

Comment

The World Council of Churches meeting in Nairobi and the Roman Catholic international Pax Christi were both quite right to condemn the United Nations declaration that Zionism is a form of racism. They were right to insist that Zionism is 'concerned with the liberation of the Jewish people from oppression, including racial oppression'. It is hard to believe that the sponsors of the motion themselves took it seriously and literally; rather its implausibility made it a more effective insult. The editor of *Témoignage Chrétien* is probably right to see it primarily as an expression of the exasperation of the Assembly at Israel's insolent treatment of UN resolutions, 'on ne se moque pas ainsi impunément d'une Assemblée'. Still, international bodies ought not to indulge in fits of temper.

Zionism is not racism in any illuminating sense and neither will it fit easily into categories like nationalism and colonialism, though it has something in common with all three. It is not, in fact, an 'ism' at all, it is the desperate reaction of a people to threatening historical events and circumstances. In my view it is a tragically mistaken reaction, but nothing is gained by deliberately misinterpreting it. Zionists do not propose that Jews are a master race or that in the natural order of things they should dominate non-Jews, nor do they propose any theoretical justification for economic or political discrimination against non-Jews. The Israel declaration of Independence ensures 'complete social and political equality for all inhabitants without distinction of religion, race or sex'. Anti-racism is inscribed on the banner of Zionism as surely as Religious Liberty is inscribed on the banner of Ulster Loyalists.

The problem with Zionism, as with Loyalism, is not its passionately held convictions but what it finds itself doing in practice. Zionists have not the slightest difficulty in demonstrating the genuine racism of, let us say, Iraq, just as Loyalists can easily show a history of religious persecution under the Roman Church, but by an irony of history they both find themselves behaving in just the ways they condemn in their opponents. Zionism is entirely a matter of behaviour, frequently bad behaviour, but not bad behaviour justified by some perverse theory; rather the aggressive behaviour of frightened and desperate men. It is absurd for Georges Montaron to maintain that Israel is intrinsically expansionist on the theoretical grounds that the Law of Return would authorise the entry into Israel of all the fifteen million Jews in the world. This isn't going to happen and Zionism is a matter of what happens, not of some political or racial theory. Zionism is mistaken and dangerous because a 'Jewish state for a Jewish people' is no more

a formula for stability than is a 'Protestant parliament for a Protestant people', and unstable societies, however high and humanitarian their ideals, make for injustice, oppression and violence.

If Zionism is 'mono-ethnic' it is not because Jews have discovered a special racial consciousness but because their enemies have. For Zionism, a Jew is pretty well anyone who is accused of being Jewish. Zionism is just one of the bad by-products of anti-semitism and it is ludicrous to condemn the Jews for it unless we identify and deal with the vicious source from which it comes.

If we are to distinguish Zionism from racism it is also necessary to distinguish anti-Zionism from anti-semitism and for this reason it seems unfortunate that the United States hierarchy should have succumbed to Zionist pressures to include in their otherwise excellent recent statement on relations between Christians and Jews a reference to 'the land' which suggests that love for Jews must involve support for the state of Israel. This is very nearly the same as suggesting that a loyal Catholic must approve of the papal states or of modern Vatican diplomacy.

But minor criticisms of this kind seem merely pedantic when you realise the sort of thing the American bishops are up against amongst their people. We have just received, God knows why, a copy of something called *Veritas* published by 'Traditionalist Faithful Catholics' in Kentucky (the 'Honorary Editor in Memoria' is, I am sorry to say, called Paul E. McCabe). Here are some quotations: 'Arius . . . like John Hus, Calvin and other Jewish instigators of religious revolution. . . . Here is a race of people (the Jews) who come into a country as strangers, foreigners, to infiltrate in order to conspire, sabotage, subvert and spy against both Church and State . . . as if this isn't treachery enough, the Jews in one country conspire with Jews in another nation'. The only cheering thing amongst all this sordid rubbish is the evident hatred these Traditionalist Faithful Catholics have for their Church: 'The synagogue appealed to John XXIII to call a Council to suppress Catholic doctrine and to drastically change the worship, thinking and attitudes of Catholics . . . the eternal laws of the Church against Jewry were permitted to fall into disuse . . . the presence of an unbelieving Jew sitting unmolested in the Holy Chair of Peter and usurping papal power . . . etc., etc.'

It is not enough to say that this stuff is clearly insane; the point is that it is an especially Catholic insanity; we have to bear responsibility not only for what we say and do when we are on our best behaviour but also for what we allow to lurk in the Catholic unconscious, for what comes out when Catholics go mad. Episcopal and papal statements are excellent things but they will not of themselves wipe out the effects of centuries of bigotry and savagery. A more positive therapy is needed but the task will not be made any easier by the suggestion that love for the people of Jesus includes approval of internal repression and external aggression in Israel.

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