

I deeply hope that this beautiful initiative in the Holy Land, marred by so much hatred and war, may contribute to making sure solidarity and peace prevail. May the Immaculate Virgin, who, at Lourdes, came to bring comfort to humanity, continue to watch lovingly over those are wounded in body and spirit and intercede for all who care for them. May she obtain for the Holy Land, and for every other region of the world, the gift of harmony and peace.

With these sentiments, I gladly join you now, in the traditional candlelight procession that reminds us of Lourdes, and to all I impart a special Apostolic Blessing.



# Solemn Inauguration of the Tenth World Day of the Sick

VAILANKANNI, TAMILNADU, INDIA, 9 FEBRUARY 2002

It is a great honour for me to come to India to celebrate the Tenth World Day of the Sick. This is a double honour: the honour to come here on behalf of the Holy Father John Paul II, to represent him as his Special Envoy, and the honour to visit you in this wonderful country, which is full of culture and cordiality.

Receive the warm greetings and the blessings of the Holy Father! He feels special affection for India. He holds in high consideration the immense culture of this country, the sincerity and openness of its people, and its special religiosity. The population of India has developed a great sense of Transcendence. This special feeling is a very appropriate weapon with which to fight secularism in the world.

I would like to greet, on behalf of the Holy Father, all the public authorities, and in particular His Excellency Dr. C.P. Thakur, the Minister of Health of the Republic of India, and His Excellency the Governor of Tamil Nadu. Their presence amongst us, as a sign of the appreciation by the Indian government and the State governments of the participation of the Catholic Church in the system of health care in this country, is greatly appreciated.

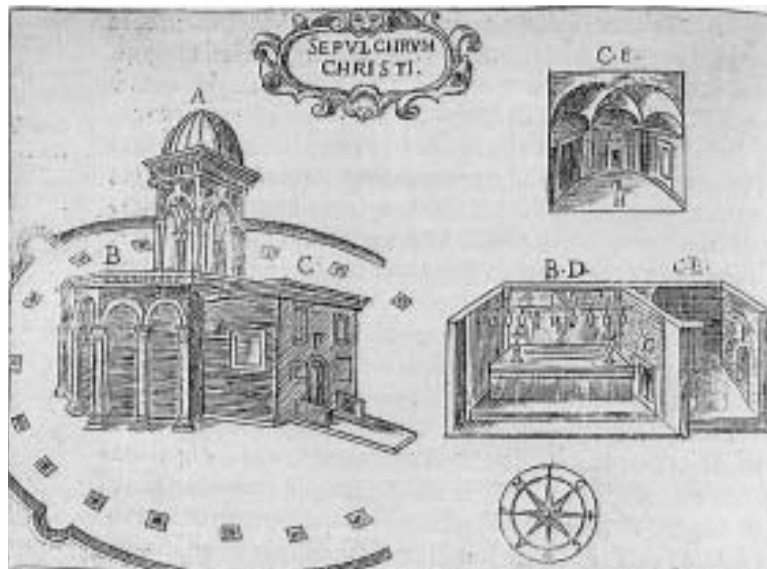
I also greet on behalf of the Holy Father His Eminence Cardinal Ivan Dias and His Eminence Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil; the Bishop of Tanjore, Msgr. Dadavass; the Apostolic Nunzio, Msgr. Lorenzo Baldissieri; all the Archbishops and Bishops of India of the Syro-Malabara, Latin, and Syro-Malanka rites, and in a special way the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, H.E. Msgr. Cyril Mar Baselios, and H.E. Msgr. Thumma Bala, the President of the Commission for Health of the Catholic Bishop's Con-

ference of India. I also greet all the Archbishops and Bishops of the other countries of Asia, especially those who chair the Commissions for Health of their respective Bishops' Conferences.

I would like to render homage to the Commission for Pastoral Care in Health for the great efforts it has made in organising the celebration of this Tenth World Day of the Sick. The President of this Commission, H.E. Msgr. Thumma Bala, and its Executive Secretary, Rev. Alex Vadakumthala, have worked with great commitment to present this Tenth World Day of the Sick in all the dioceses of the country through conferences, courses, celebrations etc, thereby motivating the other Bishops' Conferences of Asia to celebrate this World Day and to be present with us here.

Irudayam. The Holy Father has been personally informed of your arduous and efficient work.

His Holiness sends a special blessing to all the priests and to all the male and female religious who work in the field of health care. It is extraordinary to see how all the dioceses of India have heroically developed the mandate of the Gospel in this very difficult field. A special mention should be made of the six hundred religious male and female congregations and their members who have dedicated their own lives to proclaiming the Gospel by helping the sick of India. By this we do not ignore the large number of Catholic laity who have taken their own medical profession seriously to serve their sick sisters and brothers, independently of their caste or creed. You are near to the heart of the



My thanks now go to the diocese of Tanjore and to the team that has prepared all the aspects of this celebration with so much care, and in particular to the Rector of the Marian sanctuary in which we have all gathered, Rev. Arul

Pope, who in his Message for the Tenth World Day of the Sick said: 'Through the celebration of the World Day of the Sick, the Church expresses her gratitude and appreciation for the dedicated services of the many priests, religious and



laity engaged in health care, who selflessly minister to the sick, the suffering and the dying, drawing strength and inspiration from their faith in the Lord Jesus and from the Gospel image of the Good Samaritan.<sup>1</sup>

I greet with great affection all the lay Catholics of India, and in a special way those who are sick, troubled, and suffering. I bring to them the blessing of the Holy Father. The Pope is always with you and prays for you. He exhorts you not to lose hope and to be happy because Christ is always with you, and through his cross he transforms your suffering into joy.

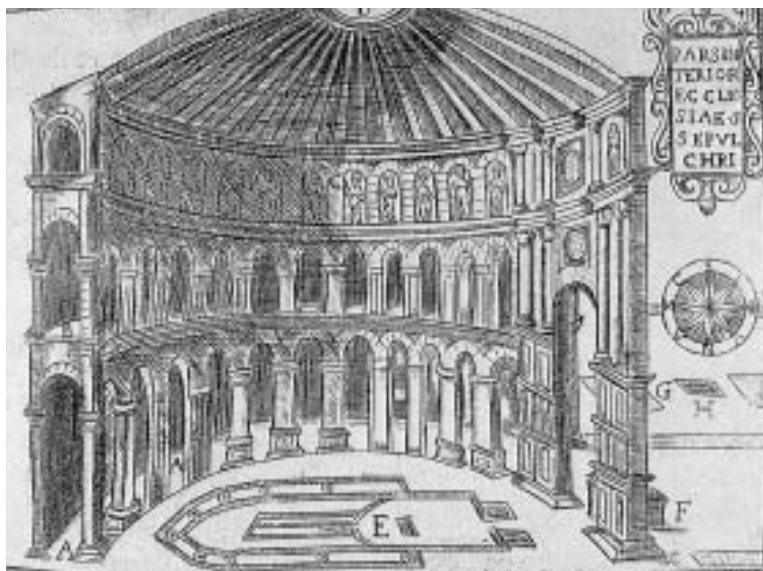
It is also my privilege to greet all the Christian brethren

make the Holy Father constantly present in the world as the principle promoter and proclaimer of the Gospel in the difficult field of health care. There are 'extreme situations' in which life must be weighed with seriousness: death, illness, suffering and health. Our challenge is to respond in a correct and adequate way to these situations, and in definitive terms it is the essential question of the whole of life. If we preach Jesus Christ, it is solely because we are convinced that he is the answer. In his Message the Pope states that 'the various religions of humanity have always sought to answer the question of the meaning of suffering...' He goes on to say

mends us to the intercession of Our Lady of Health.

During these days here in Vailankanni, we will meditate on, and celebrate, the mystery of life and death, of illness and health, following the luminous path indicated to us by the Holy Father. Bishops from the whole of Asia are here, the largest and most populated continent in the world, the forge of the great religions of humanity. May God be present in our efforts to find Him; may we experience the divine, mysterious and salvific presence, as a light shining in the darkness of pain, illness, suffering and death! We are ready to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, the divine Physician, because the Kingdom of God is near and we must heal the sick (cf. Mt 10:8). May our dear Mother, Our Lady of Vailankanni, Our Lady of Health, lead us by the hand during our steps along the path of life, in the footsteps of the divine Physician!

H.E. Msgr. JAVIER LOZANO  
BARRAGÁN  
Archbishop-Bishop Emeritus  
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present here with us, and to hope and wish that they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. All of us believe that Christ is our Redeemer, and that through his death and resurrection we share in a single baptism. He transformed his death into a source of eternal life.

The Pope also sends a respectful greeting to all other believers, 'especially Hindus, who see in our Lady of Good Health the caring and compassionate Mother of suffering humanity.'<sup>2</sup> May Our Lady of Vailankanni be for you a certain sign of health and happiness!

Every year we celebrate the World Day of the Sick in a different continent. We wish to

that 'even though the Church finds much that is valid and noble in non-Christian interpretations of suffering, her own understanding of this great human mystery is unique...the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering has been 'given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ' (*Salvifici Doloris*, n. 13).<sup>3</sup>

The Pope continues his message by calling us to engage in active co-operation in the struggle against illness. He says that at the Last Supper Jesus asked us to give ourselves to others. It is the struggle for health care that involves the defence of human life from its conception to its natural end. Lastly, the Holy Father com-

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'Message of the Holy Father for the World Day of the Sick', Vailankanni, India, 11 February 2002, n. 3.

<sup>2</sup> 'Message of the Holy Father for the World Day of the Sick', Vailankanni, India, 11 February 2002, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> 'Message of the Holy Father for the World Day of the Sick', Vailankanni, India, 11 February 2002, n. 2.

# Christ is a Long-term Healer Through his Death and Resurrection

*HOMILY GIVEN BY ARCHBISHOP BARRAGÁN ON 11 FEBRUARY 2002  
DURING THE HOLY MASS OF THE TENTH WORLD DAY OF THE SICK*

We are celebrating the mystery of the Eucharist. Suffering Christ is present in the pain of humanity. He is not only compassionate towards humanity but overcomes suffering and death through his resurrection. We do what we say. This is the solution to illness, to pain, to suffering and to death: Christ, who is the unique physician, the Divine Physician.

In the profound reflection of some Asian religions, the question of the origin of suffering is rooted in the very question of the whole of human existence. They offer interesting different answers. In the view of some of them, the cause of suffering lies in the bad conditions of the past and we can be freed from suffering by knowing the truth that comes from the Word of God.

Another of these religions has a broader vision and argues that life is always suffering and its cause is the passion of selfishness. In order to free ourselves from this passion it is necessary to eliminate selfishness and all kinds of desire, following the right vision, the right thoughts, the right words, the right actions, the right life, the right efforts, the right attention and meditation. Some religions assert that suffering is due simply to opposition to the Word of God and that God himself will provide a remedy. For others, the origin of suffering lies in the bad actions of men against their own lives or those of other people; moral crimes such as theft, slavery, etc., that disturb the spirits, who must be placated with sacrifices.

In his Message for the Tenth World Day of the Sick, the Holy Father says that 'Vailankanni attracts not only Christian pilgrims, but also many followers of other religions, specially Hindus, who see in Our Lady of Good

Health the caring and compassionate Mother of suffering humanity. In a land of such ancient and deep religiosity as India, this shrine dedicated to the Mother of God is truly a meeting point for members of different religions, and an outstanding example of inter-religious harmony and exchange' ('Message of the Holy Father for the Tenth World Day of the Sick', Vailankanni, India, 11 February 2002, n. 1).

We find this meeting point exactly in the first reflections on suffering. The Pope expresses the view that: 'Human suffering remains a fundamental fact of human life. In a way it is as deep as man himself and touches upon his very essence (cf. *Salvifici Doloris*, n. 3; 'Message of the Holy Father for the Tenth World Day of the Sick', n. 2).

In fact, all the previous religious assertions agree about a fundamental question: suffering is not an evil in itself but the consequence of evil. It is not a sin but the consequence of sin. We thus draw near to the Christian position which sees in Original Sin the mephitic source of all suffering. For we Christians, the extraordinary thing is not the widespread nature of suffering, but solidarity in evil. Suffering derives from evil and if isolated becomes absurd and unjustified.

Some of the religious ideas that we have mentioned propose divine action as a solution: listening to the divine word, the fact God himself will come to free us from suffering or the offering of sacrifices. This is a good way, but we ask ourselves: how? They answer by speaking about right human moral conduct. However, when man has to face up to death as the culmination of suffering, how can he overcome pain?

In his Message, the Holy Father observes: 'even though the

Church finds much that is valid and noble in non-Christian interpretations of suffering, her own understanding of this great human mystery is unique. In order to discover the fundamental and definitive meaning of suffering 'we must look to the revelation of divine love, the ultimate source of the meaning of everything that exists' (*Salvifici Doloris*, n. 13). The answer to the question of the meaning of suffering has been 'given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ (*ibid.*, n. 13). Suffering, a consequence of original sin, takes on a new meaning; it becomes a sharing in the saving work of Jesus Christ (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1521).

Through his suffering on the cross, Christ has prevailed over evil and enables us to overcome it. Our sufferings become meaningful and precious when united with his. As God and man, Christ has taken upon himself the suffering of humanity, and in him human suffering itself takes on a redemptive meaning. In this union between the human and the divine, suffering brings forth good and overcomes evil' (Message of the Holy Father for the Tenth World Day of the Sick', n. 2).

In the New Testament St. Paul offers a detailed description of this mystery: 'It makes me happy to be suffering for you now, and in my own body to make up for all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church...' (Col 1:24).

'He supports us in every hardship, so that we are able to come to the support of others, in every hardship of theirs because the encouragement that we ourselves receive from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives; so too does the encouragement we receive through

Christ. So if we have hardships to undergo, this will contribute to your encouragement and your salvation; if we receive encouragement, this to gain for you the encouragement which enables you to bear with perseverance the same sufferings as we do, So our hope for you is secure in the knowledge that

From this inner solidarity, Christ took on our sufferings and our death on the cross and transformed it into the unique source of felicity.

However, as the Pope states in his Message: 'The Christian response to pain and suffering is never one of passivity. Urged on by Christian charity, which



you share the encouragement we receive, no less than the sufferings we bear' (II Cor 1:4-7). 'I urge you, then, brothers, remembering the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice dedicated and acceptable to God (Rom 12:1).

'I have been crucified with Christ, and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me. The life that I am now living, subject to limitation of human nature, I am living in faith, faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:19-20).

'But as for me, it is out of the question that I should boast at all, except of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Gal 6:14).

If solidarity in evil is extraordinary, solidarity in good is wonderful. The reason for solidarity in evil, with the first sinner, Adam, is in itself impossible to understand. We need to see it as the point of departure of history: the eternal Decree of the incarnation of the Word. It achieves the deepest solidarity through communion with divine grace through participation in his life, through omnipotent love, the Holy Spirit.

finds its supreme expression in the life and works of Jesus, who 'went about doing good' (Acts 10:3-8), the Church goes out to meet the sick and suffering, bringing them comfort and hope... The command of the Lord at the Last Supper 'Do this in memory of me', besides referring to the breaking of the bread, also alludes to the body given and the blood poured out by Christ for us (cf. Lk 22:19-20), in other words, to the gift of self for others. A particularly significant expression of this gift of self lies in service to the sick and suffering. Thus those who dedicate themselves to this gift will always find in the Eucharist an inexhaustible source of strength and a stimulus to an ever new generosity' ('Message of the Holy Father for the Tenth World Day of the Sick', nn. 2-3).

The Holy Father, John Paul II, urges us to carry out the new evangelisation in this field. This new evangelisation, observed the Pope, must be such in its zeal, method and expression. It must be an evangelisation appropriate to the real conditions of India and the whole of Asia. We know that in India about four million people have been afflicted by

HIV/AIDS and that this country has the highest number of people suffering from tuberculosis. However, the response of the Catholic Church is already ready.

Indeed, in India there are three thousand centres where the Church takes care of sick people. We have about seven thousand hospitals, four hundred and sixty two health care centres, one hundred and sixteen hospices, six faculties of medicine, seven rehabilitation centres, forty one centres for the treatment of lepers, and about one thousand five hundred dispensaries.

The Church has eleven thousand five hundred schools of all levels responsible for two million students.

I would like to finish with the words of the Holy Father, when he thanks all the people who are involved in India and the whole of Asia in health care services: 'My thoughts go to the countless men and women all over the world who are active in the field of health care, as directors of health care centres, chaplains, doctors, researchers, nurses, pharmacists, paramedical doctors and volunteers... The Church expresses her gratitude and appreciation for the dedicated services of the many priests, religious and laity engaged in health care who selflessly minister to the sick, the suffering and the dying, drawing strength and inspiration from their faith in the Lord Jesus, and from the Gospel image of the Good Samaritan' ('Message of the Holy Father for the Tenth World Day of the Sick', n. 3).

May Our Lady of Good Health give us the light, the harmony, the Word of God, her son Jesus Christ, the unique acceptable sacrificial Victim, the Lamb of the World who takes away the sins of the world, who is complete health, and who in the end will defeat death and all pain and suffering.

H.E. Msgr. JAVIER LOZANO  
BARRAGÁN,  
*Archbishop-Bishop Emeritus  
of Zacatecas,  
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