Against Child Poverty:

Relationships as a Foundation for Social and Economic Justice[1]

Pamela Couture
Emmanuel College of Victoria University in the University of Toronto
pameladcouture@gmail.com

"Our children are surrounded by violence," said Dr. Saied al Hashimi, a professor of psychiatry at Baghdad's Mustansriya University. "Most of them are traumatized." He says mass displacement, the death and murder of family members and the constant presence of heavily armed troops, militias and death squads have a long-term impact on the children, especially those

[1] This paper was first presented to the International Academy of Practical Theology in Berlin, Germany, March 30-April 4, 2007.

in and around Baghdad where violence is most intense. “I call them the silent victims. Our Iraqi children are the silent victims,” he told CNN.[2]

Introduction

“War is never good for children[3],” I say to Rosemary, now near eighty years old, who at thirty-seven had welcomed me as an exchange student into her family near Cologne, Germany. Without hesitation she nods, her face somber. She knows. World War II, fought in her land, shaped her childhood.

War demands the sacrifice of children’s biological, emotional, and cognitive health. Children who spend their prime developmental years in a war zone sacrifice for war aims with the rest of their lives. So, can there be any such thing as a child-centered or childist[4] “just war theory,” even if the aim of the war is just?[5] If not, adults must answer these questions: Is the alternative to war – for example, living in a politically oppressive society--worse for children

---

[2] “Silent Victims: What Will Become of Iraq's Children?” cnn.com, March 20, 2007. http://www.aliraqi.org/forums/archive/index.php/t-71702.html (accessed August 20, 2010)

[3] For the purposes of this paper “child” refers to persons under age eighteen, as dictated by international law. “Youth” refers to teenagers, as in the United States, and adults younger than thirty, as it does in Europe.

[4] “Childist” is a term coined by ethicist John Walls as parallel to feminist or womanist, but holding children's concern in central view. See “Human Rights in Light of Children: A Christian Childist Perspective,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 17:1 (Spring 2007) 54-67.

[5] To answer the criterion of proportionality, a just war theorist must answer the question, how many lives of children in the land where a war is fought are worth the aim of the war? As children are innocents whom a just war should defend, the question is logically absurd. For a good introduction to just war theory see http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war/ (accessed August 20, 2010)

than war itself? Can adults imagine an alternative to war –whatever that alternative is – that reduces threat and brings about a more just society without engaging in war itself?

For forty years the world lived under the threat of the Cold War – the stalemate of power between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Cold War framed the actions of world powers as a battle between communism and capitalism. The Cold War prevented the feared world nuclear holocaust, but it erupted in "hot wars" in Asia, most notably in Vietnam, and Africa, most recently in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In *Child Poverty: Love, Justice and Social Responsibility* I explore the examples of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's response to Hitler's Germany and the responses of Phillipe Guillard, the French director of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Romeo Dallaire, the Canadian leader of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force, to genocide in Rwanda.[6] I conclude that violence challenges Christianity to sustain a normative mentality of peacebuilding, even in the midst of militarism. A wide variety of "liberating practices" – practices that include active non-violent resistance, conflict mediation, and, occasionally, acts of violence – arise within this normative stance of peacebuilding.

I begin with the following assumptions that I have argued elsewhere: that a mentality of peacebuilding is preferred to a mentality of militarism, and that violence that arises within a

---

[6] Pamela Couture, *Child Poverty: Love Justice and Social Responsibility* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), Chapter 9.

peacebuilding norm differs from violence that arises from militarism.[7] The idea of "peacebuilding" is anticipated by the 1968 Christmas message from the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC):

> Christmas is not the feast of peacekeeping but of peacemaking. . . . Not only wars violate peace. Injustice does too…. Peace can be violated by those who want to keep it at all costs, by those who have vested interests in preserving the world as it is, by those who resist or delay land reform, open housing, tax reform, freedom of speech and organization, changes in obsolete and useless structures. Necessary change is often resisted with violence by such "peacekeepers." Let Christians celebrate Christmas by making peace.

This paper ponders, in light of the last fifty years and reflection on the "Cold War" and its aftermath, and in light of the tragedy of children's deaths and impaired development, another statement from the WCC 1968 Christmas message: "Open violence of arms is not necessarily harder to bear than the crushing of human rights, or insecurity, or segregation, or hunger, or fear."

But reasons for protesting war or offering alternatives evade logical argument. Is there a form of "public narrative therapy" that helps us tell the story of war as a "problem story" and the story of peacebuilding as an "alternative, favored story"? Can international friendships, such as the ones we form through the International Academy of Practical Theology and other

---

[7] The primary popular challenge to this view is--"Remember Hitler!"—insinuating that history has proved correct the military response to destroy the Third Reich, and, therefore, militarism in response to other dictatorships is also appropriate. In Chapter 9, "Children, Violence and Peace" of *Child Poverty*, 131-144, I respond to that argument.

international organizations create stories of liberating practices of peacebuilding that provide metaphors for living?

Germany, 1968[8]

Ironic images of peace and war fade in and out.

In August, 1968, as a sixteen year old high school senior, I looked back one last time as the lights of the New York faded behind me, then settled into my seat, facing toward the future that lay beyond the dark expanse over the Atlantic Ocean. My church was sending me to spend a year in West Germany through the International Christian Youth Exchange (ICYE), an ecumenical program initiated in 1949 by a "peace church," the Brethren Church in America, to reconcile hostility between Germany and the United States. This experiment imagined that international exchange could be a liberating practice. The ICYE hoped that through language study and cultural understanding the youth of Germany and the United States, who had not yet formed a hardened political ideology, could bind themselves to one another in a peace-making friendship.

For me, like most of the teenagers in the program, the original reason for the exchange didn't immediately sink in. World War II was a prehistoric event. My impressions of German-speaking people were less formed by scenes from war than by illustrations from the children's book, *Heidi,* set in German-speaking Switzerland. One illustration showed an Alpine hut surrounded by pine trees. On her first night with Grandfather Heidi gazed from her bed of straw

[8] This section expands the story introducing "Children, Violence and Peace" in *Child Poverty,* 129-131.

in the loft through a small window at the stars. Embraced by simple, natural surroundings Heidi's newfound security conjured in me emotions of care, of security, of hope, of love. In Germany I aroused these same feelings when, from the small window of my loft bedroom, I gazed over the rolling hills and pine forests at the distant lights of Solingen.

Leaders in ICYE wanted more. ICYE's primary concern was peace through social and economic justice. The leaders of ICYE now believed its original purposes of the reconciliation of World War II enemies had been supplanted by the growing distance between the wealth and power of the countries of the First and Two-Thirds worlds. And this changed what it meant to be a Christian.

Bill Perkins, the Executive Director of ICYE, wrote letters urging us to prepare ourselves socially, politically, and economically.[9] We were expected to read voraciously about race relations, poverty and wealth in our own country, and rich and poor nations. We were told to prepare ourselves to answer political and social questions. In the document "Preparation for a Year Abroad" Perkins explains the word “Christian” in “International Christian Youth Exchange.” His comment echoes both the secularization of the church and apostolic spirituality. Hear Perkins' version of secularized Christianity:

> ‘Christian’ does not refer only to Church sponsorship or Church involvement in the program, or to the Church membership of those who participate. 'Christian'

[9] The Winter, 2006, *Ecumenical Courier* of the World Council of Churches contains a tribute to William A. Perkins, who died in 2005. http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/regional/us-office/courier/courier66.pdf (accessed August 20, 2010).

should be primarily a reference to *the purpose, nature and context of the exchange experience, rather than a description of the participants*…. (emphasis mine)

In fact, ICYE eventually changed its name to International Cultural Youth Exchange. Yet this secularized Christianity could result in an attitude Roman Catholics were calling "apostolic spirituality." Apostolic spirituality considers prayer "a contemplation of the face of Jesus in the world, in the brother or sister who is in need." [10] Perkins' quotation continues:

> As a Christian program, ICYE is primarily concerned with enabling persons to discover the common humanity which Christians share with others and to live in the light of it, in a common pursuit of truth and justice. We are concerned with Christian commitment, with commitment to Jesus and the world in which He lived and suffered, in which He lives and suffers. We are concerned with a style of life for Christians that doesn't turn away from the world to seek God, but forces us to meet Christ by involvement in life and in the life of the world.[11]

We exchangees were asked to reach toward these lofty goals even as we fulfilled certain prerequisites. We had to learn a new language, new customs, and a different sense-of-being in the world. We had to learn to preheat hot water if we wanted it, to bathe less frequently, to wear our clothes multiple days in a row, to close the internal doors in our living quarters, to ride buses, to

---

[10] Mary Milligan, R.S.H.M., "Apostolic Spirituality," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality,* edited by Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN.: The Liturgical Press), 1993, 55: Prayer is "not a source from which one draws water that will then be dispersed in the world; it is rather a contemplation of the face of Jesus in the world, in the brother or sister who is in need."

[11] "Preparation for a Year Abroad," enclosed in a letter from William A. Perkins, Executive Director, International Christian Youth Exchange, 777 United Nations Plaza, Room 7c, New York, New York 10017, March 18, 1968.

be less obsessive about our hairstyles, to socialize in groups rather than by dating. Students from the United States tried to fit into, to use the now-antique phrase, the "Second World." The "Second World" was still recovering from war that had destroyed its land only twenty years before and was still quite distinct from the "First World" in which we lived.

Only years later did I realize that my extended family was conflicted over sending their child to live for a year with a German family, a hated enemy in my own grandparents' young adult years. Hostilities between Germany and the U.S.A had not entirely abated. My grandparents and great aunts worried terribly, but my proud parents struck up a correspondence with various members of my German family. Still, my mother nervously wondered, "What do they think about Hitler?" and on March 17, 1969 my father wrote, "By now you have probably been to East Berlin. Needless to say, we were a little uneasy about having you visit Communist territory but I'm sure ICYE would not send you there unless it were safe." And when Rosemary visited us in 1971, my future father-in-law, who had fought in World War II near Cologne, who had written generous letters while I was abroad, could not bring himself to introduce himself to her.

Only years later did I realize the depth of generosity of the German family of five with whom I lived. Rosemary, a single parent mother, received public child support assistance and waited tables on occasion for extra money. Opi, a veteran who worked part-time in a factory, rode the bus and leapt home on two crutches at a running pace, while two prosthetic legs hung unused behind a curtain in the bathroom. Omi fed us on the year's worth of vegetables and fruit juice she had canned and bottled from the garden and trees in the backyard. Rosemary, Omi and

Opi had yielded to the desires of the younger generation, the contemplative, fourteen-year-old Petra, and the jovial, eleven-year-old Iris, to host an American "sister."

Only years later did I realize the courage and commitment of the parents of Margret, my closest German girlfriend, who were still helping East Germans escape through what we would call an "underground railway." In 1968 I knew they were from "the East." In 1974 I learned of their continued efforts when I planned a trip to Munich but discovered that all the hotel rooms had been booked for the World Cup Soccer Match. Margaret's parents made some phone calls and arranged for me to stay in a group home for East Germans who, they said quietly, "owed them something."

In 1968, we talked about war and peace in very personal ways. My family told war stories. Opi had eluded orders to fight in the Russian front when an officer looked away. Omi, a passionate, determined woman, had ridden a coal train to southern Germany to find him when he was injured. As I struggled with trigonometry at the kitchen table, Omi compared my frustrations to the obstacles Rosemary faced when she studied. "Rosemary did homework with war planes flying overhead," she quipped, implying that I should be able to concentrate. When Rosemary criticized my potato peeling, she reasoned that they were not so worried over food security that I needed to leave the potato eyes. "You peel potatoes like that only in wartime," she murmured. We talked about social and economic justice in these indirect ways.

Though the ICYE was administered by Pastor Albert Boecker of the Evangelische Kirche in Duesseldorf, my family never attended church. Out of a sense of duty Rosemary offered to take me to church but was quite happy when I declined. None of my friends attended church,

either, unless they were Catholic. I wondered why. "The pastor stands on high and talks at you," Rosemary said. "I don't need that." Yet we all studied Religion in the Gymnasium.

In March, 1969 ICYE held a mid-year seminar in East Berlin. As Americans were restricted from overnighting in East Berlin, so our quarters were in West Berlin. At night we frequented the Big Apple, a discotheque with flashing, multicolored neon lights. The streets churned with people. When we rode the U-Bahn we sped rapidly under East Berlin where soldiers guarded what were once subway stops.

During the day we experienced East Berlin in shades of gray, like black and white television. Here, for the second time in Germany, I attended church. Gottesdeinst at the Immanuelkirche seemed like a ritualistic affair. The church's congregation had been divided by the Berlin Wall – 90% of the congregation was in the West, but the building and 10% of the congregation was in the East. The church had a youth group, and we attended Gottesdeinst together. Dagmar took me home for dinner with her family after church. She led me beneath heavy, snow-laden clouds, past armed East German soldiers in olive uniforms, up the stairs of an apartment building whose walls were crumbing, into her living quarters that were partitioned by drapes. Inside the living room a welcoming table was set for a Sunday dinner. Her parents served Wienerschnitzel and coffee. I knew that I had to eat all of the Wienerschnitzel, including the fat that I would have carved away at home. When I asked about life in East Berlin, they said they didn't talk about politics. But they commented on the high price of coffee. Not being so very fond of coffee myself, I asked why they bought coffee if it was so expensive. "We like nice things, too," Dagmar's mother answered. I must have asked Dagmar what I should send to her,

and she said she would like a pair of pantyhose. In a later letter she wrote, "Think about the pantyhose – or have you forgotten?"

In East Berlin, Dagmar and I wandered out onto the cold, deserted streets where we met other teenagers from the church. Outdoors the East Berlin teenagers talked more openly. Somehow, the Berlin Wall was decorated with wreaths commemorating the deaths of people who had attempted to flee over the wall to the West. Wolfgang, a sixteen-year-old East Berliner in the congregation, vowed to escape over the wall before his eighteenth birthday, even if it meant his death. I pondered Wolfgang's determination and courage. Its youthful quality was different than anything I had experienced before.

In East Berlin we met other children who were experiencing the direct effect of "the crushing of human rights, or insecurity, or segregation, or hunger, or fear." These children and their families, like African-Americans and other minorities in the United States, lived deeply aware of the daily choices they were making about how to absorb the violence surrounding their lives, whether by conforming or by taking action that could lead to direct violence against them. Different choices for different children and families might have been liberating practices. Likewise, ICYE sought to make students from the First World aware of the choices we might be making that either promoted or absorbed the violence that was ricocheting around the world. Meanwhile, the practices of daily life – romancing, studying trigonometry, wearing pantyhose, drinking coffee, writing letters – sought to connect us in a world wide web of humanness.

The choices described above were much different than those of children, youth, and families living in war zones. The Cold War contained the peace of Europe and the United States

by exporting its conflict to Asia and Africa. In 1968 the letters I received from the United States were dotted with news of Vietnam. My parents wrote descriptions of the platforms of Nixon and Humphrey that included their plans for the Vietnam draft. Friends from church served on active duty, and church friends not in close social contact wrote letters to those overseas. Dick, an acquaintance serving in Vietnam, wrote to me about his duty painting the mess hall. Greg, a former boyfriend now in the Air Force, wrote twice, and my mother scolded me for telling him that I didn't want to correspond. A letter from Mrs. Minert, a member from my church, spoke of her son, Paul, in Vietnam, and a later letter from my mother said Paul was injured and on his way home. My camp counselor met her husband in Hawaii while he was on leave from Vietnam; both her mother and brother wrote letters rejoicing in their week together.

One day in East Berlin we visited an organization that we were told was similar to a YMCA. There we watched a film most likely produced by the North Vietnamese, showing Americans beating and killing Vietnamese villagers. We were given copies of Mao's red bible. We were ushered to the next event; we were not allowed to react to the film. We simply lodged it in our memory; forty years later, checking this memory with a high school friend, she had vivid memories of the movie, her angry, hurt, and sad feelings, and the silence that surrounded them.

The following statement from "Preparation for a Year Abroad" as easily frames my trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2003 as my year in Germany in 1968-1969:

> To learn how life is lived in another part of the world, to overcome prejudices and to establish personal bonds of friendship is an asset in the last third of the twentieth century, but it is not enough. . . .The primary issue for the world is

> peace. . . .We find ourselves in a world which is sharply divided into rich and poor nations, in which one-third of mankind (sic) has all it needs and more, and in which two-thirds of mankind (sic) suffers from hunger, poverty, illiteracy and hopelessness. The gap between the rich and the poor countries continues to widen; relations between developed and developing nations deteriorate; the politically and economically powerful continue to exploit the powerless. The dominant question in the developing world is not containment of communism, but whether the poor and subservient will find ways to become full participants in their societies. Social and economic justice *within* nations and *between* nations are two aspects of the same problem. This is *the* international issue of our generation.

From ICYE's standpoint persons still needed to engage in the liberating practices of reducing stereotypes and building friendship, but those practices could not be an end in themselves. Such practices needed also to aim at fostering social and economic justice, marked by reducing the gap between the rich and the poor. Bringing about that vision would require a change in practice in international relations, not just among persons.

Democratic Republic of Congo, 2003

While my slightly older friends were being drafted to fight in Vietnam, Ntambo Nkulu Ntanda was discovering the writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., and making choices about his role in the independence of the Congo. Ntambo hated Belgian colonialists and considers himself to have been primed in his youth for a role in violent revolution. As a barefoot village youth, he

decided to attend a church youth group where, he heard, he could "meet the girls and get an education." After reading Martin Luther King, Jr. Ntambo converted to Christianity and to a life of non-violent action. Ntambo attended seminary, became a United Methodist pastor and District Superintendent, and was elected Bishop in 1996. He would become responsible for people who had to be responsible for children and for reconstructing their lives in the midst of active warfare.

The gap between the rich and poor nations that threatened world peace, identified by Bill Perkins in his ICYE letters, had only widened since 1968. The United States did not opt to separate the goal of containing of communism from supporting the poor nations. Rather, in the next twenty years the United States' fight against communism would fuel the increasing poverty of the ordinary citizens of the Two-Thirds World.

Congo had gained independence from Belgium in 1960. Beginning with the Eisenhower administration US presidents evaluated the importance of Congo to US interests in containing communism and, accordingly, structured the United States' relationship to Congo's fight for independence and eventually to the Mobutu regime. This relationship began in violence: When Patrice Lumumba, one of the first of Congo's leaders, originally sought help from the Eisenhower administration, Congo was not considered of enough significance to send assistance. When Lumumba then sought help from the Soviet Union and Cuba, the Belgium and the US took notice and supported Lumumba's assassination.[12] The poverty of Congo was furthered by

---

[12] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/correspondent/974745.stm, citing Belgian archives (accessed August 20, 2010). See also Larry Devlin, *Chief of Station, Congo: Fighting the Cold War in a Hot Zone* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), 94-96, 262-263.

U.S. support of a corrupt dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, by the oil and debt crisis of the mid-1970s, and gross disparity between wealthy Congolese such as Mobutu Sese Seko and the poverty-stricken population. Mobutu's dictatorship ended in 1997, when his regime was overthrown by Rwandan-backed forces.

In the last decade, the 1993 Rwandan genocide in which 800,000 people died has become well known. In 1993 the world ignored pleas for help in Rwanda. Much of the world, following President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeline Albright, has repented of its 1993 folly.[13] However, the Congolese war that has now claimed over 5.4 million lives is the flip side of that folly. The Congolese war began in 1997 when Rwanda and Burundi invaded Congo. Many Congolese believe that President Clinton, visiting Rwanda five days before the invasion, led the Kagame government to conclude that the world would not intervene if Rwanda invaded Congo. Nor did the world intervene until November 2000, when the United Nations sent in a peacekeeping force, known as MONUC.

Three United Nations investigations have documented the triangle of natural resource exploitation, arms trade, and war that so has destroyed the Congo. One report documents a cycle in which natural resources were exported by Rwandan and Burundian forces and arms for war were shipped back to Congo on return flights.[14]

---

[13] "Folly" is the theological word coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer for the actions of the British Government when it was warned of Hitler's threat and chose to look away. See Couture, *Child Poverty,* 140.

[14] For a fuller description of the triangle of arms-natural resources-war that I described from the United Nations reports, see Pamela Couture, "Demystifying the War in Congo," *Journal of Pastoral Theology*17:1 (Spring 2007) 15-26.

This war has directly victimized children. Children have lost their first source of protection: their families. When war engulfs villages, family members are killed and maimed; families flee from the fighting and lose their children en route; families become so hungry and ill they cannot care for their children. Food becomes a deadly weapon of war. Offers of food seduce children into mine work for invading armies whose support depends on exporting Congolese minerals. Offers of food entice children into Congolese militias who resist invading armies and one another. Illness also becomes a deadly weapon. Childhood illnesses spread when war prevents health organizations from administering the normal childhood vaccines. Water and waste-borne illnesses proliferate in makeshift housing and refugee camps. Sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV-AIDS, multiply when armies rape women and girls. Many of the 5.4 million dead are children who have been killed, have starved, or have died from disease as Congo's infrastructure collapsed. The children who have survived have known violence their whole lives. They are easy prey for gangs and organized crime. Congolese leaders such as Bishop Ntambo, who seek a stable and productive future for Congo, are deeply alarmed by the prospect of losing an entire generation to war and its effects.

For Bishop Ntambo secularized Christianity would be an oxymoron. Though he extends assistance to Congolese regardless of religious affiliation, he also understands the church to offer salvation – not only salvation for an eternal soul but salvation for an earthly life. For him, "church sponsorship" offers the opportunity to connect impoverished people to an outside world that provides financial support for farming, schools, and orphanages. "Church involvement" opens doors for emerging leaders to prepare themselves for a new world. "Church membership"

provides children and youth with a visible alternative to a life of violence in a nation of war. For him, the church is truly a site for peacebuilding, and this peacebuilding occurs directly with the youngest generation. Peacebuilding involves feeding, clothing, and educating children; it also seeks to reach children with direct conflict resolution. The church has the power, prestige, and neutrality to convene warring factions in conflict resolution.

One of the most significant of these peacebuilding efforts involves the Mai-Mai, a fearsome militia known for cannibalistic practices whose membership in some places largely consists of the children of church members.[15] The Mai-Mai originated in the 1970's as militia who defended local communities against the extortion of Mobutu Sese Seko. They were reinvigorated by Laurent Kabila, in his effort to arouse communities to resist invading Rwandan armies. After the peace agreement of 1999 in which the Mai-Mai groups did not participate, the Mai-Mai rebelled against the Congolese army. After Kabila's assassination in 2001, the militia groups lost their political purpose but hung together relationally. Short on food they began to terrorize local communities. According to Rev. Guy Mande Muyombo , "Originally the Mai-Mai were defending the local populations; now they turned against them." But as the church attempted to draw the Mai-Mai into peace talks, they discovered that the Mai-Mai knew the church hymns and prayers, had formerly been church members, and in some cases, were children of current members who pled with them to return to their families.

North American Christians were not engaged directly in these peacemaking efforts. This peacemaking drama has an all-Congolese director and cast. But North Atlantic Christians

---

[15] Guy Mande, "Theological Responses to the Mai-Mai Conflict," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 17:1 (Spring 2007) 17-35.

function as something of a behind-the-scenes "stage crew" that organizes the props so that the drama can occur. The engagement of the church, the ability to bring persons from the United States for constructive purposes, provides a backdrop of credibility for peacebuilding efforts.

After the war abated, Bishop Ntambo began bringing North Atlantic groups to Kamina, in the DRC, in which I participated. The flight to Kamina required six segments, in increasingly smaller planes, resulting in a final leg from Lubumbashi, DRC, to Kamina in a medical transport plane with room for six passengers. Bishop Ntambo was focused on what he wanted to accomplish with foreigners. He toured us through projects initiated and executed by Congolese – transforming deteriorating mud buildings into substantial fired brick buildings, rehabilitating a Belgian farm into an agricultural training center, building churches that are an icon of stability. He invited townspeople together for a seminar on business practices. And yet, in private, Bishop Ntambo warned, clicking his fingers to demonstrate, "The situation is unstable, and anything you see can be gone in an instant." For a period of time before the 2006 elections he suspended North Atlantic trips and sent home a United States citizen in Kamina on a long-term assignment.

Political stability decreases when economic and social justice increase. In 1968 ICYE sent its exchange students a policy statement of the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC) in the U.S.A. on "World Poverty and the Demands of Justice."[16] The statement promoted three broad areas for policy and action. From these areas liberating practices for social and economic justice might be inferred. First, the statement called on the United States to increase development aid because of the "need of the people" and to distinguish development aid from

[16] "World Poverty and the Demands of Justice," the National Council of Churches in Christ in the U.S.A., adopted by the General Board, February 22, 1968.

political and military objectives. “Our nation, in is own best tradition long the champion of justice, should clearly distinguish its immediate political and military objectives abroad from its development efforts, providing development aid to peoples as justice requires.” Second, the statement urged the United States to “avoid the support of an unjust or corrupt status quo in the countries concerned” when it created and distributed development aid. Toward this end the United States “should support the emergence of indigenous economic power . . . should build on the just aspirations of the peoples involved” . . . and give "vigorous and generous attention . . . in public and private sectors to trade arrangements which will work especially to the benefit of the less developed countries….” Third, the United States should provide development assistance “whether in the form of aid or trade . . . through international channels . . . (T)he most essential matter . . . concerns dependency. To avoid unhealthy relationships of dependency must be a prime objective of development policy.” Such efforts, the NCC believed, were necessary for world peace.

The strategies of the United States have not followed these policies, and at times ecclesial policies seem to follow United States foreign policy. Other times, as currently in Congo, the strategies of the church have aligned with the NCC aims. First, through Bishop Ntambo the Congolese government has learned that, in this case (although not all others), the ecclesial interests of US Christians may truly put the need of the people first and differ from the political and military interests of the United States. An important part of Bishop Ntambo's legitimacy in peacebuilding has resulted from the government's recognition of this difference. Second, Bishop Ntambo and his family are well aware of the depth of Congo's entanglement in corruption and

seek to document personal and church expenditures. Therefore, funds that are transferred from North Atlantic churches can be traced directly to support for "indigenous economic power." If funds get lost or are embezzled, as they sometimes are, funds can be recovered or at least the path of diversion can be identified. Emerging leaders promote the importance of "transparency" in financial relations. Third, the relationship of dependence sears the hearts of Congolese pastors. They know full well that some of the North Atlantic Christians are more concerned with accountability than they are with sustaining and building human dignity. Though at best accountability and dignity reinforce one another, Congolese pastors strongly feel the sense of "being examined" by US visitors. Congolese pastors, when asked what message their guests should take home, say, "Tell them, we are taking care of our children."

Conclusion

For all the prophetic wisdom of its 1968-1969 writings on wealth and poverty, ICYE may have retreated too soon from emphasizing the importance of "overcoming prejudices" and "establishing personal bonds of friendship." Deep relationships that establish friendship and even love between human beings also motivate the desire for human communication and increasing expressions of human dignity. Such relationships fulfill a prerequisite for social and economic justice. Such relationships often begin with children. Theories without relationships may well dehumanize life and may even lead to violence.

In 1989, twenty years' later after my experiences in East Berlin, the opening of the Berlin Wall and dissolution of the Soviet Union ushered many common people of the former Soviet

orbit from one difficult era to the next. The transition was governed by capitalists who were filled with prejudice and lacked the personal bonds of friendship that might have allowed them to see the humanity of the other. In 2007, eighteen years into the formidable economic globalization of the newest form of capitalism, social and economic justice between rich and poor nations remains a worthy, if illusive, goal. Yet the exchange of persons, including children and youth, remains a foundation between nations and churches upon which to build toward that goal. "In Memoriam: A Tribute to William A. Perkins, 1926-2005," in the *Ecumenical Courier* of the World Council of Churches, remembers him repeating these prophetic words throughout his life:

> Within the ecumenical movement, Bill was deeply convinced of the importance of the exchange between persons. Bill believed that such exchanges were essential "incarnational" bonds that would nurture ecumenical sharing of resources, and which would in turn lead to action and church unity. "As we share our resources, we share ourselves, and in so doing, transcend our differences and separation."