

# Response

## Gilbert Márkus's 'Theologies of Repression'

*In his article of this title, which we published last January, Gilbert Márkus OP wrote about the political and social influences of some of the evangelical groups now in Central America, and he mentioned World Vision, which has its headquarters in California. The Director of World Vision of Britain writes:*

The incidents to which your author refers, predominantly in the present tense, occurred approximately five years ago and this in itself is extremely misleading. World Vision, while we have 75 development projects in Honduras, caring for some 10,000 children and their families, together with some other general development work, has no involvement whatever in relief projects or refugee involvement in areas where fighting is going on. This has been the case for approximately four years so, again, your article is misleading.

Further, a number of the allegations which are repeated here, which appear to be drawn from a report circulated some years ago by Pax Christi International, though without the support of its most knowledgeable national bodies, have been extensively investigated. A great deal of what you write is unproven or demonstrably untrue. Taken in sum, it is seriously misleading about an agency which has a thirty-five year record of working among some of the poorest and neediest people around the world.

It is also misleading to present us as 'One of the main thrusts of conservative evangelism'. World Vision is, and always has been a non-denominational agency and both staff and partner agencies around the world are drawn from the widest possible spectrum of churchmanship, including many Roman Catholics. We have a simple Christian Basis of Faith to which many Catholics are happy to give assent and we rejoice in our broadening fellowship in the common work of obeying the command of our Master to heal the sick, succour the suffering and bring the Good News of the Kingdom. We grieve when brother Christians misunderstand or, indeed, misrepresent us as this is hurtful to the Body of Christ.

**Peter Searle**

World Vision of Britain

Dychurch House

8 Abington Street, Northampton NN1 2AJ

*The author comments:*

Far from being based entirely on a Pax Christi report (though I am grateful to Mr Searle for drawing my attention to this), I made use of a wide variety of published sources. These included: *The United Church Observer*, January 1982 (USA); *Newsweek*, 8 March 1982 (USA); *National Catholic Reporter*, 23 April 1982 (USA); a report from NACLA (the church-affiliated 'North American congress on Latin America') of July 1983 (USA); *NACLA Report* Jan/Feb 1984 (USA); *El Salvador Report*, no. 3 (Bulletin of El Salvador Committee for Human Rights in London), in which the testimonies of Sister Irma, a Franciscan nun, and Father Fausto Mills, both of whom were then working in the area of Honduras in question, were quite detailed and specific; *Latinamerica Press* (Noticias Aliadas, Peru), 15 December 1983.

Though Mr Searle claims that the allegations in my article are 'demonstrably untrue', I notice that he makes no attempt to demonstrate their untruth, or even to suggest where such a demonstration might be found. More recently published material (e.g. *Latinamerica Press*, 17 April 1986) links WV again with conservative evangelical fundamentalism, and repeats many of the charges made in my article. Directors of WV, among others, are, according to these reports, now running seminars for the right-wing *Asociación Evangélica Ministerial* whose content is 'highly critical of liberation and of everything that smacks of ecumenism.'

It is true that WV works among 'the poorest and neediest people around the world'. What is in question, though, is whether the work they do actually *benefits* the poor and needy, whether their political leanings and links lend support to regimes that continue to oppress the poor and needy, and whether those who support WV do so in the full knowledge of how they operate.

Mr Searle's response fails to answer these questions, and the membership of 'many Roman Catholics' in WV is hardly evidence that the organisation as a whole is not absolutely typical of the US-based and US-backed evangelical counterattack against liberation theology and against the Church's 'preferential option for the poor' in Latin America.

**Rev Gilbert Márkus OP**

Dominican House of St Albert the Great

25 George Square,

Edinburgh EH8 9LD