

World Council of Churches
Education and Ecumenical Formation

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*Peter Mawindo, member of Zimbabwe's National wheelchair basketball team
and advisor to 8th Assembly of the WCC, Harare, Zimbabwe, 3-14 December 1998*



This quarterly journal aims to encourage sharing and cooperation among all who are working for the renewal of the churches through programmes of ministerial formation. All correspondence regarding MINISTERIAL FORMATION should be sent to the address below. Submission of relevant articles, reports and news is welcomed. Items in this journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the WCC and its programme on Education and Ecumenical Formation (formerly Programme on Theological Education).

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Cover photo: Peter Mawindo, member of Zimbabwe's National wheelchair basketball team and advisor to 8th Assembly of the WCC, Harare, Zimbabwe, 3-14 December 1998.

LETTER FROM STAFF

Dear friend and colleague,

We wish you many blessings in the Year 2001 as we begin the first decade of 21st century.

We begin this year by thanking God for sustaining us through a busy year full of many challenges and opportunities. We also want to thank you for your continues support for the work of ecumenical theological education and ministerial formation in various ways. We especially want to thank all those who contribute articles for the four issues we publish in a year. We welcome your comments and constructive ideas of how best ETE Office and its networks can improve our services.

In this issue we focus on concerns and needs expressed by people with disabilities. We look forward to being more inclusive and hope that our sisters and brothers who are involved in ministries with and for people with disabilities will in the future contribute more articles on variety of topics as covered in this journal.

In the Spirit of God who lives and moves within us, we pray for strength, courage and determination to labor in God's vineyard in regard to ecumenical theological education and ministry.

Françoise Faure

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***NOT AN OPTION:
MINISTRY WITH AND FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES***

Nyambura J. Njoroge

In August 2000, Samuel Kabue, the consultant for the World Council of Churches Programme on People with Disabilities, invited me to join a small group of sisters and brothers involved in developing Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN). Kabue was keen to see that Ecumenical Formation and Education Team and in a particular Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) Programme is informed about EDAN and that it is involved in creating critical awareness of the needs and concerns of people with disabilities in theological institutions. This small group was particularly concerned that women and men who are trained to work in churches, lay training centres, theological and ecumenical institutions are well prepared and equipped to address the pastoral, theological and ethical concerns that are voiced by people with disabilities. As one participant put it: “The problem is not that we have people who are deaf, mute and blind (and with other disabilities) among us, rather the churches and church-related institutions are usually deaf, mute and blind towards our concerns and needs.”

We observed that to a large extent, despite the talk about contextual and ecumenical theologies, these institutions are yet to be inclusive, sensitive and relevant to people with disabilities, their families and their care-givers (part-time or fulltime depending on circumstances) in the church and the society. Even when we ask who is missing at the ecumenical table, rarely do we remember that people with disabilities are not represented. During our conversation, we agreed that theological institutions and lay training centres must be challenged to address this important and urgent matter. These institutions have the duty and responsibility to prepare and equip women and men who are critically aware of the pastoral care needs of all people in the community. We noted with gratitude that some institutions as well as churches have begun to listen and look attentively at the needs and concerns of people with disabilities but much more needs to be done.

With this January Issue of *Ministerial Formation* we begin to create a forum of exploring and searching for ways of ensuring that theological institutions will be in the forefront of promoting and supporting the work of EDAN in concrete ways. We are also reminded that indeed ministry with and for people with disabilities is not an option but an integral part of the life and mission of the church. As a matter of fact, all Christians need to heed the call by people with disabilities to pay attention to their humanity and their well being. It is therefore necessary to enter into critical discussions on this area that has been mostly neglected in the patterns of ministerial formation in many parts of the world.

Often times when I discuss with theological administrators and educators the need to pay attention to all theological voices that have emerged (and continue to emerge) from the marginalized, neglected and excluded peoples in the last fifty years, the most common questions I get are:

- How can theological educators accommodate these voices within the ongoing traditional ways of offering theological education?
- Do we have to drop some courses in order to accommodate new ones?
- Do we add an extra year of theological education, especially taking into account that theological education is already a very expensive venture compared to some other disciplines?
- Who will teach in these new areas of concern since the current faculty is not equipped?
- How do we begin to teach such a controversial issue?

Yet, others have asserted emphatically that we must search for ways of providing a holistic theological education, which addresses the urgent and critical needs of today. For instance addressing the issue of racism in the United States of America, Peter J. Paris, African-American Professor of Christian Social Ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey, writes:

I contend that a major issue faces theological education in present-day America, the problem of racial injustice, which is evidenced primarily in the many inadequacies of theological education. Thus, in my view, neither blacks nor whites are being trained adequately for the demands of ministry in our day, *because the methods for training ministers have long been obsolete*. Business, medical, and legal education all face many similar problems. Like them, *theological education will need to launch some bold and innovative pedagogical approaches or choose to become anomalous*. Sociological, political, and economic forces continue to reshape institutions, urbanization processes, and human personality in ways undreamed of even a generation ago. *Churches of every race and class face a cultural environment that differs radically from that which gave rise to our theological pattern of education a century or more ago...*

For too long students in training for ministry have been mainly pursuing certification goals rather than actual training for ministry. This fact may be a major contributing factor in the high rate of burnout among young ministers. Hence, we are concerned about the *total educational process, which cannot be addressed merely by adding new courses to the curriculum. Rather, a radical change in the style and substance of theological education is required.*¹

Taken seriously, the concerns voiced by EDAN and such words from Paris should provoke us to identify patterns of exclusion and discrimination and the inadequacies of theological education and ministerial formation. We need to come together especially with those most affected to work out ways of addressing these concerns through dialogical and interactive processes, scrutinizing attitudes and practices that inform our theological institutions. We must be intentional, deliberate, strategic, courageous and determined in confronting whatever diminishes the effectiveness of church ministry. During our meeting, it was suggested that people with disabilities, especially those in EDAN, should approach theological institutions in their area to discuss how together with theological educators they can formulate ways of transforming the style and substance of theological curricula with regards to their needs and concerns. We were also encouraged to discover theological institutions that have already taken seriously the needs and concerns of people with disabilities so as to provide models and patterns that can be adopted by other institutions. It was also felt that it is necessary to create bibliographies of books, video and other materials that address this subject.

On the other hand, listening and paying critical attention to people with disabilities in our communities and including their pastoral, theological and ethical concerns should inevitably lead us to consider the causes of disabilities. It is not my intention in this introductory essay to delve into this issue, however, it is crucial to mention that some of the causes of disabilities require social and political action. I have in mind disabilities that occur due to all kinds of accidents and violence. For instance, we know that landmines have maimed many people. Road accidents are another area that leaves many people incapacitated. In other words, addressing concerns voiced by people with disabilities mean being critically engaged in the politics of the day. Theological educators and students should deliberately ask: What is going on in our communities and the world around us and how can theological institutions be agents of social transformation with regards to violence and other activities that result to unnecessary injuries and diseases that incapacitate people for life?

In the past, we have brought to the attention of our readers the fact that the World Council of Churches has called for an Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence, 2001-2010. Hopefully by engaging in the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV), we will challenge ourselves to face the reality that many of the people with disabilities in the world today have been victims of accidents and violence in one way or other. By critically engaging ourselves in this discussion should obviously compel us to look into how individuals as well as communities participate in perpetuating circumstances that bleed violence. Sometimes our own complacency and inactivity have contributed to conflicts that result to violence and even war. Other times, it is power struggles, greed and corruption that result to violence and accidents. Unfortunately churches and even theological institutions have not been spared from engaging in or condoning violence.²

I have briefly mentioned causes of disabilities and in particular accidents and violence, to remind ourselves that the call to take seriously concerns and needs of people with disabilities is not just an academic exercise. Rather these are concerns that should lead us to be accountable and responsible citizens in our day to day activities to help overcome some of the harsh realities that condemn many people to unnecessary suffering may they be physical, psychological and spiritual. As theological educators and students, we need to remember that we are charged with the responsibility of preparing and equipping God's people for ministry.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13, NIV)

People with disabilities are God's people and they too are called to be prepared for works of service. With the Spirit of humility and love let us open the doors of theological institutions to our sisters and brothers with disabilities as well as listening attentively to what they have to say in the body of Christ. If we listen attentively to God's people and take action to respond to their needs and concerns, many paradigms of providing holistic ecumenical theological education and ministerial formation will certainly emerge and so we need to come together and discern the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As I have argued elsewhere we need to articulate the Pentecost motif, i.e. the promise and ministry of the Holy Spirit for our time and social location to help us hear and understand the different voices that come from God's people in their struggle for dignity and fullness of life. As we begin a new decade and century, let us take action and engage in a process of critical analysis and evaluation on how best we can provide a life-giving ecumenical theological education and ministerial formation to many who have been neglected and excluded from the body of Christ.

¹ Peter J. Paris, "Comparing the Public Theologies of James H. Cone and Martin Luther King, Jr." in Dwight N. Hopkins, ed. *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's Black Theology and Black Power*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999, p. 229-230.) Emphasis mine.

² For more reflection on violence see *Echoes: Justice, Peace and Creation News*, No. 18/2000. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000.)

***THE PLACE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
IN THE MISSION AND CALLING OF THE CHURCH***

Samuel Kabue

Introduction

I was once invited to address Bible School final year students on the subject of people with disabilities in church and society. I began my address with a rhetoric question as to whether people with disabilities were worthy the effort in reaching them out with the Gospel. The answer was as expected “Yes”. What else could I have expected from these future pillars of the church just about to begin their theological career especially when I myself was a person with a disability? Their training was based on the premise the God is no respecter of persons. After all, I was told, even the people with disabilities are created in the image of God. This is a very easy concept at the academic level. As I continued my interaction with these students for the short time I was with them, I wondered whether they really understood who persons with disabilities are. As the students described their own experiences, it was clear that even to them, the reality on the ground was different.

They agreed that participation in spiritual, social and development life of the church by people with disabilities is certainly wanting but they were not sure what could be done about it. The rest of this paper explores the practice from a point of view of Kenya where I come from and I believe the situation is not much different elsewhere. I begin with a short explanation on who the people with disabilities are, after which I will give a historical background before going into specific experiences.

Who are the people with disabilities?

The terminology and definitions used to refer to the categories of the people considered in this discussion have been the subject of an on going debate among the academicians, health professionals, social workers and the disability movement at least in the last twenty or so years. I do not intend to dwell on that but suffice to mention that in the past, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has used the term “differently abled” which was meant to emphasize the fact that these people have capacities though in a different way. However, this terminology has now been discarded because it lacks international recognition and acceptability. The term used here – people with disabilities, is currently what has been approved and used by the World Council of Churches in the last three years. It is, however, subject to further discussions as more information on the subject come to light through the continuing debate at international level. Although it is widely used the world over, there are those opposed to this terminology arguing that disability is not a property of the individual but rather a social construction emerging from the interaction of the people involved and their environment.

According to this argument, the term “impairment” which refers to the loss or dysfunction of any anatomical or sensory organ is preferred as it is seen to describe the person in form of what makes him or her different from the others without having to refer to what he or she is seemingly able or not able to do. Thus, the people referred to in this paper are those within our churches and the society in general who have an impairment which is either physical, sensory or mental which makes it necessary to either require extra assistance and means to enable them to carry out functions which the society considers normal in the day to day life. They include among others the visually impaired, the hearing impaired, the physically impaired, and the intellectually impaired and in the recent years, other categories of people who may not

have an obvious impairment but have a condition that impacts on the individual's day to day life. The definition is even widening to include those in situations that result in societal discrimination for the mere fact that those involved are in one way or the other different from what is considered the norm. A case in point are people who are psychiatric users and those who are HIV positive though these are not as at now the subject of this paper.

Brief Background

The historical path towards the understanding, acceptance and integration of people with disabilities in church and society has been a long one. We still cannot say with certainty that much has as yet been achieved in regard to their spiritual and social emancipation. However, after virtually centuries of misunderstanding, discrimination and downright paternalistic care, a dim light through the dark tunnel has begun to bring about a sign of hope in form of the prevailing good will. Churches have begun to be sensitized to view people with disabilities not just as people who only need physical and material help but as full members of the human family who like all God's people also require spiritual care and nourishment.

Throughout history, disabilities have been commonly seen as acts of a vengeful God. In a world in which real or imagined sin abound, the emergence of a child with a disability in a family was regarded as a punishment for sin. This common social belief clearly manifests itself in the Jewish cultures as expressed in the Gospel according to Saint John 9:1-3. In this passage, Jesus was faced with a question from his disciples in connection with a man who was blind since birth; "teacher, who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind?" In his answer, Jesus exonerated both the blind man and his parents as we read in verse 3. "It is not that this man sinned, or his parents but that the works of God might be made manifest in him". This message is as yet to reach the majority of those concerned, their families and a great section of the church. It has also not been given enough impetus to sink into the thinking and theology of the church.

In Judeo-Christian culture, children with disabilities were at least permitted to live. The situation was worse in other cultures, infanticide was widely spread. Among the Greek City States like Athens and Sparta, the common practice was that everybody in the society had to train to be a soldier. To them, a healthy spirit deserved a healthy body. There was no room for weaklings and the people with disabilities were therefore rarely allowed to survive.

In the early days of human experience life on earth when he lived on hunting and gathering, there was no place for people with disabilities in the society. Life was based on survival for the fittest. When farming was discovered, there was surplus food to be shared and this is when welfare for people with disabilities begun. Subsequently, the extended largely agricultural families that were common until the Industrial Revolution raised a good number of people with disabilities. Others were taken into convents and monastic infirmaries where their bodily survival needs and care were met though with no reference to their spiritual needs. Obviously, some of the less fortunate ones were treated inhumanly and often abandoned in streets where they were objects of ridicule.

Church's Experience

Measured against the standards of the time, the church was a virtual pioneer in the care of people with disabilities. It has continued to play this role alongside the governments and other modern charities. However, there still remains a big question as to how the church has treated people with disabilities in

regard to spiritual care as compared to other needs. Too many assumptions have been made about people with disabilities spiritual state based on an attitude, which can be referred to as “a spread phenomenon”. This is characterized by the tendency to draw inferences about a person based on the loss of an obvious functional ability. For instance, the fact that a person does not either see, walk or hear leading to the assumption that; he is not capable of committing sin. Disability is in this case assumed to play down not only on one’s general health but also his/her natural emotions. Whereas a weak body, a feeble mind or a sensory disability is easily noticeable, this is not so with a weak spirit. Measures are usually attempted to compensate these other physical or sensory disabilities but the soul which might even be easier to put right is either forgotten or ignored all together. The fact that evangelists and church ministers will only see the physical needs of people with disabilities and will more often offer to pray for such deficiencies and will not even think of praying with the concerned is in itself a form of discrimination or prejudice. It may be happening as a result of ignorance but it is, nevertheless wrong. The emphasis on the physical dysfunction has often erroneously made people with disabilities feel that their state of being will cause them remission of sin. In the past, the lives of people with disabilities have been spent within conditions of regulated care, mistaken theology and misguided notion of charity. This has been characterized by “caging” them especially in their formative stage in segregated institutions for a long time, bringing about the idea that they are special and different from the rest of the society.

The result has been spiritual and social alienation of these people from the rest of the society. The evidence to this situation is the fact that up to the present time, very few churches are accessible to people with disabilities. Those that permit entry deny further accessibility. A fully accessible church should permit the people with disabilities access to the sanctuary so that they are able to participate in all aspects of the church activities. Fully accessible churches should have programmes for intellectually impaired, some sign language interpreters for the deaf, sitting that can permit wheelchair users to sit with their families and should also assign Sunday readings to blind readers who can read Braille and are willing to do so as a way of encouraging participation. It may be rightly argued that not all congregations can afford these facilities but at least the majority of churches should feel challenged about it.

The situation up to now be that pastors and evangelists do not see the people with disabilities because they do not go to the churches and congregational meetings. The reason why they do not go to these places is either because they cannot get in or cannot participate if they get there. I am reminded of a hearing impaired friend who approached a pastor after a church service and said: “Pastor, I understood nothing of what you said”. The pastor retorted, “Do not worry, God knows that you are deaf”. My friend left the church very disappointed as he expected a better solution to this problem but which he realized that he could not get. The deaf are not an exception when the Bible says in Roman 10:13-15: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher”.

For reasons like the example of my friend above and many others, the people with disabilities stay away from the church and pastors think that they do not have disabled people in their parishes. It is an established fact that 10% of the population within a catchment area of any parish is made up of people with disabilities of one type or the other. Very often their families do not go to church either. The preparation for eternal life in which our bodily infirmities and other forms of suffering shall be no more calls for opening of doors for all souls by reaching them with the word of God. It does not matter the cost at which this has to be done. Faith has to be created in the hearts of people irrespective of their bodily infirmities since these have no relevance to eternal life. The Bible says again in Romans 10:17, “So then, faith cometh by hearing and preaching the word of God”. The church therefore has a duty to reach the people with

disabilities as well as their entire families lest their souls should be lost on account of having not been reached with the gospel.

It has to be borne in mind that it is not just in the realm of spiritual needs that the people with disabilities have received discouragingly separate treatment. They have also not been involved in other social and development activities within the church and the community in general. The spiritual negligence is only a part of this trend. The church should see itself as the most authentic institution to champion the course of forging an equal partnership with the persons with disabilities. It is the most legitimate door to participation of people with disabilities in spiritual, social and development activities in the community. Equal partnership has to be justified by the fact that people with disabilities are not an exception in the society. Rather they are the rule as they have always been. Jesus defined his mission on earth by reference to the people with disabilities. When asked by John's disciples if he was the Messiah, he said "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear and the dead are raised to life and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Mt. 11:4-5). This inclusion of all people by Jesus in his work is a sign of his special message to restore the human condition to wholeness. The church is expected to follow this example and to do all that is within its means, not as an option but as a commission by Jesus Christ.

People with disabilities have been misunderstood, overlooked and sometimes discriminated for too long and thus to restore their confidence and trust will require very careful approach. Pastors and evangelists will not only need to dig deep into the word of God to understand God's will and promise to them but also to socially understand their feelings, aspirations and specific spiritual needs. Three main aspects that have so far worked negatively are: paternalistic and patronizing attitudes, exclusion from participation and an unjustified emphasis on physical healing. These need to be elaborated a little.

P/Maternalistic and P/Matronizing Attitude

Quite often, pastors and evangelists are heard eulogizing people with disabilities at church functions, telling other individuals or sometimes the whole congregation how cheerful the particular person is in spite of his or her disability. Sometimes there may not even be reasonable cause for such eulogy. The utterances only serve to magnify the presence of the disability ignoring other attributes of the person's characteristics. What the people with disabilities want is for the pastor to let them be human, they want him/her not just to choose such single unique attributes to endow them with a special place, rather, they would be much happier if the pastors were to help the parishioners to get over their discomfort with people disabilities and cut off their exclusion. Closely related to this problem is the general assumption that disabled people are the same in their social behavior, emotional maturity and sometimes even believes. Disability has very little if at all to do with individual's cognitive or affective processes. People with disabilities are therefore very different in personality from each other and there should not be any reason to believe that one is religious just because you know another one that is religious. There should equally be no reason to take it that one is a Christian because he or she is among a congregation unless there is a personal confession to that effect. This is a tendency that has at times made the disabled people complaisant about their state of being. Burdens of sins are not physical or sensory and cannot therefore be eliminated or even made less by physical or sensory disability. There should be no exception when the Lord says, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I shall give you rest" (Mt.11:28).

Exclusion from Participation

Church ministers, pastors and evangelists want to fulfil the Lord's great commission "Go ye therefore and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost"

(Mt. 28:19). There is however, more often than not an inadvertent omission of adequately reaching and teaching the majority of the world's 10% population which is disabled. There are various reasons for this state of affairs. Some of these can be identified as emanating from the human affective progress. They include among others pity, fear and uneasiness. How do these interplay with our thinking? In general sense, pity has the idea of desperation and contempt. The person being pitied usually rejects it. In our case, it occurs when the pastors and evangelists equate people with disabilities with either general inferiority or general inability of the person. There is often evidence insinuations where these teachers of the word of God justify their failure to extend their invitation to the people with disabilities to evangelical or church gathering on the assumption that they cannot, or will find it difficult to get to the places of gathering which is not always the case. In a family situation, the pastor will want to pray "for" the people with disabilities at home while s/he invites the rest of the family members to the gatherings. The negative aspect of pity becomes apparent when the teachers of the word find themselves so insecure as to seek satisfaction by expressing feeling of being superior, all knowing and all caring.

Fear manifests itself in different ways. For instance, disabilities are seen as works of the devil and the presence of people with disabilities within the congregation is seen to reflect the inability of that church to combat the devil. One then finds her/him in an approach of avoidance. S/he wants to be seen to invite everybody in the church, as closing the doors to anyone may not be generally acceptable. Yet, the pastor would like to avoid any sign that would manifest spiritual weakness such as the evidence of the works of the devil as might be construed through the presence of people with infirmities in the congregation. The avoidance aspect, which is usually hidden from the conscious, is fought indirectly in various ways. This may sometimes be expressed by desperately invoking healing powers and designating as faithless those on who so desired outcome is not seen to be forth coming. Another dimension of fear is that of shying away from responsibility under the assumption or the perception that limitations of disability may make the anticipated relationship appear to carry with it an overwhelming burden which the church maybe unwilling or unable to assume.

Uneasiness mainly emanates from the failure in the first place to have contact with the people with disabilities. The basis of uneasiness is usually the uncertainty as to how to treat and to behave with a disabled person. Church ministers and others are often unable to act naturally with people with disabilities because of their own complex about disabilities, their lack of understanding, and because their attention gets dominated with the idea of the presence of disability and the imagined limitations it imposes on that person. They remain in the awkward position of wanting to help but being reluctant to ask the concerned person lest they are thought ignorant. It will be necessary to overcome these shortcomings in order to establish full understanding, fellowship and participation of people with disabilities in our churches.

Emphasis on Physical Healing

The Bible says: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39). Presence or absence of physical healing is no exception to these words of Paul, people with disabilities are no less created in the image of God and the state of their physical bodies does not in any way make them less deserving in terms of grace, honor and spiritual nourishment. It is all right if their physical suffering can be healed while they are yet on earth but this should not be made the principle purpose for presenting them before God. A good number of people with disabilities reject the church on the basis of embarrassment by preachers who assume that whenever a person with a disability appears in a congregational gathering, he or she is seeking physical healing. In many charismatic meetings people with disabilities will even be

literally forced in front for prayers and will be designated faithless when such prayers do not take effect. This attitude downplays the people with disabilities and their spiritual needs. The person is rarely seen as being in need of listening to the word of God and is merely used to demonstrate individual preacher's power of prayers. We need not in this respect lose sight of Paul's experience when he testified in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me lest I should be exalted above measure (v8). For this thing I sought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me. (v9) and he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

When the Lord in Jeremiah 29:11 says "I alone knows the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for" the people with disabilities are not excluded. God cares for them in their present state as God has promised, "And I will bring the blind by the way that they knew not: I will lead them in the paths that they have not known! I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them and not forget them" (Isaiah 42:16). The most important thing to realize is that the timing is the Lord's but the pastors and evangelists have the duty to bring this message to people with disabilities. In chapter 35 of the same book of Isaiah verses 5-6, God promises to remember people with disabilities in God's own time suggesting that in the present or for the time being, God will give them strength to endure: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart and the tongue of the dumb sing."

It is clear that God has in God's own ways provided means through which the Gospel shall reach the people with disabilities. They are pertinent partners in the journey and the church has no option other than to accept their participation and to offer opportunities for it. It is the duty of those responsible of the expansion of the kingdom through propagation of the gospel and other church development work to ensure that they are reached as they have to answer if they do not get to the uttermost part of the earth including the often forgotten people with disabilities. We can no longer ask the question: how shall they hear because the Lord has provided the answer.

MINISTERIAL FORMATION AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Arne Fritzson

Ministerial formation and issues concerning people with disabilities, how are they related? Is a pastoral seminary obliged in any respect to highlight the situation concerning people with disabilities? I think they are and let me mention a couple of reasons why.

People with disabilities are a marginalized group around the world. They are discriminated against in societies and churches. Their human rights and their dignity are not respected. This should not be acceptable to the churches as the people of God. As the churches hear God's calling, that they all may be one, every form of discrimination should be something unacceptable to the churches, not in the churches and not in the societies around the churches. On the contrary the churches should be an example for the societies of a different way of fellowship, a new way of being together, as God's people. But sadly this is seldom the case. Instead of hearing God's calling to be a reflection of the values of the kingdom to come, God's kingdom, the churches often are reflecting the values of the surrounding societies.

This call for a conversion within the churches highlights the need for the churches to look at themselves and put some serious, self-critical and disturbing questions. How are we responding to God's calling that they all may be one in relations to people with disabilities? Are our communities fully including people with disabilities? Are they discriminated in any sense? Are their gifts and contributions to the communities honored? In what way do we have to change our way of being together in order to be able to say that people with disabilities are not discriminated in the churches and they are capable of participating fully on their conditions in the lives of the churches?

In order to answer these questions, people in different ministerial responsibilities in the churches need to spearhead the process where the churches' awareness of the plight of people with disabilities in their communities is raised and the process to change those conditions should start.

The first thing people in different ministerial responsibilities in the churches need to do, and thus also people training to become ministers, is to ask themselves who are the people with disabilities? What are their needs? In what way can they contribute to the churches' mission?

In December 1993, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a document called "The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities on Persons with Disabilities". This document is interesting in many respects, because it gives a comprehensive foundation for the understanding of the disability issue and guidelines for a policy concerning this matter. The Standard Rules deal with almost every aspect of human life stating the rights for disabled people in different areas. The Standard Rules are directed towards the states, but also they can challenge the churches.

A preamble directed to the states of the world recalls several conventions earlier adopted by the United Nations, which is a way of underlining the fact that all the rights stated in them, such as the human rights, the rights of the children, etc., also concern persons with disabilities. However the Standard Rules only make explicit what is implicit in these earlier conventions. The reason why the Standard Rules did not get the status as a convention was that there should not be a need for a specific convention on the rights for persons with disabilities. All the earlier conventions ought to be enough.

In the introduction to the Standard Rules, there is a distinction between the term disability and handicap. It says: The term “disability” summarizes a great number of different functional limitations occurring in any population in any country of the world. Physical, intellectual or sensor-impairment, medical conditions or mental illnesses may disable people. Such impairments, conditions or illnesses may be permanent or transitory in nature. The term “handicap” means the loss or limitations of opportunities to take part in the life of the community on equal level with others. It describes the encounter between the person with a disability and the environment. The purpose of this term is to emphasize the focus on the shortcomings in the environment and in many organized activities in the society, for example, information, communication, and education, which prevent persons with disabilities from participating on equal terms.

The term “encounter” is important in this text. “Handicap” is not a category that is connected to a particular person that has a disability, but something that appears when people meet each other. That means that “handicap” is a relative term and does not indicate a permanent condition. This is important because this means that when a person with a disability encounters his or her environment it is possible to change the conditions for that encounter and then change takes away the handicap. A person with a disability does not necessarily have to have a handicap.

So the churches can ask themselves in which respect are our communities’ environment the cause for people with disabilities to become people that have different forms of handicaps. How are we to change our way of being together in order to change that, so people with disabilities can feel that they do not get a handicap when they come to our churches? This is a question about accessibility. Here I want to use this term in its broadest sense. That means that accessibility here means that an environment is accessible when it is open for people with disabilities in every possible respect.

In order to explore this concept of accessibility, let me talk about four different dimensions of accessibility. This is a model, and as every model it is a simplification of reality in order to lift up certain aspects and put the focus on them. I will talk about physical, social, ethical and spiritual dimensions of accessibility for people with disability.

Often accessibility in this respect is seen as a purely physical concept. Accessibility for people with disabilities equals physical accessibility. And for some it is limited to people who use wheelchairs.

Accessibility is a question about ramps, lifts, toilets, etc. These are all very important issues but the questions concerning people with disabilities’ physical access are much more. It concerns hearing aids for the persons with hearing impairment, the question of lightning for the persons who are visually impaired. We need to look at the way our written material is formed. Can everybody read our information? Do we need information in bold printing or in Braille? This is just a few examples how we need to look at our churches’ physical environment in order to see how accessible they are. It is not possible to give a complete list here.

But we need to take another step. To see the accessibility of our social environment we need to ask ourselves how we as individuals and communities encounter people with disabilities. For a long time and, I am sad to say, still in many parts of the world, disabilities is something that people are ashamed of. This is something that should be kept out of sight, something that many people do not want to hear of. Disabilities are stigmatized in different respects. That means that many persons are not used to encounter people with disabilities and when they do feel a certain uneasiness, as they are not acquainted with the situation. And this is nothing that we should moralize over. People do have the right to feel uncomfortable

in new situations. We all have the right to be beginners. But this feeling of uneasiness is a problem that we need to look at with a clear mind and tackle it in an adequate manner.

We need to remember that it is not only people encountering people with disability that feel this uneasiness but it is also felt by the people with disabilities themselves and their relatives. This can become a major problem that can in the end lead people with disabilities to choose not to go to certain gatherings, for instance, church gatherings. This is why the question of the social environment is a major concern on how accessible the churches are for people with disabilities. How can we as churches deal with this problem? As mentioned earlier being angry and moralizing attitude does not help anyone. We need to help people acknowledge their own uneasiness and discomfort when encountering people with disabilities. We need to learn how their attitudes need to change in order to encounter people with disabilities in a more open way. To create places where people with and without disabilities can encounter one another in a relaxed manner can be a way to tackle this problem. In such meetings it is good to let people with disabilities share their experiences, their struggle, their joy and their hopes in order to make other people understand that we all have much in common.

The third dimension of environment that we need to look at in order to make it accessible for people with disabilities is the ethical dimension. We need to ask ourselves how we understand human life, what makes human life valuable. People with disabilities make different experiences of human life. In order to meet people with disabilities on an equal base we need to acknowledge this and see the experiences people with disabilities make in life as valuable experiences for our common understanding of what human life is all about. As long as we see experiences of a life with disability as some sad experience that has the character of an exemption, of some thing that should not be there if everything was as it ought to be, then we can never encounter people with disabilities in fully equal manner. This means that our understanding of what a disability is have consequences for our understanding of human life. This challenges much our traditional ways of encountering persons with disabilities within the churches. In the churches, we have the need to be good, to do good deeds. People with disabilities are a possible target to be treated as objects for such a need, but with that attitude we cannot encounter each other as equals.

But if we work thoroughly with the ethical dimension we will see that this changes our understandings of what human life is. With a new understanding of human life we get a new understanding of God, because our understanding of human life is always related to our image of God. And that brings us to our fourth dimension of accessibility, the spiritual or the theological dimension.

We need to explore how a process where we change our way of being together in the churches in order to create environment where people with disabilities do not have to experience a handicap. Such a process can change our understanding of the church, of ourselves as the people of God and eventually of Godself. This will have consequences for our way of being together in worship, our way of interpreting the scriptures, and our way of seeing each other as gifts from God to the whole community. First we need to ask ourselves how we from a theological perspective, understand injuries, sickness, disabilities and handicap. For instance, how do we preach or educate in Bible studies about stories on the signs that Jesus did where people experienced healing. How should we as communities open to the special experiences made by people who live with a disability? How can we talk about those texts in such a way that does not exclude them and their experiences?

Let me highlight four scripture passages, all from Paul's letters to the Corinthians that can help us to see how we in the New Testament can find inspiration for an inclusive way of being together in the churches.

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7)

“The parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable.” (1 Corinthians 12:22)

“My power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

“For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we shall live with him by the power of God.” (2 Corinthians 13:4)

The question of weakness and how the meaning of weakness is changed by the transforming power of God’s loving presence is an inspiration to challenge structures where there is any form of discrimination towards any group. It gives us a vision of a new way of being together in the churches as the people of God with a common vocation. How would a community be where the manifestation of the Spirit is in each one which is acknowledged? Which new qualities of life would we see if we really took the words seriously about the parts of the body that seems to be weaker are indispensable? How would we experience the power of God that is made perfect in weakness and was power working in Christ that took him from the cross to the open grave on Easter morning?

These are the four dimensions of accessibility that we need to deal with in order to look at our churches and their way of being environments for people with disabilities. The concept of dimensions is important because it helps us to remember that the four dimensions are not separate but closely related issues. For instance, if a room for worship is not accessible for persons that use wheelchair then this says something about the social, ethical and spiritual life of the community that meets in that room for worship. An environment that is not accessible is consciously or not a theological statement because it bears witness of how the community interprets itself, its faith and God.

This means that the leadership in our churches have a big responsibility in starting and engaging in a transforming process that makes our church communities accessible in the broadest sense of that word. And with that comes the responsibility for seminars for all that are working and training for ministry to highlight these concerns and to ask us how our specific areas relate to the issues concerning people with disabilities?

How do we train persons that our going into ministry to interpret and talk about the Bible in an inclusive way? How should we form our systematic theology, dogmatics and ethics, in a way that includes the experience of people with disabilities? In what way do we have to change our teaching in liturgy, homiletics and pastoral counseling in order to prepare persons training for ministry to meet people with disabilities. The issues concerning people with disabilities challenge every aspect of human life and the life and mission of the churches and this should be reflected in ecumenical theological education and ministerial formation in churches around the world.

COULD A BLIND PERSON HAVE BEEN A DISCIPLE OF JESUS?

John Hull

As a blind person myself, I have often asked this question. All the actual disciples were sighted people. Of course, there must have been many women who have wondered whether Jesus might have called a woman to be amongst the twelve, and it is true that they were all men. However, there were women amongst his closest followers, even if not amongst the inner group, but when it comes to blind disciples, it seems clear there was a special reason why no blind person could possibly become one of his followers. Jesus would have restored the sight of the blind disciple, and then the new follower would no longer be blind. If there had been a blind disciple, it would have created huge embarrassment amongst the disciples, and people would have asked, as they asked concerning the death of Lazarus, ‘Could not this man, who opened the eyes of so many, have restored the sight of this disciple of his?’

The fact is that every time blind persons are mentioned in the gospels, they are described as being outside the followers of Jesus, and it is not until their sight is granted that they become followers. The outstanding case is blind Bartimaeus. He is described as a blind beggar, sitting beside the roadside, who heard that Jesus and his disciples were about to pass by. The climax of the story says that ‘His sight was restored, and he followed Jesus in the way.’

The blind person in the gospels is the symbol of the unbeliever, and the opening of the eyes is symbolic of the granting of faith. Blindness represents sin and unbelief; sight represents faith and discipleship. Indeed, many modern commentators say that we must not interpret these miracles of the restoration of sight as nature miracles, or as miracles of healing, but see them as parables or Christian sermons, in which conversion is described.

When we come to the famous story in Mark about the blind man who was healed in two stages, first seeing people ‘like trees walking’ and after the second healing touch, seeing ‘all things clearly’ as a comment on the history of the faith of the church. At first, in the days of his earthly ministry, the disciples only had a sort of half faith. They could not see Jesus clearly, that is, they did not have a clear understanding of his person and mission. It was only after the coming of the Holy Spirit that they had a clear faith, and the old blindness finally passed away. Understood in this way, the Gospel of Mark is the story of those days of semi-sight, when faith in Jesus as the Christ was only partly developed.

Whatever theological motives may be expressed in these stories, whether they were literal healing miracles or allegories of the development of faith, it leaves blind people today in much the same position. They are in the dark, from a Christian point of view, and since they could not become disciples of Jesus then, how do they stand today?

The truth is that this symbolic use of blindness as indicating a lack of faith still hangs over the church today. We have it not only in the gospels, and if it comes to that, in the rest of the Bible, but in our hymn books.

*Lord, I was blind, I could not see
The radiant beauty of thy face...*

If the hymn said ‘My eyes were closed, I could not see...’ there would be no problem, but as long as we go on singing about blindness as suggesting lack of faith, we place a burden upon people who are literally

blind. This means that when a Christian today loses his or her sight, in addition to the crisis of loss of sight, there is an additional problem. All one's life as a Christian one has been soaked in the symbolism of blindness as sin. Now I am blind myself, so am I therefore plunged into sin? To this must be added that pressure which is often placed upon blind Christians that they should accept miraculous healing, and if that does not happen, or if they refuse to go forward, they are somehow confirmed in their sinfulness. In many a literal-minded congregation, a blind Christian is a puzzle, a cause of offence.

Where does all this leave us? It is clear that the Bible is not a politically correct document. It was women theologians who first drew attention to this, but now disabled people are joining in. Until this is realised, it will not be possible for the church to offer equal opportunities and self-esteem to disabled people. It has become common to pour scorn upon political correctness, but that the people who are slandered and marginalized by the failure to use the language of liberty do not share scorn.

Does it matter that the Bible is not a politically correct document? Not really, for the Bible was to some extent incarnated into its own times and into the social assumptions of those who wrote it. However, within the pages of the Bible we also find a message of redemption and hope for all human beings. The implications of that message of deliverance which were extended to slaves in the early nineteenth century in spite of the fact that the Bible condones slavery, must be extended to disabled people in spite of the fact that the Bible is harsh on them. In that way, we must allow the Bible to release us from the Bible, and to fulfil its message of fullness of life for all.



People with disabilities in Vietnam

IN SEARCH OF AN EFFECTIVE MINISTRY TO THE BLIND

Noel O. Fernandez

Introduction

Every group of human beings requires special attention in their search for the great values of Christian faith; that is why the blind and visually disabled deserve special attention to their spiritual needs.

Pastoral ministry, as we understand it, means expressing the faith in ways that are appropriate to the life needs of human beings; it is an absolutely necessary effort by the whole church to achieve knowledge and fulfilment of men and women in their whole life with the important and necessary help of faith in Jesus Christ.

In recent times, all over the world, there is work being done on how to bring the faith into the path of human activities and express it in ways that are appropriate to the existential realities of men and women. It seems to us that pastoral work with the blind and visually disabled requires very specific training because of the particular characteristics of this group and because faith is a basic, essential instrument for the human fulfilment for this important minority in our churches. Certain conditions make this pastoral work more difficult and delicate. On the one hand, the intuitive, acute pity the blind cause in the majority of the population; on the other, overprotection by relatives and friends who have the most valued of all senses, sight, as well as the other negative attitude to the blind present among us: overestimation. This is sometimes the most damaging. A blind person who walks without tripping or runs fast, who reads easily, recognizes relatives and friends by their step or their voice demonstrates skills acquired with the use of their remaining senses and a great capacity for concentration. These skills are not reason for praise, but natural skills that have had to be developed; extolling them may cause serious personality disturbances. I will discuss this ministry not as a specialist, but as an observer and by personal experience. I am open to criticism, suggestion and debate, in the constant search to advance this work, which must have repercussions on the evangelical and evangelizing work of the Christian church among us.

Characteristics of the Blind

a) Psychological

Blind people, like anyone else, are a product of the relations that they maintain with their milieu. Because this is a predominant factor in the development of a blind person's psychological characteristics, we should begin by analysing the surroundings in which the visually disabled develop. Recognizing and analysing the milieu will help us to understand the main psychological traits of a blind brother or sister. A blind person who is isolated because s/he has been abandoned by family or society will never be able to respond in the same way as the one living in a family that is concerned about his or her basic needs. Let us not forget that human beings are eminently social beings and need other men and women to be fulfilled. Specifically, we think that certain social conditions facilitate the psychological development of the blind, as follows:

Love

As Saint Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians, love is everything. In fact, any ministry relating to the blind and their search for human fulfilment must be founded in love. This must be understood in both directions: receiving and giving love. Obviously, expressing love to the blind is essential because this

shows that they are not belittled or not respected because of their disability, but are part of a loving world. Care must be taken NEVER to confuse love with pity. Even the least intelligent blind person detects immediately, even if by the tone of voice, the feelings of those who approach him.

Work

This is a very important factor. Work is a gift from God to the human race. With it we achieve our highest ideals. A blind person who is able to enter the labor market and create goods for consumption by others with his or her own hands feels useful; at no time is s/he considered a problem or a burden to others.

Communication

Isolation individualizes people and paralyzes action. The blind are very communicative beings for whom communication is important psychologically. The history of communication between human beings is as old as the biblical description of the first couple in the Garden of Eden. Even when the blind join the work force, communication will not be fully achieved if certain factors which bring it about are not understood, especially the need to listen carefully to the blind, who use their voices much more than other people. When communicating with the blind, care must be taken to use sound and never gestures or mimicry. Incommunication among the blind causes:

- Little desire to speak;
- Listening more than speaking;
- Personality disturbances;
- Indecision.

We must struggle to combat isolation, both that is imposed on the blind by society and that which arises from the blind themselves, as they respond to the demands of the milieu in which they have developed. Wisdom is needed to distinguish between what the blind must do on their own and what they must do along with other human beings. In Europe there is a growing movement to include the blind in all spheres of daily life, and a trend towards closing special schools for the blind, on the premise that the world in which they will develop in adult life is not a world of the blind with whom they went to special primary school.

Certain attitudes when relating to the blind can create defense mechanisms and serious personality disorders. They are:

- Insincerity;
- Defensiveness;
- Unscrupulousness.

These three negative factors are frequently present in relationships with the blind, whether by ignorance or ill intention. The blind often feel incensed when they encounter them and sometimes their reactions are violent. The blind are extremely sensitive and can easily understand the intentions underlying the way we are treated.

Some psychological characteristics of those who are born blind are not present in equal degree among those who became blind as adults. Among these characteristics are:

- Suspiciousness;
- Aggressiveness;
- Excessive self-regard.

From this, one can infer that children born blind should be given special treatment that will allow them to experience the love that generates confidence; fairness in relationships to preclude aggressiveness; and as far as possible, equality of treatment at home without excessive praise of their abilities.

The psychological trait most characteristic of the blind deserves a separate paragraph. I am referring to their extreme sensitivity, most apparent in those who were born sightless. The blind can recognize the intentions of words much more easily than a sighted person, they can sense a person's mood or state of mind, and any insincerity in attitudes, amongst other things. The blind are often subject to irritability and depressive neurosis, both strongly linked to their sensitivity. This should be taken into account in the ministry to these men and women.

b) Spiritual

Though there may be and indeed there are many blind people who do not accept the reality of God, the situation of most – with their potential for inner life and their social relations – brings them closer to acknowledge of the Truth.

The blind seek refuge in the transcendent, even when they cannot identify it with the God of the Bible. They generally have little confidence in human beings, but have a strong trust in the supernatural. Some notable characteristics of the majority of the blind are:

- Credulity;
- Loyalty to the faith;
- Development of an intimate relationship to God;
- Confidence in divine power.

“Religiosity” may be a negative factor in the spiritual life of blind people, but it is a natural tendency among us that can only be counteracted through knowledge and maturity in relation to faith. The “religiosity” of the blind is strongly linked to the isolation that we tend to suffer when the social conditions in which we live and develop are not what they should be. The church should be alert to this.

An Effective Ministry

Christian faith should be for the blind what it is for all human beings:

- Liberating action;
- Fulfilment;
- Source of hope.

The first means experiencing faith as the transforming agent of human existence and of the blind person's life. Faith can put an end to the negative factors that inhibit and are a deadweight in the blind's attitude to life. In the second place, self-fulfilment and understanding of others will be found in a real and living faith that makes it possible to enjoy ABUNDANT LIFE as the Lord proclaims in John 10: 10. Ministry to the blind should take into account the following needs:

- Understanding;
- Solidarity;
- Fulfilment;
- Communication.

The most appropriate resource material for a ministry to the blind is undoubtedly the Bible. Efforts should be made to include the blind in systematic study of the Bible, first of all teaching braille and then providing Bibles or parts of the Bible in braille. Audio cassettes of Bible readings are also useful. Sunday or Sabbath school teachers should provide the lesson reading in advance to the sightless in their classes, so that they can read it or listen to it before the weekly study meeting. Braille readers should be used in church meetings from time to time, just like others. Care should be taken for this to be part of a routine and not merely showing off. Excessive praise of the quality of the reading can be harmful, and the subject should be treated naturally.

One of the difficulties for blind people is following the rites of liturgical churches. None of them has published the order of worship in braille and the sightless are mere bystanders in these congregations. As through practice blind people have very good memories, pastors and liturgists should help them memorize the parts of the worship service that demand reading, if they have not yet been put into braille. Both in these congregations and in those with free and open rites, there is the problem of hymns. Since they cannot follow the singing in the hymnbooks, the sightless should receive a copy in braille of the hymns to be sung, so that they can learn them by heart and participate fully in the worship.

One of the blind's many difficult moments during worship is the offertory. The ushers should take into account their inability to see the offering plate. They should call their attention to the plate by guiding the blind's hands to it or whispering that it is time for the offering or simply touching their shoulders, as long as this is a previously agreed-upon signal. The same applies to the communion service. Whatever the rite or the way of giving communion or eucharist, the blind and those officiating should be trained so that the sightless can participate fully, without worrying about spoiling the ceremony. It is important that all this should be done naturally, for the blind do not like to seem ridiculous - no one likes to make mistakes. The passing of the peace in worship services is a very unpleasant moment for people who do not see, if their limitations are not taken into consideration. To shake hands without identifying oneself is not an act of peace or friendship, and the noise and the rush of greetings at the end of worship disturb the blind, who gradually begin to avoid these moments and cut themselves off from a very effective and positive social relationship. A sighted person should stay by their side in their predicament and identify the people who approach, who should take their hand and greet them without expecting them to "guess" that a hand has been extended.

An appropriate ministry must work to ensure that the blind are not mere spectators during worship, but are actively involved. This will help to link the blind to life itself and not contribute to their isolation. The church's programme of mission and evangelism should take these brothers and sisters into account and involve them according to their capacity and vocation. Their presence on commissions and teams, in departments or committees, will contribute to their self-fulfilment and make them feel a part of the local church.

On the other hand, appropriate pastoral care includes self-understanding. The pastoral worker should help the blind to perceive their immense potential and link them to the work of the missionary community. All churches should participate in training sessions on "how to help the blind." Leaflets and materials are available on how to relate to the sightless. A congregation prepared for these needs will make the lives of the blind much happier, especially in their relationship to the church.

A ministry appropriate to the situation of the blind should always take into account our limitations, so that in our lives of faith we find fulfilment, solace and understanding; this is not always the case among non-believers. Let it be clear that faith should never be understood as a palliative for a limitation, but as

an agent of transformation and force for life for this group of people. Faith does not bring resignation but understanding, and an appropriate ministry to the blind will help them in that way.

The liberating power of the Gospel should become effective among the blind who do not know Jesus Christ, so that the negative personality traits that affect their character are transformed, such as:

- Suspiciousness;
- Over-sensitivity;
- Excessive self-regard;
- Incommunication;
- Individualism.

Christian faith works against these negative traits and, with tact and patience, a ministry to the blind can be a liberating and evangelizing agent for the blind. We cannot neglect the particularities of this group of believers.

The National Churches and the Regional Associations of local congregations cannot develop an effective programme that will meet the specific needs of the blind on their own, so ecumenical work is valuable as problems and solutions can be worked on interdenominationally. Among possible recommendations for interdenominational pastoral work with the blind, we note:

- Hold meetings, seminars, workshops and camps;
- Hold seminars for pastors and pastoral agents on correct treatment of the blind;
- Produce or purchase aids such as canes, braille typewriters and paper, materials published in braille, speaking clocks, etc;
- Plan and maintain relations with the National Association of the Blind.

We do not think that with this paper we have touched on everything necessary in this potentially vast field, but we see this as a start in the ongoing search for new forms and methods.

EN LA BUSQUEDA DE UNA PASTORAL EFICAZ PARA CIEGOS

Noel O. Fernandez

Introduccion.

Cada conjunto de seres humanos del universo requiere una atención específica en su búsqueda de los grandes valores de la fe cristiana, es por ello que los ciegos y discapacitados del sentido de la vista son acreedores también de una atención definida de sus necesidades espirituales.

Pastoral, tal y como la entendemos nosotros, es decir, una adecuación de la fe a las necesidades vivenciales de los seres humanos; puede ser y de hecho es una labor imprescindible de toda la Iglesia por lograr el conocimiento y las realizaciones del hombre y la mujer en su vida íntegra con el auxilio siempre importante y necesario, de la fe en Jesucristo.

En los últimos tiempos en todas partes del mundo hay un trabajo a profundidad en lo que a poner la fe en camino de las realizaciones humanas, en adecuar la fe a las realidades existenciales de todos los hombres y las mujeres se refiere.

A nosotros nos ha parecido que el trabajo pastoral con los ciegos y disminuidos visuales requiere de cierto adiestramiento y capacitación muy específico por poseer este grupo características muy particulares y por ser la fe un instrumental básico, más bien imprescindible, para la plena realización humana de éste importante, aunque no mayoritario sector de nuestras Iglesias.

Hay determinadas condiciones que hacen este trabajo pastoral más complicado y delicado. Por una parte la intuitiva, pero lacerante, lástima que a la mayor parte de la población causan los ciegos; del otro lado la sobreprotección que familiares y amistades suelen brindar a los que no tienen el máspreciado de los sentidos, la vista, sin dejar de señalar otro factor negativo presente entre nosotros en la atención a los ciegos, la sobrevaloración. Esto último a veces más dañino que los aspectos anteriores. Un ciego que camine sin tropiezos o que corra con presteza, que lea con agilidad, que pueda conocer por la voz o los pasos a familiares y amigos y que demuestre otras habilidades adquiridas con el uso de sus restantes sentidos y su amplio poder de concentración no son factores de encomio, sino habilidades naturales que se desarrollan imperativamente y que en su ensalzamiento pueden crear trastornos serios de personalidad. Sin ser especialista, simplemente observador y un poco por la experiencia propia, pretendo adentrarme en esta pastoral. Estoy abierto a la crítica, a las sugerencias, al debate, siempre en la búsqueda de una profundización de este quehacer que ha de redundar en la labor evangélica y evangelizadora de la Iglesia Cristiana entre nosotros.

Características Del Ciego.

a) Sicológicas

El ciego, como el resto de los seres humanos, es un producto básico de las relaciones que logre establecer con su medio, de allí que como factor predominante en el análisis de las características sicológicas del mismo debemos de partir del análisis del entorno en que este discapacitado se desenvuelve. En tanto y cuanto podamos reconocer y analizar el medio podremos entender mejor los principales rasgos sicológicos de nuestro hermano o hermana ciega.

Nunca un ciego aislado por el abandono familiar o social podrá responder de igual manera que aquel que vive en el seno de una familia que se preocupa por sus necesidades básicas. No olvidemos que el ser humano, es un ente eminentemente social y que básicamente requiere de otros hombres y de otras mujeres, para su realización. Concretamente consideramos que existen determinadas condiciones sociales que facilitan el desarrollo del ciego psicológicamente hablando:

El amor

Fue precisamente San Pablo quien escribió en su Carta a los Corintios “El amor todo lo puede...” En realidad el principal factor para el tratamiento a los ciegos y para la búsqueda de su plena realización humana no puede ser otro que el basamento del amor. Este ha de entenderse en las dos vertientes: recibirlo y darlo. Obviamente el expresar al ciego amor es lo primordial porque esto le demuestra que no es un ser menospreciado o tenido en poca estima por su discapacidad, sino que por el contrario es parte del mundo que ama. Hay que ser cuidadoso y no confundir JAMAS el amor con la lástima. Un ciego, aún el menos inteligente, detectaría inmediatamente, incluso por la inflexión de la voz, cual es el sentimiento con el que se allega el prójimo a él.

El trabajo.

Este es un factor muy importante. El trabajo es un don de Dios para el género humano. Con él logramos la realización de nuestros más altos ideales. Un ciego que obtiene su incorporación al trabajo, que crea con sus manos bienes de consumo para otros, que siente la utilidad de su acción, en ningún momento podrá considerarse estorbo o carga para los demás.

La comunicación.

El aislamiento individualiza, paraliza la acción. El ciego es un ser en extremo comunicativo y requiere como un factor psicológico de importancia la comunicación.

La historia de la comunicación entre los seres humanos es tan vieja como la descripción bíblica de la primera pareja en el Huerto del Edén. Aún y cuando el ciego se incorpore al trabajo, la comunicación no se logra plenamente si no se analizan factores determinantes en la realización de ésta, especialmente en la necesidad de ser escuchas atentos del ciego, que utiliza la voz mucho más que otro tipo de persona. En la comunicación con los ciegos, hay que tener sumo cuidado en que ésta se da principalmente por los sonidos, nunca por gestos o mímica. La incomunicación entre los ciegos crea:

- Necesidad de hablar poco
- Oír más que lo que se habla.
- Trastornos de personalidad.
- Indecisiones.

Debemos de luchar por combatir el aislamiento, tanto el que en determinados momentos la propia sociedad impone a los ciegos o también el que provenga de éstos por imperativos del medio donde se ha desarrollado. Debe distinguirse sabiamente aquello que sea necesario realizar entre los propios ciegos y aquello que deba realizarse en el conjunto de todos los seres humanos. En Europa actualmente hay un creciente movimiento a la absorción de los ciegos en todas las esferas de la vida cotidiana, incluso se tiene la tendencia a la eliminación de las escuelas especializadas para ciegos teniéndose la premisa que el mundo en el que tendrán que desenvolverse en la vida adulta no es el de los ciegos que aprendieron en la escuela elemental o primaria especializada.

En las relaciones con los ciegos hay determinados factores en el trato hacia éstos que pueden crear mecanismos de defensa y serios trastornos de personalidad:

- Falta de sinceridad.
- Desarrollo de mecanismos defensivos.
- Inescrupulosidad en las acciones.

Es frecuente, por incapacidad o maldad, que estos tres aberrantes factores negativos se encuentren presentes en el trato a los ciegos. Estos se enardecen ante tales circunstancias y a veces sus reacciones son violentas. Los ciegos somos extremadamente sensitivos y podemos comprender con facilidad las intenciones subterráneas en el trato hacia nosotros.

Hay determinadas características psicológicas en los ciegos de nacimiento que no se evidencia en igual intensidad en los que quedamos ciegos en la vida adulta, entre éstas citaremos:

- Desconfianza.
- Agresividad.
- Autoestimación (sobre estimación de sí mismo)

De éstas características se infiere que al niño ciego de nacimiento hay que brindarle un tratamiento específico y adecuado, especialmente que le permita sentir el amor que genera confianza, relaciones de convivencia justas y adecuadas que barran con la agresividad y un nivel de relaciones lo más igualitario posible en el hogar que no ensalce sus potencialidades.

Debemos dedicar un párrafo aparte al rasgo psicológico más característico de los ciegos, ya antes mencionado. Me refiero a la excesiva sensibilidad de éstos, más apreciada en los que nacieron sin este sentido. El ciego puede reconocer con mucha más facilidad que un vidente las intenciones de la palabra, percatarse de los estados anímicos de la persona y la insinceridad en el trato, entre otros factores. Es frecuente en los ciegos la irritación y las neurosis depresivas, ambas están muy vinculadas con las notorias posibilidades sensitivas de los ciegos. Debe tomarse muy en cuenta en el trabajo pastoral con estos hombres y mujeres, este factor.

b) Espirituales.

Aunque puede haber, y de hecho existen, múltiples ciegos que no aceptan la realidad de Dios, la generalidad de ellos y su amplia posibilidad de interiorizar la vida y las relaciones de convivencia social, lo acercan al conocimiento de la Verdad.

El ciego suele buscar refugio en lo trascendente, aún y cuando no lo pueda identificar con el Dios de la Biblia. El ciego que generalmente es poco confiado en los seres humanos, sí lo es con fuerza en lo sobrenatural. Nos atrevemos a señalar algunas características notables entre la mayoría de los ciegos:

- Crédule.
- Lealtad a la fe.
- Desarrollo de una relación íntima con Dios.
- Confianza en el poder Divino.

La “religiosidad” puede ser un factor negativo en la vida espiritual de los ciegos, esta es una tendencia natural entre nosotros que solamente puede ser combatida con el conocimiento y la madurez en las relaciones de fe. La “religiosidad” de los ciegos está muy vinculada con la tendencia al aislamiento que sufrimos cuando las condiciones sociales de nuestra formación y vida no son las más correctas. La Iglesia deberá velar por ello.

Una Pastoral Eficaz.

La fe cristiana ha de ser para los ciegos, como para la generalidad de los seres humanos:

- Acción liberadora.
- Realización plena.
- Fuente de esperanza.

En el primer aspecto encontrar en la fe el agente transformador de la existencia humana y de la suya propia. Con la fe ha de lograr el término de los factores negativos que le inhiben y lastran su actitud hacia la vida misma. En segundo lugar su auto realización y la comprensión de los demás será encontrada en una fe vivencial y real que le posibilite el disfrute de una VIDA ABUNDANTE como la que el Maestro proclama en Juan 10: 10. Una pastoral adecuada para los ciegos deberá atender las siguientes necesidades:

- Comprensión.
- Solidaridad.
- Realización.
- Comunicación.

Indiscutiblemente que el material adecuado en la pastoral para los ciegos es la Biblia. Debe procurarse la vinculación de éstos al estudio sistemático de la misma, para ello debe conseguirse en primer lugar el aprendizaje del Sistema Braille para posteriormente proveerles Biblias o porciones de éstas en dicho Sistema. También son válidos los audio cassettes que existen con la Biblia grabada.

Los maestros de la Escuela Dominical o Sabática, según el caso, han de proveer con suficiente anticipación a los invidentes de su grupo, del texto donde se encuentra la lección de modo que éstos puedan leerlo o escucharlo antes de la reunión de estudio de la semana. Es conveniente que se utilicen a los lectores Braille en las reuniones de la Iglesia en determinados momentos, tal como se hace con otros participantes. Siempre debe cuidarse que esto sea algo de rutina y no mero exhibicionismo. La exaltación desmedida de la calidad de la lectura puede ser dañina por lo que se tratará este asunto con naturalidad.

Una dificultad de los ciegos es el seguir los rituales de las Iglesias litúrgicas. Estos en ninguno de los casos están pasados al Braille y los invidentes son solo espectadores en éstas congregaciones. Como que la memoria de los ciegos, si se ejercita, es muy buena, los pastores y guías de las congregaciones deben ayudar en la memorización de las partes del culto que requieren lecturas, si es que éstas no se pasan al Braille previamente. Tanto en estas congregaciones como en las de ritual libre y abierto el problema de los himnos es de consideración también. Al no poder seguir el canto con el himnario debe preverse el que los invidentes tengan su copia en Braille con los himnos que sean programados para ese día de manera que puedan aprenderse éstos de memoria y unirse plenamente a la adoración.

Un momento difícil, entre tantos, para el ciego en la hora del culto lo es el ofertorio. Los encargados de recoger las ofrendas tendrán en cuenta la limitación que tienen los ciegos de no ver el platillo y deberán llamarle la atención, bien guiándole la mano a éste, o susurrándole al oído que es el momento de ofrendar o simplemente tocándole en el hombro, siempre y cuando esto se encuentre convenido previamente.

Lo anterior es válido también para el servicio de comunión. Cualquiera que sea el ritual o la forma de dar comunión o eucaristía debe entrenarse al ciego y a los oficiantes de manera que los invidentes participen plenamente y sin temor a dañar la ceremonia. La naturalidad ha de ser un factor de peso en estos menesteres,

al ciego no le gusta hacer el ridículo, como a ninguna persona le agradaría errar. Los saludos, o la Paz, en las ceremonias religiosas es un momento muy desagradable para el que no ve, si es que no se toma en cuenta su limitación. Dar la mano sin identificarse no es un acto de paz o amistad; por otra parte el tumulto, y a veces el atropellamiento en los saludos finales del culto, alteran al ciego, que poco a poco va evadiendo estos momentos y se va aislando de una relación social tan efectiva y positiva. Un vidente deberá acompañarlo en estos trances e ir identificándole a las personas que se le acercan, las cuales tomarán la mano del ciego para saludarle sin esperar a que éste “adivine” que la mano está extendida. Una pastoral adecuada ha de luchar por que los ciegos no sean en la adoración simples espectadores, sino actores de peso e importancia. Esto posibilitará la vinculación de los ciegos a la vida misma, y no contribuirá a su aislamiento.

El programa misionero y evangelístico de la Iglesia deberá tomar en cuenta a estos hermanos y hermanas, y vincularlos de acuerdo con sus posibilidades y vocaciones a los mismos. Su presencia en comisiones y equipos, departamentos o comités, ha de contribuir a su auto realización y hacerlo sentir parte de la vida de la iglesia local.

Por otra parte una pastoral adecuada incluye la comprensión de sí mismo. El agente de la pastoral ha de luchar porque el ciego se percate de sus inmensas posibilidades de realización y lo vinculará al quehacer de la comunidad misionera.

Toda Iglesia deberá participar en sesiones de adiestramiento en “como ayudar al ciego”. Existen folletos y materiales adecuados sobre el tratamiento a los invidentes. Una congregación preparada para tales menesteres, hará mucho más feliz la vida del ciego, especialmente en su relación con la Iglesia.

Una adecuación de la fe a las realidades del ciego deberá tomar siempre en cuenta las limitaciones nuestras, de manera tal que en nuestras vidas de fe encontremos realización, solaz y comprensión; lo cual no siempre se consigue entre los no creyentes.

Es conveniente insistir en que la fe no debe considerarse nunca como paliativo para la limitación existente, sino como agente transformador e impulsor de la vida de este conjunto de personas.

No es resignación lo que la fe da, sino comprensión, una pastoral adecuada ayudará en tal sentido.

El poder liberador del Evangelio deberá hacerse valer entre los ciegos que no conocen a Jesucristo, para lograr en ellos la transformación de aquellos factores negativos de la personalidad que inciden en su carácter, tales como:

- Desconfianza.
- Excesiva sensibilidad.
- Sobre estimación.
- Incomunicación.
- Individualismo.

La fe cristiana es contraria a estos factores negativos y su adecuación, con tacto y paciencia, serán agentes liberadores y evangelizadores para una pastoral con ciegos.

No podemos descuidar la especificidad de este conjunto de creyentes. La realidad nos dice que las Iglesias Nacionales, o las Asociaciones Regionales de congregaciones locales no pueden desarrollar por

sí mismas un programa eficaz de atención a las necesidades específicas de los ciegos, por ello es valedero un trabajo ecuménico en el cual interdenominacionalmente se aborden problemas y soluciones.

Entre las recomendaciones posibles para la realización del trabajo pastoral interdenominacional con ciegos apuntamos:

- Realización de Encuentros, Seminarios, Talleres y Campamentos.
- Seminarios de adiestramiento a los pastores o agentes de pastoral sobre la atención adecuada de los ciegos.
- La construcción o adquisición de medios tiflológicos tales como, bastones, máquinas de escribir en Braille, papel para escribir, materiales en este sistema, relojes parlantes y otros.
- Consecución de planes e inter relación con la Asociación de Ciegos del país.

No consideramos que con el presente trabajo hemos abarcado todo lo que se necesita en este campo, cuyas potencialidades son infinitas. Valoramos que este es el inicio de una búsqueda siempre abierta a nuevas formas y métodos.

**INFORMACIÓN IMPORTANTE SOBRE PROYECTOS DE
FORMACIÓN TEOLÓGICA ECUMÉNICA***

Nyambura J. Njoroge

Desearíamos llamar la atención de ustedes sobre algunos puntos relativos a los proyectos que apoya el Programa de Formación Teológica Ecuménica (FTE). También desearíamos comunicarles una carta del profesor Ross Kinsler, ex colega del Programa de Formación Teológica (PFT) como se llamaba anteriormente.

Pensamos que todos ustedes saben que, tras la Asamblea de Harare del Consejo Mundial de Iglesias, celebrada en diciembre de 1998, ha habido una importante reestructuración en la Oficina de Ginebra. El Programa de Formación Teológica Ecuménica forma parte del Equipo de Educación y Formación Ecuménica (Equipo EFE), en el Sector de Estudio y de Acción. En lugar de los tres secretarios ejecutivos, actualmente tenemos una secretaria ejecutiva en Ginebra encargada de la coordinación mundial de los mandatos de Formación Teológica Ecuménica, y de los proyectos en África y en Oriente Medio. Sin embargo, para ayudar en las actividades que se realizan en las otras regiones, la Oficina de Ginebra está elaborando otros métodos de trabajo. A pesar del reducido número de personal de que se dispone, Formación Teológica Ecuménica continúa apoyando proyectos en África y en Oriente Medio, en Asia y el Pacífico y en el Caribe y América Latina. Por otra parte, estamos examinando actualmente la posibilidad de apoyar proyectos similares en los países de Europa Central y Oriental.

En relación con esos proyectos, recibimos solicitudes en materia de:

- cursos de especialización para docentes de instituciones teológicas ecuménicas (denominacionales) y de facultades de teología que deseen mejorar el nivel de conocimientos de su personal mediante maestrías o doctorados;
- ampliación de bibliotecas, especialmente mediante la adquisición de libros que estimulen la práctica y la enseñanza del ecumenismo, y de teologías según una perspectiva feminista o desde el punto de vista de otros grupos marginados o minoritarios como los dalit, los aborígenes australianos, las sociedades tribales, y otros;
- elaboración de modelos creativos e innovadores de formación teológica ecuménica adaptados a las necesidades y contextos locales, sin exclusiones y que sean auténticos. Un buen ejemplo de ello son los modelos que permiten una integración sin limitaciones de las teologías feministas, lo que algunos han llamado estudios centrados en una perspectiva de género o estudios feministas;
- programas de extensión y de formación a distancia con una orientación ecuménica;
- intercambio de profesores y de estudiantes de teología con motivo de conferencias, seminarios y estudios de corta duración;
- formación de asociaciones de instituciones teológicas (para la participación en asambleas o conferencias)

Uno de los principales objetivos de la Formación Teológica Ecuménica es facilitar y alentar una conciencia, práctica y enseñanza ecuménicas con espíritu crítico en las iglesias y en las instituciones teológicas. Por ello, al examinar cada proyecto tenemos en cuenta si promueve y favorece el ecumenismo en ese contexto particular. Dado que el ecumenismo intenta responder al imperativo bíblico que nos impulsa a comprometernos en la misión de Dios en la unidad, afirmando y celebrando nuestra diversidad y diferencias

* Traducción del Inglés (MF 91, Oct. 2000), Servicio Lingüístico del CMI.

que nos han sido dadas por Dios, estamos llamados también a interrogarnos acerca de quienes no están presentes en la mesa ecuménica. Durante muchos años, las mujeres y otros grupos marginados estaban excluidos de la formación teológica y de la formación para el ministerio. Por esta razón, prestamos atención a la manera en que los proyectos propuestos tienen en cuenta la discriminación y la injusticia para con las mujeres, y la necesidad de incluir a todo el pueblo de Dios. Recientemente, también hemos prestado atención a la exclusión de que son víctimas las personas discapacitadas y a la necesidad de que las instituciones teológicas tengan en cuenta urgentemente sus preocupaciones y sus teologías.

El personal de Formación Teológica Ecuménica se encarga de estudiar los proyectos, y la decisión final sobre las solicitudes incumbe al Grupo de Trabajo de Formación Teológica Ecuménica, que se reúne una vez al año (entre abril y junio). Además del apoyo financiero limitado (la cantidad máxima que podemos ofrecer son 10.000 dólares EE.UU.), el personal se encarga de recomendar un determinado proyecto a otras organizaciones e iglesias cuando reúne los criterios expuestos anteriormente, pero el programa de FTE no puede ir más allá de esa financiación. Suele ser el caso de la especialización de docentes, cuando el presupuesto excede los 10.000 dólares EE.UU. Para reducir al mínimo los plazos de la selección de las solicitudes, tengan a bien tomar nota de lo siguiente:

- Las solicitudes deben ser presentadas por la persona (presidente, director, rector o decano) responsable de la institución o de la asociación teológica interesada, **y no por personas a título individual;**
- en las solicitudes se deben explicar claramente los respectivos objetivos, el presupuesto (en moneda local y en dólares EE.UU., indicando el tipo de cambio), y dejar claro si instituciones locales aportan una contribución y si se han presentado solicitudes a otras organizaciones o se han recibido de las mismas contribuciones;
- se debe indicar claramente la manera en que el proyecto apoya y promueve la conciencia y la práctica ecuménicas, por ejemplo, cuáles son las denominaciones patrocinadoras que se beneficiarán con una biblioteca bien equipada. En otras palabras, ¿es ecuménica la institución teológica de que se trate?;
- en las solicitudes debe figurar el nombre, el cargo y la dirección de la persona responsable, y, para los proyectos en los que participen otros integrantes del personal, se debe indicar claramente su responsabilidad en el marco del proyecto. Por ejemplo, si una institución teológica está comenzando un modelo creativo e innovador para integrar el estudio de la problemática de género, se deberá indicar quién es (o quiénes son) la(s) persona(s) encargada(s) de poner en marcha ese modelo; qué relación tiene(n) con la institución (dedicación exclusiva, dedicación parcial, asesor, otra);
- para que la oficina de Formación Teológica Ecuménica pueda rendir cuentas a las organizaciones asociadas que apoyan nuestras actividades ecuménicas, y para evaluar la eficacia de nuestras actividades, necesitamos que nos presenten un informe de los progresos realizados o de los resultados del proyecto en el plazo de un año desde que se otorgó financiación;
- para las solicitudes relativas a cursos de especialización de docentes véanse las páginas 36-38 de esta publicación;
- en caso de que se apruebe el proyecto, indiquen los datos del banco al que ha de girarse el dinero;
- todas las solicitudes y pedidos de información relativos al Caribe y a América Latina se deben enviar al señor José Duque, asesor de Formación Teológica Ecuménica, Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana, Apartado 901, 1000 San José, Costa Rica; Tel.: + + 506 224 2791; Fax: + + 506 283 6826; correo electrónico: eteduque@racsa.co.cr ;
- las solicitudes relativas a África y a Oriente Medio, a Asia y el Pacífico y a Europa Central y Oriental se deben enviar a Nyambura Njoroge, Oficina de FTE, en Ginebra. Correo electrónico: nn@wcc-coe.org ;

- habida cuenta del volumen de trabajo y el tiempo que requiere la selección de los proyectos, les pedimos que nos envíen informaciones completas de conformidad con las indicaciones anteriores, antes del 30 de noviembre.

Preocupados por estimular a un mayor número de mujeres a que estudien teología o ejerzan la docencia en instituciones y facultades de teología de los países del Sur así como de Europa Central y Oriental, les pedimos encarecidamente que ayuden a financiar el **Fondo Sarah Chakko de Dotación para la Formación Teológica**. Recientemente, una mujer nos ha enviado una donación de 22.500 dólares EE.UU.

Por último, puede que algunos de ustedes hayan oído hablar del libro de Ross Kinsler y Gloria Kinsler titulado *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life: An Invitation to Personal, Ecclesial and Social Transformation* (El jubileo bíblico y la lucha por la vida: invitación a una transformación personal, eclesial y social) (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, Nueva York, 1999). Sin entrar en detalles, reproducimos la carta que nos ha enviado Ross en relación con este libro que puede servir como material de base para un grupo de estudio y esperamos que ustedes piensen en responder al reto que nos plantea a todos nosotros como cristianos.

“Estamos convencidos de que este libro tiene mucho en común con el proceso de Justicia, Paz e Integridad de la Creación (JPIC) y también con el llamamiento que la Alianza Reformada Mundial (ARM) hizo a toda la familia reformada y a las iglesias a “comprometernos en un proceso de reconocimiento, educación, confesión y acción (*Processus Confessionis*)” por lo que respecta a la injusticia económica y a la destrucción del medio ambiente”. Sabemos que el CMI ha apoyado este proceso, pero no sabemos en qué medida se han comprometido las iglesias a nivel local y a otros niveles, como, por ejemplo, las escuelas de teología. Reconocemos que estas cuestiones son complejas y, a veces, controvertidas, pero son esenciales para que podamos cumplir con nuestra vocación como discípulos de Jesucristo y como iglesias.

Expresamos nuestro temor de que se pueda perder ímpetu a medida que llega al final de la campaña del Jubileo 2000 y que el año 2000 llega a su fin. Como muchos han señalado, la injusticia económica en el mundo y la devastación ecológica han de ser los problemas centrales del siglo XXI. Son las amenazas más graves que se ciernen sobre la vida de la humanidad y la biosfera, y tienen que llegar a ser preocupaciones teológicas y espirituales fundamentales de nuestras iglesias a todos los niveles, como indica la propuesta de la ARM. Pensamos que la economía del Sabbath y la espiritualidad del Jubileo son temas recurrentes en la Biblia y son argumentos de peso para que los cristianos hagan suyas esas preocupaciones.

Nuestro libro se está vendiendo bien, y en la actualidad ya está en su segunda edición en Orbis Books (Apartado de correos 308. MARYKNOLL, Nueva York 10545-0308, Estados Unidos de América; Fax: 1-914-945-0670, correo electrónico: orbisbooks@maryknoll.org). También ha sido publicado por Paulinas en Filipinas para el mercado asiático, pero tenemos que intensificar nuestros esfuerzos. **Orbis ha aceptado ofrecer un descuento del 40 por ciento para encargos de 10 (diez) o más ejemplares a fin de estimular a grupos pequeños a estudiar esas cuestiones. Esperamos que ustedes informen a otros grupos de esta oferta a través de sus contactos.** Quizás el Programa FTE se decida a invitar a las escuelas de teología y a las redes de contactos a que comuniquen lo que están haciendo en relación con estos temas tan importantes.” (Ross Kinsler)

Como siempre, esperamos poder colaborar con ustedes porque nuestra actividad no se limita a la Oficina de Ginebra sino que se desarrolla entre ustedes a medida que hacen suyo los retos que el Movimiento Ecu­ménico plantea y aprovechan las oportunidades que se les ofrecen.

**SOLICITUD DE BECA DE ESTUDIOS /
SUBVENCIÓN DE VIAJE PARA DOCENTES**

A – Adjunten el formulario, los datos y documentos siguientes:

- 1/ El nombre de la institución teológica o de la facultad de teología solicitante;
- 2/ el nombre de la persona (presidente/director, rector o decano) que presenta la solicitud;
- 3/ el nombre del profesor/a (candidato/a) que desea realizar los estudios;
- 4/ el acuerdo por el que el/la candidato/a se compromete a volver a trabajar con la institución que lo envía por un período mínimo de cinco años;
- 5/ una copia de la carta de admisión a los estudios;
- 6/ un presupuesto completo establecido por la institución en la que el/la candidata/a va a realizar los estudios relativo a toda la duración de los estudios;
- 7/ los recursos disponibles, por ejemplo, otras becas de estudio o apoyo financiero de la comunidad local;
- 8/ una fotografía del candidato (adjúntese al formulario);
- 9/ dos referencias, de las cuales una, al menos, debe ser de la iglesia a la que pertenece el candidato;
- 10/ la lista de las iglesias miembros que patrocinan la institución o la facultad de teología que presenta la solicitud o de las iglesias que envían estudiantes a su institución.

B – Les rogamos que tomen nota de que:

- 1/ Las solicitudes para el próximo año académico deben enviarse a la oficina de Formación Teológica Ecuménica antes de finales de noviembre.
- 2/ Las becas del Programa FTE se conceden a instituciones y no a personas.
- 3/ No se conceden becas para programas de estudio que ya hayan comenzado.
- 4/ Se insta a los candidatos a que realicen estudios en su propia región o continente.
- 5/ Se insta a los candidatos a que estudien en seminarios o facultades universitarias en los que se ofrezca formación ecuménica.
- 6/ Se da preferencia a las solicitudes de becas para mujeres.

Solicitud de beca de estudios / subvención de viaje para docentes

Apellidos:

Nombres:

Fecha de nacimiento (mes/día/año): Estado civil:

Nacionalidad:

Nombre y fechas de nacimiento de los hijos (si es el caso):

.....

Denominación:

Dirección actual:

.....

(Fax, tel., correo-e):

Ocupación actual:

Estudios: (Instituciones de enseñanza y años de estudio)

.....

Títulos y méritos:.....

Experiencia profesional:

Curso de estudio previsto:

Duración: Institución:

¿Tiene asegurada la admisión?: En caso afirmativo, ¿para cuando?:
(Adjunte el documento de admisión)

Presupuesto en moneda local y en dólares EE.UU. (indique el tipo de cambio):

1.Costo anual de la matrícula:
(Adjunte una carta al respecto de la institución en la que va a estudiar)

Gastos de alojamiento y comida:

Otros gastos (por ejemplo, gastos de viaje):

2.Recursos disponibles:

Cantidad:

Origen:

3. Apoyo local:

4. Cantidad solicitada al Programa FTE:

Expliquen brevemente el proyecto o el curso que usted desea seguir, sus objetivos, la importancia de ese curso, el programa y la razón de su elección del lugar de estudios. (En caso necesario adjunte otra hoja).

Información general sobre la institución de envío, nombre, historia, afiliación confesional, plantilla de profesores y número de alumnos, programas ofrecidos, especializaciones propuestas, etcétera. (En caso necesario adjunte otra hoja).

Firma del/de la candidato/a:

Nombre y firma de la persona que dirige la institución
(presidente, administrador, rector, decano) y sello oficial:

Lugar: Fecha:

INFORMATION IMPORTANTE SUR LES PROJETS FTO

Nyambura J. Njoroge

Nous désirons attirer votre attention sur quelques points concernant les projets soutenus par le Programme de formation théologique œcuménique (FTO). Nous souhaitons également vous communiquer une lettre du professeur Ross Kinsler, ancien collègue du Programme FTO, sous son ancienne appellation de Programme de formation théologique (PFT).

Nous supposons que vous savez tous qu'après l'Assemblée du COE à Harare en décembre 1998, le secrétariat de Genève a été substantiellement restructuré. Le Programme de formation théologique œcuménique (FTO) est maintenant rattaché à l'équipe " Education et formation œcuménique " (équipe EFO), dans le secteur " Etude et action ". Au lieu de trois secrétaires exécutifs, nous avons aujourd'hui une seule secrétaire exécutive à Genève, responsable d'une part de la coordination mondiale des mandats FTO et de l'autre des projets en Afrique et au Moyen-Orient. Cependant, pour faciliter les activités dans les autres régions du monde, le secrétariat de Genève est en train d'élaborer d'autres méthodes de travail. Malgré la réduction de ses effectifs, le Programme FTO continue à appuyer des projets dans les régions de l'Afrique et du Moyen-Orient, de l'Asie et du Pacifique, des Caraïbes et de l'Amérique latine. De plus, nous explorons actuellement la possibilité de soutenir des projets semblables dans les pays d'Europe centrale et de l'Est.

Les projets que nous soutenons répondent à des demandes telles que celles-ci :

- formation du personnel enseignant d'institutions théologiques œcuméniques (interdénominationnelles) et de facultés de théologie qui désirent élever les connaissances de leurs enseignants au niveau de la maîtrise ou du doctorat ;
- création de bibliothèques, notamment par l'acquisition d'ouvrages qui encouragent la pratique et l'enseignement de l'œcuménisme, et de théologies élaborées dans une perspective féminine ou du point de vue d'autres groupes marginalisés ou minoritaires comme les dalits, les peuples autochtones, les sociétés tribales, et d'autres ;
- élaboration de modèles créatifs et novateurs de formation théologique œcuménique adaptés aux besoins et contextes locaux, sans exclusive, et authentiques ; par exemple, modèles qui intègrent pleinement les théologies formulées par les femmes, fondées sur une approche différenciée selon le sexe, dites aussi " féministes " ;
- activités de rayonnement et vulgarisation en matière de formation théologique, programmes de téléenseignement à orientation œcuménique ;
- échanges de professeurs et d'étudiants en théologie pour des conférences, des séminaires et des stages ;
- formation d'associations d'institutions théologiques (pour la participation à des assemblées ou à des conférences).

L'une des fonctions principales de la Formation théologique œcuménique est de faciliter et d'encourager, dans un esprit critique, la conscience, la pratique et l'enseignement œcuméniques dans les Eglises et les institutions théologiques. C'est pourquoi, pour chaque projet qui nous est proposé, nous nous assurons qu'il encourage et facilite l'œcuménisme dans ce contexte particulier. Puisque l'œcuménisme s'efforce d'obéir à l'impératif biblique qui nous enjoint d'accomplir la mission de Dieu dans l'unité tout en affirmant

* Traduit de l'anglais (MF 91, Octobre 2000), Service linguistique, COE.

et en célébrant nos diversités et nos différences, qui sont un don de Dieu, nous sommes aussi appelés à nous demander qui manque à la table œcuménique. Depuis longtemps, les femmes et d'autres groupes marginalisés sont absents de la formation œcuménique et de la formation au ministère. Voilà pourquoi nous examinons de près comment les projets qui nous sont proposés prennent en compte la discrimination et l'injustice liées aux préjugés contre les femmes, et la nécessité d'inclure tout le peuple de Dieu. Récemment, le réseau de défense des personnes handicapées a attiré notre attention sur l'exclusion dont elles sont victimes, et sur le fait que les institutions théologiques doivent absolument s'intéresser à leurs préoccupations et leurs théologies.

Notre personnel est responsable de l'examen sélectif des projets, et la décision finale sur les demandes d'aide incombe au Groupe de travail FTO qui se réunit une fois par an (entre avril et juin). En plus du soutien financier limité que nous pouvons apporter (USD 10 000 au maximum), nos collaborateurs recommandent un projet à des partenaires et à des Eglises lorsque ce projet répond aux critères exposés plus haut, mais que le Programme FTO n'est pas en mesure de fournir un financement supplémentaire. C'est en général le cas pour les projets de formation des enseignants dont le budget dépasse USD 10 000. Afin de réduire au minimum le délai de sélection des demandes, veuillez prendre note de ce qui suit :

- La demande doit être soumise par l'administrateur responsable (président, directeur, recteur ou doyen) de l'institution ou association théologique intéressée, et **non par une personne à titre individuel**.
- La demande doit expliquer clairement le(s) objectif(s) poursuivi(s), le budget disponible (en devises locales et en USD, avec indication du taux de change), et montrer si des institutions locales ont versé une contribution et si d'autres partenaires ont été sollicités ou ont versé une contribution.
- La demande doit montrer clairement comment le projet encourage ou développe l'esprit et la pratique œcuméniques, par exemple quelles sont les dénominations parrainant la demande qui bénéficieront de la création d'une bibliothèque bien équipée. En d'autres termes, l'institution théologique en question est-elle œcuménique ?
- La demande doit porter le nom, la position dans l'organisation, et l'adresse de la personne responsable, et pour les projets auxquels d'autres membres du personnel participent, une explication claire de leurs responsabilités. Par exemple, si une institution théologique met en place un modèle créatif et novateur intégrant la problématique de la spécificité des rôles des hommes et des femmes dans la société, qui est responsable de la mise en place de ce modèle ? Quelle est sa relation à l'institution (à plein temps, à temps partiel, consultant, etc) ?
- Afin que le secrétariat FTO puisse rendre des comptes à nos partenaires qui soutiennent nos activités œcuméniques, et pour évaluer l'efficacité de notre travail, nous demandons un rapport d'activité ou un rapport sur les résultats du projet dans le délai d'un an après l'octroi des fonds ;
- Pour les demandes concernant la formation des enseignants, voir les pages 42-44 de ce numéro.
- Au cas où le projet est approuvé, veuillez donner les coordonnées de la banque où les fonds devront être versés.
- Toute demande de fonds ou de renseignements pour les Caraïbes et l'Amérique latine doit être envoyée à M. José Duque, consultant FTO, Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana, Apartado 901, 1000 San José, Costa Rica, Tel : + + 506 224 2791, Fax : + + 506 283 6826, et e-mail : eteduque@racsa.co.cr
- Pour l'Afrique et le Moyen-Orient, l'Asie et le Pacifique, et l'Europe centrale et de l'Est, veuillez envoyer vos demandes à Nyambura Njoroge, Secrétariat FTO à Genève. E-mail : nn@wcc-coe.org
- Vu le volume de travail et le temps nécessaires pour l'examen sélectif des projets, nous vous prions d'envoyer des informations complètes, selon les indications ci-dessus, d'ici au 30 novembre au plus tard.

Dans le souci d'encourager davantage de femmes à entreprendre des études de théologie, ou à enseigner dans les institutions et facultés de théologie des pays du Sud, ainsi qu'en Europe centrale et de l'Est, nous vous prions instamment d'aider à alimenter le **Fonds Sarah Chakko destiné aux étudiantes en théologie**. Récemment, une femme nous a fait don d'actions d'une valeur de : USD 22 500 !

Enfin, certains d'entre vous ont peut-être entendu parler du livre intitulé *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life : An Invitation to Personal, Ecclesiastical et Social Transformation* (Le jubilé biblique et la lutte pour la vie : invitation à une transformation personnelle, ecclésiastique et sociale), de Ross et Gloria Kinsler (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1999). Sans entrer dans les détails, nous reproduisons ci-dessous une lettre que Ross nous a envoyée à propos de son ouvrage, qui pourrait servir de matériel de base pour un groupe d'étude, et nous espérons que vous songerez à relever le défi qui nous est lancé à tous en tant que chrétiens :

“Nous sommes convaincus que cet ouvrage a beaucoup de traits communs avec le processus ‘Justice, paix et sauvegarde de la création’ (JPSC), et avec l'appel de l'Alliance réformée mondiale (ARF) à la famille des Eglises réformées et à l'Eglise dans son ensemble, par lequel elle nous invite à ‘nous engager dans un processus de reconnaissance, d'éducation, de confession et d'action (*Processus Confessionis*) sur l'injustice économique et la destruction de la planète’. Nous savons que le COE a donné son adhésion à ce processus, mais nous ignorons dans quelle mesure les Eglises locales et, à d'autres niveaux, les écoles de théologie s'y sont engagées. Nous reconnaissons que ces questions sont complexes et parfois controversées, mais il est essentiel d'y faire face si nous voulons nous dire disciples de Jésus-Christ et Eglises chrétiennes.

Nous craignons que l'élan ne se ralentisse vers la fin de la campagne “ Jubilee 2000 ” et de l'an 2000. Comme beaucoup l'ont fait remarquer, l'injustice économique dans le monde et la dégradation de l'environnement vont être les problèmes majeurs du 21ème siècle. Ce sont les menaces les plus graves qui pèsent sur la vie de l'humanité et sur la biosphère. Elles vont soulever des questions théologiques et spirituelles cruciales dont les Eglises à tous les niveaux devront s'occuper, comme l'indique la proposition de l'ARF. Nous pensons que l'économie du Sabbat et la spiritualité du Jubilé sont des thèmes qui courent tout au long de la Bible, et que ce sont des arguments assez puissants pour convaincre les chrétiens de s'attaquer à ces problèmes.

Notre ouvrage se vend bien ; il en est maintenant à sa seconde édition chez Orbis Books, Box 308, MARYKNOLL, NEW YORK 10545-0308, USA. Fax : 1-914-945-0670. E-mail : orbisbooks@maryknoll.org – il est également imprimé par Paulines aux Philippines pour le marché asiatique – mais il nous faut intensifier nos efforts. **Orbis a accepté d'offrir un rabais de 40% pour les commandes de 10 exemplaires ou plus, rabais que nous avons demandé afin d'encourager des petits groupes à étudier ces questions. Nous espérons que vous informerez d'autres groupes de cette offre par l'intermédiaire de vos réseaux.** Le Programme FTO pourrait inviter les écoles de théologie et les réseaux à communiquer ce qu'ils ont entrepris à propos de ces importantes questions.” (Ross Kinsler).

Comme d'habitude, nous nous réjouissons de travailler avec vous, car notre activité n'est pas limitée au secrétariat de Genève ; notre travail se fait parmi vous, lorsque vous relevez les défis que le mouvement œcuménique vous présente et saisissez les chances qu'il vous offre.

**DEMANDE DE BOURSE D'ETUDES/
SUBVENTION DE VOYAGE POUR ENSEIGNANT(E)**

A – Veuillez joindre au formulaire :

- 1/ Le nom de l'institution théologique ou de la faculté de théologie qui fait la demande
- 2/ Le nom de l'administrateur qui fait la demande (président, directeur, recteur, doyen)
- 3/ Le nom de l'enseignant(e) (candidat/e) qui désire suivre le cours
- 4/ L'accord par lequel le/la candidat(e) s'engage à retourner à l'institution qui l'envoie pour une période de cinq ans au minimum
- 5/ Une copie de la lettre d'admission aux études
- 6/ Un budget complet établi par l'établissement d'accueil pour la durée complète des études
- 7/ Les ressources disponibles, par exemple bourse d'études ou soutien financier de la communauté locale
- 8/ Une photographie du/de la candidat(e) (à joindre au formulaire de demande)
- 9/ Deux références, dont l'une au moins de l'Eglise à laquelle appartient le/la candidat(e)
- 10/ La liste des Eglises membres qui parrainent l'institution ou la faculté de théologie présentant la demande, ou des Eglises qui envoient des étudiants à votre institution.

B – Veuillez noter que :

- 1/ Les demandes d'admission pour l'année académique à venir doivent parvenir au secrétariat FTO avant fin novembre.
- 2/ Les bourses FTO sont accordées à des institutions et non à des personnes.
- 3/ Les programmes d'études en cours ne peuvent être pris en considération pour une bourse.
- 4/ Nous encourageons les candidats à étudier dans leur propre région du monde ou continent.
- 5/ Nous encourageons les candidats à étudier dans des séminaires ou des facultés universitaires offrant une formation œcuménique.
- 6/ Nous donnons la préférence aux demandes de bourses pour des femmes.

Demande de bourse d'études/subvention de voyage pour enseignant(e)

Nom de famille :

Prénoms ou autres noms :

Date de naissance (jour/mois/année): Etat civil:

Nationalité:

Nom et date de naissance des enfants :

.....

Dénomination :

Adresse actuelle :

.....

(Fax/tél./e-mail)

Occupation actuelle :

Etudes : (Etablissement(s) d'enseignement et nombre d'années d'études)

.....

Qualifications :

Expérience professionnelle :

Programme d'études prévu :

Durée : Etablissement :

Etes-vous sûr(e) d'être admis(e) ? : Si oui, quand ? :

(Joindre le document d'admission)

Budget en devises locales et en USD (indiquer le taux de change) :

1. Frais de cours par an :

(Joindre une lettre de confirmation de l'établissement d'accueil)

Frais de logement et pension :

Autres (par exemple frais de voyage) :

2. Ressources disponibles :

Montant:

Source:

3. Soutien local:

4. Requête adressée au Programme FTO:

Expliquez brièvement le projet ou le cours que vous désirez suivre, votre objectif, l'importance de ce cours, les raisons de votre choix d'un établissement particulier. (Continuez sur une seconde page si nécessaire).

Information générale sur l'institution d'envoi : nom, histoire, appartenance confessionnelle, effectif des enseignants et des étudiants, programmes offerts, spécialités, etc. (Continuez sur une seconde page si nécessaire).

Signature du/de la candidat(e):

Nom et signature du/de la responsable de l'institution
(président, directeur, recteur, doyen) et timbre officiel :

Lieu: Date: