

and care and support are extended to those who suffer, offering through our ministrations his reconciliation and peace with himself and all men. In this way God has called us to lead others through the shadows of life without fear, strong in our own belief that shadows betray another dimension to life, and conceal the quiet presence of God and his reconciling love.

And finally, the gift of God in Christ and through those who care is not only reconciliation with God and with man, but also, and radically, reconciliation with oneself. Such reconciliation is a deeply satisfying human experience, a healing of self-rejection, which enables one to accept clear-eyed one's weakness, impotence, achievements and failures, vulnerability, frailty, humanity and suffering. It is a coming to terms with oneself and one's life, not in the sense of surrender or passive resignation before life and its vicissitudes, nor in the sense of actively desiring to increase one's sufferings, far less regarding them as the vengeance of an angry god; but in the sense of an active personal acceptance that life has been and is in the making, and that God's work of loving creation is still in hand and being made manifest. Peter Abelard in his loveliest hymn, written for Good Friday, addresses our Lord as going forth 'alone to sacrifice' on our behalf, and prays that we in our suffering may accompany him, to share his glory and 'win the laughter of thine Easter Day'.¹ It is only in the tension between death and birth that we can really make sense of suffering. And it is only through the constriction of pain that we can come to the divine laughter of release, of relief, of contentment, and of rebirth. It is something of this, but little else, that can make meaning of pain in the Christian life.

¹In Helen Waddell's sensitive translation, *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics*, Penguin, p. 179.

The Church in Haiti*

The subject of this interview, which was given in Paris to Claudio Zanchettin just before the death of Duvalier earlier this year, is a citizen of Haiti. For obvious reasons he must remain anonymous.

Can you tell me about the present social and economic situation in Haiti?

To understand the present reality you must go back to the history of this country.

The state of the social classes in Haiti is even today not very different from that existing before independence was achieved in 1804. From the times of slavery—which lasted for three centuries—we have dragged along a structure based on three classes: the French

*This interview first appeared in *Il Gallo* (March 1971). It is translated by Robert Ombres, O.P.

colonists, the freemen and the slaves. This last group made up about 80 per cent of the population. At present in Haiti, peasants represent 87 per cent of the population while the remaining 13 per cent consists of the middle class and the petty bourgeoisie. The peasant masses bear the burden (without any of the advantages) of the Haitian economy. As is well known, apart from agricultural produce needed for home consumption, almost the only product of Haiti is coffee. Well, the bulk of exports (and be it well understood of imports too) relate to the U.S.A. The United States have a hegemonic role in the economic life of Haiti; the banks, the main businesses are totally dependent on the U.S.A. even if in appearance they are controlled on the spot by Haitians.

The present government carried out a demagogic measure in placing *illiterate* peasants in the ministries and the positions of power in the country. Under the appearance of giving way to the peasants the government in fact has simply worsened the situation at the economic level. It was really a measure that favoured only a few individuals and did not touch the real wretchedness and underdevelopment of the peasant masses.

Even today 95 per cent of Haitians are illiterate and this is true not only of the peasants but also of those who live in urban centres.

What do you think of President Duvalier's regime?

It is a regime that has already lasted thirteen years. When he came to power Duvalier gave the impression of understanding perfectly the Haitian mentality. But from the start the Haitians realized he was motivated solely by an unchecked personal ambition. The balance-sheet of Duvalier's regime shows nothing but continuous, merciless repression. Repression at every level: religious, social, political. Duvalier has created in these years a special militia whose members are nicknamed *Tontons Macoutes*. It is in substance some-very like Hitler's S.S.; men without scruples or restraints and with an absolute right of life and death over every inhabitant of Haiti.

Duvalier has chosen the *Tontons Macoutes* from among all the various social classes; illiterates as well as 'educated' people are involved. In common they wield arbitrary power and enjoy a standard of living well above the poverty of the majority.

It only takes the slightest suspicion for not only the person concerned but also members of his family and his friends to be thrown in gaol and kept there without trial or the right of defence. That is if they do not first disappear in more or less mysterious circumstances.

By means of the *Tontons Macoutes* the government is able to carry out a continuous and pervasive repression, so blocking the growth of a strong opposition in the country.

Are there at the moment 'revolutionary' classes in Haiti?

One can identify the peasant masses as the base of a possible revolutionary class. It is useful to remember that Haiti has behind

her a long tradition of rebellion and revolt; some of the slaves who were brought over by force from Africa in the sixteenth century escaped from the plantations and hid in the woods. In fact there has always been a certain rebellious spirit among the peasant-slaves.

From the time of independence—which goes back to 1804—the country has been governed by the middle classes. They have prevented any revolutionary evolution. The peasants remain substantially deprived of the opportunity to participate in the democratic and popular government of the country.

In 1915 the United States intervened militarily in Haiti and their occupation lasted for twenty years. In this period the economic links with the U.S.A. were strengthened to the point of making the Haitian economy almost totally dependent on the United States.

When the peasants protested about the theft of their land, the Americans intervened to restore order, while in fact, they themselves were the cause of the disorder.

Do many Haitians emigrate?

There are difficulties about migration statistics—and there are numerous clandestine emigrations.

This marked and continuous exodus of Haitians is due to both political and economic factors.

All opponents of the present regime are forced to seek refuge abroad. The tragic face of the Duvalier regime is now evident to everyone in America and it can be said that the Americans themselves no longer support the regime. However they fear that the removal of Duvalier will lead to a left-wing government (which for the Americans is synonymous with Communism).

Can you tell us something about the position of the Church in Haiti?

The story of Haitian Catholicism is one of the saddest imaginable. In the course of the centuries Catholicism has resulted in a real repression of Haitian consciousness, and as such of Haitian culture.

When the slaves were imported into Haiti they were forcibly baptized in the belief that the Catholic religion would keep them quiet. In fact the slaves had brought with them from Africa their own animist religious beliefs. These beliefs fused with elements of a certain type of Catholicism to give birth to that religion—characteristic of Haiti—that is called *voodoo*. This religion is the result of the condition of the peasant (and once slave) masses of Haiti; a condition of wretchedness, abjection and oppression. Catholicism has been assimilated in its most external and superficial features while little of the message of Christ's redemption and salvation has filtered down to the level of the masses. One has in addition to bear in mind that in 1869 the Haitian government and the Vatican concluded a Concordat that gave the Catholic Church a number of important privileges and at the same time allowed the State to 'control' religious activity in its territory. The President not only has the

privilege of nominating bishops and archbishops but can also nominate parish priests.

Before as well as after the Concordat, the Catholic Church tried to stamp out voodoo religion in Haiti. Voodoo, which was and still is the basic religious and cultural language of the Haitians, is decisive in the situation of this people. By impeding in every way the expression of voodoo, Catholicism has seriously undermined the cultural achievement of Haitian civilization. Moreover the Church in Haiti has always been on the side of order, of the State, of the powerful local bourgeoisie.

Both at the cultural and at the political level the presence of the Church in Haiti has been substantially negative.

As things are the bishops are an extension of the political authorities, of Duvalier's politics.

The Haitian masses, who are particularly sensitive to a religious message, realize what influence the Catholic Church has. An influence rather on the negative side precisely because the Church encourages and has always preached the resignation of the poor.

Is it true that 90 per cent of Haitians are baptized?

This is the present situation. The absurdity is that voodoo religion is not considered in absolute opposition to Christianity. 'One has to be a Catholic to practise voodoo' is a common saying in Haiti.

To be a Catholic today in Haiti also fulfils a need, an image of social prestige. To be baptized means to become a *man*, to enter with full rights into society.

Christianity thus fulfils a function of social legitimation.

To what extent has there been and is there still collusion between the Vatican and the present Haitian government?

The collusion is absolute. In 1966 an agreement was signed to save the presence of the Church threatened by the numerous disputes that had arisen in the years 1960 to 1962. As is well known, in 1960 Duvalier's government expelled the archbishop of Port-au-Prince and the Holy See replied by excommunicating Duvalier. By the 1966 agreement, however, the Vatican not only sanctioned the preceding regime but also gave Duvalier enormous political and moral support. And the consequences of this agreement have made themselves heavily felt in these last years. Not one Haitian bishop has protested against the violence, the crimes, the murders committed by Duvalier's men. Indeed when there were some unsuccessful attempts at revolt, the bishops did not fail to manifest publicly their solidarity with 'Papa Doc'.

Do you agree with Illich's thesis that it is now counterproductive to send foreign missionaries to Latin American countries?

Illich's position—which I share fully—seems to me to be the most radical critique of the Church that has so far been made in Latin

America. Illich is fully aware of the situation in our countries and he knows perfectly well that the missionaries in fact become an instrument of foreign penetration. If you look at the case in Haiti you realize that no missionary has the chance to set himself in opposition to Duvalier's regime.

Looking at the whole Church in Haiti I cannot but say that it has today largely compromised with the established authority. In Haiti it is not a matter of eliminating certain ecclesiastical structures. It is the very kind of presence of the Church that is under examination.

Has the Council changed the situation of catholicism in Haiti?

Perhaps yes at the liturgical level, as regards a few external manifestations. But the position of the bishops and the priests has not changed greatly and the peasant masses know nothing about the new openings and orientations brought about by Vatican II.

Is there a crisis among priests in Haiti?

It is a phenomenon very much present in our country. The expulsion of the Holy Ghost fathers and of a group of secular priests decreed by Duvalier in 1970 has magnified the fact. The priests that remain in Haiti have either to join in with the regime or leave. In Haiti it is sufficient to be a priest to be considered one of the Tontons Macoutes. Even in Haiti, however, the wind of 'reform' has been felt.

Uneasiness is felt especially by the seminarians. But the thick veil that smothers the country makes it difficult to see the disagreements, the resignations, the abandonment of religious life.

Are you for revolution or for a Helder Camara-type of non-violence?

In Haiti we have to face a situation of continuous violence. The response of the masses—if it comes—cannot but be revolutionary. The only way to smash the existing dictatorship is to organize ourselves.

It is not the masses that have chosen violence. Violence comes from those, whoever they may be, who bolster-up the present regime.

Prophecy and the Gift of Tongues by Simon Tugwell, O.P.

'If you have faith', St Cyril of Jerusalem tells his catechumens, 'you won't only receive remission of your sins, you'll also do things beyond the power of man. Please God, you'll receive the gift of prophecy.'

In the previous two articles, we have been dissecting the Pente-