

BIAFRA . . . the children's war

(This report analyzing the Nigeria/Biafra situation was written by an Irish-born missionary priest who helped initiate the night flight flights to Biafra.)

By FATHER DERMOT DORAN
(NC News Service)

The war between Nigeria and Biafra was almost a year old before it caught the attention of the world.

Then overnight, radio, television and newspapers were vying to reveal the horrible plight of thousands of starving children. The world was concerned and aroused.

The churches took the lead in organizing emergency programs to get food and medical supplies through the military blockade to the innocent victims. Religious differences were brushed aside and a major ecumenical venture was launched. Joint Church Aid, a consortium of Catholic and Protestant relief agencies (with financial support from the Jewish groups in the United States), was formed to airlift supplies to the blockaded enclave. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) followed suit thereafter.

Soon the imagination and support of people all over the globe was captured by herculean death-defying efforts of the combined churches to break the blockade by hazardous night flights and roadside landings in dense rain forests.

Governments, who until then had remained silent, came under pressure from shocked citizen groups and

outraged youth organizations and began to contribute food and some planes to the humanitarian efforts of the churches. This was done grudgingly and sparingly, considering the magnitude of the tragedy.

At the same time they pointed out their political and diplomatic position. This was, and still is, quite simple and direct. Nigeria is a member nation of the United Nations and has relations with most major powers.

The degree of support varies according to vested interest. Britain, the Soviet Union and Egypt give all-out military support. Unlimited supplies of tanks, armored cars, guns of all descriptions, as well as MIG fighters and bombers, and naval craft are made available to Nigeria and no bones made about it. The standard British attitude is: "We have to maintain our influence and protect our economic interests," to quote Lord Sheppard speaking in the House of Commons.

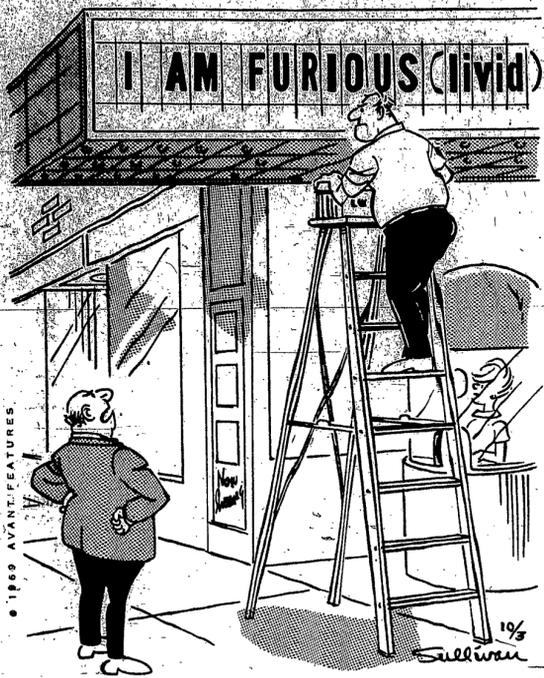
The United States, while refraining from military support for either side, nevertheless, has been less than neutral in its diplomatic and economic support of Nigeria. Even the generous relief supplies to Biafra have been limited to what the State Department feels it can safely supply without incurring the hostility of the Nigerian government.

France, on the other hand, has not only given moral support to the Biafrans but also, it appears, either contributes or allows some military aid through two of its former African possessions, Ivory Coast and Gabon, both of whom officially recognize Biafra.

All of this makes a mockery of the attitude of the United Nations and its stated reasons for its impotency in the whole tragic affair. To quote the words of Secretary General U. Thant: "It is an internal affair of a member nation and cannot be discussed at the U.N."

Surely, however, the most convincing argument against the whole conflict is the death of almost two million people, most of them helpless, innocent children and women. In actual fact, the only ones gaining from the war are arms manufacturers and suppliers, and the foreign investors in Nigeria, especially the oil companies.

One or two vital facts must be recognized. First, that the Nigerian/Biafran war has become a Great Power conflict and not solely an African question, as many governments like to view it. Second, the only Great Power that has preserved any flexibility in the matter is the United States. The longer the U.S. delays in using its leverage (not unilaterally, but in concert with other responsible nations), the greater the number of innocent young lives lost, and the greater the likelihood that Africa will be reduced to cold war adventurism, economic stagnation, and continued bloody civil strife.



"DO ME A FAVOR—STRUGGLE WITH YOUR RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS AFTER YOU GET THE RIGHT TITLE UP!"

COMMENTARY

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ALL IN THE FAMILY

Where Blessing's an Event

By Sarah Child

"Bless us O Lord and these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy bounty through Christ, Our Lord, Amen."

The traditional Catholic blessing before meals seemed to be getting short shrift at our house.

In the first place the brief, repetition of formal words written by somebody else seemed particularly conducive to rapid fire delivery without too much thought to meaning.

And since the children in our house are still very young, the previous almost little or no comprehension.

My parents love to remind me of a meal that occurred when I was about seven or eight. Piously folding my hands, bowing my head and uttering the blessing with great fervor and intention I came to the last Amen, raised my head and looked to see what my mother had set before us on the table.

Without missing a beat I bellowed indignantly, "Oh, beans: Is this all we're having?"

Now with children of our own, my

husband and I were beginning to realize after similar situations at our table that our little ones were learning words rather than appreciation.

Then, too our delivery was getting to be so fast that if anyone wanted to add an extra thanks or two, say for instance, for a safe trip home or the fact that much loved relatives were sitting down with us, we really had to rush to throw it in.

Thus we came to the decision. Instead of saying the formal prayer at every meal, why not vary it at times by saying the children say in their own words, such as:

Our four-year-old daughter looked a little worried when we put the question to her.

Her two-year-old brother just knocked over his milk, put his foot on the table and pushed his chair over backward as he is wont to do frequently at meals.

"I'll start you off," I told our daughter.

"Tonight why don't you just say something simple such as 'Thank you for my food, dear Jesus?'"

"Later," I told her, "you may add more as you think of different things you'd like to thank Jesus for."

Red-faced and shy, our normally outspoken little girl mumbled something, ducked her head in our arm and the rest of us deciding that that must have been the end of her prayer, made the sign of the cross and began to eat.

Two months have passed since our experiment was started.

She has become proficient in giving thanks, if somewhat redundant. Not only does she refuse any help in composing her prayer, but she is firm as to its content.

It has now evolved to "Thank you for my food, Dear Jesus. Thank you for everybody's food. Thank you, Dear Jesus. Thank you. Thank you, Thank you."

It is not exactly poetry. But, it is making an impression on all of us. Now her brother clasps his hands together and chirps "Kew (Thank you) Food" before he knocks over his milk and sends his chair reeling backwards.



COMMENT FROM ROME

3-Way Look at Vatican Synod

Three long-time observers of the Vatican scene, all with considerable expertise in the operation of the Holy See and first-hand knowledge of the papacy and the man who now holds that office, gave the Courier-Journal their views on the progress of the Synod of Bishops to date in an interview.

The clergymen permitted use of their specific statements, here presented in composite, not to be attributed directly to them.

They are the Rev. Vincent T. O'Keefe, assistant to the Father General of the Jesuit Order; the Rev. Edward L. Heston, secretary for the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and Vatican English press officer for the Vatican Council and the first Synod; and the Rev. Francis McGool, former assistant to the Father General of the Jesuit Order.

By ROBERT HOLTON
Courier-Journal
Special Correspondent

Vatican City—As it seems to shape up now, there are three views of collegiality being urged in the synod. One calls for a hands-off policy when it comes to the primacy of the pope. Another calls for a co-responsibility in the operation of the Church. And the third is in the middle trying to get the other two sides to reach some sort of compromise.

There is the theological question which it now appears will be turned over to the Vatican theological commission. I think this is a smart move because these men at the synod are not theologians. They are organizers and practical men.

However, some say the theological commission is being used as a waste basket by the synod fathers. I do not believe this. They merely realized theological implications and definitions for collegiality are out of their scope of competence.

You might say that by going ahead now and setting up some ideas for a practical application of co-responsibility before they have a real definition of collegiality the synod is putting the cart before the horse.

But they have no other choice. They must set up the beginnings of

collegiality on a practical basis and then see if the Vatican will agree to go ahead on an experiment. The Holy Father approved the agenda and it calls for discussion of the practical ways of attaining collegiality and co-responsibility. So I think he must have wanted ideas.

From what the Holy Father has said in his speeches and the fact that he has sat in on so many hours of synod deliberations, I must say that I can see no signs that he will not buy a legitimate experimentation suggestion.

The bishops already seem to have agreed that responsibility can be shared. They seem to feel the disciplinary and pastoral matters should be left to the bishops and filtered down from there.

When it comes to doctrinal matters — matters of faith or morals, they seem to feel that this falls into the college of bishops under the pope. But this also leaves it upon the pope in these matters to decide how much advice he wants to take from his bishops. He is still boss.

I would say that if these ideas are approved by the pope it will be a step forward. I would be inclined to hope for more but I will be satisfied if at least this much is put into practice. Then we have to wait for other synods and top meetings to work for greater sharing of responsibilities.

The deliberations in the synod have been free of pressure from the Vatican. The talk has been frank and open. Nobody seems afraid to speak his piece, even with the Pope sitting there in the hall in front of him. But the talks and criticisms of the Church have been within bounds. No one has gotten bitter or out of line.

Having the Pope sit in on the sessions has been great. It is being taken by the synod fathers as a real sign of collegiality and a sign that the Holy Father is taking these men seriously.

I agree that the theological question about collegiality should be farmed out to the commission. This will not waste the time of the synod arguing about something which few of them are really equipped by training to do.

Now they must move ahead and get to work on the down-to-earth

practical schemes for bringing collegiality about. Experiments along these lines can be settled here and now at this synod.

The practical things of which I speak are such matters as the exact relationship between the bishops' conferences and the Roman Curia. We will need structures for this. Perhaps a permanent synod is the thing. Some see such a permanent structure as taking over some of the work of the curia. This would give the bishops of the world a say in policy making and would make the curia people members of a sort of civil service which carries out what the pope, in conjunction with the curia and the bishops of the world, decide needs to be carried out.

As to what the theologians might find in their study of the matter, I say that all the power is in the pope and he passes it on. This is fine. But in this day and age of rapid change and fast communication, more consultation should go on between the bishops and the curia and the pope. And the pope should be more liberal in his sharing of responsibility with the bishops. This is the way I think the majority of the bishops in the synod are thinking at this point. I find it very encouraging. I also see no conflict here with primacy.

Among the matters I find the synod fathers more and more agreeing on is the local or regional naming of bishops with the Pope approving them. They also seem, many of them, to feel that episcopal conferences should have a stronger voice than papal nuncios in the selection of bishops and other regional matters.

In setting up structures for experimentation, I think the synod must be cautious to make them general so that as time goes on they can be adapted to the many national and cultural differences in the Church throughout the world when it comes to practical and pastoral matters. What could be good for one area might be harmful in another. These structures must be set up scientifically as you do in any worthwhile experiment.

Generally, then, I would say I find the overall tone of the synod deliberations very good. I think the Pope's speeches and his conduct have created an air of optimism among those who hope that collegiality really is going to be put into force.

ON THE RIGHT SIDE

Of Signs and Their Meaning

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE APPOINTMENT OF BISHOP-DESIGNATE HOGAN?

Very glad. I like him personally but that's beside the point. Bishops are overseers who must shepherd their flock. It is more important that they be good shepherds than that they be popular. Furthermore, I like the way he wears his hat!

WHAT DOES THE WAY HE WEARS HIS HAT HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

In 1927 I worked as a clerk for Dowd-Leo haberdashery shop in Auburn. The Stetson hat people sent a folder to the store on how to size up a man's character and personality, for the purpose of selling Stetson hats. From their psychological studies they had concluded that a chap who wore his hat cocked on the side of his head was less interested in quality, durability, costs. If he wore it cocked toward the back of his head he was even less interested.

If the hat was on the left side toward the back of his head, don't even suggest anything! He knows it all. Don't alienate him as a prospective customer.

On the other hand, the folder continued, the man who wears his hat straight on his head is concerned about quality, durability, costs, as well as appearance. He wants to know about these before buying the hat. He is concerned about appearance. But he is concerned that the appearance continue through quality.

AND NEW BISHOP HOGAN?

He wears his hat in the middle of

his head. It is not an infallible indication of personality and character, but I think his case gives credibility to the theory.

He has a strong concern for appearance (image of the Church), quality (orthodoxy and charity), durability (firm, wise administrative procedures). They're all there, right under his black hat.

WHAT DO YOU THINK HIS REGIME WILL BE LIKE?

That depends on the Holy Ghost working not only in him, but in the priests and Sisters of the diocese. Priests should be extensions of the bishops. Sisters should be special collaborators with him, under his direction, in their own dedicated realm. The people of the diocese are solid, loyal and concerned.

HOW DO YOU THINK HE WILL FUNCTION?

I don't belong to the prophetic school. But judging from what I know of him, my guess would be this: He is scholarly, experienced in academics and administration; and also in pastoral work. He knows his priests well, and has taught almost a generation of them, so he will utilize them for the good of the Church with first hand knowledge.

Since he is from Lima, and taught in Geneva he will be sensitive to the areas "south of the Barge Canal."

He is judicious rather than sentimental. While he is a model of urbanity and graciousness, he will have the cold steel of objective judgment.



He will be cordial without being sentimental. And I think he will be calmly decisive with troubled spots and troubled people.

WHAT ABOUT BISHOP SHEEN'S DEPARTURE?

Many priests can be effective shepherd-bishops and administrators. Few have the genius to proclaim the Gospel to the millions. Bishop Sheen has that genius: in TV, radio, books and lectures.

Recently Father Tormey sent me a clipping from the N.Y. Times. It was a long article about a fundamentalist Protestant preacher named Rev. Armstrong. He is a minister of an off-beat denomination founded by his own father a few decades ago. Though the church has only 600,000 members, Rev. Armstrong broadcasts to a listening audience which the polls indicate is 24,000,000 every week! I have seen the program. It is simple, attractive and effective. What has the Catholic Church to compare to it?

Since Bishop Sheen has a charismatic effect on people, my hope is that he will return to TV to proclaim the Gospel to the millions. This, I think, is what St. Paul would do.

A FINAL QUESTION? HOW DO YOU WEAR YOUR OWN HAT?

When I was a young priest I wore it tilted on the left of the head — but not on the back. One day in my forties I looked into a mirror. The hat was square in the middle, and I remembered the Stetson hat folder. Do you think men arrive at maturity in their forties?

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