

**“CAMPUS 2009” August 24 – 28, 2009 at the International Centre of the
International Movement ATD Fourth World, Pierrelaye, France.**

By Martin Costa

Thank you, Mr. Jean Tonglet for giving me this opportunity to be part of this assembly, to listen to the humanitarian services rendered to the poor and to make a small contribution with our experiences at Purnodaya – Sri Lanka.

Reading through the invitation and the outlined details in the “CAMPUS 2009” my attention was drawn to the authentic words of Fr. Joseph Wresinski, whom I love and follow and who is a **LIVE** inspiration in our work at Purnodaya.

“Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To overcome together to ensure that these rights be respected is our SOLEMN DUTY”.

This **emphatic** statement of Fr. Joseph Wresinski, I know was his breath and today it is the breath of the ATD and it should be the breath to all of us who strive to serve the poor. While reading this few times over and over I caught its Key Words namely the” **Solemn Duty**”

So with these key words in mind I present my reflections over the theme before us with our experiences and activities.

“Violence and Peace What to do about violence?” and “Social Relations or ties; from discrimination to mutual transformation.”

Introduction

“Nothing in life is beyond Redemption”

Therefore, Restoring Peace, Developing Healthy Relationships through transformation can begin **in the heart**.

Do not cry over the spilled milk, but avoid spilling milk in order to save tears. Similarly, avoid adding insult to injuries with new violence and keep watering the flames of violence, with a determined vision to Restore Peace.

Twenty years ago we began a Journey of Hope and today we see that this was a Journey begun **in the Heart**, spreading into many hearts, into the hearts of givers and receivers.

The more one goes deeper into the life of Fr. Joseph Wresinski, one can discover that ATD, what it stands for and live Today, began in the heart of this poor man, Joseph

Wresinski, who was surrounded with the miseries of poverty from his very childhood along with that of his neighbors. In order to eradicate poverty he began a Journey in his heart, under conviction that living and dying for it was worth his life and organized individuals, establishments, men and women and represented matters to the National and International levels considering it as a “ **Solemn Duty.**”

Life

Life is a gift to be shared in full as much as nature shares its resources abundantly with humanity. Life begets its Primary gift (Love) to share. We call it or we know it as Love.

We get this gift of life through the love of a man and a woman. Through their most intimate love, through their deepest communion. Through their being One.

This Unit of Love we call **a Family**. A family that loves together lives together, grows together, bearing fruits of love, extending into other Love Units of families – A Universal Family. All these Units are invited to live in conformity of a Love Sharing Life.

Can one think of Violence in an environment of this manner? There is no need to speak of Peace as the Unit itself is Peaceful.

Naturally, we are all an embodiment of Love emancipating “**PEACE**”. Deep in our hearts in the midst of violence is a deep **YEARN** for Peace.

Unfortunately, how did a **deepViolence** get into this **Peaceful Heart**, is the Question of the Day.

Generally we know that a child begins to react when he is not attended to, the more the attention becomes lesser the growth of violent reactions of the child increases.

We can see Violence as an enlargement of this small act of negligence, developed into complex needs of individuals and communities growing into selfishness, greed, power and so forth.

Violence and Peace

What is more prominent today? **It is Violence**

What is more yearned and desired today? **It is Peace**

We are compelled to breath, see, hear Violence and sometimes to act violently for survival, personally, collectively, family wise, occupationally and socially.

We allow all forms violence to by pass us even though we are neither advocates nor victims of violence.

Today the world and its activities are at our door steps around the clock. The print and the electronic media feed us with the news of tragic deadly events of violence in the world. Violence among school children, nations, ethnic groups, cultures and religions, also sadly with the news of violence in the Family Units. Violence has its numerous forms.

May be that you and I are not physically affected, but truly we are Wholly affected for we are humanly Love Sharing Beings.

The irony of Violence is that most affected are the Poor. What echoes in them is “Are we born to suffer?”

Violence can be called the **Deadliest Disease**. Through the scientific development we enjoy remedies for almost all diseases. Scientific researches are being carried out to keep a Healthy Humanity.

But Violence continues to kill, destroy nations and makes all human beings even though alive, **in a deadly atmosphere**.

Violence begets as a Molecule in the hearts that are made to Love, and grows from strength to strength in the individuals, in small units and families and spread among humanity dividing them to no returns.

Violence is adopted as a means to restore Peace. That is why Violence precedes Peace .It is common to see that after total destruction of human lives, their belongings and nations infrastructures, Peace Negotiations and Reconciliations begin. This methodology has become the political norm of the day, ever forgetting the psychological and traumatic damages done to humanity by the loss of their loved ones and seeing the bitter, tragic and deadly experiences that roams in the minds and hearts of those saved.

Peace

Peace is a messianic word commonly publicized today welcomed by all hearts. Though the concept of Peace has been torn into pieces, yet there are growing sacrificial elements striving to restore peace amidst violence. Individuals, Organizations, National, International and Religious communities have organized themselves to combat Violence and Restore Peace. We are happy and thankful to them as we support this Human Aspiration of our times.

Peace is the Dire Need of the Hour.

Purnodaya

Stopping this introduction to the Theme, I like to address to the request made of me in support of the Theme based on the work of Purnodaya in the last twenty years.

Purnodaya stands for Total Development of the person.. With this vision we launched a mission far back in June 1988 and continue to serve, specially the development of the children, with guidance to parents and with their participation in the process of our development activities.

Our approach is through education, assistance in their basic school studies and in the development of their aesthetic and other skills, Life Education for character formation in Personality Development.

Coming into the context of this sessions themes,

General Violence as a whole affects them equally with additional deprivations and losses. In the last twenty years we have discovered and continue to discover other prominent areas of Violence that hinders their growth as they are poor and disadvantaged. We adopted the form of empathy into their personal and general life situations. To their very lives in their own homes, their immediate environment, among their close relations and friends. Life in school and at other social institutions and events, life in public places, markets, by ways, life at functions and so forth.

The general and the common discovery was that they felt that they were discriminated. They were excluded, deeply humiliated, harassed, ridiculed. Defenseless, unsecured and unrecognized. They were used as objects, used and set aside. They felt they had no right to education, as sometimes they were told in school that their place was in the market.

They were used at occasions but were deprived in participation. Got to keep waiting even to get what was legitimate and what was received sometimes were the left over.

Another area is Violence through sexual abuse, specially by their own kith and kin. Violence through isolation by the separation of either mother or father. Violence of oppression by their own clan.

Our Call at Purnodaya.

It is Two fold. To remedy the past . To Restore the future, by a Loving Human approach. For us it is Heavy and Dutiful task.

The children have their questions burning in them.

Why are we not listened to? Why are we not laughed with? Why are we not chosen for events with other children? Why are we shy when our parents appear in school?

Some have guts to say, that with all the good formation given to us, when we go to the society as men and women, we are sure to be looked down remembering our clan and our past.

We have logical answers. But they cannot stomach them. We tell them to keep understanding and endure patiently. They speak back (for they can do it in our presence) For how long? Why can't the elite understand us as children?
We know they truly have a Dream and a Song to sing. A Dream of their Human identity, Human Dignity, A Song of their Freedom.

Our Approach – Mutual Transformation

Twenty years, what have we be doing? We have not just continued to guide and assist them in their academic studies nor in developing their aesthetic and other hidden skills.

In and around the clock of twenty years, we have **been available** to them. We have been **with them** and for them.

We have a Thrust to follow. “Whatever you do the least, you do it to me” Mt:25.40 Jesus.

We began with an approach truly based on LOVE. A Love indeed. Love with a revolutionary approach. Love encircled with a Human, Psychological, Social and Religious values. Gradually we made the very environment of Purnodaya a place of entertainment, making them realize that it belongs to them, to raise their Selfesteem.

(we have been criticized for making Purnodaya comfortable, decorative to facilitate the children. We have also been appraised for doing so to make these children happy and comfortable)

Our is a place of acceptance, respecting them in all circumstances and at any time, whereby we have built confidence in them and in us.

The children learn to salute each other with a genuine salutation “I Love You” invoking God’s blessings.

One would ask or has the right to ask, as to whether this approach has been a success in the last twenty years. We say, “Yes” for we were open for corrective guidance, learnt through our failures, were open to change, receive professional and other relevant guidance having our Mission in mind.

We exposed ourselves to programs of Human relations, Life Education, Counseling etc.

We provided Trust & Respect in them, as we acknowledged the childrens right to have their own feelings, friends, activities and opinions, independence, privacy and believe in them.

Provide emotional security by friendly relationships, make them feel safe, comfortable and thereby make them express. Be gentle to them .

Provide physical security by providing nutritious or healthy food, guide them for safe shelter and clothing where appropriate and personal hygiene.

Provide discipline though guided rules appropriate and practical to age. Guide them on limits, possibilities and expectations using discipline to give instructions and not to punish.

Give time by participating in their activities, focus on education, celebrations and psycho social development.

Make them understand who we are, How we love them, care for them, Convey these physically and verbally and Accept their Love.

Our Achievements

Of course we know that our seeds did not always fall on the fertile grounds. We had to make the ground fertile and in the course of fertilization some dropped out while most continued. Today we can see the lovely results with our naked eyes with joyful tears.

A review of the last twenty years revealed that we had prepared a good number of children to enter primary schools through our pre-school program. Most of our children who have gone through our Comprehensive Education Development Program have sat for the GCE O/level examination and some have qualified and are employed in the private sector and the state sector, generating an income. It is our pride to note that one is serving in the armed forces, with the Sri Lanka Navy. Some have married and are settled in better conditions and sending their children to our pre-school. It is a pleasure to state that this year two of our children are sitting for the GCE Advance Level examination. (2009) qualification will open doors to enter university.

All most all the families involved with us from 1988 did not have houses of their own. We are glad to mention today most of them live in their own houses and most of them have entered the general socialized means in their basic and main life events. They have systematically entered society, upholding their human dignity and have become an example to many.

Since 1995 we continue to study and live the life and spirit of Fr. Joseph Wresinski, guiding ourselves to guide our children.

For the children the day begins with blessings and thanksgiving and invocations, guided by a teaching over values, attitudes, personal and social responsibilities.

They are regularly guided in personal hygiene, love and respect to parents, elders, teachers. We relate stories of successful people and events in life specially of those people who have come up in life under very difficult and challenging circumstances.

Almost all activities are conducted in a brotherly atmosphere. We eat and drink together sharing meals and tea in the common cups and plates.

Live in seminars are conducted periodically from Friday to Sunday noon. During this period we guide them to adopt themselves for day to day living. Rising in time, attending to personal hygiene, punctuality, order and cleanliness, silence and recreation etc.

At our sports meet we guide them to competitive victory. To take leadership and accept victory and defeat and to act in groups.

All in all ours have been a basic human approach focussed on the person individually while guiding for collective living. We have realized that our Love Approach with all our shortcomings is a Way to tread in guiding the children at Purnodaya. We have been able to grow in our love towards the poor while they in turn have realized the impact of Love and begun to love.

In conclusion while reminding ourselves authentically that “Nothing in our life is beyond redemption” and of our ...Solemn Duty to come together to be faithful to the tasks in hand in favor of the poorest, to continue to tread the path to victory for the poorest through loving understanding and to endure in patience.

“Be kind to the poor you meet, they are fighting a hard battle that needs your hand to win”