

PEOPLE OF THE FOURTH WORLD, AN URGENT CALL TO RECONSIDER HUMAN RIGHTS¹

By Joseph Wresinski

Introduction presented at the first study circle "The Fourth World and Society", held at Pierrelaye on 18 October 1980, which brought together some forty lawyers, philosophers, full time volunteers and friends of the Fourth World movement.

INTRODUCTION: WHY CREATE THESE STUDY GROUPS?

I welcome you here this morning, and thank you for having responded to our call. It is incumbent upon me firstly to summarise rapidly the circumstances which have led to our desire to create permanent "Fourth World and Society" study circles, and which we have been considering for many years.

Why do we think it is essential to bring consideration of the voices and circumstances of the poorest, without further delay, into modern thinking about society, democracy and human rights?

If we place together these three notions - society, democracy and human rights - it is because it would seem, at this point in the world's history, that they have become necessarily interdependent and inextricably linked. So why do we feel the urgent need to introduce the reality of the poorest and the excluded into this triangle?

Our reasons fall into two categories. Some are dictated by the circumstances of the excluded, as seen in the Fourth World across every continent. Others are drawn from the often deep-seated concerns of the non-poor, of all of us, to move towards a society of national and international democracy which better complies with human rights. This concern is all the more troubling and even painful because we feel powerless and have the impression that we will never achieve our goals. But let us begin with the reasons imposed by the Fourth World.

A PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE AGES

I said a moment ago that our reasons reside in the circumstances of the Fourth World across every continent, because it is indeed a question of universal reality. The poorest are excluded in every country and in every civilisation of the world. It has been this way throughout the ages. It is undoubtedly this discovery which has marked our Movement most deeply: we follow up our initial intuitions with assessments, which are continually verified by experience, study and research. These assessments show that the Fourth World is a universal reality which has existed in all times and places.

A universal reality in time: we have often declared and written this, using, in particular, the history of Western Europe as an example. It is a reality which is difficult to decipher, owing to

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the fact that, through the ages, the history of the poorest has never been told. We have often spoken of this fact too. The history of Western Europe, in the same way as all other parts of the world, has a huge gap, a genuine historical misunderstanding. The poor, but, above all, the very poorest, appear only fleetingly, insofar as, occasionally, their role has been noticed in the history of the non-poor. However, those who have familiarised themselves with exclusion's characteristic features recognise the impoverished as they appear in these historical "flashes."

They recognise them in the poor who crowded the routes of the pilgrims, when age-old justice adopted penalties drawn up by the Inquisition and began clearing the towns of Brabant and elsewhere of a population in rags, sending them forth on long pilgrimages for stealing food or other petty thefts of poverty. In the same way they recognise the excluded among the poor who have no right to asylum, or even less to register; who, in France during the Middle Ages, were forced to leave the city walls before sundown. The excluded reappear in our textbooks, through the image of a horde of impoverished peasants, defended by Luther against the princes and the rising middle class, then later rejected by him, when he noticed their barbarous behaviour, a result of such abuse that they could not behave civilly, or praise God. Terrifying honest citizens, the excluded are found among the mass of starving, violent peasants in the Dutch provinces, when Count Floris V recruited them in his fight for power. And they reappear among those sent back to their hovels, shacks and caves on the outskirts of Paris, after having served on the barricades of the Commune, where some of them gave their lives.

During the last century, perhaps the best flashes of recognition came from Marx and Engels, even though many other authors alluded in passing to the excluded without truly recognising them as such. Need we recall that Karl Marx drew attention to the "surplus of workers", among which there was a "stagnant population, repelled rather than attracted by the new centres of industry"? At the very bottom of the "sphere of pauperism" he distinguishes a "social layer" composed of those who have never attended the "the stern but steeling school of labour". These are men who do not have a defined or reputable source of income, nor, in some cases, a fixed address. This is what Marx, followed by Engels, called the "Lumpenproletariat", a name still used in Eastern-bloc countries. A people who are excluded from the outset from industrial society, and whose exclusion the two authors sealed by pronouncing the curse from which their descendants still suffer today: a "mass sharply differentiated from the industrial proletariat, a recruiting ground for thieves and criminals of all kinds living on the crumbs of society, people without a definite trade, vagabonds, *gens sans feu et sans aveu* [men without hearth or home]..."

This is the definition of the "Lumpenproletariat", the ancestors of today's Fourth World. Here, theoretically, the distinctive story of how they came to be excluded from the newly rising urban and rural working classes is recognised. Here too, is heralded the story of their exclusion, their own solitary history they would continue to pursue in what was to become our industrial society. These forefathers of today's Fourth World reappeared in the writings of the father of sociology, Charles Booth, a sociologist and righter of wrongs, who turned his attention to London's poor at the end of the nineteenth century to identify what he called the "submerged classes". This excluded population inspired his remark: "The rich have drawn a curtain over the poor on which they have painted monsters".²

2 Regularly found in French in this form, the full text of Booth's remark is as follows: "East London lay hidden from view behind a curtain on which were painted terrible pictures – starving children, suffering women, overworked men ; horrors of drunkenness and vice ; monsters and demons of inhumanity ; giants of disease and despair."

It is historiography through flashbacks, a history of scraps and crumbs, but a history where the informed observer recognises these men, women and children, who are seen as monsters in the eyes of their contemporaries. They are monstrous because they are mutilated by poverty, and excluded because of those very mutilations which prevent them from being recognised as our brothers, clothed in the same inalienable dignity of man and, as such, subjects of human rights in the same way as ourselves. They are a people who have existed in every age, following our successive societies as the eternal “bad poor”. Today, we have every reason to believe that their circumstances are, to a large extent, passed down from father to son, creating lineages of excluded people, much as there are lineages of nobles, bourgeois, peasants and workers.

A PEOPLE OF ALL ORIGINS

It seemed important, today, to remember this persistent exclusion throughout the ages. We have already said that exclusion from our societies, and exclusion from the rights which they grant to their members, has continued to exist in both time and space, throughout the history of the Western world and across every continent.

It is a sensitive issue to mention but it can no longer be ignored. A Fourth World exists in every country and we must recognise that nations held in a state of dependence and economic weakness owing to a lack of adequate aid for development are, in turn, holding back their poorest populations by excluding them from all policies and development programmes. Here again, I must recall some indicators and facts.

We are unable to go back in time and consider the history of the different regions and civilisations of the world as we have just done with our modest attempt to examine the history of Western Europe. Let us simply consider some examples of exclusion in different parts of the world, in the present day.

First of all, there are those whom the International Labour Organisation calls “the landless”, or those who have only a tiny plot of land. Yesterday’s poorest agricultural workers are today’s victims of modernisation in rural areas. Paradoxically, they are also victims of agricultural reforms in various places in the Third World. In the past, in certain Latin American countries, they could still find work with large landowners. In India, the terms of their employment allowed them to ensure the survival of their families on a tiny plot of land cultivated by the women and children. Agrarian reform and new agricultural cooperatives rejected them because they were too worn-down, unhealthy and unable to adapt. For example, in Bolivia in the 1950s, when large private landholdings were subdivided and redistributed among former agricultural employees, the poorest among them were driven off the land. They were relegated to hamlets at an altitude of more than 4,000 metres where nothing would grow in the rocky soil. From that point on, no policies, development programmes or even literacy programmes reached them.

In the Far East, especially in India, modernisation and agricultural development together with the deterioration of the terms of employment for the most modest farmers, have turned these people into a fleeing population. They migrate to the cities after a poor harvest or to escape their debts. There they are to be found working in the building industry, under-employed and under-paid, squatting in squalid, temporary shacks where refuse piles up. Around them are schools, hospitals and various urban amenities, but they do not have access to them. The

municipal authorities do not see them as having the right to any form of public support. They are no longer India's poor, they are already India's excluded. In the future, the modernisation of construction methods will throw them out of the employment market once and for all. Their children, undernourished and denied schooling, will become tomorrow's lifelong residents of the shanty towns where no one will ever come to look for them.

Must we also mention those abandoned, homeless children, wandering the streets of certain sub-Saharan cities, fighting at night with chains, knives and broken shards of bottles, dressed in rags and surviving by their wits? The Fourth World children of today will become the Fourth World adults and families of tomorrow. Like the Fourth World found in the disreputable urban areas of Latin America, ravaged by poverty, alcohol, domestic instability, theft, and child labour from the ages of 5 or 6. Like certain decaying slums in South-East Asia, where hundreds of families have settled without permission from the city authorities. The children of these families are not entitled to enrol at public schools, because this requires a birth certificate which they do not have. Since, for the city authorities, they and their families do not exist, children and parents in desperate straits become violent, thieving, dishonest and indecent, a hideous population in the eyes of their neighbours who are often poor themselves, but oh! how civilised.

It is when we begin to hear from the lips of the neighbours the curse which has always been uttered in the West, when we begin to scorn this poverty-stricken population for misconduct, seeing it as a "recruiting ground for criminals", that poverty becomes exclusion and the Fourth World comes into being. This is an outlawed Fourth World. The most active defenders of Human Rights keep away from them, and do not even mention them.

"NOT EVEN AN ANIMAL SHOULD HAVE TO LIVE LIKE THIS"

Thus, exclusion has existed since the beginning of time all over the world. It seems we find the same disdain everywhere, the same rejection of the poorest, whose status as men appears to be denied, for they have no place when we talk about society, democracy, justice, peace or development. The suffering thus inflicted - and we are witnesses to this the world over - is untold. It is not made more tolerable by the fact that, in many cases, it is inflicted unwittingly. Seeing this suffering increase at the same time as development and concern for human rights, seeing it spread in parallel with everything good we try to do, awoke in us the desire to create with all speed "Fourth World and Society" study circles. To clarify this paradox, as you have understood, we could do no better than to call upon the very best thinkers. Since we have lived in poverty-stricken areas, we, perhaps more than others, are witnesses to the fact that the exclusion inflicted on the poorest is the worst suffering possible. It is the poor themselves who tell us this each day and oblige us to repeat it here: it is not hunger, nor the inability to read, nor the fact of not having enough to feed and successfully raise a family, it is not even the lack of work which is the worst of man's misfortunes. The very worst misfortune is to know that one is deprived through scorn, denied one's share, treated, literally, as an outlaw, because one is not recognised as a human being, a subject of rights, fit to share and participate.

A man whose rights and freedoms are flouted, but who can tell himself that he is the victim of an injustice, that he is still a man despite everything, is, naturally, to be pitied, but he has not reached the depths of suffering. It is the Fourth World who reach the depths, because, as a mother on an underprivileged housing estate near Paris said, "It isn't that he doesn't

understand his rights, it's that he doesn't even know he has any." When speaking of one of her neighbours who had died recently, she continued, "He had so few rights during his life that, at the end, he no longer claimed any. He asked for nothing, you know, he didn't have anything more to ask for." We knew this man. We had spent some time together and during that time he had succeeded in obtaining a decent job and had discovered social security for the first time. His neighbours, Fourth World men and women who choose the right words far more often than some people might think, said of him, "He recovered his dignity. He came back to life."

We have made Fourth World families and underclass workers feel so strongly that they are worth nothing and are nothing, that they do not even see themselves as victims. Too often, we have said that they were guilty, sub-human even. And not to know one's humanity means that one cannot live. When the families of these residential dumping grounds say, "This is no way to live", their words express exactly what they mean. Having an existence which is not a life gives rise to this unbearable expression which we have heard in every language and on every continent, "Not even an animal should have to live like this".

No human being, even the most completely impoverished and rejected, can reconcile himself, once and for all, to the idea of being no more than an animal. We are also witnesses to this. Day after day, such a person turns it over and over in his heart and mind, no longer knowing who he is. We are creating the study circles so that by taking a stand, through reflection, speech and understanding, they will contribute to bringing an end to this tragedy.

THE WEST'S FALSE BELIEFS

A moment ago we said that there were also other reasons why we wanted to create these study circles. These reasons do not derive from the Fourth World, but from the anxiety which is becoming ever more present, especially in the West. This anxiety seems undeniable but, even worse, it could become destructive: destructive of trust, hope, peace and unity among men, destructive of love.

In a chronicle published in the journal *La Croix* on 5 October, Henri de Soos stated that "human rights today assert themselves as a powerful engine for challenging and transforming all organisations that crush man." Is this true? No one will deny that thinking about human rights today represents a form of challenge. This is so, in any case, in Western countries and in Central and Latin America, where the Western Judeo-Christian civilisation has left its mark more strongly than elsewhere. It is far less true for other parts of the world, particularly sub-Saharan Africa and the Far East. I put it to you that one of the errors of the Western world is to try to impose a declaration of human rights, called universal but written according to the concepts of and in the language of the West, on populations which come from very different civilisations.

In 1948, Western countries set the tone at the UN. Although the fundamental notions expressed in the declaration could be or could become universal, their translation into an "International Declaration" most certainly was not. Since then, has it not been a well-intentioned colonisation, but nonetheless a deception, which the West has effected over the other regions of the world? Is it not a sham to try to impose the text of a declaration on others rather than to search, with respect and humility, for what could be the equivalent of our thinking on man's inalienable rights in other civilisations? Are the zealous agents for human

rights that we aspire to be, trying to get an immediate agreement on a wording which is destined to change with time, even in the West, or are we seeking a deeper agreement, the only one which can lead to peace, namely a common conviction, rather than a common wording?

Many of us have been asking ourselves this question for a long time, as a result of encountering an astonishing belief day after day: that the “powerful engine” of Human Rights, which sooner or later must change the world, belongs to we Westerners with our Western thinking and language. The fact that many governments in Africa and Asia signed the Universal Declaration when admitted to the UN does not allow us to conclude that a common conviction exists, for without a doubt, international opinion and pressure from wealthy countries mean that a government cannot refuse its signature without laying itself open to public criticism.

The question is whether we are advancing the cause of man and of understanding among peoples by proposing that Upper Volta³ sign a text granting every person the right to the free choice of employment, social security, and free, compulsory, public education. It is a thought which comes spontaneously to mind when reading passages of the type that I have just quoted. Who among us would have the heart to deny that we are the heirs to a unique, marvellous concept of man? But what is more uncertain is our ability to express it in words and make it a “powerful engine” for the happiness of all men.

Does it not make many of us anxious when, day after day, we are told that our declarations are perfect, yet day after day, we see them fail as instruments of justice and peace? This anxiety is expressed through the proliferation of articles and works on human rights that we see today, all of which, no doubt, express our concern, but it is not clear whether they allow us to reach a better understanding and, therefore, to progress in our actions.

It is good to see these works published, it is good to see a publication like “*L’aujourd’hui des droits de l’homme*” (Human Rights Today) by Guy Aurenche. It tells us that many of us share the same concerns for the same ideal. But it also tells us that we cannot let the matter rest there, sharing our concerns and questions. The circumstances of the poorest as well as the anxiety of our fellow citizens require us to move towards answers. We must do something so that the poorest, whose inalienable rights we deny to their very core, are able to meet with concerned citizens, who are eager for these rights to prevail throughout the world. If not, what a waste of sincere goodwill.

Our study circles must help in this respect. Not by establishing, like others, the chronicles of our confusion and hasty assurances, but by going back to the roots of the human rights question, starting from the conceptions of man that have allowed us to disregard these rights; we must also consider this question from the real life experiences of those who have not benefited from them in any way. Light may only be appreciated and understood when in total darkness. In the same way, we may only appreciate and understand human rights through the eyes of those members of humanity who continue to be completely deprived of them.

I believe that by proceeding in this manner, we shall be able to make considerable progress, both in understanding the instruments, declarations, pacts and conventions that we have created, and in understanding how to give priority to using them to accelerate their application to everyone. Allow me to make a few more remarks on these two points.

3 Name given at that time to the country now known as Burkina Faso.

MAN IS SUBJECT TO RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The conception or conceptions of man and his supreme destiny lead us to say that all men have rights they cannot be denied. For reasons of diversity and sometimes of ideological difference, our declarations and conventions all maintain a sensible silence on this subject. Without this silence, these texts would not have seen the light of day, much less have been signed by governments whose ideologies differ greatly one from another.

But once these texts, which make no reference to the deep-rooted motivations, are declared, they give every human being a falsely absolute status, yet they do not fill people with enthusiasm for their actual application. Our charters, written for the immediate present, are always temporary, needing constantly to be up-dated, always lagging behind both men's self-awareness and the changes in the cultures and societies in which they will take on substance. Thus they tend to take the place of the sources which inspired them; from being the fruit of the tree, they become the tree itself.

The fact that today, at UNESCO, "the third generation of human rights" is being discussed, and at the Council of Europe, the pact on economic, social and cultural rights is being revised and that, during the International Year of the Child, there was a desire to begin improving the Declaration of Children's Rights, shows us that human rights are like a living body which must continue to develop.

Since the Declaration of Independence in the United States in 1776, the first in which a Christian concept of man was expressed in a declaration of fundamental rights, the notion of the equality of men "before the law" has evolved towards that of equality "in dignity", which is an entirely different matter altogether. The right to work was not recognised by the authors of the French declarations in 1789, 1793 or 1795, only appearing in the United Nations Declaration in 1948. This notion rapidly evolved via the pact on economic, social and cultural rights, to become a right to have a trade or profession. The right of every person to life, liberty and personal safety is only in its initial phase, because we only recognised it in 1948, and even then we could not or dared not clarify at what point life begins, and at what point a person, whose right to life must be respected, begins to exist.

Human rights can certainly be seen as a living body which is to be developed, but remains the fruit, and we readily concede, only one of the fruits, of our concept of man. Have we forgotten that this concept has given substance to other fruits of the same kind? Have we forgotten that these same ideas have been expressed in another, apparently very different form, in other times: not those of rights, but of commandments? "You shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour", and finally, "love your neighbour as yourself." These are all commandments, that is to say, duties, related to the human condition, which imply that others have rights over us, both as human beings and as citizens, as well as over the societies and States we have created.

Perhaps, paradoxically, it is in Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland, that it is most clearly stated that rights and duties are a single entity. This occurs not only at State level, but also in the life of every person. Man is subject to a "unity of rights and duties", states a legal commentary on the Polish Labour Code and this idea can be found throughout the entire legislative thinking in Eastern European countries.

Perhaps these countries which have tried so hard to attain the right to work and equality, and which, in so doing, have flouted the rights to freedom of opinion, association and movement,

nevertheless have some merit, or, could we say, they are an essential complement to us? Perhaps we should be more attentive to them if we want to restore human rights to their rightful place so as better to implement them? Be that as it may, the legislators of Eastern Europe do not only take us back to the human rights that men had the immense merit of writing down as public declarations in the eighteenth century. They also refer us back to the expressions of rights that are far more ancient, to declarations of the inalienable duties of man which are also a part of the history of these absolute rights. Is this not a way of bringing us back to our roots, allowing us to distinguish between the tree and its fruit, and to harvest all the fruit? And would this not help us to leave our confusion behind, to “take stock”, to find that basic level of perceptiveness, certainty and, above all, unity, that we need to make better progress?

Above all, do we not need unity among people, especially when faced with obstacles from all sides? Unity of understanding which may lead to unity of action? And at this point in the history of humanity, must we not believe that this attempt to understand better in order to unite with one another better should be part of what those in Poland call the elements of duty, and what we would more readily call the responsibilities of every man? Who is responsible for what, and to whom, or better still: for what am I personally responsible as a human being and a citizen? To whom am I personally responsible?

IN TERMS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, IT IS NOT A QUESTION OF BEING JUST, BUT OF SHARING RESPONSIBILITY

I suggest it would be useful, after many years of reflection on human rights, to re-examine the question from the angle of duties, or better still, responsibilities. We believe this for specific reasons, including the fact that we need to form alliances, and these alliances, at least in the area that interests us, are not based on volunteer workers, but rather on a shared responsibility which is well understood. On this point, there may also be the risk of a misunderstanding which is damaging to the cause. A misunderstanding which consists in seeing humanity as divided into the “just” on one side, and the “unjust” on the other side.

Take the example of how we look upon the signatories to Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, or the naval yard workers in Gdansk. They never claimed to be just. They simply took a stand against certain attacks on freedom. This is to their credit, and we can learn from them about courage. Nevertheless, this does not negate the fact that Prague intellectuals carry a large part of the joint responsibility for the underclass to be found in certain suburbs of this city; they have never done anything to share their privileges as intellectuals with this population, which is held in contempt; they have contributed to the silence which suffocates the poor. Likewise, the Gdansk workers have a great deal to teach us about the defence of human rights. Yet, the fact remains that they never spoke out for their underclass comrades and sometimes even contributed to their dismissal, because they represented a burden and brought little credit to the working class.

We say this as we have said it to our Polish friends, not for an instant intending to deny or diminish their sincerity. In simple terms, what is to become of human rights, above all among the poorest, demands clear thinking on our part, without complacency. In the eyes of the Polish underclass, the Gdansk workers are no more just than the communist leaders who, in 1945 and 1948, granted a tiny plot of land to even the most impoverished farm labourers. It is difficult to divide men into those who are just, and those who are unjust. We, ourselves, are

not among the just by the mere fact that we are against torture and in favour of peace, or that we aspire to the fulfilment of human rights. Our Movement for human rights, which, today, seeks to launch study circles for democracy, human rights, and priority rights for the poorest, is not made up of righteous men and women.

Being aware of this should allow us to recognise ourselves as jointly responsible both for the lack of justice today and the future of justice tomorrow. This is not a matter of optional responsibility to be taken on through voluntary service. It is a matter of duty. Because, even if we have been just in all things in other respects, not one of us is just towards the poorest. In this regard, these study circles should help us to gain a better understanding.

THE REASONS FOR MAKING THE POOREST OUR PRIORITY

Please allow me to make a few more remarks on this proposal to focus special attention on that segment of the population which, in every country, is denied access to its rights, to society and democracy. I will be brief and I apologise for having taken so much of your time.

I said that, first of all, in every country, we must clarify the situation of the lowest level of the social ladder. This must be done because of the nameless suffering of our fellow citizens. We shall certainly not deny that the suffering resulting from the disregard for rights at various social and cultural levels cannot be measured or compared, and that it must be fought at all levels. But it is surely still true that we owe our first duty to those who are completely helpless and defenceless on all levels. Must we not focus our priorities on those who have been suffocated by our silence more than any others? Should we not focus on those whose unspeakable condition we have not studied, debated, nor publicly denounced and who, due to our silence, cannot even be sure that they, too, are human?

Moreover, in our society, can we ignore that we have exercised our own rights and freedoms to the detriment of theirs? That we are responsible for their circumstances more directly, more concretely, than for those of all other victims whose rights are disregarded? This responsibility to the poorest, as we said a short while ago, we share with all people all over the world. We even share it with the citizens of the Fourth World, because they too - perhaps even more than us - are driven by the realities of their existence to thrust aside and exclude the poorest among them. The poorest unite us because not one of us can put the blame on others, or preach at them, or claim to be more just than them. With the poorest, hostility and hatred between us loses its meaning. We can no longer accuse each other, or even say that "it is the government's fault". With the Fourth World, in the most concrete way, democracy and human rights become the concerns of all men and of all peoples, as stated in the 1948 Declaration.

Finally, making the fourth world the centre of our preoccupations brings our actions together. Some of us are concerned with those who are imprisoned for their opinions, others with victims of torture. I do not mean that some should abandon their stand against slavery, others their support for refugees, so that we find ourselves all supporting one group of people at the bottom of the social ladder. However, in these different areas where rights are trampled, we might think first and foremost of the condition of the most defenceless victims and, to be fair, make it a priority to act on their behalf!

To illustrate our idea: if Amnesty International were to adopt this perspective, they would require us to understand and reject, first and foremost, the fate of such stupefying blindness as to defy the human condition, which was inflicted on Ivan Denisovich and presented to us with such finesse by Solzhenitsyn. They would not forget the “first circle's” intellectual prisoners, but they would not stop halfway in their understanding and denunciation, they would avoid committing the injustice of first serving those whose defence is already the most eloquent and the most widely heard throughout the world. And while we are speaking of prisoners, can we forget those impoverished common law prisoners, illiterate, ravaged by alcoholism, that poverty has turned into delinquents and who find themselves imprisoned for petty theft or even crimes they did not commit? Perhaps we should admit that we have ignored this age-old injustice, that we have discovered, or rediscovered, prisons and the abusive denial of freedom through those who were closer to us or more likeable, the non-poor and the intellectuals. What hierarchy have we thus established in injustice and in our efforts to repair it?

I put it to you that the breaking down of this hierarchy and the revision of our priorities would make us more just ourselves, and, therefore, more likely to convince our fellow citizens.

FAMILY RIGHTS

Finally, how do we make the Fourth World the centre of our preoccupations, while taking into account the reality of their lives?

So as not to lose ourselves in unverifiable generalities and impressions rather than focussing on the facts, we must select a well-defined field of observation. The Fourth World itself proposes one which is vital to it, and when I say “the Fourth World,” I mean the excluded from all over the world, because I am referring to that which serves as the final line of defence for the poorest throughout the world: the family sphere. When they lose this, they lose what remains of their identity, the justification for their existence, their reason for living and perhaps, at times, for hoping. But this final bastion is systematically undermined, attacked and destroyed, both in the West as well as in Africa, Latin America and the Far East.

At the same time, considering the family's fundamental rights seems to us an urgent need for all. As we know, the 1948 Declaration represents a collection of individual rights. Under the influence of welfare and socialist thinking, for example, what are known as “social” rights, in the sense of collective rights, as well as the right to participate in labour unions, came onto the scene through the pact on economic, social and cultural rights.

As for the family, whose fundamental role most societies never cease to proclaim, it only appears incidentally, as a modest reference, chiefly in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Again, does not the right of a child to his family find its logical extension in a declaration of the rights which a family must have in order to assume its role towards its children? Likewise, the right of every person to found a family, granted by the 1948 Declaration, does not lead to a proclamation of the rights held by the family as an entity, once it has been founded.

By focusing on the family itself, our first study group in France and the European Union will serve the poorest in our part of the world, while extending the dialogue to our friends who are reflecting on the same issues, especially in West Africa. It will contribute to bridging a gap

which might become a real handicap for the achievement of human rights in the international community as a whole.

IN CONCLUSION: A LONG-TERM MISSION

You are the members of the first study group in France and in Europe, and we have thought it advisable to limit the number of participants at this first meeting. This is an initial orientation, the first outline of a programme, and we thought that you would like to select your own companions for the road ahead and to decide together whom we will ask to join us, according to the direction decided upon today.

In our view, this first study group and the others that will be created in neighbouring countries, could have a long-term mission. Indeed, we hope that they will become a tradition, embodying the universal need to accompany in spirit the people in search of their inalienable rights.

Today, we confer the initial experimentation to you.