

by Dom Helder Camara

I. Speaking to Willing Ears

First of all, let me speak on behalf of the Third World, and thank those of you who represent the Haslemere Group for the Declaration which you are transforming into a programme of thought and action. I assure you, in my capacity as a man of the underdeveloped world, that your vision could not be clearer nor your attitude more courageous. This is what I have already said in Manchester, at the Manchester Student Congress, organized by the Student Christian Movement.

I have come here to co-operate with you; to urge you on in your effort in spite of the obstacles before you. I have come here to testify to the truth of the theme of this Conference.

I will try to show you quickly how the underdeveloped world is being crushed by a triple violence.

II. The Triple Violence against the Underdeveloped World

1. *Internal colonialism, which means established violence*

Taking Latin America as an example, when people ask me if I think our Continent is threatened by violence I feel that the question is looking ahead to the possible, eventual violence of those who are now oppressed, whereas it does not take into account the already existing *violence of the oppressors*—a small privileged group whose wealth is maintained at the expense of the misery of million of their countrymen.

Those who are unfamiliar with Latin America may think I am exaggerating; they may think I am being demagogic, or deliberately provocative. Let us then see what the voices of authority have to say on this point:

—This is what His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, said in Colombia: 'We know that social economic development has been uneven in the great Latin American continent, and, although it has favoured those who promoted it, it has practically by-passed the great majority of the people, in most cases abandoning them to a level below human dignity, and at times harshly treating and exploiting them.'

—The Latin American Bishops, gathered at Medellin, Colombia, whilst examining the problems of peace, referred specifically to

¹ Lecture delivered by Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife (Brazil), at the Haslemere Group Convention on *Poverty is Violence; Exploitation of the Third World*, at the Round House, London, 13.4.1969, and published here by courtesy of the Haslemere Group.

Internal Colonialism, maintained in the Continent by a privileged group who create 'marginal conditions of life, not only in the cities but also in rural areas'. Although this is a world-wide phenomenon, in Latin America it assumes 'particularly aggressive dimensions'. The Bishops also pointed out that the reason for this was the very lack of equality 'which systematically prevents the satisfaction of the legitimate hopes of the people'.

For anyone born and bred in a developed country, with no chance of visiting underdeveloped areas, it must be very hard to understand what is meant by 'sub-human' or the need for the 'promotion of humanity'. Let us take the example of land holdings in Latin America, in Brazil, to be precise. I am quoting from facts given by the Brazilian Institute of Agrarian Reform.

In Brazil, there are 3,700,000 rural properties covering an area of 390 million hectares, or let us say, about 970 million acres. 94 per cent of these acres are held by only 6 per cent of the number of properties: that is 6 per cent of the landowners hold 94 per cent of the acreage.

You cannot imagine how hard it is for these small landowners, some of them tenants, some small proprietors, some share-croppers, to farm their poor quality land. What is worse, the workers in the extensive 6 per cent of the properties which cover 94 per cent of the total area, very often are even poorer off than the owners of small plots. Their houses can barely be called houses, and as for clothing facilities, food, education, health and welfare—well, the situation is shameful.

All these conditions, it seems to me, amount to a state of violence. The small privileged group is possibly unaware that it is contributing to this existing violence by imposing such bad conditions on rural workers and small holders. And this is what I have called Violence Number One.

2. *Violence from the developed world*

The second violence is imposed on the underdeveloped by the developed world. Here, I fully agree with your Declaration.

- You are right to say that the so-called 'developing' countries are, in fact, underdeveloped if foreign policies of developed countries, including Britain, carry on as at present.
- You went to the heart of the matter when you stated that the international monetary and trade system was devised by the rich countries to suit their needs. And when their interests are involved, the rich can and do break its rules with impunity.
- You have exposed the myth about Overseas Aid. What you have to say about Overseas Aid fits like a glove on the Alliance for Progress: 'at best, a wholly inadequate payment for goods received, at worst another name for the continued exploitation of the poor countries by the rich'.

- You have put clearly just what *is* the exploitation of underdeveloped countries by the developed ones. It consists in the refusal of the rich countries to allow the poor to own and use what material resources they possess in their own interests and in their own way.
- You have understood very well that the Third World needs deep and urgent changes in its social structures. And you did not hesitate to point out that the developed world needs changes just as much in some of its economic and social structures. I am sure that unless you are able to change your own systems it will be almost impossible to change ours.
- You have the ideal formulas in your Declaration ('May I say in *Our Declaration*?) for example: 'Our technology is used to annihilate the distances between places, and widens the gap between men.'

Capitalism, despite its championship of the human individual and freedom is egotistic, selfish and cruel. It does not hesitate to crush human beings when profit demands it. Under the banner of saving the free world, it commits terrible atrocities against freedom. It speaks proudly of tradition and family but it does not create the right conditions for workers and small proprietors to rear their families. It makes much of religion when it supports its own interests, but it defies and persecutes it when it fights for the development of the whole man and of all men. In the name of individual initiative, it supports national and international trusts and combines.

For its part, Marxism calls itself the only authentic humanism. In practice, super-powers, professing inspiration from Marx, are as cold and egotistical as their capitalist rivals. They do not admit pluralism in the socialist world; they fear intelligence, liberty, creativity and originality when these do not conform to the rigid precepts of the party. They nurture super-militarism and promote wars which are in no way different from capitalist wars. They shut themselves up in atheism without realizing that one can believe in a Creator and not feel oneself a slave but a co-creator, charged with subduing nature and consummating creation.

Taking all this into account, it is fair to conclude that underdeveloped countries, besides putting up with internal colonialism within their own frontiers, being exploited by their own countrymen to a degree of national slavery, have also to put up with another kind of violence from developed powers, even though these powers claim over and over again to be practising neighbourliness, and are able to give an impression to their own citizens of generosity.

3. *Violence sustains the 'established order', which is legally installed violence, which leads to subversion and more violence*

When, in underdeveloped countries, movements are set up—no matter how democratic and non-violent they may be—which try to criticize internal colonialism and national slavery, and which work

for a change in the social, economic and political structures; when in these underdeveloped countries, such movements try to uplift humanity, try to help people become human beings by overcoming despair and apathy and by teaching them to work together in teams, by encouraging and training leaders, then the local economic powers become nervous, the privileged groups are alarmed, because they can see the possible consequences of this effort which we call 'conscientizacao' or, the awakening of social conscience. And they cry out 'subversion', 'Communist'! In the case of Latin America, it hardly seems to matter that the Latin American Hierarchy, assembled in Colombia, chaired by His Holiness Pope Paul, attempted to stress the urgency of the need for basic reforms, and gave a warning against the distorted ideas of the 'social order' and against the exploitations committed in the name of anti-communism. We *should* have on our side the conclusions of the famous Punta del Este meeting, where the United States of America established as preconditions for aid from the Alliance for Progress, reforms of unjust and obsolete patterns of society. But it so happens that the U.S.A. looks upon our continent as their immediate area of defence, and are not willing to allow a second Cuba. The Economic Powers in Latin America have only to shout that there is a possible danger of Cubanization for the U.S.A. to be disturbed and the local governments to be geared for action.

Nowadays, the Pentagon is in direct communication with Latin American armies, who receive, as an important Aid Item for their respective countries, out-of-date armaments from the U.S.A.; they receive military missions and hold meetings of command of all Americas at regular intervals. Inspired by the thinking they take in, Latin American Armies have worked out a theory of national security. An important sector of this national security is to be permanently on the alert against communism, thus forcing Latin America more and more into the arms of the U.S.A. who by mere coincidence, represent for Latin America the very incarnation of International Power.

Of course I realize the responsibility of speaking frankly like this on a world resounding platform like London. I am moved by the peace of mind of someone who has a duty of conscience to perform, and I am encouraged by the hope of seeing the Brazilian Army—and this already seems to be happening—return to its best traditions, because it is well known that in the days of African slavery, when the abolition movement encouraged slaves to flee and the big Brazilian landowners asked the Army to help capture them, the answer was a definite *NO*. I long for the time when the wisdom and impartiality of our Armed Forces, without leaning to Cuba, or Russia, or Red China, no longer identify their interests and aims with those of the U.S.A. I long for the moment of enlightenment when our Armed Forces, as it seems might well happen, uphold without question the need for change in the archaic structures of our country;

and no longer listen to the privileged minorities who consider the loss of the privileges they abuse the same thing as subversion and communism. This gesture coming from Brazil would, certainly echo throughout the continent.

Meanwhile, crushed by the violence of internal colonialism, by the violence of external imperialism, nearly all Latin America runs the risk of being crushed by her own Governments, conscious of their mission to save democracy and peace in their own countries and perhaps in the Continent.

III. How to Escape this Triple Violence without More Violence

1. *The responsibility of the spiritual forces in the underdeveloped world*

There are countries in Latin America where it is still possible to appeal to the spiritual forces of the nation, such as the Church (and by Church I mean not Catholics only, but all our evangelical brethren, and all men of good will): the Press, Radio and Television (wherever it is free from the controls of Economic Power): the universities, and youth in general: and to the intelligent and sincere elements in our political life.

In some countries political parties are to all intents and purposes non-existent; youth is silenced by threats such as the forfeiture of educational rights; the press, radio and TV is kept under tight control. In some countries the only voice that remains—and even that is under growing suspicion—is that of the Church.

It seems to me that an absolute requirement of the Gospel, a matter of being faithful to Christ—no matter how wrongly this fidelity is interpreted—is that the Church, as long as she *is* able to speak out, as long as her voice is not stifled, should demand changes in the inhuman social structures that are holding up the full development of our peoples, and that are keeping them in conditions which are sub-human and unworthy of the Children of God.

2. *Responsibilities of the spiritual forces of the developed countries*

To the spiritual forces of the developed world, I can do no better than to indicate as a programme, provided it is not limited to beautiful and brave statements only, the Declaration of the Haslemere Group. I would especially emphasize this item of your programme: 'We intend to build links with the groups that are fighting poverty, homelessness, racial discrimination or any other issue that reflects the failure of society to cater for the weak and the oppressed.' Putting this another way, we align ourselves with those who are *struggling for development*, fighting poverty and subhuman conditions that reflect the failure of our society to help, efficiently, the promotion of *human justice*, the indispensable condition of peace in the world. You have referred to some of the groups which are striving for development in underdeveloped countries in these words: 'Many of these groups do not yet interpret their frustration politically; there

is no common language or institution to express them. The task ahead is to weld these disconnected feelings of protest into a coherent and united movement; to open a debate about the values and priorities and structures of our society that will involve those—particularly the young—who have stayed outside politics.'

3. *Who knows? A prophecy about the Haslemere Group*

I would like to finish by calling to mind something that happened in your country. During those dreadful days when the whole world anxiously watched the bombing which looked as if it might reduce London to ashes, the great figure of Churchill stood for Britain.

What an example he was for politicians of all time, by the absolute courage with which he was the first to tell the truth to the nation, no matter how hard it must have been! What an example it was when, instead of soothing you with lies he only promised you 'blood, toil, tears and sweat'.

When I look upon this small Haslemere Group, I am reminded of the famous words of Winston Churchill, when he referred to your Royal Air Force in these words: 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.' I would like, at some time, not too far in the future, the Third World to be able to use these same words about you.

Keep up your courage and do not be disheartened. Commit yourself fully. Try to get going other Haslemere Groups—even if with different names but with the same spirit—in other European countries, in the U.S.A. and Canada.

And, even if you do not regard yourselves as practising any particular religious faith, I assure you that you will be carrying out a profoundly Christian work!

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