



Churches in Europe:

Initiatives to overcome racism, xenophobia and racial violence

Dossier 2:
United Kingdom and France

Justice, Peace and Creation team
World Council of Churches
August 2001

**CHURCHES IN EUROPE:
INITIATIVES TO OVERCOME RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND RACIAL VIOLENCE**

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INTRODUCTION

Faced with a disquieting resurgence of racial violence in Europe, the World Council of Churches (WCC) decided to invest resources in a new project entitled “The Churches in Europe: initiatives to combat racism, xenophobia and racial violence”. The aim of this project, which was entrusted to the Justice, Peace and Creation team’s Programme to Combat Racism, is to research Church initiatives in the struggle against racism, xenophobia and racial violence in four European countries: Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom and France.

A dossier with the results of research in Germany and Austria was published in December 2000 and presented to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches at Potsdam in February 2001. This second dossier looks at anti-racism initiatives of the French and British Churches.

Since the first dossier was published, the phenomenon of racial violence has not faded. In Germany, the first statistics available for the year 2000 show a worrying increase in racial attacks.¹ In England, members of ethnic minorities have continued to be the victims of racial attacks and harassment. Race riots broke out in May and June 2001 in north-east England. Between September and November 2000, there was an unprecedented wave of anti-Semitic violence in France, related to the explosive situation in the Middle East. This racial violence reveals the level of racism in these countries, but it represents only the tip of the iceberg. The media are interested in racially motivated murders but not in the discrimination to which people of African or other origin are systematically subjected. The issues of immigration and asylum have been ver much present in several election campaigns. In Austria, during the campaign for the Vienna municipal elections in March 2001, Jorg Haider’s Nationalist-Populist party (FPO) made exaggerated xenophobic and demagogic political promises to attract votes. The French extreme right held on to most of its mayoralities in the municipal elections that were likewise held in March 2001. In Britain, racist outbursts were a feature of the campaign leading up to the June 2001 General Election. The subjects of asylum and immigration played a prominent role, with candidates displaying their xenophobia as they tried to appear more hard-line than each other. Official reports have denounced, “the political use of racist propaganda and xenophobia”², the role of the media in spreading a negative image of immigrants and asylum seekers and the “repercussions of immigration and asylum policies”³ on the climate of opinion towards refugees and minority groups.

This second dossier collates the results of our research in the United Kingdom⁴ and France. These two countries are neighbours but the racism in each country has different characteristics. In England, racial attacks are terrifyingly common: since 1999, at least 19

¹ Crimes committed by the extreme right, including attacks on foreigners and ethnic minorities, have increased by 59% according to a report published in March 2001. Source: Associated Press, <http://icare.to.news>, see Dossier 1 – Germany and Austria.

² European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI): second report on Austria, adopted 16 June 2000 (<http://www.ecri.coe.int/fr/08/01/40/CBC2/20Autriche.pdf>).

³ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI): second report on the United Kingdom, adopted 16 June 2000 (<http://www.ecri.coe.int/fr/08/01/40/CBC2/20RoyaumeUni.pdf>).

⁴ In fact, this dossier only contains information on England. With time short, we had to leave Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to one side. However, we did contact many Churches in these regions and they sent us a lot of information. We would therefore like to offer our warm thanks to all those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who took the time to contribute to our research project and who sent us information on anti-racism initiatives in their area.

people have died as a result of racial attacks!⁵ The publication of the MacPherson Report into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 generated an unprecedented wave of soul-searching on racism in British society. British society and all its institutions, including the churches, came under scrutiny because of the notion of “institutional racism”. There is less racial violence in France. The last racist murder was in 1997.⁶ That does not mean that xenophobic attacks are a marginal phenomenon in France, witness the outburst of anti-Semitism in the Autumn of 2000. In France, racism takes the form of discrimination of all kinds against immigrants in employment, housing and education. What is common to the two countries, however, is that both belong to “fortress Europe”. On both sides of the Channel, the same increasingly restrictive legislation, designed to discourage the arrival of immigrants and refugees, is in place. Both countries employ the same administrative procedures to deport “undesirables”. So this second dossier gives a large amount of space to initiatives that seek to prevent deportations, to denounce the violence associated with deportations and to make unjust and discriminatory laws more flexible.

It was definitely not our intention to provide an exhaustive list of everything being done by churches to overcome racism, xenophobia and racial violence. We wanted only to give some examples, as varied as possible, of numerous anti-racism initiatives more or less closely related to the churches.

This report aims to draw the attention of the churches to the significant work that is being done day after day, in the hope that it will help them to know about one another’s actions. It is our hope that this will encourage persons of good will, the agents of change, who are directly involved in the projects highlighted in this report. We also hope that this will encourage churches and their partners in Europe and elsewhere to pursue their efforts towards overcoming racism and xenophobia.

Acknowledgements

United Kingdom: Sandra Ackroyd, Sion Aled Owen, Doug Baker, Jerome Connolly, Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed, Abraham Gethin, Glynn Gordon-Carter, Gordon Gray, James Harris, Mukami McKrum, Naboth Muchopa, Batook Pandya, Norman Setchell, Norman Shanks, David Sinclair, David Stevens and Arlington Trotman.

France: Jean-Marc Dupeux, Martine Kentzinger, Pierre Kopp, Marc Lienhard, Christophe Perrin, Raphaël Picon, Frédéric Sétodzo, Dominique Simon and Ove Ullestad.

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⁵ Institute of Race Relations: “Counting the Cost: racial violence since MacPherson”, March 2001.

⁶ Source: “La lutte contre le racisme et la xénophobie”, Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l’homme (CNCDH), 2000 report to Lionel Jospin, Prime Minister, 21 March 2001. It is revealing that this murder was committed on the fringes of a National Front (extreme right wing party) demonstration. This shows there is a certain link between the dissemination of extreme right wing ideas and racial violence. It is no coincidence that many Church initiatives in France fight right wing extremism.

UNITED KINGDOM

Population:	59.5 million
Refugee population on 31.12.2000⁷:	149,800 (132,700 in 1999)
Number of refugees per 1000 inhabitants:	2.5
Asylum requests in 2000⁸:	75,700 (71,000 in 1999)
Number granted refugee status in 2000⁹:	21,550
Rate of admission¹⁰:	21.9%
Ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination:	6 March 1969

Main concerns of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (August 2000):¹¹

- The absence of comprehensive legislation to combat racial discrimination.
- The persistence of racial attacks and harassment, and the consequent increasing sense of vulnerability felt by ethnic minorities. The committee is further concerned about the findings of “institutional racism” within the police force and other public institutions, which has resulted in serious shortcomings with regard to investigations into racist incidents.
- The disproportionate number of deaths in police custody or prison of members of ethnic minorities and others. The fact that there have been a number of such cases of deaths in police custody in which no officers of the police or the prison service have been prosecuted nor disciplinary action taken against them.
- The risks related to the system through which asylum seekers are dispersed (making access to legal experts, health and education more difficult).

⁷ Source: “Provisional Statistics on Refugees and Others of Concern to UNHCR for the year 2000”, 11 April 2001 (<http://www.unhcr.ch/statist/main.htm>) and “Les réfugiés dans le monde, cinquante ans d’action humanitaire”, 2000, United Nations High Commission for Refugees (<http://www.unhcr.ch>).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Source: “Provisional Statistics on Refugees and Others of Concern to UNHCR for the year 2000”, 11 April 2001 (<http://www.unhcr.ch/statist/main.htm>).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CERD.C.304.Add.102.En?Opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CERD.C.304.Add.102.En?Opendocument)

- Despite the government's efforts to deal with the backlog of asylum requests, the committee recommends that measures be adopted to ensure that effective safeguards are in place to respect the rights of all asylum seekers.
- The higher rate of unemployment suffered by ethnic minorities. There is concern about racial harassment and bullying and that ethnic minorities continue to be disproportionately excluded from schools. In the fight against discrimination, the government is invited to give particular attention to the rights to employment, education, housing and health.

"In the United Kingdom, ethnic minorities make up about six per cent of the population.¹² According to the Minister for the Home Office,¹³ the number of race crimes between April and September 1999 was 10,982, of which around half were cases of harassment. Fifteen per cent of the one million arrests and searches carried out by the police in line with the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act were directed at members of ethnic minorities, with blacks accounting for 60% of this percentage. In 1998/99, the police recorded 1890 homicides, ten of which were racially motivated. The police were less inclined to identify suspects of homicides where the victim was black than they were to identify suspects in cases where the victim was white or from another ethnic group. It is also useful to compare figures for the different types of homicide.

Twelve per cent of the 1.3 million arrests made for reported crimes were of members of ethnic minorities, with blacks accounting for 60% of this percentage. Black people are more often arrested than white people or members of other ethnic groups. Eleven per cent of the 190,000 warnings issued by the police for non-indictable offences were to members of ethnic minorities; however, the percentage of whites arrested was slightly higher than that for ethnic minorities.

In June 1998, ethnic minorities accounted for 18% of male prisoners. Sixty-seven per cent of these were black.

Racial incidents recorded by the police increased by 66 percent to 23,050. This increase is probably due to improved reporting and to the broadening of the definition of racial incidents after the MacPherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence.¹⁴

Concern about the treatment of ethnic minorities and institutional racism in the police and the penal justice system was heightened by the death in detention in doubtful circumstances of two black people, police handling of the Michael Menson and Ricky Reel cases and the case in Scotland of Gulbar Chokrar Singh."

(European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), Annual report 1999).

¹² Figures based on "Ethnic Minorities in Britain", CRE Factsheet, 1999.

¹³ Home Office: Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System 1999.

¹⁴ The Institute of Race Relations has a different interpretation of these figures. Certainly, the increase in the number of racial incidents is due to the fact that members of ethnic minorities are more likely to go to the police and that the police are more likely to record complaints. Nevertheless, there is an increase in racial violence. Proof of this is that there have been 19 racially motivated murders since the publication of the MacPherson Report in February 1999. Source: Institute of Race Relations: "Counting the cost: racial violence since MacPherson", March 2001 (http://www.homebeats.co.uk/pdf/counting_the_cost.pdf)

THE CHURCHES' COMMISSION FOR RACIAL JUSTICE (CCRJ)

When examining church involvement in the fight against racism, xenophobia and racial violence in the United Kingdom, it is impossible not to mention the Churches' Commission for Racial Justice. This body has a special mandate from the United Kingdom churches to deal with issues relating to racism, xenophobia and racial violence. If you ask the various English churches about what they are doing to combat racism, they invariably refer you to this Commission.

Since 1992, the CCRJ is part of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, formerly known as the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland. The Commission is guided by a committee of 25 members representing the interests of churches and religious organisations, including those of African or Caribbean origin, all of which are members of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. It was set up by the churches to observe and analyse developments in the area of racism and justice in British (and European) society and to promote better exchange of information between the churches. It aims to facilitate the development of Christian reflection and theological exploration based on the different traditions and experiences of the churches and ethnic minority Christian organisations. When circumstances require, the Commission co-ordinates church response in the fight against racism, xenophobia and racial violence. It also has the task of raising awareness about these problems in the churches.

Part of the reason why the CCRJ cannot be ignored is because its work encompasses so many aspects of the fight against racism: support for victims of racial attacks, deaths in detention, "institutional racism", detention of refugees. We have chosen to highlight some of these activities while being conscious of having to leave out others.

SUPPORT TO VICTIMS OF RACIAL VIOLENCE AND THEIR FAMILIES

This task is essential given the high number of racial attacks that take place every year in the United Kingdom. According to the Institute of Race Relations, such attacks have been responsible for the death of 19 people since February 1999!¹⁵

In this area, the CCRJ's work consists mainly of funding programmes or organisations which combat racial violence. The Commission's Ecumenical Racial Justice Fund provides no less than £300,000 every year to different projects or organisations throughout Great Britain.¹⁶ Some of these organisations aim to protect and assist victims of racial violence.

¹⁵ Source: Institute of Race Relations: "Counting the cost: racial violence since Macpherson", March 2001 (http://www.homebeats.co.uk/pdf/counting_the_cost.pdf).

¹⁶ Grants are up to £15,000 for national projects, £5,000 for local projects and £2,000 for urgent cases. The main donors to this fund are the Church Urban Fund, Christian Aid and Racial Justice Remittances.

Newham Monitoring Project (NMP)¹⁷

Founded in 1980 after a racially motivated murder, the NMP provides independent assistance to victims of racial violence in Newham (east London). It gathers evidence from victims, informs them of the legal steps they can take to obtain redress and encourages them to make a formal complaint. The NMP also tries to raise young people's awareness of their rights and how to make sure they are respected.

However, what makes NMP special is its Racial Harassment/Police Harassment Emergency Service. Open 24 hours a day on a free phone number, this service provides immediate advice and assistance to victims. The round the clock service is provided by specially trained volunteers.

In addition to supporting victims, NMP records cases of racial attacks, produces publications on racial harassment and takes part in public debate on the issues. During a by-election in the constituency of Beckton (south Newham), NMP led a campaign against the British National Party (BNP) candidate.¹⁸ In the leaflets that it distributed to encourage the electorate to vote for other candidates, NMP emphasised that any increase in support for fascist candidates always leads to an increase in racial attacks.¹⁹

Birmingham Racial Attacks Monitoring Unit (BRAMU)²⁰

As the name suggests, BRAMU's aim is to monitor racial attacks. The organisation is the only one of its kind in Birmingham. The gathering of evidence and compilation of statistics is, however, inseparable from the practical assistance it offers victims. Those who have suffered racial attacks only agree to give evidence if they can see there is the possibility of obtaining justice. Victims are put in contact with legal or voluntary institutions that are in a position to ensure that their rights are not flouted.

With regard to statistics, BRAMU has recorded a 50% increase in the number of racial violence incidents in 2000 in comparison with the previous year. However, the organisation believes that the phenomenon of racial violence is still greatly underestimated, because many people hesitate to report their case for fear of reprisals and because they lack of confidence in the legal system.

¹⁷ The Newham Monitoring Project was a beneficiary of the CCRJ's Ecumenical Racial Justice Fund in 1998. Source: The Ecumenical Racial Justice Fund, Annual Report 1998. Unfortunately, we were unable to obtain a more recent list of projects/organisations benefiting from this CCRJ fund.

¹⁸ Extreme right wing party.

¹⁹ The election, which took place on 29 March 2001, was won by the Labour Party. However, the BNP received about 17% of votes. Despite this disquieting number of votes, the NMP noted that the turnout was greater than usual, which shows that efforts to mobilise the electorate against the BNP were successful. Source: Newham Monitoring Project, icarenews, 3 April 2001, <http://www.icare.to/news.html>.

²⁰ Birmingham Racial Attacks Monitoring Unit received a grant from the CCRJ's Ecumenical Racial Justice Fund in 1998 (Source: The Ecumenical Racial Justice Fund, Annual Report 1998).

The Ecumenical Racial Justice Fund also supports families seeking truth and justice after losing one of their loved ones in a racial crime or an alleged racial crime. In too many cases, the murderers are still at liberty or the death is considered to be accidental. Too often, investigations have been sullied by negligence and omission or the family of the victim has been treated with little regard by the investigators.²¹

Justice for Ricky Reel

The tragic case of Ricky Reel is one of the best known in the United Kingdom – and beyond. Church & Race, the bulletin published three times a year by the CCRJ in co-operation with other organisations, regularly covers the fight of the Reel family to see the truth come out and to see justice done.²²

On the night of 14 October 1997, Ricky Reel (20) and two friends were the target for insults and racial threats in Kingston (Surrey, south-east London). Fearing for their safety, the three Asians decided to flee in different directions. That was the last time Ricky was seen alive. Worried about the prolonged absence of their son, his parents alerted the police. At first, the police refused to investigate and suggested that Ricky was surely at a friend's house or had got a secret girlfriend. It was the first in a long series of mistakes.

When the student's lifeless body was dragged out of the Thames a week later, the police immediately concluded that it was an accident. They said that Ricky must have slipped while urinating, fallen into the river and drowned. Sure about their hasty conclusion, the investigators categorically discarded the hypothesis of a racial crime. Consequently, the police felt it was not worth seeking witnesses, refused to countenance any link between Ricky's death and the racial attack to which he had been subjected and refused to look for the people involved in the attack (the aggressors had, however, been filmed by a surveillance camera) and made no attempt to look for clues on the river bank.

After the family and friends had put a lot of pressure on the authorities, the case was reopened. After a long investigation, the Police Complaints Authority, the body responsible for dealing with complaints against the police, apologised for the "weaknesses and imperfections" of the investigation; three police officers were charged with negligence. However, the report has still not been made public. Meanwhile, the case was given to another body, which also concluded that it was a case of accidental drowning. But, in November 1999, an inquest gave an open verdict, confirming the family's doubts about the accidental death theory. Ricky's mother is convinced that the colour of her skin is not unconnected with the fact that she has been denied justice.²³

The CCRJ also lobbies Members of Parliament and the government to try to make them aware of certain injustices and to get them to take measures to remedy them. Finally, the Commission organises commemorative religious services and events aimed at mobilising society after a tragedy has occurred, such as the one at Dover where, in June 2000, 58 Chinese refugees suffocated to death in the container of a lorry.

²¹ On this subject, see the Institute of Race Relations report "Counting the cost: racial violence since Macpherson", March 2001 (http://www.homebeats.co.uk/pdf/counting_the_cost.pdf). This document gives details of how the police dealt with several racially motivated crimes and attacks. Conclusion: two years after the MacPherson report highlighted "institutional racism" in the police force, a lot of progress remains to be made.

²² Church & Race, Vol 14 n°3 - Winter 1999 and Vol 15 n° 1-Spring 2000.

²³ Source: Guardian: "Race Case Verdict Blow to Yard", 9 November 1999.

DEATHS IN CUSTODY

Since 1969, when David Oluwale drowned after being beaten up by two police officers and thrown in a river in Leeds, the Institute of Race Relations has recorded 150 cases of the death of people of African, Caribbean or Asian origin after they had been detained at police stations, psychiatric hospitals or prisons.²⁴ INQUEST, the only organisation in England and Wales that works solely on deaths in custody, has campaigned for justice for the families of victims since 1981 and provided legal advice to them. It claims that 55 people from ethnic minorities have died between 1990 and 2001 after having been arrested by the police and placed in custody. The INQUEST statistics also show that 10 percent of deaths in police custody between 1990 and 2001 were people of African, Caribbean or Asian origin. In addition to this being “disproportionate”²⁵, many organisations question the efficiency and transparency of investigations and ask why legal proceedings are so rarely taken and sanctions so rarely imposed against the responsible police or prison officers.

It is in this worrying context that the CCRJ organises commemorative religious services for families who have lost a loved one after ill-treatment by police or prison officers. Events of this kind are part of the churches’ contribution to the fight for truth and justice that many families are engaged in. On 24 June 2000, for example, a large number of people attended a religious ceremony in solidarity with the families of those who have died in custody. The public heard the accounts of several families and were able to provide comfort and show their support to them.

The CCRJ provides financial support for families campaigning for the punishment of the people responsible for the death of their loved one. So the Ecumenical Racial Justice Fund supports the United Families and Friends Campaign (UFFC), an association created by the families of Christophe Adler, Orville Blackwood, Brian Douglas, Leon Patterson and Roger Sylvester.²⁶ All these families have in common the fact that one of their loved ones died while in custody. They all also share the same disappointment and resentment towards the bodies charged with shedding light on the death of these people who were so dear to them. They are convinced that they have been denied justice because they do not form part of the white majority. At the end of October 1999, more than 300 people, including the friends and families of Roger Sylvester, Christophe Adler and Joy Gardner marched to 10 Downing Street (residence of the Prime Minister) to demand a public inquiry into deaths in prison, police stations and psychiatric hospitals. The march was organised by the UFFC. At 10 Downing Street, the demonstrators presented a list of all the people of African and other origin who have died in custody since 1969.²⁷

The CCRJ aims to raise the public’s awareness of deaths in custody. It also supports INQUEST in its efforts to help the families of victims.

²⁴ Institute of Race Relations: “Black Deaths in Custody: Deaths in police, prison and psychiatric custody 1969-2000” (<http://www.homebeats.co.uk/resources/custodyt.htm>).

²⁵ Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: main subjects of concern (August 2000), [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CERD.C.304.Add.102.En?Opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CERD.C.304.Add.102.En?Opendocument).

²⁶ Source: Church & Race: “Christian solidarity on deaths in custody”, Summer 2000 - Vol 15 N°2.

²⁷ Source: Campaign Against Racism & Fascism (CARF): “United Families and Friends Campaign”, December 1999/January 2000 - N° 53.

The death in police custody of Roger Sylvester²⁸

At the time of these events, Roger Sylvester was a 30 year-old man in good health. On Sunday 10 January 1999, this young man of African descent went to a family christening. All those who saw him on that day and the following day reported him as being in good health. Roger Sylvester had suffered from mental health problems in the past but this was now just a bad memory. Although many of the facts are unclear and contradictory, what is established beyond doubt is that on the night of 11 January, Roger Sylvester was at his home when around half past nine in the evening, the police appeared in response to a 999 call. The two officers who arrived at the scene found Roger Sylvester naked in his garden. Within minutes another six officers had arrived and Roger Sylvester was restrained and handcuffed on the ground by the eight officers.

Roger Sylvester was detained under the Mental Health Act. The police told his family that he was restrained *for his own safety*. The police also said that he had not been violent or aggressive towards anybody. However, the police confirmed that they had to restrain him to take him to the psychiatric hospital. Handcuffed and physically restrained, Roger Sylvester was placed in a van; according to at least one witness, his body was limp. At the destination, Roger Sylvester was restrained on the floor by the police officers for some 20 minutes before being seen by a doctor. While the doctor left the room to get some medication, Roger collapsed. The officers, with the assistance of medical staff, tried to resuscitate him. But Roger Sylvester had sustained numerous injuries and remained in a coma for seven days until it was decided to switch off his life support machine.

The local police force at first entrusted the inquiry into the death of Roger Sylvester to its own investigation unit. Following the family's complaint about the partial and unacceptable behaviour of that body²⁹, the inquiry was entrusted to a neighbouring police force (Essex Police). It took 10 months to complete its investigation. During this time, many meetings were organised to inform the family of the victim, their lawyers and INQUEST, in accordance with the recommendations of the MacPherson report (see section on institutional racism), which had just been published and which had called for better communication with the families of victims. In the opinion of the family and their supporters, these meetings supplied only minimal and partial information. The family complained that the investigation concentrated too much on the victim rather than on the behaviour of the eight police officers, "*in an attempt to blame him for his own death*" in the words of his mother. Moreover, the police carried out a misinformation campaign to discredit Roger Sylvester. The victim was presented as an unstable, violent person who was dependent on drugs.

Essex Police finally passed its report to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), which is the legal body that decides whether to bring charges. The family has still not been given the opportunity to see the report. On 20 November 2000, that is 13 months after receiving the report, the CPS decided that none of the eight officers would be prosecuted due to insufficient evidence.

²⁸ Source: "Report on the Death in Police Custody of Roger Sylvester", INQUEST, November 2000 (<http://www.gn.apc.org/inquest/briefings/sylvester2.html>).

²⁹ Roger Sylvester's family blames the Tottenham police investigation unit for treating them with a lack of dignity with regard to a search warrant. This warrant had been issued without the knowledge of the family and a police officer had threatened to search Roger Sylvester's home while the family were at the hospital at the bedside of the victim who was still being kept alive. The officer later said he would not carry out the search if the family would hand over the victim's medical records.

A new inquest with a jury will be held but there is little chance that it will produce a different result. The family has no right to financial aid to allow it to be represented by a lawyer, while the police have unlimited public funds. The inquest also allows the eight police officers the right to refuse to answer any question that might incriminate them. In addition, the family does not have access to certain medical information on the true cause of Roger Sylvester's death Roger Sylvester. Finally, we should mention that it is no less serious that the police officers incriminated were not suspended while awaiting the results of the inquest.

Despite all these obstacles, the family, supported by INQUEST and many sympathisers, has not given up. On 18th January 2001, on the second anniversary of Roger's death, it organised a vigil in front of Tottenham police station. Three days later, a religious service was held in honour of the victim in a Methodist Church in London.

INQUEST has campaigned for the creation of an independent commission of inquiry into Roger Sylvester's controversial death. It has worked with the Roger Sylvester Justice Campaign, founded by the family after Roger's death. It has also obtained the support of several dozen Members of Parliament, the Mayor of London and many organisations including the CCRJ.

The manner in which the police and the authorities charged with examining the complaint against them proceeded in their investigation of Roger Sylvester's death and treated the family of the victim is unfortunately not exceptional. According to INQUEST, there were ten verdicts of unlawful killing in cases of death in police custody between 1990 and 2000 in England and Wales. But there were only four prosecutions and only one police officer was convicted.³⁰ INQUEST believes that the disproportionate number of people, particularly those of African or Caribbean origin, who have died in custody after being restrained shows the existence of racism in certain sectors of the police force, prison service and psychiatric hospitals. Moreover, the repeated failure of the competent authorities to shed light on the deaths leaves the black community with the impression that the blunders are the results of institutional racism.

Through the CCRJ, the churches have taken a position about these problems. The CCRJ has published a booklet explaining the point of view of the churches of the United Kingdom on deaths in custody. Entitled "Deaths in Police Custody", this booklet deals solely with deaths in police custody. It examines only the deaths of people of African or other origin, not because the death in detention of men and women belonging to the white majority is not a worrying problem but because the deaths of individuals belonging to ethnic minorities cause further deterioration in relations between the police and communities of foreign origin. The CCRJ document calls for the creation of an independent commission of inquiry into this type of death. Even though it dates from July 1997, it remains as topical as ever (especially when the sequence of events and the results of the investigation into the death of Roger Sylvester are taken into consideration). Moreover, the CCRJ continues to call on the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) to create a completely independent investigative body.

³⁰ Source: INQUEST, Statistical Information: "Unlawful killing verdicts and/or prosecutions following deaths in police and prison custody 1990-2000 (England & Wales)". (<http://www.gn.apc.org/inquest/unlawful.html>).

Deaths in police custody: a paper seeking an independent inquiry into the number of and reasons for such deaths over the last ten years³¹

In the introduction, the document notes that the investigation procedures for this type of death are largely deficient. In fact, the first inquiry is conducted by the police themselves – almost always under the supervision of the authority responsible for examining complaints against the police, the Police Complaints Authority (PCA). This raises a lot of questions about its independence, particularly among the black community. In addition, families meet many obstacles in their quest for the truth (they are not advised of their rights, they are told nothing about the possibility of legal support, they are not allowed to consult the report forwarded to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and they have no right to financial legal aid). The result is that the responsible police officers are rarely prosecuted because the CPS generally says that there is insufficient proof against them.

This is why the CCRJ wants a commission of inquiry into the number of and reasons for deaths in police custody over the last ten years, the aim being to avoid this type of death happening. Such a commission should pay particular attention to the deaths of individuals from ethnic minorities with a view to increasing the confidence of these communities in the police and improving their relationship with them.

A commission of inquiry should take the following points into account:

- The family of the dead person should immediately be informed about its rights and where to go for advice and assistance. The family should later be given as much information as possible on the progress of the investigation.
- The authority which oversees investigations into complaints against the police, the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) should be more independent, notably by having its own investigators to monitor police inquiries.
- The police should be entirely scrupulous in giving information to the press after a death in custody, in particular with regard to the medical records of the victim or their use of illegal substances.
- The suspension of police officers involved in any death where external violence is suspected should be the rule.
- The provision of legal aid to the family of the dead person should be automatic.
- Families and other parties should have access to documentation about the death.

³¹ CCRJ: “Deaths in police custody: a paper seeking an independent enquiry into the number of and reasons for such deaths over the last ten years”, July 1997.

THE DETENTION AND DEPORTATION OF REFUGEES

As in the rest of Europe, the situation of refugees is particularly worrying in the United Kingdom. In this context, support for refugees has always been at the heart of the CCRJ's work. There are many aspects to this work.

The CCRJ has always campaigned against the detention and deportation of refugees. In 1993, the Commission organised a conference on the issue of the detention of immigrants and asylum seekers.³² Already at that time, there was concern about the stricter laws and procedures regulating asylum. One of the particularly serious consequences of this tougher stance was the arbitrary (because they had not committed any crime) detention of an increasing number of immigrants and asylum seekers. The conference called on the government not to resort to detention, and more generally, not to criminalise refugees. The conference called on the churches to campaign against the detention of immigrants and asylum seekers, to establish a pastoral support service for those in detention and to raise the awareness of local churches about this problem. With regard to the deportation of refugees, in 1994 (international year of the family) the CCRJ published a small booklet entitled "Breaking up the Family".³³ The booklet used concrete examples to show the injustice and cruelty of deporting people where this resulted in splitting up families. The CCRJ simply asked for more compassion and flexibility in applying the immigration laws so that, for example, parents with children born and brought up in the United Kingdom would not be sent back to their country of origin.

The Free Families From Fear Campaign

Still on the subject of families and the problem of deportations, in December 1998, the CCRJ launched the Free Families From Fear Campaign. Since then, the campaign has been joined by the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (now the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) and the United Reformed Church. Many families are threatened with deportation or risk being split up because of the deportation of one of their members. Because of the nationality laws, it can happen that certain members of the family have the right to stay in Britain while others do not. Authorisation to stay in the United Kingdom may be granted to one or other of the parents, but the authorities may decide to deport one of a married couple because they judge that the marriage was arranged in order to obtain British nationality. Because the churches believe that the family represents essential values, the Free Families From Fear Campaign demands that families should no longer live in fear of being split up or deported. The campaign calls for the regularisation of the situation of all immigrants who have been waiting for permission to stay in Britain for more than five years, who have strong links with the country and who have children born in Britain. In the pursuit of this objective, many letters have been written to political representatives asking for their support for more humane legislation aimed at keeping families together. The campaign also organises important educational and awareness raising efforts. For example, on 20 November 1999, the Anglican Cathedral of Southwark (in the south of London) held a religious service for those living in fear of deportation and all those who wished to demonstrate their support and compassion.

³² "Release for the Captives: Report of a Conference on the Detention of Immigrants and Asylum-Seekers in Britain", June 1994.

³³ CCRJ: "Breaking up the Family: Deportations in the International Year of the Family 1994".

Two families told the story of their successful fight to stay in Great Britain. However, these successes must not let us forget all those who have not been so lucky: among the people present at the service was someone who was due to be deported the next day.

The CCRJ's work is not limited to working with families. The Commission also supports, sometimes successfully, individuals seeking asylum.

The case of Ben Amoah

After years of intensive campaigning and especially because of the support given by the CCRJ, Ben Amoah was granted permanent right of residence in the United Kingdom, where he has lived since 1981. He had left Ghana after being violently harassed by soldiers. In 1985, he returned to his country of origin, but he was detained and once again beaten up by soldiers. After the decision by the English authorities, Ben promised to help in the campaign to halt other deportations.

The Bail Circle system

In 1997, a group of 24 asylum seekers detained in Rochester prison decided to go on hunger strike. They wanted to protest about being imprisoned for months when their only crime was to have requested asylum. Their gesture succeeded in attracting the attention of public opinion to the many injustices and irregularities in asylum procedures. Amongst these are the fact that asylum seekers are not advised of their rights, and are therefore unaware that they could be bailed out while waiting for their request for asylum to be processed. At that time, detainees could not be released unless they were able to find two people who knew them personally who could each pay £2000 bail. As the health of the hunger strikers deteriorated, the CCRJ had the idea of trying to find people willing to furnish guarantees for the 24 detainees and to advance a small sum (£100) so they could be released. The Bail Circle was born.

Today, the Bail Circle consists of a network of volunteers willing to pay between £100 and £500 to allow asylum seekers to be released and await a decision on their status in liberty. By the Winter of 2000, this system had allowed 150 refugees to be released, 75 of these in the year 2000 itself.³⁴ The Bail Circle has about 150 members. They are briefly informed about the problems experienced by asylum seekers in Great Britain and how they can stand surety for the refugees whose release they have obtained. They promise to stay in contact with the detainee after he/she has been released and to persuade them to follow the court's instructions while their request for asylum is being examined. Bail Circle volunteers include wage earners, people who are well-off but too busy to get involved above and beyond going to court to volunteer bail, retired people, former refugees, students, the unemployed.³⁵ This bail system has been successful in 50% of the cases that have been taken to court.³⁶

³⁴ Source: "Join the Bail Circle: Living the Gospel of Justice", Church & Race, Winter 2000 - Vol 15-N°3.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ CCRJ: "Bailing Out: the Bail Circle and the human face of the asylum seekers whom it was established to assist", February 1999.

Mr. C.

Mr. C. is a 23 year-old Kenyan. After joining an opposition political party, his passport was confiscated and he was hounded and tortured by the police. So he decided to flee by ship to Great Britain. The captain of the ship organised false papers for him. Arriving in the United Kingdom, he was immediately arrested, placed in detention and accused of illegal entry using a forged passport.

Mr. C. became baffled, confused and anxious. At his appeal against his initial refusal of asylum, his replies were confused, and this was held against him. He knew nobody who could provide surety for him. It was eight months before he was released on bail with the help of the Bail Circle.

Once he was free, Mr. C.'s confidence returned. He quickly found work, and his new lawyer discovered a legal fault in the refusal of his first appeal. In a fresh appeal, his answers were found to be clear, honest and consistent. The fact that he had been tortured and could be tortured again if he had to return to his country was recognised. As a consequence, he has been given refugee status and allowed to stay in Britain.

Without the intervention of the Bail Circle, it is likely that Mr. C. would have been removed to Kenya to face renewed persecution and torture.³⁷

The case of Mr. C. should not allow us to forget that the Bail Circle system is often powerless to obtain the release of many detainees and that many refugees are deported every year to their country of origin where they face an uncertain future.

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST REPRESSIVE IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM LAWS AND EFFORTS AIMED AT MAKING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES MORE WELCOME.

Great Britain used to be more liberal than its neighbours in asylum matters. Those days are gone. The tougher line is due above all to the big increase in the number of requests for asylum during the last two years: 71,000 in 1999 and almost 76,000 in 2000. The country had never received more than 50,000 requests in the previous ten years.³⁸ This influx of refugees led the Labour government to introduce more restrictive asylum and immigration laws in 1999 – the Immigration and Asylum Act. The government hoped in this way to stop the criticisms of the opposition Conservative party which accused it of being lax. The new legal arsenal has not however had the desired effect, for the number of asylum requests increased in 2000. Moreover, the new legislation has contributed to projecting a negative image of asylum seekers in British society. Since then, the asylum debate has been limited to distinguishing between “true” and “false”, “bogus” or “economic” refugees. The press and many politicians were certainly partly responsible for the wave of hostility towards asylum seekers and refugees. But, as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) said in its

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Source: “Provisional Statistics on Refugees and Others of Concern to UNHCR for the year 2000”, 11 April 2001 (<http://www.unhcr.ch/statist/main.htm>) and “Les réfugiés dans le monde, cinquante ans d’action humanitaire”, 2000, United Nations High Commission for Refugees (<http://www.unhcr.ch>).

June 2000 report on the situation in the United Kingdom, “the frequent changes to immigration and asylum policies during the last few years, aimed at discouraging more and more these categories of people from entering the United Kingdom, have played a fundamentally important role in the creation of such a climate”.³⁹ It went on to say that “certain cases of racist attacks or harassment against asylum seekers, especially against Roma people show the dangers of the increasingly negative climate of public opinion”.⁴⁰ The approach of a General Election (June 2001) did not help the situation. On the contrary, in an attempt to make up ground in the opinion polls, the Conservative Party made asylum one of the main themes of its campaign.⁴¹ Politicians regularly made racist and xenophobic comments during the electoral campaign.

Campaign for the amendment of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

The new legislation on immigration and asylum came into force in November 1999. The refugee support organisations considered it to be the most draconian ever introduced. The CCRJ had already expressed its serious concern when Parliament was drafting the new measures.⁴² Events have largely justified these fears. As a result, the CCRJ launched a campaign calling on the government to revoke the fundamentally restrictive and punitive measures introduced in November 1999. To that end, it published a leaflet setting out the changes introduced by the new law and the Churches’ response to those changes. The CCRJ encourages people to write to and lobby their elected representatives using the arguments set out in the leaflet.

³⁹ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI): second report on the United Kingdom (adopted 16 June 2000) (<http://www.ecri.coe.int/fr/08/01/40/CBC2%20Royaume%20Uni.pdf>). Moreover, ECRI puts the problem of the “repercussion of immigration and asylum policies on the situation of asylum seekers, refugees and minority groups, and their image with the public” in the section on “particularly worrying problems”.

⁴⁰ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI): second report on the United Kingdom (adopted 16 June 2000) (<http://www.ecri.coe.int/fr/08/01/40/CBC2%20Royaume%20Uni.pdf>).

⁴¹ From March 2001, William Hague, Leader of the Opposition, showed the way by predicting that Great Britain would become “a country of foreigners” if illegal immigration was not halted. He later refused to countenance expelling a Member of Parliament from the Conservative Party after the MP had publicly spoken of the menace that immigration posed to “white, Anglo-Saxon” England. The Conservative Party programme quite simply proposed to intern all new refugees while processing their request for asylum. Source: “Le Parti conservateur tente d’exploiter les émeutes raciales d’Oldham”, *Le Monde*, 29 May 2001.

⁴² See Church & Race: “The New Immigration and Asylum Bill: a draconian Approach”, January-March 1999 - Vol 14 N°1.

The UK Immigration and Asylum Act 1999: A Summary and Christian Response⁴³

The new law includes the following measures:

- The acceleration of asylum procedures. The result is that the scope for appeal is reduced. Even though this measure has allowed the number of pending cases to be reduced, the first figures available indicate that more requests for asylum have been rejected.⁴⁴
- More frequent recourse to the detention of immigrants and refugees arriving in Britain.
- The dispersal of asylum seekers throughout the country. This measure has been particularly criticised.⁴⁵ Local communities are often not consulted about the arrival of refugees, and this causes great hostility to the new arrivals. Extended families may be split up. Asylum seekers are separated from relatives in England or from communities of people from the same country of origin as themselves. Finally, certain regions do not have the necessary infrastructure (legal, psychological, etc.) to receive and provide support for refugees.
- The abolition of the right to work. This measure was seen by the government as a means of dissuading “bogus” or “economic” refugees from coming to the United Kingdom.
- High fines for vehicle drivers trying to smuggle in illegal immigrants to the United Kingdom (penalties also apply to drivers unwittingly transporting illegal immigrants).
- Co-operation between registrars and immigration officials to improve detection of arranged marriages.

The CCRJ believes that these changes to the law are fundamentally restrictive and punitive. They are based on the mistaken hypothesis that the majority of asylum requests are phoney and that most of the refugees who arrive in the United Kingdom only come here to profit from the social security system. The churches and Christians must therefore call on the government to review its approach to asylum and immigration policy, keeping in mind the following cardinal Christian values:

- All people are created equal in humanity and dignity and are made in the image of God.
- Respect for human dignity and the infinite worth of every person regardless of nationality, ethnicity, race, colour or religion.
- Human life, personal safety and physical security should be upheld in law and the practice of institutions.
- Government must uphold human rights and international law.

⁴³ Churches Together in Britain & Ireland, Commission for Racial Justice & Religious Society of Friends (Quakers): “The UK Immigration and Asylum Act 1999: A Summary & Christian Response”.

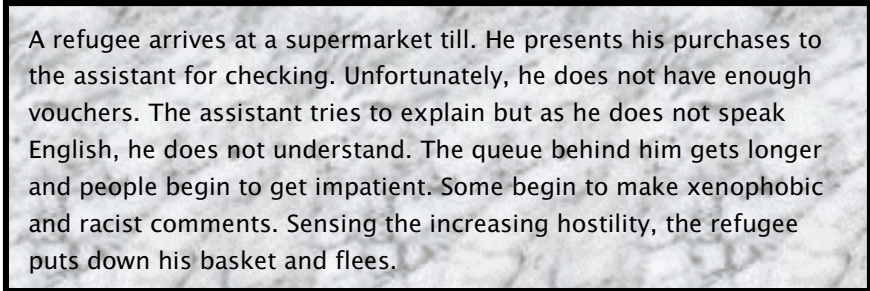
⁴⁴ 70% of asylum requests were rejected as compared to 60% prior to the introduction of the new law. Source: Home Office, Asylum Statistics, August 2000. These figures were reproduced in “Proportion of asylum seekers allowed to stay in UK falls”, The Independent, 25 February 2000.

⁴⁵ In a report entitled “The dispersal of xenophobia”. (<http://www.homebeats.co.uk/dispersal/index.htm>), the Institute of Race Relations blames the dispersal measures for causing the isolation and social exclusion of asylum seekers and making them more vulnerable to racial attacks. In addition, the manner in which the measure was presented as “a measure to spread the burden of asylum seekers” contributed to feeding the xenophobia against the refugees, according to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI): second report on the United Kingdom (adopted 16 June 2000) (<http://www.ecri.coe.int/fr/08/01/40/CBC2%20Royaume%20Uni.pdf>).

The voucher system

The voucher system certainly represents one of the most shocking aspects of the new legislation on asylum and immigration. What is this system? As asylum seekers do not have the right to earn an income, the state is responsible for providing for their needs. Previously, they were eligible for a cash benefit. This benefit was perceived by the government as attracting “economic refugees” to Britain. Consequently, the new legislation replaced it with a voucher system: from then on, refugees no longer received money but vouchers for use in various shops.

This new system was supposed to rationalise the aid allocated to asylum seekers. In fact, it only served to discriminate against them more and led to a deterioration in their material situation. Under voucher system, asylum seekers have to survive on 70% of the minimum income, that is £36.40p per week for an individual (three-quarters of this sum is paid in the



A refugee arrives at a supermarket till. He presents his purchases to the assistant for checking. Unfortunately, he does not have enough vouchers. The assistant tries to explain but as he does not speak English, he does not understand. The queue behind him gets longer and people begin to get impatient. Some begin to make xenophobic and racist comments. Sensing the increasing hostility, the refugee puts down his basket and flees.

form of vouchers). The supermarkets that participate in this system are not allowed to give change if the total value of purchases is less than the value of the voucher. Asylum seekers, who are among the poorest and most vulnerable people in the country, therefore spend more on these purchases than any other consumer! Finally, the vouchers can only be used in certain supermarkets and for certain products. So voucher holders are forced to go to shops that are not necessarily the nearest to their accommodation nor the cheapest. In addition, they are not allowed to buy certain products that may, however, form part of their traditional diet.

More than one year after its introduction, the voucher system still suffers from other serious defects: asylum seekers receive the precious vouchers late; refugee support organisations, including the churches, must fund certain needs from their own pockets; some people live miles away from the Post Offices which distribute the vouchers. Because of these deficiencies, the government decided to consult organisations with a view to changing the system. In its response to the authorities, the CCRJ highlighted the many harmful effects of the voucher system, among the most serious of which are the following:⁴⁶

- The creation of an illegal market in vouchers, with asylum seekers trying to change them for cash. The criminalisation of asylum seekers.

⁴⁶ CCRJ: “Response to Government’s Review of the Operation of the National Asylum Support Service, Voucher Scheme”, December 2000.

- The voucher system marks asylum seekers out from the rest of the population and creates the opportunity for expressions of hostility towards them.
- Without cash, asylum seekers have great difficulty in getting to the hearings held to examine their requests for asylum. Consequently, the voucher system prevents them exercising their rights.

The CCRJ, along with the Jewish Council for Racial Equality, has also launched a campaign called “Human Too” which calls for the abolition of these vouchers. A leaflet has been widely distributed. It lists no less than “ten reasons why vouchers for asylum seekers are wrong”. The leaflet also lists the names of supermarkets that participate in the voucher system. The aim is to get people to write and ask these supermarkets and the authorities to abandon this unjust system.

Ten reasons why vouchers for asylum seekers are wrong:

1. Vouchers punish and humiliate asylum seekers.
2. Vouchers cause additional suffering to people who have already been the target of violence, including rape and torture.
3. Vouchers encourage racism.
4. Vouchers encourage hatred of strangers: they signal that those who hold them are undeserving.
5. Vouchers are a licence to defraud. Retailers keep the change. Supermarkets profit at the expense of destitute people.
6. Vouchers criminalise asylum seekers: to exchange a voucher for cash or to accept any gift in cash or kind, and not declare it, is an offence.
7. Vouchers discriminate against women and children. They may only be used by one named person, usually an adult male.
8. Vouchers deliver less to asylum seekers and cost tax payers more.
9. Vouchers will not deter claims for asylum. There is no evidence that refugees risk their lives to travel thousands of miles only for the sake of British benefits.
10. Asylum seekers are human beings. We owe them fair and humane treatment.

“Bonus Not Bogus”

In the last few years, the refugee problem has become a very sensitive subject in Great Britain. This is largely the fault of the press, which gives a lot of coverage to the arrival of illegal immigrants on English soil, and to politicians who do not hesitate to play on the fears of the public for their own electoral ends. The campaign for the June 2001 General Election, in which the issue of asylum and immigration was central, did nothing to calm people down.

In this obnoxious climate, the CCRJ and several other organisations⁴⁷ decided to try and dispel the myths and prejudices about refugees that the media and certain politicians were disseminating in such a demagogic way. With the publication of a leaflet entitled “Bonus Not Bogus: the facts about asylum seekers”, the CCRJ wanted to set out some basic facts.

During 2000, Great Britain received a little under 76,000 asylum seekers, that is 1.6 asylum seekers per 1000 inhabitants (placing the country 10th in Europe). According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of requests for asylum made in Europe in 2000 fell by four per cent in comparison to 1999. This is a far cry from the image of a tidal wave of refugees flooding over Europe put forward by some.

Contrary to popular perceptions, it is the countries of the South that take the immense majority of the world's refugees. One or two per cent of Iraqi refugees have come to the United Kingdom while 80% have gone to Iran. Pakistan accommodates 1.2 million Afghan refugees; in the United Kingdom 5220 requests for asylum were made by Afghans in 2000.

“Bogus refugees” or “economic immigrants”? In 2000, more than half of asylum seekers obtained protection (this figure includes individuals whose case is under appeal or pending). Most refusals are based on technicalities and not because the reasons given by asylum seekers are unfounded.

“The costs of asylum represent less than half of 1% of government expenditure”, said Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister in Parliament. Moreover, many asylum seekers have received an education and training that could be useful to their adopted country if they are given the right to work.

The CCRJ appeals to politicians to be objective about such delicate issues as asylum and immigration, to refute the lies spread about them and to avoid stirring up prejudice against immigrants and refugees. As for the media, they have the responsibility to disseminate accurate non-defamatory information. The campaign was launched at a press conference on 3 May 2001 in the middle of the election campaign.

⁴⁷ The Joint Council for Welfare of Immigrants and the National Coalition of Anti-deportation campaigns.

THE FIGHT AGAINST “INSTITUTIONAL RACISM”

Since it was popularised by the MacPherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence, the notion of “institutional racism” has become extremely well known in Great Britain.

The murder of Stephen Lawrence⁴⁸

On the night of 22 April 1993, Stephen, 18, and his friend Duwayne Brooks, were waiting for a bus in Eltham (South West London) on their way back home after visiting Stephen’s uncle. Stephen stepped into the middle of the road to see if the bus was coming. At that moment, five young white men came running across the road and threw themselves on Stephen. Within a few seconds, he received two stab wounds to the thorax. Duwayne, who was a few yards away, fled and begged his friend to do the same. Despite his wounds and the fact that he was bleeding badly, Stephen ran more than 100 metres before collapsing. Meanwhile, his attackers disappeared. According to medical experts, he died a few seconds later, before being taken to hospital.

According to the MacPherson report, “the motive for the death of Stephen Lawrence was only and unequivocally racism”.⁴⁹

The police were the first to arrive on the scene. But they seemed more interested in questioning Duwayne Brooks, who they considered to be a suspect, than in giving first aid to Stephen Lawrence. The MacPherson report concluded that “nobody did anything for Stephen Lawrence”⁵⁰ during these vital moments. The police were incompetent enough not to take a statement from Duwayne Brooks, who was, however, the last person to have seen the murderers of his friend. Especially in the first crucial hours after the crime, the investigation was a series of blunders, omissions and neglect, according to the MacPherson report. Some suspects were arrested and then released for lack of evidence against them. The victim’s family was treated insensitively and with a flagrant lack of sympathy. It was only several years after the death of their son that they learned what really happened to him.

However, the family was determined that the truth should come out and justice be done. The family made a complaint against the police. Another police force was given responsibility for investigating whether their colleagues had been negligent. The results were not what the family had hoped for. Nevertheless, the family did manage to reopen the inquiry into the death of Stephen, even though no new evidence emerged that led to the guilty parties. Finally, the new Minister for the Home Office decided to open a public inquiry with the aim of determining the exact circumstances of the death of Stephen Lawrence and learning lessons from it for future investigation into racial murders. The inquiry ended in February 1999 with the publication of a 600 page report: the MacPherson report. Its main conclusion was that the police force in question suffered from “institutional racism”.

⁴⁸ Source: Church & Race: “The Macpherson Report: The Churches called to address Institutional Racism”, January-March 1999 - Vol 14 N°1. This article is based on “The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry”, Report of an Inquiry by Sir William MacPherson of Cluny”.

⁴⁹ “The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry”, Report of an Inquiry by Sir Wiliam MacPherson of Cluny (1.11).

⁵⁰ Ibid. (10.51).

“Institutional racism”

“Institutional racism consists of the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people”.⁵¹

It was the institutional racism prevalent in the police force that prevented them giving first aid to Stephen Lawrence. It was institutional racism that resulted in Duwayne Brooks being treated as a suspect and not as a witness. And it was institutional racism that explains why the victim’s family was treated with such little regard.

The churches and the MacPherson report

The publication of the MacPherson report had an enormous repercussion in Great Britain. For the first time, the latent racism within the police force was publicly and officially recognised. One reason why the report had such an impact was because the definition of institutional racism was so general that it could apply to any institution or organisation. As Arlington Trotman, the General Secretary of the CCRJ said, “the report on the death of Stephen Lawrence is the most detailed investigation into racism and discrimination prevalent in British society”.⁵² Consequently, the report’s recommendations are not only addressed to the police but also to all institutions and organisations, including the churches. Many voices called on the churches to undertake some self-criticism with a view to eliminating all forms of racism and discrimination within their own ranks.

In this context, the CCRJ undertook to determine to what degree the 70 recommendations of the MacPherson report were applicable to the churches and to make sure something was done about it. This work has yet to be completed. On the CCRJ’s initiative, a first conference, entitled “A Christian Response to Racism – The Stephen Lawrence Report”, was held in March 1999, just after the publication of the MacPherson report, with the participation of about 400 people. Its aim was to provide information about the conclusions of the MacPherson Report and their relevance to the churches. The problem for the churches was that the notion of institutional racism signified that they may not be providing the same quality of service or giving the same treatment to members of ethnic minorities. The conference also put forward a set of basic principles to remedy this kind of discrimination.

⁵¹ “The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry”, Report of an Inquiry by Sir William MacPherson of Cluny (46.25).

⁵² Church & Race: “CCRJ follow up of Stephen Lawrence Inquiry”, Spring 2000 – Vol 15 N°1.

How to overcome institutional racism?⁵³

- Analyse the organisation and its administrative structures to discover inequalities and how they manifest themselves. The existence of discrimination does not necessarily result from anybody's particular will but may be the result of a structural defect.
- Understand the reasons for these inequalities with a view to eliminating them.
- Establish a procedure to change structures in a way that improves the integration of people from ethnic minorities.
- If they want to overcome these inequalities, the churches must apply Race Equality in Employment Principles⁵⁴ and make a formal declaration affirming that racism will not be tolerated.

The CCRJ continues to supervise the implementation of the recommendations of the MacPherson report within the churches and to further their implementation in British society as a whole. As we have seen, the CCRJ puts pressure on the police to be more efficient and independent when investigating racial crimes and deaths in detention. The CCRJ is also preparing to launch, in October 2001 an initiative called PEERS – “Police, Education, Employment, Rights, Self Respect”. It aims to provide information and to raise awareness among younger people between the ages of 13 and 24 about their rights and how to get them respected when faced with discrimination and the diverse manifestations of racism within the police force, education and employment.

RACIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY

Racial Justice Sunday is on the way to becoming an event that cannot be ignored in Great Britain. This event is held every year on the second Sunday of September. Each church or congregation is invited to mark the date, for example, by organising a service on the theme of racial justice, dedicating a prayer, formally declaring its determination to fight for greater racial justice, or by deciding to take practical action. Racial Justice Sunday aims to raise awareness in the churches. Participation in this event is also a way of clearly affirming the will to combat racism, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination. “By observing Racial Justice Sunday, we confront the different manifestations of racial discrimination, racism and xenophobia. We speak up for those who are not able to. We protect those who are persecuted,

⁵³ CCRJ: “A Christian Response to Racism – The Stephen Lawrence Report: Report and Action for the Churches, Part 1”.

⁵⁴ These principles, also known as the Wood-Sheppard principles (after the two bishops that formulated them), aim to provoke positive action in the field of employment. They advocate that organisations should keep statistics on the number of people from ethnic minorities they employ, affirm that they intend to increase the representation of minority groups, use fair and non-discriminatory recruitment criteria and take positive action to prevent and punish racist behaviour.

tortured or demonised simply because they look different”.⁵⁵ Collections are also made on this special Sunday for the Ecumenical Racial Justice Fund managed by the CCRJ (see above).

Racial Justice Sunday is co-ordinated by the CCRJ in co-operation with the Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) and Evangelical Christians for Racial Justice (ECRJ). Every year, the CCRJ produces a pack containing educational resources, (Racial Justice Sunday Pack) which the churches can use to organise their Racial Justice Sunday.

The Racial Justice Sunday Pack, contains prayers, hymns and biblical reflections on foreigners and refugees.

The Church, refugees and asylum seekers⁵⁶

God is revealed in the Bible as a passionate advocate of the rights of aliens (see Malachi 3.5). He expects his people to offer welcome and shelter to the outsider and the refugee. God is always actively reaching out to the stranger (Ephesians 2.11–13). We are called to reach out to strangers because God has reached out to us and welcomed us.

The people of God in the Old Testament are told how they should treat strangers in the light of their experience of slavery and liberation: Exodus 22.21; 23.9; Leviticus 19.33;34; Numbers 15, 14–16; Deuteronomy 1.16–18, 24.14,15, 17–22; 27.19; Jeremiah 7.6,7. Furthermore, they should remember that they did not even own their own land: God is the sole owner of the land, and God’s people are sojourners in it – so they had better treat strangers with respect: Leviticus 25.23.

In Matthew 25.31–40, Jesus equates what we do to the least of his family as done to him. It does not matter whether we realise who it is that we are caring for: what matters is whether we do it. No other text speaks more strongly about what is due to the stranger. Jesus identifies with strangers. Jesus knew what it was to be a stranger – he and his family had had to flee to Egypt as refugees. When we welcome refugees, we welcome Jesus. When we reject them, we reject him, whether or not we realise what we are doing.

On the road to Emmaus (Luke 24.29–32), Jesus again appears as a stranger. The disciples welcome the stranger and invite him to a meal. Then the guest becomes the host who is recognised as Jesus. Jesus is made known in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24.35). How can we celebrate Jesus, who broke bread as a stranger, and at the same time exclude the stranger who is a refugee?

Also in the pack are definitions of refugee and asylum seeker, the reasons why so many human beings are forced into exile and become refugees (wars, political persecution, environmental disasters, rape...) and the United Kingdom’s responsibility for this situation (arms sales, unequal terms of trade...). These ideas are illustrated by concrete examples of people who have had to flee their country. The Racial Justice Sunday Pack also provides a lot of information (seldom seen media headlines) about racism and xenophobia in the United Kingdom (deaths in detention, the xenophobic and discriminatory behaviour of English football executives, the myths about foreigners in Great Britain and how to argue against

⁵⁵ Arlington Trotman: “One Race: the Human Race”, Racial Justice Sunday Pack (9 September 2001).

⁵⁶ Source: “One Race: the Human Race”, Racial Justice Sunday Pack (9 September 2001).

them).⁵⁷ The pack does not forget children and young people - it includes a few educational exercises for them. In addition, there is a list of organisations that work on racial justice. The Pack also suggests ways of engaging in the fight against racism and xenophobia: the CCRJ suggests that each congregation joins a refugee support group, subscribes to the Bail Circle (see above), enlists the support of their political representatives and makes a donation to the Ecumenical Racial Justice Fund.

THE BAPTIST UNION OF GREAT BRITAIN AND THE LONDON BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

A member of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the London Baptist Association has an office for racial justice. It was established in 1998 with a view to supporting, advising or encouraging all those wanting to get involved in the struggle for racial equality.

The role of the racial justice office is primarily to promote Racial Justice Sunday. In fact, many congregations only mark this event in a formal way. They need to be convinced and encouraged to do more. To that end, it is best to get them concerned and to show them that racial justice is not a problem that is irrelevant to them. The Christian faith and membership of the church are totally incompatible with all forms of discrimination and racism. One cannot, therefore, preach love for one's neighbour without also standing shoulder to shoulder with those who are oppressed because they look different from us. Last year (2000), more than 300 churches in the London region received the Racial Justice Sunday Pack produced by the CCRJ. This was thanks to the work of Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed (co-ordinator of the London Baptist Association and charged with the task of promoting racial justice) and her collaborators. The use made of the pack and the way in which Racial Justice Sunday is organised varies a lot between congregations.

**Northolt Park Baptist Church:
what we did for Racial Justice Sunday, 10 September 2000.⁵⁸**

The posters in the Racial Justice Sunday Pack and other documents were displayed outside and inside the church.

The Sunday service held on 10 September was based on the theme of racial justice (an explanation of the theme of racial justice, presentation on the Stephen Lawrence case and its implications, with the aid of a poster from Racial Justice Sunday Pack showing the Lawrence family). The sermon explored themes such as oppression, justice, and suffering in the light of biblical texts, songs and hymns relevant to the theme.

The service was followed by a lunch to which all were welcome.

⁵⁷ People interviewed in an opinion poll believed that ethnic minorities constituted 26% of the British population and that 20% are immigrants. The real figures are seven per cent and four per cent respectively. The CCRJ highlights how this kind of misconception feeds a hatred of foreigners. Publicised by the media in a less than rigorous fashion or used by unscrupulous politicians, they promote racial violence.

⁵⁸ Northolt Park Baptist Church: "What we did for Racial Justice Sunday, 10.9.2000". This document was sent to us by Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed.

Second, the office for racial justice offers racism awareness and racial reconciliation courses. They are open to ministers, to anybody working in the field of youth training or to any church member. These courses aim to show participants why Christians must not only be aware of the existence of racism but why they must also do something to contribute to racial equality. They begin by defining the phenomenon of racism and go on to look at its history in the United Kingdom. They then look at the various manifestations of racism and the way this scourge has penetrated even the churches. Finally, participants reflect on the opportunities for putting into practice the ideas that they have learned on the course. The length of the courses is completely flexible: depending on demand, it can be organised over several days, weeks or months.

Tottenham Baptist Church: “Breaking Down Walls: a project to encourage understanding and deeper friendship within our multi-ethnic congregation”.⁵⁹

Tottenham Baptist Church has, among its ranks, people of different ethnic origin and culture. To enable this diversity to be a blessing rather than a handicap, it decided to establish a project aimed at bringing its members together in a spirit of communion.

The project in question extended over several weeks in February and March 2001. The racism awareness and racial reconciliation course organised by the London Baptist Association was one of the four elements of this project. The other three were:

Sunday services. For four weeks, Sunday services took up the “Breaking Down Walls” theme. The sermons presented and developed the eight principles of racial reconciliation formulated by two Chicago pastors.⁶⁰

Tell your story. Each member of the church was invited to share their feelings and experiences when meeting others (“my first week in England”; my first contact with someone of another ethnic origin”; “I am married to a person of a different race”; “my personal experience of racism”).

Share a meal together. At the end of the project, everybody was encouraged to really break down the barriers between the communities by inviting people of another ethnic origin to their table.

⁵⁹ Tottenham Baptist Church, February/March 2001 “Breaking Down Walls: a project to encourage understanding and deeper friendships within our multi-ethnic congregation”. This leaflet was also sent to us by Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed.

⁶⁰ These principles are to be found in a book by R. Washington and G. Kehrein, “Breaking down Walls: a Model for Reconciliation in an Age of racial strife”, 1993. This book aimed to help solve the racial struggle in the United States and was directly inspired by the Gospel. The two authors are of different ethnic origin and were separated by the wall that divides American society before they met and got to know each other. Their principles are, therefore, inspired by their respective experiences and were refined in Chicago.

WELCOMING THE STRANGER

“Welcoming the Stranger” is a collection of documents and teaching materials prepared by the Baptist Union of Great Britain in collaboration with the Baptist Missionary Society (BMAS World Mission) in response to the 1999 Baptist Assembly call “to help the Baptist community to understand and respond to the challenge of welcoming strangers”.⁶¹ The publication aims to promote awareness of the reality of refugees and a more open attitude towards them. “Welcoming the Stranger” contains theological and biblical reflections on the issue of strangers and the hospitality which should be accorded them. It then looks at how millions of people move around the world, some on business, others on holiday or engaging in other leisure activities. Refugees, however, are fleeing from war, all kinds of persecution and poverty. The rich countries permit and encourage greater mobility of the first set of people, but erect many barriers to protect themselves against the “invasion” of those they call “economic migrants” or “bogus refugees”. In this context, it is worth repeating that refugees, whether they come from Angola, Thailand, Sri Lanka or Kosovo, do not choose to leave their country, they are forced to do so. It is also worth emphasising that the United Kingdom has always welcomed many refugees. The present situation is not new: in the 16th and 17th centuries, thousands of persecuted Christians took refuge in Great Britain. During the Second World War, the country gave shelter to Belgians, French, Danish and Dutch people fleeing from the Nazis. Later, it was the turn of the Polish, Czechs and Hungarians to arrive in Great Britain to escape Communist oppression. Some of them returned to their country when they were able to; those that stayed have contributed substantially to the prosperity of their adopted country.

“Welcoming the Stranger” also aims to dispel certain prejudices against refugees that are copiously disseminated by the media. “Headlines from the papers tell us one story... the facts tell us a very different story.”⁶²

Mail on Sunday, 15 March 1998:

... *“asylum seekers included known fraudsters who arrived with fake passports”*

If they intend to enter the United Kingdom to find protection from the persecution of which they are victims, asylum seekers are often obliged to seek false papers. It is very difficult to obtain a passport from the authorities who imprison and torture you. Moreover, article 31 of the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees explicitly states that asylum seekers should not be punished or discriminated against for travelling on false papers.

Daily Star, 25 September 1998

... *“these spongers aren’t genuine refugees. They come here because it’s a gravy train.”*

False. In 1999 and 2000, more than half of asylum decisions resulted in the asylum seeker being given refugee status or exceptional or temporary leave to remain on British territory.

The testimony of refugees who have suffered significant ill-treatment only goes to underline the inflammatory nature of these declarations.

⁶¹ Resource Pack, “Welcoming the Stranger”, Baptist Union of Great Britain and BMS World Mission.

⁶² Ibid.

Finally, Baptists and all Christians will find in the pack some suggestions and examples of good practice in welcoming or giving practical help to refugees. There is a presentation about the law on asylum and then examples of individuals or congregations who have dedicated a little bit of their time to helping refugees.

A member of Horsham Baptist Church tells of his weekly visits to an asylum seeker detained at Gatwick reception centre. Anybody can do it. To make this type of visit, you only have to contact the Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID). What does it involve? It is simply a question of visiting detainees who do not know anybody in the country. In this situation, the visitor plays a crucial role. He or she is the person that the detainee can confide in or simply chat to. The visitor ensures that his/her protégée is in good health and is benefiting from legal representation.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

The Church of England represents the Anglicanism that developed after the schism with the Catholic Church in the 16th century. It is the largest Church in the United Kingdom, with 44 dioceses and some 13,000 parishes. It has more than 70 million followers in the world.⁶³ Historically, the Church of England has always taken part in the fight against racism and racial inequality. When the British colonial empire spread across the world in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, many Christians understood the devastating effects of racism and discrimination on the colonised peoples. The Church of England was resolutely opposed to the slave trade. In more modern times, it denounced the illegal government of Rhodesia (which became the independent state of Zimbabwe), then in the hands of a small white minority. The apartheid regime in South Africa was also one of the focuses of its concern for a long time.

The study, “Faith in the City, a Call For Action by Church and Nation”, published in 1985, affirmed the need “to respond clearly to racial discrimination, but also to the rejection, aloofness and wrong suffered by many people of African or other origin in the Church of England”.⁶⁴ The recommendations contained in this document laid the foundations for the fight against institutional racism. In 1987, the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (CMEAC) was created with a brief to supervise and encourage initiatives to eradicate discrimination.

“The Church can only attack the racism that is prevalent in society efficiently, if it is first prepared to attack it within its own institutions, from its roots”.⁶⁵ The first stage of the fight against potential discrimination within the Church of England was to consult the dioceses

⁶³ Source: The Church of England web site (<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/>).

⁶⁴ Source: The Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns, 1999 Annual Report.

⁶⁵ “Seeds of Hope , Report of a Survey on combating Racism in the Dioceses of The Church of England”.

about their involvement in promoting racial justice. In 1988, each diocese was sent a questionnaire asking them whether they had a special committee responsible for dealing with issues related to racial equality, whether one or more individuals were employed to deal with this issue or whether they had implemented or planned a strategy to combat racism in the diocese. A second questionnaire was sent to the more active dioceses in order to obtain more precise information. The results of this research were published in 1991 in the report entitled “Seeds of Hope “. The aim of this initiative was to gather information on the work being done by the dioceses to combat racism, identify examples of good practice which might be shared and encourage dioceses to reflect about racial justice issues. The response to this vast survey revealed a widely varying situation. Some dioceses had no measures in place while others had taken substantial initiatives. In general, the urban dioceses were more conscious of the need to introduce anti-racism activities than the rural dioceses.⁶⁶ However, the survey showed that most dioceses did not have a strategy to combat racism, particularly within their own institutions and structures. Following on from this observation, the Seeds of Hope report issued a series of recommendations, recognising the efforts undertaken but highlighting just how much remained to be done to achieve racial equality within the Church of England.

Five years after the publication of Seeds of Hope and after the report had been debated at the General Synod in 1991, a new survey was launched to evaluate the progress made. The “Passing Winter” report, a sequel to Seeds of Hope, published in 1996, pointed out that many dioceses had set up committees and recruited staff for anti-racism work. In addition, measures had been taken to increase the representation of ethnic minorities at all levels of the Church of England⁶⁷ (since the publication of Seeds of Hope, three bishops from ethnic minorities have been appointed in the Church of England). Racism awareness courses have been delivered in various dioceses. Despite this undeniable progress, there is still a lot of work to do, especially at parish level. There is still a large number of parishes that do not see any point in taking anti-racism initiatives when they only have a few people of African or other origin in their ranks.

In this context, CMEAC’s role is to encourage and support efforts by the dioceses and parishes to put the recommendations of Seeds of Hope and The Passing Winter into practice. The committee has produced a series of teaching resources for the parishes, explaining the relevance of the two reports and containing suggestions on how they might take anti-racism initiatives. The committee monitors whether church bodies are implementing equal opportunities measures as part of their recruitment procedures. Parallel to the Seeds of Hope follow-up, the CMEAC has a subcommittee charged with promoting the integration of younger members of ethnic minorities in the Church of England and society as a whole. Another subcommittee encourages and supports people of African and other origin who have a vocation.

The publication of the MacPherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence gave new impetus to CMEAC’s work. The Church of England was accused of institutional racism and of

⁶⁶ Ethnic minorities represent a minute percentage of the rural population. All the rural dioceses replied that they had no intention of initiating strategies against racism. “It is impossible to initiate strategies to combat racism when, for us, the problem simply does not exist”, affirmed one of the dioceses! Source: “Seeds of Hope , Report of a Survey on combating Racism in the Dioceses of The Church of England”.

⁶⁷ Between 1992 and 1994, the committee charged with drawing up “The Passing Winter” report in co-operation with the Committee for Ethnic Minority Anglican Concerns undertook to examine the participation of ethnic minorities in the life of the Church. The conclusion was that members of ethnic minorities are under-represented, especially in the synods.

discriminating against non-white members.⁶⁸ The Church's highest authorities decided to take the problem very seriously and CMEAC was involved in a whole series of measures: "translation" of the MacPherson report measures to the Church of England; counting the number of people belonging to ethnic minorities in the Church and evaluating their participation in the decision-making process (to see if things had changed since the previous survey in 1994 -- see above); consultation with members of ethnic minorities about the existence of discriminatory practices. At the diocese level, in September 1999, the Bishop of Southwark set-up a three person⁶⁹ independent commission to investigate racism in the organisational structure of the diocese.

Report of an Independent Inquiry into Institutional Racism within the Structures of the Diocese of Southwark⁷⁰

The report, presented to the diocese in February 2000 and published in March 2000, concluded that there was clearly institutional racism within the diocese:

- The first evidence is the under representation of minority ethnic communities at all levels of the diocese and particularly in the decision-making structures.
- The effects of 'British/English' history and culture, including the vestiges of the imperial and colonial mentality that still survives in certain aspects of the life of the diocese, contributing to a sense of exclusion among ethnic minority communities.
- The fact that, even in the congregations where there are many members of ethnic minorities, the clergy are mostly white.
- The many testimonies reporting the existence of institutional racism in the parishes as well as in the diocese.

To combat these many forms of discrimination, the report proposes a number of solutions: greater transparency in recruitment, establishment of an energetic programme to encourage the vocation of members of ethnic minorities, census of all people of African or other origin, introduction of anti-racism courses for all ordained priests.

⁶⁸ Bishop John Sentamu, one of the three Church of England bishops from an ethnic minority, and a member of the MacPherson Commission (that investigated the death of Stephen Lawrence) accused the Church of England of "being dominated by a white educated elite" and he called on the Church to flush out the institutional racism present in the organisation. Source: "Bishop upbraids 'white' Church, The Guardian, 14 July 1999, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,3883127,00.html>.

⁶⁹ Among them was Glynn Gordon Carter, General Secretary of CMEAC.

⁷⁰ "Report of an independent Inquiry into institutional Racism within the Structures of the Diocese of Southwark", <http://www.architec2.co.uk/~dswark/download/inquiry.pdf>.

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH (URC)

The United Reformed Church was established in 1972 after a union between the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England. Today, the Church has some 1750 congregations in England, Wales and Scotland, with around 250,000 members of all ages.

In 1987, the URC's General Assembly affirmed its determination to combat racism at the local, regional, national and international levels. The declaration on racism adopted on that occasion also admitted that Christians were not sufficiently aware of the racism prevalent in society and within the churches themselves. Consequently, it was recommended that greater space should be made to hear the evidence of people of African or other origin who had suffered racial discrimination or attacks. The church had a duty to formulate strategies and allocate the financial resources required to eradicate racism. To this end, it was proposed, amongst other things, to develop educational resources and hold anti-racist seminars.

In 1997, the URC recruited a Multi-Cultural and Racial Justice development worker in the person of Marjorie Lewis Cooper, a Jamaican missionary, on a three-year contract. Her tasks were, first, to help the URC to be more open from the racial and cultural point of view and second, to promote the awareness of the different parts of the URC about racism and racial justice. The first stage of Marjorie Lewis Cooper's work was to examine and analyse the structures of the URC at synod, regional and local levels, to establish manifestations of racism, the degree of participation by ethnic minorities, relations with Christians belonging to ethnic minorities and other denominations and the promotion of racial justice in society. She visited the synods and talked to many regional congregations, regional assemblies and groups engaged in combating racism. She talked with ministers of African or other origin; the racism and rejection which some of them had suffered was a particularly worrying problem.

A minister of Indo-Caribbean background serving in a mainstream church was asked to take a funeral for one of his colleagues (a white minister). The black minister agreed, went to visit the bereaved family, prayed with them and provided pastoral care. The next day, the colleague who had asked him to organise the funeral phoned him up and said that he did not need to continue with the funeral.

Realising that this was not normal practice, the minister of Indo-Caribbean origin asked his colleague whether the fact that he had been sidelined had something to do with the colour of his skin. The white minister replied in the affirmative and told him that the bereaved family had phoned him and told him that they did not want a black minister burying their relative.¹

Marjorie Lewis Cooper contacted theology colleges and other institutions involved in training ministers to ask them to include multicultural elements in their courses and to introduce racism awareness courses. Today, the personnel responsible for racial justice issues are available to attend the different theology establishments where students complete their training prior to being ordained. The aim is, first, to show them that racism is still very much present, including within the churches. They then go on to consolidate their knowledge of and capacity for dealing with racism issues so that they will be able to behave in a manner coherent with the Gospel and, in the future, be able to work out strategies capable of eradicating inequalities. The courses generally take the following pattern. Participants begin by reflecting on their own identity and origins. They then reflect on the phenomenon of racism: its definition, origin, development and its various manifestations in British society. On this last point, the seminars give as much space as possible to people who have personally suffered racism, whatever form that might have taken. For example, the cases of some people belonging to the URC who have been victims of racial violence are used to engage the concern of church members. Other less dramatic but equally worrying cases are exposed and studied during this initiation into combating racism.

Racism in the Church

One Sunday, a person of Ghanaian origin entered a mainstream church composed entirely of white people. Feeling at home with the style of worship, he went back the following week. At the end of the service, the minister of the Church took the new arrival to one side – apparently under pressure from certain parishioners who went to see the minister during the week – and told him that there was a Pentecostal Church down the road where he would certainly feel more at home because there were many people of African or other origin there!

In order to follow up the reflection on the essence of racism, the course presents the forgotten history of Africa and other peoples (colonialism, slavery...) and looks at the substantial contribution they have made to the economic prosperity and cultural richness of the United Kingdom and the whole world. Finally, participants are informed about the means by which they can combat racism at a personal, institutional and cultural level in society or within the churches; given some practical suggestions; and given a presentation on the law on racial attacks and discrimination. The course is based on numerous biblical passages.

Marjorie Lewis Cooper's main achievement has been to create a network of 75 "racial justice advocates" whose job it is to increase church awareness, at all levels, about racism-related problems and the difficulties that people belonging to ethnic minorities experience in their daily lives.⁷¹ They are volunteers who have been given specific training and each group is attached to a Synod. Since they have been operational, these advocates have tried to

⁷¹ Source: Bulletin Ecumenical News International (ENI), 27 July 2000: "Church's racial justice campaigner battles Britain's 'caste system'."

promote Racial Justice Sunday with a view to getting more congregations to mark this date. They have collected the personal stories of victims of racism from people both outside and within the church (see above) to help them mobilise Christians in the struggle against this evil. They have raised awareness in regional assemblies, Synod meetings and in local parishes. They have also tried to support and disseminate information about local initiatives to combat racism and xenophobia (see below – “the involvement of a URC minister in Dover with refugees”). Strategies to promote the creation of truly multiracial and multicultural congregations have been developed. Marjorie Lewis Cooper emphasises that things aren’t always easy to deal with. “There are things that will have to be worked through, some of them seemingly trite, like people’s preference for liturgy. Some people like lots of singing and hand-clapping and others are quite incensed by the thought that there would be anything stronger than a murmur in church”.⁷² But she maintains that these differences should not become obstacles, on the contrary, they should be an opportunity for mutual enrichment.⁷³

At the end of her three-year contract, Marjorie Lewis Cooper made many recommendations about how to follow up her work of promoting racial justice in British society and within the United Reformed Church. She was especially keen that more racial justice advocates should be recruited, trained and attached to each Synod; that racism awareness courses should be held regularly for everybody in the United Reformed Church; and that members of ethnic minorities should be more integrated at every level of the Church.⁷⁴ It is worth noting that these recommendations were formulated just after the MacPherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence was published and that they were influenced by the notion of institutional racism.⁷⁵ However, before the expression “institutional racism” had become so famous, Marjorie Lewis Cooper had clearly diagnosed its existence within the URC. In 1998, she declared that “the sin of racism is unfortunately a reality, not only in society but also within the Church”.⁷⁶ Referring to the relatively small percentage of people of African or other origin in URC leadership positions she says, “I think the problem does not only have to do with the existence of open racism; it is also related to institutional blockages and the way that power is used”.⁷⁷

When Marjorie Lewis Cooper left her post, a lot of work still needed to be done to eradicate institutional racism from within the URC. In fact, she said she had been “saddened to find racism among some URC members, not all of it accidental.”⁷⁸ “Mostly racism is unwitting, but there are some church members who deliberately obstruct. The church is not made up of perfect people but of people who need to be perfected”,⁷⁹ she concluded. The follow up to the work of Marjorie Lewis Cooper and the recruitment of her successor to what

⁷² Rev. Marjorie Lewis Cooper interviewed by the United Reformed Church, 1998, remarks quoted by Echoes in “Today’s Faces of Racism”, 17/2000.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Source: “Report of The URC’s Multi-racial, Multi-cultural Development Program to The Mission Council”, January 22, 2000.

⁷⁵ Moreover, one of the recommendations of the MacPherson Report emphasised the role of education in highlighting cultural diversity and combating racism.

⁷⁶ Rev. Marjorie Lewis Cooper interviewed by the United Reformed Church, 1998, remarks quoted by Echoes in “Today’s Faces of Racism”, 17/2000.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Source: Bulletin Ecumenical News International (ENI), 27 July 2000: “Church’s racial justice campaigner battles Britain’s ‘caste system’.”

⁷⁹ Ibid.

is now a permanent post of promoting racial justice is more than necessary if the Church is going to be able to combat the racist behaviour that prevails in society and within the United Reformed Church itself.

A UNITED REFORMED CHURCH MINISTER’S WORK WITH REFUGEES IN DOVER⁸⁰

The town of Dover, population 130,000, is one of the main points of entry to the United Kingdom because of its geographical location. Its port is the busiest in terms of contact with the continent. The construction of the Channel Tunnel, which links the French town of Calais to Dover, made it closer than ever to France. For this reason, Dover has always been and is more than ever an obligatory stopping point for refugees wishing to enter the United Kingdom. Today, asylum seekers often travel from very distant countries such as Kurdistan or Afghanistan, crossing Italy and France before arriving at Calais, then Dover.

Norman Setchell took up his post as minister at Dover in 1997. Before that, he had ministered in Antwerp. During his two last years in Belgium, Norman Setchell was already involved in supporting asylum seekers, helping them to find housing or helping them to resolve other daily problems. In the days following his return to England, the first Kosovo refugees arrived in Dover. They were to be followed a few months later by several hundred Roma people fleeing the persecution to which they were subjected in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, their countries of origin. “At first”, said the minister, “the public reaction was very sympathetic to the newcomers but after about two months, we had the first National Front march. The reaction that I saw from some newspapers and members of the public, and even from some church people, simply mortified me. So I said to the congregation of our church that we should use the premises to help the refugees”.⁸¹

When, in Autumn 1997, several hundred Roma people arrived in Dover coming from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, they were immediately treated by the English media as “economic refugees” and their requests for asylum were described as “phoney”.¹ National and local politicians generally agreed with these allegations. It was in this obnoxious climate that, starting in October, members of the National Front (NF) and the British National Party (BNP), both neo-Nazi parties, distributed leaflets warning the inhabitants of Dover against the “invasion”. During the following months, NF and BNP extremists marched through the town several times (sometimes under police escort!).¹

⁸⁰ This section is based on correspondence with Norman Setchell.

⁸¹ Norman Setchell, quoted in “There is a place for us...”, Reform - June 2000.

The project began by offering weekly English courses to the refugees (who were mainly of Kurdish or Afghan origin at that time), in co-operation with the local authorities. When new refugees arrived and were dispersed through the town, they were met with growing hostility. So a group of Christians around Norman Setchell decided to organise a meeting place for the refugees. The United Reformed Church still welcomes refugee families on Wednesdays. The new arrivals can find comfort and support there. While their children take advantage of the opportunity to play with new friends, the parents share their experiences with other refugees or seek advice from the volunteers present. These volunteers are often members of the church, but they also include people from non-religious associations such as Dover Residents Against Racism or are simply private individuals from surrounding towns. There is plenty of work: interpreters need to be found to help the refugees with their requests for asylum and to deal with the many problems associated with arriving in a new country. According to Norman Setchell, this welcoming meeting place is an “oasis of attention and support”. The minister and his volunteers, now better known as the Asylum Seekers Support Group, managed to obtain school places for refugee children. Another of the group’s achievements was a Christmas party for the refugees. The last party was attended by about 80 people, including almost 50 children, each of which received a present. According to Norman Setchell, the meetings with the local authorities, the police, teachers and refugee support organisations have resulted in a reduction in hostility. All these initiatives are part of the long-term job of dispelling the mutual lack of understanding and the prejudices that circulate about asylum seekers. Every manifestation of racism needs to be opposed, whether that is in the press, or in the daily attitudes of people or the neo-Nazi marches.

During the autumn of 1998, when new refugees fleeing the fighting in Kosovo were arriving in Britain, the press lashed out. The editor of a local newspaper raged against the “invasion of illegal immigrants, asylum seekers, boot-leggers, drug dealers, the scum of the Earth”.⁸² “We are left with the backdraft of a nation of human sewage, [and no cash to wash it down the drain]”.⁸³ None of the media dwelled on the reasons that might have caused whole families to leave their country. As for the politicians, they echoed the phobias about the “invasion” and maintained that Dover was being “submerged” by refugees. (In fact, according to various sources, the asylum seekers still constitute less than one per cent of town’s population.

In August 1999, there were violent clashes in Dover between asylum seekers and young local people. Eleven young people were hospitalised after being stabbed.⁸⁴ Media coverage of these events was revealing. As the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF) said, “not one national newspaper bothered to go beyond the superficial to document the long history of racist violence against asylum seekers which had preceded the fairground fighting in August”.⁸⁵ Norman Setchell and Bill Bradley of Dover Residents Against Racism claim that racial violence against refugees is an established fact. “In some of the worst incidents, asylum seekers have been pushed in front of moving cars or hit over the head with iron bars”.⁸⁶

⁸² Editorial of the Folkestone Herald and Dover Express, October 1998 quoted in “Plight of asylum seekers: From here, Dover looks good”, The Observer, 22 August 1999.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Source: BBC news: “Dover ‘overcrowded’ with refugees”, 16 August 1999 (see: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk/newsid_4210000/421604.stm) and “Talks to ‘move Dover refugees’”, 17 August 1999 (see: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/uk/newsid_4220000/422606.stm).

⁸⁵ CARF: “Learning the lessons of Dover”, October/November 1999 - n°52.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

In his work helping refugees, Norman Setchell of course receives the support of the URC. But he is also supported by the Methodist Church and Christians Together in Dover. He also has a lot of contact with the Churches' Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ). However, the minister deplores the lack of official involvement by the local churches. At the beginning, he recalls, many members of the parish were reticent at the idea of opening the church to the refugees. Even today, too many Christians remain fundamentally hostile to the newcomers.

The locals are not the only people responsible for the uneasy coexistence with the newcomers. Norman Setchell freely admits that while certain families cause no problems, others have provoked resentment from the local community. He also recognises that his work supporting asylum seekers can sometimes be disillusioning. "I am not sure that all of them fully realise that the help they get is provided on a totally volunteer basis".⁸⁷

The work undertaken for refugees has also been made more difficult because of tougher legal measures on asylum matters. Many refugees in Dover have been deported or dispersed around the country, particularly after the incidents of August 1999.⁸⁸ Some families still live in Dover. After the new dispersal measures were introduced, new asylum seekers only stay in Dover for 16 or 17 days before being sent to other towns where their request for asylum is processed. While they are waiting in Dover, they are placed in detention centres. Despite that, people in the town show very little compassion, few people volunteer to help the refugees and local politicians continue to maintain that the town is "submerged". The political climate with respect to asylum seekers became even worse in the run-up to the General Election of June 2001. The subject of asylum became an obsession and brought forth racist and xenophobic comments on both right and left. As Norman Setchell revealed, "many families, who have had to return to their country, have written to me asking for support in reapplying for admission to Great Britain. I have written back stating that this is not a good time, with the elections ahead. Perhaps things will be different in a few years time."

Kingaez Mamadov, his wife Xbiba and their two children fled their country, Kazakhstan, after the brother and father of Kingaez were murdered by the police. The family first went to Belgium before arriving in Dover, hidden in a lorry, three and a half years ago. Since then, the family had become well established in the community and very much liked. The Mamadov family even had a happy event with the birth of a daughter. They all learned English and the children got excellent results at school. However, Norman Setchell and others had to fight hard to stop them being deported to Belgium, their country of entry into the European union (in line with the new immigration and asylum measures introduced in 1999). Thanks to the efforts of the local MP and more than 58 letters of support, the government decided to suspend the decision to deport the Mamadov to Belgium. After this reprieve, the family really blossomed. However, they still have to obtain permanent right of residence when their appeal eventually comes up.

⁸⁷ Norman Setchell, quoted in "There is a place for us... ", Reform - June 2000.

⁸⁸ See BBC news: "Talks to 'move Dover refugees'", 19 August 1999 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/uk/newsid_422000/422606.stm).

The Gina family, Mr. Gina, his wife, their daughter, Renata, and their two sons, is of Roma origin and has been living in Dover for more than three years. As Renata was found to be an especially gifted violinist, a Catholic school welcomed her and encouraged her talent. The local press picked it up and then championed the family in their appeal to stay in Dover. Petitions have also been sent to the government. The Gina family has become the most well-known Roma family in Dover and their persecution by skinheads in their country of origin, the Czech Republic, was given detailed coverage by the press. Despite all the steps taken, the family's final appeal was rejected, and they are awaiting a date to return.

Despite these many difficulties, it remains essential to support the refugees and to strive to reduce the hostility in the local environment towards them. The minister has not lost hope. A meeting between Catholics, Anglicans and volunteers with no church connection was held at Easter 2000 to reflect on future action. In addition, the local authorities have promised to provide minibuses for outings for the refugees during the summer.

SUPPORT AGAINST RACISTS INCIDENTS (SARI)

To end this outline of initiatives to combat racism in the United Kingdom, we thought it necessary to highlight the essential and exemplary work of an association that supports victims of racial violence: Support Against Racist Incidents (SARI). Although it is not a church organisation, many contacts recommended that we talk to SARI about the problem of racial violence. Moreover, SARI receives financial support from the Methodist Church.⁸⁹ The existence of such an organisation is all the more important in the context of what seems to be a spreading evil of racial violence in Great Britain. According to Institute of Race Relations figures⁹⁰, the number of racist incidents reported to the Metropolitan Police⁹¹ was around 5000 per year between 1994 in 1998. This figure rose to 11,050 in 1998/1999 (that is an increase of 89 percent) and doubled in 1999/2000. The IRR recognises that the increase in the number of racial incidents is also due to the fact that ethnic minorities are more willing to go to the police about them and that the police are more willing to record complaints. But the improvement in recording complaints is not enough to explain these worrying figures. The IRR says that racial violence is indeed increasing. For proof it point to the fact that there have been 19 racially motivated murders in the United Kingdom since February 1999, when the MacPherson report was published.⁹² The IRR notes that, although the case behind the investigation that led to the

⁸⁹ Source: Support Against Racist Incidents – SARI, Annual Report 1999-2000.

⁹⁰ Institute of Race Relations: "Counting the cost: racial violence since Macpherson", March 2001 (http://www.homebeats.co.uk/pdf/counting_the_cost.pdf).

⁹¹ The Metropolitan Police is the most important force operating in Greater London. It has more than 25,000 officers and has seven million inhabitants within its jurisdiction.

⁹² Institute of Race Relations: "Counting the cost: racial violence since Macpherson", March 2001 (http://www.homebeats.co.uk/pdf/counting_the_cost.pdf).

MacPherson Report was one of intentional racial violence – the murder of Stephen Lawrence – attention has since focused on indirect or unintentional racism. Most organisations, including the churches have concentrated on institutional racism.⁹³ “In effect, there are two racisms in Britain today... the racism that discriminates and the racism that kills. The solution to the one is no solution to the other”.⁹⁴ SARI is one of the few organisations engaged in combating this second type of racism.

SARI was founded in Bristol (in the west of England) in 1988, by victims of racial harassment who realised that people who suffered what they had suffered had nowhere to turn for help and support. SARI workers have direct experience of racial violence and are therefore in a good position to help their clients.⁹⁵ Over the years, the staff has become increasingly multiethnic and the members of the organisation come from different backgrounds. SARI continues to be led by people of African or other origin.

SARI’s main objective is to support victims of racist incidents or harassment. An emergency telephone number is available. Support for victims means, in the first place, moral support to allow the person to get over the stress and trauma caused by the aggression. Victims are then informed of their rights and the possibility of taking the matter up. SARI workers provide direct help to them in any steps they take to stop harassment or obtain redress. Alternatively, they ensure that the victim’s case is treated efficiently by other organisations in a better position to help. Since SARI became fully operational in 1991, the organisation has dealt with about 1500 cases in the Bristol area.

Definition of a racist incident

SARI defines racially motivated action as a physical, verbal, written or psychological attack on an individual or group, or their property, by another person or group of people, for which there is no reasonable explanation other than their race, culture, religion, ethnic origin or personal relationship with an ethnic minority person, where this is the view of the person receiving the report or the person reporting it.⁹⁶

SARI takes on any case which fits this description, where the victim is willing to accept SARI’s support.

In 1999/2000, SARI was contacted by more than 9000 people and dealt with 283 cases (198 new cases⁹⁷ and 85 cases carried on from previous years). As in previous years, the majority of the people seeking SARI’s services were from ethnic minority communities. Most clients were women (54%) and about half were under 16 years of age. It is interesting to note that the racist incidents reported to SARI most often took place in the vicinity of the victims’ home. When this type of incident is repeated, the victims begin to be afraid of going out, may lose confidence in themselves and experience feelings of guilt or frustration. Children suffer

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Dr. A. Sivanandan, Director of the Institute of Race Relations: “Counting the cost: racial violence since Macpherson”, March 2001 (http://www.homebeats.co.uk/pdf/counting_the_cost.pdf).

⁹⁵ We stress that SARI’s services are free.

⁹⁶ Source: Support Against Racist Incidents – SARI, Annual Report 1999-2000.

⁹⁷ This figure is based on records for 1997-1998 and 1998-1999.

most from these symptoms and the isolation that fear of racism imposes can cause lasting psychological and emotional problems. Finally, of the 198 new cases of racial violence dealt with by SARI in 1999/2000, seven resulted in successful prosecutions of the perpetrators (including police officers). Other measures have been taken against those guilty of racial harassment in schools (warnings, expulsion), the workplace (warnings, dismissal) or housing.

A young Asian man was brutally attacked by a group of unidentified men late one night in Bristol. He suffered cuts measuring several centimetres on his right cheek, a black eye and bumps and bruises to his head. His brother and a friend, who stepped in to help him, were also badly injured. A passer-by called the emergency service. The young Asian man left hospital with 30 stitches.

The SARI advice worker visited the victim's family several times so that they could talk about this traumatic incident. SARI liaised with the police officers who were dealing with the investigation and kept the family up-to-date on developments in the investigation. Despite their best efforts, the police were not able to identify and apprehend those guilty for the assault. SARI also took steps to help the family obtain financial compensation for the damage suffered.

In addition to providing support for victims of racist incidents, SARI tries to broaden awareness of racial violence. Ideally and in the long-term, SARI aims to reduce the number and seriousness of racial attacks. As in previous years, SARI has received financial support that has allowed it to equip homes subject to racial harassment with alarms, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers and surveillance cameras. In another initiative to prevent racial attacks, SARI organised no less than 57 anti-racism courses in Bristol for the police, courts, housing agencies and educational establishments.

In the Bristol region, an Asian child was the object of frequent racial harassment by his fellow pupils. In addition to helping the boy's family, SARI worked with the school to develop specific measures to eliminate racial harassment from the school and did a training session for the teachers to help them identify and respond to racial incidents. As a result, racial incidents in the school dropped and, when they did happen, the school felt more confident to tackle them firmly.

Like all non-profit making organisations, SARI has financial problems. At the end of 2000, grants for the anti-racism courses were not renewed. These difficulties should not allow us to forget that SARI carries out exemplary work and that each case that is solved justifies the survival of such an organisation as this.

The testimony of a young white mother of two mixed race children

This person was the target of racial harassment from her neighbours. Not wishing to make a complaint for fear of reprisals, she decided to move house. SARI helped her find a new home and while she was waiting to move, the family received the organisation's support.

"I just wanted to write and thank you for everything you have done. Without your help, we would still be in *** and I would still think I was paranoid. You dealt with everything so well – it took so much pressure away from me to know you had taken over the load. Since moving, everything has changed, knots inside me have started to go. You have changed all our lives. I would recommend SARI to anyone who has experienced similar problems. I just wish I'd known to contact you years ago."⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Source: Support against Racist Incidents – SARI Annual Report 1999-2000, p. 11

FRANCE

Population:	58.6 million
Refugee population 31.12.2000⁹⁹	129,700 (as against 140,200 in 1999)
Requests for asylum in 2000¹⁰⁰	38,600 (as against 30,600 in 1999)
Refugee status granted in 2000¹⁰¹	?
Admission rate¹⁰²	?
Number of immigrants¹⁰³	4,310,000, that is, 7.4% of the total population ¹⁰⁴
Ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (April 2000)	7 July 1971

Main subjects of concern of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (April 2000):

- The Committee expressed concern about possible discrimination in effect in the implementation of laws providing for the removal of foreigners from French territory.
- The Committee recommends that France ensure the effective protection of the exercise, without discrimination, of the rights to work and to housing, in both the public and private sectors, and to provide compensation to victims of racial discrimination.

⁹⁹ Source: “Provisional Statistics on Refugees and Others of Concern to UNHCR for the year 2000”, April 11, 2001 (<http://unhcr.ch/statist/main.htm>) and “*Les réfugiés dans le monde, cinquante ans d’action humanitaire*”, 2000, United Nations High Commission for Refugees (<http://www.unhcr.ch>)

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Source: “Provisional Statistics on Refugees and Others of Concern to UNHCR for the year 2000”, April 11, 2001 (<http://www.unhcr.ch/statist/main.htm>).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ “The notion of immigrant is based on the declared place of birth and nationality. An immigrant is a person born abroad but who did not hold French nationality at birth. After arriving in France, he may become French by acquisition (French immigrant) or keep his nationality (foreign immigrant)”. Source: “*Recensement de la population 1999: la proportion d’immigrés est stable depuis 25 ans*”, Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE) (http://www.insee.fr/fr/home/home_page.asp).

¹⁰⁴ Source: “*Recensement de la population 1999: la proportion d’immigrés est stable depuis 25 ans*”, Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE) (http://www.insee.fr/fr/home/home_page.asp)

- It is recommended that the State party reinforce existing measures to ensure that access to places or services intended for use by the general public is not denied to any person on grounds of national or ethnic origin.
- The Committee recommends that the State party reinforce the effectiveness of the remedies available to victims of racial discrimination.
- Negative images of the Roma minority prevail in the mass media and in the public generally.

“The total number of racist and anti-Semitic attacks in 2000 (146) reached the highest level recorded since 1990. This increase is mainly due to a spectacular quintupling of anti-Semitic violence (116 cases in 2000, 24 in 1991), after 28 September 2000, the date when clashes between Israelis and Palestinians began. Overall, 80% of all cases of violence were anti-Semitic in nature – out of 16 persons injured in 2000, 11 were the victims of anti-Semitism.

So-called acts of intimidation (threatening statements or gestures, graffiti, tracts, minor violence...) also peaked in 2000 (722) as compared with the past ten years, with 603 anti-Semitic threats. Other racist threats (119) have increased in comparison with the last two years, while not attaining the peaks reached in 1995 (487) or 1990 (284). This violence is mainly directed at the population of North African origin (16 incidents during which 4 persons were injured).

(...)The 16 racist and xenophobic attacks registered in 2000 can be broken down as follows: 2 cases of major damage, 3 attempts at arson and 11 bodily attacks that injured four persons. To give a few examples:

On February 9, in Grenoble (Rhône-Alpes), aggression, torture and attempt to rape the wife of the head of a North African association by two men who claimed to be policemen and left racist graffiti on the spot. The victim and her husband subsequently received repeated threats of a racist nature.

On April 26, in Nanterre (Paris region), attack on a Frenchman of Moroccan origin by seven or eight skinheads in the carriage of an underground train.

In the night of August 7 to 8, in Six-Fours (Var – south of France), dispute between two billstickers, members of the National Republican Movement (M.N.R.), and a group of five young men. After proffering racist insults, the latter were chased by the “Megretists”¹⁰⁵, who fired two 6.35 mm gunshots, only one of which was in the air – nobody was injured.

Although the facts were not formally recorded as racist or xenophobic, it is also fitting to mention a violent fight on 24 September, in a bar in Les Mées (Alpes de Haute-Provence – southern France), between four customers armed with baseball bats and some fifty Portuguese seasonal workers who were watching television. As they fled, the aggressors hit one of the workmen riding a bicycle, who died from his injuries. About twenty of the Portuguese left their work and returned in fear to Portugal. The four persons suspected of the homicide were arrested and held in custody.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Far right wing party run by Bruno Mégret.

¹⁰⁶ They were arrested and condemned immediately by the court to 1 year in prison with a 4 month suspended sentence and 1 year in prison with a 6 month suspended sentence.

As to anti-Semitism, during the last quarter of 2000, 43 synagogues or places of worship were damaged in addition to 3 Jewish cemeteries. The far right claimed to have carried out only two of these attacks. 42 arrests highlighted the participation of delinquents who did not claim to subscribe to any specific ideology.

Police services noted that the far right was little involved in the context of events in the Middle East. They seem worried about a possible flare-up in connection with new developments in that region. (...)

(The fight against racism and xenophobia (progress report 2000) National Consultative Commission (CNCDDH). Report submitted to Lionel JOSPIN, Prime Minister, on 21 March 2001)

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), in its 1999 annual report, noted furthermore that: *“Several prominent cases of ill-treatment in custody raised by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), Amnesty International (AI) and le Mouvement Contre le Racisme et pour l’Amitié des Peuples (MRAP) have given rise to concerns about the treatment of ethnic minorities held in detention. The actions of the police force came under scrutiny and as in other Member States of the EU, the treatment of detainees being forcibly deported also caused grave concern.”*

In 2000, Amnesty International reported, in particular, two cases of police violence involving foreigners:

“In the night of 15 to 16 April 2000, Riad Hamlaoui was shot dead in Lille (Nord-Pas-de-Calais – northern France) by a police officer in charge of investigating the theft of a vehicle involving the victim and one of his friends. The young 25-year old man, of Algerian origin, was not armed at the time of the tragedy.”¹⁰⁷

“Cornélie Chappuis, 34 years old, filed a complaint in March 2000 against police officers in Roubaix (Nord-Pas-de-Calais – northern France). The facts date from January 2000. This French citizen of Zairian origin accuses the police officers of aggression in addition to verbal and physical threats. She was then illegally detained.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Source: Amnesty International (see

<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/EUR210042000?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES\FRANCE>)

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. (see <http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/EUR210022000?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES\FRANCE>)

CIMADE – ECUMENICAL AID SERVICE

In this first chapter on France, we sought to highlight the outstanding and necessary work being done by CIMADE.

CIMADE is an ecumenical association. To understand this term, reference should be made to the statutes of the association and, more specifically, to article 1:

“The aim of CIMADE is to show active solidarity with those who suffer, who are oppressed and exploited and to take their defence, whatever their nationality, their origin or their political or religious position. In particular, it seeks to combat racism.

CIMADE is a form of service that the churches wish to render people in the name of the Gospel of freedom. It works in liaison with the World Council of Churches, the French Protestant Federation, the Orthodox Church in France, and co-operates with various Catholic and lay entities. (...)”

CIMADE, according to its secretary-general, Jean-Marc Dupeux, is neither “a church nor a political party; however, it has always shared the characteristics of the various theological movements of young French Protestants, in a spirit of disobedience in support of people in danger.”

The association was created in 1939 around Marc Boegner, then president of the French Protestant Federation, in order to help people displaced in France during the Second World War. At that time, young people working as teams carried out their duties with strong help from a number of pastors and, through them, the churches to which each was attached. Over the years, CIMADE thus created a vast network of assistance throughout France. In the 60s, the movement welcomed refugees from eastern Europe, Latin Americans and Indo-Chinese, followed in the 70s and 80s by more South Americans, Africans, and then Eastern Europeans and refugees from the Indian sub-continent.

It now works to serve refugees and foreigners in France and to foster solidarity-based development in countries to the east and south. CIMADE’s action is based on a broad structure comprising permanent teams, members and supporters throughout France. CIMADE brings together people of different national, denominational, philosophical and political horizons. However, the movement bears the hallmark of its Protestant origins.

CIMADE takes the requisite action and co-operates with numerous religious and social leaders, as well as local parishes, in particular belonging to the Reformed Church of France – whose premises or annexes are used by several permanent staff members – to defend the rights of foreigners in France, be they “clandestine”, asylum seekers or simply born in France but of foreign origin. Defending foreigners expelled from the country is another key area of activity. The aim in this very special instance is to ensure that the rights and dignity of the individuals are respected. Given the ever more restrictive legislation on asylum, and faced with constant obstruction from the administrative services, CIMADE often has to call on the French Protestant Federation and all the associated churches to intervene and put pressure on the competent authorities. The association plays an active part in the reception of refugees, advising them, teaching them the language or providing shelter. It is also active in the field of international solidarity in some twenty countries in the South. CIMADE furthermore produces

a by-monthly magazine (“*Causes communes*”) and other publications bearing witness to injustice towards foreigners, with a view to raising awareness and mobilizing public opinion.

As can be seen from this introduction, CIMADE is active in a wide range of different fields. We shall now look at the activities more directly linked with the theme of racism.

RECEPTION AND ACCOMPANIMENT OF FOREIGNERS

In this context, CIMADE provides foreigners with legal and administrative assistance to make them aware of their rights as guaranteed by law and to enable them to defend those rights, with a view to denouncing any form of racism and discrimination...

“(...) defending the rights of foreigners means defending tolerance and solidarity throughout society”

“CIMADE’s main mission consists in defending and helping foreigners whose rights are threatened or precarious.

The combined effect of ever more restrictive legislation on foreigners and growing support for xenophobic and racist ideas has increased the number of cases of exclusion where the rights and dignity of individuals are seriously threatened.

Every year, several thousand foreigners turn to CIMADE, chiefly for administrative and legal assistance but also to find someone willing to listen carefully to their problems, at a time when so many doors are slammed in their face.

CIMADE welcomes, listens to, advises all these people, in the belief that individual aid, the defence of a single case, is always a way and means of defending the rights of everyone. Our aim is not to offer fine words of consolation to people in difficulty but to help them effectively in practical ways, which involves filling in files, providing legal advice, studying each case according to its own merits.”¹⁰⁹

CIMADE services to combat racism and discrimination in the Languedoc Roussillon region

CIMADE is particularly active in the fight against racism and discrimination in two regions in southern France: Provence, Alpes, Côte d’Azur, through training programmes on ways of combating racism and discrimination; and Languedoc Roussillon, where it has set up a system to denounce violations and compel the authorities to take action.

These services are based above all on a **permanent structure to welcome, listen to and provide legal advice and support** to foreigners. “Identifying a victim of discrimination and that person’s ability to speak up and take action, is not neutral. It entails recognising the individual as a victim, of course, but also as an actor in the struggle. This means that we

¹⁰⁹ Source: <http://CIMADE.org/presentation/migrants.htm>

cannot act on behalf of the victim but must decide on a strategy with the person and support him or her in the effort to solve the problem. In this respect, the welcome extended is not an invitation to list complaints but a place to define action to enforce respect for individual rights. However, we do make time for them to express their pain. During the discussions, it is not uncommon for people to cry. In fact, quite often, the first meeting is solely a moment for expressing this pain.”¹¹⁰

Subsequently, the aim is to establish the facts as objectively and scrupulously as possible. “In the area of discrimination, facts are of paramount importance. It is the facts, stripped of any personal considerations, that enable one to say whether there has been discrimination or not.”¹¹¹

Efforts will then be made to prove the unlawful nature of the facts. “Ignorance is no excuse in legal matters; yet in the area of discrimination, ignorance of legal texts is a well-established, wide-spread fact. This lack of knowledge places victims in an uncomfortable position in which doubts about the violence they have endured feed suffering and block any possibility for action. Providing a strictly legal interpretation of the facts enables the victim, now duly recognised as such, to perceive the problem in a different light and envisage the possibility of taking action.”¹¹² Finally, the victim is informed of the recourses available so that s/he can take action in full knowledge of the facts.

A few examples:¹¹³

“CIMADE services to combat discrimination” for the Languedoc Roussillon region (figures for the first six months of the year 2000)

“41 people were seen by the permanent welcome desk.

29 interviews highlighted acts of discrimination: 16 people wished to take action to defend their rights; the other 13 did not wish to do so.”

12 interviews did not call for any follow-up as careful consideration of the facts established that the problems raised did not involve discrimination.

¹¹⁰ “*Dispositif CIMADE de lutte contre les discriminations*”, Languedoc Roussillon region, report covering the first six months of the year 2000.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ All these examples are drawn from the report “*Dispositif CIMADE de lutte contre les discriminations*”.

Police violence

Refusal to register a complaint

Testimony of Nassira E. (15 years old)

“On Saturday afternoon, 20 November, I was in the Polygone with some girl-friends. There was a fight and there were a lot of policemen. We were on our way out when we heard a girl screaming as though someone was trying to kill her. We saw people gathering and went over to see what was happening. We saw some policemen hitting a girl and her friends. There were lots of people and many youngsters looking on. Suddenly, the policemen started hitting other young people, both boys and girls. They only struck the coloured ones. A policeman came towards us; we stepped back to go. The policeman grabbed me from behind and hit me hard over the head. I fell to the ground and the policeman continued to hit me. My girl-friend was hit with a mobile phone by a guard. A young boy pulled me away and got me out of there. I recognised some of my younger, 14-year old brother’s friends. They had handcuffs and the policemen were hitting them.

My friends took me home; I was in a state of shock and my head hurt. My mother took me to the emergency ward where a doctor examined me. He said I had concussion.

The next Tuesday, I went with my mother to register a complaint at the Comédie police station. The policemen refused to file the complaint. They said they could not register a complaint against their colleagues, that we had to write to the public prosecutor.”

Miss K.: letter CODAC¹¹⁴

REFUSAL TO SELL

Montpellier, May 22nd 2000

*Mrs. OBENICHE
Deputy prefect of LODEVE
President of CODAC*

Madame Deputy Prefect,

May we inform you of the discriminatory acts of which Miss Zina K. was victim.

On Saturday, 20 May, in the evening, Miss K, her daughter Antonella and one of her friends together with Mrs. Christine L. and her two daughters went shopping in Cap d'Agdes.

Mrs. K. wanted to buy a pair of shoes for her daughter. The group went into the "100% MODEL" shop. Young Antonella and her friend each chose a pair of shoes. Miss K. went to the check-out counter to pay. She prepared a cheque in the amount of the purchase: 490 francs and produced her French identity card.

The manager, after reading the identity of Miss K, refused her cheque and asked her to write out two cheques for 245 francs. Miss K., surprised, asked for an explanation for this practice. The manager answered: "With you foreigners, it's safest". He then asked Miss K. if she had a credit card. Miss K. took her card out of her bag. The manager asked her to go to an automatic teller and get cash, adding: "at least that is reliable".

Miss K. became angry and asked to speak to his superior. The manager replied that he was in America until January. She then asked him to call the police. He refused.

Miss K. left the shop without making her purchase.

Please inform us of the action you intend to take in this case.

Yours sincerely,

Following these events, Miss K. was given tranquillisers and had to stay in bed for several days.

¹¹⁴ In each French department, a Departmental Commission for Access to Citizenship (CODAC) has been set up. The mission of these CODAC, chaired by the prefect, is to receive complaints and work on cases of racism and discrimination. To this end, a single national telephone number (114) collects all the complaints linked to racism and transmits them to the CODAC. On a national level, a Group to Study and Fight Discrimination (GELD) has been set up; its task is to monitor and study trends in calls to 114. CIMADE belongs to the GELD Board of Directors.

Gaujal case

On 8 February 2000, at a meeting with the press, Jean-Claude Gaujal, departmental secretary of the RPR¹¹⁵, stated the following: *“if we do not want violence to develop in schools ,we have to stop granting visas to Algerians. What kind of example is this for our children – people from a country where there is nothing but violence, throat-cutting and knife wounds? I wonder...If we let that kind of individual into our Republican schools, where will we end up? I am not inventing this: only 5% of non-European immigrants come to France to work and 95% come for the socialist hand-outs...We must be selective. Maybe I'm being a bit tough, but I've given a lot of thought to the matter.”*

Following this unacceptable statement, CIMADE immediately called on the CODAC. However, as it failed to react, CIMADE decided to involve the legal authorities at a high level through a letter campaign. A legal investigation for racial slander and incitement to racial hatred was begun against Mr. Gaujal.

In addition to its permanent welcome desk, CIMADE services to combat discrimination also seek to disseminate information about existing mechanisms and means of action to fight racism and discrimination. As stressed, institutions like CODAC and number 114 are often little known. CIMADE is therefore active in the field of information, awareness-building and training; it publishes summaries of the main laws in the area of discrimination and meets with people involved in associations and young immigrants to inform them of their rights and the means of defending them.

DEFENCE OF FOREIGNERS EXPELLED FROM THE COUNTRY

Since 1984, an agreement entered into with the Ministry for Social Affairs guarantees the presence of CIMADE in a certain number of “detention centres”¹¹⁶ throughout France¹¹⁷. It is worth noting that CIMADE is the only organization that is allowed to meet individuals in the process of being expelled. The role of CIMADE team members is to monitor “respect for the dignity of the persons detained” and their rights¹¹⁸ by visiting detainees on a regular basis, responding to emergencies and providing information and material.

“It is necessary above all to listen in order to understand and act. During the process that led to administrative detention, the foreigner has usually been interviewed by various people but CIMADE team members are often the first to listen to him as an individual and not a

¹¹⁵ Rassemblement pour la République: political party on the French right.

¹¹⁶ The term “detention centre” is the place where foreigners subject to expulsion or banned from French territory are administratively “detained”, that is, those persons waiting to be taken to the border. Foreigners placed in these centres are there either because they are illegal (no residence permit, expired visa...) or because they have committed an offence (for which they have already been judged and sentenced); in this respect, they may be subject to an additional sanction: ban on entering the country or expulsion (the famous “double sentence”, see below). One should not mix up “detention centres” and what are called “holding areas”. The latter are solely for foreigners arriving in France but not authorised to remain in the country. In this case, the foreigners concerned are kept in a “holding area” while their request for asylum is reviewed in a preliminary manner or their expulsion is organised if said request is “clearly unfounded”. (Source: <http://www.CIMADE.org/organisation/der00.htm> and “rapport Louis Mermaz”: parliamentary report on the police budget presented in October 2000 (<http://www.assemblee-nat.fr/budget/plf2001/a2628-02.asp>)

¹¹⁷ CIMADE is present in 14 of these centres: Bordeaux, Lille, Lyons, Marseilles, le Mesnil-Amelot (Charles de Gaulle Paris airport), Nanterre, Nantes, Nice, Paris (dépôt), Perpignan, Sète, Strasbourg, Toulouse, Vincennes.

¹¹⁸ <http://www.CIMADE.org/presentation/der.htm>

delinquent, a potential criminal or a person subject to a given jurisdiction. This sometimes brings to light new elements in an administrative or family situation that make it possible to challenge the expulsion procedure. Action must then be taken quickly.”¹¹⁹

Saved from expulsion in extremis¹²⁰

“I can talk to you about Louis XV but I can’t even tell you the last two presidents of the Congo. I can give you the names of twenty, thirty, fifty cities in France but apart from Brazzaville, because I know it is the capital, I do not know the other towns”. This statement by Harold Mokengo highlights the absurdity of the expulsion order, which tops a prison sentence that has already been served.

Harold is child of Montpellier. He came there at the age of 4 as an orphan. Taken in by his uncle and aunt, he soon began to call them daddy and mummy. Unfortunately, Harold’s behaviour was not ideal. As a adolescent, he became violent; the slightest excuse was good for a fight. *“It took me longer than some other young people to understand that that was not what life was all about. I spent thirty-three months in prison. That led me to think and I wanted to get out with the help of the probation committee, plan a career, but I was not given an opportunity to show that I had changed my ways.”*

He had been sentenced to thirty-three months in prison for three offences of aggravated violence. Yet Harold had prepared carefully for the time he would leave prison. A place in a hostel and a job awaited him in Castelnau. But he was haunted by the Ministerial Expulsion Decree of which he had been informed after six or seven months’ imprisonment. An appeal to overturn the order had been lodged by his lawyer, but there was no further news. Nothing seemed to have been done to tackle the problem properly and above all to inform Harold of possible recourse. It was only a fortnight before leaving prison, in Villeneuve, that he learned about the existence of CIMADE and the regular visits paid by Brigitte Bretton, a social worker and legal adviser at the Sète detention centre. She immediately took several legal steps but time was too short. Harold was transferred to the Mesnil-Amelot detention centre for expulsion within three days to Brazzaville. There, he met with another CIMADE team member, Abderrazak Maaouia, who brought the matter before the Ministry for Home Affairs a second time, but again without success.

However, having been taken to the plane, Harold did not get upset. He asked to speak to the captain and explained the situation to him. The captain refused to take him on board. This *“refusal to board”* is an offence that often warrants a six-month prison sentence. Yet the president of the Bobigny court lent a sympathetic ear to the arguments put forward by the lawyer, Mr. Costamagna. He handed down a decision that Abderrazak described as *“lenient”*: three months in prison, but without committal. In other words, Harold is free; he jumped onto the first train to join his family in Montpellier. He will soon receive an order to serve his sentence, but that is the sine qua non to have the time and legal possibility to file an appeal

¹¹⁹ <http://www.CIMADE.org/presentation/der.htm>

¹²⁰ This is drawn from an article by Jérôme Méry published in the CIMADE journal *“Causes communes”*, n° 31 (February-March 2001)

with the administrative court to overturn the decision. Abderrazak is fairly optimistic in his analysis: *“I think the expulsion order will be overruled because it is clearly illegal. I do not see how one can send an orphan back to a country at war. A person, as he said himself, who is virtually French, all he lacks is the nationality”*.

Unfortunately, not everyone subject to an expulsion order is as lucky as Harold. In many cases, CIMADE is unable to prevent the expulsions and can only protest against something that creates tragic situations and often constitutes a flagrant injustice.

The absurdity of “double sentences”

The procedure of “double sentencing” is vigorously denounced by a number of associations for the protection of human rights, and rightly so. What exactly does this mean? When a foreigner is sentenced to prison in France, the decision often comprises a “ban on entering the country”, which means in practice being expelled from France for a limited or unlimited period of time. This measure is decided by a court. However, if the Ministry of the Interior deems a given individual represents a “threat to state security”, it may decide on expulsion by ministerial decree. In fact, foreigners who have served their sentence (and thus paid their debt to society) are subject to a further sanction simply because they are not French! These measures rarely take account of the personal and family status of the individuals concerned or the amount of time they have spent in France. As stressed by Jean-Marc Dupeux, general secretary of CIMADE, “applied to a foreigner who has all his ties in France, the detention-expulsion duo is a genuine social death sentence, banishment.”¹²¹

In addition to its activity to defend foreigners who are expelled, CIMADE is fighting to obtain revision of a clearly unfair, discriminatory measure. This is a concrete example of how work to defend expelled foreigners is linked to the struggle against discrimination and a degree of covert racism.¹²²

¹²¹ Jean-Marc Dupeux in the leading article of *“Causes communes”*, n° 29 (July-August 2000).

¹²² It is worth noting that “double sentencing” is not the only practice under French legislation that heavily penalises illegal foreigners. The procedure that governs “administrative detention” as a whole gives the impression of being less and less respectful of the rights and dignity of the persons detained: passive attitude of the judiciary, which merely replaces the police, abolition of the exceptional nature of detention, extension of lawful detention or generally lackadaisical attitude towards the requisite procedure (failure to inform the detainee of his rights, absence of an interpreter...); in other words, tendency to enforce ever more hasty justice.

PUBLICATIONS AND STUDIES

Over and above its work “in the field”, CIMADE produces a number of studies. Several deal with the issue of racism.

“ARENAC: observatory for expulsions”

Since 1998, CIMADE in the Marseilles region, has been analysing expulsion policy at the Arenc detention centre in Marseilles; “CIMADE has been present in this symbolic detention centre for fifteen years, seeking to provide legal and social support to expelled foreigners. This solidarity has not prevented laws and practices from becoming ever stricter at the same time. The protection and guarantees granted to foreigners have not halted the drift in the system as a whole. The aim of this document is to take stock of this situation”¹²³. This report is addressed to all concerned people as well as to the key figures responsible for asylum and immigration policy in France. The goal is to raise awareness of the dramatic, inhuman predicament of expelled foreigners.

This report first sets out the figures; how many people have passed through Arenc, how many days they spent in the centre on average, what their fate was (expulsion, release or transfer to another centre), what the main nationalities in Arenc are ... The report also describes the legal framework governing detention followed by expulsion. However, legislation does not provide the full picture. Indeed, as mentioned in the report “the expulsion of foreigners should be analysed in terms of the legal framework but also with regard to how this is implemented and interpreted by decision-makers”¹²⁴. Thus, CIMADE Marseilles has endeavoured to highlight the host of deviant practices in the area of expulsion and to underscore that “if you add up the little and the big discrepancies at one level or another, you end up with an expatriation policy that is hardly worthy of a country like France.”¹²⁵ The Arenc centre itself is not above criticism, on the contrary: poor hygiene, feeling of confinement, imprisonment and boredom, numerous suicide attempts... Finally, the report finishes with a description of a few personal cases and a press review setting out often unbearable accounts of expulsion.

“Who is expelled, under what circumstances and why, these are the questions that CIMADE has modestly endeavoured to answer.”¹²⁶

It should be noted that the choice of the Arenc detention centre rather than any other is not fortuitous. In a damning parliamentary report, Louis Mermaz, the rapporteur, describes the holding areas and detention centres as “the shame of the Republic”¹²⁷. In an interview with a French newspaper, the MP confided: “the place that struck me most has been at the port of Marseilles since 1963, in Arenc, in the upper section of a depot that has not been used since

¹²³ <http://www.CIMADE.org/publi/publi08.htm>

¹²⁴ “ARENAC: observatoire des reconduites à la frontière”, CIMADE report on 1998, May 1999 (available from CIMADE).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ <http://www.CIMADE.org/publi/publi08.htm>

¹²⁷ Louis Mermaz report on the police budget, presented in October 2000. It is most enlightening that the chapter specifically devoted to holding areas and detention centres is called “Aux frontières de l’Humanité: les zones d’attente et les centres de rétention” (On the border of humanity: holding areas and detention centres)

1917. A real blockhouse that is reached by a steep concrete walkway which leads to the centre 12 metres higher up. The place belongs to a different era, a different regime. People are herded together in a single, unsuitable room. The bedding – filthy foam rubber mattresses – is horrifying. The only slightly human thing that has just been added is an infirmary. People feel totally lost and have the impression that no-one cares about them.”¹²⁸

“The power of officialdom: how foreigners are actually received and treated at a prefecture”¹²⁹

This publication is the result of a major project carried out by CIMADE in conjunction with other associations to observe administrative practices in the Hérault prefecture (department in south-west France)¹³⁰. The aim is not to condemn one or other prefecture but to highlight “the real reception and treatment of foreigners” by a prefecture chosen at random. The conclusions of the report are unequivocal: the facts reported prove the existence of “constant and widespread practices”¹³¹. “They are blameworthy not because they can be put down to a prefectural administration but because these practices are, in fact, genuine forms of discrimination that have become run-of-the-mill in daily humdrum activity. They do not seem to be a problem for those who apply these practices, overlooking the humiliation of the men and women who are mistreated in this way, e.g. being forced to queue before dawn and then be turned away rudely and without any explanation once they get to the counter.”¹³² The mere filing of a request for a residence permit is no easy matter. Sometimes the administration makes the foreigner come in in person, sometimes they ask him to send the file by mail. Quite often, the prefecture will refuse a file because certain documents (valid passport, insurance certificate...) have not been submitted; this is abusive if not illegal according to the law. An excessively long period of time may elapse before an answer is received; the administration may arbitrarily refuse to issue a receipt¹³³ which gives the foreigner a legal status until such time as the file can be examined. Requests are often processed hastily and with contempt... The following examples give a better idea of the “obstacle course” foreigners must endure in order to obtain a lawful status in France.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ “*L’horreur de la République*”, *Nouvel Observateur*, 23-29 November 2000

¹²⁹ “*Le pouvoir du guichet: réalité de l’accueil et du traitement des étrangers par une préfecture*”, special issue of the CIMADE journal “*Causes communes*”, April 2000.

¹³⁰ Groupe d’Information et de Soutien des Immigrés (Gisti), Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l’Amitié entre les Peuples (MRAP), Syndicat des Avocats de France (SAF), Syndicat de la Magistrature (SM), Human Rights League – Hérault, Association Biterroise Contre le Racisme (ABCR) and Comité 34 des Parrains et Mairaines.

¹³¹ “*Le pouvoir du guichet: réalité de l’accueil et du traitement des étrangers par une préfecture*”, special issue of the CIMADE journal “*Causes communes*”, April 2000.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Obtaining this receipt is important. Indeed, a job, social welfare are impossible without it.

¹³⁴ It is worth noting that there is no way round the prefecture if one wishes to obtain the papers for a residence permit, file the request or request territorial asylum. Furthermore, it is the prefect who is entitled to hand down expulsion decrees; everyone therefore has to go to the prefecture in the event of a problem...

“A reception that shows little respect for individual dignity”.

Every morning, dozens and dozens of foreigners crowd in front of the prefecture, waiting for the doors to open around 9 o'clock. Some have been there since 6 in the morning, or even earlier. They have to hurry as the offices close at 11h30 and will not be able to attend to everyone...

“The reception of foreigners at the prefecture: an undignified spectacle of organised disorder”

Michel E. describes his experience when he accompanied Mrs. F. (French) and her husband R., of Romanian nationality, in July 1999 to obtain a receipt so the latter's presence in France would be lawful:

“Everything seems to be organized to make “foreigners” look a nuisance: they stand in a long queue just in front of the entrance, so that they get in the way of other people entering the building. Employees answer them in a condescending or scathing tone of voice. (...)after queuing for about an hour, we were finally taken care of by an employee. She was surprised that R. had not been given his receipt in February (the first time he came to the prefecture): a “mistake”, she said. She consulted a colleague who was preparing the said receipt and handed it to R; I noticed immediately that the document did not entitle him to work, whereas he had the right to do so...a further mistake (by chance?), which the employee recognised and corrected.”

“5 October 1999, subsequent visit: the spectacle is nearly the same except that two policemen are guarding the entrance to the courtyard and only let people in in small numbers, punctuating their work with comments like: “come on, run you donkeys”. A woman was jostled and fell down.”

Another testimony:

“Nothing appears to have been done to make the long wait in front of the counters more rational and comfortable and everything seems designed to make the presence of the foreigners look bad in the eyes of people entering the premises for other reasons. What are they to think of a long queue of foreigners at the door of the prefecture manifesting their irritation more or less noisily at being made to wait outside in the cold, or standing up inside? What are they to think of a queue of foreigners waiting right in front of the premises so that anyone wanting into the building has to squeeze through three-deep lines of Albanians, Algerians, Moroccans or Romanians? Is this reception system not actually intended to discourage foreigners from going to the counters and to give other users of the prefectural administration the impression that France is being invaded?”

What is even more serious, the procedure of **territorial asylum** does not function properly either, to the detriment of the main persons concerned. According to this procedure, as soon as a request for asylum has been made, it must immediately be registered and an appointment given to the asylum-seeker within no more than a month. At the Hérault Prefecture, this may well take up to six months and the Foreigners' Service does not seem to remember what requests for asylum have been filed. The upshot is that between the time the request is filed and the appointment, the asylum-seeker has no legal status and is thus liable to prosecution or expulsion from the country.

Mr. D.C., a Turk of Kurdish descent, went to the Hérault Prefecture in July 1999 to file a request for territorial asylum. The employee who attended to him gave him an appointment to submit his request and have a hearing on 13 March 2000, that is, eight months later!!!! However, on 18 October 1999, Mr. D.C. received an expulsion order in the mail to send him back to Turkey. Had the expulsion order not been overturned by the administrative court of Montpellier, he would have been sent back to Turkey before his request for territorial asylum had even been considered .

Finally, no less worrying are the **expulsion decrees** handed down by the Prefect, which are occasionally totally illegal. Many reasons account for this state of affairs: the Prefect may delegate his power to issue expulsion decrees, but not in accordance with the law; the decrees may also be issued hastily, without really examining the personal and family status of the foreigner. In certain instances, the decree concerns people with a lawful status, who cannot therefore be expelled.

“The state police force and justice in Nîmes play the game of exclusion”¹³⁵

In the night of 15 - 16 May 1999, in Vauvert (Gard department, south of France), Mounir Oubadja lay dying. Shot at the age of nineteen with a twenty-two mm. rifle fired on purpose from a window. The killer was a thirty-five year-old truck driver. That evening, seven establishments, bars and shops with a racist reputation, had been ransacked by youngsters from the Bosquets housing scheme, Mounir’s district. Riots had been rife in the commune for two days, ever since Raymond Pia, aged fifty-three, had fired on a group of North Africans he thought were too noisy and had been beaten black and blue.¹³⁶

All in all, according to the newspaper “Justice”, events in Vauvert left one person dead and four injured among the youngsters of the Bosquets scheme. Only two people were investigated for these facts, whereas four youngsters from Vauvert were placed under arrest for real or alleged violence and fourteen were subject to criminal investigations. Given the partial attitude of the law as well as the police force and the political authorities, and in light of the biased manner in which the local press covered the events, CIMADE-Montpellier decided to investigate the events themselves but also the context in which they occurred. “The work involved recalling the facts but above all learning about the institutions: this study highlights how difficult it is for young slum-dwellers to overcome their attitude of indifference, which often leads to violence or delinquency, and to accept a tricky co-existence with institutions little inclined to accept them. Institutions that have a short memory when it comes to tracing the thread of these young people’s past history and the context of total and pervasive

¹³⁵ “*La gendarmerie et la justice nîmoise au jeu de l’exclusion*”, Justice (journal published by the Syndicat de la Magistrature), issue 161, July 1999.

¹³⁶ Source: “*Vauvert, le feu couve encore sous la centre*”, l’Humanité, May 15, 2000.

provocation in which they live, but which seem to have a long memory of the details that turn them into culprits.”¹³⁷

The results of the survey are indeed damning for these institutions (the law, police and political authorities) which, instead of calming things down, act to fan the flames. They reveal the existence of an openly xenophobic and racist atmosphere as well as a genuine system of discrimination towards the foreign (and more specifically North African) community in Vauvert.

Here are a few troubling points to say the least, highlighted by this inquiry:

- How can we be surprised about the excesses of some youngsters when, in a village bar, there is a sign saying: “no dogs or Arabs”?
- How can one account for the attitude of the Vauvert police, who did not try to stop Joël Ellie, the future assassin of Mounir (just before his murderous act, he called the police and announced: “I am going to do something terrible if you don’t come”)? Why did the judiciary choose not to investigate this point?
- Why did the mayor refuse to go and meet the family, friends, neighbours of Mounir after the assassination when they asked urgently for him to do so?
- How can one justify the fact that, a few hours after Mounir’s death, the police descended on some young people for no ostensible reason, roughly arrested one of them, took him into the police station, handcuffed him and beat him black and blue and finally released him almost immediately (because there was absolutely nothing against him)?
- A few days after the violence that left one person dead and five injured, five youngsters of North African descent were victims of a racist attack in a nightclub in the Vauvert region. One ended up with a fractured skull and concussion. When the role of the authorities should consist in calming things down and being watchful of any act that might trigger off violence once again, how can one explain the fact that the police force refused to register the complaint of the victims and failed to notify the court of the aggression?¹³⁸

This survey thus sheds a different light on events in Vauvert. “Racism, xenophobia, discrimination and injustice are things that some young people learn very early in life. They assimilate this situation almost without being actively aware of it. This prevents them from reacting to the situation within the framework of institutions that appear to be accomplices of it, so thoroughly do they ignore them and, more often than not, condemn them. It is hardly surprising that their responses are marginal, rooted in aggressiveness, violence, delinquency. The situation in Vauvert, from the judicial and police points of view, is text book case in this regard.”¹³⁹

At the end of this long section on a unique association – CIMADE – , what conclusions can be drawn concerning its action? First of all, it seems very difficult to assess the results as CIMADE’s activities cover such a wide range of fields. Nonetheless, the association carries out essential and effective work on all the fronts where it is involved: in the defence of

¹³⁷ “*La gendarmerie et la justice nîmoise au jeu de l’exclusion*”, Justice, issue 161, July 1999.

¹³⁸ The Nîmes court did not seem to mind not being informed of this matter.

¹³⁹ “*La gendarmerie et la justice nîmoise au jeu de l’exclusion*”, Justice, issue 161, July 1999.

foreigners, it is the only association allowed in the detention centres, and hence in a position to attack the arbitrariness of the expulsion machine; it takes practical steps to fight discrimination and racist acts by helping the victims in their quest for reparation and justice; it takes a critical look at slip-ups by the authorities, be they in the field of asylum or discrimination, which sometimes systematically affect the same segment of the population ...

Yet, CIMADE is often helpless. It can only protest against ever more restrictive and xenophobic practices in the area of asylum and immigration. Similarly, it can only denounce the “rampant” racism that sometimes seems to guide the behaviour of this or that institution. Indeed, if we were to pinpoint a recurrent theme in this report on CIMADE activities, it would no doubt be the discriminatory, xenophobic, even racist attitude of state institutions; what, in Great Britain, would be called “institutional racism”.¹⁴⁰ In this respect, one of our interlocutors in CIMADE even declared to us that while the far right now receives few votes, its ideas have been widely applied both in the laws on foreigners and in administrative practices or the behaviour of institutions. This is a sorry statement about a country that prides itself on being the home of human rights...

TWO CHURCHES ACTIVE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION: THE REFORMED CHURCH OF ALSACE AND LORRAINE (ERAL) AND THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION OF ALSACE AND LORRAINE (ECAAL)

There are two Protestant churches in the Alsace and Lorraine region: one Lutheran church (ECAAL) and one Reformed church (ERAL). Although they are two distinct entities, the two churches have many different things in common and carry out numerous activities together. This is particularly true of the struggle against racism and intolerance.

ERAL and ECAAL held their joint assembly in November 1998 on the theme of the stranger. They wanted this societal issue to be studied within their parish communities, their church sessions or other church organizations. A dossier entitled “Welcoming foreigners” (definition of a foreigner, official French policy on immigration, history of immigration in Alsace-Lorraine...) comprising guide-lines for Bible work was handed out. The joint Lutheran-Reformed assembly in November 1999 took initial stock of the action carried out and the thought process engaged.

We shall now examine three very different, interesting initiatives at greater length.

¹⁴⁰ This expression became popular through the report on the inquiry into the death of young Stephen Lawrence in 1993 in Great Britain. “Institutional racism” consists in the collective failure of an organisation to supply an appropriate, professional service to certain persons owing to the colour of their skin, their culture or ethnic origins. This form of racism can be detected in procedures, attitudes and behaviours which, as a result of the influence of involuntary prejudice, ignorance, levity and racist stereotypes, end up discriminating against certain minorities” The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Report of an Inquiry by Sir Wiliam MacPherson of Cluny, 46.25

THE “UNDERSTAND AND UNDERTAKE” MOVEMENT

The “understand and undertake” movement brings us to the subject of the church’s attitude in the face of the far right.

The movement was born just after the first round of the presidential elections in 1995 and just before the municipal elections. Confronted with the electoral success of the far right¹⁴¹, a group of Christians, mainly from ECAAL, came together. As one of the members of the movement says, “Understand and undertake” was the result of a shock: an extremist party, advocating a policy opposed to the Gospel on all counts, discriminatory vis-à-vis one segment of the population, blindly admiring of a concept of nation, steeped in barely veiled racism and anti-Semitism, openly declaring its intention to call into question the democratic rules governing the functioning of society, scored a success in reputedly “Christian” places¹⁴² (Alsace and Lorraine are regions with a strong Protestant presence). “Understand and undertake” is thus born of a painful question: why did so many churchgoers vote for a party like the National Front?

“We members of the “understand and undertake” movement wish to express our dismay at the wave of sympathy for the far right and its ideas in our region and in our country. This challenges us as Christians and as citizens;

We maintain that each and every one of us bears our share of responsibility in the current situation. We recognise that we have failed to listen carefully to the anxieties and expectations of the men and women around us.

This two-fold finding should not let us rest. We can no longer be content with superficial answers, like the suggestion that this was a protest vote. The time has come to take the whole phenomenon and what it reveals seriously.”¹⁴³

The aim is not to condemn or run down those who voted for Mr. Le Pen. On the contrary, it is necessary to meet, listen and talk with them to **understand** the real reasons for such a vote. This desire for dialogue does not rule out firmness; it is also important to **undertake** to declare unequivocally that the statements and ideas of the far right are absolutely incompatible with the Christian faith. Indeed, “one cannot confess one’s faith in the God of Jesus Christ and at the same time place one’s trust in a project for society based, amongst other things, on discrimination against one segment of the population”¹⁴⁴. God’s unconditional love for all people is affirmed in Jesus Christ. Christ loves all human beings, whoever they may be. In this love, Christ shows concern for all human suffering, without exception. He expresses his love

¹⁴¹ The Lutheran inspection of Bouxwiller (where the movement “understand and undertake” was born) has 54 polling stations. Of these 54 stations, 45 placed J-M Le Pen, the National Front (far right) in the lead, 22 gave him more than 30% of the votes with peaks up to 40-45% depending on the place. While the average for the far right candidate was about 15% in France, it was 24% in the Alsace region and 28% in this Lutheran Inspection of Bouxwiller! (source: Reformed Church of France, “*La tentation de l’extrême droite*”, P. Kopp. “*Le mouvement Comprendre et s’engager*”, p.160).

¹⁴² Lutheran Evangelical Almanac, 2000: “*Comprendre et s’engager: des militants témoignent*”.

¹⁴³ From the Charter of “understand and undertake”.

¹⁴⁴ Lutheran Evangelical Almanac, 2000 “*Comprendre et s’engager: des militants témoignent*”.

for those who show their suffering by sympathising with extremist theses, as much as for those who worry about this upsurge in intolerance.”¹⁴⁵

The fact that the “understand and undertake” movement is an integral part of the church is regarded as essential. The church is not just one more association fighting extremism and intolerance, but an institution with its own identity and vocation. “It is in our church circles that people are voting for the National Front and it is in our churches that love for one’s neighbour, respect for foreigners, the rights of the weak are proclaimed. It is in our villages that some people make racist and xenophobic remarks. But it is also in our churches that everyone can ask God’s forgiveness for their racism, intolerance, rejection of differences and dialogue.”¹⁴⁶

“INVITE YOUR NEIGHBOUR!” CAMPAIGN

This action was launched by a joint service run by the two Protestant churches of Alsace/Lorraine, the Protestant Service for Relations with Islam (SPRI). The aim of this organization is to build and maintain relations of trust and partnership with the various components of Islam in the region. To this end, the SPRI informs members of the Protestant churches about Islam and encourages meetings and dialogue between Christians and Muslims on a local level. Training courses are also organized for those who wish to deepen their knowledge of Islam. Providing information is the *sine qua non* for objective knowledge about one another. Thus, a number of introductory lectures on Islam are given in the parishes; they seek to promote a better understanding of others and to call preconceived ideas and misconceptions into question. “It is a slow and difficult process; it is not enough to organize lectures and simply convey knowledge to dispel negative views and attitudes. The people must meet, talk together, get to know each other and learn to work together. Only then can dialogue take root.”¹⁴⁷

The “Invite your neighbour!” action is a wonderful illustration of this combination of information and encounters. The spirit of this initiative is to promote, by all possible means, dialogue-oriented education and a culture based on solidarity, respect and life together. The project would not have been possible without partnership between the religious institutions – Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim – located in Strasbourg and Cupertino with public bodies, socio-cultural centres and schools.

A number of events took place in Strasbourg between December 1999 and December 2000 on the theme “Invite your neighbour!”, showing that it is not just a one-off action but an educational activity designed to last.

- To usher in the year 2000 with a flourish, all the inhabitants of la Meinau (district in Strasbourg) were asked to “invite their neighbour” to share a moment of joy and warmth at the breaking of the Ramadan Fast on December 30, 1999. The programme for the evening included a friendly meal, a children’s show and finally an “Invite your neighbour” concert

¹⁴⁵ From the Charter of “To understand and be involved”.

¹⁴⁶ Lutheran Evangelical Almanac, 2000: “*Comprendre et s’engager: des militants témoignent*”.

¹⁴⁷ Ove Ullestad (in charge of the Protestant Service for Relations with Islam (SPRI): “*Deux mosquées à Strasbourg*”, Bulletin d’Information Protestant, issue 1498 (15-30 June 2000).

(Hebrew, Jewish/Spanish and Yiddish songs, traditional Algerian music, Berber and Arab songs...) The party continued the next day for the new year.

- On the 14, 15 and 16 January 2000, the churches, mosques and synagogues focussed their sermons on the theme of the “neighbour”. Unfortunately, attendance was poor.
- During the first half of 2000, five lectures with two or three speakers (Christian, Muslim and Jewish) were held on the “neighbour” theme in various parts of Strasbourg.
- Mutual visits of places of worship were organised (particularly in the two mosques in Strasbourg during the month of Ramadan).
- On 2 April 2000, in conjunction with various partners (Co-ordination of Muslim Associations of Strasbourg, Protestant and Catholic University Chaplaincies...), an “inter-religious café” was organised on the Terrasse des Rohan square in Strasbourg. Three tents were pitched on the square: the first was to welcome people who wished to talk and exchange ideas on the inter-religious theme; the second housed an Arab calligrapher, and the third, Jewish, Christian and Muslim singers and musicians. The very relaxed concept of a “café” provided for great freedom of movement and a spontaneously friendly atmosphere. Furthermore, the choice of a square in the city centre gave the event a high profile and drew a wide audience, particularly among the young and people not accustomed to this kind of event.
- To wind up this action, an international symposium called “The paths of cultural and religious neighbourly relations: diversity and cohesion: three religions, five cities, experiences” was to have been held at the end of November 2000, but unfortunately had to be postponed because of the tension generated by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The idea behind the symposium was to study five particularly significant cities in terms of the “neighbour” theme: Fez, Sarajevo, Jerusalem, Cairo and Strasbourg. These five cities were chosen because each has long been home to Christians, Muslims and Jews and because their future cannot be envisaged without taking account of this religious pluralism. This symposium planned to give the floor to three inhabitants from each city – a Christian, a Muslim and a Jew – so each could bear witness on the theme of cohabitation and neighbourly relations with people of other religions (cohabitation as experienced in practice, the difficulties and crises involved and the steps taken by those concerned to overcome the crises and conflicts).

THE COMMITMENT OF PASTOR FRÉDÉRIC SÉTODZO AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE HAUTEPIERRE HOUSING ESTATE.

Before talking briefly about the commitment of Pastor Sétodzo per se, it is necessary to describe the general background. Hautepierre can be called a “sensitive district”. The estate counts 17,000 inhabitants, three quarters of whom are under the age of 30; there are no fewer than 52 nationalities represented there. Against a background of failure at school, unemployment and exclusion, young people are considered to be at the root of the violence.

Like the district, the parish has over thirty nationalities; it is a “priceless asset” according to pastor Sétodzo. Pastoral work seeks to make the most of this great diversity. “Missionary days”, for example, enable the various nationalities in the parish to present different aspects of their countries. These days are opportunities to rejoice as songs and activities during the

service create a different atmosphere of faith and the meal shared by the community after prayer is also exotic. An inter-religious group has been set up comprising Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims. Amongst other things, the group has produced a calendar setting out the religious holidays of the different religions, organized debates, participated in various ways in the “Invite your neighbour!” action (see above)...

Making contact with young people on the estate is another important facet of pastoral work in Hautepierre. *“I can say without exaggerating that this aspect of my work reflects the grace of God”*, confesses Frédéric Sétodzo.

“Young people are often singled out as the protagonists of violence in the Hautepierre development. Our concern, when we arrived in the parish, was to organize activities for the young, create a place where they would be respected, listened to, and search with them for solutions to the problems of violence on the estate. We started work with six young people. They were to carry out a survey in the district and among all the social classes on the causes of violence. The aim was for them to find out for themselves how the district viewed and experienced the violence and what solutions the inhabitants advocated. At the end of this survey, which lasted six months, the group had grown bigger and included a dozen young people of different origins and religions.

The results of their survey on violence were transcribed and presented in the form of a play called “I am all alone”. That is the young people’s message for adults. The young feel acutely abandoned, even rejected by adults and certain institutions that place them in a given category. Responsibility for violence is shared. More explicitly, the young people tell the adults in the district that the first form of violence is the huge gap between generations, which rules out any form of communication. This play was given in various parts of Alsace and Moselle and even abroad, in the Netherlands. Writing the play triggered positive responses like cleaning the staircases, to show that respect for others entails respect for their shared environment. This action also made it possible to project a more positive image of this youth in search of identity.

*The group now comprises some fifty young Christians, Catholic and Protestant, and Muslims of many different origins. They are better known in the district and beyond as the “HIGH ROCK GOSPEL SINGERS” (the name specifically refers to Hautepierre – highrock) because of their love of Gospel singing.”*¹⁴⁸ The Gospel group of Hautepierre parish set up by Frédéric Sétodzo has really made a name for itself. Shows followed on appearances at weddings or church fêtes, bringing in enough to finance a trip to Togo and Benin in 1999.

This trip enabled the young people to travel outside their own area and meet other cultures and ways of living the faith. Contacts with young people in Togo proved most enriching and enlightening. The trip was also an opportunity to carry out concrete activities like planting 3,000 saplings in a Togolese village. The visit to the historical sites of the slave trade in Benin was also one of the high points of these three weeks.

“Hautepierre is a valuable laboratory and a showcase for the ECAAL. Our project takes account of the need for pastoral work with foreigners in order to give them a real welcome, in the face of the pervading xenophobia and racism. A positive experience of diversity in the life of our churches would in itself be a testimony of love in the heart of our parishes. Missionary

¹⁴⁸ Frédéric Sétodzo.

action has an opportunity to seize here. The farthest corners of the world are here behind the doors of our tower blocks."¹⁴⁹

THE REFORMED CHURCH OF FRANCE

“FOREIGNERS, STRANGERS”, THEME OF THE NATIONAL SYNOD OF THE REFORMED CHURCH OF FRANCE IN 1998

In 1996, the Reformed Church of France decided to carry out a broad-ranging study and reflection on the theme of the stranger. For two years, the churches and local congregations gave thought to this theme. To feed the discussion, five brochures were published. Entitled respectively “Debates”, “Words”, “Policies”, “Stories” and “Sources”, these preparatory brochures are based on inter-disciplinary analyses (biblical, theological, sociological, historical...) They thus provided for a better understanding of the idea of the “stranger” or “foreigner” and the problem of “living together”. The subject was then “sent up” by the local congregations and churches, through the regional synods, to the national synod of Nantes in 1998. The adoption of a five-page synod resolution marked the culmination of the “Foreigners, strangers” process.

In 1996-1997, the churches and local congregations had an opportunity to work at length on this theme. Using the five brochures placed at their disposal, they included the theme in their regular activities (parish council meetings, parish days, sermons, Bible studies, youth evenings, catechism...) or organized specific events (lecture-debates, round tables, film evenings, activities for young people or children, exhibits...) “This series of activities on a local level made it possible, through meetings and contacts with foreigners, to reach out to others, get to know them and thereby learn about oneself, one’s own identity.”¹⁵⁰

Work on a local and regional level provided food for thought on the theme of the stranger; this was broadly reflected in the synodal resolution: difficulties and ambiguities involved in the issue of foreigners (the choice of the title “foreigners, strangers” indicates the range of situations covered by the term “foreigner”), the human problem of the stranger (the context of uneasiness, economic precariousness and fragility in which xenophobia and racism develop or the scapegoat mechanism), the place of the stranger in Christian identity.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Pierre Bühler, “*Etrangers, étrangers*”, synod report by Pierre Bühler”.

The resolution of the 1998 national synod of the Reformed Church of France¹⁵¹

The resolution was accepted by 80 out of 92 votes.

In its *preamble*, it advocates *“the coexistence of populations on French territory”*, recalling the spirit of the authors of the Edict of Nantes who, 400 years ago, *“made it possible for human beings torn by deep disagreements to live together on the territory of a single kingdom”*.

Then comes the affirmation of *common convictions*:

° *“We need foreigners as we seek to express and assume our identity as Christian men and women: they remind us of the part of the stranger within ourselves and in God.*

° *“We affirm that racist and xenophobic talk and attitudes that demonize foreigners and blame them for every ill and disorder, are totally incompatible with the openness and welcome advocated by the Christian faith.*

° *We reject the ideal of purity because it enslaves us; conversely, we consider the mixing of our identities, the diversity of our roots, our communities and our nations as an enrichment.*

On the basis of these convictions, the national synod expresses its outrage against all that damages and hurts human beings; in the search for justice and equity, it calls on all people and bodies responsible for society clear-sightedly and serenely to uphold the concern “to live together” in dignity and respect for all the partners involved.”

The resolution also sheds light on the framework in which the theme of the stranger should be viewed. *“(…)The status of foreigner covers many different situations, ranging from the visitor to the asylum seeker, including the foreign student or the migrant worker. Experiences may therefore be very diverse. Many foreigners feel fully integrated in France, just as many French people are willing to live together with foreigners.*

Nonetheless, for many different reasons, the welcome given foreigners and their integration are currently a problem; many foreigners find themselves rejected, excluded and therefore marginalized by a distant, reserved, even frankly hostile native population. At the same time, many French people feel insecure, left alone to cope with their distress and fear, with nowhere to express their confusion. Their isolation and the manner in which they feel they are being judged encourage them to become inward-looking and focus on their private life, their cultural community, their specific background. This is what gives rise to mistrust and exclusion, feelings of fear and misunderstanding vis-à-vis “those who are not from here”, who are “different from us”. If these feelings are exacerbated, they soon give way to hatred, particularly if identities on either side become overly rigid and trigger a clash of cultures, as is the case with the upsurge in certain forms of fundamentalism. The world-wide phenomenon of migration and economic globalisation, which goes hand in hand with deregulation, add a feeling of helplessness which in no way improves the general atmosphere of anxiety and concern. (...)”

The resolution makes four appeals:

- It expresses the wish that the local churches of the Reformed Church of France should take account of *“the fears, worries, conflicts that so often stand in the way of an open attitude towards others*

¹⁵¹ Reformed Church of France, national synod 1998, see Bulletin d’information protestant, issue 1460 – 28 May 1998.

and reach out to foreigners and those who view them as a threat”, foster inter-religious dialogue, take practical action to welcome foreigners, in particular immigrants at risk...

- The resolution calls on members of the churches as citizens to *“feel compelled to welcome the presence of foreigners from the standpoint of their Christian identity and to prevent this identity from becoming inward-looking”, “to translate their spiritual beliefs into carefully thought out ethical and political commitments based on justice towards foreigners, rooted in the fruitful tension between their two citizenships, spiritual and secular”...*
- *“To men and women – French or foreign – who make up the community living in France”, it expresses the wish “that they work together for coexistence that excludes no one and respects the dignity of all men and women”, “that they seek integration so all can live together, different yet equal”... Finally, the resolution calls on the authorities to work on legislation “that considers immigrants as subjects of the law and no longer as objects for the police”, “to take all the requisite measures to eliminate hatred”, “to resist the temptation of becoming involved with xenophobic and racist tendencies that demonize those who are different, foreigners, and to refuse to use the issue of foreigners for the purpose of political propaganda”, “to advocate an asylum policy worthy of the name”...*
- Finally, in order to be more than just “fine words” and before an invitation to continue work, the resolution lists a series of actions: for a “more generous” policy to give clandestine immigrants a legal status, against double sentencing, for the right to vote in local elections for foreigners who have lived in France for several years....

Pierre Bühler, the rapporteur on the “foreigners, strangers” theme at the national synod, underscores that *“the theme will only be dealt with if we can “send it down” again to the local congregations, where coexistence actually occurs.” “In this sense”, he goes on, “the national synod should not be an end but a new beginning”.*¹⁵²

THE REFORMED CHURCH OF FRANCE IN THE FACE OF THE FAR RIGHT

In this section, we look again at the theme of the far right. This time, we highlight two responses by the church to the far right and the ideas it spreads. First, it produced a book called “the temptation of the far right” which seeks to foster a better understanding of the phenomenon and gives some indications as to the attitudes to adopt. The second initiative is far more concrete; we shall look at the work accomplished by a Protestant parish in a town run by the National Front.

¹⁵² Pierre Bühler, “*Etrangers, étrangers*”, le rapport synodal de Pierre Bühler”

“The temptation of the far right”

The book called “The temptation of the far right” springs from a wish expressed by the synod of the Reformed Church of France. In 1997, when the successes of the National Front were most impressive¹⁵³, the synod asked that “thought be given at all levels of our Church to the rise of the far right”.¹⁵⁴ To this end, a working group was set up to prepare a document that would fuel the discussion and act as a basis for adopting a stance.

Even if the far right now carries less weight in the elections¹⁵⁵, such a publication was much needed. Indeed, the far right has by no means disappeared from the political landscape and the ideas it advocates are, and may always be, very much alive. “Thus, the news reminds us daily that ‘the temptation of the far right’ is in many respects just as present.”¹⁵⁶ No one is safe from this temptation. Indeed, the vote for the far right expresses fear, uncertainty or lack of understanding shared by a wide segment of the population. It is therefore important to understand and to make room within the church for such feelings. At the same time, there is no doubt as to the fact “that racist and xenophobic talk and attitudes that demonize foreigners and blame them for every ill and disorder are totally incompatible with the openness and welcome advocated by the Christian faith”, as stated in the final resolution of the national synod in Nantes in 1998.¹⁵⁷ That is the basic line of this book.

This book was written by several people, with different approaches.

A theological approach first of all, asking the necessary questions about the role of the church in politics and, more specifically, vis-à-vis the far right. “It is not up to the church to instruct the faithful on how to vote, but it can and must help them to think matters over. Creating bridges between theological reflection and socio-political reality is always a risk, the risk of being mistaken, of turning faith into ideology, of being conformed to the times. However, there are times when saying nothing is even more risky, for the credibility of what the church has to say in the world is at stake.”¹⁵⁸

A psychological approach is essential in trying to understand the success of the ideas of the far right. It is past master at playing with the resentments and fears, avowed or unavowed, that abound in society. “It is not enough to understand the emotional mechanisms that move us. Our critical mind must also analyse the ways and means whereby the far right uses these mechanisms to its advantage. It uses our desire for security and proximity and exploits our fragility.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ J-M Le Pen, the National Front (NF) candidate, obtained 15% of the vote during the first round of the 1995 presidential election. In the 1995 municipal elections and the partial elections in 1997, the National Front won the town halls of four towns: Orange, Marignane, Vitrolles (in 1997) and Toulon (fifteenth biggest town in France!).

¹⁵⁴ “*La tentation de l’extrême droite*”, E.R.F., p.7.

¹⁵⁵ The far right was seriously weakened when in January 1999, it split into two movements: the National Front (NF) led by J;M Le Pen and the National Republican Movement (MNR) led by Le Pen’s former lieutenant, Bruno Mégret. The poor results of the far right in the 1999 European elections confirmed this weakening.

¹⁵⁶ “*La tentation de l’extrême droite*”, E.R.F. ;,p.8.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.9.

¹⁵⁸ “*La tentation de l’extrême droite*”, E.R.F.,p.13.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.63.

This book also tries to situate the right wing in an historical context and a political environment, in France but also in Europe. Is it a new phenomenon? Who votes for the far right?...It is important also to analyse the reasons why it proves so attractive: “the insecurity at the heart of the statements of the far right”, “unemployment, the indirect cause of the rise of the far right”...

“How can we reconcile the requisite condemnation of the ideas of the far right and the indispensable dialogue with the men and women who share them? What course should one steer between conniving silence and counter-productive invective?”¹⁶⁰ The last chapter, called “public statements”, offers a few avenues for thought and action in terms of the attitude to adopt vis-à-vis the far right by giving some examples: the Austrian Protestant Churches and the Liberal Party (FPÖ) of Jörg Haider, the “understand and undertake” movement (see above), the example of local churches that have to contend with far right municipal authorities....

“The temptation of the far right” is an essential tool for those who wish to detect and rid themselves of the temptation to reject others, form an opinion on the far right or strengthen their commitment. Indeed “proclaiming ‘I am neither a racist nor a xenophobe’ is most virtuous but to believe it would be misleading. For we all are at the outset, whoever we may be... Truly, fruitfully, loving one’s neighbour can only be the result of awareness and surpassing oneself... a maturity that ever remains to be achieved...”¹⁶¹

A local church that has to contend with a far right municipal government: the case of Orange

A peaceful town in the south of France known above all for its antique Roman theatre, Orange, 28 000 inhabitants, suddenly hit the headlines in June 1995 when Jacques Bompard, top of the National Front list, became mayor. Like other towns “conquered” by the far right (Toulon, Marignane and Vitrolles in 1997), Orange was to become a National Front show-case and an experimental laboratory for its segregationist ideas. In the name of strict management of public funds, the town hall pulled out of structures that were too costly and did away with a number of cultural and social associations or placed them in a difficult situation by cutting their subsidies. In connection with social insertion activities, Jacques Bompard explained that he could not subsidise “*Moroccan or Algerian associations that sought to integrate Moroccans or Algerians*”¹⁶² (a patently false affirmation). The use of municipal premises became ever more problematical for associations that did not suit the town hall. While work was carried out to restore the town hall square and the city centre, the outlying districts where many immigrants live, “*the undesirable populations*”¹⁶³ according to Jacques Bompard, were

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁶¹ Thierry DE SAUSSURE: “*Inquiétante, attrayante et fascinante étrangeté*”. Brochure Sources d’Eglise, débats n°2 “*Etranger, étrangers*”, p.36 Information-Evangélisation (E.R.F.) et Les Berger & Mages, from “*la tentation de l’extrême droite*”, E.R.F., p.9.

¹⁶² Jacques Bompard quoted in “*Malgré son éclatement, l’extrême droite espère conserver des municipalités*”, Le Monde, 22 February 2001.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

totally neglected and increasingly run-down. The local employment office was simply turned into premises for the municipal police!¹⁶⁴

In the face of municipal bias, watchdog associations were set up. Under the circumstances, the Reformed Church of France could not just fold its arms. The parish council of the Reformed parish of Orange unanimously voted in favour of resistance alongside its pastor, Martine Kentzinger, who readily acknowledges that the election of Jacques Bompard as mayor of Orange “*completely changed her ministry*”.

Resistance first consisted in making the parish hall available to any association banished from premises belonging to the municipality. The parish council also lent the hall for lectures or other cultural events. Thus, the series of lectures organised by the “Agora” association would no doubt not have taken place without a helping hand from the Protestant parish of Orange since the municipality did not authorize the use of its premises. Given the themes covered by the lectures between 1995 and 1996 (“the far right”, “democracy or consensus”...), one can readily understand this obstruction... In July 1996, the Protestant church of Orange hosted an exhibit on the fiftieth anniversary of human rights in conjunction with Amnesty International, ACAT (Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture) and CIMADE. A lecture/debate on the subject rounded off by classical music was also organised. These lectures and meetings, according to Martine Kentzinger, were all messages and implicit answers to the policy of the National Front.

Many parishioners are active in the ecumenical group “Réagir” (React), a working group made up of Catholics and Protestants, pastors and priests, members of religious orders and various associations. Faced with mounting intolerance and xenophobia, the group made an appeal at the beginning of 1996 in the form of a text called “it is urgently necessary to react!”

On 24 December 1996, Abbé Goulé, one of the priests from the Catholic parish of Orange, held the annual mass for people who had retired from the national police force. He reminded members of the audience, including the mayor, that “*the Gospel is a permanent fight against the temptation to become inward-looking*”¹⁶⁵ and that all Christians were in duty bound to welcome foreigners. Mayor Jacques Bompard was angered and reacted swiftly. In a letter sent to the priest, the mayor criticized him for not having thanked the former policemen in his sermon for “*they spent their life enforcing law and order in our society for the common good*”¹⁶⁶ and regretted that not a single word had been said “*to recall the love of one’s native land, which was on the edge of the abyss*”¹⁶⁷. As to the obligation for all Christians to welcome foreigners, the National Front representative wondered “*whether systematic preference for strangers to the detriment of neighbours was not a perversion of charity*”¹⁶⁸. “*Love of one’s closest brethren, those of our beloved France, springs from the deepest supernatural instinct, which the Lord placed at the forefront in the commandments about one’s neighbour,*”¹⁶⁹ he went on to say in his letter.

¹⁶⁴ For this picture of Orange, see: “A Orange après Mosaïque, le social...”, Causes Communes, n°5- 20 November 1995; “Malgré son éclatement, l’extrême droite espère conserver des municipalités”, Le Monde, 22 February 2001 and “Des politiques de ségrégation sociale plus ou moins avouées”, Le Monde, 23 February 2001.

¹⁶⁵ “A Orange, des chrétiens se rebiffent”: La Vie, n°2684 – 6 February 1997.

¹⁶⁶ “L’épître du maire Front national au curé d’Orange”, Le Monde, 28 December 1996.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

In reaction to this unacceptable outburst, the ecumenical group “Réagir” considered it necessary to speak up again and “*call on everyone to be careful with their references, to study the Bible seriously and not construe a given declaration by the Church just any old how.*”¹⁷⁰

“It is urgently necessary to react...”

The authorities and the Church “ *We must obey God rather than any human authority*”
Acts 5:29

Politicians are elected to run the “city” honestly and intelligently for the benefit of all the inhabitants. This temporary mission does not authorize any elected person to meddle, as such, with the contents of the church’s message or to pass judgement publicly in order to intimidate or even silence it in its responsibility to transmit the message entrusted to it.

The “neighbour” “*The neighbour is the one who showed mercy to the other*”
Luke 10: 30–37

The preferential love naturally given to those closest to one is obviously not denied by the Gospel. (...) In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus invites all those who listened to become the neighbours of those whom they felt were furthest away in order to create a genuine human community worthy of the Kingdom of God. (...)

Gentiles “*For if you love those who love you...If you greet only your brothers and sisters...Do not even the Gentiles do the same?*”
Matthew 5: 46–47

Jesus Christ teaches us that true community and true proximity are those God gives us in declaring himself to be our Father. To affirm in the name of nature that the neighbour we have to love first is the one with whom we have blood ties is a form of paganism.

The homeland “*All of these died in faith, without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were foreigners and strangers on the earth*”
Hebrews 11:13–16

We believe that the earth is for everyone and that no one owns it. (...) If the place of origin of a people becomes a holy place, the property of recognized natives, the vision of the world becomes narrow, restricted and exclusive. Nationalism quickly steps in to help this ideology contrary to the biblical vision of a humanity moving towards the promised Land.

The stranger “*The foreigner who reside with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the foreigner as yourself.*”
Leviticus 19:34 and 25:23

¹⁷⁰ “*Il est urgent de réagir...*” Ecumenical Group “Réagir”, 27 January 1997.

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me"

Matthew 25:35

Stranger must become fellow citizens for us. We must treat them as God treats them, we must welcome them with bread and clothes and thus it is Jesus himself that we are welcoming. The Gospel leads us to live in a state of permanent tension between our human roots and the challenge of a world in which order would turn us into something different from a pilgrim people in this universe that belongs to God: "*the land is mine*" said the Lord, "*you are merely aliens and tenants.*"

Avignon, January 27, 1997

After the 1995 municipal elections, an inter-religious group was set up in order "to get to know and understand each other better". A dozen people representing the four main religions (Jewish, Muslim, Catholic and Protestant) made up the core of the group; pastor Martine Kentzinger was the chief facilitator of the group.

"Catholic and Protestant Christians, Jews and Muslims of the city of Orange and nearby communes, we are in permanent dialogue as members of the different religious communities of our town. We have a deep sense of being able to have consideration for each other despite our differences, to listen to each other without denying our divergences, to find a genuine convergence in our prayers. Our action is aimed at developing respect and establishing or re-establishing links between believers of various origins."

The group refuses to wage a political fight but disseminates ideas that objectively counter the ideology of the National Front. It therefore provides an indirect answer to the far right. In this respect, it is not surprising that the group acquired new momentum at the time when the atmosphere in Orange was particularly nefarious: distribution of National Front pamphlets at the door of a secondary school denouncing the "*ethnic gangs*" that "*lay down their law*"¹⁷¹, foul insinuations like the campaign launched by the town hall in the summer of 1996 against a mysterious "*Islamic association*" that supposedly intended to create a "*Koranic school*" in the city centre¹⁷² (according to the municipal newsletter "*more than 1 400 inhabitants of Orange*"¹⁷³ had almost unanimously voted against the project in a questionnaire). Indeed, the opinion of the mayor of Orange on inter-religious dialogue and more specifically the group is clear-cut: "*Buffoonery! Asses!*" For him, indeed, "*Islam is a racist religion; it is therefore difficult to deal with it in a tolerant manner. Allah's paradise is not mine*".¹⁷⁴

Members of the inter-religious group decided to meet every month to discuss topics relating to their faith, their liturgy or their vision of the world. Their first success consisted in organizing six lectures on the theme "What do fundamentalisms reveal about our society?" between November 1996 and May 1997. Organized in conjunction with the Barroux¹⁷⁵ "open

¹⁷¹ "A Orange, des chrétiens se rebiffent": La Vie, n°2684 – 6 February 1997

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ In Le Barroux, a village located in the Protestant parish of Orange, two traditionalist Catholic monasteries, closely linked to the National Front, were created about ten years ago. In reaction to certain incidents, a watchdog association was set up to look at the monastery "squarely in the face". "*Les yeux ouverts*" accuses the monks of always being highly honoured to welcome the cream of the Catholic far right and voting unanimously for the

eyes” association, the series of lectures was a resounding success, with over 150 people at each evening.

The inter-religious group can take credit for a number of other lectures, round tables and exhibits. In 1998, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10 December 1948) and the four hundredth anniversary of the Edict of Nantes (13 April 1598), the inter-religious group and the “open eyes” association invited Amnesty International, ACAT and representatives of the four main religions (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim) to speak on the theme “Religions and human rights”. It is worth noting that this event was held in a state school but that the associations “had to fight to obtain the stamp of the town hall security services on time”!¹⁷⁶ In connection with this double commemoration, an exhibit on the Edict of Nantes called “from tolerance to civil and religious peace” was also held in Barbara Hendricks school and then in the Orange Protestant church; a lecture/debate on “Are human rights universal?” was also organised by the inter-religious group and “open eyes” in conjunction with Amnesty International and ACAT. In 1999, the group set aside a special day for information and reflection on problems relating to intercultural communication. In the summer of 2000, as municipal elections were looming on the horizon, a round table on “power, politics and religion” brought together various Jewish, Muslim and Protestant speakers.

“What I want to express as I leave the parish in Orange is my joy and my thanks for all the links forged since the 1995 municipal elections. Indeed, through the inter-religious group, it has been possible to weave ties based on respect and knowledge of others as a testimony of our desire for the inhabitants of our town to live in harmony. (...)”¹⁷⁷

Municipal elections (March 2001)

“This second round of municipal and cantonal elections confirms that those who considered the far right had died in the split in January 1999 had spoken too soon. It is certainly weaker. (...) However, apart from Toulon, the far right has kept the towns won in 1995: Orange (Vaucluse) and Marignane (Bouches-du-Rhône), in addition to Vitrolles, won in a separate election in 1997. In Orange, the mayor, Jacques Bompard (NF) was re-elected as of the first round with a score of 59%. (...)”¹⁷⁸

The disenchanted comment of Martine Kentzinger, pastor in Orange from 1995 to 2000: *“What are insults, contempt for others, cultural dictatorship, the negation of humanitarian considerations, in comparison with a magnificent fountain and streets with white paving stones in the city centre? For the election of a mayor: nothing!”*

National Front (“A Orange, des chrétiens se rebiffent”, La Vie, n°2684 – 6 February 1997, and “De l’édit de Nantes aux droits de l’homme”, Réforme, 21-27 May 1998).

¹⁷⁶ Martine Kentzinger

¹⁷⁷ Martine Kentzinger (“Réflexions et ouverture pour unique démarche”, La Provence, 8 June 2000).

¹⁷⁸ “L’extrême droite conserve ses bastions malgré ses divisions”, Le Monde, 19 March 2001.

“GYPSIES, OVERLOOKED BY HISTORY”

That is the name of a project on the gypsy Holocaust. To compensate the spoliated victims of the Holocaust, the European governments allocated 2.5 million French francs to CIMADE, which has been entrusted with the project in consultation with the Evangelical Gypsy Mission of France.¹⁷⁹

Financing is in fact covered by an international fund, the “Nazi Persecutee Relief Fund”, made up of contributions from member states. “Its goal is to play a role in the reparations owed by these states to the victims of Nazi persecution. Of course, the racial policy implemented by the Nazi regimes mainly affected the Jews; however, racial measures also exacted a heavy toll from the gypsies.”¹⁸⁰ It is estimated that between 160 000 and 500 000 Roma/Gypsies disappeared in the death camps.¹⁸¹

Nazi barbarism is unfortunately not a parenthesis or exception in the history of the Roma/Gypsy community. Indeed, the systematic elimination carried out during the Second World War is part of a long tradition of “anti-gypsy feeling” in Europe. The example of France is enlightening. As of 1940, the Vichy regime collaborated actively with the genocide by interning the gypsies in camps; this was all the easier considering the “travellers” had been labelled as “nomads” since 1912. Their misfortunes were far from over despite the fall of the Reich; the gypsies who escaped deportation remained interned until 1946, that is one year after the country was liberated!¹⁸² In Sweden, they were the victims of a mandatory sterilization campaign from 1934 to ...1975. In Switzerland, the “Oeuvre d’entraide pour les enfants de la grande route” Association, created in 1926 by the highly respected foundation to assist abandoned children, Pro-Juventute, and largely subsidised by the Swiss government, sought from 1926 to 1972 forcibly to settle the “travellers”. Thus, “for nearly half a century, over 600 Jenisch children were forcibly removed from their families by the “Oeuvre d’entraide pour les enfants de la grande route”. They were systematically placed in foster families or orphanages, when they were not thrown into prison or even interned in psychiatric hospitals. They were to be shaped in accordance with the ideals of sedentary society. They endured humiliation, mistreatment and racism.”¹⁸³

Today, the status of the Roma is particularly worrying. “It is in eastern and central Europe that their fate is most dramatic. Their fundamental rights are violated, denied daily. Racist aggression, urban and school segregation, discrimination at work, constant police brutality, biased justice: whole populations have been parked in slums, sordid ghettos, occasionally the victims of fatal attacks which all too often go unpunished.”¹⁸⁴ In the Czech Republic, the unemployment rate among the Roma minority is approximately 90% and since 1989, 31 Roma have died in racist attacks by skinheads, not to mention the building of a wall separating the Roma from the remainder of the population in Usti nad Labem in 1999. In Hungary, the Roma minority, made up of between 400 000 and 500 000 people, is often the target of skinheads or various racist groups. In that country, 60 to 80% of the Gypsies are

¹⁷⁹ “*Holocauste tzigane: 2,5 millions de francs pour deux projets où la CIMADE et la mission tzigane sont partenaires*”, Bulletin d’information protestant (BIP), n°1500 – 15-31 July 2000.

¹⁸⁰ “*Tziganes, les oubliés de l’histoire*”, Causes Communes, n°30 – November-December 2000.

¹⁸¹ Figures taken from “*Tziganes, les oubliés de l’histoire*”, Causes Communes, n° 30 – November-December 2000. The figures vary. Claire Auzias, in her book, “*Samudaripen, le genocide des Tziganes*” estimates that between 250,000 and 500,000 Roma/Gypsies were exterminated out of the 700,000 living in Europe.

¹⁸² “*Samudaripen, le genocide des Tziganes*”, Claire Auzias, L’esprit frappeur, Paris, 2000.

¹⁸³ “*Chasse aux Tziganes en Suisse*”, Le Monde diplomatique, October 1999.

¹⁸⁴ “*Leçon tzigane*”, Le Monde, 27 August 2000.

unemployed.¹⁸⁵ In Kosovo, the Roma minority, after being manipulated by the Milosevic regime, is now subject to persecution by the Albanian community which accuses it of collaborating in the atrocities of the Serb regime. According to the figures of the Institute for War and Peace (IWPR), of the 150 000 Roma in Kosovo at the beginning of 1999, 120 000 were forced into exile.¹⁸⁶

The fate of the Roma/Gypsy community is not much better in western Europe. The unfettered xenophobia during the annual gypsy gathering in August 2000 in a small commune in north-east France bears witness to this fact.¹⁸⁷

The project is in two parts:

The first will consist in building dispensaries for street children in Romania in conjunction with the GATIEF Roma association (Gypsies and Travellers International Evangelical Fellowship). These street children have often been abandoned by Roma families that could no longer feed them. In the current catastrophic economic and social situation in Romania, the Roma act as scapegoats. The systematic discrimination, rejection and hatred they endure places them in a dramatic position.

The second part, called “memory”, consists in spreading knowledge of the gypsy genocide by producing a film and informative brochure. This film is to be projected as widely as possible. Few know, in fact, about the genocide of the gypsies. “The impact of pictures, which is one of the best ways of ‘making an imprint’ on people’s memories, seems more necessary than ever today in order to recall the history of suffering and, to call it by its name, ethnocide”,¹⁸⁸ given the current situation of the Roma/gypsies. “To make sure this never occurs again, it is necessary to inform, educate and thereby destroy the preconceived ideas and stereotypes which far too many “good” citizens still grow up with. “Gypsy = nomad, marginal, delinquent, thief, dirty, no-good!” This image, instilled in children, breeds hatred and contempt. Only memory and the lessons we can learn from it can protect us. This memory has to be upheld. Finally, and above all, it needs to be brought alive.”¹⁸⁹

The audiovisual document that will be made will be based mainly on testimonies: the testimonies of gypsies who were deported, interned and witnessed the extermination of thousands of fellow gypsies; the testimonies of deportees or internees who met gypsies in the camps; the testimonies of people called the “just” (people who saved Jews during the Second World War), who helped gypsies to escape death; and also the testimonies of historians who explain how the gypsy Holocaust worked and what the context was (passive attitude, or even collaboration of certain governments).

These testimonies will raise the inevitable questions:

- “Why and how, in all these European countries with such different cultures, did rejection and the hateful mechanisms of anti-gypsy feeling develop? How do things stand today?”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Source: Searchlight, April 2000.

¹⁸⁶ In this respect, read “*les Tziganes, indésirables au Kosovo*”, Le Monde diplomatique, November 1999.

¹⁸⁷ “*Le rassemblement tzigane de Chambley s’ouvre dans l’hostilité environnante*”, Le Monde, 27 August 2000: “Since Thursday August 24, 35 000 travellers have been attending the annual gathering of Protestant Gypsies in a little commune in Lorraine. Faced with rejection by the locally elected officers but supported by the prefecture, they denounce the “blows” and “constant rejection”.

¹⁸⁸ “*Tziganes: les oubliés de l’Histoire*”, description of the project: “memory”.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

- What lessons should be drawn from history in order to cope with the future and prevent the demons that haunt our memory from raising their heads and slipping insidiously into our daily lives? How can one fight indifference and xenophobia?”¹⁹¹

“The images will show these men and women, witnesses full of questions, and also the places full of memories and the places of today. Finally, they will depict the daily life of gypsies in Europe. Testimonies and images of the past, present and for the future, so the roads of Europe are the paths of hope.”¹⁹²

Roma – Gypsies: a few facts and figures

Who exactly are the gypsies? What does the term “Roma” mean? Are the Roma Gypsies or vice-versa?...It is very difficult to answer these questions as the names vary greatly.

However, it is possible to give a few facts and figures:

First and foremost, it is worth noting that the people known as Roma/Gypsies are very diverse. It is now widely acknowledged that the Roma/Gypsies originally came from India.¹⁹³ This discovery springs from linguistic studies that highlighted troubling similarities between “Romani”, the original language spoken by the Roma/Gypsies, and Sanskrit.¹⁹⁴ The Roma/Gypsies, according to historians and linguists, left India in successive waves starting from the VIIIth century.¹⁹⁵ They then scattered across Europe between the XIV and XVth centuries, mainly in central and eastern Europe (where they mainly still live today).¹⁹⁶ These successive migrations and dispersals divided the Roma/Gypsy people into any number of different entities:¹⁹⁷ gypsies in Andalusia or Catalonia, Manouche and Gypsies from Spain in France, Jenisch (or Yenich) and Sintis in Germany, Roma in the Czech Republic, Slovakia or Hungary...It is worth noting that the majority of Roma/Gypsies are not nomads, as one might think. On the contrary, about 60% have settled in one place.¹⁹⁸ The number of Roma/Gypsies in Europe is a controversial question. Official statistics greatly underestimate the numbers of the Roma/Gypsy minorities.¹⁹⁹ According to the

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Source: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), High Commissioner on National Minorities: Report on the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area, March 2000 (http://www.osce.org/hcnm/documents/report_roma_sinti_2000.pdf).

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Today, it is estimated that the Roma/Gypsies of Europe speak no fewer than 60 different Romani dialects and do not always understand each other (Source: Angus Fraser: “The Gypsies”, 1995, quoted in Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), High Commissioner on National Minorities: Report on the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area, March 2000 (http://www.osce.org/hcnm/documents/report_roma_sinti_2000.pdf)).

¹⁹⁸ Source: Commission on Human Rights: Prevention of discrimination against minorities and protection of minorities, problems relating to the human rights of the Roma and measures to protect them, 23 June 2000 (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/28).

¹⁹⁹ “(...) Another reason why statistics on the Roma are not reliable is that certain Roma themselves may declare they belong to another community making up the society in which they live, for safety’s sake as they know the Roma are not loved and are the subject of discriminatory measures. Strong memories of the extermination of the Roma by the Nazis during the Second World War also play a role. The absence of reliable statistics can furthermore be explained by the fact that in certain countries, people are requested during a census to declare in which community they would prefer to be included. In other countries, individuals are not bound to declare their ethnic origins (...)” (Human Rights Commission: Prevention of discrimination against minorities and protection

figures supplied by states to the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Roma/Gypsies number no more than 2.5 million; according to the same entity, they number between 6 and 8 million on the basis of unofficial estimates.²⁰⁰ The Human Rights Commission gives a figure of 8 to 10 million Roma/Gypsies living in Europe.²⁰¹

As regards terminology, official documents published by the United Nations (UN) or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) use the word „Roma“. We believe this name has two advantages. First, it appears more general than the term “Gypsy” and can therefore include such different groups as the Manouch and Jenisch (or Yenich) for example. Indeed, the word “Roma” refers, as we have stressed, to the “Romani” language, which is vaguely shared by all the Roma/Gypsies. Second, the word “Roma” is far more neutral than “Gypsy”, which may have a negative or even racist connotation. In the back of people’s minds, Gypsy is often equated with delinquent and marginal (see above). For many Romanians, “Gypsy” is a real insult;²⁰² the Nazis called travellers “Zigeuner” (Gypsies in German) before exterminating them...

However, one has to nuance the two advantages of the name “Roma”. First, the Roma, according to several sources, are but one group among many others. The Human Rights Commission considers in particular that the Roma represent 70% of the “Roma, Gypsies and travellers”.²⁰³ One also finds an equally general term (“Roma/Gypsies and Travellers”) in the reports of the European Commission against racism and intolerance (ECRI).²⁰⁴ Second, the term “Gypsy” does not have the same negative, racist connotation throughout Europe and in all languages, particularly in French. It is interesting to note, for example, that the French “travellers” – or some of them to be more precise – seem to consider themselves gypsies (borne out by the name “Gypsy Evangelical Mission” mentioned above), whereas their German “cousins” prefer to call themselves “Roma and Sintis”.

In conclusion, the words “Roma” and “Gypsies” are often used as synonyms. In official documents, the preference is for “Roma”, which appears to be more “politically correct”, even if one should really use the expression “Roma/Gypsies and travellers”. It would appear that the term “Roma” applies more to the “Roma/Gypsies and travellers” of central and eastern Europe, while the term “Gypsies” is more readily used for those of western Europe.

of minorities, problems relating to the human rights of the Roma and measures to protect them, June 23, 2000 (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/28)

(<http://www.unhchr.ch/Huricoda/Hur.../7bafefccd5e44e9c12569280033cc2c?Opendocument>).

²⁰⁰ European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) (<http://errc.org/publications/factsheets/numbers.html>).

²⁰¹ Human Rights Commission: Prevention of discrimination against minorities and protection of minorities, problems relating to the human rights of the Roma and measures to protect them, June 23, 2000 (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/28)

(<http://www.unhchr.ch/Huricoda/Hur.../7ba0fefccd5e44e9c12569280033cc2c?Opendocument>).

²⁰² Source: “*Tziganes, les oubliés de l’histoire*”, Causes Communes, n°30 – November – December 2000.

²⁰³ Human Rights Commission: Prevention of discrimination against minorities and protection of minorities, problems relating to the human rights of the Roma and measures to protect them, June 23, 2000 (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2000/28)

(<http://www.unhchr.ch/Huricoda/Hur.../7ba0fefccd5e44e9c12569280033cc2c?Opendocument>).

²⁰⁴ Particularly the one on the United Kingdom (ECRI: second report on the United Kingdom, 16 adopted June 2000, available on the website www.ecri.coe.int).

SOME OTHER INITIATIVES

THE REACTION OF THE CHURCHES TO ANTI-SEMITIC AGGRESSION FOLLOWING EVENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In reaction to the violence that flared up in Israel and the Palestinian territories, a worrying wave of anti-Semitism swept through France. Since 28 September 2000 – the date of the Palestinian uprising – tension between the Muslim and Jewish communities in France has risen dramatically;

Under the circumstances, pastor Jean-Arnold de Clermont, president of the French Protestant Federation (FPF), joined representatives of other monotheistic religions in calling for calm and restraint.

“Serious, painful events are occurring in the Middle East. There have been deaths on both sides. The conflict could spread.

We wish to express concern at the tense atmosphere these events may create in France itself. We call on all our fellow citizens to remain calm and serene to avoid any incidents.

France, land of fraternity and human rights, must not accept any occurrence that would undermine human dignity.

Each and every one of us, each citizen, each believer, can remain faithful to his or her beliefs while refusing hatred of others and sectarianism.

We firmly believe that all our fellow citizens will hear the voice of reason and act with respect for the dignity of others.”

Paris, October 11, 2000.

Great Rabbi Joseph SITMUK
Chief Rabbi of France
Doctor Dalil BOUBAKEUR
Dean of the Muslim Institute of the Paris Great Mosque
Pastor Jean-Arnold de CLERMONT
President of the French Protestant Federation
Mgr. Louis-Marie BILLÉ
Archbishop of Lyons, President of the French Bishops Conference

After the slogans “death to Jews” heard during demonstrations for the Palestinian people and anti-Semitic graffiti, violence became far more serious. On the night of 10 October, the Trappes synagogue (Paris region) was partially destroyed by arson.²⁰⁵ This was the beginning of a long series.²⁰⁶ The same day, Molotov cocktails thrown by unidentified individuals

²⁰⁵ See “*La synagogue de Trappes ravagée par un incendie*”, Le Monde, 13 October 2000.

²⁰⁶ See “*Série d’agressions antisémites en France*”, Le Monde, 13 October 2000, “*Les agressions antisémites se multiplient en France*”, Le Monde, 15-16 October 2000 or “*Nouvelles agressions en France contre des lieux de culte juifs*”, Le Monde, 17 October 2000.

damaged another synagogue in the Essonne (also in the Paris region). Throughout France, Jewish places of worship were the target of stone-throwing, attempted arson or other acts of vandalism.²⁰⁷

In a communiqué, Jean-Arnold de Clermont together with the president of the French Bishops Conference and the president of the Orthodox Inter-episcopal Committee in France condemned the destruction of places of worship. “When you touch a place of worship, barbarism is not far away. History is full of examples. It is inevitable that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East should have ramifications in our country; everyone should be able to express solidarity or reticence. However, it is not acceptable for such opposition to take the form of violence and, in particular, the destruction of places of worship. (...)”²⁰⁸ Joint declarations were also made by Jewish, Muslim, Catholic and Protestant leaders in Strasbourg, Lyons and Marseilles, all of them condemning outbreaks of violence and aiming to calm the situation.

Finally, the representatives of the main religious families in France, who had appealed against sectarianism and the rejection of those who are different (see above), met prime minister Lionel Jospin on 16 October. The latter assured them that measures had been taken to protect religious buildings and that those guilty of attacking places of worship would be severely punished. At the end of the meeting, the prime minister, together with the religious leaders, called for calm and delivered a message of tolerance.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ “During the last quarter of 2000, 43 synagogues or places of worship have been damaged in addition to 3 Jewish cemeteries.” (source: “*La lutte contre le racisme et la xénophobie*”, Commission nationale consultative des droits de l’homme, progress report 2000, submitted to the Prime Minister Lionel Jospin on 21 March 2001.

²⁰⁸ “*Conseil des Eglises chrétiennes en France (CECEF): Communiqué sur la destruction de lieux culte en France*”, 18 October 2000.

²⁰⁹ See: “*Proche-Orient: Rencontre de M.Jospin avec les religieux*” Bulletin d’Information Protestant (BIP), n°1505 – 1-15 November 2000 and “*M.Jospin lance un appel au “calme” et à la “tolérance*”, Le Monde, 18 October 2000.

THE WORK OF PASTOR CORINNE AKLI IN AUBERVILLIERS

Again in connection with events in the Middle East, we should like to highlight the daily work of one pastor in particular in Aubervilliers (Paris region).

"A buoyant church in the city"

In Aubervilliers, the latest census showed that 45% of the population was foreign and that every ten years, 70% of the population was new. Every week new families arrive in need of housing, jobs, a place to educate the children. One African family in three is Protestant. The life of the Protestant Hostel of the Reformed Church of France is therefore geared to the new arrivals, under the guidance of pastor Corinne Akli. Room must be found for the newcomers; it has to cope with the tendency of more long-standing inhabitants to feel up-tight and keep reminding them that Protestantism is not a private club.

Along with representatives of the four monotheistic families, the Protestants were invited to Henri Wallon secondary school by the local authorities to speak to final year students and class representatives at the time of the first clashes in October in the Palestinian territories so violence would not break out against the two synagogues and the Jewish high school by way of retaliation. The choir leader, Wassa, called on students to promote peace among believers from different cultures. His message, backed by the words of Martin Luther King in parallel with verses from the Koran, met with lengthy applause. At the same time, educators from "*A travers la Ville*" remained on call during evenings and weekends in the districts most exposed to mounting hatred. (...)"²¹⁰

CAMPAIGN TO GATHER SIGNATURES "AND THE CLANDESTINE IMMIGRANTS? PEOPLE ARE STILL IN DANGER"

In November 1999, a text called "And the clandestine immigrants? People are still in danger" was submitted at the plenary assembly of the French Catholic bishops to encourage reflection and action. In this context, the National Service for Pastoral Care of Migrants (SNPM) in conjunction with Secours Catholique and the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD) were entrusted with a campaign to spread information, raise awareness and gather signatures to demand a more human approach towards clandestine immigrants and the processing of their dossiers. This campaign, begun in each diocese in September 2000, planned to hand in the signatures gathered to the prefect of each department around Epiphany 2001.

By 15 February 2001, 65,000 signatures had been gathered and have been or will be handed in to the prefects, either by a delegation from the diocese (in most cases) or by the bishop himself. In a few cases, the signatures were accompanied by specific files on certain clandestine immigrants or papers drafted in consultation with associations specialising in the defence of foreigners and their rights.

Despite the markedly different reactions of the prefects, this campaign certainly led to greater awareness of the fate of clandestine immigrants. It also encouraged many Christians to become more deeply involved; it even led to a few support groups being formed. Finally, it is

²¹⁰ This quote is taken from a letter from Corinne Akli published in the Bulletin d'Information Protestant (BIP), n°1508 – 15 December 2000 – 15 January 2001.

worth underscoring that this initiative taken by Catholics also enlisted the participation of many Protestants and non-religious associations.

“The campaign around this controversial and distressing subject was an interesting opportunity to gauge the lack of information, ignorance of the facts and above all the extent to which public opinion is tied into the vicious circle of closing borders to achieve zero immigration, because “*we cannot take in all the poor of this world*”. In this respect, it was clear that the reasons why people seeking to live in France leave their country are neither known nor taken into account. Meeting with clandestine immigrants here and there brought some very interesting headway.”²¹¹

ACTION BY PASTOR JEAN-ARNOLD DE CLERMONT (PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH PROTESTANT FEDERATION) IN SUPPORT OF CHÉRIF M’HAMDI, THREATENED WITH EXPULSION

It must be emphasized that this action vis-à-vis state authorities is just one of many such examples.

Chérif M’Hamdi originally comes from Tunisia. He fled his country to escape persecution resulting from his combat for human rights. As he could not furnish proof of this persecution, France refused to grant Chérif M’Hamdi the right of asylum. After taking part in a march in support of legalizing the status of clandestine immigrants, this Tunisian national decided to begin a hunger strike in May 2000. Arrested shortly afterwards in the company of other clandestine immigrants, he was notified of the decision to expel him from France. In desperation, he refused to board the plane scheduled to take him abroad.

In this context, on Wednesday 7 June, “pastor Jean Arnold de Clermont wrote to the cabinet of the Home Minister, at the request of CIMADE, pointing out the danger of expelling Chérif M’Hamdi, who was due to appear before the criminal court of Toulouse on 9 June for having refused to board an airplane. The president of the FPF told the press of “*his surprise at the French government’s decision to expel Mr. Chérif M’Hamdi despite the numerous warnings, the accounts of torture he had endured in his country, and the proven lack of respect for human rights in Tunisia*” and he asked that the French government give him the means of residing legally in France.”²¹²

Chérif M’Hamdi obtained a stay of judgment, exceptionally; he is free until such time as a new decision is taken on his fate. He is therefore still waiting to obtain a legal status...

²¹¹ Quote from “*Et les sans-papiers? L’Homme est toujours en danger*”, interim report on the signatures campaign, Service National de la Pastorale des Migrants (SNPM).

²¹² Bulletin d’Information Protestant, n°1498 – 15-30 July 2000.

Translated from French
WCC Language Service

This dossier is also available in German and French.

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Geneva, August 2001