



1996, YEAR OF ERADICATION OF POVERTY

**Fernando Almansa - Ramon Vallescà
Pilar Malla - Ramon Espasa - José I. González Faus**

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Fernando Almansa i Ramón Vallescà

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1. Poverty in the Third World and its eradication

1. Basic facts of the world

- A quarter of humanity lives in a state of absolute poverty, that is to say more than 1.000 million people are unable to find enough food to lead an active life.
- 35000 children die everyday for reasons directly related to poverty. 130 million children do not receive basic education (of these 70% are girls).
- 1,300 million people do not have access to drinking water (80% of illnesses in the world are due to drinking bad water.)
- The distribution of wealth in the world is terribly unjust: 15% of the population own 79% of the world's wealth and 85% the remaining 21%.
- The population of the industrialised countries represents approximately 20% of the world's population, but consumes 10 times as much commercial energy as developing countries, and produces some 70% of the world's total of carbon monoxide and 68% of the world's industrial waste.
- Some 70% of the people who live in poverty are women.

1.1 Differences Increase.

In the past 30 years, if we consider the world from a global perspective, important economic growth has occurred, but the number of people who live in poverty has increased and the difference from those who live in abundance has markedly increased. In 1960 the income of 20% of the richest countries has 30 times more than that of 20% of the poorest countries. In 1990 it was 60 times greater. Today the 20% of the world population that lives in the five poorest countries of the world receive only 20% of the worlds' earnings. In this way the differences between rich and poor have doubled in the last 30 years.

The distribution of wealth is unjust not only among countries, but also inside the countries themselves (in both North and South). The 1000 millions of the richest people are 150 times richer than the 1000 millions of the poorest, and this difference too has doubled in the past 30 years. This 20% of the poorest population has access to only 0.2% of loans made by commercial banks, to 1.3% of international investment, to 1% of international trade and to 1.7% of international income.

1.2 Causes of Poverty

The first point is that the Southern countries transfer more to the North than they receive. So

the net transfer of resources from the South to the North is positive. Not only at the level of capital funds, but also of qualified human resources (a brain drain of those trained with Southern resources). Some causes of this financing of the North from the South are:

1.2.1 Unequal Commercial Relations

The economies of all countries depend more and more on international trade. The rules of the market work more and more in favour of the richest countries. The Northern Countries and the transnational businesses impose their interests on the South (protectionism, the low prices of raw materials, the increase in the price of manufactured good, financial dependence...)

It is estimated that in all 70 billion pesetas are denied to developing countries each year in market opportunities, 10 times more than they receive in Official aid for development.

As may be seen in the following examples, the free market is more free for some than for others.

The European Agricultural Policy subsidises the production of European farmers and when there is excess production its export is subsidised.

There is an organisation responsible for protecting the textile industry in the North (MFA). The Northern Countries impose quotas on the import of textiles from the Third World, but not on that of the other countries of the North. The restrictions on textile products and clothes represent a loss of 7 billion pesetas for the Third World.

The share of sub Sahara Africa in international trade has been reduced by a quarter from the level registered in 1960. The poor tend to be left at the margin of the market, whether at the national, or international level.

Besides, in the realm of international trade, there has appeared in the past 20 years a new breed: "the transnational companies". If the transnational companies do not fit in with the classic scheme of exploitation of the Southern Countries by those of the North; their interests rate above national interests. They set up their factories and those countries where labour conditions are bad and laws on the environment most permissive and their headquarters are set up in fiscal paradises where they pay no taxes. The transnational companies are converting many of the countries of the south into the toxic waste bin of the world. The control of such international businesses and the payment of taxes by those who profit from them are necessary conditions for the eradication of poverty.

The internationalisation of the economy has made it much more dependent on foreign investment and outside decision. Entry to the world market is ruled by the great institutions of the international economy (the IMF - International Monetary Fund and the WB - the World Bank): the Southern countries depend on these by virtue of their external debts. Dominated by neo-liberal ideas, these institutions encourage transformations in political economy of states, such as: the increase of state solvency for the payment of the external debt, the reduction of social costs and the reduction of state protectionism. The effects of these adjustment policies fall on the poorest of people: the level of unemployment is raised, and the acquisitive capacity of Salaries and social investment (especially in health and education) "it is unacceptable that those least able to adapt themselves to charges should support the heaviest cost of the social

and economic transformation of our world". Neoliberal policy has shown itself incapable of confronting the urgent problems that the World faces today.

1.2.2 An immoral external debt

For the last 15 years many of the poorest countries have been trapped in an external debt which they are unable to pay. Interest rates have risen while the prices of the goods on which they depend to pay the debt have fallen.

The net transfer from South to North in relation to the debt is approximately 7 billion pesetas. This is a quantity similar to that given in official aid to development.

Although in some countries the change in the debt has diminished (as in Brazil and Mexico) the total for developing countries has increased sevenfold since 1970.

In Sub Saharan Africa 2.5% of earnings from exports are allocated to funds for the redemption of its external debt.

1.2.3 Unjust Distribution of Wealth within States

These are national as well as international causes of poverty, and the North-South relationship. In fact the pattern of unjust international relations is very frequently reproduced on the national scale: the few monopolise wealth at the expense of the majority. The access of people who live in poverty to credit facilities, to technology and to other inputs of production in their countries is limited.

The national governments of Southern countries generally respond to the interests of their privileged minorities. This is shown directly in the lack of interest shown towards redistributive policies (agrarian and fiscal reforms for example) and in the bias in budget policies (lack of basic excessive expenditure on defence services).

1.2.4 Poverty, environment and population

It becomes clearer all the time that poverty, the deterioration of the environment and over population are closely related phenomena. The damage which the environment has suffered and is suffering affects us all and can impoverish us all unless a remedy is found. The unsustainable tendencies of consumption and production, especially in the North increase poverty and ecological disequilibrium.

2. What we understand by poverty.

When we try to define poverty there are intellectual prejudices that prevent us arriving at an overall consensus on what poverty means. There are religious models that have been able to establish different interpretations, very often contradictory, of what poverty is. It is important to underline that in this (article) we are not talking about poverty as a positive value in the evangelical sense, as an option of service to others,

of austerity of giving oneself, but rather we assume the definition of poverty in the negative sense of the word, one which presupposes absence, shortages, forced self denials by those who suffer them.

A first definition of poverty would be one that refers to the shortage of material goods in the development of human life: this would however be the more materialist interpretation of poverty and have a direct connection with an economic view - "someone is poor who has no money". However, we find more precise definitions which try to define poverty as a lack of choice itself, it is the absence of a range of possibilities among which to choose, poverty is not to be able to decide whether to emigrate or not; its not to be able to decide whether to sow one type of seed or another.

Another element of the understanding of poverty, would be one that interprets it as the privation of human dignity, that which makes it a slave, which restricts his liberty, and prevents a coherent development. Poverty can also be understood as the process of exclusion, one which systematically marginalises. Going further with this idea, poverty includes vulnerability, that is today not only being already a victim of a system which submits and reinforces the vulnerability, of the poor themselves: the poorer the more vulnerable, the greater capacity of becoming even poorer.

Further more, speaking of the feelings and experience of poverty, it must be said that poverty involves sorrow, resignation and despair.

However, one way of defining poverty, simpler, clearer, and upon which there can be a more general agreement, is one that refers to the lack of basic essentials of a whole human life, such as health education, culture, the development of leisure, social life etc.

Ten Commandments of the basic rights of any human being:

- access to clean and drinkable water
- a living place worthy of human dignity
- sufficient alimentation for adequate nutrition.
- a safe and secure environment
- protection against violence
- equal opportunities
- the right to give an opinion on ones own future.
- access to the means of daily sustenance
- health
- education

These ten points constitute a decalogue of basic rights to bear in mind, and when they are not complete, or one of them is absent we can speak of poverty. Therefore we may speak of poverty as multi dimensional, and define three axes:

- (a) Material Poverty: that which refers to the absence of goods and basic services.
- (b) Intellectual poverty: that which conditions the cultural and ideological development of the thought and politics of persons.
- (c) Social poverty that which affects the integration of a reference group with full rights,

participation in society, a differentiated and respected identity with which one has identified itself. Therefore when we speak of the multi dimensionality of poverty, its diversity and complexity must be borne in mind so that when the struggle against it is taken up, it should be under taken from the point of view of this multi dimensionality.

Poverty moreover tend to be self-perpetuating generating what it has come to be called, a culture of poverty, which tends to transmit itself from generation to generation making it all the more difficult to escape from.

Poverty is a whole setting, a whole environment, a combination of factors that prevent the development of real persons, that we become used to calling poor. Poverty is not the accumulation of those who suffer it, but rather the setting in which combination of persons develop and live.

In conclusion we may say that poverty is not simply “possessing little”, but essentially the combination of barriers which make human life unworthy and in essence is the consequence of an unjust relationship between human groups.

3. *Characteristics of poverty in the Third World*

As we have already seen in the first paragraph, the situation in the world is extra-ordinarily unequal. When we speak of the Third World we are speaking of this 80% of the persons on the planet who survive with hardly 20% of the world’s wealth.

When we speak of the characteristics of poverty in the Third World we have to clarify that the Third World as such is not more than a combination of countries, the greater part of the planet, where poverty reaches national proportions and has a structured cause external to the country itself, that is to say, we are not dealing with isolated poverty or marginal groups.

Characteristics that can help us to understand poverty in the Third World better.

In the Third World poverty affects the majority of the population, and especially the most vulnerable groups, because of their social condition, their gender, race, or age. That is to say that the most marginalised social groups perpetuate their marginalisation: Ethnic minorities, racial factions or castes reinforce their status of inferiority within the Third World. The question of gender (being a woman) is a key factor in discrimination in the Third World. This is so well known and confirmed in the programme of the United Nations for Development in its report of 1995, there is at present no society in which women have the same opportunities as men; the gap is much more obvious in the Third World than in industrialised countries.

On the other hand and as we have already said, poverty in the Third World has a very strong structured base, where roots are outside the country, or at least the most important, that is to say in the North, and these causes combine with those of the country itself.

Another one of the characteristics of poverty in the Third World, is that it is evident in all aspects of life, not only in material matters, that it to say, from the account we gave in the earlier sections, we may say that the intellectual and social aspects of poverty weigh as heavily

as the material even though the latter is the most obvious and pressing within the pyramid of necessities. Moreover the manifestations of poverty in the Third World tend to reinforce each other so creating the so called spiral of irreversibility of poverty.

3.1 The Evolution of poverty, a vicious circle

The fact that the countries of the Third World in regard to their commercial production are subject to the North, cleaning conditions the possibilities of economic development, and generates an irreversible cycle of poverty.

When the prices of raw materials are in the hands of the Northern multi-nationals, the producers of the South remain conditioned by their own possibilities of development and the eradication of their own poverty: these external causes are reinforced in many cases by a network of consequent causes which are developed in their own country, such as dictatorial government, oligarchies, corruption's, the exploitation of labour in sub-human conditions etc.

We have defined poverty as a chronic vicious circle in which symptoms and causes are mixed, they both reinforce and feed back one upon the other, making it harder at times to identify the causes by which they were generated.

It is likely that a person born into poverty will never escape from their vicious circle. The explanation is very simple: the child who is born poor, is badly fed, has weak health and a poor education performance if he goes to school, lower than the rest. Deficient nutrition can even lower mental faculties and the physical constitution; above all the poor suffer lack of opportunities which is reflected during the length of his life, creating a psychology or culture of poverty. Poverty generates self-perpetuation mechanisms, sometimes such mechanisms are even produced from the actual strategies of survival, when they are not able to create the qualitative leap that would allow them to leave the pervasive influence of poverty.

Poverty has become such a structural and established phenomenon that many people think it is no longer possible to eradicate it or to prevent it. Being poor is not a static condition and does not reflect inherited characteristics of a person or a family. Poverty is a social phenomenon.

The social nature of poverty implies that those who live in it are not the only people affected. The whole of society is affected. The community is deprived of the creative energies and potentialities of those who are impoverished: Besides poverty and inequalities frequently generate social instability, uncontrolled growth of the population, migration and environmental degradation. In their turn, these factors reinforce the privation of those who are trapped in the spiral of violence. "The security of a few, is the insecurity of all". (Nelson Mandela)

Because it is multi-dimensional, poverty imposes intellectual and psychological limitations, which often hinder the search for more global and wide reaching solutions, simply setting short term goals, and allows them to become even more firmly rooted and consolidated within the system itself. That is to say, poverty generates spaces within the system of injustice which enables it to perpetuate itself. Once poverty has found its place the struggle to break out of the vicious circle ceases and it is transmitted from generation to generation.

We can speak of a poverty line which if not crossed, it becomes impossible to escape because of the gravitational force which poverty exerts on those who live in it. The line must be crossed in a combined choice, not only of all those who live in poverty, but also by those who live in plenty, by multi-dimensional action.

4. The Strategy of Eradication

The eradication of poverty in the Third World cannot be achieved by adopted policies that attempt to return to earlier situations. It must be achieved by looking forward, taking for granted historic processes which have been consolidated, and seeking new ways for the future of the communities of the Third World.

To eradicate poverty is not a synonym for alleviating it, it is to force the passing of a limit threshold which will permit a new system of relationships.

It is to take up the fight against the causes which provoke it and not simply against its consequences. It presupposes in fact, confrontations with the groups in power who generate it.

Our society is in many instances an accomplice of these power groups and therefore it is an ethical duty to commit oneself to a form of active militancy to achieve radical changes. It becomes a commitment to a new world order that is not only economic but also political and social at the level of international justice.

It implies the restructuring of the United Nations, and of the way in which it intervenes; as well as a greater political commitment at the international level of action including a boycott, in the face of situations in the world where human rights have been violated.

It is not only a question of dividing the surplus value more equitably, but also the mechanisms of production. It is necessary to struggle in order to obtain a world wide pact for the eradication of poverty. Industrialised countries could find themselves benefiting from such a pact, with a diminution of the drugs trade, and of damage to the environment the pressure for immigration and the nuclear threat.

It is clear that there are sufficient resources for the eradication of poverty. These will come from the redistribution of budgets and the reductions of defence expenditure and from possible taxes on the flow of financial speculations.

If it is technically possible to eradicate poverty and there are sufficient resource then if we do not do so we are deliberately choosing the maintenance of poverty.

4.1 A New World Order.

4.1.1 The Governability of the World

The new world order requires the creation of an international system of government that will guarantee world security, incorporate a universal system of social security (a sort of security council of development in the UNO) and will establish a system of control of the transnational companies. The working of UNO must become more democratic with a complete revision of the system of representation and voting, eliminating every form of veto, in use at present. There is no efficient system for the redistribution of income at the international level, it is therefore necessary to tax the flows of originating in speculative finances. For every peseta exchanged in world commercial activities, a thousand are exchanged in speculative operations. It is estimated that there transactions reach 140 billion pesetas every day. A tax of 0.5% on them would reduce the speculative flows and generate 210 billion pesetas a year which could be used to eradicate poverty.

4.1.2 New rules of the game between North and South

World Markets must be opened to the countries of the South and their inhabitants. Developing countries could obtain at least 35 billion pesetas a year of the rich countries lowered the restriction on immigration of foreign workers.

Social clauses must be included and guaranteed in commercial relations that favour just commercial dealings. The debts of the poorest countries must be cancelled and renegotiated.

4.1.3 Efficient policies of aid for development

In these the objective of eradicating poverty must be given priority over the economic and political interests of the donor countries.

Increase in quantity: Industrialised countries give approximately 12% of their gross national product to satisfy the needs of their population, including the 100 million people who live in poverty in these countries. On the other hand, the Southern countries allocate 36 times less: below 0.35% of GNP to help to satisfy the needs of the 1000 million of the absolute poor in the Southern Countries.

Improvement in quality: At present 40% of Southern Countries receive twice as much aid per person as 70% of the poorest countries.

Only 7% of the total allocation of bilateral aid, that between governments, and 16% of multi lateral aid goes towards covering priority areas for the eradication of poverty (primary education, health, drinking water, environmental health, family planning and food safety) The proposed 20/20 agreed in the Copenhagen Summit in 1995, attempts to correct this situation by obliging the donor countries to give 20% of bilateral aid the priority sectors for the eradication of poverty and in the recipient countries to allocate 20% of their national budget to the same sectors.

4.2. Democratisation of Countries resources.

In the face of the neoliberal offensive to reduce the structure of the state means of redistribution of wealth (agrarian and fiscal returns) and the access of all person to basic social services must be defended. Southern Countries must organise their own forces to eradicate poverty.

Besides reducing military expenditure, the decentralisation of control and the creation of true local power, will encourage the approach of administrations to the situation of the poverty and the participation of people in the decisions affecting their lives.

4.3 Relations between civic societies and co-operation for development

Co-operation for development is only a useless element if the other factors present are not taken into account, it may even become a tranquilliser for consciences, or a weapon in the service the governing power.

Only 3 or 4% of the economic volume of Co-operation for Development passes through NGO's, nevertheless an exaggerated responsibility is attributed to them. In the South co-operation should be a tool for social transformation and a support for the marginalised sectors in the incidence of the distribution of wealth and power in their countries: Creditable symbols that the eradication of poverty is possible must be created, and it must be shown that human rights, democracy and participation also apply to the poor and excluded. The NGO's have a special responsibility in the social task.

4.4 Profound Personal Changes.

To see that those cases of injustice and discrimination reckoned intolerable within a country for reasons of ethnic status, belief or sex are considered equally intolerable in the planet as a whole.

To encourage responsible and austere consumption of goods, and to support the movement for a fair trade.

To combat the neoliberal mentality of an offensive against all the mechanism of the redistribution of wealth, and the accumulation of wealth of a speculative origin. We must take up active, militant and demanding social activity in the face of public administration, political parties, trade unions, churches and civil organisations, in particular NGO's that ought to feel the support but also the pressure of civil society, to carry forward this all embracing commitment to the eradication of poverty.

2. Poverty in the Fourth World and its Eradication.

1. The Term “Fourth World”.

Before entering into the principal theme of my exposition, I should like to recall Fr. Joseph Whesinski, a defender of the rights of the marginalised and the first person to use the term “Fourth World” to refer to those who are excluded in our countries, the rich countries.

I would also like this short introduction to be a testimony to my admiration for Fr Joseph, and at the same time, the exposition of a philosophy, of some ideas which, to my mind, are absolutely necessary to eradicate, poverty and marginalisation.

Joseph Waesinski was born into a wretchedly poor family, where shouting, hunger and cold were common. “ At home, he explains, my father was for ever shouting out, hitting my brother, making my mother angry...My father was a man who had been humiliated. He was suffering because he had been broken down, he dragged the shame of not being able to give us security or happiness. this was the root of damage done by poverty. A man cannot live like this, humiliated and without reacting...We were too poor, the most marginalised of the district, linked to the group by aims not by friendship”.

This small boy, poor among the poor, already suffered when he was small on behalf of the victims of the stronger boys”, and this suffering”, he says, “is the point of departure of a struggle from which I shall continue obstinately to the end of my life.” In his struggle he sees the Fourth World from within, with its wretchedness and its contradictions, but also with its values and its strengths.

He sees in the groups of the poor of Western Europe the same continuity of poverty that exists in the countries we call poor. He discovers in them the same characteristics of rejection, self underestimation, shame, fear and ignorance that paralyse a man. But at the same time he discovers in there groups the same resistance, the hope of better days. To those of us who see the Fourth World from the outside, he says that. “ We know very little about the reality of the sub-proletariat because it displays to us excessively disrupted features and it is difficult for us to establish fraternal and understanding relation with it. The further we proceed the more negative any view of them as people becomes. Even to recognise their existence would amount to recognising ourselves as to blame. We do what we can in order that they should not show themselves as a group of human beings. And this incapacity to understand becomes rejection: we deny it. Instead of valuing the circumstances in which they live, of using it as a trampoline for their liberation, instead of acknowledging their values and accepting them as they are living, we attempt to isolate the families form their like, in some cases even breaking them up.

Do we see a reflection in there words?

Let us listen further:-

To become a fighter on behalf of the marginalized is not easy: one cannot make oneself a

militant for scattered individuals. I have tried to meet them as people, I have tried to find myself as an integral part of this people. To find myself an adult, in there young boys of the shanty towns, and in the slums that constitute the poor areas around our great cities. Poverty would cease tomorrow if we could agree to help there young men to realise the reality of their people, to transform their violence into an intelligent struggle, to arm themselves with love, hope and knowledge, to finish the fight against ignorance, hunger, begging and exclusion.”

This must not be a question for government only: it must be a question of men who will go along with the marginalised and commit their lives to them, sometimes to leave everything to share their fortune”

I believe that in there words Fr Joseph Sums up his philosophy and his method of action. Fr Joseph’s struggle bore fruit in the foundation of the movement called Aid to distress in the Fourth World. (ATD)

1.1 Aid to distress in the Fourth World.

J Wesinskis book (The poor are the Church). Ed Cuarto Mundo, Madrid 1996) contains various basic principles. To consider the family as a refuge and as a liberating force. “It was an aim from the start, that families living in extreme poverty should be the defenders of their brothers. We wanted their militancy to be the guarantee that society should again take them in as responsible for themselves their children, their lives and their words.” To trust in the potentialities of all human beings. “The human being is never at the end of his course.” To give the movement some special characteristics. “The movement has chosen from the start, to be interconfessional and interpolitical, which does not mean non-confessional and non political.” In order to unite all people of good will in the fight in favour of the excluded.

To work so that the Fourth world will become an interlocutor who is heard. “There families will never be able to free themselves alone: I will make them ascend the stairs of the Elysee, the Vatican and UNO, of all the big international organisations. They must be interlocutors with full rights”.

All his struggle is stamped by his great love for the Church. When the publisher of his book asked if he wanted to add anything, he said only; “ I pray that this book will fulfil its purpose, that people will love the Church and that many will unite to fight against poverty:” that is what Joseph Wiesinski was like. Would we might make our own his words: “We must see, hear and live like those men and women of the Fourth World see, hear and live.”

2. What are we talking about when we speak of the Fourth World?

2.1 Our Fourth World

The introductory text of some days study of marginalisation said: “when it becomes clearer and clearer that to be the world of the marginalised and to encourage values and actions of solidarity, an important element in the composition of the Church. We must stop and think truly about what we are speaking, if we are all saying the same thing, and if what we are doing is what ought to be done.”

To stop and think what we are talking about and if we are all saying the same thing seems to

me elementary. What do we mean when we say that a person is poor or that a person is excluded?

A poor person is one who lacks sufficient economic means to live with a certain dignity. If his situation in poverty is not too drawn out, it may be that there will be no serious consequences: if it becomes chronic and affects fundamental aspects of his life, it will lead to exclusion. To be excluded means to be on the margin, not to have a place in society. The excluded are poor, but not all the poor are excluded.

2.2 Characteristics of exclusion:

Let us note some of the principal characteristics of exclusion:

(a) Chronic economic hardship -

It is a characteristic of exclusion that one cannot meet properly primary necessities, such as proper diet, nursing, education of children etc.

(b) Cultural poverty: This kind of poverty has many stages and aspects: inadequate literacy, uncertain guidelines in conduct, lack of professional preparation, and inability to take up tasks with perseverance and responsibility. The low cultural level deprives the poor of resources to escape from the situation of poverty.

(c) The tendency to self-reproduction: it is certain that exclusion is increasing because of new difficulties caused by unemployment and insufficient social protection, but it also increases naturally through self-reproduction.

(d) Serious family conflicts: when economic distress occurs in family relationships, bad effects appear, violence, alcoholism, drug traffic and running away from home.

Lack of shape and defencelessness

The world of the excluded is amorphous. It is made up of people from different backgrounds and histories. They are not part of an organised establishment. Consequently even such amorphism is defenceless.

The excluded have more problems and more serious ones than any other group and they are incapable by themselves of exercising the least social presence.

(f) State of Dependency: the excluded do not seem capable of overcoming their situation with their own resources. They depend on the help of others: (In Catalonia it is necessary to underline that the situation of dependency rests on our society - and on the Administration which represents it - the serious responsibility of the growth of exclusion. For the last ten years exclusion in Catalonia has increased by 3 points, whereas in Spain as a whole it has been reduced by 1.5 points.)

3. *Poverty and social exclusion among us.*

3.1 **The poor population of the Diocese of Barcelona.**

In order to discuss poverty and exclusion in the Diocese of Barcelona I must needs refer to the study made by the Edis-Foessa team, undertaken by Caritas of Barcelona. (Conditions of life of the poor population of the Diocese of Barcelona: Madrid 1996)

I will limit myself to some of the points I made in the prologue to the study.

The reasons for undertaking the study was the need to know in depth and in detail the deficiency and shortages of the various sector groups that compare our diocese and which seek help from Caritas. Our first objective was that analysis and knowledge of the poorest and most marginalised would enable us to understand it better, and in consequence to take action where it was most necessary. The following data are significant:

- The study covers 618.000 poor people and 169.200 families. People and families which lack many of the things our society consider basic. Of these families some 27.150 - about 126.960 people - reckon that they live in a state of severe poverty.
- The population of poor is becoming younger. For every person over 65 there are 2.2 poor children or adolescents.
- Poverty bears an important relationship to lack of education, 41.3% of the poor are illiterate. The figure of those not at school is 11.7% which will make their future adult development difficult.
- The severest poverty is urban and is concentrated especially in some districts of Barcelona.
- Only one in ten of the poor is in active employment. The rate of unemployment among the poor who are potentially active is 48.1% and the black economy of 27.6%
- 15.3% of families live in substandard dwellings.
- Poor families have to support some deficiencies that affect all their members: food shortage, lack of social health care, delinquency, alcoholism, drug addiction, deficient health.

There are also related problems, traffic in drugs, fights, robberies, prostitution, all these problems worsen the quality of life. The authors of this study emphasise, also, that it is not enough to fight against poverty by maintaining a policy of sustained economic growth:

The report of 1992 prescribed by the UN programme for Development established among its conclusions that economic growth does not automatically ameliorate people's standard of living, either within the state or internationally. Plan for economic development may generate more wealth, but such wealth trickles down from the rich to the poor very slowly, if at all. It seems necessary therefore to clarify whether the fact that poverty can be resolved follows automatically from the processes of development, or on the contrary, requires a specific and insistent action.

The study demonstrates the necessity of specific and insistent action in order to overcome poverty.

4. *The eradication of poverty.*

4.1 The deficits of our society

The evidence of the study of which we have been speaking is sufficiently eloquent to show that the problem of poverty is primarily political, a problem of political choices.

I believe politicians say what they think people want to hear: so few politicians talk about poverty in their electoral campaigns. In the first place because those who suffer poverty are not likely to bring votes: secondly it would be necessary that those of us who are not poor ask for an increase in assistance to the poor population despite the fact that we would lose some acquisitive power.

Perhaps we would not like it because we are not conscientious or because we do not think our loss would help those in need. But it is obvious that an important population of poor exists among us and also important economic wealth. Not all the solutions, or indeed, the most important are in our hands but we can in fact do something to help change the situation.

4.2 Our duty as brother citizens of the poor

It is a serious problem for our country that society as a whole has not recognised that there are poor, in the strict sense of the word. It has not recognised that a large number of people and of families, live very close to them, and they lack enough money to be able to live, or to satisfy basic necessities: they are people who are hungry, have problems with employment, health, housing, alcoholism and drugs. All such scarcities that lead to social exclusion

As citizens we cannot avoid this reality, we cannot live as if poverty did not exist. This does not mean simply giving money or other goods. as Abbe Pierre says “life consists in learning to love every day.” If we were to go on practising this we will find a way of meeting with the excluded without causing damage.

4.3 The Social services

Above all it must be said that if the social services are not given resources then however good they are, however good the professional social workers at their work, they will be able to do very little to battle against poverty and exclusion.

Well then, being self critical of the development of social work. I dare to say - things being as they are - we have applied theories and legislation according to the books but we have lacked creative imagination. Until now we have helped individuals or families chiefly in isolation. We have tried to understand their problems and have sought a way of solving them, if it was in our hands to do so. Now we are facing a new challenge, the need to affect the whole circumstances of poor families, to discover the needs of families and individual, what the

group in the neighbourhood lacks. We cannot, then, limit ourselves to an individual task: it is the work with a group, or with a community project that is one of the necessary instruments of social work and when working among the excluded. The classical rules will have to be somewhat forgotten, and we must start from the causes of marginalisation. This is a situation which is related to a lack of preparation. The educational aspect is, therefore, fundamental, but cannot be fully realised from a situation other than that of its own world.

We need social workers with the aptitudes and vocation to work in this world, who are able to draw out the values of people who are excluded and so, with them to modify their conditions who should be able to analyse what the normal population has and what the excluded population lacks, precisely because it is excluded: who should analyse what is being done to help it emerge from exclusion.

It is necessary to look for global policies that affect the poor collectively. It is urgent that everybody comes to realise their own dignity, and their own rights as persons and as citizens. We must establish what is the function of social work in the field of poverty and exclusion.

4.4 Strategies for action.4 Strategies for action

There are three lines of strategy in my opinion:

Social protection, that is to attend to the basic needs of the population: so that the poor are less poor.

Social promotion: to encourage the participation of the population and their involvement in social and labour affairs.

Community promotion; that is to help the group, neighbourhood, or community to become aware of its reality, and to look for valid answers for its problems with the help of public and private bodies which will participate in the process. Not only must action be taken on the problems that have been revealed, but there must be movement towards preventive policy. The lack of training and education is a fundamental limitation that conditions poverty. The solution lies not only in increasing economic aid but also in taking serious action against illiteracy, thus achieving an efficient policy for human capital.

To close, let us recall what has been said; it is essential to see the Fourth world from within, with its poverty and its contradictions but at the same time to see its values and its strength.

3. A New Economic Culture, a new Poverty .

Today globalisation of the economy is evident. Its causes have been thoroughly analysed. Nevertheless very few, until now, have dared to promote new strategies of solidarity, social progress and strong reform with which to face politically the new situation of the world economy. The ideological pressure of rampant liberalism, born of the new monopolising hegemony of the markets, has created perplexity disorientation and paralysis among the parties of the European left, in which I include not only the political parties but also a broad spread of social movements such as ecologists, feminists, pacifists and groups of a Christian origin or tendency.

Yet the world markets represent today the most serious menace to state economic policies, which with their successes and failures have attempted to eradicate and overcome poverty. Consequently a large number of the cultural assumptions of the European left which inspired this formidably powerful redistribution of income - the Welfare State are today out of favour.

1. *Economic Globalisation: a new political situation.*

L Thurow has shown how capital raw materials, manufactured products knowledge and the actual production of goods and services, circulate or are located in any part of the world at a cost gradually approaching zero. Goods and services can be produced in almost any part of the world.

2. In the world share market, in the area of "hot money" (120 billion pesetas) are transferred every day. This money is moved more rapidly than ever and some analysts see it as a new shadow government if we add to this the disappearance of the dollar as an international exchange currency. Monetary rises caused by the stock exchange markets are at hand. This new financial reality implies an increased profitability for productive investments and a whole culture of speculation. But it shows above all the loss of autonomy of national monetary policies.

3. Growing industrial dislocation is the response of the highly tuned planning of multinational business and others to the defence of their interests, to the situation described above. One example is enough: Nike, a world leader in sports goods has 9000 employees in the USA and 75000 in the rest of the world. Transnational companies can plan and choose distinct points and the most favourable markets for their products. Their wage cuts, fiscal and sales advantage, while the nation state and its political economy remains subject, or better enchained, to its own national market.

4. The emerging economies of the newly industrialised countries, born of this dislocalisation, base their success not so much on the recalcitrant liberalism preached by the Economist and the Financial Times as on a wise measure of state 'disincentive' political economies open only to the outside world, monetary dumping and on a far smaller scale, social dumping.

This economic globalisation therefore presents a new fact of political reality which profoundly affects everything the state represents, not only in its economic activities but also and this is new, in its political activity.

2. *The Welfare State under Cross fire.*

In Europe the period 1945-1975 is one of the most intense economic growth, the longest and more sustained in world history. It is characterised by:

- (a) An almost full employment rate: a continued and significant increase in the influence of the state in the economy of each state of nation.
- (b) The political economies of the states were relatively autonomous and self-enclosed.
- (c) A certain level of equilibrium between increase of benefits and growth of incomes and salaries, was possible thanks to the relative autonomy of national policies. Policies based on growth demand have been the order of the day until recently, with the result, a wise balance between budgetary policy, fiscal policy and public spending especially in its social cost component and in expense on active infrastructures.

The most relevant political, social and economic effect of the welfare state has been its undoubted tendency towards the transfer and redistribution of income. Active policies of education and training, of safety and health measures, guaranteed income for old age, sickness and unemployment, fiscal benefits for families, the encouragement of leisure and culture, regulation of the labour market, and the demand - at least tendency - for full employment all understood as a necessary complement of new social rights have been important levers in implementing an ideal pursued to transfer incomes as a sign of progress and civilisation and, it must not be forgotten, as a form of social cement.

The exchange and finance markets have become universal and immediate as a result of their decisions. The assets beneath these markets are far larger than the reserves of states central banks. From such a powerful position and following the implacable logic of profit these markets gamble on the enormous economic disequilibrium that threaten states.

The amount of GDP spent of public services (from 44%-49% approximately in member states of the EU) is therefore criticised as inefficient and a brake as possible economic growth of a 'lighter' state. The corrective function to the market through freeing the market in certain goods and services (education, health, pensions and culture) is presented as a cause of grave distortions of economic efficiency. All the monetarist warning shots from the financial markets are directed towards the policies of solidarity and the redistribution of income that the states have produced. The decade 86-96 has marked the end of keynsianism in one country. From being the motors and co-ordinators of growth states have become mere agents for public spending (that 44-49% of GDP) in the framework of a setting gradually becoming more open, and more world-wide which they no longer control.

Today the exclusive stimulus to demand in one country is translated immediately into an increase of disequilibrium in the commercial balance: this disequilibrium will bring pressure

on the kind of exchange of the currency itself, provoking a rise in interest rates, which in turn aggravate inflation. If we add to this the logic of a definite level of budgetary deficit - which had been accepted to induce the original stimulus to demand - we have closed the infernal circle. It all destroys the capacity of the state to control its own economy. The loss of autonomy for national currencies, pressures of the markets on exchanges, which compel devaluation's incongruent with the state of the economy, are significant signs of the end of an epoch.

3. *A New Contradiction.*

This contradiction between the economic topic of irreversibly globalised markets and the needs and logic of strongly redistributive economies in all the states of the EU raises the fundamental question today to which European ves processors have not been able to give an answer.

The new "International of the markets, finances and capital" has finally opened our eyes. It is of no use taking refuge in part ideologies, much less hiding under the skirt of the Mother-State. Progressive men and women must take action in the new scenario which is more difficult, more hostile and more complex. The reply cannot be simple or rhetorical because the nation state continues to be the space with a determined level of solidarity - conquered by the progressive movement - which expresses itself by way of the transfer of income from the public budget. Against this noble and politic function of the state the world markets rise up ever more menacingly. These are in essence committed to the rule of inequality without transfer of income between different sectors of the population, without a fiscal policy of levelling incomes, without pensions to make up for the lack of employment, and without obligation in health, education, culture or infrastructures, which naturally they delegate to the state.

In these areas only profit counts. Governments must choose between pleasing the financial and exchange markets (the area of inequality) or pleasing their voters (the area of solidarity).

4. *Three final points, three replies.*

While the liberal right, from its catechism teaching demands a smaller and smaller as a token for greater growth and prosperity, the progressives today offer three replies.

A) The most radical focus starts from the previous diagnosis but adds to it the gross gap of inequality between the rich and poor countries, the growth of debt in the third world and the new targets of sustainable growth and concludes that - we must finish with this disturbing triumph of the economy over political. It must be turned right round, a new reign of politics must be inaugurated which, ruling the global economy must administer, at world level, remedies for the present state of affairs as much in the world as in each state. The means, the tactics and strategy whereby the praise-worthy and desirable objective will be achieved are left, however too much in the air, relying totally on solidarity, charity and the power of reason, forgetting unfortunately the motives of force.

B) Another more flexible focus, apparently more realistic more loaded towards a technical view of economic and social problems, accepts fairly uncritically the state of the question. The crisis of profitability in productive investments in advanced industrial countries, the automatisisation and globalisation of markets the financial bubbling, the loss of authority in political economies and state currencies, industrial dislocation, new methods of organising production, these, are assumed as revealed evidence by the new neo-liberal oracles. In these conditions the deregulation of labour, the diminution of unit labour costs, the cutting of public expenditure - especially social expenditure - and the continuing propaganda against the stifling weight of the state in the altars of favouring new productive capacity, a greater competitiveness and new political economies of supply, are changed into measures which under the cloak of modernity cover a serious ideological weakness. The acceptance of the markets as the only directors of the economy, the unconditional surrender before the market, and the extremist monetarist - free-exchange discourse, inevitably take the defendants of this option which could be called 'social-liberal' to accept the following and disturbing evidence at the theoretical level: transnational companies can and must continually plan more and better, while states must be gradually deregulated so that the markets and transnational companies can operate without any restriction.

(C) A third focus which is as appropriate to call thorough reformation, starts from the following reflections.

(a) The appearance of new economic areas such the EU, TLCA, MERCOSUR, CEAHP etc display an absolutely unstoppable economic dynamism and so must be taken into consideration. We are dealing with very heterogeneous economic groupings which run from a free trade treaty to projects for political, social and economic union, but the agencies in the near future will be economic and social and their objective will be moved to the left.

(b) The disorder in the money market and the tyranny of the exchange market proclaim noisily that we should bet on the death of the Bretton Woods agreements (its patron the dollar of IMF + WB) and defend a new equilibrium consisting of a currency based in a mix of the triad - Dollar, Yen, Euro. We must, then, without shame explain and propose a new financial and monetary international regulation which facilitates productive investment in the face of the present growth of financial and exchange markets. In this sense the proposals of James Tobin (a tax on exchange dealings) or of Ruben Mendez (the creation of a foreign exchange control market supervised by UNO), suggest stability mechanisms and controls in the face of the increasingly speculative tendencies of the exchange markets. Both proposals are, among others examples of the fact that control of the globalisation of markets is not only necessary but technically possible.

(c) The civilising nucleus with "later sense" the forms and regulations of the European welfare state represent must be exported to the rest of the world as a guarantee of its continuity among us.

5. A New Proposal for a new political scenario.

It seems that an economic space the size of the EC (by reason of the size of its GPP) could withstand the assaults of the financial and money markets. The UE could, by providing sufficient will and political force for it, return to putting the economy at the service of a democratic policy, and overcome the exhaustion which every one of the states is suffering

from in this area. A possible alliance of the progressive sectors of the UE should propose the following minimum agenda as a programme:

Settle an increase in the internal demand in the whole UE in its classically combined social spending, active infrastructures, territorial whesion and social levelling.

Guarantee an increase of productivity using the adequate policies of supply, a greater use of resources and development, new intermanagement skills and a greater versatility of workers assured by means of continual professional training.

- to encourage an increase in the quantity and quality of personal social services (education, health, leisure etc) as much to satisfy a real demand as to establish an authentic seam for the creation of new jobs and an area specially faranable for the inclusion of women in work.

The social rights universally consolidated in Europe must not be diminished in amount or volume. The ways in which they are realised may change, but then basic raison'd etre - goods to be set gradually apart from market values neither can nor ought to be changed.

- to increase the necessary compatibility between productive processes and nature to satisfy both ecological demands, and to increase and diversify industrial processes and the creation of new technologies, demanded by work and "green wealth".

- to assume the maintenance of low rates of interest, fighting against inflation not only from the point of new of view of the reduction of expense but assuming first an adequate level of income to balance reasonably the budget and to guarantee realistic rates of exchange.

The programme here listed might be more extensive and detailed but it is the formulation of the idea rather than its exact development that is of more interest. It is an attempt to give a new answer to the permanent objective of combining liberty with solidarity. The EU represents at the present time the economic area where there is the greatest concentration of theories, practices and organisations of the left and inclined towards solidarity in the whole world. It does not seem out of place therefore to indicate that where more prohibitions exist and therefore more responsibilities arise, that is within the framework of the EU, must be where a reflection arising from a new impulse of solidarity seeking again the eradication of inequalities, and ending poverty.

Our discussion should be leading to relocating politics and reason above economy our reflections and proposals must not avoid the economic intent of every solid growth project, on the contrary. Only by taking on the elaboration of "a new political economy" may we be in a condition to confront the heart of the problem, that is the subordination of the political - with all its load of civilisation to the blind logic of certain economic markets which today seem to be setting themselves beyond all critical reflection.

Some Untimely Christian Observations in the Proceeding Chapters

There is no need to repeat the facts. We must give two finishing touches - painted in concentrated circles. According to the PNUD report (of 1996) the gross domestic product of the whole planet is round about 23 trillion ptas. Of these 18 are consumed by the developed countries: only 5 remain for 80% of the worlds population. (Vida Nuera 27.7.96.1.34)

In Spain, according to a recent report from Caritas, 8 million people live on less than 42 000 ptas a month and a million and a half with less than 27 000.

Recently various politicians have told us that they thought Barcelona organised the Olympic Games much better than Atlanta. It would have been more useful had they raised the subject that Pilar Malla has discussed earlier in this pamphlet: in the last ten years exclusion has risen by 3 points in Catalonia , while in the rest of Spain it has fallen by 1.5 points. Certainly, a community aware of solidarity is not lacking in Catalonia, what happened then?

1. Second Track.

In such conditions, to dedicate a year to the eradication of poverty can only be a shameful piece of hypocrisy whose purpose is to eradicate our bad conscience as rich people in the face of poverty. This year is now coming to an end but poverty continues, the facts follow, the deaths from hunger continue. Can we offer any project or plan a facing both these facts, that would allow us to hope that, from this year, there is going to be a decisive change of direction in the increase of poverty? Unhappily, no.

This kind of hypocrisy was discussed centuries ago by Ignatius of Loyola in his ‘Spiritual Exercises’. Speaking about the second track (a class of men): he is one who faced with a difficult decision (and precisely one of an economic order) considers all means except those which must be taken, to deceive his conscience: he plays, gives, aims, does penance - he is prepared to do everything except letting go of the doubtful money if God asked him to, since, although he would like to do God’s will, what he really wants is that God will should ‘coincide with his own’
(Spiritual Exercises 150-155)

We are like this kind of man when we say, for example, that the solution of the problem of growing poverty is to “create wealth”. To create wealth may be absolutely necessary, but is radically insufficient. For in our economic system, wealth can only be created by concentrating it on a few and sharing it less. When there is economic growth the number of poor grows: in the USA when the number of unemployed falls noticeably the stock exchange of New York also falls. This is very logical: since the disappearance of unemployment would suppose a great effort on the part of the worker at the time of fighting for wage increase: which is the equivalent to a noticeable fall in the advantages of investment.

The absolutely necessary means of eradicating poverty is not only to create more wealth but that we ourselves should be a little less rich. To achieve this, if we want to be simply honest, a decade of eradication of the rich, ought to follow the year of the eradication of poverty. Or at

least one of sharing wealth.

2. *The Church of the poor but - disorderly.*

In these circumstances, the church which is so obsessed with the immorality of contraceptives should declare once and for all that certain fortunes are a mutual sin subject to excommunication (and excommunication reserved to the supreme pontiff) because they control the fecundity of the goods of the earth, and about an infinite number of lives that nature had intended to be human. Let us consider that 358 people alone own fortunes “larger than the annual income of those countries where nearly half the earth’s population live.” (Vida Nueva Loc cit). This indeed, is “against nature”.

It should be clearly stated that in an economic system such as ours where there is nothing so sacred as not to be subjected to the laws of the market place (neither the human body or its power for work, or even the laws of nature themselves, in such a system fiscal fraud is absolutely sinful (perhaps with time it should be excommunicated as well. Taxes are the weak instrument that our system has at its disposal to dispense some justice and compensate for the excluding dynamic of capital. Not to proclaim this becomes a form of cynicism and all this so called “catholic” morality, (that is to say universal) which as we have said is obsessed with contraception for Aids sufferers, while it Lignones the economic contraceptive used by millionaires.

Finally the Christian Churches (who are aware of the richness of the New Testament concept of communion - koinonia) should declare as radically insufficient a democracy which leaves it excluded from the world of the economy. Formerly economics was part of politics (it was called “political economy). But today politics is humbly subordinated to the dictates of certain fictitious economic powers responsible only to themselves (an R Espasa indicates as his contributors to this publication). To denounce the falseness of a democracy in these conditions would be as troublesome as denouncing the myth of “organic” democracy in the days of Francos dictatorship. But somebody has to do it; the churches here must play the mission of “Substitution” (or replacement) without economic democracy, poverty cannot be eradicated a political democracy realised.

3. *A Civilisation of Shared Soberness (or Moderation).*

If all of this argument affects us as Christians, we must as citizens understand that the lowering of our standards of living, which is demanded of us to be in solidarity and to eradicate poverty would be - however paradoxical and it may seem to us a benefit for ourselves. Rather than in a civilisation of shared restraint and moderation, we live in a form of culture where wealth is concentrated. Well then, this kind of structure generates fatally a civilisation of fear: and this is one of the dominant characteristics of our first world. We are afraid of loving what we have, of heart-attacks, cholestrol, AIDS, unemployment, depression, meaningless experiences, lack of communication, the outsiders, of not having the corporeal “means” or signs of external wealth which earn one the acceptance of others which we require so much.

It is an observation of elementary psychology that fear brings out the worst in all human

beings. Nothing makes us so cruel and inhuman as material fear.

Anyone who has lived in and knows the countries of the Third World can witness that those are societies of suffering: of much suffering which should be eradicated. But curiously and perhaps because there, there is nothing to lose, profound experiences of solidarity mutual help and human relations capable of developing the best in many people. The people of the Third World are not better than us by nature, and we do them no favour by mythologizing them. We are all human beings of the same weak clay and incorrigibly deficient. But they are much freer of this fear which dominates and weakens so many of us.

People say “money doesn’t make you happy but it solves a lot of problems”. Unfortunately, this is said as a realist excuse to justify the accumulation of wealth. Such a conclusion is not logical. The reasonable thing would be to conclude: let us keep money for some problems (health, education) and let us get rid of the money that does not make us happy and could solve other people’s problems: the impressive amount spent on arms, on useless and refined items of luxury, an empty ostentation, on the obscene and provocative signing on of contracts in football, and on the thousand and one useless commodities which end up weakening us and making us lazy in mind and body. A civilisation of poverty means nothing else and a change would contribute decisively to the eradication of poverty.

4. *Justice, not charity.*

To lower the level of the standard of living would be like recovering the ancient theology of alms giving in a world which, on the one hand is gradually becoming smaller, and on the other, through the complexity of networks is becoming larger. The ancient theology of ‘alms giving’ said that it was an obligation under pain of mortal sin; giving alms was a act of strict justice not one of charity: because in giving alms we do not give away what is our own but return to the other what is his.

For 1800 or 1900 years this theology had important social consequences. Today we must transplant it and inculturate it again in a new economic situation. It is not enough that one day we should suffer from a bad conscience and the next give a little by way of tranquillising ourselves. It is a matter of creating a social structure so that all this wealth which does not at present make us happy and could solve so many real problems of others, belongs to those others and not to us. And therefore as Christians we are obliged to return it to them.

If we truly believe in the God of Jesus. Let us try to put ourselves before Him, and look with his eyes at the world described in these pages, and hear the question. “What have you done to your brothers”. Their blood is crying out of the earth to me.” (Gen 4.10). We know already that one cannot have everything, but it is also certain that the reply, “Am I perhaps my brother’s keeper?” is not allowed by the same God in which we say we believe (Gen 4.9).

Perhaps we shall understand then that the problem of the eradication of poverty, is to be seen not as a “horizontal “or secular question, but as one which is expressly religious. We are dealing with the matter of the credibility of God, which the God revealed in Jesus Christ has chosen to put into our own human hands: in Christian theological tradition it appears clearly enough that the existence of poor on the earth creates one of the most decisive arguments

against the Providence (to day we would say simply the existence) of God. I will quote two witnesses to conclude.

“From this it follows manifestly either that God did not show enough Providence, but was careless in leaving the poor without sufficient means to live, or that the rich (we would say today) would be considered cruel and untruthful people who, when God has entrusted them with so many goods to be shared with their brothers, have gone off with them, breaking the faith they should have in God: Domingo Soto in 1545”

“What an injustice, brothers, that the poor should bear all the burden and that the weight of poverty should fall on their shoulders! If they complain or minumum against providence - theirs is certainly a just complaint. But in this strange disequality how can we justify providence of administering badly - if we had not had another means of succouring the poor? Well then, for this he founded the Church”.

Bossuet in 1659

(Both texts, and others, are quoted and commented on in my book “Vicars of Christ: the poor in Christian theology and spirituality. Madrid 1991)

It may be said, in the light of there texts, that any affirmation on the Church or on theology as theology of liberation, can be exaggerated. Above all when those who disauthorise it, have not been able to propose in its place any alternatives, but have only forgotten it. Christians like to say. “ God has put himself in our hands.” (and this is a good summary of Christian experience.)

But then, when the time comes to draw the consequences from this faith, we prefer to give back to God this gift which alarms us, and we try to serve him not as he wishes to be served, but as it happens to be more convenient for us to serve him. Therefore the year of the eradication poverty is not simply a cultural, political, or sociological affair, but a theological matter. As a social cultural theme it may happen to end the year. As a theological theme it continues to the important as long as there are the undermined of the earth. It’s relevance was formulated for us twenty centuries ago by Jesus of Nazareth “Go and learn what it means : ‘I want mercy and not religion’ for it had known you would not have condemned the innocent”. MT 9.12 + 12.7

© *Cristianisme i Justícia*, Roger de Llària 13, 08010 Barcelona
Telf: 93 317 23 38;Fax: 93 317 10 94;
espinal@redestb.es; www.fespinal.com