

THE TORTURE OF BRAZIL

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"Torture, that is, cruel and inhumane police methods, used to extort confessions from the lips of prisoners, is to be openly condemned.

"It offends not only the physical integrity but also the dignity of the human person.

"It is not to be tolerated, even if it is used by subordinate bodies without the mandate and permission of the higher authorities, upon which authorities may fall the responsibility for such illegal and dishonoring oppression."

It is not surprising that Pope Paul, whose words these are, would condemn torture in strong terms. The question is why he would do so at this time. Is the torture that he referred to widespread—in Vietnam, for example, and the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Africa—or did he intend to comment on some particular regime? While acknowledging that cases of torture were widespread, the Pope added that "their center is said, perhaps not without certain political intentions, to be in a great country, which is undergoing the stresses and strains of economic and social development, and which has hitherto been honored by all and considered free and wise."

Despite the fact that Cardinal Agnelo Rossi of Brazil denied that the Pope was referring to his country—"It could have been Canada also"—few commentators doubted that the Pope had in mind any country other than the world's largest Roman Catholic nation. The week before he gave his address, Pope Paul had received from the central commission of the Brazilian Bishops Conference a report that deplored torture presently employed by the state. This official report followed upon other detailed and harrowing accounts by people who have undergone torture in the jails of Brazil. Except within Brazil, where such accounts are distorted or blocked, knowledge about Brazilian torture is plentiful and fully documented.

The pressure to comment on the systematic use of torture was readily dismissed by the Brazilian government for years. It refused to discuss the issue, denying its very existence. But the pressures have now proved too great for the head-in-the-sand approach. In late October, President Emilio G. Medici, in his first comment on the issue, denounced those who accused Brazilian authorities of torturing prisoners as "bad Brazilians, Communists and subversives." And he added that "Brazil is one of the most peaceful countries in the world." If this judgment of President Medici were correct, it would indeed be a sad judgment on other countries of the world. But he is not correct. Brazil is a tortured, not a peaceful country.

But what should this mean to Americans, who have, after all, political relations with Brazil? And what to Christians,

who have a right to feel special ties with the Christian groups, guerrillas and revolutionaries, who oppose the present Brazilian government by illegal and frequently violent means? Is Brazil simply to be added to the list of outrages that are regularly deplored by "right-thinking" people in this country? Is "torture in Brazil" to follow racism in South Africa, fascism in Spain, dictatorship in Greece, poverty in India, as one of many ills to be noted, deplored and catalogued?

Some people think it should be otherwise. Writing in the November *Catholic World*, Marcio Moreira Alves, a Brazilian journalist and ex-Congressman now in exile, said of Brazil today:

"The financial statements of banks and industries are the best in history—especially for foreign investors. The American business community, leader of private industry, lavishes praise on the wise dictatorship that guarantees profits. USAID, playing safe, provides for police and military training in counterinsurgency techniques. The bulk of the aid given to Brazil and other Latin American countries takes the form of cheap but efficient goods—light arms, tear gas, jeeps, etc."

This has a familiar ring to it and so will the responses such descriptions call forth. In his typical provocative fashion, Dean Acheson recently listed a number of countries which the United States should support since, whatever their deficiencies, they were joined in their opposition to communism. Brazil could easily join such a list. And it would not be difficult to find the commentator who would like to sharpen his wit on Alves' implication that good financial statements are bad. Nevertheless, there is a real issue in his judgment, and it cannot be resolved until prior questions are answered: e.g., what responsibility do private investors have for the uses to which their investments are put? And Government agencies? And the citizen whose government issues grants, loans and aid? At what point could moral disapproval override economic or political returns? Not new issues but raised with force once again by the example of Brazil.

What Alves writes about Christians in Brazil presents more, and even harder, questions:

"Brazil has an un-Christian social and political structure which every Christian has the duty to try to destroy. This can only happen by organizing the masses. Organizing is only possible underground. It follows that to be a Christian in Brazil means, today, to be an outlaw."

Let us grant that grave injustices exist in Brazil. At what point do unjust social and political structures become un-Christian? Does one have an overriding moral obligation to destroy such structures? What are the powers of legitimation for revolutionary, life-taking projects? And what chance for success justifies urban guerrilla warfare? To ask such questions is *not* to answer them, for a sound answer cannot be made apart from both sound politico-moral principles and a good grasp of the particulars involved. The questions are, nevertheless, important now for they can be and are being applied to countries other than Brazil today. It is, for example, the United States that has developed both a film entitled "Holy Outlaw" and the man the film celebrates, a priest who calls for profound resistance to present social and political structures in this country.

J.F.

THE MILLS OF MAN

The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small. Old proverb. Well, sometimes the mills of man don't grind so fast either. For example, when they're asked to grind up the means to engage in germ warfare.

Almost one year ago, in the person of President Nixon, the United States renounced germ warfare. Today there still exist in the United States almost 50,000 bullets and darts, some containing batuliniam, a deadly toxin; anticrop biological agents that produce, for example, rice blast and wheat rust; stockpiles of various germs; and biological research facilities. Furthermore, the Army's budget for germ warfare will be almost as much this fiscal year as it was last year. It's about time, some might say, to put the American shoulder to the wheel and in its efficient, practical way, get that mill grinding.

NEXT MONTH—

J. Bryan Hehir, in "The Idea of a Political Theology," writes: "The Kingdom of God is depicted in terms of the biblical promises found in Isaiah: peace, justice, liberty, reconciliation, and love. To carry out its task the Church must become an 'institution of social criticism' which exists neither above the world nor beside the world but *in* the world. The role of the Church as an institution of social criticism is to measure every political situation against the value of the Kingdom."