

Editorial

THE CHRISTIAN MORALIST IN 1966: SOME RANDOM REFLECTIONS AND QUERIES

THE "NEW MORALITY" has many prophets, inside as well as outside the Christian churches. Since in practice this "new morality" often turns out to be nothing but the immorality condemned in 1 Corinthians 5-6, with a little perfume from 1 Corinthians 13 sprinkled over it, traditional moralists not unnaturally suspect that those who commend it are up to no good. Under the circumstances they might even be pardoned for wondering whether we should hear talk of "new morality" at all, were it not for the notorious fondness of vice for the appearance of virtue. Yet at least one countervailing point should be taken into account. While all too many traditional moralists have been narrowly preoccupied with personal (and especially with sexual) behaviour, not a few of the advocates of a "new" sexual "morality" have displayed a creditable sense of economic and political responsibility. Consequently, sweeping denunciations of their "immoralism" can hardly carry much weight; the only effective response to their challenge will be a morality deeper and more comprehensive than theirs.

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Speaking recently at the United Church of Canada "Camp Meeting" in Berwick, Nova Scotia, the Reverend J. Raymond Hord asked: "What is the church saying about planes from the largest so-called Christian nation of the world dropping bombs upon the poor, confused people of Viet Nam?" (Report in the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, 2 August 1966, p. 13.) Presumably Mr. Hord is acquainted with the statements made by Pope Paul VI, by the members of the World Council of Churches' Conference on Church and Society (Geneva, July, 1966), and by other responsible churchmen—but he remains dissatisfied. Can we doubt that he is right? Admittedly, the situation in Viet Nam has been long in the making and now seems almost hopelessly tangled. But surely the entire Christian community in the United States and other Western countries ought to be saying with one clear voice that an acceptable solution cannot be found through the intensification of furious violence against helpless people. Are the Christians of Canada concerned even to the point of wanting to find out what has really been going on—let alone to the point of encouraging their government to pursue its peace-making policy more boldly?

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The province of New Brunswick is one of Canada's less prosperous provinces, and such wealth as it enjoys is very unevenly distributed among its people. Unhappily, the division between grinding poverty and relative affluence coincides to a great extent with linguistic and religious divisions.

In recent years and months the young Premier of New Brunswick, the Honourable Louis Robichaud, has been taking decisive steps to equalize (*inter alia*) standards of primary and secondary education and municipal services throughout the province. The "backlash" among English-speaking New Brunswickers has been strong—and in some cases almost unbelievably vicious. This *Journal* holds no brief either for or against Mr. Robichaud. But whether he has been mainly right or wrong, mainly wise or unwise, the attitude of some professing Christians towards him has been nothing less than shocking. Men being what they are, it is understandable that the "haves" of the province should question measures which must inevitably touch their pocketbooks, and above all that long-favoured financial interests should look askance at tax reform. But we might well hope that serious Christians would be ready to subordinate short-term personal advantage to the well-being of the total membership of the community. Regrettably, many English-speaking Christians, including ministers of religion, have instead brought racial and religious prejudice to the support of a politics of self-interest. No doubt there are prejudices on the other side—Acadians are as sinful as anyone else—but that is irrelevant. It is Anglo-Saxon and Protestant prejudice that provides the ideology for a stubborn defence of the *status quo*, whatever the possible injustice to "them." Is it impertinent to ask whether the Christian churches of English-speaking, Protestant and Anglican New Brunswick, which as never before is now being challenged to examine its moral position, are doing their best, at this juncture, to promote unity and concord and a lively sense of mutual responsibility among the citizens of their province?

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It seems fair to say that in our day the men and women of the greatest moral sensitivity, whether Christians or non-Christians, are both strongly opposed to capital punishment and more or less hesitant to acknowledge the morality of any form of warfare. One can hardly remain unmoved by their insistence on the dignity of the human person—whether or not they see that dignity as something sacred, rooted in man's creation in the divine image—and by their refusal to let a man's living or dying be determined by *raisons d'état*. Indeed, it seems unlikely that the Christian conscience will ever be able to set aside its testimony and relapse into untroubled acquiescence in the killing of man by man. The Editor of this *Journal* must, however, confess that he is puzzled by an apparent inconsistency in much modern humanitarianism. Many of the strongest opponents of capital punishment and war are prepared to justify ready recourse to abortion, not only as a desperate measure in obstetrical practice, but as a matter of domestic or even personal convenience. Is it really possible to treat life in the womb—even the life of a viable foetus—as morally expendable, at least for any slighter reason than the saving of another life, and at the same time to stand unshaken against the execution of a patently guilty murderer for the advantage of society or against the defence of the state at the cost of enemy lives?

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