

El Salvador's Climate of Terror

It is now eight months since the White Warrior Union announced its bizarre threat to begin assassinating Jesuits in El Salvador on July 21. The threat served to draw some attention to that tiny Central American country just as Gen. Humberto Romero was assuming the Presidency. The fact that two priests had been killed in March and May made the threat credible. July 21 came and went and the media soon turned to more newsworthy issues. "No Jesuits Killed" is not much of a story.

Indeed, the first couple of months seemed to bring some letup in the repressive climate that had existed for over half a year. The state of siege was lifted and the press was allowed more freedom, although, as noted below, the press has served as a basic instrument for the powerful. Some popular demonstrations and strikes have been permitted. This apparent loosening seems to satisfy the Carter Administration. Ambassador Ignacio Lozano, a political appointee of President Ford, had surprised all by his vigor in pursuing human rights. As a signal of his displeasure with the Salvadoran Government, President Carter waited over two months before appointing a successor. However, the new ambassador, Frank Devine, is described as a "cold warrior," and both he and the Salvadoran Government are giving the impression that relations with the United States are substantially improved.

Yet El Salvador's problems are far from solved, and there is increasing polarization that seems headed for greater violence. Like it or not, the church is involved and will be forced to make decisions.

When President Romero urged "dia-

logue" with the church, the new Archbishop, Oscar Romero (no relation), whom these events have catapulted into a prophetic role, laid down conditions: that arbitrary arrests cease, that there be information on political prisoners, that the situation of exiled priests be reviewed (seven have been exiled and eight expelled), that the Government use its influence to stop the public defamation of the church. A further step would then be the formation of a commission to study the post-Vatican II and post-Medellín pastoral work of the church and its language. No progress has been made in any of these areas. Hence, there is no "dialogue."

On November 12, Raúl Molina, a well-known industrialist, was killed in what the newspapers called a kidnap attempt by guerrillas. Actually, the indications are that it was more likely a personal crime, but the groups representing the landowners, business and industry have once again launched a propaganda campaign with ads in the papers.

A refrain in this campaign is that the foundations of the "republican and democratic" society of El Salvador are being undermined by a Communist movement and only vigorous action from the Government can stop

it. Part of the tactic is to lump all opposition together and brand it "terrorism": guerrillas, labor and peasant groups, political parties and church groups. These pronouncements accuse the Government of being afraid to act. For example, when the People's Revolutionary Bloc peacefully occupied the Ministry of Labor in support of striking workers and to publicize their demand for higher agricultural wages, the Government accepted the church's offer of mediation, which was, in fact, successful inasmuch as the bloc withdrew with no need for violence.

FARO, a landowners' association, says in one communiqué that a "hypocritical dialectic has been adopted to interpret the Gospel and invoke Jesus Christ in order to justify the crimes, vandalism and atrocities which the good students of the People's Revolutionary Bloc commit." In another piece, they pick up the phrase "institutionalized violence" from a Jesuit publication and declare that "nowhere at all in the Gospels is anything like this 'institutionalized violence' to be found; on the contrary, Jesus Christ's whole soul, His whole thought, everything about Him . . . is in absolute opposition to this monstrous new birth called 'institutionalized violence.'" This interpretation of the

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Gospels is not that of the evangelists, they write, but of "Saint [Marx], because his fanatical followers consider him more than a saint." The FARO theologians do not advert to the fact that the phrase "institutionalized violence" comes from the Latin American bishops at Medellín.

Every day, the papers have carried several such statements, and, right after Mr. Molina's death, they numbered in the dozens. Ostensibly, these groups are calling for the Government to stop being weak, stop bowing to international pressure and to Jimmy Carter ("Cartercommunism") and impose order. The coffee exporters' association made a reference to "a ruler many years ago who made the security, peace and internal order of the Republic a primary and indispensable condition for our country's development and prosperity." To Salvadorans, this is an unambiguous reference to the dictator Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, who, in 1932, massacred peasants in numbers estimated as large as from 10,000 to 30,000 or even more.

On November 24 the Legislative Assembly responded to this clamor with the Law for the Defense and Guarantee of Public Order. Whether the propaganda campaign and the law were orchestrated together is not known. Proposed, discussed and passed unanimously in one day, the law grants sweeping powers to the Government to combat subversion. Any activity that interferes with production or public services is illegal. In short, no strikes or demonstrations. It is a crime punishable by imprisonment of one to three years to propagate "tendentious or false news or information aimed at disturbing constitutional or legal order, the tranquility or security of the country [or] the economic or monetary system. . . ." Indeed, one assumes that it would apply to those who furnished information for this article. In the prologue to the law, the legislators cleverly invoke human rights, although its clear purpose is to supply a basis in law for suppressing human rights.

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and demonstrations from workers and peasants. This year, approximately five well-known people have been kidnapped and/or killed. Yet, it is not clear how many of these cases are really the work of guerrillas. There is a persistent belief among the upper classes themselves, high Government officials and foreign diplomats that some of this is simply gangsterism perhaps emanating from rivalries or simple extortion as a business. These rumors are supported by a widely circulated document which informed sources consider an F.B.I. leak. To the upper-class victims of violence should be added perhaps a dozen policemen, guardsmen and members of ORDEN, a Government paramilitary group, who have been killed in armed clashes this year.

The situation of peasants in El



Salvador is increasingly desperate. Land and wealth are extremely concentrated, and the country's agricultural production is oriented to export and profits for a few. Ever more peasants are landless. In 1961, the number was only 30,000, while today it is 266,000. Today, money buys only 38 percent of the beans, corn, salt, sugar and other necessities that it bought in 1972, but the minimum wage for a day's agricultural work has risen only from \$1.28 to \$2.40 during that time. This year, inflation is estimated at 22 percent, but there is no minimum-wage increase for cotton and sugar harvesters.

This situation—"institutionalized violence," *pace* FARO—is what is motivating peasant militancy in strikes and marches, at personal risk. Many say: "I'd rather die struggling than die of

hunger." While there seems to be a general understanding that priests are not to be killed, repression continues.

Throughout 1977, there have been reports of peasants, especially leaders, being killed, tortured, threatened and harassed. One source has verified from families and relatives the cases of 45 killed last year by security forces and ORDEN, and 26 people who have disappeared after being picked up by security forces. Sixteen of the killings and 14 of the disappearances have occurred since President Romero took office on July 1, 1977. These lists are assumed to be incomplete.

A group of Christian communities wrote a letter to Archbishop Romero detailing various cases of harassment, including several cases of rape and gang rape by soldiers. One case involved a 10-year-old girl. Both the security forces and ORDEN are active in this terrorism in the countryside. In some cases, peasants have retaliated.

Much of this terrorism is aimed directly at catechists and leaders of small Christian communities. The aim seems to be to eliminate leaders and possible foci of opposition. Since a number of priests have already had to leave the rural areas, the church's ability to function is being severely impeded by this persecution. There are reports that some people have felt obliged to bury, or even burn, their Bibles. In one case the bodies of two cursillistas were found badly mutilated. Although for image reasons, priests are generally not being picked up, the guardia did torture the Rev. Miguel Angel Ventura in early November as they were searching the townspeople in Osiacala. Later the same month, Father Ventura fled to the United States with another priest, Leonel Cruz.

In short, while the upper classes have been subject to violence, whether from guerrillas or gangsters, the basic terrorism is that directed by the state apparatus against the peasants.

Archdiocesan publications and the church's radio stations continue to denounce specific acts of repression. Archbishop Romero laments the violence directed at the upper classes—he preached at the funeral of Raúl Molina—but he seems to see clearly where the basic violence lies. Indeed, his resoluteness seems to derive largely

from the constant stream of requests he gets from the families of the victims of violence in the rural areas, as well as his contacts with the situation in his pastoral visits to rural Christian communities, many of them now without priests.

Failing to get the church to dialogue, the Government seems to be looking for ways to neutralize the effect of this refusal. Not all the bishops agree with Archbishop Romero. One told the Roman synod that the young clergy in El Salvador were being swayed by Communism, to the delight of the upper classes back home. President Romero has taken advantage of some protocol occasions and religious events to be photographed with the nuncio and some of the bishops who seem quite willing to be so used.

Another tactic is an open door to spiritualistic evangelical sects. Their revivals and meetings are given prominent play in the newspapers. Interestingly, at an ecumenical meeting to deal with the issues mentioned here, some Protestant and Evangelical participants were emphatic in telling Catholics that they had not organized a current evangelical campaign but that it had been arranged directly between a sponsoring organization in the United States and the Salvadoran Government.

It should be noted that the church's struggle has fallen largely to Archbishop Romero and the clergy. Christian groups among the poor are themselves being persecuted and have no access to the public arena, while middle- and upper-class groups, people who have had years of Catholic schooling, attend Mass regularly and have been members of church organizations, have been conspicuously absent, with a handful of heroic exceptions, either because they agree that the clergy and the Archbishop have gotten involved in "politics" or from fear. The oligarchy's adamant refusal to consider even minimal reforms and the people's increasing desperation seem to point to further violence.

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JOHN LANGAN

The Imagination and Spirituality of Peter Paul Rubens

In Belgium 1977 was the year of Rubens. This small country so rich in its artistic heritage has celebrated the 400th anniversary of the birth of Antwerp's most famous son. On June 29, 1577, Peter Paul Rubens was born near Cologne, where his parents were living in exile from the religious strife of Calvinists and Catholics and the repressive activities of the Spaniards who then ruled the Netherlands.

In addition to the main Rubens exhibition in Antwerp, which drew over 700,000 visitors, major shows of Rubens's works were held in Vienna, Cologne, Berlin, London and Paris. The extent of the commemorative celebrations was appropriate to the breadth of Rubens's fame as a painter of European renown and of his career as a servant of the wide-ruling Hapsburgs in the 17th century.

Even to this day Rubens remains very much a European painter. Unlike Rembrandt, who is comprehensively represented in American collections,

especially the Metropolitan in New York and the National Gallery in Washington, the great concentrations of Rubens's work remain in Europe, particularly in Munich, Paris, Madrid, London, Vienna and Antwerp. Despite the presence of many fine and interesting paintings by Rubens in American museums, it is still true that an adequate appreciation of the full range and boldness of Rubens's art depends on seeing the great European collections.

There can be no doubt that Rubens is often regarded as an embarrassing painter. His buxom women and hyper-muscular men seem to belong to an alien race, while his allegorical and mythological figures come from another world; his use of art in the service of the Hapsburgs and in defense of Counter-Reformation Catholicism appeals to ideas that seem archaic and to values that seem suspect. There can be no denying Rubens's mastery of color and movement, but his enormous skill often seems to be in the service of causes that are dubious at best. For those Americans who have been taught over the last 30 years to admire the abstract and the informal in painting, Rubens's mastery of the figurative and the formal is likely to appear irrelevant. The dissatisfaction and embarrassment one feels come to a head when one confronts in the Louvre Rubens's most famous commission, the cycle painted to honor Marie de Médicis, Queen Regent of France. Here a wealth of historical and allegorical personages adorn the career and



