

something or other. And what can the cause of this failure be if it is not the choice or will of the sinner?

- A. Can it not be God as creating the sinner?
- B. But this does not make God a cause of sin. For sin, we are saying, is recognised as failure, as a not-being. And not even God can cause that. Surely the cause of sin is the will of the sinner.
- A. But what makes that to be as it is?
- B. The answer is surely God. For did we not agree at the outset that since God is Creator he is responsible for everything that is done? *Deus non solum dat formas rebus, sed etiam conservat eas in esse et applicat eas ad agendum et est finis omnium actionum, ut dictum est (Summa Theologiae, Ia, 105, 5 ad.3).*

Theologies of Repression

Gilbert Márkus OP

At the end of their National Conference this summer, the bishops of the Philippines spoke out strongly against human rights abuses in their country. They recited a long list of the names of people killed in the past year, including priests, journalists, trade unionists and other community leaders. Such denunciations of violence and repression are now fairly standard parts of the conclusions of many bishops' conferences, but the Philippine bishops' statement is interesting because it singles out the use of 'religious fanatics' in the government agencies' counter-insurgency campaigns. The bishops condemned this as an 'unholy strategy', and claim that it is only 'conducive to the worst forms of terrorism'. The arming and training of fanatical religious groups to fight the New People's Army had led the civilian Home Defence Force to become 'instruments of terror rather than peace'.

Though the Philippine bishops' conference was addressing itself to its own local situation, they are clearly aware that this use of certain groups of Christians by repressive governments is not peculiar to their own country. Other local Catholic hierarchies have spoken out strongly against various religious groups. In recent months Mexican Church leaders, together with labour leaders and others, have called for the

expulsion of various evangelical, fundamentalist sects from Mexico. The enormous financial resources of these sects, together with their political and social impact, has led to accusations that they are an integral part of US foreign policy in the region, and even that they operate as a front for the CIA. The Honduran bishops have also warned against 'the very serious danger' of the influence of these sects, especially with respect to their involvement with 'anti-communist' organisations in Honduras. Guatemalan church leaders have expressed concern over the rapid growth of these sects among their people: twenty per cent of Guatemalans are now thought to belong to one or other of the many sects that have flooded into the country in the past fifteen years or so. According to the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity, more than thirty national conferences of bishops in various parts of the world described the aggressive proselytism of the sects as a major problem in 1984.

It is tempting to dismiss these warnings from the Catholic hierarchy as merely the complaint of what was once *the* church in Latin America, now faced with the necessity of competing with others who are encroaching on what has been Catholic territory for centuries. But if this were the case one would expect *all* Protestant churches to be opposed by the Catholic hierarchy with similar enthusiasm, but this has not happened. The bishops have singled out for attack particular forms of Protestant Christianity—the evangelical sects—and in some cases Catholics have united with mainstream Protestant churches in attacking the influence of these sects. Clearly, then, what is taking place is not simply a Catholic-Protestant struggle for control.

These sects are characterised by their insistence on salvation by a faith conceived of as a state of mind, an inner experience of Jesus which removes the necessity of involvement of any sort with the world at large except in so far as the believers are called to preach their gospel. To be 'saved' is to be saved *from* the world of social and political problems, and so to be relieved of the obligation of engaging in any form of political activity. Often the preachers of these sects will account for any conflict or violence simply as a fulfillment of prophecy, and this explanation neatly conceals the more obvious causes such as landlessness, repression, unemployment and so on. The believer's duty is to keep himself or herself pure of such worldly concerns, to pray and to accept whatever happens as the will of God. Salvation, or liberation, is firmly kept in the hereafter, and is not to be sought in this life in any way. This kind of theology is designed to bring about the political demobilisation of the people, reducing them to an apathetic and disorganised collection of individuals, concerned only with a very personal and individual morality. Meanwhile, since in 1968 the Medellin Conference of Latin American Bishops made its famous 'preferential

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option for the poor', the Catholic Church in Latin America has increasingly stressed an entirely different theological approach. The year after Medellín the Rockefeller Report on Latin America warned that the Catholic Church could not be trusted to lend its support to pro-US regimes, and that it had become vulnerable to 'subversive penetration'. General Schwaeker, the Pentagon coordinator of Latin American Forces complained: 'We can no longer rely on the Catholic Church in Latin America. We have to rely on the Free Churches'. The Santa Fé Report, drawn up by a Reagan transition team on foreign policy in 1980, urged US policy-makers to take steps to 'counteract' liberation theology and its proponents. 'Unfortunately', it read, 'Marxist-Leninist forces have used the Church as a political weapon against private property and the capitalist system of production.' In the light of these perceptions of the Catholic Church by US interests, we can see the sharp increase in the number of evangelical sects (almost all centred in the USA), the vast amounts of money they have at their disposal, their strong anti-Catholic and anti-Communist rhetoric and their association with powerful political figures on the right as part of a wider political movement to prevent any real change in Latin America, and to diffuse and discredit popular movements.

I do not want to suggest that there is a *necessary* connection between US-backed regimes and the form of Protestantism preached by these sects, but there often occurs, during periods of economic and political change or crisis, an increase in the number of adherents to the sects and in their influence among the ruling elites. The same hard conditions that tend to give rise to popular revolutionary movements and to radicalise many Christians can also serve to lead many people to seek consolation in the fundamentalists' gospel. After the Second World War the increased demand for coffee led to the eviction of thousands of peasant farmers from lands that their families had worked for generations. The demand for sugar and cotton led to similar invasions by big land-owners in the coastal areas, while in the sixties the big cattle farmers took over land that had been used for the growing of subsistence crops of beans and corn. These often violent appropriations of land produced wave upon wave of new landless peasants who either must seek to make a living as migrant labourers on the land, formerly theirs, that was now given over to cash crops for export, or else attempt to make ends meet in the poor barrios springing up around the cities. The scale of these appropriations is impressive: in a period of fifteen years the big landowners in Guatemala increased their holdings by one and a half million acres, with the result that over 200,000 peasant families were made landless.

With the disintegration of traditional rural communities, the support of established family and community relationships was lost,

along with the religious life of the communities. For those with sufficient ability and optimism, political organisation and resistance was an optional response to such circumstances. But for many, such was their isolation and despair, there seemed to be little point in organisation, especially as this often led to violent repression. Such despair became an important part of the mentality upon which the gospel of the sects would play. The problems of personal isolation, alcoholism, family violence and parental desertion, exacerbated by the social disruption, would be addressed by evangelical preachers. Their message of hard work, thrift, sobriety and a strictly personal morality could hold out at least some hope for a few individuals. Meanwhile their doctrines of unquestioning obedience to any government because 'God put it there', the separation of the 'saved' individual from the unclean society of 'the world', and the promise of full compensation in the hereafter (Costa Rican evangelicals sing 'I've got nothing in this world, but a mansion in the next') all militate against engagement with any political movement that might alleviate some of the causes of all this human misery.

This process can be clearly seen, for example, in Guatemala. Since a CIA-backed coup overthrew the elected reformist government in 1954, Guatemala has been ruled by a series of military regimes that have pursued a policy of complete repression of all opposition and dissent. Since the sixties this repression has involved the killing of tens of thousands of Indians. In 1981 alone over 5,000 people were murdered. While the formerly conservative Catholic hierarchy of Guatemala denounced this repression and discussed ways in which Catholics could legitimately confront the 'social sin' that was being perpetrated, the leadership of the evangelical sects raised no protests. The Reverend Antonio Sandoval of the Fundamentalist Presbyterian Church in Guatemala regarded the army's genocidal violence against the Indians as 'a righteous blow against Communism'.

When General Ephraim Rios Montt, a member of the California-based 'Church of the Word', became President of Guatemala by a coup d'état in February 1982, he immediately began to fill top government posts with fellow 'born again' Christians. Of the coup by which he came to power he said, 'We ourselves have done nothing. God has brought about all this'. Under Rios Montt's presidency the attacks against the Indians were continued with renewed ferocity. While the President preached homely fire-side sermons every Sunday on television, his troops ran the infamous 'beans and bullets' counter-insurgency campaign in which up to 30,000 civilians lost their lives. More than 10,000 of these were catechists, lay Christians commissioned by their bishop or parish priest to assist in the religious instruction and community organisation of the people in their care. Meanwhile preachers from the evangelical sects were appointed to 'liaise' between the army and the peasants, who were

forced to live in 'strategic hamlets' under complete army control, and many of these evangelicals were accused of helping the army to identify and murder peasants whom they suspected of being 'sympathisers' of the guerillas.

In the United States members of the Church of the Word were busy lobbying in Congress and the State Department for large-scale military aid for Guatemala. Further funds for Rios Montt came from such sources as the Christian Broadcasting Network in the USA when Pat Robertson, director of CBN, told millions of viewers to pray for the success of the Rios Montt government and to send financial contributions. This is the same CBN which, according to *Time Magazine*, is providing aid to Nicaraguan Contras and has links with the World Anti-Communist League. A great deal of financial aid was sent from the USA to Guatemala via International Lovelift, an evangelical aid organisation set up by the Church of the Word and supported by leading evangelical preachers such as Pat Robertson, Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell. Guatemala was described as 'our opportunity to demonstrate God's alternative in the struggle for freedom'.

At the same time Catholics and some mainstream Protestant churches suffered appalling persecutions. The sects and the government together denounced the Catholic hierarchy as a 'Communist tool', and thus legitimated increased violence against church workers. So severe was the repression in the diocese of El Quiche that the bishop was forced to declare his diocese closed after three priests and several catechists were killed. The bishop of Escuintla, Mario Rios Montt, the President's own brother, was forced to leave the country after protesting against the arrest of union leaders from his church centre and subsequently being informed that his name was on a death list.

When the president was asked whether he felt there was any contradiction between his Christian faith and the fact that he was in command of an army responsible for so many atrocities, he replied, 'There is no contradiction. Both are part of a single unity presided over by God'. It is interesting that the 'apoliticism' of the evangelical sects probably contributed to Rios Montt's fall in 1983, when his defence minister, Oscar Mejia Victores, led a successful coup. Rios Montt would have been in a far stronger position had he been able to draw on the support of a politically organised evangelical group. Furthermore, some of the officers who backed Mejia Victores in the coup are said to have done so not because of any political opposition to Rios Montt, but because of the preferential treatment in promotions and appointments that had been given to his fellow evangelicals.

The sects have had a similar, if slightly less obvious, role in other countries in the region. In El Salvador the Catholic Church has lost over a third of her priests and lay workers as a result of persecution, murder,

expulsion and disappearances. The 'people's' martyr, Archbishop Oscar Romero, murdered while saying Mass in 1980, left his country an inheritance of outspoken criticism of the atrocities and abuses committed by the Salvadorean armed forces and other agencies associated with the government and the ruling families. It is an inheritance that his successor, Archbishop Rivera y Damas, has accepted with considerable courage, and for which he has already been attacked in full-page advertisements in the press by right-wing groups. ARENA, the far-right coalition which was then under the leadership of Robert d'Aubuisson (who is widely held to be responsible for the murder of Romero), has described the Archbishop's attitude as 'diabolical' and has accused his followers of 'openly collaborating with the terrorists of international Communism'. This kind of statement is generally interpreted as an invitation to members of the death-squads to solve the problem. The evangelical sects in El Salvador are in the meantime enjoying great success, preaching unquestioning obedience to authority, all couched in terms of a theology developed and financed in the United States, and disseminated by multi-million dollar film and television presentations in which Jesus is presented as a rather wet, white, glamorous miracle-worker. The conservative evangelists, who can easily fill a stadium with 80,000 people, preach anti-communism and anti-Catholicism in the same breath, lending their voice to the persecution that still faces those who attempt to bring Gospel values to bear on political problems.

In Honduras one of the main thrusts of conservative evangelism has come in the shape of an aid organisation called World Vision. This organisation, based in California, has an annual Central America budget of ten million dollars. The main interdenominational Christian organisation in Honduras, CEDEN, is continually undermined by World Vision, and especially its criticisms of the Honduran military are undermined. World Vision supports religious organisations sympathetic to the military such as Alfa y Omega and AMEN, whose president appears regularly on the evening news preaching to army officers. But it is in its work with Salvadorean refugees that World Vision has made most impact. These refugees have fled to Honduras from their own country because of the continuing sweeps of the army through rural areas, murdering and destroying crops and houses, and the bombing of the villages by the air force. World Vision has been accused of using the food and medical relief that they offer as an incentive to join their religious groups, and even of refusing aid to refugees who would not attend their evangelical services. At a time when other aid agencies were refusing to register the names of newly arrived refugees with the Honduran authorities on the grounds that these names often ended up in the hands of the Salvadorean military who were on the look-out for communist sympathisers, World Vision continued to inform the army of

new arrivals and to allow the harassment and murder of refugees in their camps. On one occasion two newly arrived refugees were taken by a World Vision camp coordinator straight to the local army post, where they were arrested. That night the army entered the refugee camp and took away two more refugees. Several days later, one of the four having been released, the bodies of the other three were found shot on the Salvadorean side of the border. The World Vision worker who must be held at least partly responsible for this event did not even report it to other aid agencies in the district.

World Vision's attitude to other aid and relief workers often leads to difficulties and dangers for them. They warn against 'communist religious workers and priests' in other agencies. But the close cooperation between World Vision and the Honduran and Salvadorean military and paramilitary organisations is hardly surprising, given the kind of people they recruit to run their camps. At one time the Colomancagua camp was managed by three members of the Honduran intelligence services. In one camp with six administrators, one of them was an anti-communist Cuban exile and close friend of the Honduran national police chief, while four were former soldiers, two of whom had military intelligence connections.

Evangelical preaching in Nicaragua seems to lay much less emphasis on the need to obey government authorities. The revelation in 1984 of the contents of a 'dirty tricks' manual prepared by the CIA for the use of the Contras showed that God was on the side of the United States, even if that meant overthrowing an elected government. The manual, entitled *Psychological Operations in Guerilla Warfare*, suggests ways in which religious ideas can be used as part of the campaign of destabilisation of the Sandinista regime. The Contras engaged in indiscriminate destruction of civilian populations and their resources are now encouraged to adopt a Christian rhetoric in justification of their activities. The manual suggests slogans such as 'God, Homeland and Democracy', 'With God and Patriotism we will overcome Communism'. It suggests that the Contras attempt to represent themselves as 'Christian guerillas'.

Within Nicaragua, although the Catholic hierarchy endorsed the revolution, some churchmen are critical of aspects of its development. This is only to be expected, of course, in a society where political opposition is possible in a way almost unique in the region. It would be an error, however, to regard all criticism as evidence of counter-revolutionary ideology, and an equally serious error to suppose that Christians in general in Nicaragua support all the specific criticisms that are voiced by Cardinal Obando y Bravo.

The United States government has attempted to portray the Sandinistas as persecuting Christian groups, using (and often

misrepresenting) isolated events as evidence of anti-Christian activity in the Sandinista movement. Following the success of the revolution, a great many evangelical sects pulled out of the country. Several evangelicals were jailed for war crimes, including the general secretary of the Bible Society, who had also been a high-ranking officer in Somoza's National Guard. The Director of the Campus Crusade for Christ went to Honduras, and a sect called Evangelism in Depth moved its offices to Costa Rica. All this fed fears of religious persecution that were being generated. Meanwhile, the appearance of dozens of new sects (twenty have appeared in the northern town of Estelí alone) only served to confirm the need for intensive evangelical activity in the face of an atheistic government. The inferences were the same, whether the missionaries came or went!

The anti-Catholic rhetoric of the sects continues both within Nicaragua and abroad. From Costa Rica the office director of Campus Crusade for Christ said of such Christians as those who cooperate with the Sandinistas, 'the theology of liberation people ... are nothing more than masked Communists. They're a bridge between faith and Communism'. Another attempt to discredit the Sandinistas was made by Manuel Tijerino, a representative of the US-Dutch agency 'Open Doors with Brother Andrew'. Tijerino gained publicity by 'smuggling' Bibles into Nicaragua. What his backers seem not to have been told was that the Sandinistas had actually printed and distributed 300,000 copies of the Bible free of charge as a follow-up to the Literacy Crusade.

One evangelical described for his fellow-Americans a scene in Nicaragua where 'the mobs would throw up their hands and wail about imperialism ... they were clearly controlled by the devil'. What he was describing was the funeral of one of the 8,000 civilians who have been killed by the US-backed terrorists of the Contras since 1979, almost half of them children. This kind of propaganda, together with the often hostile attitudes of newly arrived sects with names such as 'Midnight Messengers', 'Church of the Living Water' and 'Divine Call', all serve to prepare the Christian public of the USA for the rhetoric of Reagan's foreign policy, in which the Contras are presented as 'freedom fighters'.

Finally, though they are not strictly speaking a Christian sect, it is worth looking at the activities of the Moonies in the region, if only because of the ways in which they resemble the evangelical sects. The Moonies (or, more accurately, the Unification Church) have poured millions of dollars into political and economic interests in Latin America. Though their main claim to fame is their alleged brain-washing of converts and their acceptance of lying as a legitimate part of their publicity (though they prefer to call it 'heavenly deception'), equally disturbing is their political activity. In 1985 the International Security Council, a body with links to the Moonies, held a conference in Paris

attended by 70 high-ranking military experts from Argentina, Chile, Brazil, El Salvador, Cambodia, South Korea and the USA. It was presided over by retired Lt. Gen. Gordon Summer, who proposed 'the creation of a permanent police force in Latin America to defend the region against Communist aggression'. Conference participants agreed to launch an 'anti-Communist crusade' in Latin America. When the US Congress refused to approve the proposed 14-million dollar aid package for the Contras in June, the *Washington Times*, a Moonie-owned newspaper, immediately set up a fund to raise the funds by other means.

These sects, Christian and otherwise, find themselves in more or less permanent conflict with both Catholic and established Protestant churches. This is not because they are making inroads into other churches' congregations. Staff at the Managua branch of the Jesuit Central American University have pointed out the very high drop-out rate among adherents to the sects (though this raises pastoral problems for those who have to help people put their lives back together again afterwards), which suggests that questions of membership numbers are not the most important of the problems. The problem is rather, as a Franciscan nun in Honduras said, 'not religious, but political. It is a question of the theology of liberation against the theology of repression'.

Reviews

BEING AS COMMUNION: STUDIES IN PERSONHOOD AND THE CHURCH, by John D. Zizioulas, *Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1985, pp. 269. £9.95.*

John Zizioulas, a lay theologian of the Greek Orthodox Church and a member of the Catholic-Orthodox Commission for Theological Dialogue, has been described by Yves Congar as 'one of the most original and profound theologians of our epoch'. In this collection of essays he tells us that, as a Greek living and working in the West (he is Professor of Systematic Theology at Glasgow University), he is reaching out not just to his fellow-Orthodox but to western Christians as well. He wants to detach us from the 'confessional' view of Eastern Orthodoxy as a merely 'exotic' phenomenon, and to open up to us the faith of the Greek Fathers as 'a dimension necessary to the catholicity of the Church' (p. 26). The author's Patristic learning is evident on every page, but he is also clearly indebted to modern theologians, to Orthodox such as Florovsky and Afanasiev (though he subjects the latter's 'Eucharistic ecclesiology' to searching critique), and to Congar and Rahner, among others, on the Catholic side.

What are the author's achievements? First, his essays are a beautiful illustration of what the Fathers of Vatican I meant when they said that the uncovering of the 'links between the mysteries' was the proper task of theology (cf. DS 3016). In this book