The Pope's visit to Latin America was eclipsed by the dark events of Czechoslovakia. But it remains truly historic, the acknowledgement of a portent in the world's destiny. And certain of the Pope's words deserve deeper reflection. Thus, in his address to the crowds assembled for Mass at the 'eucharistic field', he first referred to the insistence, especially among the young, on the need for urgent structural changes, even at the cost of violence, if need be. He went on to 'reaffirm that violence is not in accord with the Gospel', continuing as follows:

> Accordingly, from our point of view, the keystone of the fundamental problem of Latin America consists in the double endeavour, simultaneous, harmonious and mutually advantageous, of proceeding, not simply to a reform of social structures, but to a gradual reform that all can assimilate. Such a reform must therefore be realized at the same rate—and, we would say, as though demanded by it—as the immense and patient work aimed at advancing that improvement of the 'way of being human' of the great majority of those who are now living in Latin America (*L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 5th September, p. 2).

Now the apparent smoothness of construction should not hide from us the precision of thought here achieved. To see this we need to remind ourselves of two debates which have already been rehearsed in the English-speaking world. The immediate occasion of the Pope's utterance may have been the situation in Latin America. But the issues involved face us all, in one way or another, and this is why it is worth recalling them in their English formulation.

One debate is most easily accessible through an excerpt from the concluding passage of Brian Wicker's book published last year, *First the Political Kingdom:*

> The second condition . . . is that, since the ultimate decision as to when the call to revolution has come is one that only the individual can make, according to his own conscience, it is essential for any *genuine* revolution that the individual should himself be free to determine this moment for himself. And this means that the person who tries to show the viability of the 'double stance' has to prove, against a good deal of historical evidence, that revolution does not necessarily entail the suppression of just that liberty that a personal decision requires (p. 132).

This passage concludes the summary of the 'third subject' of

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'the continuing debate', namely, 'the question of the legitimacy or otherwise of revolution as a means for achieving the social changes that the catholic left, in common with the new left itself, demands'. But it also catches up another debate, about the difference between 'liberalism' and 'radicalism' in left-wing thinking (cf. e.g. 'Politics and Theology: Retrospect and Agenda' by Fergus Kerr, O.P., *New Blackfriars*, August, 1968).

It is at the intersection of these two debates that the Pope's words assume their true significance. For what is in issue is the place and restrictions of personal initiative and freedom. To the radical insistence that it is only fair and fitting structures of society as a whole that can bring out and in turn give adequate scope to an individual's potentialities, there corresponds the totalitarian danger of the 'suppression of just that liberty that a personal decision requires'. Whilst to the liberal insistence that it is individual men who in the full force of their inwardness and freedom enrich and change society, there correspond the dangers of competitive indifference, domination, and the acceptance of the status quo for the vast majority of 'the others'. If, however, these are the rival claims and their respective dangers, then there is only one way through: a gradual process of mutual kindling of conscience and sensibilities to the point where a fire of unanimity can break out, as it did in Czechoslovakia. And this is precisely what the Pope says: he speaks of 'a *double* endeavour, *simultaneous*, harmonious and mutually advantageous, of proceeding *not only* to a reform of social structures, but to a gradual reform that *all can assimilate*' (italics supplied).

Obviously, such a programme can be as heroic in practice as it is smooth in formulation, simultaneously demanding as it does the vision of the whole and the humble patience with the particular, and risking the mutually exacerbating strains of tenderness to the individual and the advance of the group. But what other ideal is good enough for the Christian? What the Pope is doing is to restate the traditional dialectic of the Christian life: where peace is the effect—and the means—of that charity which brings an implacable conflict to our present condition.

For the Christian, therefore, violence and war are on a scale and in a context, defined on the one side by the realities of any given situation and on the other by the transfiguring ideal of love. This transformative energy of love is betrayed alike by the inertia of accepting things as they are and by the mystique of a violence that forgets its subordination to peace. The Pope has therefore refused to surrender the evangelical ideal of the peace that lies beyond violence, whilst aligning himself with all those who are working for what the Brazilians so well call *conscientização*, the awakening of man to his native identity and energy. In so doing, the Pope has rendered service, if we may say so, not only to Latin America but to that converging world of which Latin America may well be a 'catalyst'. P.L.

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