



Special Edition International Seminar and General Assembly

This special edition of the newsletter has been written to give a report on the International Seminar and General Assembly of the World Movement of Christian Workers which took place in Nantes, France in October 2009.

The MCW sent two representatives to participate in the event which was attended by 150 delegates from 44 affiliated movements from every continent around the world. The attendance by so many people from so many movements was due in part to the generosity of those who contributed to our solidarity appeal during the summer months.

The success of this world event highlights the fact that despite difficult times in terms of funding and other resources, Christian Worker Movements are still vibrant as demonstrated by the enthusiasm

and commitment of thousands of leaders and activists throughout the world.

The Seminar had as its theme Migrant Workers and Globalisation. This has been the recurring theme at every continental meeting of the WMCW in the past two years. Jo, in place of Mary Foy, Chair of MCW, and Jim Dearlove represented our Movement and participated in a rich exchange of experience regarding migration. David McLoughlin, a member of the Birmingham MCW group, was an invited expert and delivered a well received paper on migration from a theological perspective. The General Assembly adopted a new set of statutes as well as a budget which recognised the current reality in which the WMCW exists. What follows is a more detailed account of the highlights of the whole event.



Delegates attending World Assembly

Migrant workers and globalisation was the theme of the International Seminar. Delegates looked at the complex world reality of migration and their experiences of it. They also deepened the theological meaning of the theme and met some of the activists in Nantes who are supporting migrant workers.

Migration is not a new phenomenon which touches only countries of the North. In fact, the flow of migration has been constant through the whole of human history. It would be difficult or impossible to prevent the mobility of human beings. From the beginning of time, men and women have migrated for economic, political, social and cultural reasons. Today, there are about 200 million international migrants amongst the world's 6 billion inhabitants, about 3% of the world's population. It is often ignored in the countries of the North that 80% of migrants are moving from the South to other countries of the South.

Contrary to the commonly held view, those emigrating to the North (only 20% of world migration) are not the poorest, the majority are people who have a qualification, or a degree, and whose families are able to finance their voyage. They represent for the host country a ready supply of young, trained and motivated manual workforce. Their contribution is an asset to the host country, even if they are over qualified for the jobs they do. Thus Migration is not "massive", as some governments would want us to believe, nor are the majority of migrants clandestine or the poorest.

Pushed into exile for economic or political reasons, these qualified men and women cannot participate in the development of their own country, thus depriving it of precious skills. However, it was stated that they do provide an essential support to their country of origin as it is estimated that the amount of financial transfers home from migrants is about 300 billion dollars, about three times more than the amount of public aid allocated to

development (about 104 billion dollars). Their support in the economy of their home country is therefore essential. Migrants also participate often in financing community projects in order to fill the gaps in state services such as health education.

Migration is a phenomenon accentuated by globalisation. The global economic crisis has shown that the unregulated free market economy without limits cannot create a more equal and just world. Through the experiences of their members, the representatives of the national movements of the WMCW have shown that working men and women are the first victims of this crisis, particularly in the South. The lack of democracy, corruption, the absence of a future for young workers and hunger, notably in the rural world where there is a high level of internal migration to the towns, or to countries on their borders, fuels migration.

Delegates recognised that the challenge was to help build a more just world based on solidarity. The globalised economy requires a rethinking of the phenomenon of migration. We have to get out of the mindset that migration poses permanent dangers. We have to overcome the politics of fear. The policies of security and repression put in place by the countries of the North shows their limits and in the long term they are doomed to failure. It is also important to denounce the hypocrisy of menacing undocumented workers, as a large number have regular work and are participating actively in the economy of the host country.

Delegates could not accept that the regulation of the migratory flows is determined only according to the needs for the economies of the North, with the whims of the market place acting against the needs of families. The only equitable and sustainable solutions can be agreements negotiated between the country of origin and the host country that are based on solidarity.

Even though this seems to be still difficult and a

long way off, the creation of global governance of migration is indispensable. The consequences of the economic crisis and the failure of the neo-liberal politics requires a departure from a system that restricts interdependence between states and to open up a partnership between those directly involved. One way could be the creation of a right of citizenship which is not linked to nationality. It is necessary in effect to get away from "different rights" which shuts out migrants, and instead give them an authentic "right to difference".

Each reflection is a call to a progressive conversion, to the breaking down of cultural barriers: by seeing in the foreigner a brother or sister of humanity, it is an opportunity and not a threat for the better development of everyone.

Calling on the message of the Gospel, the delegates of the movements reaffirmed their belief that to follow the call of Jesus is to struggle for a more just humanity. There are no strangers in the house of God.

They also reaffirmed their commitment to solidarity "it is the firm determination and perseverance to work for the common good, for the good of all, because we are responsible for everyone." (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis).

Delegates made a number of visits to meet with local members of the Action Catholique Ouvriere (ACO) to see at first hand the work in which they are engaged alongside migrant workers from different parts of the world. These visits were inspirational as they facilitated a direct exchange of experience and helped in the formulation of practical action plans.

Migration and Our Image of God by David McLoughlin

[A short extract from the presentation given at the World Council, Nantes]



David McLoughlin presenting the theological aspects of the theme



Delegates discussing their experience of migration

In a recent programme of the Simpsons, Homer picks up a book looks carefully through it and angrily throws it aside saying: "That book has no answers!" The book is the bible and in many ways he is right. The bible has no simple answers to our concerns about modern migration. However reading the scriptures in the present context of injustice, alienation, violence, fear and oppression within the experience of migration will provide us with provocation to thought and action. This, in the end, is the point of the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This in the end is the point of our Movements. They provoke us to see the world differently and to act to make that difference real.

The challenge of the strange

In dealing with migration¹ and the reality of the inter-cultural nature of our world we deal with the strangeness and otherness of people and of our personal and collective histories. Shifting between cultures, languages and customs is the stuff of everyday existence, yet it always involves challenges to mind and heart, to our deepest feelings, beliefs, and sensibilities. It touches the very heart of who we are and who God is, who according to Genesis, we are called to image².

Abraham and Sarah: Archetypal Migrants

Judaism, Christianity and Islam all remember the journey of Abraham and Sarah. They are the Archetypal migrants, leaving all³, becoming homeless and setting out on a journey of hope for a better life. They cross foreign lands, negotiating boundaries and become strangers. They have lost both State and status being greeted with suspicion as foreign. Like all migrants they are dependent on the kindness of the people they encounter. Even at the end of life Abraham must still negotiate to buy a grave for his wife as he and his family own no land.

Jesus among Strangers and Foreigners

The Gospel of Jesus begins on the margins: Palestine on the edge of the Roman Empire, Bethlehem a town that never appeared on a map, his birth acknowledged by Shepherds, outsiders from polite society

¹ The 2006 World Population Report reveals that 191 million people live outside the country of their birth and nearly 50% are women.

² Genesis 1:27

³ Genesis 12:1-2

⁴ cf. Antiquities 17, 8, 4; 17, 11, 2; 17, 11, 04.

and strangers, albeit wise men, but nonetheless foreigners from the east.

Roman policy: Greed, debt and dependency

The world that Jesus grew up in is one of new economic and political structures which were breaking down traditional Jewish Society. The Romans imposed taxes which created debt and the dispossession of land. Through direct, indirect and so-called voluntary taxes, described as oppressive by Jewish historian Josephus⁴, the burden of taxation meant that produce had to be used in payment often leading to peasant farmers getting into debt.

The Palestinian economy was massively based on agriculture and ancillary industries. Intensive farming yielded enough for local consumption. The land was relatively densely populated. To pay debt land would be mortgaged, then falling behind on their payments they would have to sell the land. The result was the creation of increasingly large estates, under wealthy landowners, who often lived distantly in the cities leaving a steward to manage local affairs.

In contrast the peasant farmers either ended up as indentured slaves or beggars, becoming part of a growing force of itinerant day workers who wandered the country, waiting in the market each morning to be hired by the stewards of these local estates⁵. Thus there was a large cheap labour force, unorganised and insecure who were hireable for a denarius a day, just sufficient for the bare necessities of a small family⁶. Archaeologists tell us that in Jesus' time many were wandering day labourers through debt, and totally dependent on their physical strength, dying of malnutrition and exhaustion. Jesus' parables attack the isolation and marginalisation of migrant casual labour in a society founded originally on solidarity with all, but especially the powerless; the widow, the orphan, the stranger. The Gospels also have plenty of references to the role of good and bad stewards and of the decadence of the rich⁷. Jesus stories are not the creation of a fertile mind but the observation of the brutal social reality around him.

Encountering the Stranger

He spent all his adult life in Galilee. "Galilee of the nations" (i.e. foreigners) was a cosmopolitan region. It was a place of mixed race, mixed language and a place of trade and commerce. It was not particularly religious. "Can anything good come out of Galilee?" say the religious leaders from Jerusalem about Jesus. We hear of Jesus walking around Lake Genezareth into the Decapolis region, which was Greek speaking engaging in conversation with a Syro-Phoenician woman and a Roman Centurion, all foreigners. His world was multi racial, multi ethnic and multi-faith. The Gospels show us Jesus gradually developing his analysis and response to all of this.

It is a stranger from outside, the Syro- Phoenician woman, who provokes Jesus to open his message of the Kingdom beyond Israel when she challenges him to heal her daughter. At first he says he has come for Israel's children not the puppies under the table. But she is quick witted. "Even the puppies can catch the children's scraps!" Suddenly he sees her faith and responds and the mission begins to move beyond Israel thanks to an anonymous foreign woman. A conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well leads him to say that God cannot be limited to Jerusalem, or indeed any holy places, churches or basilicas. But rather the Gospel will happen wherever men and women gather in spirit and truth; in other words, anywhere.

Community and Blasphemy

Jesus' meals too establish a different type of community deliberately sitting at the table with the perceived unholy and the marginalised⁸. Then Jesus provokes and challenges to think about "but who is my neighbour?" His answer is not a technical definition; instead it starts from everyday life, a mugging on the Jericho road which was a common occurrence at the time. The listeners are immediately in sympathy with the victim, a fellow Jew, since it could be them next. Along comes a Priest on his way to the temple who walks by. The same happens with the Levite, an officer of the Temple. The crowd's reaction, the listeners,

⁵ Cf. the parable of the workers in the vineyard Mth.20: 1-15

⁶ When Jesus sees the effects of the new economics, he tells the story of the workers in the vineyard (Mathew 20).

⁷ Luke. 12:42; 16:1-9 and Luke 12:16-21

⁸ Mark 2:15 -16

would be angry.

The crowd, seeing themselves as perhaps this unfortunate individual, expect the hero to be a good Jew, an ordinary chap who will be the minister of God's compassion. But Jesus' story explodes their expectations: instead it is their hated enemy, a Samaritan, a foreigner. All their sectarian and nationalist prejudices and stereotypes are attacked. The religious, racial, economic and political alien becomes the agent of God's mercy. This is the Kingdom of Abba, an alternative vision offering to transform the world of the hearers. The crowd would have been as shocked as the Lawyer. When Jesus asks him, "who was the neighbour?" he cannot even say the name "Samaritan" only "the one who helped him".

The Gospel the margins and the marginalised

Jesus has a place in society as a skilled worker however because of the life he led, just like his birth on the margins, he dies outside the city in an unclean unholy place, between marginal figures, criminals. And the first witnesses to his resurrection were marginal to public life; women.

His ministry was one of breaking boundaries and blurring margins⁹. The movement he initiates "the Kingdom of God" has to have them at its centre if it is to be truly of God. He died because for the powerful of his time his life and teaching crossed too many boundaries, blurred margins, and invited a new perspective. For many then as now this was threatening. We are still called to the same mission. To go out to be alongside men and women oppressed and enslaved and limited by religious, economic and political structures, and prejudices.

To remember and to challenge

Jesus' ministry displaces the centre of religion. The margins and the marginalized become the focus for the new centre of the kingdom of God¹⁰. There the stranger becomes a potential fellow pilgrim on the way. The place of encounter with the stranger is not an easy place to be, but it is a place of unexpected truth and even revelation. It is holy ground.

⁹ Mth 21: 1-13; Peter 3:13

¹⁰ Lk 10:30-35

Delegates from around the world attending the WMCW World Assembly



Action Plan from the General Assembly

'Open up to the future for a World of Solidarity' is the title of the new action plan for the coming four years adopted by the delegates in Nantes. They reaffirmed their determination to continue the struggle in all Countries and at the International level for the creation of a new world economic order based on satisfying the needs of all and acting for:

- The rights of migrants to health, education, housing, social protection, to citizenship and to work with the same status as workers in the host country.
- For a true culture of peace in struggling against corruption in all countries.
- For the defence of the rights of workers and in particular for decent work which respects the dignity of women and men allowing them to live a decent life.
- For equality between women and men in civil, political, social and economic life.
- For a development of solidarity between the North and the South which respects people and their cultures.



The previous executive handover to the newly elected leaders of the World Movement during the final Eucharistic Celebration

The New Executive, elected for 4 years comprises the following:

- Co-Presidents
 - Alda Beatz Fortes, Brazil
 - Crespín Laté Lawson, Niger
- Treasurer
 - Jean Michel Lanoizelez, France
- Other members of the International Council
 - Charo Castelló Alfaro, Spain
 - Franz Anzenhofer, Germany
 - Sabah Eskander Gayed, Egypt
 - Ethelbert Penheiro, Bangladesh
 - Danilda Sosa, Dominican Republic
 - Victoria Sun Hee Seo, Korea
- General Secretary
 - Betina Beate, Germany

Paul Edwards from our own MCW Movement completed 5 very successful years as General Secretary at this General Assembly and intends to continue his international commitment as part of the support group for the in-coming General Secretary.

Thoughts of Pierre Philippe Saintelait

During the WMCW/MMTC gathering in Nantes Pierre Philippe Saintelait of the Haiti AOC approached me and asked if I could provide a letter of invitation so he could visit the United States. I answered that I would be delighted to do so and that in fact we would be honored to host him in our home.



We heard from Brother Philippe only occasionally and began to doubt that the visit would happen, when on New Year's Eve we suddenly received a call from a friend of his in the United States informing us that he would arrive in Washington the next day, at 10am! It turned out that his town in the mountains north of Port-au-Prince had no electrical service, so communications were quite limited. Philippe, we learned, was an elementary schoolteacher in his hometown; each weekend he made an arduous journey into Port-au-Prince (five hours walking down from the mountains on a dirt road before he could catch a bus on the highway) to study French.

Despite our limited communication – I and my family knew little French, and he little English – we enjoyed his company. In the holidays after New Years we toured Washington DC together, both its government buildings and monuments and its neighborhoods. In the evenings we alternated preparing dinner for each other in the manner of our respective cultures.

Now, barely a week after his return, his nation has been shattered by this devastating earthquake. Although we take comfort in the fact that Philippe, his wife, and his five-year-old daughter live well outside the capital and away from the epicenter, we have not yet heard from him. Naturally we fear that even if they have escaped the collapse that they may soon encounter shortages of food, drinking water and other necessities. Philippe's wife is late in pregnancy, adding to our concern.



My trade union, the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), represents bus and metro operators around the United States and Canada. Among our members are approximately 1,000

Haitian immigrants, mostly in New York, Miami and Boston. The ATU has begun a drive to collect for the relief and rebuilding effort in the wake of this catastrophe.

Our thoughts, our prayers, and our wishes of solidarity remain with Philippe, his family, and all the people of Haiti.

Clayton Sinyai, Catholic Labor Network-USA

Stop Press

The following message was received by Paul Edwards from Clayton Sinyai "I am pleased to report that Philippe is alright although his family has not escaped hardship as a result of the earthquake. Please continue to keep him, his family and the people of Haiti in your prayers."

The views expressed by contributors to MCW Review do not necessarily represent the views of the MCW

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