

CORRESPONDENCE

Ellul Replies on Violence

TO THE EDITOR: In your July 20 issue Stephen C. Rose ("Bethge's Monument") commented on my book *Violence* and ended by asking me some questions concerning the possible justification for violence that Christians might offer. I am afraid that there was some misunderstanding with regard to my thoughts in that book. I would ask you to publish the following rectification:

(1) Violence, whatever it is and whatever the circumstances, is always of the order of necessity (one cannot do otherwise) and never of the order of freedom.

(2) Violence obeys a certain number of sociological laws, the principal of which is that it necessarily produces new violence, and that situations created by violence are never just.

(3) Christians should never offer a spiritual justification for an action or situation of pure necessity. In attempting to justify revolutionary violence we repeat the same error committed during 2000 years of the just war debate, which brought the churches into many compromises but never arrived at an answer.

(4) Since we live in *this* world (and as Christians we cannot escape it), we are obligated to participate in many unjust but inevitable actions. We must recognize that often men cannot do otherwise than revolt or make war, and we can join with them in violent actions. But in doing so we must remember that this is always blameworthy before God. We must never pretend that our violence is conformed to the will of God, but only that we have obeyed necessity.

(5) I have been asked if I have changed my opinion since the Resistance (1940-1944). I reply that I have participated in several revolutionary movements, in several wars and in the Resistance, but I have always maintained the same position. I could not help but think that these actions, which I thought necessary but not just, were consistent with what Jesus tells us about the relations among men and liable to bear witness to the love of God or the nearness of the Kingdom. In other words, these necessary actions are of the order of sin, and so I must repent and rely on the grace of God, even for that which I believe useful and indispensable on the political level.

JACQUES ELLUL
University of Bordeaux
Bordeaux, France

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and Related Religio-Erotic Themes*

Nicolas J. Perella

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is such a time—effective communication makes people aware of conflicts that poor communication obscures. Yet it is possible that accurate understanding of a conflict may lead to sane efforts at a solution. Muddled communications and misunderstanding invite disaster.

Conceivably the churches might make a contribution to the body politic on this issue. They, like all our communities and institutions, are plagued by problems in communication and threats of polarization. But they do include, within a voluntary society sharing some symbols and loyalties, disparate groups of people who are victimized by the failures of communication within our society. Many a local church

might do something for its own health and the health of the society if it went to work at the demanding task of becoming a community that communicates.

ROGER L. SHINN

BETHGE'S MONUMENT

BERNHARD BETHGE'S monumental biography, *Bonhoeffer*, is now available in the United States as a \$17.95 hardcover book (Harper and Row), and one can only hope that it soon comes out in an edition more available to students and the general public. Reviewing the biography, Daniel Berrigan has suggested that he would diverge from Bonhoeffer only in rejecting the cloak-and-dagger decisions that led the German martyr into mortal conflict with Hitler. Berrigan, now an exile from his (our) own State, would rather identify himself with those who espouse peaceful, if confrontational and dangerous, resistance.

This, of course, is a central issue raised by the *life* of Bonhoeffer. To what extent is the Christian justified in resorting to violence to break a larger cycle of violence? Even this phrasing of the question is too simple. Nevertheless, any final reckoning with Bonhoeffer must see him not merely as the author of provocative theological notes but equally as the man who, opposed to his nation and rejected by his nation's church, chose a violent course of resistance.

One might compare Bonhoeffer with another who resisted during World War II, Jacques Ellul. Ellul's recent book, *Violence*, would seem to place an interdict on any and all attempts to justify violence as Christian. Thus one must put a question to Berrigan and Ellul: Has something happened between those war years and now to modify the grounds on which Christians can assent to violence? Or would we be better served by a careful, prudential, contemporary suggestion of those areas in which violence might be justified, even called for?

One deals with this issue both because it was incarnate in Bonhoeffer's life and because it bears a certain analogous relevance to issues raised on the extreme religious left in America. The great Bonhoeffer boom in this country in the late 1950's and early 1960's slighted the issue of violence. A reading of Bethge's book indicates that this is not the only area overlooked by Bonhoeffer's American popularizers. Nothing is more apparent in the biography than Bonhoeffer's lacerating experience of the institutional church in his native land and in the Geneva-based ecumenical movement later to become the World Council of Churches.

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WAYNE H. COWAN

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In the Introduction, Bethge notes that his account is merely the starting point in what must be a more searching and detailed study of Bonhoeffer. Certainly one thrust of further study must be to elaborate the tantalizing suggestions concerning Bonhoeffer's ecclesiastical career, especially in relation to the forces within the ecumenical movement on the international scene to whom the Confessing Church was either a nuisance or anathema. For example, it emerges that the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the

Churches (predecessor to the WCC) throughout the 1930's took a quite compromising position vis à vis the German Christians, sacrificing the Christian to the expediencies of "unity."

Bethge's book is bound to commence a new round of Bonhoeffer evaluation in the US. Let us hope that the issues of violence and the performance of the institutional church, then and now, will not be ignored during this perilous hour in America. Perhaps there is still time to learn from recent history.

STEPHEN C. ROSE

An Exploration into US-Brazil Relations

An Interview with Marcio Moreira Alves

WAYNE H. COWAN

Readers will recall that in our March 16 issue we published the first full-length magazine article—William L. Wipfler's "The Price of Progress in Brazil"—to appear in this country documenting torture in Brazil. Now, as a part of our continuing examination of various aspects of United States involvement in Latin America, we are pleased to bring you an interview with Marcio Moreira Alves. Mr. Alves, who now lives in exile in Chile, is a well-known journalist and ex-member of the Brazilian Congress, in which he represented the State of Guanabara (which is the city of Rio de Janeiro). Because of his opposition to the abuses of power by the ruling military regime, the army demanded that he be stripped of Congressional immunity so that he could be tried by a military court. When the Congress refused, President (General) Costa e Silva closed the Congress on Dec. 13, 1968, and ordered the arrest of Mr. Alves, who escaped to Chile, and other leading persons. We invited Mr. Alves, a leading spokesman of the "Catholic Left," to our offices when he was in the US recently on a speaking tour. Joining Editor Wayne H. Cowan in the interview is Prof. Margaret E. Crahan, who teaches Latin American history at Lehman College, City University of New York.

Cowan: Compared with other Latin American nations that were colonies of Spain, Brazil has generally been viewed as less doctrinaire and rigid, and as more flexible and pragmatic. How do you explain the changes there in the last decade?

Alves: I don't think there is a striking difference between Brazil and the rest of Spanish America. What has always happened in Brazil is horizontal

violence similar to the violence in the rest of the Latin American countries only not on such a national level. What I mean by horizontal violence is a dispute, a violent dispute of power, between factions of the same class.

What has never occurred in Brazil until now is vertical violence from the bottom up. Oppression by small groups of a large percentage of the population has been routine: the land owners and the industrial powers have always resorted to violence when their privileges were threatened. But now revolutionary violence is building up because the previous possibility of accommodation under civil rule no longer exists.

The negotiations between classes that characterized the decade before 1964 and that kept Brazil in sort of a social balance was interrupted by the military coup. And this generates violence, repression and armed struggle that is uncharacteristic of Brazil. Now with the increased structuring of Brazilian society, with the growing proletarian consciousness of the urban working classes, with the revolutionary mood of the students and of a fairly sizable part of the church, the elements for revolution are there.

For the the first time in Brazilian history the military has intervened to stay. The accompanying oppression has caused revolutionary pressure to build. The military is very messianic and cut off from much of civilian society. They think that they have the formula for saving Brazil and that they are the only sector of Brazilian society free enough of class bonds to enforce the development model that would