Camilo Torres -
Helder Cámara

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Mr. Parle
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In February of 1966, Camilo Torres-Restrepo, the priest-turned-guerilla, was killed during a clash with government troops in Santander Province in Colombia. The government secretly buried his body in an unmarked grave in an effort to prevent his elevation to the state of a martyr. In the face of riots, rallies, and promises of vengeance, coming primarily from students, the oligarchy outwardly lamented the loss of the sheep gone astray. "El Tiempo", one of the primary organs of the oligarchy, wrote, "Unfortunately his very vocation of service, which was generous and unselfish in him, carried him to extremes and led him first to separate from the priesthood and then to change his cassock for the clothes of a guerilla, in a country where today such activity lacks all justification and even all revolutionary significance." In that same year, in Colombia's mammoth neighbor to the east, Brazil, students were protesting the abolition of the direct vote for the upcoming presidential elections. Alarmed at the violent manner in which the "revolutionary" government was repressing the protests, the Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, Dom Helder Câmara, began establishing for himself the reputation of being the Red Archbishop by supporting the students and by expressing concern over "the violations against the living temple" (physical violence) perpetrated by the government. What are the stories of these two churchmen and what led them down such different paths in search of common goals?

Ironically, Camilo Torres was born a member of the oligarchic class of Colombia. His mother descended from one of Colombia's most aristocratic families; the one which produced both the man who freed the Colombian slaves and the president of the country from 1966 to 1970. Torres' father was a prominent pediatrician and served as a scientific consultant to the League of Nations for a number of years. As the youngest of the children, Camilo was pampered and protected a bit more than usual. He attended several good private schools and eventually, after a public quarrel with his mother over his decision, he attended the diocesan seminary. At the seminary he received his ordination a year early in order that he might go to Louvain, considered by many as a communist university, to study sociology. Upon returning to Colombia, he lectured at La Universidad Nacional de Bogotá, where he helped to establish the first faculty of sociology, and later became the university's chaplain. From there, he moved quickly into conflict with the established order. In 1962 he support-
ed a student strike which the government crushed. The students elected Torres rector, causing the official rector to close the university. After this encounter, his cardinal, Concha Córdoba, ordered him to resign from the university, which he did. 6 He then became dean of the Institute of Public Administration, where he set up a pilot farm cooperative in a rural community. Torres tried to establish some light industry in the area with which to get the people on their feet. The government was displeased with these actions and it was suggested that he was setting up communist camps to train guerillas. 7 His contact with this agrarian community increased his social consciousness and his conviction that something needed to be done soon to change the situation. From here he began his real political involvement which led him ultimately to his death in 1966.

Felder Camara’s beginnings were certainly more humble than Torres’. His mother was a primary school teacher and his father a journalist and theater critic. His mother was his first teacher and she frequently expected a great deal from him in order to set an example for the other students. His mother was a very sensitive woman who instilled in him his religious beliefs and his understanding of human nature. From his father, Camara gained a deep love for the theater and later came to recognize its revolutionary potential. For three years, he had a flirtation with Brazil’s form of fascism, integralism, which attracted him by its appearance of order. After ordination, he held a number of official posts in the government, at his bishop’s urging, and he also helped to found the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB). He was appointed as auxiliary bishop and then auxiliary archbishop. In 1964 Camara was appointed to the position of Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, where he remains today. He has never exercised his own parish ministry, although he does frequently speak at others. Just two weeks after the revolutionary government came into power in 1964, Camara ran into trouble with it by requesting the release of those persons who were arrested in the confusion of the takeover. The next day, government troops invaded the Episcopal Palace. 9 Since that time, Camara has been running into increasing conflict with the government.

The countries of these two men have a great many similarities, a fact which is not too surprising for neighboring countries in Latin America. A comparison of the northeast area of Brazil, where Camara is based, and Colombia as a whole show even more similarities. Some of these are worth noting in order to understand the different methods they employed in dealing with the resultant problems in
each country. Over one-half of the active, working populations of both countries is employed directly in agriculture and, even with such a large human investment, neither country is able to raise enough food to support itself. Both countries must import many essential foodstuffs. Even with this importation they are unable to meet the needs of the people, as the bulk of the population is undernourished in both, with Colombia having a nearly universal protein deficiency and 25,000 people dying of malnutrition yearly. There is a high infant mortality rate for both, 10% for Colombia and 50% for the northeast sector of Brazil.

Income is very unevenly distributed between the backward and the developed areas of each country; the ratio in Brazil is seven or eight to one and in Colombia it is eleven to one. The wealth is further concentrated into the hands of the few, as seen by the fact that, in Brazil, 28% of the national income goes to 10% of the population and 3.5% of the income goes to 80% of the population, and in Colombia, 40.6% of the national income goes to 4.6% of the population, with the lowest half receiving only 20%. In Colombia, two-thirds of the rural population are landless laborers. In Colombia, 61% of the agricultural land is owned by 3.6% of all landowners, with some sources placing the figures at 60% to 65% of the land being owned by 1% of the landowners. Little of the land is actually cultivated so there is massive underproduction. In Brazil, 80% of the cultivated land belongs to 2% of the landowners, with only 3% of the total land surface being cultivated. The per capita income is low for both, $230 for Brazil and $250 for Colombia. These figures are of course distorted, as one end of the scale receives high wages and the masses, at the other end, receive next to nothing in paid wages. The illiteracy rate is very high, 70% in the northeast of Brazil and 40% for the whole of Colombia.

Regionalism dominates both countries which further adds to the isolation of the peasant masses. An elite propertied and capitalist class rules each country. Politics is a world to which the masses have no access. Unemployment is growing in both, along with the inflation, with an estimated one-half of Colombia's work force being unemployed. The oligarchies of Brazil and Colombia have a tendency to buy off the potential militancy of the masses by instituting a few welfare programs rather than the extensive reforms which are needed. Anticommunism runs strong in both, with the oligarchy using it as an excuse for repressive measures. They rely heavily on their export crops, for which the world market fluctuates greatly, causing
both to have an increasingly poor balance of payments. Internal colonialism is evident in both, especially in the northeast part of Brazil. The masses display a high degree of fatalism or lack of self-awareness. From this general comparison, one can perceive the common situations which both men tried to deal with. Neither country is economically independent of outside powers and they are so entangled with complex aid programs and foreign loans that the near future doesn't seem to hold any marked changes in either society. It would be difficult to discern the reason for the differing methods of Camara and Torres from this comparison.

One possibility for their divergence is in the basic theology they each profess. How do they perceive the role of the Church and the Christian in today's world? Torres understood the primary reason for the existence of the Church as being "to establish and extend the kingdom of God." He conceived of love as the necessary indicator and condition for apostolic activity. Love is service and the purpose of the Church is to serve. He stated that, "By revelation we know that the highest commandment is to love God and our fellow man." He stated that "there are certain circumstances which don't permit a man to offer himself to God. A priest must fight those circumstances." Torres conceived of man as being "an integrated reality, naturally and supernaturally." He did not accept the idea of ignoring the physical side of man, because he saw the physical as an integral part of the whole. He understood his duty as a priest to be to reduce the misery of people, both physically and spiritually. He believed it to be the duty of every Christian to fight tyranny when it existed. To Torres, Christ was the first guerilla. He considered the ultimate expression of love, of service to man, to be to lay down one's life for one's friends. Not believing that one necessarily had to be a Christian, or even a conscious believer in God, to be saved, he asserted that, "In the final judgement our eternal destiny will be determined insofar as we have given food, drink, lodging, clothing, refuge, and welcome to our brothers." He also stated, "It is not certain that outside the Church there can be no grace or that the only way to belong to the Church is through formal reception of the sacraments." Camara seems to share the same basic approach to theology with Torres. Camara considers the need for the Church to serve important. This has absolute priority for him. He emphasizes that the Church must serve in poverty. Reluctant to accept the purely spiritual evangelization, he questions those who do espouse it
and asks, "How can they forget that they are proclaiming divine life to listeners who very often live in subhuman conditions." He believes that, "To persist in a purely spiritual evangelization would soon result in the impression that religion is something separate from life and powerless to touch it or overcome its absurd or erroneous aspects." Like Torres, he also admits the possibility of salvation outside the Church, as long as the individual performs acts of love unselfishly. He proclaims that, "he who clings tightly to the creature also clings, no matter how unintentionally or unwillingly, to the Creator and the Father." Câmara considers poverty an insult to God and asserts that it is the duty of Christians to try to relieve the poverty of others. He approaches the subject of mortifications and believes that the individual need not worry about self-mortification because God takes care of placing humiliations in one's daily path. Rejecting Christian passivity, he proclaims that God wants man himself to be the moving force in history.

There are obvious inclinations in their theologies which cannot be attributed solely to both being Roman Catholic. Their basic concepts seem to be the same, although expressed somewhat differently. Torres concentrated more on the function of love and saw it necessarily as the motivating force for Christians. He spoke more forcefully and specifically about a Christian's duties, making it a simple matter to understand his transition from the spiritual theology to the practical application of a theology of violence. Câmara deals with Christian responsibility in a more subtle way. The responsibilities are implicit in his statements concerning the whole man, poverty, and the human being as the moving force in history, even though they are not clearly verbalized.

Another important point of comparison is their view of the institutional Church. Stronger criticism for the institution comes from Torres. He believed that the Church had failed its trust to the people by tolerating or even supporting an unjust system. He saw the Latin American Church as being the most backward in the world because it had always intervened to protect its own privileged position in society. Admitting the benefits derived locally from the Church, he nevertheless criticized the approach as being too piecemeal and clerical. Torres criticized the Church for emphasizing the external rites and ignoring the truly spiritual. Stressing the fact that the Church was not wedded to any particular system, he proclaimed that it had the responsibility to speak out against unjust systems.
He warned that the Church could not afford to remain unaware of the Latin American reality and urged that the paternalism be replaced with participation. Torres finally abandoned the institutional Church as he felt that it restricted him in his role as a Christian.

Câmara, on the other hand, is less impatient with the Church. He acknowledges the past role of the Church in helping to maintain colonialism in Latin America in order to maintain its own privileged position and realizes that the Church played the game of the oppressors by preaching the passive acceptance of suffering and thereby inculcating the masses with a tragic fatalism. Believing that the Church must now undergo a purification to help Latin America assume its proper role in the world, he recognizes that the institutional Church can participate responsibly only as it abandons its old ways. He stresses the need of the Church to rediscover its lost poverty in order to better serve the people. He was aware of the temptation to abandon the institutional Church as a condition for maintaining fidelity to Christ, but rejects this path because he sees a great potential in the Church. Camara believes that the Church has a lot to offer to the creation of social justice, because he sees it as the only public structured organization which is not directly controlled by the dictatorship. Therefore, a priest can dare to say what no other member of the society would. With this advantage, he foresees the Church assuming a leading role in the movement for social reforms. To Camara, it is the task of the Church to put the human person back on his feet by working to develop self-awareness. He would not consider working outside the Church, nor does he see the necessity of it.

Their conception of the Church was clearly very different. Torres maintained that it was a hindrance to him in his quest for aiding the masses. He said, "I took off my cassock to be more truly a priest." However, Camara considers working through the Church as the quickest and most effective means of establishing the kingdom of God. Perhaps their differences arise partly from the different positions they each occupied within the Church hierarchy. Camara is higher in the hierarchy and he tends to attribute this to the will of God. Torres, however, was not far along in the hierarchy and his views were met with opposition by those above him. He was alone in his struggle. Encountering such a situation it is difficult to attribute it to the will of God. There might understandably be the temptation to reject that which has seemingly rejected you. In contrast, Camara received encouragement from his superiors in what he was trying to do.
Still another point of comparison between the two, lies in their analysis of the problems of their respective countries. Torres' approach was understandably highly sociological. With his detailed studies of Colombian society, he concluded that one of the main problems was capitalism, the free enterprise system. With the free enterprise system, he saw that no one assumed responsibility for anyone but himself and that the capitalist would go to virtually any length to make the profit. He connected national capitalism with international imperialism, using the United States as a prime example. He was strongly against the United States presence and domination which he could perceive everywhere in Latin America. Of the United States aid program to Colombia he said, "Because the U.S. aid program is a device for subsidizing specified U.S. exports, it means that Colombia is compelled, by the terms of such aid, to buy certain goods which it does not need and which cannot contribute to its development, and, in addition, even when essential, to pay more for these goods than would be necessary if purchased elsewhere." He blames the oligarchy for this situation for having sold out the country in order to maintain their elite status by helping the United States to exploit the masses. Seeing the need for a radical redistribution of power, he sought the mobilization of the masses. Torres recognized the need for new ideas developed specifically for the Latin American situation, as the prefabricated ones from the outside did not work when applied in Latin America. He was drawn toward socialism and appreciated the scientific approach of communism, but reiterated the need to find solutions suited specifically to Latin America. He denounced the control of power by the educated elite and showed the direct connection between elite rule and lack of social mobility. Emphasizing the need for social mobility, he made the observation that when the normal channels for ascent are blocked, as they appear to be in Colombia, the people will find unusual or unorthodox means of ascending.

Câmara's analysis was not an in-depth sociological study, but his observations were not without depth and power. The scope of his analysis tends to be more international, as he tries to fit Brazil into Latin America, and Latin America into the rest of the world. His primary analytical approach is in discussing the spiral of violence, which is especially evident in the Third World. He describes primary violence as the domination of a small elite over impoverished masses. It is violent for causing suffering and even causing people to die. Secondary violence is the justified violence of the oppressed
who rise up in revolt against an unjust system. Tertiary violence is the repression of the revolt by the elite. He maintains that if one form of violence is constantly met with another, the situation will develop into a never-ending spiral of violence, from which no one would be able to escape. Cámara also denounced capitalism, perhaps even more strongly than Torres, and his prime example is also the United States. Speaking of the United States, he said, "The U.S. is a living demonstration of the internal contradictions in the capitalist regime. It manages to create underdeveloped strata in the very heart of the richest country in the world. There are 30,000,000 inhabitants of that richest country who are living in conditions unworthy of human beings. The U.S.A. manages to arouse fratricidal conflicts between the whites and the blacks; with the pretext of anti-communism, but in fact out of a thirst for prestige and expansion of its sphere of influence, it conducts the most shameful war the world has ever known." His hatred of the capitalistic regime is clearly revealed in that quotation. He also denounces communism, although in less seething terms. He disagrees with Russia's acceptance of the Marxist doctrine as the truth, whereas with the People's Republic of China he sees a country which has adopted a method, while retaining some of its old self, its essence. This leads to a basic idea which he shares with Torres, that of the need to find solutions designed specifically for Latin America. Cámara also addresses the question of foreign aid for Latin America. Like Torres, he believes the aid program is devoid of all meaning because of the deterioration of the prices set on Latin America's raw materials. The aid is simply the remainder of what is owed to Latin America for its exports. He also denounces the type of aid which is preferred only with strings attached, usually the promise of implementing some program, such as birth control. Cámara points out the need for a complete revision of the international trade policy and a structural revolution in order to bring about justice on a world-wide scale. Hitting closer to home, he decries the superficial kind of order; a peace based on injustice. He makes the analogy that, "a swamp seen in the moonlight can deceive the onlooker. It gleams like a vision of beauty, but underneath there is nothing but filth and ferment." He strives for the establishment of the only real human society, one where man has learned to share the riches of the world. Decrying the injustices and inequities in Brazil, he announces that if the liberator of the Brazilian slaves, Joaquim Nabuco, were alive today, he would feel impelled to renew the abolitionist campaign. Like Torres,
Câmara believed in the importance of awakening the masses to their plight, of creating self-awareness in order to bring about change, and for such thoughts he has been called the unconscious puppet of communists.

Clearly, Hélder Côrêa and Camilo Torres perceived their societies in very similar ways. Which programs did each of them advance in order to deal with these problems? From the time that Camilo Torres began lecturing at the National University in Bogotá, he began to feel that a violent revolution would be necessary in order to accomplish the needed structural changes. He began formulating the plans for a united popular movement designed to seize power from the elites. In February of 1965 he wrote up the platform for the United Front which he distributed to a few people for discussion purposes. The platform was his basic idea designed to provide both an immediate and far-reaching solution to the problems facing Colombia. He intended it as the rallying point for all the various groups in Colombia who were dissatisfied with the existing system. He addressed a wide variety of issues, in particular pointing out the necessity of planning, in order to achieve the desired ends. He spoke of the need for extensive agrarian reform, to be accomplished through the expropriation of land for the common good, and a gradual reduction in the amount of subsistence farming with increasing development of commercial farming. He likewise outlined a general program of urban reform, business reform, abolition of free enterprise. Also outlined was a program of cooperatives of all natures, established for the common good. He placed emphasis on communal action as the basis for democratic planning. Also mentioned was a plan for extensive nationalizations and monetary reforms. He outlined a number of social policies, including social crimes, which included the defamation by the press, radio, television or cinema, and the disorientation of public opinion through false, incomplete or tendentious information.

Torres revised this platform slightly, adding a clause concerning women's rights, and read it to a student rally in May of 1965. Cardinal Concha Córdoba denounced Torres' platform, saying that it was irreconcilable with the Church. The conflict between the two heightened until Torres asked for laicization in June, and it was granted to him. He then met with the leader of the Army of National Liberation, (ELN) and began planning when he would go to join the guerillas in battle. Before he went, however, he tried desperately to build and strengthen the United Front. He wrote letters to all
the different groups of people there were in Colombia - students, workers, women, priests, soldiers, etc. - and addressed their specific situation in Colombia. After analysing their specific problems, he stressed the common factor of their oppression and asked them to put aside petty differences and unite to overthrow the corrupt system. He constantly reiterated the need to unite, to not let the masses be divided any longer. He explained his non-participation in the elections partially according to the idea of division. He analysed the traditional party system where an individual was forced to choose one party or another, and demonstrated that this automatically divided the people. These divisions were very strong in Colombia and the alliance with the traditional political parties caused a great many problems for Colombia. Torres maintained that the takeover of power could be peaceful if the elite would surrender the power peacefully for the benefit of the masses. But he had little hope for this. He realized that they would not willingly give up their privileges and would unhesitatingly use force to maintain the status quo. Still he advocated revolution. He said, "Violence is not excluded from the Christian ethic, because if Christianity is concerned with eliminating the serious evils which we suffer and with saving us from the continuous violence in which we live without possible solution, the ethic is to be violent once and for all in order to destroy the violence which the economic minorities exercise against the people." As time wore on and the United Front was visibly failing because of sectarianism, Torres became more impatient. He joined the ELN where he trained as a soldier and began his short career as a guerilla. Five months later he was dead.

Câmera, like Torres, suggested concrete programs for solutions to the problems of his country. Câmera addressed himself to specific issues and spoke out whenever and to whomever he thought necessary. He spoke out to try to raise the level of awareness of the masses, as part of his program of conscientization. He was sure that he was on the right track because of the response of the government. He was viciously attacked in the press nearly every day and one of his closest aides was brutally tortured and killed, presumably as a warning to him and the others like him. In spite of the many threats against his own life, Helder Câmera continues to speak out. Perhaps the counterpart to Torres' platform of the United Front is Câmera's program of Action, Justice, and Peace. The program was launched in
October of 1968.\textsuperscript{96} He conceived as the program as bringing moral pressure for liberation.\textsuperscript{97} Its goal was the humanization of all those who had been dehumanized, to be achieved through the change of the socio-economic structures and through the integration of Latin America, without any imperialistic meddling.\textsuperscript{98} The movement is open to all and it attempts to practice active nonviolence, nonconformity with the established order. The initial platform set up for the movement wasn't nearly as specific as Torres' platform for the United Front, and perhaps was able to attract more people because of this. The movement advocated making peaceful demands, even at the risk of imprisonment.\textsuperscript{99} The people who are actively involved in the movement are taking substantial risks, especially in light of the government's tendency toward torturing people, sometimes just picking someone up off the street arbitrarily to set an example and instill the fear of torture into the others, presumably to evoke cooperation with the government.\textsuperscript{100}

The thrust of Câmara's movement is nonviolence. This is his personal choice, but he respects the sincere people who have felt obligated to choose the violent course, those who have proven their sincerity by sacrificing their lives, such as Che Guevara and Camilo Torres.\textsuperscript{101} Câmara believes that authentic nonviolence is ultimately stronger than violence\textsuperscript{102} and he sees it as a positive action. He recognizes that it is easy to condemn violence from afar, but it is not so easy when one is caught up in the middle of it.\textsuperscript{103} Câmara personally says he would rather be killed a thousand times than to kill once,\textsuperscript{104} a statement which one could hardly take issue with.

Two men who saw things in so much the same way, but felt compelled to act in such entirely different ways. Which of them had the right answer? Which of them will have a more lasting effect? It is difficult to judge which of the two men will ultimately have the greatest effect. Camilo Torres has been made into a legend and as such inspires revolutionary movements the world over. But not even his charisma was able to overcome the sectarianism within his own country. And the National Front government was able to finish its designated term in Colombia, despite any guerilla activity. As for Câmara, many young people seem to be abandoning him and opting for a more rapid, violent course of action. Perhaps some might say that he has outlived his usefulness. Why did they go the ways that they did? Perhaps it has something to do with their social class. Torres had been a member of the elite class and had never been accustomed to waiting for things in life.
Perhaps that is the origin of his impatience. It is difficult to judge someone who is dead and now survives only as an idea. My own personal opinion leads me to side with Camara, for one specific reason. In speaking of violent revolution, especially in a Third World country, he concluded that the violent way was a futile path. Violence only gives the superpowers on the outside a chance to come in and crush all revolutionary movements under the guise of keeping the peace. How well this has been demonstrated in Latin America in the recent past! It is perhaps because of this perception of the weakness of violent revolutionary movements in the face of the world's superpowers which will enable Camara's ideas to endure and ultimately carry a greater significance for the development of the Third World.

Excellent companions.
Well integrated and well written paper.

Upon reviewing this paper with the utmost, I am struck with the amount of work and integration you have put into this excellent comparative study. A

especially excellent organization!

2 Ibid., p. 32.


4 Gerassi, p. 15.


7 Alvarez, p. 11.


9 Ibid., p. 45.


12 Between Honesty and Hope, p. 41.
   Lambert, p. 46.

13 Alvarez, p. 8.

14 Alvarez, p. 8.
   de Broucker, p. 31.

15 Lambert, p. 46.


17 Torres, p. 15.

18 Alvarez, p. 8.
   Wilde, p. 694.

19 Torres, p. 12.
37 Alvarez, p. 73.
38 Wilde, p. 693.
39 Gerassi, p. 263.
40 Ibid.
41 de Broucker, p. x.
42 Ibid., p. 107.
43 Ibid., p. 42.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., p. 121.
47 de Broucker, p. 134.
48 Wilde, p. 694.
49 Ibid., p. 695.
50 Gerassi, p. 304.
51 Alvarez, p. 15.
52 Ibid., p. 49.
53 Bergman, p. 52.
54 *Between Honesty and Hope*, p. 32.
56 de Broucker, p. 107.
57 Ibid., p. 116.
58 Ibid., p. x.
59 Camara, p. 15
60 *Between Honesty and Hope*, p. 34.
61 Gerassi.
62 Alvarez, p. 62.
63 Gerassi, p. 179.
64 Gerassi, p. 250.
65 Gerassi, p. 92.

Gerassi, p. 27.

Tbid., p. 30.

de Broucker, p. 58.

"Cooling Helder Camara," Commonweal, (September 19, 1969), 554.

de Broucker, p. 62.

Tbid.

Tbid., p. 64.

Tbid.


de Broucker, p. 57.


Between Honesty and Hope, p. 47.

Gerassi, p. 43.


"Collision in Latin America." Time, (Feb. 19, 1970), 44.


