

Priests and Socialism in Chile

by Maruja Echegoyen

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Eighty Catholic priests who live and work among the working classes in Chile met in April in Santiago to study the most effective way priests and lay people could help in building socialism in Chile. What follows is a summary made up from answers given to questions asked at a Press Conference on 16th April, to some questions asked later of some of the priests taking part, and from statements made in some of the papers read.

It has been compiled by the Uruguayan journalist MARUJA ECHEGOYEN.¹

Background

During the final Session of the study group, eight priests held a Press Conference at which they read out a prepared statement and answered questions from journalists representing both Chilean and overseas papers. Among these priests were Fr Gonzalo Arroyo, chaplain of the Catholic University of Santiago, and Fr Alfonso Pujadas, Director-General of the Workers' Movement at the same University. The journalists mostly represented left-wing organs. Not long before, the Christian Democrat daily *La Prensa* had published, tendentiously and without prior authorization, with misleading headings, a *private* document circulated in November last year among a group of priests, wrongly making it out to be the starting-point for this meeting of Socialist priests. Gonzalo Arroyo attacked this action at the Press Conference, and it is indeed one more example of the growing inability of the more right-wing sector of Christian Democracy in Chile to listen and discuss rationally.

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Questions and Answers

Are you holding this study group in defiance of the hierarchy, or with the support of the bishops?

There is no question of defiance. We are still Catholic priests. We invited the bishops and some would have been here were it not for the fact that the Episcopal Conference is meeting at the same time elsewhere. The Vicar of the Southern Zone has taken part in all our meetings.

We are told that more than half those taking part are not Chilean. Is that true?

Another distortion—though if it were true, it would merely indicate that foreign priests have a better sense of socio-political realities and how to serve the people in the world today than Chilean ones! The proportion of foreigners amongst us is the same as in the rest of the clergy in Chile. This high proportion—nearly

¹Translated from the Spanish by Paul Burns.

half—is explained by the crisis of vocations in Chile. But what matters is that a priest should be with the working classes, not his passport. Faith overflows the narrow boundaries of nationalism. Che Guevara, an Argentinian, did quite right to fight in Cuba, and the same can be said with much more truth of Christians. Some of our foreign companions have worked in the greatest poverty for twenty years on behalf of the Chilean people.

As for me (added Alfonso Pujadas), I came to Chile to do in the open spaces here what could not be done, what had failed, in the pressure cooker of my native Catalonia.

Why do you have to throw yourselves into politics: shouldn't a priest remain neutral in these matters?

Such neutrality is a fallacy; it never existed. The Church and priests have always had *different forms* of political involvement. Those who talk most about 'neutrality' and 'a-politicism' are those who, sometimes without realizing it, serve the *status quo*, that is, an unjust capitalist society that through its own structures continues to make the rich richer and the poor poorer, which is a scandalously anti-Christian thing to do. The Cardinal of Santiago was quite right when he said, in November 1970: 'There are more evangelical values in socialism than in capitalism.'

But you are causing scandal and division among Christians. Couldn't you choose less shocking ways of expressing your political choice?

We are not causing any scandal among the poor, or among those who think for themselves and see that socialism would allow the world to free men from slavery so as to fulfil themselves in fuller, freer and more evangelical ways. As for divisions, there is a much more scandalous one provoked among the working classes by certain Christian policies that have taken the strength and unity out of the popular movement and have sown unjustified suspicions by their melodramatic anti-Communism that has no roots in our social reality in this country. We are working as priests for the unity of the whole country, and it is our permanent contact with its people, our faithfulness to the workers, that makes us take political responsibilities. We don't use the word 'political' in a party political sense, but in the sense of a contribution to the building up of the society of men (*Polis* means 'city'). Don't forget that for the Christian there is no *one* ideal model of society in practice. His model only exists on a transcendental level and he can work in any sort of society that does not deny human fellowship. Socialism achieves this better than capitalism, and the facts are there to prove it.

To what do you attribute the failure of Christian Democracy, which also preached fellowship?

To a mistaken strategy based on an unscientific analysis of reality and a pre-Conciliar theology with no roots in the world of today. Christian Democracy was an imported product; it had nothing to do with the reality of life in Latin America. It is understandable in

Europe, where the Catholic Church had withdrawn into a sort of ghetto, as a result of the political persecution and philosophical attacks it has suffered over the last three hundred years. In Europe, Christian Democracy was an interesting attempt to escape from the ghetto, but when it was transplanted to Latin America, no account was taken of the fact that here the Catholic Church was tied to the established order, and was playing an enormous part in politics, as it always had done, directly or indirectly. The problem here was the opposite to the one in Europe. It was not one of trying to bring the Church out of the ghetto, but of freeing it from its historical links with an increasingly unjust and oppressive society. Christian Democracy failed also because it was tied to a pre-Conciliar theology, one which emphasized the dualism between the Church and the World, put forward a Christian model of society that bore no relationship to the historical reality of Christianity, and based itself on totally abstract criteria, with no relevance to the facts of history, let alone of Latin American history. This European-style social Catholicism had no chance of being a successful alternative to socialism: even without its internal divisions and before it outlasted its historical role, it lacked adequate theoretical bases, the means to make an adequate analysis of the social reality from which to work out criteria for action.

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Summary of a Discussion

One of the priests present would not accept that Christian Democracy had failed. It had, he maintained, been a positive and necessary step, and had performed an invaluable task in awakening the people—which Tomic had done—to the fact that there was no opposition between Catholicism and revolution.

(What the right wing in Chile ardently reproach Tomic with is precisely having been grist to Allende's mill. They don't ask why the Chilean people preferred Allende's Popular Union party to Tomic's socialist version of Christian Democracy when both offered almost equally revolutionary solutions.)

It is quite true, the socialist priests went on, that we had two revolutionary ways offered: Allende's and Tomic's. One of them won, and so we work with it. The Christian has no other choice. Everyone must of course decide this for himself, but let him do so as a result of a historical, socio-economic, scientific analysis, not on the basis of taboos or romantic ideals and outworn formulas that go no way towards meeting the basic problems our people suffer from.

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Further Questions and Answers

How can you reconcile the class struggle with Christian charity?

That's a false opposition, a play on words. What does Christian

charity mean as practised by a capitalist society that exploits the riches of Latin America at the cost of forty-five out of every hundred children born in the Continent dying before the age of five? What does Christian charity mean for officially Catholic governments which at this very moment are torturing mothers, priests, students and workers, sometimes to death, or just shooting them down in the streets? The class struggle is a *fact*. To deny it by invoking Christian charity is hiding one's head in the sand. But one has to make a very clear distinction between the class struggle as a fact and the use one can make of the energy of the struggle precisely in order to overcome injustice, exploitation, killings, illiteracy—all the evils of under-development—so as finally to do away with the class struggle as unnecessary.

Here one must realize and fully understand that capitalism, by its very nature and dynamism, inevitably—not because capitalists are evil men: hence the fallacy of trying to convert them to Christianity and Christian charity—inevitably produces under-development, determines that the rich nations get richer all the time and the poor ones poorer all the time. These are not Swedish, Chinese or socialist theories; they are economic facts; and history and statistics bear them out time and again. This brutal fact of inequality will not be corrected on the level of personal intentions; we have to act on the level of the structures that produce inequality between classes. This action on structures is the class struggle. It doesn't even always need physical violence. The nationalization of the copper mines and the banks in Chile are two good examples of the class struggle in action, and not only do they not run counter to the Gospel, but at this juncture of under-development and the oppression of the poor majority by a rich minority, they are the only thing that can be asked in the name of Christian charity.

But this class struggle means using hatred, fomenting it.

Not necessarily. The class struggle in Marxist terms is not an orgy of violence in which everyone releases his aggressive instincts and pent-up resentments. It is rational, controlled aggression. And hatred is not its only motive force, nor even the most effective one in the long run: Ghandi, Martin Luther King and Dom Helder Camara have undertaken effective struggles without condoning hatred as a motivation. And if a Christian is shocked at the thought of spilling blood, there are other techniques of class struggle, as there are of modern war—economic, psychological, diplomatic. What is not admissible is passivity or neutrality in the name of charity!

Nevertheless, an armed struggle is inevitable because no privileged class ever gave up its privileges except through force. Would you do what Camilo Torres did and preach an armed struggle to bring the people to power, with a machine-gun?

That is a personal choice that depends on the historical moment in

which each person finds himself. One always has to choose the lesser of two evils. As Christians, we cannot accept the violence of those over us (institutional violence, the capitalist violence that has produced two World Wars in thirty years and fifty colonial or civil wars) out of fear of using defensive violence to protect the majority against armed exploitation by the minority. The Church has never condemned the use of force in self-defence, and what the people who are saying 'Enough' and resorting to an armed struggle are doing is defending themselves. Camilo Torres represents the final political choice open to a priest. He is the example for those who, in particular historical circumstances, come to the conclusion that they have to resort to revolutionary struggle because it is the *only* way left if 'the love that men should bear their neighbour is to be made real'. One should not forget that Camilo did not give up his priesthood; he made his choice as a priest, a priest who proclaims at Communion that it is the blood of the lamb, the Paschal sacrifice, that redeems the people from their sins and frees them from slavery—and who is to say that he did wrong?

You use a transcendental language, the language of Christian faith . . . Isn't this perhaps incompatible with the atheism and materialism of Marxists?

Let's be quite clear what we mean by these terms. There is a lot of unwitting confusion—and a lot of wilful confusion. *Historical Materialism* is a theory about the conditions for achieving liberty in the course of history. It does not say that materialism determines the act of liberation, but that it conditions it. Theologically, we would say that historical materialism deals with the 'works' that enliven faith: 'Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does my commandments'. He who *does*. Doing, in a world where the survival of humanity depends on the economic process, means *doing* also on the level of the social relationships of production. All this can be translated line for line into the categories of scholastic theology. As for *Dialectical materialism*, it is a more complex case, but it can be said that its more ingenuous and primitive forms (those condemned by the encyclicals, which are incompatible with Christian thinking and belong to a particular epoch in certain socialist countries—to Stalinism, in fact) have been completely superseded by the more important Marxist philosophers. Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Marcuse, and many others, bring all that has been worked out in the first half of the twentieth century into their thinking and are way beyond the materialism-*vs*-spirituality conflict, which belongs to the late nineteenth century.

But what about atheism?

Marx's atheism was practical, not theoretical. He was not interested in the proofs for the existence of God, and he did not talk of armed struggle against religion. He was concerned with the social effects of belief in God, the fact that religion acted as a sedative for

the deep evil of economic oppression. There is no point in attacking the drug; only the illness. The fight against religion in the Soviet Union owes more to the Russian tradition of atheism than to Marx. Insofar as the building of socialism in Chile is true to our own history, that should not happen here. It is noticeable that the young people of Latin America have spontaneously by-passed that stage: they are interested in building a Latin-American society in which freedom has real meaning. Trying to fit everyone into one mould of thought is a hindrance rather than a help to their effective sharing in goods and decisions. This makes doctrinal pluralism possible. Marxists themselves in practice are revising their attitude to religion and are progressively more unwilling to discuss their global view of life. The materialist challenge to faith is really stronger in the advanced industrial nations, with their clinging to material comfort, their passion for accumulating consumer goods and their refusal to ask themselves the meaning of life in case the answer should threaten their privileges. The upper and middle Chilean classes who emigrate to the United States and Europe from fear of their children being brought up in 'Marxist materialism', when the result will be that they will then be brought up in the 'materialism of luxury, competition and consumption' are failing in critical acumen, to say the least.

There is still one problem. If Christians are converted to Marxism, what specifically Christian contribution can they make to the building up of socialism?

There is no such 'conversion' to Marxism, just as one cannot talk either of conversion from Catholicism to aristotelianism, or scholasticism, or existentialism. Marxism is not a religion—even if Communism today absorbs the religious energies of millions of people. Marxism is tending to evolve into a social science, and as an instrument of analysis and a method of action, its materialism is not incompatible with the Christian faith. Marxists and Christians have reached the same conclusions about the Chilean situation, and both of us are asking how we find a way out. As Christians, we bring very deep-rooted and dynamic motivations to this quest: those of Faith, Hope and Charity. Faith? Our Faith is not something in the air; it has always been an incarnate faith, an historical one. For this reason it implies political involvement. It cannot be separated from human progress, and the priestly function is indissolubly linked to the awakening of human awareness. Hope? Our hope may refer to the Kingdom, to the second coming of Christ, but it begins to act here and now, in temporal structures, because looking forward to the future life begins here and now, in this society in which I happen to live and for whose transformation—humanization—I am inescapably responsible. Charity? Loving one's neighbour, which is the first commandment by definition, today means working to change the

structures that are destroying my neighbour, the people, the poor. *Service*, the priest's, and the Christian's, first mission, today means mobilizing the people, helping to form their consciousness of themselves as a class. Socialism, because of its courageous, positive values and because it works for class solidarity and freedom from economic slavery, from ignorance and illness, from poverty and cultural slavery, is for us the partial realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. And we denounce capitalism because its implacable structures remove all possibility of beginning to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth for the vast majority of the human race. Christian faith incarnate in works, in social, political, economic and revolutionary action, this coincides with the faith of socialism. Both tend towards the creation of a classless society, towards solidarity. They are two Utopias (in the technical sense of the word) that back each other up. On this Utopian level, the Christian contribution seems to me important because of its dynamism, its specific nature and its universality.

The other specifically Christian contribution can be in the field of morals—as long as we put our moral theology in order first. The classical Marxists did not draw up moral treatises. Lenin was occupied above all by political strategy; his morality accentuates the political dimension and leaves personal morality undeveloped. And even as political morality, it is war morality, in that it refers to a particular historical moment when the classes are in open, ceaseless conflict. But in a socialist society that overcomes the conflict between bourgeois and proletarian, other forms of morality will apply. Socialism is a continual process, a continual growth and transformation: as it goes on, successive contributions will go on completing and enriching man's moral dimension. We think Christians have something to say here, above all through their *behaviour in practice*.

What do you regard as the worst obstacles Christians and Marxists will meet in their efforts to build socialism?

Apart from capitalism—the common enemy, which must be fought without quarter or hope of reconciliation till the final change is brought about—the worst obstacles for a time will be our mutual prejudices. Christians have a distorted view of Marxism. We tend to believe that it inevitably means violence, dictatorship, militant atheism, failing to see that violence, dictatorship and practical and hypocritical atheism have always been with us, under one name or another. We attribute to the essence of Marxism what are only the external connotations of the first steps in the formation of some socialist States, and foreign steps that need not be repeated in our countries provided we are faithful to the concept of Marxism as an instrument for changing a given reality, in this case our own reality, which is different from that of Europe or Asia. Marxists, for their

part, tend to confuse Christianity with some of its transitory historical forms—and usually the worst, not the more constructive ones—with fascism or the right-wing clericalism that compromises with colonialism or totalitarianism to protect the Church as an Institution.

But both Christians and Marxists are currently going through a process of honest, critical revision of our ideas, prejudices, attitudes and ‘hang-ups’ with regard to each other. Dialogue may not be easy, but it is possible and real, and an established fact. In practice, we are all (except for a few fanatics dominated by fear of change) agreed on the essential task: the problem of the hungry—hungry for bread, a roof, health, freedom, knowledge, brotherhood, dignity—is not solved by offering them an exhortation, or a flag or a philosophical doctrine, but by obtaining the *actual means* of satisfying their hunger. Freedom and what goes with it, is not asked for or given; it is *won*. This is what socialism is for us, and this is why we are with the Chilean people in the political mission they have chosen—to build not a European-style Christian Democracy but a Chilean socialism.

The Earl of Shaftesbury and the ‘Papal Aggression’

by Ronald Pearsall

The Earl of Shaftesbury and the ‘Papal Aggression’ of 1850 is an interesting example of how a man of sense and humanity can be driven by prejudice into taking a posture that contradicts everything he has striven for. What he did was of less importance than why he did it, for even at the time intelligent men were aware that Shaftesbury was obsessively involved in a storm in a tea-cup.

The term ‘Papal Aggression’ indicates how Shaftesbury’s contemporaries saw the Papal Bull of 1850; this Bull abolished the administration of Roman Catholics in Great Britain by Vicars Apostolic, and appointed instead two Archbishops and twelve Bishops with territorial districts clearly marked out. Shaftesbury was in Scotland recovering from illness when he heard about this. It was, he considered, ‘an act of great annoyance and audacity’ but not contrary to law, and he was prepared to simmer awhile.

When Dr Wiseman was appointed the first Archbishop of Westminster and raised to the dignity of a Cardinal, then Shaftesbury felt that he had no other course but to act, and the publication of the pastoral ‘From out of the Flaminian Gate of Rome’ was