

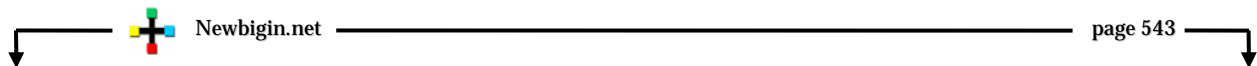


The Churches and CASA

J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

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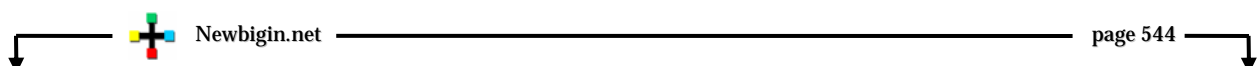
**A paper written for the Consultation between CASA and Heads of Churches at Delhi, September 1973.*

I have been asked to write a paper on 'What the Churches expect from CASA'. I greatly appreciate the invitation, and the fact that CASA is seeking to come closer to the churches and to listen to their suggestions. However, I would like to ask their permission to change the title to 'What the Churches ought to expect from CASA'. If we ask simply what the churches now expect from CASA, I fear the answer would be unhelpful. I am afraid that, in general, they expect only unlimited money, wheat, oil and milk powder. The dangers in this situation are so well known that I shall not say anything about them. I would rather ask what the churches ought to expect from CASA.

To that question I would answer that the churches ought to expect CASA to help them to bring about such a fundamental change in the life of the churches that caring for the community as a whole becomes an integral element in Church membership.

This involves fundamental questions about theology, preaching and worship. In these CASA can perhaps help only indirectly. But I believe that the basic aim of CASA should be formulated in some such terms as I have suggested; the aim should be a caring church. In the fulfillment of this aim foreign gifts can and will continue to play a part. When people here are starving and people overseas are willing to be generous, we have absolutely no moral right to say to them: Keep your gifts to yourselves; we want to strengthen our moral fibre by doing without them. This is especially intolerable because people who say it are usually people with very well filled stomachs. We cannot and should not reject foreign help; but the basic aim should be to rouse our own churches to a deeper kind of caring.

Because of this I am putting my points in the reverse of the obvious order. Instead of speaking first of programme goals, then



of administrative procedures and finally of Church involvement, I shall follow the reverse order.

I. Church Involvement

The Church, can become a caring Church only by being involved in caring. CASA can help it to be so involved. This will mean; for example:

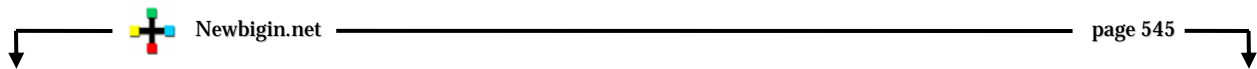
(a) Well-developed plans for training congregational members in active caring. From my own experience I can give two examples of what can be done, and many others could be given:

(i) Training ordinary Church members in a very simple way as *Health Visitors*. This can provide the foundation for a programme of community health based on a Church hospital. The whole work has 'to be under the leadership of trained medical personnel, but ordinary members; with simple training, can provide the outreach to thousands of homes. Experience shows that young people take up this work eagerly.

(ii) Training ordinary Church members for *action in emergencies*. In Madras we have printed a card to be hung in every parsonage and Christian institution giving simple clear-cut instructions for action in emergencies - floods, fires, etc. The Community Service Centre provides training for such action. As a result, when a slum is destroyed by fire or flood, trained volunteers are on the spot within a few hours. Again, young people are eager for such work.

(b) Well-developed plans for fund-raising. I am appending to this paper a letter from my colleague the Reverend Murdoch MacKenzie. I request that it be treated as part of this paper; I would stress the following points:

- (i) We have to be prepared to spend money and to use first-class technical means for raising money:
- (ii) We can raise money from the whole community, not only from Christians, when we have convinced the whole community that we are not a selfish group but really care for others.



(iii) Even the very poor will give gladly when they are asked, Some years ago we raised Rs 30,000 in Madras for a programme of digging wells in Bihar. At that time our own villages were just recovering from a devastating cyclone which destroyed 200 of our Church and school buildings, Put even village congregations whose churches were still in ruins gladly brought special gifts for Bihar.

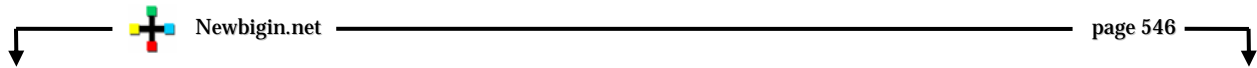
(iv) The Uppsala Assembly asked all churches, to set aside 2 per cent of their budgets for development. The Indian churches have not, as far as I know, acted on this. Could we not ask all churches to do this, and place the gifts at the disposal of the CASA Area Committee? These would provide an immediately available fund for emergencies.

(c) Real participation of the local churches in determining programmes. The situation in this respect has been very unsatisfactory. The impression has been created that all decisions are made in Delhi, and that local opinion is only advisory at most. I am glad that this is being corrected with the new powers given to Area Committees. The Madras Area Committee serves an area with a population comparable to those of the USA or the USSR. It is ridiculous to treat it as if it was a small local affair. First-class people will not give their time to serving on such bodies unless they know that real decisions are being taken.

2. Administrative Procedures

CASA has unfortunately developed a reputation for slow-moving bureaucracy. I know that big efforts are being made to correct this. I would stress the simple point that everything depends on finding first-class men and then giving them maximum discretion. No man of real ability is going to accept a post if he finds that he is merely a subordinate to carry out other people's decisions - decisions made at a point remote from the real issue.

I know that CASA has to face tremendously difficult administrative problems, especially in view of its accountability to the US Government for the PL 480 supplies. But I still maintain that the only way to get sound administration is to get top-class men,



give them full authority, back them up while they do well, and sack them when they do badly. In other words, the exact opposite of Government procedures!

I would also say that it seems to me very important to have effective liaison between CASA and the CSA Development Department. The two cannot be kept completely isolated from each other, as seems to be the case at present. I mention this point because on the occasion of the last visits to Madras of Mr Ken Buma from Geneva and of Mr Buck from Bombay, the CASA Area Secretary in Madras was not even informed of this visit and only learned about it by chance.

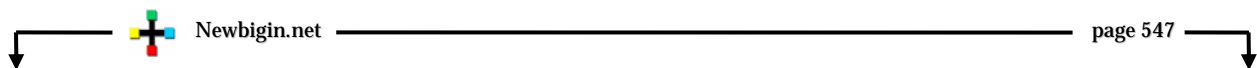
3. Programme Priorities

CASA is responsible for two types, of operation

1. Emergency Relief.
2. Rehabilitation and promotion of better community life.

The first will always have a kind of natural priority. There is much emphasis today on the need to tackle the fundamental causes of human suffering rather than merely providing 'ambulance service'. It is not enough to deploy Good Samaritans around, the place; we must also police the road. This is fair enough. But what has to be said is that this is not a case of 'either-or', but of 'both-and'. You cannot leave the man dying by the road-side while you go and organise a police service. This is a point at which the fundamental Christian concern for the human person as a person comes into play. If we allow ourselves to be persuaded that ambulance work is something to be treated with contempt, we have surrendered the basic Christian position and left the field to those who destroy the human person for the sake of social planning. We must do both. We must care for the victim of disaster or injustice, and we must also undertake those measures of social engineering or revolution which are needed to prevent disaster and injustice from happening. But I submit that we have the whole Gospel with us when we say that the first priority goes to the direct response to human need.

In the field which Zarin Rolston has defined as 'Rehabilitation and promotion of better community life' I would like to argue that the first priority during the coming years should be



given to programmes of family health and child care. I say this for the following reasons:

(a) The towering problem which makes all other problems so insoluble is the problem of our exploding population. We hear so much about this that we have almost ceased to listen. The facts are appalling in their implications. How can our country possibly support another doubling of the population within the next two decades?

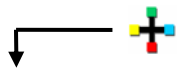
(b) The intense propaganda in favour of small families is having almost no effect among the vast majority. The reason is that it does not touch the simple question that every married couple faces. Who is going to care for us in our old age? If one has lived for centuries in an environment where more than half the children die before they grow up, how is one to be assured that with only two children they will be someone to care for me when I am helpless? The only programme for family limitation which has any chance of success is one which is an integral part of a programme of family and child care. It is only through a change in the quality of family life that any programme for family limitation can succeed.

(c) A programme of family welfare and child care is one for which the Christian Church is especially well fitted. It calls for personal love and care at every point. It calls for a high doctrine of the family. It brings into play many of the distinctively Christian experiences and convictions.

(d) It is a type of programme in which congregational involvement can play a big part. As I have said above even ordinary Church members with a little training can play a significant part.

(e) I do not say that Food-for-Work programmes should be stopped. They will still have a vital part to play especially following disasters. But while the work of providing wells, irrigation and percolation tanks, roads and other basic necessities of rural life is of vital importance, this is essentially the responsibility of the Government. I doubt whether the Church can take this as a normal part of its programme. And we know that there are very big problems of administrative integrity in programmes of this type.

This paper has been written in haste under severe pressure. If I had more time I would re-write it, toning down the things



which are said too harshly and crudely. I ask that I may be pardoned for these blemishes which do not arise from any ill-will but simply out of the desire that CASA should be as good as it can be. I realise how vast and difficult the task is, and I pray for God's blessings on CASA and its work.

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