

Liberation Seeds Of Conflict

Conditions in Third World countries make it a natural breeding ground for liberation theology. In many of these countries a small, privileged class rules in every area of life. The masses are poor, hungry, often illiterate and without land or property.

In Asia, the population is in the process of doubling within the next 20 years, with the number of young people larger than ever, in proportion to their total. By the year 2000 the 4.5 billion inhabitants of the Third World will receive only \$300 of income "per capita" while the 1.5 billion of the rich nations will enjoy \$5,000 or \$10,000.

Soedjatmoko, a philosopher who served as Indonesia's ambassador to the U.S. from 1968 to 1971, and since then involved with a development agency in Jakarta, wrote that "the development efforts, especially in the populous countries, have already become inadequate to prevent the growth of the poor, the illiterate, the unemployed, and those whose minds are permanently damaged as a result of infant malnutrition. It is obvious that the fundamental challenge posed by the concept of human dignity calls for a much more adequate capacity to come to grips with those problems on the national as well as international level."

He also noted that "there is a growing awareness of the immorality of poverty and injustice - awareness that poverty and injustice are not problems on the individual level only, to be dealt with through the traditional channels of religious charity, but are the consequences of structural relationships".

In the Philippines, the average citizen is being squeezed as never before. Spiralling oil costs, a slump in the world price of sugar, which is the mainstay of export, and a high inflation, that is expected to exceed 30 per cent, make the poor poorer. In Negros Occidental, province of the southern Philippines, where we spent two years as missionaries, we frequently saw children carrying a small coffin of their deceased brother or sister. Children burying children! Malnutrition, complicated by pneumonia or TB, causes the death of many children.

Many families must spend 70 per cent to 80 per cent of their income just on food. In the midst of this sea of poverty the rich live in palatial homes and have expensive cars, electrical gadgets, works of art and holidays abroad. The current economic situation has centralized and institutionalized wealth. And nowhere in Southeast Asia are fortunes more secure than in the Philippines.

A growing number of educated Filipino Catholics, especially the young students who are no longer satisfied with the folk Catholicism of the barrios, have given up on the traditional Catholic practices and are looking for new answers to complex problems of their nation. The Philippine Catholic hierarchy observed some years ago "that social conditions in our midst are far from being ideal. Indeed they seem to be marching with gathering speed toward a most serious crisis." The communist party concurred by saying that "the

objective conditions for the implementations of our general Asia or Latin America, claim that Christianity offers the best cause of revolution and gives meaning to the suffering of man and his pain. They say that it holds the best alternative to curtail hatred and excessive violence that revolution brings in its wake. Christianity offers love for God and for the neighbour and urges sacrificial giving even at the risk of one's own life.

An example of this trend of thought is the famous Roman Catholic priest and student chaplain of the National University of Bogota, Columbia, Camilo Torres, who joined the Columbian Guerillas and was shot in action - "I have laid aside the rights and duties of a priest," he said , "but I have not abandoned the priesthood itself. The love of neighbour has moved me to join the revolution. I will not say Mass; but I will fulfill this love of neighbour in the temporal, economic and social field. When my neighbour has nothing more to reproach me with . . . then I will return to saying Mass again. In this way, I believe I will fulfill the commandment which says: 'If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.'"

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