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THE CHRISTIAN CALL FOR REVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT

Revolution and development are two terms we often come across in the context of socio-political reforms. These two words are very closely inter-related. Revolution usually suggests the idea of a rapid and radical change in the system of a nation for the creation of a better society. Development, on the other hand, points to a somewhat slow or moderate way of establishing a better and more human world. When the developmental programmes are too slow people may lose interest in them and, at the earliest opportunity, at instigation of some leader start a revolution. Revolution, in spite of its shortcomings and massive destruction, can quickly bring about phenomenal changes calculated to benefit future generations. Some of its negative results could be well avoided if speedy developmental programmes are effectively carried out in due time. Revolution and development are, thus, very closely associated and the life of a country is often a living tension between these two.

The role of religion with regard to revolution and development is of an ambiguous nature. Religion can give a revolutionary vision to a country, which may effectively change its ways of life totally. Religion can also foster developmental activities with great enthusiasm and selflessness. However, religion may, with its outmoded creeds and addiction to certain meaningless patterns of life, hamper progress. Religion is greatly responsible in moulding the attitude of the people, though this is now slightly diminished by the highly secularized civilizations of our times. Ancient cultures and religions were often identical. One could easily assert that the great ancient cultures of the world grew under the cool shade of religion. Each country is what it is now because of the direct or indirect influence of its religion.

This article is a study of the spirit of Christian religion, especially its call for revolution and developmental activities on earth for the creation of a better humanity. What kind of a religious world-vision does Christianity have that it can mastermind change, lead the needed revolution and direct it to a successful goal? This analysis can be of great importance both to the developing and the developed nations of the world. The developing nations have to realize that in a world of inequality and chronic injustice, they are required to shape their own destiny, to make their environment more human and lovable. The ultimate solution for this is not dependence on others or developmental aid-programmes, but the realization of the basic call each man has received from God. The developed nations, on the contrary, have to see whether the power structure and the economic system they have built are really Christian and conducive to the true development of the so-called developing countries.

1. What is revolution?

Albert Camus in his book defines a rebel as one who refuses to accept the present state of things. According to him (the rebel) there is a limit to human patience and tolerance. Since no improvement in the situation can be expected through patience and tolerance, the rebel decides to revolt. Revolution is, seen from this standpoint, a radical "No" to the present state of things and a bold "Yes" to a new beginning. This radical "No" is first formulated in man's thinking and is later on applied to his practical life. It is primarily a vision which demands and forces a change in life-style as well as in the life situation of man. History provides us with several examples of "No" being articulated against the prevailing systems. Buddhism emerged in India as a radical "No" to the Brahmanic way of salvation.¹ Instead of the Vedic way of animal sacrifice, a new way of self-sacrifice and internal enlightenment was opened up. Six hundred years later Christ appeared in Palestine uttering a great "No" to the then existing oppressive structures of religion and society.²

1. Haridas Bhattacharyya (Ed), *The Cultural Heritage of India: (Vol IV)* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna mission Institute of culture, 1956), pp. 260ff.

2. Cf. John Desrochers, *Christ the Liberator* (Bangalore: Centre for Social Action, 1977), pp. 47ff; Augustine Isaac, *Jesus the Rebel* (Mangalore: Sallack Books, 1973), p. 17 and Passim.

Gandhi's utterance of the "No" was expressed in the "Quit India Movement" which ultimately led India to freedom and self-reliance.³ More recently India witnessed a great popular "No" to the previous government and to the excesses of emergency in the elections.⁴ The utterance of the "No" certainly implies a refusal. A revolutionary is one who refuses to be an object.⁵ Man to man relationship is not a subject-object relationship, one using the other. Rather, it is a relationship in which both are subjects, a relationship of "we" rather than of "I" and "it". When one man becomes the object of another man, he is exploited by him; and revolution is the radical refusal to be so exploited by his own fellow-men, a refusal to be an object of exploitation. Now, comes the question: Was Christ a revolutionary in this sense? If so, what was his revolution for?

2. Revolution and Liberation

Since revolution demands a change from the past or the present state of things and the creation of a new future, revolution is always associated with liberation: liberating the masses from the oppression of the past and the present unjust structures. The liberation movements are often revolutionary. The liberation of man from the oppressive structure of religion and society was central to the message of Christ.⁶ The Bible, from beginning to end, maintains this trend of thought. The Lord said:

I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt.
I have heard their outcry against their slave-masters.
I have taken heed of their suffering and have come down

3. R.C. Majumdar (Ed). *Struggle For Freedom*, (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1969) pp. 643-46

4. Inder Malhotra, "The Nation's Verdict" *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (Vol. XCVII 13, 1977), pp. 6-7, 11.

5. Paulo Fieire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Penguin Books, 1972), p. 75.

6. "Salvation embraces all men and the whole man; the liberating action of Christ—made man in this history and not in a history marginal to the real life of man—is at the heart of the historical current of humanity: the struggle for a just society is in its own right very much a part of salvation history." Gustavo Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis books, 1973), p. 168. Cf. also J.M. Pathrapankal, "Jesus: Freedom—Fighter or prince of peace?" in *The Indian Journal of Theology* (Vol. 24, 1975), pp. 79-86.

to rescue them from the power of Egypt and to bring them up out of their country to a fine broad land.⁷

The prophet condemned every kind of abuse, every form of keeping the poor in poverty or creating new poor people.

“Since you serve your own interest only on your fast-day and make all your men work the harder, since your fasting leads only to wrangling and strife and dealing vicious blows with the fist, on such a day you are keeping no fast that will carry your cry to heaven.

Is it a fast like this that I require, a day of mortification such as this, that a man should bow his head like a bulrush and make his bed on sackcloth and ashes?

Is this what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?

Is not this what I require of you as a fast, to loose the letters of injustice, to untie the knots of the yoke, to snap every yoke

and set free those who have been crushed?

Is it not sharing your food with the hungry, taking the homeless poor into your house, clothing the naked when you meet them and never evading a duty to your kinsfolk?”⁸

The famous magnificat hymn, sung by Mary, mother of Jesus, has the following lines:

“He has brought down monarchs from their thrones,
but the humble had been lifted high.
The hungry he was satisfied with good things,
the rich he sent empty away”⁹

3. The Christian Revolution

Christ's revolution was the revolution for liberation. Christ preached liberation: Liberation from the oppressive structures

7. Exodus 3: 7-10.

8. Is. 58: 3-7. Cf. also Hos. 12:8; Amos 3:5; Jer. 5:27.

9. Luke 1:52-53.

man has created. These included religious as well as social. Christ wanted the total liberation of man.

Man is time-bound and history-bound. All factors of history work upon him; all structures, good and bad as well, work on him, influence his actions and direct his path of life. All evil structures that he himself has built, all disruptive forces that he has released into this world, enslave him, putting him at the mercy of the situation. Thus man is in a world of anxiety and fear: anxiety of the atombomb, and fear of death. He is in a world of disease and despair, in a world of excessive inequalities and exploitations.¹⁰ Christ wanted to liberate man from all these evil forces.

Christ wanted a more radical solution. And this he found in liberating man from the estrangement he is in: estrangement from himself and from true and authentic humanity.¹¹ Anyone who sees the other as an object misses the true meaning of humanity and lives in alienation from himself and from his own fellow-men. This attitude should be changed and man must discover himself and show concern for the others. This was the core of Christ's message: This awareness will certainly express itself in his way of life and unconditionally demand a change in the social situations. Hence the message of Christ was twofold: On the one hand it wants to bring man to his true consciousness: to make him aware of his greatness and dignity as one bearing the image of God and, hence, his radical equality with all men. On the other hand it boldly denounces every situation in which this awareness of human dignity and equality is conveniently forgotten or set aside. To the leaders of his society he said:

Alas for you, Scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites, you who pay the tithe of mint and herbs and plants to the Church, have neglected the weightier matters of the Law:

10. "If demands of justice and equality are to be satisfied, vigorous efforts must be made; without violence to the rights of persons or to the natural characteristics of each country, to remove as quickly as possible the immense economic inequalities which now exist. In many cases they are worsening and are connected with individual and group discrimination." *The Documents of Vatican II*, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World". No 66. Cf. also Francis Vineeth, "Student Revolt in Europe" *Jeevadhara* (Vol. 19, 1974) pp. 60-69.

11. Paul Tillich. *The systematic Theology*, Vol. II.

Justice, mercy and good faith. These you should have practised without neglecting the others.¹²

Against this situation he proclaimed that the Kingdom of God is at hand. In other words, he said that God's revolution is at hand inviting man to his own authenticity and righteousness, which in due course will make for change in every aspect of human life. This was clearly visible in the life-pattern of the first Christians, the people affected by this divine revolution, who "owned everything in common and sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed"¹³ (Acts 2:45).

4. The Christian Call and the Theology of Development

Every religion readily accepts the fact that we are in a predicament and we need **change**. We need to be saved or liberated. Our authenticity—true nature—is to be re-discovered. The re-discovery of the self is sought either **above history** or as the **aim of history**. The transcendental element will be stressed in all religions. But the inner-historical element will be stressed differently. In some religions, Hinduism and Buddhism for example, the ultimate authenticity is obtained in absolute transcendence from the world: **moksha** or **nirvāna**. In Christianity, on the other hand, the authenticity has already begun on earth and, in the person of Jesus Christ, it is manifested and guaranteed. History is, therefore, an already transformed history and is in the process of acquiring higher degrees of transformation.¹⁴ The change of the material dimension of man and its evolution to a final goal is an essential element in the Christian world-vision. It is not a pure transcendence, though transcendence is highly stressed, but a transcendence along with which matter is also taken up, ennobled and elevated.

This basic message is contained in the mystery of incarnation, the basic Christian tenet which says that God really became man, assuming human flesh, that is matter, and thus calling matter to an elevated existence. From this radical vision is created an attitude towards matter which is fundamentally **positive**, i.e.

12. Math. 23:23.

13. Acts. 2:45.

14. Danielou, *The Lord of History* (London: Longmans Green & Co. Ltd; 1960).

not as something to be escaped from, but as something which is to be spiritualized and divinized.

It is this positive attitude to matter and its evolution that Christianity can give to India, which in its emphasis on the contemplative type of religion, laid its emphasis on the need of liberation from matter. Christianity too stresses the aspect of liberation. Christianity repudiates every form of material existence in which matter is not united with spirit, that is to say Christianity uncompromisingly demands that the spirit of spiritual ideal must be the inner force of material movement and change. Thus it rejects all thorough-going material systems, and systems of hedonistic tendencies. It also rejects and repudiates all systems which, though geared to progress, fail to recognize the dignity of the human individual. This explains Christianity's opposition to all forms of totalitarianism, though the phenomenal progress they bring about may be great.

An acute awareness of human dignity is another factor which follows from the incarnational mystery of man. Man is a combination of spirit and matter, formed in the image of Christ. Everyone shares the greatness of Christ and is called to be more and more Christ-like. Christianity, therefore, preaches a radical sense of equality of all men, irrespective of class, colour or creed. This sense of equality and dignity is to be acknowledged by every believing Christian. This means a call for radical change wherever unjust situations prevail, wherever the poor and the weak are oppressed or exploited by the rich and the powerful. This is evident from the very beginning of Christianity. In the Acts of the Apostles, in that part of the Bible which records the history of the primitive church, we read how the primitive church gave rise to a sort of theistic communism when the believers offered their riches to be distributed to the needy among them. This manifests to us the original spirit of the Christian community. Today also the same call is given and Christianity, with all its human limitations, still works in that direction.

One way of working this out is by fostering education. Education enhances one's own consciousness and makes one aware of one's dignity. Once man is made aware of his dignity he will try to better the situations he lives in and, if needed, fight against the injustices he is subjected to. When dignity is brought into sharp focus and the life-situations fail to cope with it, man will become rebellious against the whole system and try to bring

about equality by using force and power. This explains the rise of communism as a political power in a Christian country.

Another form of reaction will be to remain within the framework of the established religion, but continuously try to realize the ideals it preaches and thus bring about a radical and rapid change in the living conditions of man. This is what is being attempted by the so-called liberation theology movement in Latin America.¹⁵ The Catholic priests who fight against the unjust situations in Latin America are often looked with suspicion by the capitalist countries¹⁶ because, ultimately, the fight is directed against the unjust system of exploitation of the poor nations by the rich.

In India the situation is not much different and there is ample scope for a Christian movement which will utilise its time and energy to deliver the masses from the injustices of the social systems. Every Indian citizen has a right to live in a human situation. This is a natural consequence of his dignity. But this natural right is not within the reach of many millions in India. Apart from schools, colleges, hospitals and orphanages—all of which do work for making man's life more human—India needs programmes for liberating the masses in the villages and slums. This has been attempted in certain areas very successfully and one such area is Chottanagapur, where the adivasis have been systematically saved from the exploitation of the landlords and the face of the village is now totally changed. However, once the priest who was organising the deliverance programme was mercilessly beaten by the landlords.¹⁷ Several other small pockets are being liberated mostly by missionaries. This does not mean that everywhere Christianity has been bringing about such changes.

15. For example: Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973); Ignacio Ellacuria, *Freedom made Flesh* (New York: Orbis Books, 1976).

16. Today the most ancient monarchy seated on the rock of the first bishop of Rome is faced with a subversion of the sacred values. And it is not the silent and scandalized laity, but rather the clergy who are breaking through the rigid boundaries of their evangelical service to become on not a few occasions standard bearers of an openness to Marxism—with all the ferocity and incontinent in which converts traditionally have gloried." *The Rockefeller Report on the Americas* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969) p. 31 quoted by Gutierrez *op. cit.* pp. 140-141.

17. S. Kappan, "The Goals of Revolution". *Religion and Society*, (Vol. XX, 1973) pp. 51-61.

But such work is part of the philosophy of Christianity. This was the call and life of Christ himself.

5. Progress and Eschatology

Progress is often hampered or hastened up by the type of eschatological vision one fosters. Visions give rise to types of spirituality. The two kinds of spirituality we generally see are the ascetic and the mystic, the rational ascetic and the contemplative mystic.¹⁸ By ascetic is meant, one who accepts a worldly frame-work for his actions, and works out his ideas in this world rationally. By doing this he believes he is doing something for his own salvation and also contributing to the ongoing changing process of the universe towards the spiritual and the divine. His actions bear fruit immediately by bringing about change in a visible manner.

The mystic, on the other hand, looks for the ultimate unity of all in one, the radical synthesis of all, and tries to experience it. This, of course, is a great ideal and a source of much happiness. But unless the mystic is also an ascetic, the human aspects and the living conditions around him, will remain the same or worse. Mystics are necessary, to represent the real and the inner dynamism of the universe in a world of ascetics.

Viewed in this manner the Indian religious ideal is more mystical than ascetical. This is expressed in systems like **Aham Brahmasmi** (I am Brahman) and **tattvam asi** etc. Christianity—though it also stands for mysticism—lays great emphasis on the ascetic aspect of life as described above, that is, rationally organizing its actions in a world framework. Along in the other things, this accounts for the great material progress in the West. Within Christianity itself, the Protestant tradition has developed this ascetic ideal much more and among Protestants, the Calvinists. According to Max Weber, a great religious sociologist, the main reason for America's material progress is the Calvinist tradition, which has very greatly influenced the immigrants to America.

The lack of synthesis of the ascetical and mystical elements may give use to disastrous results. Today the West is beginning to feel free of the problems resulting from the lack of mysticism

18. Cf. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: Methuen and Co. 1971) pp. 168-169.

in the air they breathe and thousands of young men and women from the affluent West look to the East, especially to India, for mystical experience. In India, on the contrary, we have indulged in some sort of mystical idealism without rationally organising the world to produce the desired effects and to bring the earth under our control. Christianity, with its stress on matter and history as also emphasis on the transformation of matter through history, can perhaps contribute much in this direction to bring about effective change in the life of India, or of any other developing nation.

This change should not be a break with the cultural values and religious life of a nation. The change is envisaged only to counter injustices and inhuman situations. While preserving and perfecting the values that are dear to it, the change should be rapid and even radical. The need for change is certainly overdue, and everything that helps to inspire such effort should be right-fully made use of.

6. Towards a More Human World

The World needs change in her thinking as well as in her living. The change in thinking should eventually work out change in her living conditions. This change should be both radical and rapid: radical, because we need change in the very socio-political structures some of which are favouring inhuman conditions, and rapid, because the need for change is long overdue. Rapid and radical change is said to be a revolution. Revolution is often associated with bloodshed, mass-massacre etc. What we need is rapid and radical change, but not a bloodshed. In such mass-revolutions the inhuman situations still prevail. What is achieved is only the transfer of the inhuman situation from one side to the other. But we need the renewal of the whole society and justice for all. Christianity is in favour of the inner revolution of man: a radical and rapid change in his vision and attitude. In course of time this would effectively influence his surroundings. Christ repudiated every form of injustice he faced, but did not mobilize physical force and power-structures.

The use of violence in order to establish justice is a disputed point. Violence may even be justified if the present state of violence against the poor and the oppressed is greater than the violence that is envisaged necessary to restore a happy humanity.

However Christ preferred to suffer himself than to inflict suffering on others. When we speak of violence we usually think of physical violence and forget the oppressive structures established by the powerful against the weaker sections of humanity: the so called 'legalized violence'. The nature of violence is very ambiguous and needs to be analysed theologically.¹⁹ Violence can easily give free reigns to the base passions of man, such as animal tendency of exterminating the opponent, and often selfishness and greed for power lurk behind it. Revolution through the **methods of non-violence** is, therefore preferred by Christ, and many great men have followed this example in our own time, such as Gandhi,²⁰ Martin Luther King etc., This does not however, mean that nothing could be done organizationally. The **kingdom of God** has already began on earth. It is a **world of love and social justice** that Christ envisaged, and Christian vision demands that this world is not a mere ambition, nor an utopia, but an actuality. It is upto us to **make this world on earth**.

In effecting this change we go through a triple process of suppression, preservation and sublimation. The existing structures of exploitation and alienation should be suppressed. But revolution does not destroy the past altogether. The new is really built on the past. So those who are for real change should be on their guard to see that all the positive values that are lived in the present are allowed to continue in order to ensure a successful future. This is what we call preservation. So in the new society the positive values lived now will be realized on a higher plane. This is sublimation. Man's life on earth is a process in which he moves, realizing himself more and more, towards this sublimated realm of his existence.²¹

The Kingdom of God which Christ preached symbolizes this triple process of change. First of all the Kingdom of God, which is already on earth, is light which dispels darkness. Darkness here means any evil structure that is in this world, internal or eternal. Thus the Kingdom of God is for the suppression of all enslaving structures of evil. It is a real presence, though only fragmentarily realized. Since it is already present, it is concern-

19. For a theological analysis of violence Ignocio Ellacuria, *op. cit.* pp. 167-232.

20. Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of conflict* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1971).

21. S. Kappan, *art. cit.* pp. 51-61.

ed about preserving itself; but since it is only fragmentarily realized it looks forward to its fuller realization, and sees history as a march towards this great goal. Thus it is always struggling to realize its ideal a little more and thus elevates itself to a more sublimated form of existence.

Hence the inner meaning of Christianity is change. This change should be basically internal; but it should inevitably extend to bring about a betterment in the living conditions of human beings.