

‘ . . . a newly invented torture was tried out on him. It involved prolonged suspension, sometimes for seven hours, and produced vomitings of blood. . . . Afterwards he was sent to prison where he was too weak to look after himself, and lay for over a month, starving and crawling with vermin. . . . ’ (England, 1592.)

‘ . . . The questioning began again, in order to make me confess my share in the attacks: electric shocks, kicks in the genital organs and in the stomach were repeated. I was beaten with small planks of wood, cigarette butts were snuffed out on my body. For five hours I was subjected to this dog treatment. . . . ’ (Brazil, 1969.)

The juxtaposition of these two evidences of torture gives rise to at least two distinct sets of reaction. At the emotional level, we can only be sickened by the re-emergence of torture as a systematic instrument of a policy of national security in yet another country, and we instinctively have to protest in any way we can in the name of common human decency, and especially as Christians in the face of a country which, incredibly, still affects to be maintaining Christian values. World opinion is gradually—but only gradually—being made aware of what is going on in Brazil (cf. e.g. *Herder Correspondence*, April, August, '69, February, '70; *Commonweal*, 24 April, '70; *The Times*, 28 May, 1970; such publications as *La Lutte du Peuple Brésilien* from the *Front Brésilien d'Information*, Algiers, from which we have translated the piece by Père Michel de Certeau, S.J.).

Two facts about this nauseating situation should, however, also make us pause to think. There is first the fact that so many of the victims of this systematic torture in Brazil (the evidence for this is succinctly summed up, for instance, in the issue of *Commonweal* already mentioned, pp. 129, 135–141) are committed Christians, not to say priests and religious. And there is the further fact that despite the mention of inimitably modern instruments of torture in the second passage quoted above, we realise that we have been here before, with Christian pitted brutally against Christian, as the first passage testifies. At an intellectual level, then, these facts pose two questions which at first appear to be quite distinct and yet which may in fact be intimately connected.

On the one hand, the first evidence of torture is taken from a pamphlet about the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales sent out by the Office of the Vice-Postulation for their cause, which also states in an accompanying leaflet that when considering the claim to sanctity on the grounds of martyrdom the Church requires the strictest proof that the persons concerned ‘died for religious, not political, reasons’. Yet so many of the Christian, clerical and religious victims of torture and death in, say, Brazil are tortured and killed in this way not merely because they are seen to be subversive in the

eyes of a purblind régime but because it is precisely on account of their own 'religious' convictions that they have gradually been driven into 'political' opposition. Nor are they necessarily driven to such a position merely on account of a radical left-wing interpretation of Christianity according to which it is in terms of the political that the Gospel has to be rediscovered and re-presented. There is now the unimpeachably restated principle expressed in *Populorum Progressio*, albeit in the form of an exception: 'We know, however, that a revolutionary uprising—*save where there is manifest, long-standing tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental human rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country*—produces new injustices . . .' (§31). In other words, the first problem is whether in a situation such as that of present-day Brazil it makes sense to talk of being killed for 'religious, not political, reasons'.

And this is where the second problem may become pertinent. This is whether in this ecumenical day and age it is advisable to canonize martyrs when to do so seriously risks reviving and exacerbating race memories and conflicts which we have only too much ground to know die hard. Now the Pope has made his decision about the martyrs, and he and the Vice-Postulators seem to have gone out of their way to heed the very moderate and prudent cautions of the Archbishop of Canterbury. They are taking the opportunity to renew that sense of several guilt and mutual forgiveness first dramatically expressed at the Council, and to emphasize that the martyrs on either side were above all martyrs to Christ.

And it is if we look at things at this level that we may gain a deeper insight into our problems. For one element runs through the tradition of just war—and so of justifiable rebellion—and through the actual lives of the authenticated martyrs. According to St Augustine, re-echoed by St Thomas Aquinas, one of the paradoxical conditions for engaging in war is the desire for peace and the continuing love of one's enemies (2a2ae, 40, 1; 25, 8). Likewise, what is astonishing about the Forty Martyrs is their re-iteration of their Master's words of forgiveness in their respective last agonies. Thus, for example, Blessed John Boste murmured, when he had been cut down and as his heart was being torn from his body: 'God forgive thee, go on, go on.' In other words, what seems to be really specific about Christian martyrdom is not so much the grounds for the death as the Christ-like attitude of forgiveness to the killers.

There is, however, one last point. Whilst it is appealing, it is ultimately insufficient, to present the martyrs in the manner of Robert Bolt's Thomas More, as a martyr to individual conscience in the face of a totalitarian régime, in this sense, a Man for All Seasons; further, whilst it is appealing, it is ultimately insufficient even to present Christian martyrs merely as witnesses to Christ. Unfashionable as it may seem to do so, one has surely in some way

(continued on page 352)

others, and to the world; they speak of the mystery and tragedy of human life, of the kind of hope that leads to action without sentimental illusions.' If R. Pollock is correct in his assertions about Americans never having developed a tragic vision out of a healthy respect for the materiality of facts, then American theology, if it is to remain theology, must expect little from American philosophy. Yet these words of Novak's provide a capsule account of his conclusions in his own book, *A Theology For Radical Politics*.

It has become a truism that the 'revolution' in America has been divided into those who favour political action, direct confrontation, counter-insurgency on the one hand, and those seeking an inward, psychedelic revolution, a new spirituality, an expansion of the dimensions of consciousness on the other. Novak's book is an attempt to indicate the need for a unity of these perspectives: the revolution is of the spirit or not at all, but it cannot stop there but must move into the social. His final chapter, 'Human First, Christian Second', underscores again his quest for the human. The Christian often feels, because of the compelling nature of the demands to which he responds, that his categories and his beliefs offer a necessary means for an adequate understanding of what it means to be human. Yet God can speak more than one language, and Christianity does not have exclusive rights to Jesus: he is already there before us, present as the Word in the complexities of history. One must be careful at

this point. M. Novak is critical, and I believe rightly, of the secular theologians who have rushed to embrace technopolitan man as 'come of age'. He is not saying that Jesus is to be found in the secular, or at least not exclusively. Neither is he saying he is to be found exclusively in the cultic acts of the institutional Church. In as short and as popular book as this one, it would be too much to ask for a detailed and sophisticated account of where and how Jesus, or the Word, is to be found. Michael Novak's tentative answer would seem to be in a new mysticism which somehow combines the aesthetic and the political and yet is capable of reaching all men, of not being the exclusive prerogative of the intelligensia. There is much to answer here, and one can only hope that his promised extended work will do so.

The seminal question for Novak is really 'Who am I?' or 'Who are we?'. As Stokely Carmichael has so astutely pointed out in *Black Power*, the problem is not only of what the definition is going to consist, but who is to do the defining. As a philosopher and theologian, Michael Novak stands with those who are genuinely concerned about the need to rescue men in their lostness and alienation. He has realized the profound truth, difficult to affirm in the affluent society, that our vaunted success as technologists and problem-solvers leaves untouched many of the really important dimensions of human life. We are in his debt for the reminder.

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COMMENT (concluded from page 308)

to insist that it is the one holy Catholic apostolic Church which in principle and *par excellence* can release such a martyrdom to conscience which extends to the final forgiving love even of one's torturers. Yet the very implausibility of *this* claim to so many people may be the one way in which the call of the martyrs comes home to most of us who do not appear to be summoned to the heroic witness of our Elizabethan or Brazilian brothers and sisters. Is the Catholic Church a school of martyrdom to conscience for us?

P.L.