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priest-
guerillas

The following article first appeared in *Revista Familia* (Bogota, Columbia) in April of this year. The magazine was thereupon banned in the archdiocese of Medellin, and the author, Fr. Javier Dario Restrepo, was suspended by his bishop.

amilio Torres never thought that he would die in the bush. "But if it comes to that, then let it come," he said to one of his comrades.

And so it was to be. Two friends accompanied him on the night of October 18, 1965, when he departed for a place near Santander, Colombia. He said to them: "I hope they will not kill me on a main thoroughfare, as they killed Gaitan. If they kill me in the jungle my death will be a sign of new directions."

A fine drizzle was falling when the car arrived and parked in a street on the north side of Bogota. He said good-bye to everyone. He thought that his stay with guerrillas would last perhaps as long as ten years. Several days later he announced from the guerrilla headquarters in the mountains: "I have joined the army of national liberation because I have found in it the will and the realization of a grassroots unity, union with my countrymen without distinction as to religion or political opinion. The only goal here is liberation of the people from the exploitation of oligarchy and imperialism. I will not lay down my arms until political power is restored to the people."

NEW COMMUNITIES

communities for men

Queen of Peace "Berrybrook" Monastery, Winona, Minnesota. Government is shared equally. We are open to any type of apostolate that the members desire, whether in agriculture, craft, trade, art or science with which a member is particularly talented. We wear no distinctive clothing.

communities for men and women

Adeodatus Community, Detroit, Michigan, affiliated to St. Augustine's House, Oxford, Michigan. Our purpose is to be active in work fostering the unity of Christians. I am a Catholic and my wife is Lutheran; we are both active in the Lutheran and Catholic churches. Our community includes one other couple. When funds allow, we envision continuing our work in a rural environment. *The Martin Luther King Community, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.* After thinking and praying for exactly one year about the formation of a Christian community, the Spirit gave us the go-ahead in July 1968. We are all in our early and middle twenties. We go to school and work either full or part time. We take two promises: charity and poverty. We spend about ten percent of our earnings on ourselves. *Saint Benedict's Farm, Waelder, Texas.* A lay group of celibate men and women living together in community with the aim of discovering and living the Gospel. The group supports itself by a common effort in running a small farm with side occupations such as commercial photography and teaching music . . . Hospitality for day or weekend guests, especially for religious dialogue, is encouraged. *Thomas Merton Center, Magog, Quebec, Canada.* The nucleus and soul of our community are Christian, Tibetan, Buddhist and Hindu contemplatives. We hope this will expand to Jews and Moslems. The majority will be lay people, and the community will grow along the classical development of the ancient *Sacred City.*

PRIEST-GUERRILLAS

His life as a guerrilla was to last scarcely four months. But that would be time enough for him to become the symbol of a difficult and even incomprehensible choice of life.

The priest who followed him four years later had been expelled by the authorities of Colombia. When Domingo arrived at his home in Paniza, a small village in Spain, his only possessions were the clothes he wore. His mother said: "I saw him then as he always was and always wanted to be, poor, without anything except what he had with him, no luggage, no passport. He had left everything behind." He had always been so. On the day of his ordination to the priesthood, the poor of the neighborhood had been invited to the "banquet"; they shared together a bottle of wine and a tin of biscuits.

The editor of a daily newspaper in Saragossa has written: "When one of us, a man of 28 and a priest furthermore, takes the Gospel in his hand and enters the harsh and trying life of the guerrilla, he must have very strong reasons. It is no lark to head for the jungle, leaving behind shelter, light and peace." A group of academics in Colombia remember well the challenge given to an audience in the faculty of law: "I appeal to you to go the way I am going." Even his friends did not understand all that his words contained: "The world is mad with hunger and sorrow, and I want to be there." When he made public his intention of joining the guerrillas, he characterized it as a "moral imperative."

revolutionary love

Neither Torres nor Lain abandoned the priesthood or gave up the faith. On the contrary, their experience of the faith and their concept of the priesthood was what impelled them to become revolutionaries.

Torres wrote the following to his bishop: "In my opinion the revolutionary struggle is a Christian and sacerdotal undertaking. I am sacrificing one right that I esteem very highly—that of celebrating the liturgy of the church—in order to help create the conditions that will make liturgical life more authentic. I believe that living and working as I have in the past is not a sufficient



response to the precept of fraternal love. That love is the platform of the united front; it imposes on me this sacrifice. The supreme measure of human decisions is charity. I accept whatever risks this norm demands of me."

Domingo Lain's friends described him as "a mystic who could even make guerrillas turn to meditation on the Gospel." His statement upon joining the guerrillas bears out their opinion: "In making my decision public, I am only renewing the irrevocable commitment that I accepted when I was ordained a priest: dedication and fidelity to the poor and the oppressed, solidarity in their struggle for liberation from all slavery. I believe that my true priestly consecration, which demands total sacrifice so that all men have life and may have it more abundantly, dates from today."

We can believe that the statements of Torres and Lain truly reflect their thinking, even though it may be difficult for us to accept the paradox of a charity that leads to the dark path of guerrilla warfare. On the other hand, a change of context can make the paradox disappear. It is commonly held that love of one's fatherland, of one's family, of certain other basic principles, is sufficient justification for arming soldiers and sending them to war. If in the course of military actions the soldier kills an enemy, the licitness of his act is accepted without question, and he is even commended for it. The medals that embellish the hero's chest are his reward for having killed other men, commonly referred to as "enemies." In the case of the two guerrilla-priests, all the evidence leads us to conclude that it was love of their fellowmen that inspired them to take up combat against an institutionalized violence, a cold and calculated violence that was capable of destruction and enslavement.

Are Torres and Lain heroes or imposters? It is important to realize the relativity of such labels, conditioned as they are by the times and the purpose for which they are used. History shows the inconsistency with which such terms are applied to the authors of acts that affect the lives of other people: the rebel of yesterday may be the hero of tomorrow, and vice versa. The men who threatened the established order during the colonial



epoch, for example, were excoriated by the civil, military and religious authorities; they were branded as criminals. Their activities set them in contradiction to the laws which governed the social order of the particular time and place. But those same men, several decades later, were seen as the courageous authors of a new order, and society took upon itself to assure that in the minds of coming generations their names and faces would be surrounded with a halo of admiration and affection, and everyone would recognize them as the champions of freedom.

Brigands and criminals are often heroes born before their time. Transfer from the gloomy dungeons of banditry and illegality to the sun-bathed heights of national heroism comes about by itself. The only requirements are the passage of time and the success of the clandestine undertaking.

Torres and Lain took up the life of a guerrilla in the name of fraternal love and a faith lived with risks. In so doing they have put in question the charity and faith of others. To faith-security they oppose faith-insecurity; to a sentimental, timid and passive charity they oppose an efficacious, daring and dynamic love.

the poor

An analysis of the reasons why a priest arms himself with the guerrilla's machine-gun comes up against numerous prejudices. These partly explain the mental laziness of those who dismiss such an analysis by pointing to the paradox constituted by the priest-guerrilla; some condemn him in the name of love of neighbor, while others elevate him to the order of myth. Both groups help to popularize opposed conceptions of the priest-guerrilla. What some see as criminal, others see as a sign of hope for liberation and change.

It is in this perspective that we see two armies at work: one that mobilizes the established order for its self-perpetuation, and one which arouses those who are at the bottom of the social ladder—the poor and oppressed—as the final resort open to their despair. Is it necessary to recall that the liberation armies that have left their traces in history have always been armies in rags and that their



spiritual inspiration was often born of "foolishness" and despair?

If a priest chooses for the army of the oppressed, and thus not for the army of the powerful, we may be sure that his choice is not whimsical. He obeys the logic of the sacerdotal life, which urges him to serve the poor and the weak. In a recent interview, fifteen "Golconda priests" reconfirmed the lines of this logic. When asked whether "accepting the ultimate consequences" of their conception of the priesthood implied joining with guerrillas, several of them gave the following answer. "Engagement to me means that I would try, in sincerity and loyalty to my people, to go as far as they ask of me, even if 'the system,' at a given moment, would order my death." One of them said: "We have a philosophy of life: we have nothing for ourselves, nothing to lose. This is how we show our lack of ulterior motives in our commitment to the well-being that we seek for others."

Torres and Lain, and those who are following them, look upon their joining with guerrillas in the same way: as a "counsel of despair" when all other ways have been tried without success. They join a band of guerrillas only because it offers, as the ultimate resort, the possibility of awakening the conscience of society. The bishop of Buenaventura, Gerardo Valencia Cano, said to a journalist: "I have made it my concern to follow the tragedy that some call 'guerrilla service' and others call 'banditry.' I have known of them in Llanos, Vaupes, Buenaventura, in the interior of the country, and north of Antioquia; and now, with the Vietnam experience and what I know about North American anti-guerrilla tactics, I believe that the guerrilla can perhaps be a symbol. But I do not believe he will be an effective symbol."

The apostolic prefect of Vaupes, Belarmino Correa, has given the following as his opinion: "I would not enter upon a judgment of the guerrilla from a legal point of view. But I am not sure that the situation in Colombia, and in Latin America in general, is so entrenched in injustice and inequality that it obliges individuals to take upon themselves such contestation and sacrifice."

The Colombian people seem incapable of understanding the guerrilla's language of despair. Suddenly blind and



deaf, and more preoccupied with maintaining and defending the status quo, they are inclined to ignore the priest-guerrillas and deny that they are doing anything of importance. The remark of the minister of defense in reference to Domingo Lain is symptomatic: "He should be shot." Equally symptomatic is the remark of the vicar general of Bogota: "The revolution is turning priests into cannon fodder." In both cases, the words of Pope Paul VI at Bogota were forgotten, but their validity is now coming to light: "Certain great crises of history could have had other results if reforms had been foreseen in time and great sacrifices made; explosive revolutions have often been born of despair."

Keeping Pope Paul's words in mind, the phenomenon of guerrilla-priests should have the effect of an appeal, a provocation, to awareness of a situation that can only be called sinful. Dom Helder Camara has spoken of the "more self-less and more generous" persons whom a situation of injustice tempts to violence. The adjectives used by him are applicable to Camilo Torres and Domingo Lain.

hell with hope

There is a delicious irony in juxtaposing two photos of Camilo Torres: one taken when he was giving a sermon on the occasion of the crowning of a nine-year-old "queen" in a small schoolroom decorated as "the kingdom of charity," and the other taken when he was a guerrilla: bearded, a haversack hanging from his shoulder, a machine-gun strapped across his chest. The majority of those who reject him and his cause let themselves be carried away by theorizing on the contradiction between the two pictures. But a reflection that goes beneath the surface would discover that the two scenes are linked in their manifestation of a sincere and immense love of neighbor. Camilo did not become a guerrilla despite his priesthood, but because of it. His commitment to a practical love for others was what finally led him to guerrilla engagement.

The same must be said of Domingo Lain. People who knew him in Aragon said of him: "Never was a better man born in Paniza." The contentment with which he worked



in the brick kilns in Meissen, his desire to share to the full the lot of the disinherited, reveal an uncompromising priestly spirit for all that regarded the poor. At one time he asked to be assigned to a parish in the poorest section of Cartagena. His superiors made available to him and his companions a modest house, no different from the others around it. But they turned it down and chose instead a shanty with a clay roof where pigs strayed in and out.

When France was scandalized by the spectacle of worker-priests, a writer came up with a phrase that was to be repeated many times: "The saints are going to hell." The hell of guerrilla life, the ultimate recourse of hope for the poor, is consciously chosen by men who feel incapable of living the priesthood except "from time to time." Torres and Lain could not resign themselves to a love of doubtful efficacy. Their unrelenting search, inspired by the demands of an effective love, led them finally to the desperate choice of armed subversion, just as the bonzes in Vietnam burned themselves to death in the desperate attempt to denounce, as prophets, a collective sin.

success and failure

There are other ways of living the priesthood; there are ways of doing it "full-time"; there are other roads that lead to practical charity, differing from that chosen by Torres and Lain. In their over-estimation of what they could accomplish and in their manifest despair lies their success and their failure.

Revolution can be undertaken without thought; it can be more a matter of sentimentality than reasoned conviction. Torres denounced such revolution. He first studied the situation in depth. But his scientific studies, his profound examination of the possibility of peaceful revolution in Colombia, were rendered useless when pressure from the ruling powers drove him to the conclusion: "There remains only the way of armed combat. The people are in despair and have resolved to give their lives so that future generations will not live in slavery."

Four years after his death other priests are speaking the same language and taking as a motto: "to accept the final



consequences in our commitment to the people." They may not have the intellectual prestige that Torres had, they may not have been able to spend years in universities, but they believe they have the support of various statements made by the bishops of Latin America and the doctrine of a papal teaching in *Populorum progressio*. But there opens before them too the risk of impatient skirmishing, the temptation to an unreflected precipitation, faced with the pressure brought to bear by a society which sets up defense mechanisms when it hears appeals for justice, when it hears the prophetic and sometimes emotional voice of spokesmen for the poor and oppressed.

When Camilo Torres was killed in the Colombian jungle, people began to analyze the tactical errors that had led him to undertake a form of struggle in which his talents were wasted. It was thought that such an analysis would barricade the road to guerrilla engagement for other priests. The recent decision of Domingo Lain and a consideration of his motives make it evident that the road is not barricaded after all. No one can guarantee that others will not follow the same road, faithful to their commitment to the liberation of the people, and "accepting the final consequences."

Unfortunately, we must note that the great conflicts which for years have brought bloodshed to Indochina and the Middle East, far from reaching hoped-for solution, have recently become even more difficult and complex. Not only have the fields of military operations been extended, but the peoples directly concerned and in whose name the wars are being fought appear to matter less and less.

(Paul VI to the College of Cardinals, May 18, 1970; N.C. News Service.)



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Marxist futurology and Christian hope

Riccardo Lanzoni, author of the following study, is director of CSEO Documentazione and CSEO Informazione, publications of the Centro Studi Europa Orientale, Bologna. It publishes important texts on the church in Eastern Europe that appear in newspapers and journals in Poland, Czechoslovakia, etc. Its intent is to sublimate the political and ideological stereotypes that are usually applied to problems the church encounters in East European countries. It takes its inspiration from the belief that wherever the church is called to live, it is called to constitute a force for the total liberation of man.

science and humanism

Sociologists in the West have entered the field of futurology, using all the techniques of the human and social sciences. As an attempt to grasp the dynamics of the development of a social system, it is anything but new. With the help of statistical data and diagrams, it studies the consequences of over-population and urbanism, industrialization and automation. The significant aspect of this phenomenon is that the research takes on ever greater importance not so much for what it predicts for the future as for its disclosure of contradictions and critical factors at present. Like a rationalistic science fiction, futurology, from a viewpoint cast hypothetically in the future, permits an evaluation of the gravity of the