

Reflections.
Bishop Richard Wood.

The Deanery Synod of the Church of England in Hull, where I now live, recently passed a motion “That this Synod deplores the grant by the World Council of Churches to the terrorists of the Patriotic Front operating in Rhodesia.”

It was pointed out that the fund to Combat Racism consists of donations given for its declared purpose. It does not draw from the general income of the World Council of Churches. The money was given for the humanitarian needs of the Patriotic Front, which has many thousands of women and children in refugee camps. Support for them confirms that the Patriotic Front is an authentic part of the liberation struggle and must be seen as essential to the solution of the problem of racism in Rhodesia.

A senior visiting clergyman from Tanzania was present and said not a word. I was surprised by this. Later I asked him why he had not felt obliged to comment. He said he was ignorant of events in Southern Africa. Activists had come to him asking for his support for the liberation struggle, but he had never responded. “I will pray for you” he had said. “God knows what is happening, and He will put it right.”

I find that there are many Christians who, when faced with a controversial problem, opt out and say “Leave it all to God.” A woman who had spoken against the motion at the Deanery Synod, came to me in tears of frustration after it had been passed by a large majority. I warned her what to expect against a background of the conservative Church of England. A sort of piety, as well as the ‘Kith and Kin’ prejudice, strikes deep at the heart of British society. If this were not so, the situation in Rhodesia could never have developed to its present critical proportions. It was a serious inaccuracy not to differentiate between the World Council of Churches and its Fund to Combat Racism.

It was sheer prejudice to call the soldiers of the Patriotic Front “Terrorists”. The Rhodesian army has been responsible for terrible massacres. Indeed, one asks who the “terrorists” really are.

The liberation struggle in Rhodesia cannot truthfully be described as a terrorist activity. The members of the Patriotic Front are - patriots. They’re responding to an unjust, illegal regime in their own land. It is right for us to ask them to consider the long-term value of non-violent resistance. In fact, the liberation movement started as a non-violent organisation. The continuing economic support of the Rhodesian Government by South Africa, with the collusion of western companies, and the implicit knowledge of western governments, created immense frustration.

Remember the oil and the chrome! The belief developed that only military intervention would bring the desired change. Presumably the United Kingdom acted on similar reasoning in the Suez crisis, and in all the many wars we have fought and, in our preparedness, to fight today.

What I am saying does not applaud the use of military force to solve problems and does not support any acts of brutality. What I am pointing out is that within traditionally Christian nations, there’s often a false piety: false whenever it’s a cover-up of our national prejudices in the name of a sentimental love!

God acts through people. He has no physical body here except our own. The man who’d been mugged would still be lying by the roadside if the Good Samaritan had not gone to his

help. Of course, a Christian should pray, but prayer does not exempt us from acting. It should show the right way and strengthen our wills to act.

Richard Wood.