

oventant: the one and the many

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## THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE VIOLENT

theses for debate

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*(This continuation of the previous article on Liberation Theology attempts to sharpen the hard question facing perhaps the majority of humanity today: whether to use violent means to gain freedom)*

1. *violence as climate:* ours is an age of violence —hot and cold wars, in the streets and airports and ghettos, on cinema and tv screens. Its presence among us has provoked a demand for "law and order" as countermeasure. We need to ponder this climate, and whether "law" meets the problem or treats only the symptoms. And we need to ponder a different question: is our climate of violence the same as that of depressed areas and Third World? Or is their violence a rational kind of counter-measure appropriate to their situation? Two recent events centring in Montreal raised this question right in our midst: the "computer party" at Sir



## EDITORIAL

### OUT OF THE WHALE

This issue was delayed, in part by the postal strike. We were waiting for responses to the article on violence which we had sent out to selected readers. Few were chosen; only two called. Perhaps the theme of liberation and violence is so blatant in our newspapers—James Bay, Northern Ireland, the Middle East, the SLA, strikes and sports—perhaps because of all this we are getting tired of the subject. The theme of *peace* is what we seek, and after all, the Gospel is all about peacemaking, reconciliation. Or perhaps we are confused, especially about violence in the Third World—it's so remote, despite theories of global interdependence ("symbiosis"!) and the charge that our old Worlds are largely the *cause* of that surging discontent of the emerging nations. African tyrants look much worse than the old British imperialism, while even Gandhi's India has the atom bomb. If students on campus are now the apathetic generation, it looks as though the church is nursing its own kind of apathy.

And yet—perhaps we expected too much from a small group. (But is *is* significant that our two responders are from the Third World, namely Nigeria and Trinidad). The point may be that *ARC* serves its purpose best by addressing itself to such issues as violence and reconciliation without undue worry over feedback. Our articles on liberation theology and its issue of violence are, we think, valid comments on the contemporary scene, whether or not Christians are able to engage in serious discussion on them.

The function of the "little magazine" whether literary or theological is to stimulate thought and to activate concern. Our first volume has presented a series on current movements in theology, along with articles on biblical material (*both* Testaments!), church-and-mission structures, features such as a workshop for pastoral use, media rare, an occasional poem, and letters from that friendly enemy J-P McLennan (the appeal from Prof. von der Kuche is beyond comment). We see our venture as a contribution to that "continuing education" or self-study without which minds remain fixed and behavior frozen in familiar but irrelevant patterns. Picture ourselves as Jonahs, inside the whale. It may be dark, and as fragrant as a fish market at the end of the day, but one gets used to it; and the alternative is to be thrown up in the general direction of Nineveh. What is Nineveh? Arch-enemy of God's People: worthy of damnation. Even a prophet can resist God's continuing education. Consider ourselves, dear reader, your theological emetic; but make sure you're headed in the right direction. And such prophetic nausea—that, too, is a form of violence.



George Williams University & the October Crisis of 1970. The one involved the protest of Caribbean students against what they considered Canada's exploitation of their area, and the other the protest of *Canadiens* against what they considered similar exploitation by *les Anglais*.

2. *violence as protest*: the ideal protest might seem "civil disobedience" (Thoreau). But it may be too simple, a cop-out. Protest is the symbolic of the degree of wrong in society. Indeed, most doctrines of non-violence grow out of philosophies which take *sin* less seriously than does the Bible; both Thoreau and Gandhi, for instance, did not weigh "immoral society" as a Christian analyst such as Reinhold Niebuhr did. Moreover, one cannot shrink from protest because it may escalate into more violent forms: even the 16C Reformers were accused by the Roman established church of opening doors to peasant uprisings, not to mention damage to statues.

3. *structures of violence*: how does one "measure the weight of sin"? In part by recognizing that it is not just personal and private but also social and public. There is "institutionalized injustice", "situations of sin" according to the S. American Bishops (Medellin '68) --they should know, they supported it for long. Father Pessoa of Brazil declared of his situation: "Against this *state* of violence, effective *acts* of violence are necessary to save humanity from slavery". And Pope Paul VI ('On the Development of People' *Pop. Progressio*) spoke of the likelihood of "revolutionary uprising" where "long-standing tyranny" harms "fundamental personal rights". Where that "psychosocial violence" described by Fanon and Torres threatens sheer survival, one can expect rebellion, for the sake of justice.

4. *Canadian involvement*: structures of violence - the *status quo*, inherited from colonial-expansionist days—locks us all in on one side or the other. We cannot talk of "the will of God", else we turn history into fatalism. Nor can we ignore the precise form which Canadian violence takes, against our native peoples, our ghetto dwellers, our Quebecois, and the Caribbean and South American recipients of our unfair trade, banking and immigration policies over the years. Are we therefore guilty of provoking their counterviolence?

5. *violence and pacifism*: it would seem that pacifism is clearly taught in the N.T. as the Christian ideal. But I would argue that it is set in the complex of Biblical roles for Messiah, Messianic community, Zealot approach and church-state relationship. It cannot become a doctrinaire pacifism, as if we operate from a view of impersonal life as monistic religion does, and not from the doctrine of creation: good but spoiled by evil powers. Christians are not called to pacifism as a way of life but to a kind of enlightened pragmatism, by which they may decide on the appropriate means for each new situation in the struggle of life against death.



6. *violence as identity*: the crux is that we become who we are through our acts in this struggle. "The real questions are: Where is your identity? Where is your being? Does it lie with the oppressed blacks or with the white oppressors?" (James Cone). The state of violence forces choice on everyone. If the Third World is poor *because* of our economics, and if the gap between rich and poor grows wider, then we must acknowledge our guilt and join in the struggle to overcome this guilty hangover. To precipitate the social order toward the state in which it *ought* to be, the only "catalyst" may be violence (cf Kenneth Boulding's chemical analogy in *Reflections on Protest*). If Cone is right that "God has made the oppressed condition his own condition" then we cannot exegete scripture as a past event but must help it come alive as today's incarnation. The question for Canadians is twofold: 1) how can we share the lot of the Third World and help them attain genuine freedom, economic as well as political? and 2) within Canada is freedom of the press and democratic government sufficient means of justice so that acts of violence are never in order? i.e. is a minority justified in claiming that it has exhausted those means and therefore needs to resort to violence?

7. *justice, not charity*: we fall into a trap if we think that providing "charity" is a non-political act. Even "to offer food or drink in our day is a political action" (Gutierrez), because it comments on the state of affairs and decides to do this about it. Against this, Father Torres of Colombia said, "Revolution becomes the true charity". When 60% of the world's children suffers from malnutrition, when 16% of the world's population owns 65% of the world's wealth and controls 75% of its trade—will "charity" provide the Christian answer? Even if it take the form of "development" it will fail; unless by development we mean a form of *justice*, of rendering what *we* owe, and of assuming responsibility—only then will developmentalism be taken positively in the Third World.

8. *violence as reconciliation*: Frantz Fanon's analysis of revolution shows that below subsistence level the poor lack both time and energy for protest. The irony of "development" is that the rich nations help the poor reach that level where protest becomes possible. What Freire calls "the culture of silence" then finds its tongue, gains a language of its own (as distinct from that of the Big Boss). This energy of language mirrors the new power for the liberation struggle. It is "liberation" rather than "integration" because they want to be *themselves*. And as a happy by-product (Martin Luther King used to say) they will set *us* free too! Thus reconciliation in a sense awaits *their* awakening—the oppressed hold the key to the dynamics of reconciliation, even in their use of violent means. If alienation has come about through politico-economic activity, then reconciliation involves such radical changes in our structures that perhaps only Christians can supply the motive: justice will be the form our love takes.



9. *violence and vocation*: there is a growing attraction of the Third World toward Communism, at least toward Marxist economic theory of history. Even Hindu and Buddhist peoples are studying possible uses of marxism (see D.E. Smith's sourcebook). The charm of Marxism is in large part its positive stance when compared with the negative image of Christian missions. So often the "purity of faith" was jealously guarded at the expense of involvement (incarnation) in the culture and thought-forms of the land. The reaction generally is toward spiritism-pentecostalism (e.g. Brazil) or marxism (e.g. Buddhists in S.E. Asia, Christians in the Caribbean-S. America). Mission today means a critical view of our past efforts and a new openness to the alternatives possible for various lands. Violence lends potency to the Christian vocation, for our faith was born in violence and persecution; our history is marked by the false violence of crusaders and the constructive violence of those other saints who agonized over their choice of weapons: Zwingli, Bonhoeffer, Torres to name a few. The choice remains difficult; perhaps the means justify the end after all. At the very least Christian vocation may no longer be seen in personal-private terms, but rather as one's open commitment to human freedom, justice and interdependence.

References: Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*; D.E. Smith, *Religion, Politics and Social Change in the Third World*; MacEoin and Thomas, *Mission and Ecumenism in Brazil* (Graymoor '73); P. Wotherspoon and T. Hay, study papers for Assembly's committee on church doctrine; the *Magnificat*.

J.C. McLelland

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## VIOLENCE IN RELATION TO PERSONHOOD

Archbishop Helder Camara, the revolutionary Bishop of Recife, by no means an apostle of the violent way to revolution, emphasized that one of the basic obstacles in the initiating of non-violent revolutionary action is the mutisme and fatalism of the peasants of Latin America. Paulo Friere indicates that there is a culture of silence. Thus peasants when challenged to action comment with a shrug, "It is God's will".

Camillo Torres sees that fatalism and this loss of self-esteem manifesting itself in many ways. First, a sense of inferiority to urban institutions develops. Second, there is a type of individualism as each person tries to concern himself with his survival and that of his family. Moreover, each little community isolates itself from each



other. However, Torres argues that when the peasants group themselves for guerilla activity against the urban forces, these same peasants develop a sense of security.

Fanon supports this view from a different standpoint. He notes that a colonial society is created through violence. There is no other way to become a free society than through violent means,...violence is seen as a "royal pardon."...Aimé Césaire in a poem, *Les Armes Miraculeuses*, argues in the same way.

### The Rebel

My name - an offence;  
my Christian name -  
humiliation - my status -  
a rebel; my age - the  
stone age

### The Mother

My race - The human race.  
My religion - brotherhood

### The Rebel

My race that of the fallen  
My religion — but it is not  
you that will show it to  
me with your disarmament  
'Thus I myself with my  
rebellion and my poor fists  
clenched and my woolly head  
( Very calm ): I remember one  
November day; it was hardly  
six months ago ---. The  
master came into the cabin  
in a cloud of smoke like  
an April moon. He was flexing  
his short muscular arms -  
he was a good master -  
and he was rubbing his little  
dimpled face with his fat  
fingers. His blue eyes were  
smiling and he could get  
honeyed words out of  
his mouth quick enough.  
"The kid will be a decent  
fellow", he said looking at

me, and he said other  
pleasant things too, The  
Master - that you had to  
start very early, that  
twenty years was not too  
much to make a good  
Christian and a good slave,  
a steady devoted boy, a  
good Commander's chain gang  
captain, sharp-eyed and  
strong-armed. And all that  
man saw of my son's cradle  
of a chain gang captain

The master's room was wide  
open. The master's room was  
brilliantly lighted, and the  
master was there, very calm  
- - and our people stopped  
dead - - - it was the  
master - - I went in  
"It's" he said very calm  
It was I, even I, and  
I told him so, the good  
slave, the faithful slave,  
the slave of slaves, and  
suddenly his eyes were  
like two cockroaches,  
frightened in the rainy  
season - - - I struck,  
and the blood spurted;  
that is the only baptism  
that I remember today



Fanon makes a further point, he suggests that violence created by the oppressor not only dehumanizes the oppressed but eliminates his own humanity...thus it seems that it is too simplistic for Christians to respond to the Gospel of Love. Torres issues a challenge to us, which we cannot ignore with comfortable platitudes of reconciliation and pacifism.

References: Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*; *Black Skin White Masks*; Helder Camara, *Race against Time*; Camillo Torres, *Revolutionary Writings*; Aimé Césaire, *Les Armes Miracules*.

Knolly Clarke

## ON VIOLENCE

...The theme of violence is a burning issue in my mind. My response may not be what you expect from somebody from the third world, but it is my candid opinion that the W.C.C. approach is more disastrous than helpful. They seem to be treating the symptoms and doing barely nothing in regard to the root cause.

I am not a pacifist, even though my thoughts tend to suggest just that. Really I am asking the question which is implied in McLelland's, to wit, have all other means been exhausted before resorting to violence...

"If Cone is right...then we cannot exegete Scripture as a past event but must help it come alive as today's incarnation." The vital question is how do we make it come alive. I agree that Christians are not called to pacifism as a way of life. But neither are they called to violence as the W.C.C. tends to propagate...

"Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of Yahweh, which he will show you today"...

"All who take the sword die by the sword"...

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay"...

These prompt me to ask, is this God still alive or dead?

In Christ's cleansing of the Temple, I see violence. His disciples, I note, did not use the whip of cords. Must we?

Inya Ude



## VIOLENCE AND CREATIVITY

Often we speak of violence in the same breath as destruction. How often do we speak of violence coupled with creativity? There is in human violence the two faces of destruction and creativity, of death and resurrection. The Christian (even when he is a theologian) sheds light on this paradox, not by dispelling the tension that exists in the opposing forces but by accepting destructive violence and drawing from its apparent emptiness the creative seed. That, however, demands two faiths: faith in Jesus, faith in man.

Let's begin with the latter.

Faith in man is the immovable conviction that this bi-ped image of God, that seems to dominate, and at times obliterate, God's creation is in process. He is not just a human being but above all a human becoming. This process of becoming has as its principle driving force the search for meaning, which comes only through the birth pangs of violence. Only through the violence done to her body in birthing does the mother give life to the child; only through the often violent adolescent mistakes does the teen-ager learn meaning and arrive at some plateau of maturity; only through the violence of life does man arrive at a certain wisdom of age. Faith in man requires that we look beyond violence to the goal that violence seeks: personal meaning. Redeemed or un-redeemed, man seeks that meaning often despite himself. Our faith demands that we sustain that search by confidence in him despite the apparent destructiveness of violence.

What then does faith in Jesus add? It adds the full rhythm of redemption: that *only* through death comes life, only through the crucifixion comes the resurrection, only through baptismal death is the new man born. The incarnation demands a total acceptance, like God's, of fallen man and once having accepted that violent nature does the creative salvation of man begin. Faith in Jesus is the belief that man can celebrate new life not only in eternity but here and now. Faith in Jesus is the hope anchored in his life and word that despite personal and social failure man is capable of creativity. Faith in Jesus is love that celebrates the Eucharist, meal and presence, in the knowledge that man's suffering, weakness and destruction find meaning in love.

The basic paradox of violence remains: violence and creativity walk hand in hand. The Christian theologian first accepts this fact then goes on to make the necessary distinctions. On one hand he must reject the "pseudo innocence" of which Rollo May (*Power and Innocence*, New York: Norton, p.49) has so well spoken that leaves man totally pure, unencumbered by evil as long as he wills it. On the other hand he rejects an ethic of violence which accepts force and aggression as the only means for the solution of individual and social problems. The precarious line that the Christian draws will be somewhere in the



combination of three elements: a clear vision of man's social and individual needs in given circumstances (Father Camillo Torres' answer might have been a virtuous act in his milieu); an adamant conviction that in the ruins of human violence life is present; and finally that Jesus' redemptive work is not only an individual liberation but a liberation that demands social and economic structures essential for the growth of that human and Christian life.

Charles B. Paris

Loyola of Montreal

## VIOLENCE AND TWO KINDS OF ANGER

excerpted from *Contempo*, Nov.-Dec., 1973

Violence is a form of behaviour among people today which many commentators regard as the major point of crisis for our civilization...

Two ways of stating the crisis may both merit some thought:

- the more violent that people grow, the sicker their civilization grows.
- the sicker that a civilization grows, the more violent its people grow.

The philosophy underlying both of these propositions is that human nature is like a steam pressure boiler of energies, desires, emotions; heat up the boiler too recklessly, and you guarantee an explosion of uncivilized behaviour. So the basic task of those interested in the preservation or the betterment of civilization, on the basis of this philosophy, is to "cool it." Don't heat up the boiler of behaviour.

And the way to cool it is to keep your distance. Don't get too close to other people. Don't let them get too close to you. Don't get too close to issues. That way, the risk of temptation—of pressure in the boiler—is reduced. Keep out of trouble. That's what life and morality and religion are all about...

Against this play-it-safe or cool-it philosophy, Jesus of Nazareth and others propose the much riskier life-style of love. "Love God—and your neighbour as your self."

An alternative to the cool-it philosophy is to perceive such matters as social violence as forms of energy which require not to be cooled, or repressed, but to be focused.



A first step toward what I mean by the achievement of focus, is to get facts, without fear of the possibly quite violent consequences.

Some definite cases may be a help. For example, Canadian business and government have large investments in Latin America. The people of those Latin American countries are much poorer than the poorest Canadians. But for every dollar that we invest in the economy of those poorer neighbours, we take out four dollars. Love thy Latin American neighbour?...or rob him?

A Canadian tractor cost a farmer in Jamaica 680 tons of sugar in 1966. Two years later, the same tractor was costing 3500 tons of sugar. That is economic violence, surely.

Ours may be a time not for cooling it but for learning how to heat up our anger and make it work for justice...

We must learn to distinguish between two kinds of anger. There are angers and angry actions that are destructive; and there are other angers, and actions, which are truly the practical expressions of loving our neighbour. The behaviour of Jesus toward people who used their privileges as power to victimize the men and women who had less than they did, was anything but meek and mild.

*Stuart B. Coles*

### THIRTEEN QUESTIONS ON VIOLENCE

1. Are conditions of exploitation, poverty and repression different today in quality or magnitude from other times and other civilizations?
2. Does violence as an option today in oppressed countries, the third world, or North American civilization hold fundamentally different possibilities from previous manifestations of violence?
3. Does justification for selective violence rest on socio-economic and political factors? Or is there a "theology" of violence, applicable today, which is rooted in a perception of God's action among men?
4. Is it legitimate to move gradually from a stance which deplores the subtle forms of violence perpetrated by the well-fed and well-bred, to an appreciation of the violence which is fostered by the reaction to these, to a deliberate advocacy of violence as Christian solution to the wrongs of society?
5. Is there a clear dividing line between political force (sanctioned by most western societies) and the use of revolutionary violence? Does one legitimate the other?



6. Do ends justify means?
7. What conditions provide the possibility of violence successfully ushering in a humane successor to what it opposed?
8. In what situations should violence be attempted as an alternative to non-violence? How should one decide between violence and non-violence?
9. To what extent does the pervasive violence of the Old Testament provide justification for Christian violence today?
10. Is Jesus' I-say-to-you-love-your-enemies normative today?
11. Why did the early church's authority figures, Peter and Paul, counsel obedience to secular authority?
12. Under what conditions might violence be creative or regenerative?
13. Why are so many of us attracted by violence? Does it meet deep needs not met in other ways?

Peter Richardson

## ON THE THEOLOGY OF "VIOLENCE"

Committee on Church Doctrine: 1974 Report

...*Love* and especially neighbour-love, is the sole essential characteristic of the Christian ethic. Love is *the* characteristic nature of the attitude, teaching, life and death of Jesus; it is *the* word which defines the revealed nature of God and his purposes for man...

This love is seen as leaving no room for ill-will and indeed continues even in the face of violence. This is manifested in the teaching of Jesus, even more strikingly in his life, and above all in his death...

This love treats sinful man as precious and having dignity, both in himself and in his community. The ministry of Jesus from start to finish manifests a concern for individuals but at the same time he is concerned with persons in community:...

If this love is real it will express itself in goodwill for others and that goodwill demands at the very least, justice. Justice is not a gracious gift which we may bestow on another; it is a demand, a minimum...



How does love respond to contemporary situations of revolution and violence?...At some times and in some circumstances violent revolution is no more than a response to prior violence, and is indeed more in the nature of self-defense, a "kind of violence" we have always understood, if not condoned. It ill becomes the Church to make superficial judgments based on what violence happens to be visible and which happens to appear as the maintenance of law and order. In some contemporary revolutionary activity the people of Christ may need to show their love and concern by endorsing the cause of the revolution even while they lament the violence and by refraining from passing judgment upon their fellows involved in violence who may see no other way...

Our Church's Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation... declares in paragraph 6 on the Church and Tyranny that "It is the Church's duty to denounce and resist every form of tyranny, political, economic, or ecclesiastical, especially when it becomes totalitarian. A citizen is not barred from disowning any government or organ of power which usurps the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, and indeed may be obliged by God's word to rebel against it. But if involved in such action, the Church must remember that the weapons of her warfare are finally not of this world. Led by the Holy Spirit she will in any situation bear public witness to the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ and to the freedom of all men in Him."

It is untenable that we should condemn the counter-violence of freedom fighters if we are not far more adamant in our abhorrence of the systematic and sustained violence which they may be resisting. We need also to be honestly aware if we look differently upon violence depending upon the political or racial identity of the perpetrators. We must become aware of ambiguities in our actions, too...

## WORKSHOP

What's the purpose and procedure of pre-marriage counselling? Just the preparations for the wedding? Not that that should be down-graded. Indeed, it's about time that it be rethought and reworked. Why should we continue the romantic antics of the father escorting the bride and giving her away (he's not arranging anything but the payment of the bills!)? How many in the congregation see the wedding as a Christian and religious rite? Usually they're spectators absorbed in the beauty of it all. Why not include and involve them in psalms, readings, hymns, prayers? Print a calendar—make it a real worship service, expressive of the Gospel in relation to marriage. Expressive also of the particular couple, their faith, their symbols (rings, kiss of love, candles, communion). Let them write their own vows so long as they



are consistent with the Christian (rather than merely current) view of marriage. And the music could be far more appropriate, perhaps even "say" something.

But the wedding, important as it is, lasts 25 minutes at best. What about the whole process of marriage? Marriage is a process, of course—and much that is thought to be developed before marriage soon emerges as less than perfect. But few couples come to a pastor with that kind of realism. They expect some advice—that's what preachers are chiefly known for! And many of us will speak like Polonius to his son, Laertes,—information, anecdotes, do's and don'ts. Alas, it's no wonder that the average couple is uptight about pre-marriage "Counselling"!

Information giving is neither acceptable nor helpful unless specifically requested. What is useful, in fact, almost essential is to enable each couple to understand themselves, each other and the process of their communication. To *discover* the "baggage" they bring to the marriage: ideas, feelings, hopes, ideals. To be able to share where they have come from as two separate persons with different families and styles. Then to develop a trust that can move beyond defenses, beyond keeping score, beyond games.

That takes time. It takes personal time with each couple—if they are willing! You can't help those who don't want help. But we pastors should have more intestinal fortitude to help those with obviously weak relationships to face up to reality. One current approach that may have success with relatively closed, as well as more open, couples, is transactional analysis ("I'm okay, you're okay"). If couples can discover their "parent" and "child", as distinguished from their "adult", they'll go a long way toward better communication. Marriage is for "adults". When the relationship is parent-child, child-child or parent-parent problems are inevitable. Some group sessions combined with conjoint interviews, combined with the specifically Christian conception of marriage will get a lot more marriages off to a better (and lasting) start.

One thing more. Would it be useful to have a post-marriage program within the first two or three years of marriage? After all, the non-verbal forms of communication will have developed a whole new dynamic during this period. We can't wait for couples to come on their own (the few who do would likely have problems beyond reach anyway). Let's set up a general program with a positive thrust. Every marriage can improve and in improving may contribute to the development of others.

\* \* \*

#### *Good News and Bad*

Have you heard the good news? Jesus is coming back *soon*!

Now for the bad news: He's mad as hell!



## STRANGERS

We begin with the obvious; Canada is a plural society. What to do about it is less obvious. Our fathers were reasonably confident that the newcomers, the Europeans who flocked into this country at the beginning of the century, had to be evangelized and Canadianized, lest they become prey to the Communists and the Catholics, who in those days, it was believed, were very keen on representative institutions. We have become more liberal since then, and we talk about a bilingual and multi cultural nation. Of this I heartily approve. I merely want to draw conclusions.

Let us take two examples, Nigeria and the West Indies. Nigeria is closest to our experience, for the British, for reasons of their own, put together in a single economic and political unit, a large number of people who had hitherto had little to do with each other, and then the British pulled out, without even attempting to tackle the problem of how these disparate tribes were going to work together. That problem is still not solved, and hence the parliamentary system, the first military government, and eventually the country itself fell apart. The basic element in Nigerian politics is tribalism: my people, as it were, right or wrong. Nigeria is an acute and complicated case of the Canadian problem.

This is a straightforward case; we can understand Nigeria because it is much the same as Canada, only more so. In the West Indies there is another variant, the tension between blacks and Indians, but that is not what I want to talk about. There is a variety of social pluralism in the West Indies which has been created, not so much by the physical presence of whites in a black community, as by their spiritual presence.

The West Indies was born in plantation slavery, a system which involved a large number of black people under the control of a small number of white people. In this society it came to be believed that white was good and black was bad, an assumption that was not challenged till the appearance of the evangelicals in the later years of the eighteenth century. The missionaries assumed the fundamental equality of white and black, or they would not have been missionaries, for one does not ask his dog if he is born again. When a church came into being, the converts asked the obvious question, what does it mean to be a Christian, and the missionaries gave the obvious answer, which was the only one available to them at the time: to be a Christian means to be like me, to assimilate the norms of Victorian society. Thus, ironically, the missionaries were saying that for a black man to achieve his true humanity he had to become white. Though they had rejected the crude biological distinction between black and white, they replaced it with a cultural one, and in so doing perpetuated the ancient West Indian heresy they had come to destroy, that black is bad and white is good.



All this is history, but even this generation has to live with history, and the West Indian past has bequeathed to our time a legion of ghosts, the ghosts of now departed white men whose superiority was assumed on all sides. These ghosts in their turn create in the minds of all too many West Indians a chronic self hate, which manifests itself on the one hand in a denigration of things West Indian, and a persistent imitation of British or American models; or it appears as a vigorous self assertion, the phenomenon known as black power. There are some, of course, who have no problem, but the quiet confidence which they display in themselves, in their colour, and in their humble origins is far too rare.

We then have two kinds of strangeness, people who are strangers to each other and people who are strangers to themselves. Of what does the church speak to these people?

Let us begin with first principles. In the Cross God says to us, "Man, I accept you, just as you are." Normally we would go on to speak of justification by faith, freedom from the law, *sola fide* and all the rest of it. But not everybody has Paul's problem with the law. In the West Indies the problem goes somewhat differently: "In the Cross God says to us, 'Man I accept you, just as you are, sin, skin and all. I accept you as you are, black and of humble origins. Your refusal to accept yourself as you are, your striving to be somebody you are not, is tantamount to saying that I didn't know what I was doing when I made you. Further, because I accept you, you are free to accept yourself, and having accepted yourself, to accept the people around you.'" In other words, sin in the West Indies is inclined to appear as self hate, just as much as self glorification or immorality.

In West Africa the argument goes a step further. If God accepts men as Igbos, and nobody suggests that a man has to cease being an Igbo in order to become a Christian, then he accepts Yorubas on the same terms. If he accepts men of both tribes, then it follows that they should accept each other. The classic manifestation of sin in Nigeria is ethnocentricity, and it is a work of grace to overcome it, to bring men to accept each other across tribal lines.

But it is easier said than done. Lévesque's *Option Québec* begins, "Nous sommes Québécois." Such a start shows how little they have come to terms with us and we with them, how much they have closed in within themselves, and how delighted we really are that they migrated to New England and not to Ontario or the West where we would have to take them much more seriously than we do. Acceptance means taking people seriously, learning their language, their culture, getting inside it to the point where we enjoy living in another's world. I suspect we really do not do this even within the ministerial fraternity. How many of us count as our close friends the men in 'ethnic' ministries? Why is it that they rarely appear in any other role than 'ethnic minister'?

One last point that arises from my living in the West Indies. A mission-



ary takes for granted, at least he should, that his first task is to understand his new society and speak to it, in terms of its needs, and not of necessity in terms of what he learned in theological college in another country. Perhaps working within our own society, we take for granted that we know what our people need. If so it is odd that at a recent meeting in Toronto, not Presbyterian, minister after minister said that he did not think he knew what his people needed. How many of us could sketch out an essay "The Gospel for Today", on the basis of the last six months, or even six years' parish experience? Why is it that *Salvation Today* is a kind of private preserve of Overseas Missions and not a central concern of the Committee on Church Doctrine?

Geoffrey Johnston

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