

established members of the Urban Coalition, the group organized in the aftermath of the Newark and Detroit riots to lobby for the cities, are likely to be faced with a moment of truth when Dr. King comes to town. If they are unable to devise ways to assist the Poor People's Campaign, and if other natural allies, such as the churches, are equally ineffective,

the likelihood of King's failure to affect the goth Congress, as well as his personal humiliation, would appear great.

And this failure, in turn, would increase dramatically the likelihood of bloodshed, disorder and sharp repression that can only make more distant any massive assault on poverty and the ghettos.

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The Christians May Be Incapable of Sharing Fully in a Massive Revolution

Christianity and Violence in Latin America

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TO SPEAK of the middle class in Latin America would appear to be a contradiction. One of the most typical elements of the social situation of the continent is its rigid two-class structure: lower poor and upper rich. On the whole, the only Latin American countries that escape this kind of social structure are relatively small. The groups we find there are less cohesive and differ greatly from the usual understanding of the middle class in the developed countries.

Nevertheless, what middle class groups there are—more or less powerful and active—join the upper classes in their tendency to suppress any attempt at subverting the established order for the purpose of implanting a new structure based on the social and racial majority. In other words, they form a united front against all possibility of a massive revolution. This united front has become stronger and more aware of itself and its interests in recent years.

What role does Christian thought play in the formation and accentuation of this tendency? I believe it is interesting to pose the problem in the following terms: in the groups where Christianity is taken seriously, what is the relation of its message to the possibility of a massive revolution? What does Christianity have to say about the violence of the masses in the way that violence presents itself in Latin America?

In an article published last year in *Epoca*, the Montevideo daily, I had the occasion to introduce the problem of Christianity and violence. I did so by reference to a personal friend of mine, Father Camilo Torres, killed with the Colombian guerrilla

fighters last year and who has already become a myth in Latin America.

To present the problem requires, clearly, the rejection of two easy solutions that solve the problem before considering it. One is that Christian doctrine supports evolution but not revolution—change but not violence.

Disregarding whatever difficulties such an apodictic judgment would create in the name of Christianity, that proposition cannot even be maintained before the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, aside from the fact that revolution is not one of her common sins. In the last encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI writes:

Revolutionary insurrection except in the case of evident and prolonged tyranny that threatens gravely the fundamental rights of persons and dangerously injures the common good of the nation—will produce new injustices.

Both in and out of the continent many Christians and non-Christians will describe the situation of many Latin American nations precisely by using the terms covered by that "exception."

The other easy solution is the assumption that the state of the poor and exploited justifies whatever is done *for them* or *with them*.

To penetrate the true problem, then, requires a *demythologizing* of certain terms and images that distort and oversimplify reality.

In the first place it is necessary to reject those images that many Christians, established in the legal order, hold about the process of a violent revolution and about the uprising of the masses to seize power. Their myth is the taking of the Bastille—a multitude that one day decides to take to the streets, that advances rapidly towards its clear objectives, that acts clearly in its own defense against those who oppose violence with violence, and thus arrives at the

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second phase of the revolution: the power and the new order.

Up to a certain point the greatest factor contributing to this image in Latin America is a set of exceptionally favorable circumstances, such as those that give rise to Fidel Castro's revolution in Cuba. This holds despite the fact that the Cuban revolution does not fit the myth due to its prolonged duration.

The Introduction of Violence

Now the problem of violence, within a given civilization, consists precisely in the *introduction* of it. The masses do not take to the streets "one day." That difficult unanimity has to be created within an established order that, however unjust, does protect the interests and expectations of a good part of the population. This unanimity originates in a larger section than one is apt to realize, because included in it are not only the vested interests but those on the way to being created as well. Also laziness, cowardice, and the illusions of the exploited must be encompassed.

It is true that the violence of the masses, speaking in moral terms, can and should be conceived of as a response to yet another existing violence under the guise of a legal regime. The fact is that this regime, supported by the force of arms and legalized repression, is tantamount to robbing the salary of the workers by armed assault with no less fatality and no less injustice.

This response is valid on a moral plane but inoperative as a movement of the masses, because appearances are deceiving and made to deceive. It takes a long and powerful effort to expose the monster of violence cloaked under the appearance of order and ease, security and hope. Only thus can the masses—the real majority capable of changing the situation—be excited; only thus will they be able to come out to the streets united one day to oppose violence with violence.

This constitutes a long, murky and dirty process from which the responsibility falls on the originators (or those that permitted the situation), but not, however, exempting those who would utilize human means to attain the revolution. It must be assumed that before the enemy is attacked, the life of the friend, the neighbor, the fellow worker or fellow sufferer must be made unbearable or more unbearable, until the masses can understand that they will have nothing to lose by going out into the streets to destroy the existing order.

When not given a monstrous government such as

Batista's in Cuba—now wisely avoided by those in power who oppose a massive revolution—violence must itself take the responsibility of creating the right climate. In other words, it must make life so unbearable for the majority that they will take to the streets. Insecurity, fear and desperation must emerge in its cruelest reality, and this can only happen when the awareness of legalized exploitation increases and the security and the hope that subdues and restrains the masses disappears.

A good part of the hope for Latin America is united paradoxically with this cause, because only a drastic remedy can cure a radical disease and a drastic remedy is applied only when illusions of deceptive superficial improvements end. Here is the true moral dilemma of the whole Latin American left, in particular that which confronts the Christian message. Latin American social reality is not that of the jungle where violence is natural, nor is it that of developed countries where politics is concerned with the welfare of the people.

It concerns a middle way that involves a false legal western order that conceals a violence as fierce as that of the jungle but at the same time prevents spontaneous reactions to it. Thus, the Latin American left is neither the "liberal left" of the US, nor the "European left" nor that of Communism, which achieves revolution by taking advantage of world conflict.

Reconstructing the Structures

This left can still be called the left, despite all the ambiguities of the term, by virtue of the radical nature with which it seeks to change the structures—not remedying but reconstructing. In Latin America it runs into the problem of having to introduce violence within an established order that makes continuous and intelligent efforts to give birth to ever new hopes as well as new plots and new complicities.

In these circumstances, only a radical challenge to the law, security, dignity, property, well-being and progress (which, I repeat, will be purely insufficient and deceptive but are, nevertheless, real gains) will bring the possibility of revolution. But in this law, in this security and in this progress are seen the classic instruments with which love to one's neighbor is expressed.

When it is said that "development is the new name for peace" many Latin Americans believe that in the complex Latin American reality, the problem springs precisely from the fact that "development is the new name for violence," that is, that the empty

promises and the minimal realizations of development help to make bearable an order that, under the appearance of law, hides an inhuman violence.

In the second place, as much as the image of violence to seize power must be demythologized, so must the simplistic moral image of self-defense be demythologized and applied to this complex reality to justify massive violence.

To say that violence exists under the appearance of order is quite certain in many places. To say that violence aimed at putting an end to this false order is self-defense for the masses is also certain—too certain, perhaps.

Not all violence that opposes an unjust aggression merits the qualification of a legitimate defense. No one will doubt, for example, that when a gunman is unjustly threatened and whips out his pistol a tenth of a second before his adversary, his violent action is legitimate self-defense. However, would it be the same if our gunman, knowing that his unjust adversary is quicker, hides and attacks him from the back? Remember that the aggressor is unjust, and these are the only forms of protection.

But let us go a step further: would it be self-defense if, realizing the circumstances and unable to take his enemy by surprise, our gunman kills one of his own friends and lays the responsibility and guilt on the enemy?

What can one conclude then, from this image, of legitimate defense? That it justifies one type of reaction against aggression but not all. In other words, applying the image to our case, it seems certain that the real violence exercised by the unjust established order justifies in principle a massive violent reaction. This, however, does not help us in knowing what means can be employed in legitimate self-defense.

On this point, many militant Christians would want to hear this simplistic watchword: given that violence of the masses is in principle justified as self-defense, and since the only effective way to do it is, as discussed above, the justification in principle extends to the methods needed to use it. If the Christian wishes, then, to fulfill his duty towards the deprived and poor of Latin America, he should share in the violence in all its stark reality and in all its inhuman duties.

If such a simple and unrealistic solution were proposed, the problem would appear resolved. But I believe that among Latin American Christians in general there exists a rather widespread and growing awareness of the inadequacy of such a solution.

Our consideration cannot evade in the long run another problem: if Christ's message signifies some-

thing about human existence, will it lead solely to identification with all causes considered just, or will it also have influence over the means to be employed? In other words, will it solely guide the selection of causes, or will it also affect the attitudes within a chosen cause?

The key question then becomes: what kind of a revolutionary can a Christian be as he tries to be faithful to his beliefs?

Is the Christian a Bad Revolutionary?

Here enters the third aspect decisive to the study of relations between Christian thinking and the revolutionary attitudes of the Latin American: the hypothesis that the Christian, while recognizing the justice of a massive violent uprising, is nevertheless a bad revolutionary.

This hypothesis deserves double attention from the point of view of its consequences. It is important to know what constitutes a motive of anguish for the Christian who is concerned with his duty in the face of misery and violence. But it is perhaps more deserving of attention because it constitutes a hidden resource of the almost official position of the church. The presumption that the Christian is a bad revolutionary is equivalent to saying that the Christian will be excelled by others in the task of directing a massive revolution, if it is realized.

Many Christians oppose whatever may tend to destroy order by violence. This opposition is born of an anguish concerning the possibility of launching a movement that will necessarily escape from the hands of those who initiated it and, by its own weight, pass to those who will accommodate themselves to the needs of massive violence.

This is one of the most powerful levers, though not always recognized, of the conservative influence of Christian thinking in Latin America. It is worth examining more closely the basic hypothesis: although Christianity may be revolutionary, the Christian may be incapable of sharing fully and concretely in a massive revolution. Is this certain?

The following is the simplest expression of this kind of opposition: the Christian has more moral scruples than the man in the street. His stricter moral code will collide fatally with the tasks of violence. In other words, even if he should start at the front of a revolution, he would undoubtedly end up isolated and crying, "Stop! Don't do that . . .," which is a clear indication that he will not renounce his moral beliefs along the way. Still this type of opposition is superficial and arguable because it lends itself to this accusation that the scrupulousness

of the current Christian morality comes, in large part, from its individualism, as the Vatican Council itself has pointed out.

One must seek other more just images of the opposition. Let us say that the Christian message is essentially anti-Manichean, while all movements of the masses tend, of their own accord, toward a simplification of their goals and means. Demagoguery, the art of swaying the masses, is nothing but the simplification of political goals and means. It consists of facilitating massive action by dividing the world into two easily identifiable factions: the good and the bad. Thus clear orientations, secure instincts and maximum efficacy are achieved.

Why do I say that Christianity is *essentially* anti-Manichean? By the simple fact of placing brotherly love as the only law of the universe and making an absolute value out of each man (" . . . Come, O blessed of my father, . . . for I was hungry and you gave me food, . . . 'as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'" Matt. 25-34-40).

There is in this principle an element that destroys, at the root all Manichean tendencies, all attempts to find efficacy in simplification when it involves human dimensions. To make of every man an absolute will lead progressively, insofar as this principle dominates concrete existence, to a dangerous substitution of the instinctive for the rational, of the simple for the complexity and synthesis. Dialogue will be sought prior to action, and there will be resistance to the making of a man into an instrument; the image of the enemy as *bad* will be demythologized.

In one word, Christianity tends to possess a dynamism exactly opposed to what the Latin American masses are seeking to make in their encounter of violence with an unjust order.

This hard truth must be seen clearly if one is to assess Latin American Christianity as it relates to violence. Two logical lines of thought ensue.

The first is to convince the masses that the only way out, despite appearances, is the use of non-violent methods, such as passive disobedience and other procedures that are manifest in the fight against racial segregation in the US and, previous to that, in Gandhi's campaign for India's freedom. However, in Latin America, we are not dealing with the attainment of concrete and definite objectives as in such examples, but with the transformation of an entire social structure, and in these circumstances such methods collide again with the problem of Manicheism inherent in all massive action.

In any case it is urgent that the believers in non-violence as a revolutionary political instrument cease to confuse religious imperative with political analysis in their propaganda. If nonviolence must be sought for religious reasons, it need not be concluded that it will be politically successful in every epoch and in all human situations, from the Neanderthal man to the man who lives in New York.

A theological problem

Let us admit this point and move to the second alternative. Suppose that the Latin American masses need to assume attitudes opposed to the mandates of the Christian message in order to resist injustice and violence. What would be the consequences of such a course of behavior? Above all, one: to recall and give full importance to a significant fact whose theological meaning has not yet been studied, i.e., the Christian message was not directed to men of all times, but was inserted into history at a certain determined epoch.

Theologically, this determination cannot mean anything else but that it was only from that particular point that the Christian message began to be positively useful to human history. To suppose the contrary would be to make the date elected by God for His revelation and for the Church, a crime *lesae humanitatis* (against humanity).

If that date is significantly adequate to be the specific moment of the insertion of the Revelation, is it wise to suppose that that date is uniform for all of humanity whatever may be the human development of beings that coexist at a given moment? If that date begins to be useful only after certain acquisitions of culture and civilization, will it be the same for the people of the Roman Empire in that first period of generalized peace, as well as for the indigenous people that in that same instant lived in the interior of the American or Australian continents? Evidently not.

The element that establishes the relation between that date and human development is given by the same factor to which I have alluded so often here: the Christian message contains a dangerous and revolutionary substitution of the instinctive simplification of human conduct for another type of attitudes where analysis and synthesis permit the creation of a new world in the supreme measure of man.

If this substitution is attempted too soon, upon a too primitive human base one or perhaps both of these two things will happen at the same time, as history has shown in the conversion of the barbarians and in the acts related to us in today's press. On the one hand, we arrest human development as it would be restrained in a boy to whom we would want to teach philosophy before he had developed his instincts and muscles, and for another, a man, sure of his instincts, does not understand or accept Christianity but only what confirms those instincts. In other words, if due to his situation he has to live by killing and needs sure and efficient reflexes for that purpose, he will ask the Christian religion to declare his cause sacred, that his survival instincts be blessed, and that his enemies be declared God's enemies. . . .

Whoever wants to understand the impact of Christian thought in Latin America should, we believe, dig deeper into this essential but relatively unknown problem of theology.

I am aware of having done no more than having brought a problem close to the readers. That is, however, the sole purpose of this article.