

The Gospel and Brazil¹

by Tito de Alencar, O.P.

'For many Catholics in Brazil, the Dominican Order is synonymous with subversion and the destruction of genuine values.'

(Brazilian daily *O Globo*, 1969)

Tito de Alencar was one of the Dominicans imprisoned and tortured in Brazil; he was released in exchange for the kidnapped Swiss Ambassador. He is interviewed here by CLAUDIO ZANCHETTIN.

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There are two sorts of revolutionaries; those of the drawing room and the real ones. The first talk about revolution, the others make it. Tito de Alencar, the young Dominican I went to interview in the convent of St Jacques in Paris is one of the real sort. His revolutionary struggles, imprisonment, torture and exile could have made a 'hero' of him. But Tito has nothing about him of the vain exhibitionist. For him revolution is a terribly serious matter.

His sufferings have marked him greatly. When he speaks he conceals his emotion with difficulty. With fixed eyes he tries to get to the bottom of things straight away. His young life is consumed by two great passions; revolution and the gospel.

At this time when the limelight of news is no longer directed at Brazil, I believe it to be a matter of urgency to contribute to breaking the wall of silence and complicity that surrounds the sufferings of the entire Brazilian people. It is so that this silence may be broken that Tito has agreed to answer my questions.

CLAUDIO ZANCHETTIN

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Can you tell me something of your life?

I was born on 14th September, 1945, at Fortaleza, a very poor city in the North-East of Brazil. I was brought up in a progressive family. My brothers were activists in the Communist Party. Once I had joined São Paulo university I soon became one of the leaders of the student opposition to the régime. Twice I have been vice-president of organizations pitted against the government.

During the 1964 *coup d'état* I was a member of the 'Front for Popular Mobilization', which tried to bring about socialism. At that time I began to think about the priesthood and I entered the Dominicans, who had recently established themselves in Brazil. Even though a Dominican I have continued to undertake political tasks. I have been arrested twice; the first time after the Ibiuna congress in 1963 and the second, a year later, at the time of the Marighela affair.

¹Translated by Robert Ombres, O.P.

*The newspapers have made much of your attempted suicide in April 1970. Why did you want to do it?*²

For a variety of reasons. Above all I wanted to cancel out once and for all the picture that was being created that all Dominicans were betrayers of the revolution. The police wanted to have it believed that we were accomplices to the Marighela murder. I remember that when Captain Oberna told me, 'It was you who betrayed Marighela', and I replied, 'No, it is not true', he struck me viciously on the mouth. Furthermore, I wanted the public to learn of the tortures we had undergone and which the police and the press were trying to conceal. No one knew why the Dominicans had been arrested. On the other hand it was necessary to let it be known that our arrest marked the beginning of an enormous wave of torture inflicted on the Brazilian clergy. Finally, I wanted to denounce torture at a general level. The bishops concealed the fact of torture: 'We have confidence in the government'. Since the government was maintaining that there was no torture in Brazil, the bishops were in fact agreeing with this.

Why were you arrested?

As with all the other Dominicans it was on account of our participation in the revolutionary movement. As for me personally, it was because as leader of the theology and philosophy faculty I openly preached armed struggle, I organized armed operations and I had no desire to hide my revolutionary views.

How were you tortured?

I was arrested by the 'Death Brigade' headed by the sinister Sergio Fleury. When Fleury came to arrest me he told me coldly: 'We have no mercy for people like you. That is what we are paid for. We know that you have much to tell us. If you want to remain silent so much the worse for you. We shall torture you.' They assured me that Br Ivo and Br Fernando had been subjected to a truth injection and had talked. I remained impassive for two hours. Fleury grew irritable on realizing that I was not afraid of torture. He had me taken to the torture chamber. There were some fifteen people who hit me. He subjected me to the '*pau de arara*', a device well known in Vietnam and in all countries that go in for torture.³ For forty days I remained completely isolated.

²Cf. 'Military Repression in Brazil', Tito de Alencar, O.P., *New Blackfriars*, July, 1970, p. 335.

³*Pau de arara*: 'The victim's wrists and ankles are tied. He is made to sit on the floor and grasp his knees with his arms. A bar is passed through, under his knees which are placed between the arms of the individual bent forward. The bar passes, therefore, above the forearms. The ends of the bar are supported by two tables or two chairs or two high crates. The torture victim is left hanging in the air. The weight of his body rests on the joints of the knees and on the forearms. It is as if a sixty or seventy kilogram weight were put on a certain spot on the forearms and left there for several hours. After half an hour the instrument begins to take its toll. The bonds on ankles and wrists, because they are stretched by the weight of the body, practically cut off all the blood circulation. Hands

Afterwards Cardinal Rossi came to visit us in prison. He showed himself indifferent, treated us very badly and seemed much more like a police agent than a pastor. Cardinal Rossi has always supported the police and the government of São Paulo. He has always concealed the occurrence of torture. He knew well that there existed a bureau of religious information controlled by the police but he has never had the courage to denounce it. During the trial we were questioned above all on ecclesiastical and theological matters. We mentioned it to the Cardinal but he was not interested.

Three months later began the trial concerning my involvement with the Ibiuna congress. Following this I was again tortured in connection with my participation at the congress sponsored by the 'National Liberation Front'.

How did you come to be released?

It happened on the occasion of the kidnapping of the Swiss ambassador. In prison I had compiled a dossier of all the kinds of torture used by the police and I had made an official request to the Church that she should denounce torture and take up the side of justice. This dossier has been published in Brazil and in several foreign magazines such as the *American Look*. It is probably because of this that my comrades put my name on the list of the seventy prisoners to be freed in exchange for the Swiss ambassador, Bucher.

What happened to the other Dominicans who were tried with you?

Some such as Giorgio Callegari (an Italian) were found not guilty. Three have been sentenced to four years' imprisonment.

Have you met Carlos Marighela?

Unfortunately, no. It is a pity because all those who have met him spoke highly of him to me. He was a great leader and a marvellous person.

Are you a Marxist?

From a certain point of view, yes. I accept the Marxist analysis of the class struggle. I think Marxism has an exemplary theoretical rigour. To anyone who wishes to change the structures of society,

and feet become purple, then numb; initially this provokes a feeling like itching, afterwards a swelling progressing to plethora and finally ischemia. The victim thinks that his fingers will explode at any moment. A dark liquid begins to flow which darkens his limbs and makes them swell. This sensation is reinforced by the words of the torturers, who insinuate constantly that that is what is going to happen to his fingers, his spinal column, his lungs. This part of the torture is called 'sugesta' (suggestion). It is psychological pressure designed to break the prisoner's morale.

Some time later the pressure on the forearms begins to cause terrible pain, as if the arms were breaking at the point where they support the weight of the whole body on the rod. The pain increases when the tortured person's body is swung back and forth, which the torturers constantly do, laughing and joking among themselves as if they were playing a game.

(Reproduced from *Cuadernos de Marcha* (Uruguay) by the Church and Society Movement in Latin America. English translation from *IDOC-North America*, November 1972, p. 3.)

Marx is indispensable. Society is made up of classes and one dominates the rest. In Brazil there is the dictatorship of a bourgeoisie allied to foreign capital, monopolies and imperialism. Our aim is to enable the working class to achieve power. But this having been said, the world-view I have as a Christian obviously differs from the Marxist one.

What does being a revolutionary mean to you?

Basically it means being in solidarity with and participating in the struggles of the working classes in all their forms and tactics, legal and illegal. It means making eventual use, if the objective and subjective conditions permit, of armed struggle to obtain power. There is also a whole ideological, humanist, Utopian dimension to the revolution. Revolution is the struggle for a new world, a kind of earthly Messianism in which Christians and Marxists can converge.

Do you regard the Brazilian State as fascist?

Yes in the fullest sense, especially so after Institutional Act No. 5.¹ We are dealing with a police State. The class in power today would never have reached there had it not had dictatorial perspectives. It is only concerned with the concept of order, a characteristic of all fascist mentalities. For that class, progress is order upheld by repression; and the order is that of the established powers.

Do you agree with those who say that Brazil has moved from Portuguese to North American domination?

We have gone through three phases—Portuguese domination, English domination with the opening of Brazilian ports and the present North American domination.

The United States was responsible for the 1964 *coup d'état*. At that time there was in operation Furtado's three-year plan, a relatively progressive measure. The United States Ambassador, Lincoln Gordon, declared to the press his official opposition to this plan. The United States had the support of all Brazilian reactionary forces, of the industrialists, of the right-wing politicians and of the army which already since 1945 had attempted a number of *coups d'état*.

Which is the worst social injustice your country suffers?

The level of wages. They are the lowest in Latin America.

¹Institutional Act No. 5 provides, amongst other things, that 'In preservation of the revolution, the President of the Republic, after consultation with the Council of National Security and without the limitations specified in the Constitution, will be authorized to suspend the political rights of any citizen for a term of ten years and make void elective political mandates. . . . The guarantee of habeas corpus is suspended in cases of political crimes against national security, economic and social order, and the popular economy. All acts practised in accordance with the Institutional Act and its complementary acts, as well as the respective effects, are excluded from any juridical judgments.' (*Editor*.)

The government declares that the national income increases by 9 per cent a year.

It is true, but the government never says how this national income is distributed. It is easy to obtain such figures; but what are the social conditions of the people?

What can you tell us about the 'favelas' and the 'flagelados'?

Nothing shows more clearly than the 'favelas' and the condition of life of the 'flagelados' to what extent Brazil's development is a pseudo-development, a mask, an imposture.

Why does the phenomenon of the 'favelas' become more and more alarming? In Rio de Janeiro there are at least 500,000 people living in 'favelas', in São Paulo the areas where men live in sub-human conditions are beyond counting now. In the North-East it is even worse. There have been projects to remove the 'favelas', but with the present fascist government it is impossible to achieve anything on the social plane.

Some have talked of daily repression as regards Brazil. In what does it consist?

There is a state of overall control and interminable questionings of all those who oppose the régime. Without mentioning the threats of sackings made against left-wing professors and workers. There is, moreover, a climate of fear. Brazil, despite the cliché of being a happy nation which a whole fascist campaign tries to spread abroad, is a nation in agony.

Is it true that justice is corrupted?

Entirely so. The military tribunals are a naïve farce. I am sure that Hitler's Nazi tribunals were more honest than the existing Brazilian ones. It is practically impossible to find out what goes on in a Brazilian court, but there are frequent cases of torture being applied in the court-room itself.

When I was tried, for example, one of the judges had come to see me in hospital. He ascertained the wounds, the marks of torture, but said he could do nothing. As a rule in Brazil people are tried behind closed doors. Later the press reports that X or Y has been sentenced to four or five or ten years in prison, but never says why.

Tell me something about the 'Death Brigade'.

The 'Death Brigade' existed before 1964 but since then it has increased enormously its murderous activities. Marighela in a broadsheet published after Institutional Act No. 5 had predicted that the victims of the 'Death Brigade' would no longer be the social outcasts, but the militants of the revolutionary left. Marighela was a prophet for he himself was murdered by Fleury, head of the 'Death Brigade'. Fleury is a real monster. More than twelve hundred people have been murdered by his gang, not to mention those tortured. Fleury has always had the support of the army and the government,

which is grateful to him for his repressive activities. The 'Death Brigade' which brings terror to the unfortunate people and those on the Left is not an isolated phenomenon, but is the product of the ruling class and the army that supports it.

The magazine 'Veja' published on 29th July, 1970, the results of a poll, according to which 60 per cent of the population of Sao Paulo were in favour of the 'Death Brigade'. How do you explain this?

There is no doubt that it was a poll of the middle class to whom *Veja* is directed. This class is the greatest ally of the fascist régime. It is obviously in favour of 'Order' at all costs and therefore well disposed towards the 'Death Brigade'.

How many political prisoners are there in Brazil?

It depends on which period is in question. In São Paulo in two months (November-December 1969) there were more than a thousand political prisoners. In Rio de Janeiro at the time of the J.O.C. (Y.C.W.) militants there were ten thousand. The numbers depend on the waves of repression.

In Brazil there are about forty revolutionary groups, often in opposition among themselves. Why is unity so difficult?

Because we have yet to find a satisfactory praxis for the revolution. And when there is no such praxis revolutionary bodies cannot achieve solidarity. Theories as to the evolution of capitalism and the means of struggle to be adopted differ. It was the same in Vietnam at the beginning. But once Ho Chi Min imposed a satisfactory praxis the differences disappeared. At the moment we are at an impasse. The worst thing is that we are cut off from the people. The bourgeois press has been able to pick out those revolutionary groups that have not been sufficiently conscious of the need for mass participation. One cannot move on to armed struggles straightaway. It is first necessary to prepare and organize the people. There ought to be more cohesion, more strength among the working class. No one doubts the importance of revolutionary leaders such as Marighela and Lamarca, but it is not enough. Other countries have available a more united vanguard, as are the Tupamaros in Uruguay. But I am convinced that at least in the long run we can escape from our impasse.

What do you think of urban guerrillas?

I hold all strategies to be valid. One has to see the results. For example, the kidnapping of the U.S. ambassador provoked a government crisis and to that extent it was an intelligent operation. On the other hand, this sort of action isolates us from the masses. It is obvious that something is wrong. One must discover where the mistake lies to arrive at the correct plan of action.

The police have eliminated one after another the great revolutionary leaders. Carlo Marighela was brought down in November 1969. Joaquin Camara Ferreira in October 1970. Carlo Lamarca in September 1971. Who are the most important revolutionary leaders today?

I think that, thank God, the days of the great leaders are over. It is not a hero but the working class that makes a revolution; it is the people who must be organized and who must have confidence in the vanguard. Marighela and Lamarca never tried to be 'super-guerrillas' and they were right because belief in the omnipotence of a hero is an idealistic conception of the revolutionary process. Revolution comes about by means of correct political action and a united vanguard which is in contact with the masses, and which with their support gains new ground each day.

The Brazilian nation is said to be indifferent and fatalistic. Is a revolution really possible in such conditions?

I believe that the fatalism will disappear one day not thanks to the government but because of the people's new consciousness. The class struggle is attaining maturity. The people want to free themselves. We are living through very important moments. The way of revolution is the only one available to us to overcome underdevelopment. It will triumph in the end.

Let's move on to the Church. Would you say the Brazilian Church taken as a whole is reactionary, reformist or revolutionary?

On the whole it is reactionary. There are some reformist groups and a revolutionary minority. But things are changing. We are gaining ground. There are strong shifts to the left among both Catholics and Protestants, bishops and laity.

During your trial were you accused of disobedience to the Church?

Certainly, certainly we disobeyed the Church—but not the gospel.

During the last few years we have been seeing in our countries the growth of the theology of revolution, political theology, the theology of liberation, the theology of hope. What do you think of all these theologies?

They represent the historical legacy of Latin America. Our people lack something as did the Hebrew people at the time of the Exodus. Evangelization comes about through a more human society, through structural changes. There can be no dichotomies.

Now Latin America cannot change its structures without a revolution in the short, medium or long term, according to the conditions existing in each country. For my part I think it is a case less of a theology of revolution than a revolutionary awareness of the gospel. The gospel is a radical critique of capitalist society. In this sense it is revolutionary. The themes of hope, poverty and Messianism

that are so profoundly biblical are the deep springs of the revolutionary movement. I accept fully the stance of Camilo Torres. I do not see how we can be Christian and not be revolutionary.

Do you find among the young in Brazil the same indifference and contempt for the official Church that our young people have?

No. The young place great hope in the Church and not only the young but all those on the left. Unfortunately we have lost the young as we have lost the working class. It is obvious that if the Church is that of Cardinal Rossi then one needs quite a nerve to belong to it. Luckily there is another Church that is well received. When Helder Camara or Mgr Fragoso speak the young listen to them. The young thirst for the good news.

How do you see the future of the Church in your country?

There is a very strong crisis on the institutional side and as to that the Church is disintegrating. At this level the difficulties over celibacy are enormous. It is necessary to review the whole question of the function of the clergy and of the missionary apostolate. A new Church is being born and not just in Brazil but in all of Latin America. Everywhere there are developing grass-root communities of men who are Christians but not in the formal sense of the word; men who criticize the institutional Church in the name of the gospel ferment. This Church already exists. The hope of the Church lies in the world of the poor. Personally I expect nothing from the bourgeois Church, the European Church in general. The future of the Church is with the future of the world of the poor. This is a profoundly biblical theme. The Hebrew people were a poor people. Christ worked with the poor. The apostles were truly poor. The gospel has a meaning for the poor.

Looking at the immediate future of your country are you optimistic or pessimistic?

I am deeply optimistic in the Christian and revolutionary sense. Our present stalemate is not, in fact, very fruitful. One could draw several parallels. Think of Russia in 1905. Lenin had known the break up of the Party, the massacre of the militants and so on. After serious self-criticism he was able to reorganize the struggle until the triumph of the revolution was achieved. Mao Tse Tung has known the same crisis. It is the same in Brazil. Many leaders are dead, others are in exile. But a self-criticism is taking place concerning all the mistakes we have made. If we have the courage really to correct these mistakes then I think the revolution will be successful.

Tito, you are in exile and cannot return to your country. Is this difficult to bear?

Yes it is very hard to live away from one's country and especially outside a whole context of revolutionary struggle. But exile is the risk all militants take, as is prison and torture. One must bear exile

as one bears torture. I continue to hold the same ideas, the same positions as when I was in prison. I do not know how long I shall be away from my country. I wait impatiently for the opportunity to make my humble contribution to my people should they still want me to continue fighting with them.

Natural Theology and the Historicity of Faith

by P. F. Harris

'An existential system cannot be formulated. Does this mean that no such system exists? By no means; nor is this implied in our assertion. Existence itself is a system—for God; but it cannot be a system for any existing spirit. System and finality correspond to one another, but existence is precisely the opposite of finality.'

S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

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Philosophy of religion and theology

We are by now too well acquainted with much that goes on under the heading of 'philosophy of religion' which seems to provide sport for some professional philosophers but has little to do with religious belief. The tactics are well known. A typical statement of a theological kind is set up for examination and is then put through the logical hoops without, apparently, any further need for reference to the theological context. The strategy often presumes that there is basically only one type of theological statement and that this can be dealt with adequately without looking at the complex structure of thought which surrounds it in its theological setting. Faith may indeed be simple, but its systematic exploration and articulation inevitably demands a complex and sophisticated exposition without which it becomes not only unreasonable, but even unintelligible. The discussions of some of the philosophers of religion have as a result only too often a rather tired and well-worn air, and frequently theologians find little resemblance between what they themselves are doing and what philosophers presume that they are about.

A certain tradition in philosophical theology, usually related to the label 'neo-scholastic', has itself contributed considerably to this situation. Carried on, as it has been, within the confines of an explicitly believing community, it found little difficulty in identifying the God of natural theology with the God of Christian faith. (Admittedly, its better exponents were aware of the problems existing