

Message to Christians

English translation of Camilo Torres Restrepo, "Mensaje a los Cristianos"

Source: Marxists Internet Archive page supplied by the user: <https://www.marxists.org/espanol/camilo/cristianos.htm>. The text was cross-checked against the Spanish edition in Camilo Torres Restrepo, *Obra Escogida*, where it is identified as Frente Unido, No. 1, August 26, 1965. Translation prepared by ChatGPT.

The convulsions produced by the political, religious, and social events of recent times have possibly led the Christians of Colombia into great confusion. It is necessary that, at this decisive moment in our history, we Christians stand firm around the essential foundations of our religion.

The principal thing in Catholicism is love of neighbor. "The one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law" (St. Paul, Romans XIII, 8). For this love to be true, it must seek effectiveness. If beneficence, almsgiving, the few free schools, the few housing plans - what has been called "charity" - do not manage to feed the majority of the hungry, or clothe the majority of the naked, or teach the majority of those who do not know, then we must seek effective means for the welfare of the majorities.

Those means are not going to be sought by the privileged minorities who hold power, because in general those effective means require the minorities to sacrifice their privileges. For example, in order to create more work in Colombia, it would be better not to take capital out of the country in the form of dollars, but rather to invest it in the country, in sources of work. But since the Colombian peso is devalued every day, those who have money and power are never going to prohibit the export of money, because by exporting it they free themselves from devaluation.

It is necessary, then, to take power away from the privileged minorities and give it to the poor majorities. If this is done quickly, that is the essence of a revolution. The Revolution can be peaceful if the minorities do not offer violent resistance. The Revolution, therefore, is the way to achieve a government that feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, teaches those who do not know, and carries out the works of charity, of love of neighbor, not only occasionally and temporarily, not only for a few, but for the majority of our neighbors. For this reason, the Revolution is not only permitted but obligatory for Christians who see in it the only effective and broad way to realize love for all. It is true that "there is no authority except from God" (St. Paul, Romans XIII, 1). But St. Thomas says that the concrete attribution of authority is made by the people.

When there is an authority against the people, that authority is not legitimate and is called tyranny. Christians can and must struggle against tyranny. The present government is tyrannical because it is backed by only 20 percent of the electorate and because its decisions come from the privileged minorities.

The temporal defects of the Church should not scandalize us. The Church is human. What matters is to believe that it is also divine and that, if we Christians fulfill our obligation to love our neighbor, we are strengthening the Church.

I have left the duties and privileges of the clergy, but I have not ceased to be a priest. I believe that I have given myself to the Revolution out of love of neighbor. I have stopped saying Mass in order to realize that love of neighbor in the temporal, economic, and social sphere. When my neighbor has nothing against me, when I have carried out the Revolution, I will offer Mass again if God permits me. I believe that in this way I follow Christ's command: "If you bring your offering to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering" (St. Matthew V, 23-24).

After the Revolution, we Christians will have the consciousness that we established a system oriented toward love of neighbor. The struggle is long; let us begin now...

Camilo Torres