

SPECTRUM

Positively Pink

And yet it moves

THE VATICAN/ *While its priests and nuns suffer in prisonment and death for their defense of human rights around the world, head office cozies up to far too many of the thugs.*

by Adrian Park

In the Fall of 1965, while the Vatican Council was discussing marriage and the family, and by way of an aside, contraception, Cardinal Suenens of Brussels pleaded that the anticipated encyclical on birth control avoid a biological definition of a moral issue. Such planting of moral teaching in the shifting sands of scientific understanding would be tantamount to the church attempting to define reality, and the Cardinal concluded "I beg you (the Council), let us avoid a new 'Galileo affair'. One is enough." The advice was not well taken, and in July 1968 Pope Paul VI issued "Humanae vitae... Rome had spoken and to hell with the consequences.

In October 1986, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), under the imprimatur of Cardinal Ratzinger, issued a "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons." Often referred to (somewhat inaccurately) as the "Hallowe'en encyclical", amongst its other logical and theological absurdities, the letter defined homosexuality as "an objective disorder" leading to "an intrinsic moral evil." This alone was not enough to provoke outrage - after all its merely built on earlier teaching in which ignorance was paraded as virtue. What did provoke outrage was the statement blaming "out" gay men and lesbians for the violence and discrimination they all too often face. When the dust had settled the Vatican was faced with a minority of bishops such as Cardinal Connor of New York who supported the letter of this document, and a majority who either ignored it, or openly defied it. Theologians who questioned the CDF, like James Curran and John McNeill, were silenced.

In early July this year, Cardinal Ratzinger and the CDF struck again with a letter to US bishops entitled "Some considerations concerning the Catholic response to legislative proposals on the non-discrimination of homosexual persons." This document purports to offer guidance, and an amplification of points made in the "Hallowe'en encyclical", especially with regards current legislative trends in North America to include sexual orientation in human rights codes. Such initiatives have enjoyed the support of local church authorities (such as was the case here in New Brunswick), where wiser counsel had realized that recognition of civil rights in no way endorses every conceivable "life style" an empowered group may manifest amongst

its members. Actually, the July 1992 letter improved on its predecessor in one minor way - it stated that "it is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech and actions (that) deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors whenever it occurs." A small step for a man, a major leap...

What prompted outcry in general, and outrage within the church (see the July 31st edition of the *National Catholic Reporter* for the text and some spirited responses) was the letter's insistence that there are circumstances where discrimination is not only advisable, but would be obligatory. No prizes are offered for guessing what these are - the adoptive and fostering of children, teaching, athletics coaching and military recruitment. In this the CDG goes beyond trying to define reality, it elevates lies to the level of profound insights. Amongst the tortured logic and contradictions of the July letter any notion of Christian virtue is lost. As the editor of the *National Catholic Reporter* put it "the document says the church has the responsibility to promote the public morality of the entire civil society, and indeed it does. But if the Vatican continues to exercise that responsibility in ways so un-Christian, ways so vastly out of touch with the tolerance of the gospel, who will be listening."

While researching this article, a quote from Shakespeare's *MacBeth* kept springing to mind while I read and re-read the text of the July letter, that it was truly "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." How I wish that last clause were true. But this is not the venomous outpouring of a maniac in a tent with a handful of feeble minded followers, or a spiritual pyramid salesman swindling the aged and infirm out of their life savings. This is the voice of the spiritual leader of close to a billion souls - several tens of millions of whom are gay and lesbians. To them is offered a counsel of despair.

In fact, the July letter is a transparent attempt to intervene in the upcoming US presidential and congressional elections. Having failed to turn abortion into a touchstone issue, the Vatican, like the Republican party is turning to "family values", and homosexuality. In the past, such interventions have been studiously avoided - when Popes Pius IX and X came perilously close to condemning democracy in the encyclicals "Syllabus of Errors" and "Lamentabili", the American bishops ensured that some degree of sanity prevailed. When freedom of conscience, speech, publication,

thought and worship were declared anathema, democracy was spared.

In a church that still has enormous influence in human rights issues around the world, and which enjoys a good deal of respect as a result, head office is getting increasingly desperate about its own loss of power. The July letter identifies gays and lesbians as a major threat, with more than a hint of desperation in its tone to add to a flavoring of paranoia and obsession. In doing this, the Vatican is enlisting the aid of allies in the US body politic who have very dubious moral credentials. While its priests and nuns suffer imprisonment and death for their defense of human rights around the world, head office cozies up to far too many of the thugs. While the Vatican maintains an embarrassed silence on the utterly misplaced compassion expended on pedophiles in its clergy, it blasts gay men and lesbians with a doctrine rooted in fear and hatred. But then again, the CDF was once better known as the Holy Inquisition, and human rights were never a high priority with those gentlemen.

Progress of GALA

The first meeting of G.A.L.A., passed successfully last Monday with a total of fourteen participants. The main conclusions of the meeting (which was followed by an in-promptu social) were as follows:-

1) A drop-in centre should be available regularly and frequently, allowing gay students to meet, "come out" and socialize. This is now a reality, every Friday from 7pm, unless otherwise stated here. For the venue and other information please call the F.L.A.G. gayline on 457 2156 (Mondays and Thursdays 6-9pm).

2) Gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and gay positive students are all welcome to the forthcoming events. This includes people from both UNB and STU.

3) A video-social will occur this Friday, 9th October at 7pm. The feature film "Parting Glances" will be shown. Sponsorship allowing popcorn will be available! Bring soft drinks if desired. For venue phone 4820, today ONLY.

4) The next discussion meeting will occur on Friday 16th October at 7pm, to be followed by another feature film. All ideas for possible activities G.A.L.A. could provide would be extremely welcome. Mail is received at: GALA, UNB Help Centre, Student Union Building.

Metanoia

The Charlottetown agreement

ANALYSIS/ *Will the agreement remedy the injustices of the past?*

by John Valk

Canadians are at an important cross-road in their history. Crucial choices must be made about the future of our great country, a country envied throughout the world. A fragile consensus was achieved between the First Ministers and leaders of the First Nations in Charlottetown on August 28, 1992. The Charlottetown agreement will map out the constitutional contours of Canada's future.

As Prime Minister Brian Mulroney stated, the agreement is a "compromise"; it is not a perfect deal. Is it, however, "fair and honorable"? And, "will [it] strengthen Canada"? What concerns and principles will guide Christians in their decision-making at this crucial juncture? These questions need to be addressed before the October 26 referendum.

The biblical call to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8) speaks to us now as perhaps never before. This includes correcting oppression, defending the fatherless and pleading for the widow (Isa. 1:27). As people of God we must heed the call of the Lord (Mk 9:35; 10:45; Mt 25:40) to bring healing to those disadvantaged, oppressed and marginalized in our society. This is the perspective out of which we speak. It is also to recognize that the governments of this land must act as a shield for the weak and powerless.

In time when our society is overwhelmed by self-interest ideology, we are challenged to consider not our own immediate material advantage, but the socio-economic well-being of the poor and powerless. Will the agreement bring some measure of liberation and justice to these neighbors? Will it remedy the discrimination and injustices of the past? Do not ask what this agreement will do for you - the well-off and the advantaged - but what it will do for those whom our society has alienated and exploited for so long. Does this agreement represent a window of opportunity? Will it encourage us to build a stronger more just society, a society in which human dignity, mutual respect and responsibility, social justice and responsible can flourish? God's invitation speaks loud and clear to all Canadians. Love, compassion and genuine solidarity ought to define our actions, and be extended to those who have been disadvantaged in Canada's past and present.

This rationale must guide us in our decision making, lest we be trapped by values foreign to the Gospel. Issues of marginalization, poverty, individual and collective rights will not be resolved in the October referendum. They will continue to challenge us regardless of the outcome. At this juncture, however, we must affirm the important gains made by the agreement.

The inclusion of the inherent right to self-government of the Aboriginal peoples is a true historic breakthrough. The fundamental rights of First Nations are finally acknowledged and constitutionally protected. The affirmation of Quebec as a distinct society is an essential recognition of the cultural and linguistic diversity of Canada. The commitment to gender, racial and ethnic equality, to individual and collective rights and freedoms, to the preservation and development of a national social and economic union, is a reflection of Canada as a nation unique among others. These advances are healing steps forward at this point in Canadian history.

Canada has not achieved a perfect deal with the Charlottetown agreement. There are serious shortcomings and omissions. The referendum ought not to be considered the end of the debate, however. More opportunities to discuss and act on these issues will arise. There will be more occasions to wrestle with the worsening socio-economic crises, the human suffering due to high unemployment, the lack of adequate housing in our inner cities and rural areas, the increasing poverty in the Atlantic and other regions.

The Gospel calls us to share the abundance we have with others, and to give our lives for others. God's call to servanthood at this time of crisis, recession and poverty is a real challenge to the Christian community to take seriously Jesus' call to be reconcilers and healers, to care and share. The Good News offers peace and reconciliation to all persons and communities. It also calls all of us to be a public witness, to be "salt and light" in the world.

Canada is a beacon of light in a world full of despair, exploitation, hunger, torture and abuse. We are called to be Good Samaritans in the modern period, to devote our lives to serve the beaten and the broken.

The Charlottetown agreement may well be a significant step on the way to national reconciliation and justice for all.

(With notes and editorial assistance from Gerald Vandezande, National public Affairs Director, Citizens for Public Justice, an ecumenical research and public advocacy organization based in Toronto. This article, plus an Open Letter to First Ministers and leaders of the First Nations, will also appear in Catalyst, newsletter of Citizens for Public Justice)