

Revelation in the Revolution?

Violence is something toward which many of today's intellectuals are displaying a peculiar interest, if not an outright affection.

(Bruce West, *Toronto Globe & Mail*)

. . . the guerrilla fighter, as a person conscious of a role in the vanguard of the people, must have a moral conduct that shows him to be a true priest of the reform to which he aspires

(Che Guevara, *Latin America Guerrilla leader*)



OURS IS A TIME of revolution, and one of the concomitants of revolution has always been violence. The myth of a non-violent 'Industrial Revolution' or 'Parliamentary Revolution' is precisely that — a myth! There is, however, another face to the revolutionary situation, and one which in North America is almost completely ignored. That face consists of the efforts on the part of the revolutionary society, *after* the period of armed conflict, to build a new and better society which will in time replace the old system which abused and degraded the mass of society.

It is this side of the revolutionary coin that the Christian Church, and indeed all other forms of 'religious' society, can no longer afford to either ignore or attack. It is of critical importance that religious bodies attempt to understand the true meaning of the revolutionary ethic if they wish to function in a productive relationship with the impoverished and discontented masses in areas such as Latin America, to say nothing of those which still exist within their own continental boundaries.

However, from the point of view of the established Christian churches in North America such an understanding may be well nigh impossible. Part of the problem is that the Christian 'community' as a whole expresses its viewpoint in a manner which is almost totally anthropomorphic and ethnocentric. The North American churchman of today, although he may spout judgmental

passages from the Old Testament now and again, really believes in what the American writer Nelson Algren calls *The God of the Middle Border* . . . a Now-you-see-me-now-you-don't-scratch-my-back-and-I'll-be-back Sporty-O Jehovah, propitiable by prayer. So long as you gave him an hour of hymning on Sunday morning and provided an organ with a heavenward trump, he'd vibrate your soul with an I-shall-quit-this-Mournful-Vale sensation then let you sleep it off . . . all Sunday afternoon.

This was a God who wouldn't stick needles and pins in your little ones because you cut a corner or two on a real estate deal. What was wrong with speculation so long as you didn't use your own cash? Long before the Pentagon devised the phrase 'military dialogue' the owners of the Middle Border knew that there was nothing wrong with any war you didn't go to yourself.

If you didn't make trouble for Him, He wouldn't make trouble for you, this God-of-Good-Dividends, who never tossed pebbles at your midnight window just to whisper 'Hey you! He who gains his life shall lose it.' 'Hard times on the rivers and hard times on the plains, hard times on the farm and hard times in town,' had bred a midland generation of Righteous Grandfathers who'd stayed right with Him. And now, by God, Grandpa had the property to show for it.

Risks that were narrow had all been taken; times that were hard were over at last. What was left to do in the world now for the winners except to keep out the losers?

The religious conservatives of today—or those who exercise church leadership at any rate—tend to be products of the intellectual tensions of

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tian gospel, but because they are convinced that the present system has had its day—that it is wrong to think of the typical parochial set-up as the only valid ministry to which a man may be called. They are frustrated with the mountains of trivia that so often constitute the weekly round. They are certain that their true calling by Christ was not to be a combination after-dinner speaker, fund-raiser and religious public-relations man — a professional oiler of the ecclesiastical machinery—but a servant of the Gospel *in and for the world*.

They feel, too, that in many cases the professional clergyman is hindered rather than helped in the proclamation of the Christian message by his own clerical image. People expect a clergyman to 'talk religion;' after all, that's what he's paid to do, isn't it? At times it may even be suspected that he couldn't do anything else anyway!

Some parishes act as though, by paying their minister, they own not only him but his wife and family as well. It is not surprising therefore, if some clergy are asking the radical question: 'Can a man preach the truth in real freedom if he knows his sermon may well upset some comfortable parishioner in the front pew whose weekly giving is essential not only to his own salary and the church mortgage but also to the meeting of commitments to church headquarters?'

Even worse is the suspicion that by his very role as the professional holy man he stands in the way of his people ever really catching the vision of their true vocation to be the church. He wonders if the laity will ever seriously tackle the task of evangelism or of effective Christian presence in society as long as he is their 'paid proxy'.

The feeling which many clergy say they encounter is: 'Well you're the expert, Padre—get on with it!' By paying their minister a salary, providing a house and services, *etc.*, many in the congregation feel they have fulfilled their Christian obligations. By putting a weekly envelope on the plate they can (for this small price) pay someone else to be the church.

Just the other day a young parish priest admitted to me his frustration at finding that when he was attending college and was able to be in his small rural charge only on the weekends, his congregation had more sense of its duty to witness and work for Christ than it had when he

graduated and assumed full responsibility as rector.

As a result of all this, a growing number of men are taking secular jobs and donating their services of leadership and spiritual counsel to the local congregation. As 'secular clergy' or 'worker priests' they feel they can speak with greater authenticity and greater freedom to their fellow-men. So far from 'leaving the ministry' they are finding a fuller ministry than ever was theirs before.

This will not be the path for all to follow; but it is a trend which, however, inconvenient it may be either for local congregations or for church hierarchies, seems here to stay. It ought not to be met with cries of 'drop-out' on the one hand or feelings of guilt on the other.

In many parts of Canada it may be the only answer. In many isolated northern areas, such as The Yukon which I visited this summer, the present parish system is as out of place as an elderly lady in the middle of a football scrimmage. Here the clergy, for the most part, must be skilled at some secular trade or calling, be it mining, teaching, or what have you.

In some remote communities consideration should be given to ordaining Christian geologists, miners, or lumbermen, who are already on the spot and have authentic roles of their own. In this way the Sacraments and preaching would be cared for, while the other Christians there would no longer be able to fob off their responsibilities on someone who was a paid expert.

Saint Paul earned his living at a secular trade and was proud of it. Let the so-called 'drop-outs' take courage—there may be a lot to be said for a 'tent making' ministry in the challenging days ahead.



the 1930's, and the menaces of that decade, Fascism and a Communism which he tends to equate with Russian nationalism, are inextricably linked in his mind with the idea of revolution. And revolution is evil because it tends to destroy 'law and order'. He will undoubtedly protest against injustice, he'll preach sermon after sermon, he may even risk a certain amount of official censure by taking part in a demonstration now and then. But you can be certain of one thing. He'll make damn good and sure that its all nice and legal!

Law and order must, after all, be maintained. The Christian should refrain from violence. And political systems which profess to honor God, Mother and the Flag should be supported by the church.

The fact that for Latin America 'Law and Order' means an average income of 75c a day, indescribable housing and sanitation, illiteracy, disease, sometimes outright serfdom; that archaic tax structures protect an elite to the extent that 5% of the total population of this immense continent accounts for fully one-third of the total income — all this is deplored by the church, but *it continues to give its tacit support to the very governments which cause these conditions!*

The recent history of Cuba is a case in point. In spite of protests made to me by various leaders in the Cuban churches, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, that their leaders were opposed to the tyranny of the former dictator, Fulgencio Batista, their official position was to remain silent and maintain the *status quo* — letting somebody else do the dirty work. Since the revolution, however, the churches seem to have had a sudden attack of conscience and have at times supported counter-revolutionary measures such as the Bay of Pigs attack.

Perhaps this 'religious zeal' is somewhat mitigated by the fact that the Cuban churches formerly identified themselves with the upper and upper-middle class strata of society. Or, in the specific case of the Protestant sects, the fact that they receive their money from the World Council of Churches — with most of the parent churches being in the United States — might have something to do with their lack of enthusiasm for a revolution which has given their country the first real autonomy that it has ever had . . . and the first honest government.

There have always been individuals in the Cuban churches of all denominations who have

taken an active part in supporting the social measures of the revolution, but on the whole they are in the minority and do not really have the support of their parent religious bodies.

I have met many of them in Cuba, notably Presbyterian minister Fernandez Ceballos, who headed the literacy campaign instituted by the Castro government after the revolutionary triumph, and the noted theologians Adolfo Ham and Rafael Cepeda, and have been impressed by both their sincerity as Christians and their honest attempts to reconcile their position as theologians with the tensions and moral implications created by the revolutionary situation in which they exist.

The God of the Middle Border existed in Cuba, as well as in North America, of that there is no doubt, and if he is not entirely 'dead' as current liberal theology would put it, he is at least moribund and has been rendered so by the revolution itself.

And the Cuban theologians are looking towards, not a resurrection, but a new understanding of the meaning of the Incarnation — in which God works through man.

As one Cuban churchman with whom I spoke put it, 'I could never be a Marxist . . . I already have my faith in Jesus Christ. But it is true that this government is undertaking much of the work which has always been neglected by the church. I believe that this revolution is the instrument through which God has chosen to continue His work with us.'

In the Latin American situation as a whole several startling new developments are becoming rapidly apparent, most of which spring from the experiences and the very *fact* of the success of the Cuban Revolution.

One is that the prophetic role formerly assumed to be one of the prerogatives of the Christian churchman is being taken over by the figure of the guerrilla fighter — as epitomized by the martyred Che Guevara and the ex-communicated (and later murdered) priest Camillo Torres.

The second is the fact that it is more and more rapidly dawning on the peoples of the 'Third World' as a whole that underneath the pious exhortations of the North American religious community towards non-violence there lies an essential — if subjective — element of hypocrisy.

They are beginning to see that if a man, woman or child is forced to suffer or die at an early age because of social conditions such as disease, exploitation, aggression by a corrupt or

foreign government; or are forced to suffer the degradation of a poverty and illiteracy *which are preventable*; — they are being destroyed, indeed murdered, just as effectively as if they had been exterminated by a nuclear holocaust — just as efficiently; but not as quickly!

As long as the people of Cuba, of Latin America and the whole 'underdeveloped' Third World are forced to suffer because of the 'don't-give-a-damn' indifference or outright hostility of their North American or European 'brethren', they are not likely to listen to our preaching no matter how well intentioned.

The first problem which this situation poses is not one which concerns us directly at all, but one which is of the utmost importance to the indigenous clergy functioning in Latin America, and which directly effects their relationship with the forces which seek to bring about radical social change within their countries.

It is summed up by a quotation from Regis Debray, a young French intellectual and neo-Marxist who is currently under arrest in Bolivia on a charge of aiding revolutionary movements in that country.

'The worker-peasant alliance [the two most exploited groups in these countries — WE] often finds its connecting link in a group of revolutionaries of bourgeois extraction, from which a substantial part of the guerrilla command is recruited . . . one finds that a working class of restricted size or under the influence of a reformist trade union aristocracy, and an isolated and humiliated peasantry, are willing to accept this group, of bourgeois origin, as their political leadership. In the course of the struggle which awakens and mobilizes them, a kind of provisional delegation of powers is produced. Inversely, in order to assume this function, this *historic vicarship*, and in order not to usurp a role to which they have only a provisional title, this progressive petty bourgeoisie must, to use Amilcar Cabral's phrase, "commit suicide *as a class* in order to be *restored to life* as revolutionary workers, totally identified with the deepest aspirations of their people." The most favourable time and place for this suicide is with the guerrillas, during guerrilla action: here, the small initial groups from the cities have their first daily contact with rural realities, little by little adjust themselves to its demands, and begin to understand from the inside the aspirations of their people; they cast aside political verbosity and make of these aspirations their program of

action. Where better than in the guerrilla army could this shedding of skin and this *resurrection* take place?

'Here *the political word is abruptly made flesh*. The revolutionary ideal emerges from the grey shadow of formula and acquires substance in the full light of day. This *transubstantiation* comes as a surprise, and when those who have experienced it want to describe it — they resort not to words but to exclamations.'

The theological implications of the language used by Debray should not be passed off lightly as a pseudo-religious phenomenon. It is, rather, indicative of the fact that revolutionaries of the Cuban type (and I must insist on making the distinction between them and the Russian Communists) are concerned with the religious-philosophical implication of their actions. Like the traditional 'religious' man both Debray and, to a large extent, Castro and Guevara are intimately tied to what is in essence a 'Christian' outlook — the potential and dignity of the human condition.

As to the place of the native clergy in such a movement, I am of the opinion that there is yet time for the Christian clergy—if they are willing to take part in, and even, as was the case with Camillo Torres and the Mexican Revolutionary-priests Hidalgo and Morelos, to assume a role of leadership in various revolutionary movements—to provide an active moral and spiritual influence which would aid in preventing the perversion of genuine social revolution into a form of permanent totalitarian government.

To attempt this, of course, would place an immense responsibility on the clergy themselves. They would come under fire from both militant atheistic Communists and the reactionary forces within their own denominations. They would face threats ranging from ostracism to excommunication and, in some cases, death.

But the revolutionary lines are being more distinctly drawn in Latin America every day (in spite of propaganda to the contrary) and for the exploited worker and peasant in areas which are experiencing Fascist military domination, armed struggle, either Communist supported or Christian supported, appears to be the only immediate solution.

To sum up, I am suggesting that the clergy of Latin America actively support armed struggle to achieve social equality, and that they in turn be supported by the clergy of North America and

Europe, not for the sake of creating either anarchy or terrorism, but in order to protect the ideals of the genuinely concerned men who are engaged in this struggle and to help prove that Christian concern for social justice on a world-wide scale rather than in a narrow nationalistic

sense can become more than just a trite phrase.

The risks of such a course of action and conduct are, of course, staggering but if the Christ honestly offered himself in the face of death that *all* men might be saved . . . can we do less?

by TIM BENTLEY

Ministry in Broadcasting

EVEN UNSHOCKABLE PEOPLE appear a little shaken when I tell them I am preparing for a ministry in broadcasting. And when I mention—heresy of heresies—that I may not be ordained for that ministry, they become convinced I've fallen by the wayside. One worldly-wise theological student put it like this: 'Isn't it the long way into television, *via* the Church?'

The suggestion, as I took it, was that what I really wanted was to be a famous producer—and not having the talent for that, I was using the ministry as a side door in.

It was not unfair to suggest that I've got electronic 'stars' in my eyes. Television and radio have been fascinating me for ten years, ever since I was the most two-left-footed square dancer of a troop that graced a small town country-music television show.

That is fact. But my faith is that God has been calling me to use that special interest in his service, by producing TV programs that will present his Son, and will, in other ways, contribute to the well-being of his world.

Of the specifics I am not sure. But I suspect that after a year or two becoming professional in the medium at a commercial station in this country, I shall go overseas. There, in a developing nation, I shall probably work either full or part time for the national broadcasting organization, producing not only religious but also cultural, agricultural, and current affairs programs.

My concern is for the whole man, as, I understand, was Jesus'. At the same time, I hope and pray that I will not make the mistake of regarding bodily well-being alone as that 'whole man'. I hope I will continue, in God's strength, to present the Gospel in its full spiritual depth. That may not be easy, but it will be eminently right.

Tim Bentley, an Anglican theological student, studies television production and announcing at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in Toronto.

The question of ordination resolves itself basically into the question of whether I will be a more effective Christian witness with the collar or without it. At present I incline to the former view. But the answer could be delayed until I reach the mission field and get the advice of the bishop of the spot. Right now the question is not urgent.

The important thing is preparation. And this preparation must be concerned with the Message *and* the Medium.

There appears to be a gradual recognition in theological college, and even in the Church, that the ministry need not conform to the traditional pattern in order to be effective. I would never suggest that everyone ought to abandon the parish for the specialized ministries, much less for broadcasting. But, on the other hand, there is—and will be increasingly—a vast potential for Christian communication, evangelism, in broadcasting.

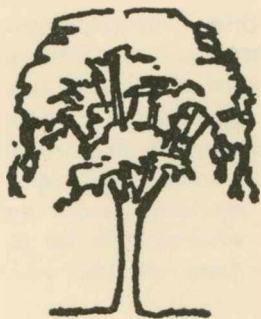
At present, there are only two kinds of religious broadcasters. I am convinced that there ought to be a third. There is the mass-evangelist type, whose appeal and message are limited to the fundamentalist clientele. (It is interesting to note in passing that one of the reasons that the government first began to control radio in Canada was that gospel broadcasting stations were springing up like weeds in our hitherto uncultivated airwaves.) And there is the new-wave religious broadcaster who has read all the research literature but hasn't read his Bible. If there is Good News, he won't tell you, but he will do public relations work for the Church.

The third kind would be a small but deeply committed group who, like the first, have the Message and, like the second, know the medium. With them, the Gospel might get a genuine hearing in the livingrooms of the world.

God willing, that's where I'd like to serve.

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