

Violence and Brotherhood: a case of 'trahison des clercs'

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If I understand the French expression of the title correctly, the word 'clercs' does not primarily refer to the clergy but to those that in olden days were the philosophers, the writers, the scribblers and the gabblers, and no doubt some clergy came under this heading. Now there are few problems so bluntly omnipresent and so impractically approached by the intellectuals as violence.

I have three books in front of me, one dealing with brotherhood, one with peace, and a symposium on violence. All three are connected since peace can only come from brotherhood and will never come at all as long as our world is dominated by violence. *We are all Brothers*, by Fr Louis Evely (Burns & Oates, 1967, 15s.), puzzles me. Apparently his books sell on the continent by the 100,000 and are translated into ten languages. Yet, the treatment of the theme of brotherhood is wholly that of a talk given at a retreat in the old style of a nice, comforting, pleasant relationship between a somewhat domestic God and a simple-minded Christian leading himself up the garden path in the private garden of his private soul. One respects the intention but it is difficult to take such spiritual glibness seriously. The next book is *Building Peace*, by Fr Dominique Pire, O.P. (a Corgi Book, 6s.), which is somewhat clumsily put together by Dr Dricot, but it is honest and faces some facts. I shall return to this later. The third book is called *La Violence* (Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1967, 12 Frs). It is a collection of papers read at the *Semaine des Intellectuels Catholiques* in February last year.

The contributors count some of the most prominent French intellectuals, both lay and clerical, among them. They are divided into groups of three or four, each group dealing with one aspect. Cardinal Veillot opens the series of papers and is followed by E. d'Astier de la Vigerie and J.-M. Domenach, all three presenting the *status questionis*: the world of violence. They are followed by the group that proceeds with a psychoanalysis of violence. This section, particularly the paper by Dr Henri Ey, leans heavily on the Freudian concepts of *libido* and *destrudo* (p. 48), but I am not convinced that these instincts lie deeper than the instinct of self-preservation, which seems to be rejected as 'antiquated'. Then a group studies the relation between violence and language (Borne, Weil, Ricoeur), and sees in language, in the *discours* or conversation, the opposite of violence: to talk is to recognize the rationality of the other. 'The multiplicity, diversity and hierarchy of languages and modes of speech is, for us

men, the only way of working towards a meaning that is reasonable' (p. 94).

Violence is the main theme of the book really because of our present preoccupation with war. We come closer to this with the next group which asks whether there is a Christian teaching about violence (Wiener, Cottier, Thibon), and we delve into a mine of violences of all kinds and the conclusion is drawn by Thibon that the systematic refusal of violence leads straight to the reign of absolute violence (p. 121). Then we reach the theme, How to overcome war? (Grosser, Fessard, Aron). It is most unfortunate that Fessard has turned his argument into an altercation with an imaginary and absent Communist. What is most disturbing is that while he accepts, rather grandiloquently, Garaudy's admissions of Communist violence, he seems to make the usual radical distinction between an eschatological Christianity, which we occasionally fail to live up to, and the actual institutional Christianity, which in Communist eyes is bound to appear as totally white, racist, capitalist, and linked with religious-flavoured dictatorships. This is not fair: a Communist can only deal with living Christians and if those living Christians are giving the impression that they identify themselves with every force that Communism detests, we cannot argue with them on an eschatological basis unless we argue at the level of Marx's stateless and classless society of the future. Raymond Aron is one of those annoying people who know so much that they are totally incapable of forming any judgement and look down on the world of their fellowmen with a disdain that is jaundiced with cynicism and has lost all sense of generosity and commitment. The next group deals with politics and violence (Racine, Lavau, Verret, Massenet). Here the paper by Verret really tries to analyse the forces that constitute modern political society. His address is tense in style and in sincerity, strewn with questions, but the questions are very much to the point, although the 'point' is never reached. The last section tackles the subject of Christians in the world's violence. And here we have Fr Voillaume talking about Charles de Foucauld, and Régamey praising Dr Martin Luther King.

It should be clear by now that, in the proper intellectual manner, every possible aspect of violence has been dealt with. It is precisely because the symposium attempted to do this that it fails, at least in my eyes. It is so easy for intellectuals to dig deep down into any notion under the sun and in the end we shall always find that they coincide with 'being' at large. The whole discussion is dominated by a concept of violence that is so vast, so varied, so all-embracing, so subtle in the most minute details that it really becomes coextensive with that most general of all scholastic notions, the notion of 'being'. And while I accept with the scholastics that this notion has a value as such, if only in order to see clear into the process of our own existence, nevertheless, if we identify any other notion with it we

shall fall into meaninglessness. To talk about violence as if it is the same thing whether I pray hard, or do intense work, or forcibly stop a child from falling into the water, or restrict the circulation of a pathologically violent individual, or direct the traffic or fight with bayonets or napalm or nuclear weapons, is not talking about anything at all. It certainly does not mean anything in the language of common culture. The problem can only be significantly dealt with if we agree to circumscribe the area which is meaningful to all of us, and clarify our terms, not by using a thousand beautifully subtle intellectual distinctions, but by using a few clear definite ones.

If we really want to discuss war, let us discuss war, and war is a specific phenomenon where physically violent means are used in a totally impersonal way for a definite political purpose which is calculated and prepared a long time ahead. Wars, as Professor Böckle says, do not fall from heaven, they are not natural disasters, not even humanly natural disasters: they are willed, prepared, organized in cold blood. It is precisely this refusal to face concrete facts which makes so much discussion among intellectuals futile and sterile. This is what makes it possible for Raymond Aron to say that the war in Vietnam is not waged for economic purposes by the United States because at the moment the States are losing twenty thousand million dollars on it. One expects this kind of argument from a fourth-former, not from a responsible political writer (p. 156).

The basic emotional stranglehold which prevents us from doing anything constructive, or even thinking constructively, is Western individualistic nationalism, in which white racialism and exploiting capitalism are integrated. Already in 1937 the Marquis of Lothian talked about 'the demonic influence of national sovereignty' in the Council of Churches. Recent Popes have been equally outspoken. Why then no paper in this book on that subject?

There is nothing wrong with cultural nationalism and cultural variety but economic and militaristic nationalism are an evil and frankly out of date. Let our economists start with unmantling the bulwark of capitalism which is investment by shareholding: a way of making money without working for it and without ever demanding whether what is produced is needed or in what conditions the work is done. We have in the United Nations the beginnings of such work (Gatt, World Bank, etc.). Let the Christian economist work out Mr Stamp's plan for a liquid currency, based on the U.N., and capable of freeing the developing countries from being engulfed in every setback to the dollar or the pound. Let us surrender all inter-national disputes once and for all to the U.N. and strengthen the U.N. with a genuine and viable police force. Let us follow up the demands of the scientists of the Pugwash Conferences that *all* secret scientific work should be *published*, for the sake of science and of public control. Let us dismantle the whole phony glory of militarism, and keep a small voluntary or conscripted auxiliary force merely to assist the police

in national disasters and in other fruitful contributions.

Pope Paul said in New York that the United Nations is the only solution for political conflict in a unified and contracted world; that the U.N. is doing at the secular level what the Church is trying to do at the spiritual level. Why, then, can French Intellectuals (and any other intellectuals) not go in for those issues where national politics can be bent towards the building up and strengthening of the U.N.? It is so easy to be cynical (and sometimes vicious) about the U.N., but it would be more useful if we saw our Christian responsibility in politics in this building up of a world government, based on democratic consent and moral principles (embodied in the charter), so that we could put power-politics where they belong, in the past.

Fr Dominique Pire has at least a very firm grasp of the key idea of the 'unity of mankind', as behoves a disciple of St Thomas. He has worked out his ideas in practice with his 'universities' and 'villages' of peace. He has worked fruitfully at the main thing that a Christian should devote his life to: concern with the personal dignity of the brother. It is a pity that his achievement was put in the book in the form of a conversation, an interview, with too many irritating leading questions and too little expansion of worthwhile ideas. But that is not his fault. The only thing that worries me is that he still lives in the individualistic morality of the past; we need to change *structures*, and we lack a social morality. This is particularly evident in the French discussion mentioned above. We simply cannot achieve anything lasting and solid by individual charity, however noble. Politics are the very heart of concern with the brother.

If Fr Fessard demands of Communists that, on the basis of present admissions by outstanding Communist thinkers, they should start again (*refaire ce chemin*), why does he not begin by showing us how we as Christians should start again? But we have no philosophy of the unity of mankind, of the brother, of the personalist community, the only community that is compatible with Christ as a person.

We live in a fascinating age with immense possibilities, but I am afraid that we are wasting the *tempus opportunum*, because we are not really prepared to take Christ seriously.