

Christianity and Social Change

by Ramon Clarete

MAN'S ACHIEVEMENTS have not made him a bit happier nor more a man. On the contrary, all that his success add up to is NOTHING.

Current False Ideas and Practices about Christianity

There are some people who will spend most of their time, praying countless and incessant number of novenas, rosaries, and everything in church. They are making religion as an individualistic and personalistic relationship between God and man. There is no social aspect given to religion.

One is not so much concerned about the betterment of this world, even if this world will go to the dogs. Anyway, the "good Christian" will always get his reward in heaven. So, he must patiently bear all the exploitation and suffering in this world, without trying to fight or do away with them. Anyway, there is always reward after life. It is in this sense that Christianity is thus called the "opium of the people" or the "pie in the sky" that will keep the people satisfied and contented in their misery. Intimately connected to this is the attitude that the "Christian" should not meddle in secular affairs, for his concern is totally in the other world.

The essence of Christianity is love. Therefore, it is "un-Christian" to make the tenant aware of his rights, for that would set him against his landlord, and thus would foment hatred between them. Tenant-landlord problems should be settled "amicably." This notion of love is false.

The Church is allied with the establishment in oppressing the poor. She benefits from the status quo and is, therefore, interested in its preservation. She uses religion as a means to keep the people under control in exploitation and suffering.

In view of all these, it is not surprising that many intellectuals and radicals think that the Church is obsolete, outmoded and stands in the way of the revolution. The Church always says "Christ is the answer." But what is the question? People are beginning to yawn over the cross and they think that to be genuinely revolutionary, one has to be an a-theistic leftist.

Political Theology

Political theology is not Caesaro-papism, nor a sacral civilization, nor the entanglement of Church structures in the government, nor a political structure as the Church used politically by the Iglesia ni Kristo members.

Salvation was social, communal and political in the old Testament. Freedom, justice, and peace were not primarily between God and man, but between God and his people — Israel. To be saved, one had to belong to Israel or at least must be an affiliate with the people of God in some way.

The Old Testament Israel was essentially a people of the Exodus, always travelling on the way — a people of hope and promise, leaving for the future. Their God was not I am who am, but I-will-be-who-will-be.

In the New Testament the Old-Testament Israel is now taken up into the New-Testament people of God. Salvation is still social and political. The communism of the early Christians attests to this. The

present people of God are still essentially a people of hope, promise and of the future — an eschatological future. Although the Kingdom of God is already among us, it has not yet come in power, fully established and formed.

The Church has to play the role of a prophet to denounce the evils of society, its political structures and its practices, wherein human freedom, justice, truth and love are suppressed. And she must work for the achievement of these ideals.

The Church, therefore, is not wedded to any political structures of any form of Government. She is always above them. The people of God is a pilgrim people who live in tents — not permanent structures — for they will never rest in their criticism of society and in working for its betterment. "There is no lasting system here on earth. We will always look for greater and higher forms of freedom, justice, truth and love till the kingdom is achieved. Here, Christianity is more revolutionary than Marxism.

In a society where there is widespread injustice and exploitation, it is the duty of the church to criticize such society and must inspire, initiate, support and be the moving and guiding force behind revolutionary movements which aim to establish justice, peace, freedom and love.

The Incarnation and Resurrection is the model for the Church's task in this world. In the Incarnation of God, he took on human nature, conferred upon it his divine personality in their mysterious hypostatic union between God and man. This union was possible because the human nature of God was now swallowed up by its divine personality. Love and Union is possible therefore, between God and the world. The more "world" the world is, the more God loves it. The Church therefore has the duty to secularize, not try to sacralize, the world in order to develop the world. To the Church is entrusted with the task of continuing the Redemption through time and space "of humanizing the universe and Christifying man."

In the Resurrection, Christ's body was transfigured and glorified. The world, too, must be transfigured and glorified into the Kingdom of God. It is the task of the Church to prepare the world for this transformation and glorification by establishing justice, freedom and love.

This means that the full achievement of the Kingdom is the task of both God and man although not as equal partners. Man has an authentic part to contribute toward the achievement of the Kingdom and in this sense everything that man does, which in some way or another contribute towards the achievement of the Kingdom, has an eternal value and effect (theology of work). Man's work on this earth acquires value and significance, not only because he imprints in his hand work the image of his personality which is a reflection of God's own person but also because his work contributes towards the building of the Kingdom.

The Question of the Means

In social change (restructuring society) does the Church sanction the use of violence? This is the traditional answer. According to the following principles violence can be justified. One has the right to defend
(continued on page 14)

The Philippines in Travail

By Roberto C. Canton

THE FILIPINO PEOPLE today are living in great peril. They are living in a country which is being festered with widespread injustice, criminality, graft and corruption, maldistribution of wealth and other insurmountable problems.

Our country is indeed in the crucial stage of its history as an independent nation. The multifarious problems plaguing this nation do not only corrode our national survival but also pose a serious threat to the very foundations of our democratic way of life.

Paradoxically, many people in this so called bastion of democracy in Asia are losing faith and confidence in the government as well as in the democratic processes. The masses, needless to say, are disenchanted with the government. This disenchantment is traceable to the failure of the government to alleviate the people's plight and to liberate the masses from the shackles of poverty and deprivation. Moreover, many citizens are very skeptical about the genuine existence of justice and democracy in this country.

From every length and breadth of the land, the people's cry for justice is unmistakably clear. Hundreds of people undertake the parliamement of the streets and people's congresses, condemning the existence of the so-called double standard of justice in our country and clamoring for a true and genuine democracy. They harange the gonnstabularies, the profligate landlords, the power-thirsty politicians, and the corrupt government officials whom they accuse of committing crimes and injustice to the have-nots and the defenseless citizenry. Moreover, they condemn the recent atrocities committed against the innocent and impoverished people in Bantay, Ilocos Sur and the underprivileged cultural minorities in South Cotabato and in other provinces. The injustices committed against those defenseless and powerless people, according to many citizens, sounded the death knell of democracy in this country.

Needless to say, the people are not only suffering from widespread injustice but also from the breakdown of peace and order in this country. The mounting rise of criminality and the deterioration of peace and order engendered by this country's rotten political system have great repercussions in our sense of values. Senator Lorenzo Tañada, in his speech delivered before the second national convention of the Movement for the Advancement of Nationalism, says, "Under the present political system, we had seen incompetence enconced in office, dishonesty rewarded, the unscrupulous promoted; graft goes unpunished, wealth, no matter how acquired is exalted; authority, even if unjustly exercised adulated." "As a consequence," the nationalist senator added, "the administrative machinery moves sluggishly, economic development bogs down and poverty spreads and intensifies, justice grinds slowly, criminality rises and peace and order worsens."

In almost all parts of the country, killing, landgrabbing, armed robberies and all sorts of hooliganism are prevalent nowadays. In Central Luzon, an atmosphere of terror and violence prevails today, Filipinos are pitted against Filipinos, brothers against brother, the Huks against the BSDU's and other para-military units. The Huks are waging a vicious war against the duly constituted authorities and the defenseless citizens who

(Continued on page 41)

CHRISTIANITY AND

(continued from page 7)

one's life property, and liberty, to exercise one's rights from the unjust encroachments of another and with violence if necessary. One is even allowed to kill in self defense and just war. May the exploited, therefore, not use force to counteract the exploitation of their rich few?

Secondly, violence can be justified by the principles of government. Government authorities derive authority from the people. Such authority is given to government officials as a trust and charge that they should rule according to the aspirations of the people for a common good. If those in power abuse their authority and power and use it for personal aggrandizement, oppression, exploitation and gradually "kill the poor", may not the people take back from them their authority (honest election) and with violence if necessary?

The Christian Attitude

Man by sin revolted against God but he did not answer in kind, but through His son who by His suffering and death conquered sin and nullified man's revolt. For hatred, God answered love through redemption.

Christ's example and sayings must be a Christian attitude. It was precisely his suffering for truth, freedom and justice and his dying for them, and not the use of brute force, that he saved us and was glorified. "Love your enemies", "Turn the other cheek", etc. are some of the many sayings of Christ that reveal a moral force.

The early christians finally conquered and Christianized the Roman Empire not by rising up against it in violent revolt, but by the power of truth, justice, and love, which just gained them in their suffering and persecution.

It is by the cross that the christian overcomes the world, It is by the power of truth, justice, freedom and love that he conquers it. These forces are more real, more powerful, and more noble than mere physical force of violence, and it is through these powers that we should work for the establishment of the Kingdom. The best way to eliminate an enemy is to make of him a friend. Not to kill him.

Theology of Power

Power as a physical force, like suffering and death is a manifestation, and consequence of sin, of man's fall from grace. It is something which didn't exist in the paradoxical order of things, and which should not exist in the fully established and transformed kingdom of God.

Power, in itself, is not a sin, but like any creation of God, is a gift from God which has to be used responsibly. But since it stems from sin, it leads very easily to sin, unless used with faith and love.

Power is essential to man's existence. It is the ground for the exercise of human freedom, because all men share only one sphere of existence and freedom common to all. This is the very exercise of the true act. The absolute renunciation of force, therefore, is un-Christian and immoral because it would mean removing the ground for the exercise of freedom.

Power is a consequence of and manifestation of sin and, therefore, it too can easily be abused. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The wielder of power must check and safeguard himself against this danger.

The exercise of power on another has an eternal effect and bearing on that other's eternal destiny. There should be valid reasons for exercising power on another, and it must redound to that other's good here and for eternity.

"Power exists either as the embodiment of sin, egoism, and rebellion against God . . . or it exists as the effort of faith which knows that power is unreliable and unrewarding but accepts it obediently as a task from God, as long as he wills." (Theology of Power by Karl Kahner)

(continued on page 40)

CHRISTIANITY AND

(continued from page 14)

The Non-Violent Revolution

The aim of this non-violent revolution is to achieve rapid social change to restructure society so that an even greater measure of justice, freedom, progress, peace and love can be obtained among members of society.

Politicalization of the masses is its first step. This means making the people aware of their rights, of how they were used and exploited for personal gains, and convincing them of the justice of their cause. This can be achieved by preachings, teach-ins, seminars, organization works, demonstrations and rallies.

After this, the exploited confronts the exploiter with the latter's wrong-doings and to convince him of the justice of the former's cause. If exploiters persist in their practice, the exploited organize themselves.

This can be conducted at the local level and national level (nation-wide boycotts). It can also be conducted at the international level, when for example, third world countries unite to change the unjust trade structure and practice perpetrated by the first world countries.

The revolution is never finished. It goes on and on in establishing even greater measures of justice, peace and love of freedom and progress . . . until the world is ready for the transforming action of God into his kingdom.

Violence is avoided as a rule. Since non-violence derives its strength in being non-violent, it loses its power once it becomes violent.

The Case Against Violent Revolution

Since violence stems from sin, its results are unforeseen and uncontrollable. The outcome is very vague. It is very easily subject to abuse. Consider the atrocities in Vietnam, guerrilla warfare, and other forms of violence. In violent revolution, there is a terrible loss of innocent lives and property.

Violent take-over of power results most likely in abuse of this power. In modern times, there is no instance where violent take-over did not result in abuse of this power. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

He who uses violence as a means to seize power is open to violence. Others will take his example and may lawfully use violence to seize power from him. Violence begets violence, as in the case of many Latin American countries.

After a violent revolution, nothing is accomplished yet. Just structure have to be built, which non-violent revolutions are already doing from the start. The latter concentrate their energy and resources in establishing and building just structure right at the start, and not in dissipating it in toppling down governments and then building up society after that.

Conclusion

Enlightened conscience obliges us Filipino Christians to dare the first move up to the last remedial one. To cure our social schizophrenia, we must revamp the socio-political-economic structures of our country, and reconstruct them upon Christian principles. To every citizen must be restored human dignity and the concomitant right to food, shelter, clothing, education, a decent job, and a just wage. Not until a person has acquired these basic needs can he really be free.

The Filipino Christian has no illusions of being able to build a heaven on earth. Realizing his imperfection, he knows he cannot completely eliminate evil in society. Yet he is hopeful that the Great Builder shall come to make the finishing touches on their greatest masterpiece. He continues to lay stone upon stone.

The Christian calling makes no split between material and the spiritual

world. The two are a unity as the body and soul of man are. To cultivate the material to the neglect of the spiritual is to humanize in vain. To cultivate the spiritual to the neglect of the material is to Christify in vain. Every Filipino Christian should take sides. "Behold I set you, over nations and over kingdoms to root up and to tear down to build and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:10) You are either identified with problem or with the solution. Either, or. There should be no silent and neutral majority. To be such is a crime, nowadays. "You are either for me, or you are against me." And be for Christ is to be with the exploited majority. Decide now!

YOUTH ON THE

(continued from page 11)

The youth, in particular, must realize that the activists are a vocal minority. They are passionate in their idealism, fervently desirous for reforms not so much in the realm of material security but in the area of basic human values. They vibrate with impatience for the achievement of these desires because of the feeling that time is running out on them, and with a tremendous vitality which could be oriented for the good. Realizing all these, must the youth, in a moment of unthinking, abort reforms by refusing to harness their vast potentials just because their suspicions do not allow them to coordinate with the elders? On their side, must the elders invite tragic disaster by taking lightly the gravity, intent, and validity of the cause sponsored by the youth simply because they abhor the idea of having to budge an inch from their position of advantage? Both surely must desire to follow the path of peace and progress.

SHARPEN YOUR TOOLS

The apparent stumbling block lies in conservatism and it is the job of the young to overcome it. They can make their militancy more telling upon an adamant society if they choose to do so. What should be done is to stimulate a rationally persistent and massive militancy, to make and execute plans of action with deliberation, to curtail emotionalism and to promote reliance on sound judgment and to hurdle the crisis in confidence.

One weakness to overcome is hasty planning and implementation. Hectic preparation spells the difference between success and failure. Intellectualized leadership and action born of deliberation is uselessly dissipated in the confusion and haste.

Nothing is so pernicious as emotional disturbance in moments of crisis. Never allow any threat, imagined or real, to disquiet the rationality of the human mind and to disturb the soundness of one's judgment. Emotionalism renders youth leadership puerile and repellent to the unactivated and the uncommitted. And worse, it is conducive to mob behavior which internally transforms the movement into a rag-tag army of profanity-shouting, mud-slinging, glassy-eyed zombies, bent on tearing down any and all that fall within their reach. Unreasoning on both sides could only mean either anarchy if allowed to go unchecked or fascist tendencies characterized by police brutalities. What youth leadership must do is to encourage a healthy respect for law and order which readily wins the sympathy of bystanders and irresistibly draws more adherents to the cause.

It is heroic for the youth to successfully go through the gauntlet of the crisis in confidence. It is true that their sad