

Last month 'Comment' was given to Mr. Martin Green to express some criticisms of anti-liberal bias he has detected in *New Blackfriars* during the past year. This month the editor replies.

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Dear Martin,

What disturbs you about *New Blackfriars* is that it wants christians to be 'revolutionists and not liberals' and asks for revolution and not for reform. This is not quite accurate; what we say is that christianity is fundamentally revolutionary and that sometimes revolution can be the enemy of reform. Sometimes the christian task of subverting and transforming the world means the sacrifice of immediate goods which to the liberal seem demanded by the situation; this, and not legalism, is the reason for the 'hardness' of christian morality and the reason why it can contain tragedy. It is equally true that, in other contexts, reform may be a preparation for revolution. To take an apparently non-political example, the reform which has removed the more obvious anomalies from the roman liturgy has led to a more radical questioning of the function of the liturgy itself. Conservative opposition to reform is not always simply a matter of apathy and inertia, it can come from a clear recognition that reform may be carried beyond itself.

As christian revolutionaries the liberalism we oppose is one which by reform would merely conceal the need for more radical change, or one which draws back when the revolutionary consequences of change become clear. A recent *Panorama* programme showed several North American priests who worked hard to relieve the appalling living conditions of the poor in Peru. They all admitted that these conditions were built into the Peruvian political structure but they took it for granted that an attempt, such as the communists envisage, to subvert these institutions by revolution was out of the question. For them, christianity made violent revolution unthinkable—and yet I suppose it was almost by chance that they were working in Peru rather than as chaplains in Vietnam.

For me there is a place for reform—within the context of revolution. For me there is even a place for violence—within the context of non-violence and forgiveness, the only intrinsically revolutionary act. The programme of christianity is to subvert the world. You

object that the revolutionary must 'hate the world—the world as it now is, as we have known it. And to hate the world is surely wrong.' The christian response seems to me more complex: *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . . not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him, but Do not love the world . . . If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him, and If you were of the world the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world . . . therefore the world hates you.* The *world* here is not Nature or Creation or Man, it is the actual political and social structures within which christianity is at work. The world's hatred is shown in police actions, in being thrown out of churches, in being stoned or shot down for the sake of law and order by men who think they are doing a service to God.

Christians should be disturbed if their relations with the power-structure are not in some way violent. It is of the nature of the world to dominate by violence and we have not made the world see itself for what it is – we have not 'convinced the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgement' – until we have brought this violence out into the open.

Of course christianity does not offer violence as a solution, it offers crucifixion through which the violent act becomes redemptive. Christianity may also sometimes demand the use of violence but such force only achieves its aim in a context of non-violence. Taken in and by itself it will merely be an expression of destructive hatred.

Violent revolution runs the risk of being mere violence, of being a new attempt at domination and thus of conforming to the world, losing its revolutionary meaning. But this risk must sometimes be taken because the alternative is the certainty of sheer violence and hatred. The alternative to revolution is not always an uneasy peace within which the reformer may work, it is often increasing, though unpublicised, violence. 'I would rather have blood on my hands than the water of Pilate' – the point of this is that Pilate's hands, although he will not see it, are drenched in blood. Neither Dr. King nor Stokely Carmichael are substituting 'unrest' for *order*. Blood did not flow in Chicago for the first time this summer. When the babies in the Negro slums are attacked by rats, they bleed.

There are contexts in which there just is and will be violence and the problem is how to make it redemptive. In a limited and personal case we can do this simply in our hearts by 'offering it up', but outside this narrow field we may have to make of our forgiveness a sign, by suffering persecution for *justice*, and this is a political and a revolutionary act.

'What do we see around us? The deep tragedy of the war in Vietnam: less publicised battles in Africa and Asia; tyrannies based on race, ideology or sheer lust for power. The pitifully slow progress

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in its turn was to succumb to scholasticism and intolerance. The Bibliography is invaluable, and well up to date.

Dr McAfee Brown is less concerned with history. He attempts to state what it means to be a Protestant to an educated and contemporary audience. The result is a readable and attractive book. He makes good use of Luther and follows him in regarding faith as a lively, reckless confidence in God, a trust that is not without

content. It will always be a deeper plunge into the meaning of the Gospels, and an affirmation that the believer must abide by God's word alone, at least in the sense that only Christ can make an absolute claim on man. With all this a Catholic can agree, the only difficulty occurs about what the basic content is, and to what extent the prophet speaking in the Spirit is controlled by the revealed Word.

IAN HISLOP, O.P.

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towards peace-making and peace-keeping; the failure of the nations to disarm; whole areas of the Pacific Ocean blanketed off for experiments with rockets and bombs; and, perhaps the most terrifying of all, the grinding and degrading misery of poverty and ignorance and disease.' This is Mr. George Brown before the United Nations describing 'the world as it now is, as we have known it.' Christians propose neither to love this world nor to leave it, but to transform it.

Finally to come to your most telling point. 'Imagine the New York people, having been to see 'Blues for Mr. Charlie' or an underground movie, coming out again on to the hot pavements of New York, seeing everywhere again the works of what they so long ago committed themselves to destroy, going on to a party; what chance have they that the relationships begun or developed there will be anything but destructive?' Hardly any chance at all; and if the christian church offered no more than a doctrine of protest and a vision of a future ideal, it would fail in human terms as tragically as the communist party. Christians, however, do not just oscillate between protest and parties, each one subtly corrosive of the other. Their fundamental stance is defined by neither of these but by the eucharist, a party, a love-feast whose whole point is a revolutionary act, the crucifixion of Christ. The sacramental life proposes and realises a human relationship which is neither destructive nor conformist but redemptive. That is what the church is for. To say this is, partly, what *New Blackfriars* is for.

Yours Sincerely  
H. M. C.