



Revolutionary Love In Action

This article is based on a transcript, edited by Wenche Hunt

In January 1980 Frontier Youth Trust issued a statement which reviewed the prospects for the decade, predicting that alienation would increase among those 'most at risk' and that consequent 'stresses set up in the social and political fabric ... could stretch society to breaking point'. By August 1981 it seemed as if that breaking point had been reached. The Trust then issued an open letter to Christians, calling for action in a number of areas, and also calling them to pray for alienated young people, for those in authority and for Christian people throughout the nation, that we might re-discover in the Good News of Jesus the power of revolutionary love.

There can hardly be a person who is not alarmed at the present economic, political and social situation in Britain and elsewhere in the world. I believe,

however, that for the church this is a time of unprecedented opportunity. We see how the church has suddenly become relevant in places like Poland, Latin America, Africa and in the peace movement in Europe. In such places it is seen to be championing the cause of the poor and the oppressed, and actively working for peace. Because of this stand, Christian people in some of these lands are suffering hardship, persecution, torture and even death. It is the way of the cross, and, as with Jesus, this both attracts and repels people. However, the people of God have become a recognisable force within society, which cannot be ignored. I find this exciting as well as sobering.

As Christians in Britain we are faced with a clear choice. We can either bury our heads in the sand and wait for God to deliver us the best way he can, or we can begin seriously to address ourselves to some of the big questions facing us as a nation. We cannot claim that Jesus is the Lord of all life unless we are willing

to see how this affects our approach to life in Britain today. Primarily this is a question of quality of life, or values. More specifically, there are a number of important issues which we, as Christians, have not yet thought through properly. The church, being the living expression of the revolutionary love of Christ, has a great deal to offer in today's situation.

Today we are seeing a situation in which the basic struggle in society is over control, between those who do have power and those who do not. We see this in the antagonism between government and trade unions. Because of widespread unemployment, the unions have less power than before. It is this sense of powerlessness that lies behind the frustrations of young people in particular, and which erupts in rioting and anger against the police.

The police have been made to represent the establishment and sometimes to implement laws that are clearly unjust, such as the 'sus' law which has now been repealed. We are experiencing the results of all this. For too long the police have had an increasingly difficult job for which they are inadequately trained. Better screening of racist attitudes among recruits is becoming essential. It must surely be clear that here is one position in society which *cannot* be held by a person who also holds racist attitudes.

This touches on the whole question of our response to violence, and to what is happening around us, both in terms of breakdown of law and order and the fact that fewer and fewer people lead disciplined lives. As a backlash to this, it is likely that our society will become more and more authoritarian. What is to be our Christian response? We are experiencing violence from people who, in turn, are responding to violence within the actual system. On the other side, there is an escalation of fear, which makes people reluctant to leave their homes and women afraid to venture onto the streets. As Christians, are we prepared, by non-violent means, to find ways of changing the system and make it more just?

How to make use of this Whitsun issue of GrassRoots

- 1 Form a group to study the bible study, 'The Spirit Among Us', or use it as material for a group which already meets.
- 2 Encourage each group member and others in the church to read this issue of *GrassRoots* as a general background to study and as preparation for Whitsun.
- 3 Present the drama, 'The Spirit is Moving', in church on Whitsunday, or in preparation for Whitsunday.
- 4 Afterwards write and share with us and other readers of *GrassRoots* what you learned, and what you heard the Spirit saying to you as an individual, group or church.

There is injustice in our economic policies, whereby certain sections of our society become poorer, while others become richer. Great power now resides in some trade unions and no power in others, while many of those who are the neediest in society are completely outside the unions. Can our unions be restructured in the interests of the powerless? Can the system of differen-

tials be abolished, so that there is no caste system of privilege? As a society, we need to look for other ways of organising our trade unions so that they are not themselves vehicles of injustice in society.

Then there is the problem of the homeless. There are an incredible number of families in Britain today suffering hardship from overcrowding and bad housing conditions. Many are homeless. More homes are needed right across the country, and we need planners who can develop community and housing schemes that encourage community involvement and participation, and that include adequate provision for large numbers of single people and single-parent families.

Part of the answer could lie in more participation in decision making by ordinary people. This means our moving increasingly into the area of community development and community action, leading eventually to a greater degree of community control. Part of this process lies in the development of more local parents/teachers' associations, neighbourhood groups and tenants' associations, and more ventures in co-operative housing and food co-operatives. Christians can play a major part here, both by initiating ventures and by taking part in them.

There is the issue of how we relate to people of another race and of other cultures. Clearly we are not going to become anything other than a multi-racial society, and our Christian contribution towards fulfilling and enriching multi-racial society is essential. We are faced with a growing number of instances where minorities are treated as the scapegoats of British society. Racism emerges when people are fearful and defensive of their own interests. Serious action is needed to reduce antagonism between people of different races and cultures, and expose all forms of fascism and anti-semitism. Here the church has a key role to play, not least in seeking to understand and love those who are trapped by fear and hatred *at both ends of the spectrum*, and by seeking to set personal examples.

Obviously, we cannot avoid the problem of unemployment. What is our Christian understanding of the place of work in people's lives? Can we find ways of preparing people for work which is not paid employment as such? More resources are needed in education and training at all levels, both in terms of finance and personal involvement. Perhaps we should consider if it is not more realistic to train 55-year-olds in-

stead of school-leavers for three years in personal and social development, and release more jobs for our young people.

Education is a key issue. Our young people must be educated for life in a multi-racial society. The future well-being of our society depends on this. Our present educational system does not fit the changing nature of society. With the bleak prospects for paid employment, the system stands revealed as certainly inadequate and frequently destructive. Christians can address themselves to finding a system that seeks to develop the potential *within all our youngsters*, and to a consideration of the preferential treatment given at present to those who are academically inclined. The number of school children who are playing truant every day because they cannot handle what they are taught, and cannot see the point of it anyway, is alarming.

This is a major area for us to think through. One possible way forward is in the development of alternative schools: small groups of people working in garages or in workshops, under one skilled teacher, assisted by parents and maybe retired people or those who have been made redundant. Their aim would be to help youngsters to find themselves, to develop their talents and skills and to acquire appropriate attitudes for living in a co-operative kind of society rather than in a competitive one. This is not to advocate the formation of Christian schools as such. We must approach such a possibility with extreme caution, and be wary of any attempt to claim or reinforce privilege.

Perhaps an area in which we in Britain are behind some other parts of Europe is how we handle the people who cannot, or will not, conform to the kind of society in which the rest of us find it relatively easy to live. It is the old question of deviance, as seen in terms of non-conformity to existing norms. I, too, would rebel against a great number of the things against which many youngsters are rebelling, but I have learned a means of rebelling that does not put me outside society. As Christians we consistently refuse to look seriously at the relationship between personal sin and environmental and institutional sin. We are not merely called upon to get youngsters to conform, we have to work with them to change society, and to eradicate the measure of sin within it.

Our society has not really begun to experiment with alternatives to prison. On the continent, there is a great deal of creative work being done in this field,

with prisoners living in small, residential communities and able to take part in decision-making and the learning of new skills.

There are other issues I have not mentioned: family life, nuclear arms, germ warfare, Northern Ireland materialism, developments in trade and commerce, our relationship to the Third World and to other countries overseas, ecology and pollution, propaganda and censorship, the media, health, safety, growing hazards on our roads, questions about abortion, euthanasia, the needs of rural areas. All of these are issues to which we as Christians have much to offer.

Where and how do we start? For most of us, it will be simplest to become involved with the issues nearest to us, to begin where we are. The biggest issue, however, is our concept of ourselves as the body of Christ. None of us can do very much as isolated individuals, but together there is much we can do. Together we must think about kingdom values and how to live them out. Above all we can add our Christian presence to groups already working in some of the fields mentioned, rather than start new groups. In order for this to be effective, we must be present in large enough numbers to have some impact, and ideally have the backing and support of local congregations.

As well as this, there is much that we as Christians have to contribute, perhaps not least in the area of celebration and festivity. Our country is crying out for this. There should be opportunities in every neighbourhood for celebration. For many, life has become very dull, and people are often unable to laugh, dance and simply let go and enjoy themselves. As British people we do not find this easy, but when an event comes along which provides a natural opportunity, such as the Queen's Jubilee, or the Royal Wedding, we welcome it. Does not the need for festivity provide a natural opportunity for Christians to initiate or encourage celebratory neighbourhood events?

Here, then, are some of the issues with which I hope *GrassRoots* readers will concern themselves in the 80s, and I trust the magazine itself will help us look into some of them more deeply, and help us become more involved.

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