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- 3 P. Benoit, *Inspiration and the Bible*, London 1965, p.15; K. Rahner 'Inspiration in the Bible' in *Studies in Modern Theology*, London 1965, p.13.
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- 5 A. Rohling, 'Die Inspiration der Bibel und ihre Bedeutung für die freie Forschung', *Natur und Offenbarung*, 1972.
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Brazil's "Dominican Affair"

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In late 1969 and early 1970 the Brazilian press carried a story which it called the "Dominican Affair". It told of how an important urban guerilla had been shot dead by the police owing to his betrayal by two student-brothers of the Dominican Order. The story had the widest implications for Church-State relations at a national and international level, and it got world coverage. Recently more information has come to light, which makes possible an hypothesis (but not yet a definitive statement) of what really happened. It is fascinating, whether or not one is a Brazilian or a Dominican. It reveals very dramatically the complexity of the ways in which the apparatus of government and the media may distort—and continue to distort—even the most localized of events. And it shows how, in spite of these distortions, a seemingly modest man, Frei Tito de Alencar, whose sufferings and ideals have been written about several times in *New Blackfriars*¹, can emerge eventually with the stature of a martyr.

1. The Story

On 31 March 1964 a military coup in Brazil ousted President João

Goulart and began a period of military rule which enjoyed, at least initially, the support of the Brazilian middle class as well as of international capital. As the economy worsened, opposition grew even among those civilian groups which had welcomed the coup in the first place, and, in December 1968, the President of the Republic, Marshal Costa e Silva, decreed Institutional Act nº 5, which provided that the President

...will be authorised to suspend the political rights of any citizen for a term of ten years and make void elective political mandates... The guarantee of Habeus Corpus is suspended in cases of political crimes against national security, economic and social order, and the popular economy. All acts practised in accordance with the Institutional Act, and its complementary acts, as well as the respective effects, are excluded from any juridical judgements.

Thus a police state was formally installed.

During the period of military government a group of young men were maturing in their religious and political options. Ivo and Tito were students at the State University of São Paulo, Betto at Rio de Janeiro, and Fernando at Belo Horizonte. They had in common a participation in the Young Catholic Student movement in the early 1960s, and their various decisions, taken in the period after the 1964 coup, to pursue their Christian and social commitment by joining the Dominican Order.

As Dominican students, living in the Perdizes community in São Paulo, they found themselves, as the repressive nature of the régime increased, helping old colleagues from their university or professional days, colleagues whose desire for social and political change, often of a revolutionary nature, posed a threat to "national security". This help, in the words of one of the students, Betto:

was not a systematic labour, and still less was it organized like a political party cell. We welcomed people affiliated to diverse political tendencies who were pursued for their opposition to the régime. Our support consisted above all in sheltering them in safe places, transporting them from town to town, and reassuring their families. It was in accordance with our means and condition as religious that we helped people risking arrest, torture and death.

Amongst those who sought the help of the Dominicans was Carlos Marighella, who visited the community in 1967, showing interest in the renewal of the Church after the Vatican Council. He was a dissident member of the Brazilian Communist party, and, when he visited Perdizes, was on the point of founding a revolutionary movement called A.L.N. (Action for National Liberation). This

group became an efficient urban guerilla force, organizing surprise attacks on banks, and distributing forbidden literature to factories under armed guard. Especially after the decree of Institutional Act nº 5, and the sinking into clandestinity of all forms of dissent, the A.L.N. became, despite the ambiguity of its means, the partially veiled face of the hope for change.

In August 1969 Marighella's men occupied the National Radio station in São Paulo to announce that the guerilla campaign would be intensified. On 4 September the U.S. ambassador was kidnapped in Rio de Janeiro in order to obtain the release of fifteen political prisoners. The military and police had stepped up their response to Marighella's activities by forming a coordinated operation known as OBAN (Operação Bandeirantes). On 24 September some twenty members of the A.L.N. fell prisoner. On 1 October the friend of one of the Dominicans who had introduced Marighella to the Perdizes community was also arrested; on the 19th Marighella's principal lieutenant, Joaquim Câmara Ferreira, fled to Uruguay, helped by Frei Betto, who had thought it wise to exile himself to a Jesuit seminary near Porto Alegre in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. Betto had formed, for some time, the last link in an escape route for those at risk if they stayed in the country. A popular magazine, *Veja*, announced on 22 October, (its information based almost certainly on police authority,) that the net was closing around Marighella and his arrest was expected at any moment.

On 2 November 1969 Frei Fernando and Frei Ivo were arrested in Rio de Janeiro, where they had just arrived from São Paulo. They were interrogated and tortured so as to make them yield information about Marighella's movements (which they did not know). Next day the police drove them back to São Paulo, where the interrogation and torture continued. On the 4th, Fernando, whose torturers had deliberately left his face intact so that he could be recognized, was taken to the bookshop which Marighella used to telephone as his way of organizing a meeting. A voice, other than Marighella's, fixed a meeting for that evening, using the correct codeword over the 'phone. At the appointed time Fernando and the barely conscious Ivo were taken to the correct meeting place (strangely, since they had both yielded different, and false, meeting places under torture). They were left to wait in a Volkswagen beetle. When the recognisable silhouette of Marighella (with his customary wig) appeared on the scene, he was shot dead by the waiting police. At Pacaembú stadium, a few kilometres away, where a capacity crowd was watching Santos play Corinthians in the hopes of seeing Pelé scoring his thousandth goal, the match, which was broadcast live to the entire nation, was interrupted by the police announcement that the terrorist leader Carlos Marighella had just been shot down, thanks to his betrayal by his Dominican accomplices.

Immediately before the killing of Marighella, Tito and Giorgio (an

Italian Dominican) had been arrested in São Paulo. Betto was betrayed to the police in the south after having hidden successfully for a week, and all were brought to the headquarters of the D.O.P.S. (Department of Social and Political Order—the political police) in São Paulo, where OBAN was organised. Here they were charged with subversion of the State, and tortured under the supervision of Commissioner Fleury, head of the 'Death Brigade'.

Church officials were allowed to see the prisoners, who tried to denounce the torture not only on their own behalf, but on behalf of those political prisoners who had no spokesmen on the outside. Cardinal Rossi (then Archbishop of São Paulo and now President of the administration of the patrimony of the Holy See) washed his hands of the affair, claiming that the Dominicans had been arrested in the course of non-religious activities, and thus it had nothing to do with him. The Dominican superiors insisted on justice, not mercy: to plead for mercy would be to admit some guilt where they were convinced there was none. The Master of the Order, Aniceto Fernández, sent his assistant, and later successor, Vincent de Couesnongle, to Brazil as a sign of support. Couesnongle and the local provincial did everything within their power to help the prisoners.

Nevertheless the torture, both physical and psychological, went on. In the case of Frei Tito it was apparently to extract information about a long-past incident of student insurrection, almost all of whose participants had been arrested before. Officially, nothing was happening to the prisoners—the torture was repeatedly denied by the authorities, but attested in documents smuggled out of the prison by the Dominicans and other prisoners. The Dominicans were eventually moved from D.O.P.S. headquarters to Tiradentes prison (also in São Paulo). Here, in March 1970, Tito was carried by his comrades, after three months of torture, to the prison courtyard, where his Provincial, Domingos Maia Leite, in defiance of police orders, received his solemn vows.

Tito had tried to commit suicide as a way of drawing attention to the torture in the prison, by leaving the authorities with the embarrassment of a corpse. He failed. His first memory on being brought round was of Captain Albernaz, his torturer, pleading with the doctor "He absolutely must not die, or we are lost". This was to dog Tito for the rest of his life, fulfilling Albernaz' promise that the torture had gone too deep for Tito ever to be able to forget it. He was released in early 1971, one of a number of prisoners released in exchange for the kidnapped Swiss ambassador. He went into exile in Chile and then France. He committed suicide in August 1974, pursued to the end by hallucinations of his torturers which psychiatrists and the solicitude of his Dominican brethren were unable to exorcise.

After twenty-two months in prison Betto and the other

Dominicans were tried. Nothing was proved against them, and they were sentenced to a further four years. Betto was released in October 1973, and, having declined to be ordained, works in Brazil as a lay brother and a theologian. Fernando and Ivo have kept silence for ten years on what they knew about the 'Dominican Affair'.

2. *The questions*

There are doubtless many thousands of similar cases in this century alone whose pain could be added to the catalogue of futility. But the story, thus baldly told, does not do justice to the wider ramifications of the events. The question remains: did the Dominicans betray Marighella? If they did not, then how did he meet his end, and why was it thought good that the Dominicans be implicated?

As to the first point, Fernando and Ivo are adamant: while they were no heroes under torture, their common experience was that Fleury, the Chief Commissioner at the D.O.P.S. headquarters, already knew the facts which he was trying to extricate from them. They independently yielded misinformation as to the regular meeting place with Marighella, and yet the police knew the correct number of the street. For that we have the friars' witness alone. Nevertheless there is striking forensic evidence of their veracity from other quarters. The police claimed that Marighella was shot while with Frei Fernando and Frei Ivo in their Volkswagen, though the friars claimed that they saw a figure being shot in the street. The police then produced the shot-up Volkswagen, with Marighella's body in it, an hour after the supposed death of Marighella as proof of their story for the benefit of the Press. Yet it is the photographs of this scene which raise most questions about the police story.

Why were the Press not allowed to the scene for an hour after the incident? How were the religious still alive? The seat of the car had been so riddled with bullets that anyone in it at the time of the shooting would have been killed outright. The condition of Marighella's corpse was strikingly at odds with the police story. It was in a state of *rigor mortis* (normal at least twelve hours after death) within an hour of his 'betrayal'. The press and police photographs reveal his trousers to be unbuttoned, owing to the swelling of his lower abdomen, a phenomenon which accompanies the onset of putrefaction. This suggests that he had been dead for several days by the time the photographs were taken. The tip of his little finger was missing, but was found later some distance from the car on the same street. A piece of cloth of the sort used by the police institute to wrap corpses could be detected in the back of the car.

These were not the only oddities. Police reported that Marighella had arrived in a blue van without number plates, but with a special driving permit. The improbability of Brazil's most wanted man driving

around São Paulo in an unlicensed van, asking to be stopped by every bribe-hungry traffic cop, is compounded by the disappearance of the van: it was never shown as evidence, and there is no record of its ever having been impounded. Police stories showed marked contradictions: some said that Marighella had come with up to 15 bodyguards, others that he had come alone. In the face of this evidence, the most plausible hypothesis is that Marighella was captured some time in late October, after the flight of his lieutenant and the arrest of many members of the A.L.N., that he was killed under arrest and his body used by the police to set up a scene which would, and did, cause great embarrassment to the Church.

For Marighella to have been captured, and for the police to know so many details of his way of getting into contact with the Dominicans, there must have been someone within the A.L.N. who was giving information. There is circumstantial evidence for this in the collapse of the network in October 1969, with the arrest of some members and the flight of others. More solid evidence is produced by former C.I.A. agent, Victor Marchetti, in his book *The C.I.A. and the cult of intelligence* (English edn. Jonathan Cape, London 1974). In a passage among the several which the C.I.A. tried to censor he affirms that Marighella's organisation had indeed been infiltrated by the C.I.A., and that it was this which led to its destruction.

The question remains as to why the police used the corpse and the Dominicans in the way they did. It would seem that Fleury conducted the operation, from the arrest of Ivo and Fernando onwards, in an unhurried way, as though there were no rush (which the hypothesis I have outlined would account for). He even invited his fellow officers in the D.O.P.S. headquarters to drink champagne with him *before* the betrayal scene was enacted on the evening of 4 November. That evening was well chosen for both assassination scene and publicity: owing to the football match, the streets would be virtually empty (though an entirely innocent passer-by was killed by mistake in the police action), and those watching the football, both live and on television, provided a huge audience to whom to announce the great police coup. This would account for the date but not for the implication of the Dominicans.

The discrediting of the friars obviously served the immediate purpose of protecting the C.I.A. informer within the A.L.N. However, their implication as religious is really only understood within a larger scenario. The Nixon administration had sponsored the Rockefeller report, which was made public in Brazil at the end of November 1969. In it, the Church and Christians engaged in the struggle for justice were diagnosed as being an even greater threat to the stability of the South American continent than the activities of the Left. A campaign, whose effects are still operative, was mounted to discredit churchmen whose interest in the things of this world led them to challenge the status quo.

In fact the renewal of the Church in Brazil even before the Vatican Council might be seen as a threat, for there were already present the seeds of the option for the poor to which the Latin American Church was to be committed by the meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Conference at Medellín in 1968. By the time of the Institutional Act N^o. 5, the Church was the only body in Brazil capable of opposition, or expression of dissent, to the régime.

By early 1969 Helder Câmara, Archbishop of Olinda-Recife, already known as an advocate of human rights, was an “unperson”, whose name and face did not appear in the media in his own country. Those who worked with him were automatically suspect as terrorists and communists. The Dominican prisoners frequently found that their interrogations referred to some subversive plot organised by Helder Câmara in which they were thought to be involved.

To link members of the Church with a terrorist in an indisputable case of complicity would, for the security forces, have the effect of shocking moderate Catholic opinion and particularly hierarchical opinion into a disavowal of the sort of causes for which the Dominicans stood, thus leading to a greater collusion between Church and State. This would appear to have been the motivating force behind the *mise en scène* of the death of Marighella. To this end also, the Dominican prisoners, after they had recovered from the more obvious signs of physical torture, were taken to the fourth floor of the D.O.P.S. building in São Paulo, where they were filmed and interrogated (rather more politely than before), under the supervision of United States officials. The resulting, highly edited, film was to be shown in military barracks and episcopal palaces throughout the continent. It demonstrated the dangers posed by these communists masquerading as religious.

If this was what lay behind the implication of the Dominicans, then it can be seen why Commissioner Fleury thought it worth celebrating with champagne in the early evening of 4 November 1969. His ingenuity would have caused the death of an urban guerrilla to have had the deepest political reverberations leading to a major shift in Church/State relations

3. *Batismo de sangue*

There are many details of this case which have yet to see the light of day. Charles Antoine, a French priest with many years' experience of Brazil, has written an essay reconstructing the circumstances of Marighella's death and the supposed Dominican involvement (*Revue Esprit*, March 1984, pp. 7-27), to which I am indebted as a basic source of historical information. He pieces together the available evidence into the only plausible hypothesis that can stand up until such a time as those members of the D.O.P.S. who are still alive choose to tell their story.

Commissioner Tucunduva, the officer in charge of the *mise en scène* on the day told *Playboy* magazine in October 1979 that he had many things to tell, but that it was not yet time.

However, the occasion for this article is that, after a ten-year silence, Frei Ivo and Frei Fernando have decided to tell their story. Frei Betto (whose letters from his time in prison were published in English by Orbis Books in 1977, under his full name of Carlos Alberto Libanio Christo, as *Against Principalities and Powers*) has compiled the stories of the Dominicans. It is this new book—*Batismo de Sangue: Os Dominicanos e a morte de Carlos Marighella* (Civilização Brasileira, Rio de Janeiro 1982)—in its French edition,² which has been my principal source of information.

The preface to the French edition (written by Jean-René Bouchet, who heads the French Dominicans) states that Frei Betto's book has enjoyed great success in Brazil. It is not difficult to see why. Betto has chosen to write in the style of a thriller, and the ingredients fully live up to the recipe. The plot is as labyrinthine as one by Robert Ludlum, with Morris West's sureness of touch at depicting the range of complicity, restrained dignity, and stubborn good sense among the high-ranking ecclesiastics. The moral starkness with which Betto refrains from self-justification, from avoiding the frailty of his brothers under torture, and from aggrandizing Tito de Alencar's painful last years is reminiscent of Graham Greenes's writing.

The adoption of the thriller genre has a deliberate purpose: it makes an excellent and interesting story. That serves an important end in Brazil, where its telling is part of a continuing polemic. Much of the mud slung at the Dominican Order stuck, and there are those both within the police and among Marighella's former associates who have an interest in a third party taking the blame: the police have their reputation to keep, and a revolutionary group the invulnerability of its folk-hero leader to shore up. Frei Betto's story is a counterblast to the bad publicity, which had the full benefit of unchallenged press coverage. It can only gain from popular appeal.

While the thriller style has important advantages within the circumstances of Brazil, its use nevertheless raises some difficulties. Frei Betto has written what, with all its horror, is a deeply edifying book. While there are no obvious saints, it is certainly a work of hagiography: its effect is to leave the reader with a sense of humanity enlarged by, and into, the Divine. However, does not the thriller style, which produces this effect, also distance the reader to some extent from the reality described? It must be said that all works of hagiography have tended to a literary form, and it is possible that only the style with which the *Fioretti* were written enabled its contemporaries to grasp something of the reality of St. Francis.

However, in the case of Frei Betto's book, as in the case of the

Fioretti, the use of a fictional style to tell a true story is a double-edged sword. How, within a framework so full of echoes of Le Carré, Fleming and others on film and in print, can we perceive the sordid, painful, wasteful story of how these lives were trampled on? At bottom, it is a case of a group of young men trying to live a considered Christian response to their society. They were caught up in something of far huger implications than they knew at the time, and were mangled, and in one case destroyed, by the system.

In fairness to Betto, it must be said that the last section of the book, that dealing with the Passion (as he calls it) and death of Tito de Alencar OP is as straight and sober a piece of writing as it is possible to imagine under the circumstances. The pathos and chill air of Tito's final solitude are taken from his own writings. The whole section is in quite a different key from the rest of the book. After this it is not the author who transforms a true account into something more powerful: it is the Church. Tito was given the burial of a martyr in Lyon in 1974. Last year his ashes were taken back to Brazil. His return was a solemn triumph by which the Church showed that it had not been defeated by the likes of Commissioner Fleury. Cardinal Arns was able to proclaim, in his sermon to mark the return of the ashes to São Paulo, "Not all were cowards during this time of infinite repression". The story has become part of the life of the Church, whose story-telling enables us to face what seems to have no plot.

- 1 "Military Repression in Brazil", report of Fr. Tito de Alencar Lima OP (tr. from French); Vol 51 No 602, July 1970, 335—337.
"Power against the People", by Michael de Certeau SJ (tr. from French); *ibid* 338—344.
"Accusation from Prison" (tr. from Spanish—document secreted from prison); Vol 51 No 607, December 1970, 549—555.
"Brazil : Assessing the debate", by Christopher Roper; *ibid* 10—12.
"The Gospel and Brazil", by Tito de Alencar OP (tr. from Italian); Vol 54 No 632, January 1973, 4—12.
- 2 *Les frères de Tito*, by Frei Betto. Cerf, Paris, 1984. pp. 250. 98F.