JUSTICE AND HEALTH

LATIN AMERICAN REALITY
INTRODUCTION

In Central America between 50 and 80 per-cent of the population cannot meet basic necessities while a high percentage of the national income goes to a small proportion of the population. Struggling for more justice, people have spoken out, demonstrated, and, in some cases, taken up arms. Thus Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua are suffering the consequences of civil war.

In a report submitted for CONTACT, Ms. Melita Wall, Latin American Council of Churches' Regional Secretary for Central America, Panama, and Mexico, describes further the conditions in some of the countries:

In El Salvador, while millions of dollars are spent on the war a fifth of the population has no access to safe drinking water and thousands of schools have been abandoned.

In Guatemala 25,000 women were widowed because their husbands were suspected of being "subversive". The indigenous population has been decimated by brutal repression.

Nicaragua has suffered 50,000 dead, 250,000 displaced and 40,000 disabled by the counter-revolutionary war.

In Honduras community organization, including that done by churches and other charitable organizations, is seen as communism and repressed by army and civilian "death squads".

Natures violence in the form of hurricanes and earthquakes has also devastated Central America in recent years. So the people there have lived daily with war, violence, poverty, oppression and struggle.

In September, 1988, the Christian Medical Commission sponsored a meeting in Panama for Christian Health workers from El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama and Nicaragua. More than 40 men and women, doctors, nurses, village health workers and pastors, shared their stories for the first time since the violence began many years ago. Many told of repeatedly facing threats of imprisonment and death from both guerillas and government death squads for their humanitarian work. Yet their Christian commitment led them to continue.

Present at the conference was Brazilian theologian, Gerson Meyer. Daily he spoke on new insights into the Christian gospel gained by the poor through the struggle for survival. He quoted frequently from Cosecha de Esperanza (Harvest of Hope), a two-volume collection of stories written by Christians involved in the struggle all over Latin America. We believe this experience needs to be shared with the rest of the world to increase understanding and solidarity with those who struggle so valiantly. In this issue of CONTACT we publish in shortened form the addresses of Dr. Meyer together with brief articles from other sources exemplifying the realities in Central America today.

The closing session of the one-week meeting was a Eucharist, celebrated with the help of guitars and Latin American songs. In the middle of the ceremony there was a sudden power failure and the little chapel was plunged into darkness, as if symbolic of the pervasive evil in the region. But, equally symbolic, the music continued on without missing a measure. After a while a match was struck, a candle was found and lit, and then others until the darkness was dispelled and the Eucharist completed.

As we read in the Gospel of John: "Jesu's life is the light that shines through the darkness — and the darkness can never extinguish it."

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Cover: WCC Photo by Peter Williams

In San Salvador Cathedral, artist working on a epidermnet, which symbolizes the hope for peace in El Salvador.

HEALTH: A GIFT OF GOD - A CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

by Gerson Meyer

Cruel and inhuman suffering is the cross borne by the majority of Latin Americans and other peoples of the Third World today. Many writers have helped us to think about the tragedy of our continent:

"Latin America needs to be able to survive in peace. To survive it is necessary to eradicate poverty and promote an economy that will lead to peace. The conflict between life and death has to be brought to the altar and expressed in the liturgy. Our solidarity with those who are dying must make present the acrid smell of the blood that is shed in every inch of the earth. This cannot be left until the end of history. Today is the day of salvation." (Cosecha de Esperanza / Harvest of Hope/ vol.l, p.33).

"The soil of Guatemala gives not life but death. The army answers the cry of the people with selective abductions and “development” programmes... Regrettably, some Protestants are involved in these programmes, not as the messengers of the God of life but as the representatives of Mammon, the god of death, prestige and money." (En Communion, No. 22, 1988).

"...We have seen the violations of life taking place every day in the form of policies which have condemned so many of our brothers and sisters on this earth to hunger and malnutrition... We think especially of those who live on the margins of society, among whom the native communities are a particularly eloquent example, the poorest of the poor... We wish that no Argentinian should be denied life in his or her own land; rather, that everyone should be able to live life in its fullness in health and have access to the benefits of housing, education and work." (MEDH, Buenos Aires).

"In Brazil, malnutrition-related diseases affect 40 million people; 6 million suffer from Chagas' disease; there are 380,000 new cases of malaria every year and 500,000 suffer from leprosy. Schistosomiasis (Bilharzian disease) causes suffering to 6 to 8 million people... 86 million are undernourished, 45% of houses do not have even minimum sanitation, 55 million have no access to clean drinking water, 45 million live without any drainage system and around 40 million people suffer from tuberculosis." (Tempo e Presença, No. 213, Brazil, 1986).

"20 million abandoned children live in the streets of Latin America's major cities, 12 million of them in Brazil; there are estimated to be some 300,000 prostitutes under the age of 14 in Rio de Janeiro alone; one in two children in Peru does not get enough to eat. Regrettably, the number of abandoned and malnourished children is growing larger every day in our part of the world." (Jornal de Domingo, Campina, Brazil).

"So we brand the situation of inhuman poverty in which millions of Latin Americans live as the most devastating and humiliating scourge. And this situation finds expression in such things as a high rate of infant mortality, lack of adequate housing, health problems, starvation wages, unemployment and under-employment, malnutrition..." (Pueblo and Beyond, Orbis, New York, 1979, p.128).

"Lord have mercy on our miners who die at the age of only 35 in the tunnels of the tin mines, spitting out their lungs little by little while the powerful do nothing. Lord, in Bolivia, the miners, the factory workers, the peasants hunger and thirst for justice." (Cosecha de Esperanza, vol.l, p. 178).

* Gerson Meyer is a Brazilian theologian who now works for CEBEP (Centro Evangélico Brasileiro de Estudos Pastora)
“Hunger, unemployment, malnutrition, disease, overcrowding, school drop-out — these are the words which truly describe the tragic situation of a large part of the Chilean population.” (Letter to Gen. Pinochet from the Christian Fraternity of Churches, 1986).

We could go on adding to the list, but let me end these sketches with words from the Constitutive Assembly of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI).

“The total panorama presented by our continent shows clearly that we are very far from achieving the reality of true humanity in our countries. Everywhere there are indications that death is seeking to smother the signs of life...” (Semilla de Comunion, CLAI, 1982, P.1100.

As in other poor countries and regions of the world, the majority of brothers and sisters who live in poverty have a very heavy cross to bear - the cross of hunger, sickness and premature death. The cross is the way of martyrdom for those who have no hope of even the barest means of survival. This cross is the price paid by the impoverished majority to enable a minority to live in luxury.

“The cross is one of the most powerful realities in Christianity: the redemption of Christ and the liberating will of the Father. What we customarily call "the cross or the crosses" is nothing other than suffering, disease and sacrificial denial of life. The cross is a fact of the human condition. Jesus did not invent it. What interests us is the attitude we have to adopt towards it, since it comes to us as pain and suffering” (Apuntes para una Teologia de la Cruz [Points in a Theology of the Cross]. Felix Ramos, Presencia Ecu- menica, Venezuela, July, 1988).

IN GUATEMALA:
* Life expectancy for rural women is 41 years.
* Four children an hour die of malnutrition.
* A doctor or nurse is murdered on average once a month.
* Almost 600 village health workers have been killed since 1980.

Guatemala Committee for Human Rights

The description given above shows that as Christians, whether Catholic or Protestant, we are aware of the dramatic situation in which our continent is living. On the one side are the people who are opposed to a vision of life, preventing the use of a church building for a polio vaccination campaign, or opposing the setting up of a communal kitchen garden by a congregation. On the other side are those, a minority admittedly, who show clearly that they are ready to carry out God’s plan for life in all its fullness for all human beings. It is therefore appropriate that we should reflect once again on the subject of health and the role of the churches in the ministry for life in our continent of Latin America.

The reality in which we talk about health as God’s gift and our responsibility is one of total dehumanization. Millions of our brothers and sisters in this continent have no hope of better days in the near future. We can scarcely imagine the degree of poverty and marginalization because we do not live with the poorest of the poor.
LIFE: A GIFT OF GOD

OLD TESTAMENT VIEW

God is the author and preserver of life. In the Old Testament God is often referred to as the living God, the source of life, in other words, the one who gives life (Ps. 115: Deut. 32:39; Isa.. 57:14-18: 40:12-26; Gen. 2:9; Prov. 3:38; PS. 36:9; Job 28:13 and Ps. 56:13).

"Life is given. We receive God’s gift with constant thankfulness... The forces of death are strong. The gift of life in Christ is stronger. We commit ourselves to live that life with all its risks and joys and therefore dare to cry with all the hosts of heaven ‘O death, where is your victory?’ Christ is risen. He is risen indeed" (Message of the VI Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Vancouver, Canada).

We have to be clear that as life is a gift, we can do nothing to acquire it; we can only accept it gracefully. Is it not our responsibility to respect and preserve it? We must, above all, defend our Creator's gift.

The verb "to live" and the words "life", "living", etc. occur more than one thousand times in the Bible. Carlos Mesters is right to say that life is the central word in the Bible. If we add other terms such as health, heal, cure, etc. we can gain some idea of the Bible's emphasis on the type of life God wants for all the beings he created.

We must be quite clear that the human being is a united whole who begins to live the moment God blows into his or her nostrils the breath of life (Gen.2:7). The distinction often made between physical, spiritual and intellectual life does not exist, because woman and man were created as a whole in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1 and 2) - hence the meaning of the Hebrew word nephesh - living being. The word comes from the verb "to breathe". By this the author wants to say that human beings have life because God created them so. Similarly, from the Latin word for soul, alma, comes anima - that which animates, which lives, breathes, and has life. Some translators have added to the confusion by translating nephesh as "soul" instead of "life": when the Psalmist says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" (Ps. 103:1), he is really saying that his whole life should be in praise to God

"...and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your disease, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s."

(Ps.103:1-2 RSV)

Here are the blessings, the gifts of God on which to meditate: forgiveness, healing of disease (health), redemption of life, gracious benefits, food (satisfies with good) and renewal of youth. This picture completes God's purpose in creating the human being.

"Faith in the God of the Bible is faith in a God who lives and who gives life": "The Lord lives" - this phrase is repeated many times in the Old Testament (Judg.8:19; 1 Kings 17:1; 1 Sam. 26:36). (From El Dios de los Pobres [The God of the Poor], Victor Araya, DEI Costa Rica, 1983).

GUATEMALA

1988 saw a distressing increase in human rights violations. This included the reappearance of the infamous death squads, the increased attacks against the trade union and popular movements, the military offensive at the beginning of the year, the allegations of baby trafficking, the closing, under threat, of several press agencies, the strengthening of the civil patrols, the attacks against church leaders, as well as the increased number of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances. All these are indicators which clearly describe a country still ruled by brutal violence and fear.

Report of the Interchurch Committee of Human Rights in Latin America (ICHRLA), CANADA.
NEW TESTAMENT VIEW

In the New Testament the words "life", "live", and "living" are once again central. There are three Greek words which are translated by life in the New Testament (zoe, psyche and bios). The first of these is the most frequently used, with or without an adjective: the second word indicates the principle of life (nephesh in Hebrew) which is sometimes translated by "soul" (Mt. 10:28; 1 Peter 1:9; 2:11; 4:19), connoting feeling, breath of life, living being and principle of life. The third word simply means life in general (Lk. 8-14; Mark 12:44). It can also mean sustenance of life, the means for living and "flesh", although there is another word for flesh in the New Testament.

According to Biblical scholars the New Testament adds a new element to the notion of life: the concept is extended by the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the one hand, and the gift of the Spirit on the other.

"Jesus, in his life, death and resurrection, is himself the guarantee of life, peace and dignity. He is the Messiah struggling and suffering with his people, and despite everything he is the conqueror" (Allan Boesak, Punto de Vista, CLAI, 1983).

For Jesus, God's original plan is that human beings should have life: the achievement of life in all its fullness, including the material base which makes it possible, is God's primary purpose" (quoted by V. Araya. op. cit.)

So we see that He who creates and sustains life is also He who wants life in all its fullness for all people. This refers to the human being as a whole. The usual division of a person into two separate parts, body and spirit, is foreign to God's word. This is very important in the discussion of life in all its fullness.

"One cannot talk of life when one is sick, feeble, exhausted and unhappy, because people who are dying of hunger live when they find food (Gen.43:8); those threatened by death live when they are rescued from peril (Gen.20:7) and those who are ill when they recover their health (Num. 21:8-9: 2 Kings 1:2; Isa. 38:9). A great favourite with many preachers, this dichotomy has been preached for nearly 2000 years now, yet it is contrary to all the principles of the true teaching of the Gospel and to modern science." (F. Michaeli, in an article in the "Vocabulary of the Bible" [von Allemani])

We shall see in a moment how important this matter is for our ministry of fullness of life and our responsibility in making human life truly human.

The Ministry of Death

"Death, alas, assumes many forms in our continent, in the islands of the Caribbean and in other parts of the Third World" (Cosecha de Esperanza, vol. I, p.13).

Abundant examples show clearly that the structures of society in Latin America are structures of death, in many cases deliberately promoting death, to such an extent that a Latin American theologian has spoken of our continent as a vast graveyard — a graveyard which is growing alarmingly as the days go by.

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EL SALVADOR

In 1988 there were 42 executions attributable to the Armed Forces. The method employed has been to carry out collective executions, as at the "Puerta del Diablo" where, according to a report by the Roman Catholic Church, 3 persons are presumed to have been executed by members of the First Infantry Brigade; and in the case known as "the massacre of San Sebastián" where 10 civilians resident in the district of San Francisco were assassinated by soldiers of the Jiboa Battalion belonging to the Fifth Infantry Brigade, with its headquarters in the Department of San Vicente.

It should be added that in the second half of the year just ended there have been reports of the reappearance of bodies executed in the style of the "death squads": handcuffed, blindfolded, bearing marks of cruel torture, mutilated. In some cases the bodies have been found without the heads. The aim of the murders is apparently to spread terror by leaving them lying for all to see.

"For the majority of our people at the most primary level, life is threatened and destroyed by injustice and by institutionalized violence...The Christian concern for the poor historically highlights the fact that to speak of life is to speak of the masses for whom life is threatened and destroyed...A creation where life is ignored, threatened, destroyed is a corrupt creation. Whereas John testifies that in Christ there appears the World of Life, what is manifest in Latin America is the anti-Christ and his word of anti-life" (Jon Sobrino, in A Igreja que surge da base, Paulinas, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1982).

At the preparatory meeting for the WCC's VI Assembly (Oaxtepec, Mexico, 1982) the Latin American participants, most of whom were delegates to the Assembly, studied in depth the theme "Jesus Christ - the Life of the World" and pointed to the signs of death which, in our continent, are not only present on an individual level but are rooted in the structures of power. The signs of death are in the structures, in the prevailing economic system, the ownership of the land concentrated in the hands of a few, the arms race, repression, etc. Our churches are challenged daily and called to repentance and to action.

For example, according to the Inter-Union Department of Studies and Research (Brazil), 20 to 30 million workers in Brazil are estimated to be suffering from pulmonary silicosis; another organization, Fundacentro, estimates that 570,000 workers are directly exposed to the danger of working with asbestos and among metal workers 60% suffer from impaired hearing. (Tempo e Presenca, no. 330, CEDI, Brazil, 1988). How many other forms of "silent death" exist in this Latin America of ours? And how many people die in silence, completely ignored by everyone, including the Christian churches? All these are concrete signs of anti-life, in other words, the ministry of death. Another question could be added to those asked above: what share do we Christians have in the ministry of death — we who preach the message of life?

A major — if not the major — cause of hunger and all its consequences in Latin America is the foreign debt:

"All the data demonstrate that the external debt of Brazil and of other countries is today one of most efficient means of shortening life and causing death. Therefore it is an instrument of collective sin and usurps the sovereignty of God. It is an idol which modern faith in economic power and domination places on the altar of temples where money is worshipped and death is pervasive. We cannot bow down before this idol and its instruments; on the contrary, we have to continue denouncing all idolatry, with its powers of seduction and distortion of truth and goodness..."(Message to the Churches, The Churches and the External Debt, CONIC/CESE, Brazil, 1988, published in WCC/CCPD Resource Material on Debt, p. 40)

**Health - Fullness of Life**

A classic text is John 10:10, which is translated in different versions as:

a) I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly (RSV 1965)

b) I have come that men may have life, and may have it in all its fullness (NEB 1970)

c) I have come in order that you might have life - life in all its fullness (Good News 1976)
Listen to Dorothee Solle, a German theologian:
Christ came into the world that all may have life “and have it in all its fullness” or, as it can also be translated, “that they may live and find in abundance all that they need” (John.10:10). What is this “life in all its fullness”? Where does it take place? Who lives it? Looking at our world I see two ways in which life is being destroyed: outward poverty and inward emptiness.

For a good two-thirds of the human family there is no such thing a “life in all its fullness” because they are impoverished, living on the edge of death in stark poverty. They are hungry, they have no shelter, no schools, no medicine for their children, no clean water to drink, no work - and they see no way of getting their oppressors off their backs. Trade agreements and international relations are dictated by the rich First World and imposed on the poor, plunging them daily deeper into destitution. The struggle for mere survival inhibits the fullness of life, the shalom of God, of which the Bible speaks. Where people need not be anxious about their daily food, where they are healthy, where they are not threatened by their enemies and can enjoy a long life in their family and community Poverty destroys the life which is promised to all of us.” (Dorothee Solle. Ecumenical Review, vol. 35, no.4 October 1983, p. 377)

What do we actually mean when we talk about health? Absence of illness? A healthy body? Mental balance? Physical well-being? Being able to live without humiliation? Working without working oneself to death and shortening one’s life little by little? A full life in harmony with society and with nature? A peaceful family life and good neighbourly relations? What do we mean? All of that and something more. The Hebrew word shalom which means peace and at the same time harmony, personal well-being, a tranquil family life, a proper relationship with neighbours and friends, and working in a setting of social justice. Let us listen to what shalom is for the prophet Isaiah:

“But once more God will send us his Spirit. The wasteland will become fertile and fields will produce rich crops. Everywhere in the land righteousness and justice will be done. Because everyone will do what is right, there will be peace and security for ever. God’s people will be free from worries, and their homes peaceful and safe. (But hail will fall on the forests, and the city will be torn down.) How happy everyone will be with plenty of water for the crops and safe pasture everywhere for the donkeys and cattle.”

(Israel 32:15-20, Good News Bible)

Is this not “life in all its fullness” Here as in other texts, Isaiah shows us the ideal for wholeness of life: peace with justice, work, leisure, security, a home and land to work. Even the crops are sown by the water and the animals range free. This matches the WHO definition:

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

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EL SALVADOR

The worst attack in our neighbourhood occurred on December 28, when a bomb went off at 3:00 am in the Lutheran Church in Barrio San Miguelito, a half block from our house. None of us were home that evening. But the neighbours are still pretty shaken by the incident. Bishop Medardo Gómez declined to name those he thought responsible, but the area was militarized by army troops during three days prior to the incident. Five days earlier, the Bishop had received anonymous telephone calls with death threats. The army and security forces announced they were stepping up military operations in San Salvador in December, “to control urban violence and terrorism” but the number of human rights abuses reported in town simultaneously jumped rather than declined. José Guillermo Alemán Vasquez, a promoter for the Mejicanos parish housing and reconstruction project in San Salvador, disappeared on January 6, for example. He was last seen at a bus stop, on a morning when the National Police agents and First Infantry Brigade soldiers decided to do a sweep of the city.

Letter from a church worker in El Salvador.
"Life in all its fullness?"

Nicaragua, living conditions of displaced populations due to conflicts.

Compare another passage from Isaiah with the situation in Latin America:

"I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall he be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the child shall die a hundred years old and the sinner a hundred years old shall be cursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them: they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit: they shall not plant and another eat: for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the works of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, or bear children for calamity: for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their children with them." (Isaiah 65:19-23, RSV)

The prophet Isaiah's preoccupation with "life in all its fullness" is obvious. Human beings - children, young people, adults, women and men - were created for a life of health, contentment and gladness enjoyed in the tranquility which Isaiah describes. But often pastors prefer to preach on New Testament texts which speak of the life hereafter, of the new heaven after death, heavenly joy and the city where there is jasper, gold and precious stones, etc. and not so much on the fact that "we have one life this side of death" (Miguel Bonino). Preaching on LIFE before the grave, commits us - and, generally speaking, we are not prepared to make that sacrifice. For us individually and collectively a health ministry demands faithfulness to the Word of God.

All the Gospels mention the miracles performed by Jesus in healing the sick — a man with an unclean spirit, Peter's mother-in-law, a person suffering from what is translated as leprosy, a paralytic and many other sick people. Jesus took care to turn the sick into healthy people, restored in their bodies. He who is the LIFE could not fail to transmit life in one way or another. That is why the message of Christ - the Gospel - is life in every sense of the word.

In the New Testament three verbs are used for healing - therapeuo, iaomia and sozo - and each contains the idea of restoration, both physical and spiritual (Matt.4:24, therapeuo: 8:8, iaomai; Mark 5:23 Sozo). Sozo is also translated "to save". (John 3:17: Mark 16:16) There is salvation for both this side and the other side of the grave. The two aspects, health and salvation, are inseparable.

Fullness of life cannot exist in a body that is sick, poor, unhappy and oppressed. This life in all its fullness is meant for the whole of humanity without exception, but in the situation in which we live this is impossible unless we change our priorities, messages and programmes, but above all change our ideas about the human being created in the image and likeness of God. The human being was not created to be hungry, poor, marginalized or sick, but to live celebrating God's gift of life.
The crosses mark the place where the people of Osicala, El Salvador found the bodies of some of the persons disappeared.

A doctor from Chaco (Argentina) has said:

"It is outrageous that medical students start their careers in the morgue, with the dead, when in fact they should start in a maternity unit, touching life the very moment it is born. (Primary Health Care, Christian Study Centre, Argentina, 1982).

Choosing Life - A Challenge to the Churches

Just as life is a central word in the Bible, so a large number of the texts speak of the option for the poor as the sole hope for humanity. Dealing with the problem of technological development, nuclear energy, the death of the forest, the consumption of energy and food, chiefly by the First World, etc., Roger Garaudy said in 1979: "Either we change now or we are murdering our grandchildren" (Appel aux vivants, Paris, 1979). What do the churches have to do with all this?

It is time the churches took seriously the call for a change of priorities. A number of texts in Cos- echa de Esperanza speak of the need for aid programmes to alleviate suffering and hunger and give the marginalized people a glimmer of hope. But even more importantly, the task is clear - we must fight the causes that produce poverty. The churches' efforts must go beyond the kind of charitable assistance which legitimi- zes the prevailing unjust structures. It has to tackle the causes of poverty and condemn the sinful situation. The First Assembly of CLAI said:

"Wherever a human being is pre- vented from living out the fullness of his or her humanity, there is a situation of sin".

Orlando Costas says that "our society has to be made aware that there is the possibility of life on this side of the grave - abundant life, vigorous life, love life and eternal life:" (Christ Outside the

Gate, Orbis, U.S.A. 1982). It is a Yes to life, because No means "death, suffering, poverty, want, sacrifice and humiliation. The time has come to speak of the fullness of life that is possible here and now, to denounce the powers of death.

All of us, whether Christian or not, are responsible before God for the life which He has given the world and we are the custodians of all persons and all things. (Gen.6:9). Consequently, the option for life is not just a passing programme for the churches: it is the very reason for their existence. The struggle for health is part of that responsibility.

"Healing has to do with the body: a sick body cannot serve generously. Health care must be available to all human beings: it cannot be a private practice serving purely individual and commercial ends. Health care should be for everyone. It concerns the body which has to be healed. There are human structures in our society, created by human beings themselves, which prevent health care from reaching men and women and which negate the hopes of the people and the community. This is injustice and the church, in its work of evangelism, as the bearer of the 'Good News', cannot allow that injustice to continue when people's health is at stake. It has to denounce the injustices which prevent health care from being available to everyone." (Cosecha de Esperanza, vol. II)
The choosing of life is thus an integral part of Christian ministry. Human well-being follows logically from the preaching of the “Good News” brought by Christ.

The question we first have to answer is: Are we prepared to change? The history of the Church has shown that changes are painful: they produce wounds and divisions in our congregations...Yes, the road to life is narrow, but the alternative is death for “where life is not human, we have living death”. We have to state very clearly and humbly that many of our churches are dead because they have no life within themselves.

What we have to change is our very concept of the Church, of its message, of the human being created in the image and likeness of God and of the task of the Church itself - in other words we have to choose life. C.S. Song is entirely right when he says that theology has to do with the earth, not heaven. It is concerned with the questions of how God deals with human beings... (Tell us Our Names, C.S. Song, Orbis, U.S.A., 1984).

A feature of the “base Christian communities” springing up throughout Latin America is that they deal with “life” without forgetting other fundamental aspects of daily living. Local base groups try to live life in solidarity, to struggle for life in fullness and to communicate in word and action the certainty that life is possible for every human being. This is Christian solidarity put into practice by the poor - and many of our churches are still a long way from doing likewise.

Dr. Allan Boesak said: “Therein lies my hope: that the Church of Jesus Christ will yet discover the gospel of liberation and hope for human fulfillment and wholeness. The challenge to the Church is to discover and implement that gospel — to become whole itself and to work for the wholeness of life everywhere in the world” (Reformed World, vol. 39, no.6, 1987), p. 717).

Responding to the Challenge

For our witness to be effective, we as Christian men and women must reflect on our lives. The truth is that most of us have not acted consistently with the gospel of life we proclaim. To proclaim life is to live life in its fullness.

Our congregations must be redeeming communities. The proclamation of LIFE creates the redeeming community - the community which provides the experience of reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, and enables everyone to feel its love, fellowship and unrestrained welcome. It is a community where people are accepted as they are, grow in love and develop fully. Only community of this kind prepares its members for the work of redeeming humanity - that is, saving people for fullness of life.

Secondly, we must use the Lord’s resources where there is priority need. A study on the subject speaks of the importance of leaving aside everything that is superfluous and unnecessary to the Church’s mission. That means luxurious churches (cathedrals) or other prestigious buildings. Programmes must aim first and foremost at human well-being. We must invest in human beings, in those in greatest need, in programmes of health care, rehabilitation and understanding among God’s sons and daughters, regardless of their confession - in other words, invest in the temple of the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). There is no limit to this kind of investment and all the resources of the community must be devoted to this...
purpose. In Campesinas, Brazil, where I live, there are poor communities which are making this type of investment. We have to learn with them and others what it really means to discover ways of devoting our resources, however scant, to what is essential to LIFE.

A third way in which the churches can participate in the process of restoring life is to support the people's struggle for their rights, for conditions that make it possible to live modestly and in dignity, with good nutrition, health care, education, etc. Studying a passage from Matthew 28:19-20, a participant in the CLAI assembly said:

"To contribute to LIFE is to help towards the fulfilment of the people's aspirations; it is to seek greater equality by breaking with the distribution of wealth based on greed; it is the search for cultural and social advancement on a wide scale. In short, it is to contribute to justice by acting justly - and that, from whichever angle one looks at it, is total service; it is to choose life. Evangelism is the good-ness of total salvation and it is part of complete discipleship. The Church in its mission evangelizes with the people" (Cosecha de Esperanza, vol. II).

The people's organizations, including many which have no church connections, are the work of the Holy Spirit. We must have eyes to see this activity and support it. The Church has to support the people in their efforts to conquer health: it has to stand by the people's side in their aspirations. This is "the Lord's command. Where are the churches? Outside with the people in their struggle for a life of dignity - or inside their own four walls? The students of the Baptist Seminary of El Salvador include the following in a pastoral ministry:

"Journey with the people, be with the people, be part of the people's aspirations and be the people..." (Cosecha de Esperanza, vol. I, p. 71).

Being with the people is not easy, nor is it without risks. It may mean speaking out when in general this is not accepted: it may require living with the poor in situations of suffering and deprivation: often it may mean confrontation with the forces of "order".

"The duty of Christians and of the churches is to be in solidarity with those who suffer injustice, following the example of the prophets by witnessing and denouncing injustices and announcing the good news. To communities in which the God of life is proclaimed and all abuses are denounced: which carry out activities for popular education, supporting the development of base groups in the poor areas and lay movements, in an ecumenical approach to marginalized people" (Cosecha de Esperanza, vol. I, p. 180).

The struggle for life in its fullness is our task - the task of the people of God at all times and in all places. The churches must not wait for the health experts to start programmes like those mentioned here. "A doctor is not an expert in health, he's an expert in illness. Health? That's our job," said a peasant from the state of Goias, Brazil at the CMC Quito Conference in 1982.

Finally, the churches must set aside their prejudices and overcome barriers to ecumenical cooperation to help the two-thirds of humanity who live in poverty - more than 130 million of them in our continent alone.
Mothers of more than 700 disappeared people in El Salvador.
This is not a task for a single church, or denomination or confession - it is a task for the whole people of God, united in a single spirit.

Furthermore, the churches have to coordinate their programmes to attain their objective. Solidarity, cooperation and the signs of living fellowship must start in the life of the local congregations themselves. The Church’s teaching ministry must point the way that will enable the whole local congregation to be an instrument serving the society in which God has placed it to serve.

Conclusion

It is clear that health is political, as it is a process of liberation. Health is also theological, as health and salvation belong together, having the same source and the same content.

According to the text of Matthew 25, it is clear: we shall be judged by the millions of those who are hungry, sick, victims of injustice, deprived of land, unemployed and all those people who are forced to live in an inhuman or sub-human situation.

José Americo, the Brazilian writer and politician, said: “There is a fate worse than dying of hunger in the desert, and that is, to die of hunger in a land of plenty.” That is the situation on this earth of ours: we have everything in abundance, but our peoples are groaning in pain. Are people to continue dying of war, hunger and poverty?

Campinas, August 1988.

HONDURAS

A shooting attack was made on Laboratorios Custodio, on Dr. Custodio’s clinic and on the CODEH office on April 9, 1988. These acts were preceded and followed by bombings in several parts of the country, perhaps intended to obscure the authorship of the attacks against CODEH and Dr. Custodio’s clinic and laboratory. Strong evidence established close links between one of the bombers and officers of the armed forces.

We must reiterate that both CODEH and its members condemn any kind of attempt on a life, because the rights to life and integrity of persons cannot be subject or subordinated to anyone’s political decisions or interests.

NICARAGUA
CEPAD, 21 AUGUST 1986

BAPTIST HEALTH WORKER KILLED BY NICARAGUAN CONTRAS

A 24-YEAR-OLD BAPTIST HEALTH WORKER WAS ASSASSINATED BY U.S.-BACKED CONTRAS IN NORTHERN NICARAGUA ON AUGUST 1, IT WAS ANNOUNCED THIS WEEK BY THE NICARAGUAN CHRISTIAN ECUMENICAL DEVELOPMENT GROUP, CEPAD.

NESTOR ANTONIO CASTILBLANCO, A HEALTH PROMOTER IN THE MOUNTAINOUS AREA OF SAN JOSE DE LA MULA, IN MATAGALPA PROVINCE, WAS TAKEN FROM HIS HOME THE NIGHT OF JULY 31, BY A GROUP OF APPROXIMATELY 100 ARMED COUNTER REVOLUTIONARIES. THEY ALSO STOLE ALL THE CLOTHING AND DISHES FROM HIS FAMILY'S HOUSE AND SACKED THE CLINIC WHICH CASTILBLANCO RAN, STEALING ALL THE MEDICINE.

THE CONTRA PROCEEDED TO OTHER HOUSES IN THE ISOLATED COMMUNITY, REACHABLE ONLY BY HORSEBACK, KIDNAPPING THREE OTHER MEN. AT EACH RESIDENCE THEY STOLE CLOTHING AND OTHER VALUABLES AND BURNED TO THE GROUND ONE HOUSE. THEY LEFT THE AREA ABOUT 3 A.M., SHOUTING "LONG LIVE THE NATIONAL GUARD" (A REFERENCE TO THE ARMY OF DEPOSED DICTATOR ANASTACIO SOMOZA).

AT MID-MORNING A SEARCH PARTY FOUND THE BODIES OF THE FOUR MEN, ABOUT ONE KILOMETRE FROM THE SITE OF THE LAST KIDNAPPING. THE BODIES SHOWED REPEATED STAB WOUNDS, APARENTLY MADE BY BAYONETS. THE TESTICLES HAD BEEN CUT OFF ONE MAN, AND ANOTHER VICTIM HAD HIS EYES GOUGED OUT, ACCORDING TO FAMILY MEMBERS WHO FOUND THE BODIES.


TWO OF THE OTHER VICTIMS WERE BROTHERS OF NESTOR ANTONIO CASTILBLANCO, DANIEL, 22, AND FILEMON, 28. DANIEL WAS ON THE CLINIC'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND A MEMBER OF THE LOCAL CEPAD DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE. FILEMON WAS STUDYING AGRICULTURAL TECHNIQUES IN NEARBY MATAGALPA IN PREPARATION FOR WORK AS A RURAL PROMOTER WITH CEPAD. ALSO MURDERED WAS JESUS BARRERA, 31, WHO WAS MARRIED TO A SISTER OF THE OTHER VICTIMS.

THE MORNING OF HIS KIDNAPPING BY THE CONTRA, NESTOR ANTONIO HAD ATTENDED THE BIRTH OF HIS BROTHER DANIEL'S THIRD CHILD, A BABY GIRL. DANIÉLA DEL CARMEN, RESCUED FROM HER BURNING HOUSE, HAS NOW LEFT THE ZONE, ALONG WITH HER FAMILY AND THE FAMILIES OF THE OTHER DEAD MEN. SEVERAL OTHER FAMILIES FROM THE RURAL SETTLEMENT OF SOME 400 HAVE LEFT, AND OTHERS WILL LEAVE SOON, ACCORDING TO REPORTS FROM THE SCENE. THEY ARE AFRAID THE CONTRA WILL RETURN, SAY CEPAD OFFICIALS WHO HAVE VISITED THE AREA, AND THUS ARE WILLING TO LEAVE BEHIND HOMES, LAND, AND UNHARVESTED CROPS.

NESTOR ANTONIO CASTILBLANCO IS THE SECOND PROVADENIC RURAL PROMOTER TO BE ASSASSINATED BY THE U.S.-DIRECTED CONTRA. IN DECEMBER, 1983, 22-YEAR-OLD, ANA JULIA LOPEZ WAS KIDNAPPED FROM THE PROVADENIC CLINIC NEAR RIO BLANCO. AFTER BEING FORCED TO TREAT CONTRA WOUNDED, SHE WAS TORTURED AND KILLED.
As imports of arms and production technology have grown over the last fifteen years, so has the developing world's debt burden. From 1970 to 1980, arms exports to the developing world (excluding Vietnam) grew from 42.5 billion (in 1975 dollars) to 49.8 billion. In the 1970s, as the United States and the European arms exporting nations began to rely less on grants for the arms transfer, and turned more to commercial arms sales, the developing countries had to finance their arms purchases through export earnings and by borrowing. Over this period, it is estimated that approximately 20% of the Third World's external debt is directly or indirectly attributable to arms imports. Military-related interest payments are calculated to amount to about 26% of all Third World interest payments in the 1970s, and probably about 20% of all Third World export earnings went to pay for arms purchases. One study of the trade effects of higher arms imports suggests that if the Third World's military burden between 1965 to 1973 had declined from 4.5% of Gross Domestic Product to 3.5%, the Third World's balance of payments would have moved from a deficit into a surplus with the rest of the world. Clearly such savings could have released tremendous resources for socio-economic development, and would have relieved the Third World of its precarious trade problem. By implication, this analysis, conducted by development economist Saadat Deger, suggests that the Third World savings rate would have increased by two and a half times, and the average growth rate over the period would have increased by 12.5%.

As the military burdens of the Third World governments increase and government revenues don't keep pace, some things must be cut. This elementary political arithmetic is evident even in developed countries like the U.S., however, in developing countries the choices are harder to make. Much evidence suggests that funding cuts fall especially hard on essential economic and social services provided by governments. In the case of education and health services in the developing countries, Ms. Deger has found a definite trade-off between higher military spending and lower public spending on health and education. Indeed, Ms. Deger argues that an 11% cut in the Third World's military budget would be sufficient to cover the cost of a comprehensive social development programme on education, literacy, and community health. Ruth Sivard has estimated that such a programme would cost US$ 44.95 billion for one year and could fund the building of primary schools for 100 million children, extend literacy to 100 million adults and provide community health services for 85% of the villages in the Third World.

CMC NOTES - Training and courses:

The Institute of Child Health is organizing a 6-week course leading to a certificate in the Care of Children in War and Disasters, between 14 August - 22 September 1989. As more and more countries are faced with the task of providing care for large numbers of children who are separated from their families, due to displacement of communities from areas of war, famine and other natural and man-made disasters, this course aims at extending the knowledge of children's development needs and planning and administering programmes for orphans, abandoned and street children that will attempt to meet these needs, to be culturally appropriate and feasible in terms of available resources. The fee for the course is £700.00. For more information write to: Tropical Child Health Unit, Institute of Child Health, 30 Guilford Street, London WC1N 1EH.

Teaching Adult Learners, from the 23 - 29 July, 1989. The course is directed at teachers and trainers of adults from any health-related discipline involved in development. For address see below.

Managing Effectively, from 12 - 18 November, 1989. A workshop for middle and upper level managers involved in health care and community development. These courses are given at Backenhurst near Nairobi for a registration fee of $83.00 each. For more information write to: MAP International, P.O. Box 21663, Nairobi, Kenya.

Organizing Primary Health Care in Developing Countries, 22 - 26 May or 18 - 22 September 1989. This course focuses on how to plan, organize and 'get things done' in communities, health centers and intermediate levels of primary health care. For more information write to: TCHU Short Course Secretary, Tropical Child Health Unit, Institute of Child Health, 30 Guilford Street, London WC1N 1EH, U.K.

Eighth European Course in Tropical Epidemiology, from 20 August - 2 September, 1989. This intensive introductory course in epidemiology is intended for physicians and other persons with professional interest in health in tropical countries. The course will provide participants with basic skills in the epidemiological assessment of local health problems and service priorities, and in the planning of field studies. For more information write to: Dr. David Stevenson, European Course in Tropical Epidemiology, Department of International Community Health, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Pembroke Place, Liverpool L3 5QA. United Kingdom.

The University of Manchester, Department of Education, informs us that they have courses in Education for Primary Health Care (PHC). These courses deal with the theory and practice of PHC, stressing intersectoral collaboration and people's participation with the emphasis on professional - community partnership. It is possible to follow a Certificate, Diploma, Masters or Ph.D. programme. For further details write to: The administrator, Department of Education, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, United Kingdom.

MAP International in the U.S.A. offers the following workshops:

Community Health, from the 20 - 25 July, 1989 in Montreal, Canada. This workshop will study a variety of levels of health care, from clinic-centred, to community-oriented to community-based health care. For address see below.

Training Trainers, from 31 October - 5 November, 1989 at Jekyll Island, Georgia. This workshop is for those involved in training health workers, community development staff, or clinic and hospital staff. For address see below.

For more information write to: MAP International, Workshop Coordinator P.O. Box 50, Brunswick, GA. 31521-0050, U.S.A.

MAP's East Africa Office offers the following:

Community Balanced Development, from 21 - 26 May, 1989. This workshop is directed at all professionals of any discipline who have or expect to have a close responsibility for directing programmes which foster health-related development at the community level. For address see below.
USEFUL PUBLICATIONS

Cosecha de Esperanza (Harvest of Hope) is a two-volume collection of essays commissioned by the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) for their assembly in Brazil this year. Written by grass roots Christians, the essays describe the conditions and the hope in Latin America today. Available in Spanish only from: Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias Casilla 8522, Quito, Ecuador.

Mesoamerica, is a newsletter about news and analysis of Central America published monthly by the Institute for Central American Studies. For more information write to: Apdo. 300, 1002 San José, Costa Rica.

KGDT Card - Simple self-learning package for nutritive values and nutritional requirements. It can be used for understanding the nutritive requirements of adults and children aged 10 years and above and also to know comparative nutritive value of common vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods consumed in a family. This card is meant for professionals in Paediatrics, Community medicine, Public Health and Nutrition. For more information write to: Institute of Health and Nutrition, E-85, Ansari Nagar, New-Delhi - 110029, INDIA.

Agencies for Project Assistance, (Pierre Aubin, MSc and George Cotter, MM, 1989), 3rd ed., is an updated and expanded directory for overseas projects. Profiles 284 international agencies which support small-scale projects in developing nations. Offers a detailed 'how to' for project application and proposal writing. Available in English and Spanish for US$50.00. For more information write to: Mission Project Service, One Haven Plaza #25A, New York, NY 10009, U.S.A.

Central America Update is a newsletter initiated jointly by the Latin American Working Group (LAWG) and Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice. For more information write to: P.O. Box 2207, Station P, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2T2


Kalros Central America: A Challenge to the Churches of the World, is a major theological analysis and affirmation, prepared and signed by more than 100 Central American lay leaders, clergy, theologians, base communities in April, 1988. English language version distributed by: New York CIRCUS Publications, P.O. Box 681 Audubon Station, New York, NY 10032.

Letter to the Churches, analysis, commentary, testimonies from communities and churches in El Salvador, published twice a month at Mons. Oscar A. Romero Pastoral Center, Central American University, San Salvador. English language edition available from: P.O.Box 351, San Antonio, TX 78291.

CMC NEWS

Birgitta Rubenson, CMC Programme Secretary, learned in January that her husband has been elected Bishop in the Church of Sweden. Rev. J. Jonson, who is currently the Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs with the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva, will be officially inducted into his new position on 5 April 1989.

Meanwhile, Ms. Rubenson is expecting a child, to be born in April. Since the couple will be living in Strängnäs, Sweden, Ms. Rubenson has submitted her resignation to the CMC Staff.

Ms. Rubenson has made many contributions to CMC and it is with great regret that we see her go. We wish her fulfilment in her new life and joy with her baby.

CORRECTION

In CONTACT 107, page 5, second column, line 7, read the word "should" without parentheses.
CONTACT is the periodical bulletin of the Christian Medical Commission (CMC), a sub-unit of the World Council of Churches (WCC). It is published 6 times a year in 4 languages: English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. Selected issues are also being printed in the Kiswahili language in Kenya and Tanzania and in Arabic language in Egypt. Present circulation is in excess of 35,000.

Papers presented in CONTACT deal with varied aspects of the Christian community's involvement in health and seek to report topical, innovative and courageous approaches to the promotion of health and integrated development. A complete list of back issues is published in the 1st issue of each year in each language version. Articles may be freely reproduced providing acknowledgement is made to: CONTACT, the bi-monthly bulletin of the Christian Medical Commission of the World Council of Churches.


The average cost to produce and mail each copy of CONTACT is SF2.50 (US$1.50), which totals SF15.-(US$10.00) per year for 6 issues. Industrialized-country readers are strongly encouraged to subscribe to CONTACT to cover these costs. Please note that orders of back issues of CONTACT will be charged at the above rate.