

Gospel and Revolution

by 16 Bishops of the 3rd World'

1. As bishops of some of the peoples who are striving to develop, we endorse the anxious appeal of Pope Paul VI in his letter 'Populorum progressio', so as to define their duties for our priests and faithful, and to send words of encouragement to all our brothers in the Third World.

2. As they are in this Third World, our Churches are caught up in a confrontation no longer simply of East and West, but of three great groups: the western powers which grew rich in the last century, the two Communist countries that have also become great powers, and finally the Third World, still seeking an escape from the domination of the great powers, and the freedom to develop in their own way. Within even the developed countries there are still classes, races and peoples that have not yet received their rights to a full human life. An irresistible urge is working these poorer elements towards their betterment by liberating them from all oppressive forces. Although most countries may have gained their political freedom, economic freedom is still a rarity. Few also are countries where social equality prevails, an essential condition of true brotherhood, for peace cannot exist without justice. The peoples of the Third World are the proletariat of existing humanity, exploited by the great, their very survival threatened by ones who, because they are stronger, arrogate to themselves the sole right to judge and police peoples less rich in material terms. In fact our peoples are no less wise or just than the great powers.

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The original signatories numbered 15, but one more bishop has since signified his wish to be associated with the document. They are therefore as follows: Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife, Brazil; John-Baptist Da Mota e Albuquerque, Archbishop of Victoria, Brazil; Luis Gonzaga Fernandes, Auxiliary of Victoria, Brazil; Georges Mercier, Bishop of Laghouat, Sahara, Algeria; Michel Darmancier, Bishop of Wallis and Futuna, Oceania; Amand Hubert, Vicar Apostolic, Heliopolis, Egypt; Angelo Cuniberti, Vicar Apostolic of Florencia, Columbia; Severino Mariano de Aguiar, Bishop of Pesqueira, Brazil; Frank Franic, Bishop of Split, Jugoslavia; Francisco Austregesilio de Mesquita, Bishop of Afogados de Ingazeira, Brazil; Gregory Haddad, Melchite Auxiliary of Beirut, Lebanon; Manuel Pereira Da Costa, Bishop of Campina Grande, Brazil; Charles Van Melckebeke, Bishop of Ning Hsia (China), Apostolic Visitor to Singapore; Antonio Batista Fragoso, Bishop of Crateus, Brazil; Stephen Loosdregt, Bishop of Vientiane, Laos; Waldyr Calheiros de Novais, Bishop of Volta Redonda, Brazil.

I. *Independence in the face of political, social and economic systems*

3. Revolutions are and have been part of the evolution of the world. Nor is this surprising. All the constitutions in force today originated at a time more or less distant from a revolution, that is to say from a break with some system that no longer ensured the common good, and the establishment of a new order more likely to bring it about. All revolutions are not necessarily good. Some are only palace coups d'état, and result only in a change of oppressor. Some do more harm than good 'engendering new injustices . . .' (Populorum Progressio). Atheism and collectivism, to which some social movements have thought it necessary to commit themselves are serious dangers to humanity. Yet history shows that some revolutions have been necessary, that they have abandoned their original opposition to religion, and have produced good fruits. There is no longer any dispute about the French Revolution of 1789, which made possible the declaration of human rights (cf. 'Pacem in Terris', 11-27). Several of our countries have had to bring about these radical reforms, and are still having to. What should the attitude of Christians and Churches be to this? Paul VI has already shown us the way in his encyclical on the progress of peoples (Populorum Progressio, 30-32).

4. From the doctrinal point of view the Church knows that the Gospel demands that first fundamental revolution which is called 'conversion', a complete return from sin to grace, from selfishness to love, from pride to a humble willingness to serve. This conversion is not merely internal and spiritual, it affects the whole man, his physical and social as well as his spiritual and personal being. It has a communal aspect laden with implications for all society, not only for life on earth, but more for the eternal life in Christ who, Himself raised from the earth, draws all humanity to Him. Such in the eyes of a Christian is the integral flowering of man. Besides, for twenty centuries, visibly or invisibly, within or outside the Church, the Gospel has always been the most potent ferment of deep social change.

5. Nevertheless, throughout her historical pilgrimage on earth, the Church is in practice always tied to the political, social and economic system that in a given period, ensures the common good, or at least an ordered society. So much so that sometimes the Churches may seem to be fused with such a system, united as if in wedlock. But the Church has only one bridegroom, and that is Christ. She is in no way wedded to any system, least of all to the 'international imperialism of money' (Populorum Progressio), any more than she once was to the monarchy and feudalism of the Ancien Régime, any more than she will be in the future to some form of socialism. A glance at history is enough to show that the Church has survived the ruin of systems who thought they had to protect her interests, or that they could make use of her. Today the social doctrine of the Church, reaffirmed at Vatican II, is already dissociating her from this imperialism of money, one of the forces to which she was for a time tied.

6. Since the Council voices have been raised, forcefully demanding an end to this temporary collusion between the Church and money which is condemned from so many sides. Some bishops have already set the example.¹ We ourselves have a serious duty to examine our position on this question, and to free our Churches of all trace of dependence on great international finance. 'You cannot serve both God and Mammon.'

7. In face of the recent development of this imperialism of money, we must remind ourselves and the faithful of the warning given by the seer of Patmos to the Christians in Rome, when its fall was imminent, a great prostituted city, living in a luxury earned by the oppression of peoples and slave traffic: 'Go out from her, my people; that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues' (Apoc. 18, 4).

8. In what is permanent and essential, namely her faithfulness to and communion with Christ in the Gospel, the Church is never in the pay of political, economic or social systems. As soon as a system ceases to ensure the common good to the profit of some party involved, the Church must not merely condemn such injustice, but dissociate herself from the system of privilege, ready to collaborate with another that is better adapted to the needs of the time, and more just.

II. *Faithfulness to the people*

9. All of this applies to Christians as well as their leaders in the hierarchy and the Churches. We have not here abiding cities—Christ our leader willed to suffer outside the town (Heb. 13, 12, 4). Let none of us cling to our privileges and our riches, but let each stand prepared to 'share what he has, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God' (Heb. 13, 16). Even if we have not succeeded in acting with goodwill and love, let us at least be able to recognize the hand of God correcting us as a father might a son in situations where this sacrifice is forced upon us (Heb. 12, 5).

10. We do not judge or condemn any of those who believe conscientiously that they must go into exile to preserve the faith in themselves and their children. The only ones who should be strongly condemned are those who evict populations by material or spiritual oppression, or by the appropriation of their lands.

Christians and their pastors are dedicated to remaining among the people in their own country. History shows that it is seldom a good thing in the long run for a people to take refuge in exile far from their native land. It must either defend itself effectively against the alien aggressor, or else accept such reforms as are necessary. It is a mistake for Christians to cut themselves off from their country and people in the hour of trial, particularly if they are rich, and would only flee

¹Cf. *Populorum Progressio* gives the example of the late Bishop of Talca (Chili), Manuel Larrain.

to preserve their affluence and their privileges. It is true that a family or an individual may have to emigrate to find work, in accordance with the right of emigration (cf. *Pacem in Terris*). Yet a large scale exodus of Christians could lead to crisis. It is on their own soil and among their own people that Christians are normally called to live, in solidarity with their brothers, of whatever religion, that they may be living witnesses among them to the love Christ has for all.

11. As for us priests and bishops, our duty to remain where we are is even more pressing; for we are the representatives of the Good Shepherd who, far from fleeing like a mercenary in the hour of danger, remains in the midst of his flock, ready to give up His life for His own (John 10, 11-18). Jesus does tell the apostles to go from town to town (Matt. 10, 23), but this is strictly in a case of personal persecution for the faith; during a war or revolution involving the people with whom the pastor feels solidarity the case is quite different. If the people itself decided to go into exile, the pastor might follow his flock. But he cannot consider only his own safety, nor seek it in the company of a few profiteers or cowards.

12. Furthermore, Christians and their pastors should know how to recognize the hand of the Almighty in those events that from time to time put down the mighty from their thrones and raise up the humble, send away the rich empty-handed, and fill the hungry with good things. Today 'the world persistently and urgently demands recognition of human dignity in all its fullness, and social equality for all classes'.¹ Christians and all men of good will cannot do otherwise than ally themselves with this movement, even if it means renouncing privilege and fortune for the good of the human community, in a greater conception of society. The Church is by no means the protectress of great properties. She insists, with John XXIII, on the sharing of property, since property has primarily a social purpose.² Recently Paul VI recalled St John's words: 'But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?' (1 John 3, 17), and those of St Ambrose: 'the earth is given to everyone, and not only to the rich' (*Populorum progressio*, no. 23).

13. All the Fathers, of the East as well as of the West, repeat the words of the Gospel: 'Share out your harvest with your brothers. Share ye our crops, which tomorrow will have rotted away. What shocking avarice for a man to leave all to mildew sooner than leave part of it to the needy! "Whom am I wronging", says the miser, "in keeping what belongs to me?"' Alright, but tell me, what are these goods that belong to you? Where have you got them from? You are like a person who, taking his place at the theatre, would like to stop others coming in, meaning to enjoy by himself the spectacle to which all have an equal right. This is what rich people are like:

¹Patriarch Maximus at the Council, 27th October, 1964.

²*Mater et Magistra*, No. 389-391.

proclaiming themselves sole masters of common goods that they have monopolized, merely because they were the first to possess them. If each kept only what is required for his current needs, and left the surplus for the need, wealth and poverty would be abolished. . . . The bread you keep belongs to another who is starving, the coat that lies stolen in your chest to the naked, the shoes that rot in your house to the man who goes unshod, the money you have laid aside to the poverty-stricken. In this way you are the oppressor of as many people as you could help. . . . No, it is not your rapaciousness that is here condemned, but your refusal to share' (St Basil, 6th Homily against wealth).

14. Taking into account certain necessities for certain material progress, the Church has for a century tolerated capitalism with its legalization of lending at interest and other practices that so little conform to the moral teaching of the prophets and the Gospels. She cannot but rejoice to see another social system appearing that is less far from that teaching. It will be the task of tomorrow's Christians to follow the initiative of Paul VI, and channel back to their true sources, which are Christian, these currents of moral strength, solidarity and brotherhood (cf. *Ecclesiam Suam*). Christians have the duty to demonstrate 'that true socialism is a full Christian life that involves a just sharing of goods, and fundamental equality'.¹ Far from sulking about it, let us be sure to embrace it gladly, as a form of social life better adapted to our times, more in keeping with the spirit of the Gospel. In this way we shall stop people confusing God and religion with the oppressors of the poor and of the workers, which is what the feudal, capitalist, and imperialist systems are. These inhuman systems have engendered others which, intended to liberate the peoples, in fact oppress the individual if they fall into totalitarian collectivism and religious persecution. But God and the true religion have nothing in common with the various forms of the Mammon of Iniquity. On the contrary, they are always on the side of any who wish to promote a more equitable and fraternal society involving all God's sons in this human family.

15. The Church greets with joy and pride a new mankind that respects not money concentrated in a few hands, but the workers, the labourers, and the peasants. The Church is nothing without Him who never ceases to endow her with the power to thrive and so act, Jesus of Nazareth, who for so many years chose to work with his hands in order to reveal the outstanding dignity of workmen. 'The worker is infinitely superior to any amount of money', as a bishop of the Council reminded us.² Another bishop from a socialist country declared: 'If the workers do not achieve some measure of control of their industries, all constitutional reform will be useless. Even if the workers sometimes receive better wages under some economic

¹Patriarch Maximus IV at the Council, 28th September 1965.

²Mgr G. Hakim, Archbishop of Galilee, at the Council, 10th November 1964.

system, these increases alone will not satisfy them. In fact they want to own rather than sell their labour. Today the workers are increasingly aware that work is a part of being human. But a human being cannot be bought and sold. Any trading of labour is a form of slavery. . . . This is the direction in which human society is progressing, even in a system reputedly less concerned with individual dignity than we are, namely Marxism' (F. Francic, Split, Yugoslavia, October 4th, 1965).

16. This is to say that the Church rejoices to see developing in humanity forms of social life where work finds its proper place of predominance. As arch-priest Borovoi noted at the Ecumenical Council of Churches, we have made the mistake of adapting ourselves to the pagan juridical principles inherited from ancient Rome, but alas, in this sphere the West has sinned no less than the East. 'Of all the Christian cultures, the Byzantine has done most to sanction social ills. It adopted uncritically all the social heritage of the pagan world and consecrated it. The civil law of the pagan Roman Empire was preserved under a cloak of ecclesiastical tradition for many more than a thousand years at Constantinople and in Medieval Europe, and in Russia in the centuries since the period (sixteenth century) when our country began to think of herself as the heir of Byzantium. Yet it is utterly opposed to the social traditions of primitive christianity and of the Greek Fathers, to the missionary preaching of our Saviour, and all the teaching of the Old Testament prophets who never grow old.' (Ecumenical Council of Churches, July 12th, 1966. Church and Society, Geneva.)

III. *Faithfulness to God's word*

17. There is no political aim of any kind behind our words. Our only source is the Word of Him who spoke through His prophets and apostles, The Bible, particularly the Gospels, denounce any attack on man created in God's image as a sin against Him. Atheists today unite with believers in fulfilling this requirement of respect for the human being, working together in a common service of mankind in its search for justice and peace. Thus we can confidently address these words of encouragement to all men, for we all need courage and strength if we are to perform successfully the huge and urgent task of saving the Third World from poverty and hunger, and of freeing mankind from the catastrophe of a nuclear war: 'Never again war, away with weapons'.¹

The poverty-stricken populations, in the midst of which the All-merciful has placed us as pastors of a small flock, know by experience that they can rely on themselves and their own efforts more than on help from the rich. Some rich nations or some rich people among the nations do indeed offer a fair measure of help to our peoples, but we should be living in a delusion if we were to wait passively for a spontaneous conversion of all about whom our father Abraham

¹Paul VI at the U.N.

warns us: 'neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead' (Luke 16, 31).

It is for the poor peoples and the poor among them to strive for their own advancement first of all. Let them regain confidence, let them educate themselves out of illiteracy, let them persevere in building their own destiny, let them develop, using all the methods that modern society puts at their disposal, schools, transistors, newspapers: let them hear the people who can waken and form the awareness of the masses, above all the words of their pastors, and let the latter give them in entirety the Word of Truth and the Gospel of Justice. Let the apostolic movements of militant laymen put into practice the exhortation of Pope Paul VI: ' . . . It is for layfolk, by their free initiative, without waiting for orders and directives, to instil the Christian spirit into the mind, the customs, the laws, and the constitutions of the community they live in. Changes are necessary, deep reforms are indispensable: they must work with determination to breathe into them the evangelic spirit . . . ' (*Populorum progressio*, No. 81). Finally, let the poor and those who are working for them unite, for union is the only strength of the poor, to insist on and promote justice in Truth.

19. It is indeed truth and justice for which the people are above all hungry, and all who are responsible for instructing and educating them must busy themselves about it zealously. Some false conceptions must at once be removed: it is not true that God wishes there to be rich men enjoying the good things of this world by exploiting the poor: it is not true that God wishes there to be poor people always wretched. Religion is not the opium of the people. Religion is a force that exalts the humble and casts down the mighty from their seats, that gives bread to the hungry and reduces to hunger the over-eaters. Jesus certainly forewarned us that the poor would always be with us, but this is because there will always be the rich to amass the goods of this world, and also there will always be some inequalities due to varying capabilities and other unavoidable factors. But Jesus teaches us that the second commandment is equal to the first, for a man cannot love God without loving men his brothers. He warns us that all of us will be judged according to a single text: 'I was hungry, and you gave me to eat . . . it was I who was hungry' (Matthew 25, 31, 46). All the great religions, all mankind's systems of wisdom echo this text. The Koran declares the final test to which men are subject at the moment of God's Judgment: 'What is this test? It is to buy back captives, to feed orphans at a time of famine . . . or the poor man sleeping on the hard ground . . . and to make for oneself a law of pity' (Sour. 90, 11-18).

20. It is our duty to share our bread and all our goods. If some claim the right to amass for themselves what is needed for others, then it becomes a duty for public authorities to enforce sharing which has not been done voluntarily. Pope Paul VI reminds us of it

in his latest encyclical: "The common good, then, sometimes calls for the expropriation of certain properties that on account of their size, their small development or complete lack of it, the poverty inflicted on the population, or the considerable damage done to their country's interests, constitute an obstacle to collective prosperity. Stating it clearly, the Council reminded us no less forcibly that the available funds are not to be left to the careless whims of the individual, and that egotistical speculation must be banned. Consequently, citizens blessed with copious incomes arising from the national resources and effort cannot be allowed to transfer a large part of it abroad solely for their personal profit, careless of the manifest wrong they are inflicting on their country' (*Populorum Progressio*). Nor can rich foreigners be allowed to come for the purpose of exploiting our poverty-stricken peoples under the pretext of business or industry any more than a few rich people can be suffered to exploit their own peoples. This is what causes bitter nationalism, which is always to be deplored and which is the opposite of real collaboration between peoples.

21. What is true of individuals is also true of nations. Unfortunately, there is today no effectual world government able to enforce justice between peoples and to distribute goods justly. The economic system now in force permits rich nations to grow even richer, even when they are giving a little help to poor nations, which are growing proportionately poorer. The poor nations must, therefore, insist, using every legitimate means within their power, on establishing a world government in which all peoples without exception are represented and which can ask for, even enforce, a just sharing of goods, a state of affairs essential for peace. (Cf. 'Pacem in terris', No. 137; 'Populorum progressio', 78.)

22. Even within every nation, the workers have the right and duty of forming real trade unions to insist upon and to defend their rights: fair wages, paid holidays, social security, family allowances, co-ownership . . . it is not enough for rights to be acknowledged on paper through laws. The laws must be implemented and governments must exercise their powers in this respect in the service of the workers and the poor. Governments must labour to bring to an end the class war which, contrary to what is usually maintained, has been unleashed, only too often, by the rich, who continue to wage it against the workers by exploiting them with inadequate wages and inhuman working conditions. Money has for a long time cynically waged a subversive war throughout the world, destroying entire peoples. It is high time that the poor peoples, upheld and guided by their lawful governments, should effectively defend their right to life. God did after all reveal himself to Moses, saying: 'I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their task masters . . . and I have come down to deliver them' (Exodus 3, 7-8). Jesus in fact took upon Himself all mankind

to lead it to eternal life, for which the earthly preparation is social justice, first form of brotherly love. When Christ frees mankind from death by His resurrection, He leads all human freedoms to their eternal fulfilment.

23. Thus we address to all men the Gospel words which some of us¹ addressed last year to their peoples who were subject to the same anxieties and spurred by the same hope as all the peoples of the Third World: 'We urge you to remain constant and dauntless, as evangelical leaven in the workers' world, relying on the words of Christ: "Look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near"' (Luke 21, 28).

¹Manifesto of bishops of the North-eastern region of Brazil. Récife, 14th July 1966.

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