

Antilles Bishops speak on Black Power

For the Bishops of the Antilles to meet in formal session without studying and commenting on the phenomenon of Black Power would be unrealistic. But we have been faced with serious difficulties. The socio-economic conditions of the several countries we represent differ very much in many cases, with the result that the impact of the ideology of Black Power varies. Then there is the difficulty of the various interpretations of the term "Black Power" by adherents of the movement and by those not involved.\

SOME TWIST THIS MOVEMENT

There are those who twist the movement into an evil thing. They see or use it as a call to inverse racism, separatism between the races. They preach a philosophy of license to hatred and violence and call their philosophy "Black Power". Such a philosophy we must reject as Bishops, priests, and followers of Christ.

However, seen through the eyes of some of its thoughtful advocates, Black Power is an entirely different thing. For them, it is a force meant to lead toward the eradication of racism and all its social, cultural and economic adjuncts. For them, it is a cultural force which is devised to awaken in all men a sense of their universal brotherhood – a political and economic programme which is intended to put an end to a history of degradation and minimal progress for black people. Such a philosophy is basically Christian.

WE WILL PROMOTE THE GOOD

Though mindful of the real and imagined distortions of the Movement known as Black Power and conscious of the violent abuses perpetrated in its name, we, the Bishops of the Antilles Conference, pledge ourselves to seek out and vigorously promote the good to be found in the Movement.

As pastors of our people, we share in their anguish and genuine aspirations for social justice and the basic right to be regarded as persons of worth and dignity. And so, we would welcome any opportunity to communicate with the leaders of this movement. There is no reason why we cannot work together to build bridges of true brotherhood, to enhance a sense of personal dignity among all our people and to establish true social justice in our lands.

LET US RECALL THE DEDICATION OF OTHERS

Looking at the past history of our territories, we might do well to recall and not to reject the constructive and selfless dedication of many Christian ministers, both local and foreign, in the cause of racial justice and equality. Many of them spent their lives for this cause, precisely because they saw the same problems as do some of the founders of Black Power. In fact, it might be said it was the work of such dedicated men which created the climate in which the nobler aspirations of this movement might be realised.

Today there still remains much to be done. Emancipation from slavery and political independence have now come to most countries. But, still, in too many areas, the God given dignity of the black man is not being recognised. It is regrettable that we have to admit not only the historical involvement of Christians and Catholics in the evils of slavery but also the refusal by not a few today to embrace fully the lesson of the equality of all men.

GOSPEL GIVES POSITIVE LEADERSHIP

For positive leadership we have guiding light of the Gospel and the Church's teaching, especially as found in the documents of Vatican II "every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language, or religion is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent ... let them put stubborn fight against any kind of slavery, whether social or political, and safeguard the basic rights of men under every political system". (The Church Today, no. 29).

DEVELOPMENT IS A NAME FOR PEACE

We share the anxiety of many about the full authentic freedom and the complete emancipation of our people, and about the progress of our countries. Yet this must be done in a constructive way and with peaceful means. Peace is not the mere absence of fighting, the inertia of the indifferent, the complacency of people without vision or ambition. We, too, must make ours the expression favoured by Pope Paul VI and U Thant: "Development is a new name for peace".

LET US USE NON-VIOLENT MEANS

It is with this in mind that the Church continues her service in the field of education and social development. Let all men of good will join in such constructive work. Let all those who have been blessed with this world's good realise their special obligation and responsibility. Let our young men and women, who increasingly are given opportunities for education and training at the highest level, after completion of their training work for the development of their own country. Let all use the non-violent means based on the Gospel, namely, the force of truth, justice, and love, rather than the force of war, killing, and hatred. The power of men is best shown in his integrity and his work.

Finally, every country that grows economically and culturally, also needs that "supplement of soul" which consists in the recognition and fostering of the spiritual and moral values of prayer, the worship of God in spirit and truth, generosity, self-discipline, and concern for one's neighbour. And this, we feel, is the task of all.

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