

## BIO-COMMUNICATIONS

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The written media can be persuaded to promote a respect for bios (life) in all its forms -- human, animal and plant. We are discussing human brotherhood, care and concern not only for ourselves, but also our fellow man, animal welfare, and environmental concerns. Do we find these subjects promoted by the media today? Let us look at some sample headlines collected over a few days in August and September 1988.

Sudanese Starve - This article tells of 8,000 people who have died of hunger in an isolated town in the Sudan.

Yugoslavs Protest - This article reports a march of some 65,000 Serbs calling for military action to be taken against the ethnic Albanians of the province of Kosovo.

The Smell of Genocide - According to an article on the genocide of the Kurds, the Iraqis are using chemical weapons. To quote: "According to Amnesty International, large numbers of unarmed Kurdish civilians are reported to have been detained, and many subsequently executed after being wounded by chemical attacks in 1987 and earlier this year. In March this year, several hundred people were said to have been apprehended as they made their way to the city of Sulaimaniya seeking medical treatment for wounds inflicted by Iraqi forces using chemical weapons. They were reportedly taken to the military garrison of Tanjaro, located 4kms outside the city, and executed by firing squad on April 2." In another incident in mid-April 1987, for which Amnesty quotes a witness, some 360 people wounded in a chemical attack are said to have been denied medical treatment, then transferred to a detention center. "With hundreds of villages leveled," the report goes on, "the Kurdish countryside has an eerie, deserted quality to it. Fruit trees, graveyards and cemeteries stand as reminders of the absent people and livestock."

"Genocide has also occurred in Burundi where 5,000 Hutus have been killed and 61,000 have fled to neighboring states (the ruling tribe are the minority Tutsi). Back in 1972 100,000 Hutus were massacred."

Shall I go on? - "in El Salvador floods killed and left thousands of people homeless"; "almost 100 people died in a three-jet crash in an air show in Germany and 343 people were severely injured, many of them critically..."

This is what we read every day -- an unending litany of death and disaster filling our daily newspapers.

The obvious conclusion is that the world is in a mess. Is there nothing good to report? Where are the articles that show a way out of the mess by stressing a genuine reverence for life? It seems that reverence for life doesn't occur naturally. It has to be fostered, developed, allowed to grow and flourish. How? Through education. I consider the media an excellent purveyor of such education -- even though many times its educational role is abrogated in favor of entertainment and propaganda.

Since the media dispenses and comments on the kind of news described above, how can it encourage reverence for life? The papers with the most popular appeal exploit the news to wring out every tragic detail. Even respectable papers have to report the news and most of the time it is bad news. In the feature pages of every newspaper the reading public could learn more about the concerns of bios.

We come to another issue: it seems the public likes to read about catastrophes - rapes, murders and mayhem. Editors interested in the profit their papers make, give the public "what it wants". Our true job is to educate the public first -- then let them demand "Bios Pages." Citizen power is strong indeed, and we have many examples of that. If newspaper editors around the world were inundated by millions of letters in favour of Bios Pages they would certainly supply them. How can we arouse citizen concern? I suggest we do it through the schooling system.

Suppose we could get teachers globally, from grade to graduate schools, to encourage the students to love life, and then encourage them to bombard editors with letters, I think we would have results. I suggest that we work through the Ministers of Education to put this plan into effect. Newspapers throughout the world are mostly in private hands, therefore, they cannot be coerced by Ministers. Responsible Ministers of Education can encourage bios through the schools and the products of the schools can influence the newspapers to publish bios articles.

Even today one can find some bios articles. Let me give you an example. One of my favourites, "About 180 white South Africans have left their comfortable homes in the white suburbs of Johannesburg and other cities to spend four nights with black families in Mamelodi, a sprawling African township outside Pretoria. In exchange, some 35 blacks are staying with white families in Pretoria. The idea is for each

group to get a taste of life on the other side of the apartheid fence... The experiment, dubbed Christian Encounter in Mamelodi, is the brainchild of Dr. Nico Smith, a remarkable Afrikaner priest who resigned as Professor at the University of Stellenbosch six years ago in protest against apartheid... He managed to persuade the authorities to waive the Group Areas Act, which enforces segregation in residential areas, to permit him and his wife to live in Mamelodi, where he preaches. It is a far cry from the oak-shaded streets of Stellenbosch. Dr. Smith has organized regular dinners where whites and blacks get together in each other's homes. The four-day encounter is the first of its kind -- a delicate plant that we hope will take root, in the words of Dean Robin Briggs, an Anglican clergyman who is also involved..."

Here is another - Lasers that are used to cure rather than kill: "In the past, lasers using helium neon as a light source, have been used for healing. However, these gas lasers tended to be bulky and their effectiveness was reduced by the limited range of light they could deliver. Omega - Universal Technologies - has developed solid state lasers using gallium arsenide semiconductors - electrons travel through gallium arsenide three times faster than through silicon, the conventional material for chips. The new semiconductors are small enough to enable the company to develop a cluster head of 31 diodes, which will deliver light at four different wavelengths, in any combination between 650 and 900 nanometres. This compares with the performance of neon helium lasers which were limited to between 632 and 638 nanometres. Mary Dyson, reader in tissue repair biology at the United Medical and Dental Schools in London, says that the biological process by which low-intensity light assists in the healing process is not fully understood. However, she explains that the lasers provide energy which is absorbed by cells called macrophages in the skin. These are able to change light energy into chemical energy, stimulating the production of scab-forming granulated tissue and scar tissue..." The new technology is supposedly useful not only for open wounds but also for internal injuries.

The following are two medical articles. The first is about a new scanning technique which has reduced the need for harmful tests on animals. "A technique which is already widely-used by doctors as a powerful new way of diagnosing disease, now promises to have a dramatic impact on one of the most controversial aspects of industrial research. Nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) one of the latest medical imaging methods, can also be used to follow the progress of new drugs or foods when they are tested on animals for efficacy and possible toxic side effects. As with human patients, NMR has no detectable physiological effect on the animal, which can therefore be employed repeatedly, greatly reducing the number of animals killed in the research stages of a potential new product. This is the experience of scientists at ICI Pharmaceuticals. They have been developing NMR methods of monitoring animals during research into three kinds of compound, for treating cancer, rheumatoid arthritis and heart disease. All three are complex disease states that require surveillance of the whole animal rather than one particular organ. Whole-body NMR scanning permits this kind of surveillance with minimum inconvenience to the animal..."

The second article is about ethics in medicine. Medicine is much concerned with transplants and implants, but is there room for ethics? This article roams many areas. I mention just two. The first is genetic mapping which will reveal in the embryo stage the health of this person in the future. An ethical question is asked - "What will this mean for a mother with an embryo which has a low intelligence?" Still more problematic - what if the doctor can say, not just "this is wrong" but "we can fix it?" In such cases, says Dr. John Alwen, "You will be talking about genetic engineering, and we have no rules for that."

The second ethical issue - should we stop helping old people live a longer life, when it is clear that this life will not be fulfilling to them? The article ends by stating that a European Association of Centres of Medical Ethics has just been formed.

The news tells us that people are starving. This article on the World Food Conference tells us what we can do to solve the problem -- not by handing out doles, but by opening up the markets of the developed countries to Third World exports and by giving "aid for self-reliance" -- not food aid -- but helping African countries to improve their production.

Yet another article, about an EEC conservation program that turns ploughed fields back into meadows explains that the whole scheme is to encourage less intensive farming both to preserve the environment and reduce the costly cereal mountains and milk lakes of the EEC. It reads as follows:

"Barely a decade ago, the Ministry of Agriculture in the United Kingdom, and also the European Commission in Brussels, was still in the dig for Victory mood of the immediate post-war years. The goal was greater and more efficient farm production. The principal means of achieving this was the high support prices of the EEC's Common Agricultural policy. On top of that came hefty capital grants and tax incentives. These helped make fields bigger -- and so more easily cultivated with heavier machinery -- and fertilized and cleansed with ever-improving chemical mixtures. The damage all this might cause to the landscape or the environment in general was barely considered. The ESAs are the antithesis to all this. Though each scheme is different, they all have the same aim -- environmentally friendly farming. They enjoin farmers to maintain hedges, walls and drinking ponds, to be extremely sparing in their use of chemicals, to plough very little and to graze their livestock less intensively. Farming practices are being designed to encourage wild flowers -- the weeds of yesterday -- as well as a range of wild animals, insects and birds."

The final articles I use for illustration deal with the Green Movement. The first reports the establishment of a Green bank -- an Ecobank ... Europe's first ecologically-oriented bank in West Germany that lends money to companies building machines to help protect or clean up the environment. The second is about demonstrators at the International Monetary Fund World Bank meeting in Berlin "castigating the International Monetary Fund and World Bank for ruining and polluting the Third World". Signs that such demonstrators have been heard is the creation last year of the World Bank's Environment Department to make sure the Bank's programs in the future do not despoil natural

resources, and that environmental considerations are dealt with in all projects.

These nine articles are examples of bios articles in the world's press. If editors around the world received millions of letters from people telling them the public wanted more such articles, they would comply.

Is this an impossible dream? Certainly not -- we can mobilize public opinion.

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