

# **Dom Hélder Câmara's Speeches to the Mani Tese Youth Movement, 1972**

## **Introduction By Benedicto Tapia de Renedo**

From *Helder Camara: Proclamas a la Juventud*, ed. Benedicto Tapia de Renedo, Pedal. 64 (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigueme, 1976): 185-186. Translated from Spanish by Maria Markovich and Dr. Gerald W. Schlabach, University of St. Thomas (Minnesota), strictly for the purposes of classroom use.

In Italy dom Hélder is known, is widely read, and is loved as the “Pope John of the Third World.” What dom Hélder represents and defends is the subject of both news reports and commentary from across the political spectrum. Publications by and about dom Hélder are “answered” by very disparate ideological positions.

The most impressive sign of dom Hélder’s presence in Italy, however, is a small fact that I witnessed when I visited an educational center in Turin. The young people know Brazil through dom Hélder and they identify Brazil with him. But one thing was particularly striking: On a world map there was a red circle around the northeastern part of Brazil and the city of Recife was circled with a green color.

The presence of dom Hélder in Italy is not just an anecdote but a living, prophetic call for the liberation of the third world. His messages to the committed young people of the Mani Tese (Outstretched Hands) youth movement are its most significant exemplars.

This movement was born in Milan in 1964 as a response to the desperate call from the third world that holds developed nations responsible for the subhuman conditions under which more than two thirds of humanity live – “the fourth world of misery.” This movement is open to all those who voluntarily engage themselves in the holistic development of third world nations through “organized and continuous action.”

In order to assure the stability of the movement and channel technical and economic assistance, the movement was legally incorporated in September 1966. Today, it has contacts with the FAO and cooperates with different international organizations such as Misereor, Oxfam, Secours Catholique, Tecnici Volontari Cristiani, and so on.

The goals of the Mani Tese Association are to promote:

- The study of social problems in developing nations and current projects here;
- Campaigns to shape conscientious and responsible public opinion, and to raise funds that to support projects.
- Specialized formation of members and recruitment of the technical staff in order to carry out the different projects;

- Assistance and coordination of the activities of the technicians and volunteers who work in developing countries.

Members commit themselves to:

- Deepen their objective understanding of the problems in developing countries and to diffuse their understanding among others.
- Freely donate part of their free time and their activities.
- To donate a stipulated annual stipend and 1.1% of their annual income in order to support the activities and actions of this Association in favor of the third world.

“Every action implies an ideology.” Mani Tese is oriented by a Christian vision of the human being, of progress and history. It is in the light of this vision that basic human rights must be valued and interpreted in order to assure “the development of every and each person”.

Guided by this Christian inspiration the Association seeks to strengthen the values that are essential for true development in third world nations, such as:

- The primacy of the human person, in relation to every ideology and every structure;
- The right to integrated development (physical, economic, cultural, moral, social, spiritual);
- Interior freedom as a requirement for spiritual endeavor and for the exercise of civic responsibility;
- Social justice sought through nonviolence;
- Universal fraternity, transcending all discrimination and division.

As the Mani Tese Association statutes note:

The fact that the movement finds its inspiration in Christians principles does not mean dependence upon the ecclesiastical hierarchy, nor does it require affiliation to a particular religious faith, but does mean that members accept those Christian principles that apply to the work Mani Tese is seeking to carry out in the third world.

The messages that dom Hélder gave in 1972 to the young people of Mani Tese in Florence, Turin and Milan have become an antenna to capture and denounce the political and social injustices that are grinding a whole world of human beings into subhuman conditions.

And denunciation leads to demands for liberation, through a peaceful struggle against the structures that hold people down. Dom Hélder brings a prophetic accent to his political analysis and audacity to his social commentary, as he asks multinational corporations to stop provoking tensions and make peace with national and international justice.

Finally, dom Helder asks the Church to intervene, not just with good intentions, but actively too. Through radical conversion, the church must break with the sterile formulas

that neutralize its evangelical mission. Through his moral presence and the force of ideas in his message – and “with a touch of grace, with an impulse from on high” – these speeches should awaken a thirst for justice, truth and love within the conscience of all humanity.

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