

Editorial

"A MARI USQUE AD MARE"

"**H**E SHALL HAVE DOMINION also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the world" (Ps. 72:8). How stirringly those words must have rung in Canadian ears ninety-eight years ago, as the citizens of the four newly confederated provinces set about their task of building a nation from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the St. Lawrence River to the Arctic seas! And how hollowly they echo in our ears today, as we consider how poorly God's purpose of peace and goodwill has been served in this dominion of his! A century of complacent parochialism, petty prejudice, simmering hostility, and wasted opportunities has brought us to the point where many Canadians of both our primary cultures see no better solution for their problems than a senseless disruption.

To say that the peace of this country is threatened and its very survival called into question by the present turmoil in the Province of Quebec and the unthinking reaction of many in "English" Canada is to labour the obvious. The thesis of this editorial, however, may seem rather less obvious, at least to some readers. It is this: that the Canadian churches ought to respond to the threat of disruption by accepting the preservation and strengthening of the Canadian Confederation as a top-priority concern in the area of Christian social action.

We must not underestimate the inevitable cost of a breakdown of Confederation. The immediate effect of separation would be the ending of a social and political experiment, begun almost accidentally two centuries ago, when Great Britain accepted the "French fact" in the valley of the St. Lawrence, and hopefully continued by generations of large-minded statesmen. But the chain of events could not stop there. The end result of disruption would surely be the complete absorption of the severed fragments of Canada into the American Empire—a development that neither the United States nor the remnants of Canada would be able to resist indefinitely. It is hard to see how either of these occurrences could be welcomed by the churches of this country.

The political disruption of Canada would be a triumph of intolerance and anger over justice and charity—a confession of the failure of two civilized peoples to fulfil the responsibilities and grasp the opportunities which history has brought to them. In an age distracted by exclusive and rabid nationalisms, the failure of an historic experiment in tolerance and co-operation would be a tragedy which Christians, dedicated as they must be to reconciliation, could not view with equanimity. Moreover, any attempt to separate the

two main strands in the fabric of our common life would result in incalculable human misery. It is an exaggeration to speak of English Canada and French Canada as "two solitudes." For all our too frequent mutual indifference, we are bound together in many a community and many a family. Have French-Canadian separatists or their English-Canadian counterparts actually counted the human cost of their respective irresponsibilities? Surely their churches should be trying to recall them to a remembrance of their common history and an awareness of their mutual responsibility.

But let us suppose (someone may say) that the worst does come to the worst; surely even this cloud will prove to have a silver lining. If the destiny of the fragments of a shattered Canada lies in an eventual reconciliation in a greater United States of America, why worry too much? In the twentieth-century world a picayune nationalism is obsolete, and even if we have to learn that lesson the hard way, it will be better for us to learn it the hard way than not to learn it at all. Surely it is a step towards a healthier world order when old national entities are absorbed into a larger community and old national rivalries are buried.

We must agree that unqualified national independence and uninhibited national self-expression are one of the great dangers—perhaps the greatest danger—of our times, and that the nations must learn to see themselves as responsible to a wider society if our race is to survive. But it is far from self-evident that a spectacular territorial enlargement of the United States would be a contribution to a genuine internationalism. American national self-assertion already expresses itself in disquieting ways, at least vaguely reminiscent of the less desirable behaviour of the great empires of the past. Is there any reason to suppose that the further aggrandisement of the United States would be a step towards a more orderly world? To put the question concretely, in terms of this spring's events: would it be a good thing for President Johnson to have more and more Marines to deploy around the Caribbean and elsewhere?

The Kingdom of God does not stand with the survival or fall with the demise of political communities. Nonetheless, Christian responsibility compels us to take the welfare of our own political community and the good order of the world community seriously. Unless the argument of this editorial has been completely beside the point, this means that Christian responsibility calls the Canadian churches to play a truly constructive role in the Canadian crisis of our day.

Given the past history of English-French relations in this country, must we not recognize further that the heavier burden of responsibility falls on the predominantly English-speaking churches? It is not for them to propose technical solutions for constitutional or economic problems. But it is their indubitable task to foster the spirit of reconciliation in English-speaking Canada and to call for concrete and substantial expressions of goodwill from the people and the governments of the predominantly English-speaking provinces.

The Board of Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church of Canada gave a fine lead to all our churches in its brief to the Dunton-Laurendeau Commission. Its call for a fair provision of French-language schools to serve French-speaking minorities in the "other nine" provinces was perhaps the most constructive proposal ever made in the area of English-French relations by a Canadian Protestant church. Let us hope that other Canadian churches will be provoked to a godly emulation by this commendable action on the part of one church.

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