

Editorial

Cultural Incongruity

The 1972 book "Fire in the Lake" by Frances Fitzgerald is an enlightening study of American intervention in Vietnam. Early in the book, Fitzgerald points out that many of the difficulties of American involvement in that country and the eventual failure of our policy there can be traced to a complete cultural misunderstanding. The point made by the author can easily be applied to American policy in Latin and South America, as well as to the daily affairs of all people dealing with cultures — ethnic or otherwise — that are vastly different from their own.

Fitzgerald writes: "By intervening in the Vietnamese struggle the United States was attempting to fit its global strategies into a world of hillocks and hamlets, to reduce its majestic concerns for the containment of Communism and the security of the Free World to a dimension where governments rose and fell as a result of arguments between two colonels' wives. In going to Vietnam the United States was entering a country where the victory of one of the great world ideologies occasionally depended on the price of tea in a certain village or the outcome of a football game. For the Americans in Vietnam it would be difficult to make this leap of perspective, difficult to understand that while they saw themselves as building world order, many Vietnamese saw them merely as the

producers of garbage from which they could build houses. The effort of translation was too great."

The Americans in Vietnam perceived that a variety of circumstances in Vietnamese life and politics needed improvement or change, but failed to recognize that those circumstances were the product of Vietnamese culture and centuries of tradition. They applied their values to a situation that was incompatible to their whole intellectual pattern, and they could not understand why the Vietnamese did not see the overwhelming merit of their suggestions and actions.

Oftentimes, people of good conscience apply their values to a set of circumstances — whether in world affairs or the everyday worlds of individuals — and decide that those circumstances need changing. But in doing so, they may fail to gain the perspective of those people affected by the circumstances — be they the people of Vietnam or Latin America, the poor in our own cities, or any group or organization that doesn't seem to meet certain standards dictated by those values.

In order to really improve any condition, we must fully understand why the condition exists and how change will affect those involved. We must also determine whether the change will really be an improvement or merely make us more comfortable within our own value systems.

Division of Urban Services



The Division of Urban Services, in its first two years of existence, focused on helping parishes in urban areas maintain existing programs and developing new programs.

Now, Rev. John Mulligan, division director, says it is time to widen that focus. Father Mulligan says, "This year our division will try to focus on MINISTERS as well as on MINISTRIES, more on people as well as programs."

This new focus will involve supporting and updating people already involved in urban ministry settings and in training new people to become involved in urban ministry.

Ms. Becky Gifford, as Associate Division Director, is coordinating a major effort toward the training of experienced as well as new urban ministers.

Preparation for cross-cultural ministry has been identified by our urban personnel as their key need. Three committees comprised of urban personnel are helping design a multi-level training process with the assistance of Sr. Maria Jose Tresch from the Maryknoll Center for Mission Studies.

The cross-cultural training process will involve training in both language and culture here in the Diocese as well as 4 to 6 weeks intensive experiences in language and culture in the United States and Puerto Rico.

Father Mulligan pointed to the close similarity between urban ministry and missionary work. Priests, religious sisters and brothers, and lay men and women entering either kind of ministry are involving themselves in a cross-cultural experience in which they may become isolated or discouraged because of a lack of mutual understanding.

"The Division of Urban Services includes the departments of the Hermanas Guadalupanas (Mexican Sisters), Office of Black Ministry, the Spanish Apostolate, and Urban Subsidies," Father Mulligan pointed out. "Each department is involved in cross-cultural ministry so we need the training just as much as the people we serve."

Father Mulligan said that while this year's prime focus is increased concern for ministerial people in urban settings, there has been no lessening in the division's commitment to existing programs. The division, responding to a mandate given by Bishop Matthew Clark, will increasingly focus on other urban areas within the 12 county Rochester Diocese.

Commenting on the work of his division, he concluded, "We count on the continuing prayers and support of all the people of the Church of Rochester to serve new areas in the Diocese and we strive to call more effectively forth the gifts of our urban people and empower them to know and share the Good News of Jesus Christ!"



And opinions

In crisis, Ireland needs help from United States

By Brother Patrick T. Flanagan, S.J.
For the past 18 years, every July and August have been the most difficult, violent months in Belfast and Northern Ireland. In recent weeks, we have all witnessed on television and read news reports in which children and young people have participated in violent scurrillages with the British troops in Portadown, Belfast and Derry. It always hits a peak with the commemoration of Orangemen's Day, July 12, and Internment Day, August 9. Always, the children are involved in the violence and in large numbers. The concerned in this country constantly ask: "Can't this be resolved?" "Can't we help them?"

Margaret Thatcher's ringing series of "No's" to the proposals of the New Ireland Forum left many perplexed and depressed, wondering just what she wants.

It is important that the American people and the U.S. government do everything possible to be supportive of the present Anglo-Irish peace talks. All reports indicate that they are at a critical crisis in their efforts to find peace now.

The proposals that the prime minister dismissed out of hand were the product of long and arduous work by a variety of Irish leaders. The forum was composed of political and social leaders from most of the nationalist parties, North and South, as well as intellectual and religious leaders from both areas; the Unionists chose not to participate. The forum met throughout most of 1983 and reached consensus on those proposals the prime minister dismissed. The goal of the forum was to seek common ground upon which all political factions, in the whole of Ireland, could be called to sit down together and take a fresh, realistic and honest look at the terrible problems confronting the Irish people, seeking consensus on new approaches that might finally bring the heart-rending violence to an end.

The prime minister's harsh reaction was a putdown for John Hume, a leading architect of the forum, and other Irish members of the British Parliament elected to sit in the House of Commons by their constituents in Northern Ireland. Clearly, the Irish unionist politicians, including their members of parliament, are unlikely to give serious consideration to anything coming out of a gathering of Nationalist political leaders if they feel Margaret Thatcher's comment reflects the thinking of the British government. It must be said that in all likelihood, her reaction was heavily influenced by the Irish Republican Army's acknowledged bomb attempt on her life, which killed some close friends of the prime minister a short while before she issued her "No, no, no." Nevertheless, that rejection was but one of a long history of rejections suffered by the people of Northern Ireland and indeed by all the Irish people at the hands of the British.

One of the worst experiences a person or people can suffer is rejection, being left alone, having backs turned on them when they are suffering and in despair.

The gospel message commands that we love one another. We are obviously not doing that when we turn guns and bombs and plastic bullets on one another. The gospel message demands that those of us who are free and wealthy respond to those confronted with turmoil, confusion, hopelessness and violence. The good news of the gospels constantly stresses the importance of the person and the dignity of the individual.

We must respond with generosity. The United States cannot continue to ignore the people of Northern Ireland in their confusion and despair while we are so capable of helping them with our able healing and reconciling talents. Our country's debt to Ireland is well-known. We have an obligation as a free people with a responsible government to offer these repressed people our professional resources, talents, wealth and influence.

It is important that more and more Americans become informed about the Northern Ireland question, and it is impor-

tant that they do it now. The present situation there requires some insight into Irish history, with particular emphasis on happenings in 1920 through 1922, 1968 and 1969.

The U.S. government can make a major contribution as peace maker by offering to serve as facilitator and mediator to encourage all factions in Ireland and England to work toward reconciliation.

We have the capability to do that as proven by the Camp David process. Our cost and investment in the effort would be miniscule and could bring wondrous results.

Mahatma Gandhi, in the remarkable movie bearing his name, tells leaders of the British Empire that one day England will walk out of India, and of course, they did shortly after the end of World War II. Gandhi visited Ireland and expressed his sympathy for and empathy with its suppressed people. One day the British will walk out of Ireland. The spectacular new film "A Passage to India" and the currently popular television series "Jewel in the Crown" both chastise England for its condescension toward harsh treatment of the people of India. All three productions evidence the glaring similarity of English imperialism as practiced in India and Ireland.

Ireland is an island. Its real estate is Irish; all its land Irish; its plants, its trees, its air Irish. It is a single soil with all its precious people being Irish. And its native and adopted sons and daughters have a single heritage. The brutality and violence have to come to an end, and the United States must move swiftly to play its essential role.

Make up your mind now to do your part. Dialogue is essential to peace. Write your senators and congressmen. Ask that they support New York Assemblyman John C. Dearie's proposal that the president appoint a peace envoy to Ireland. Let the envoy convey to England the message that the people of the United States are conscious of their ties with and obligations to the people of Ireland, North and South. Let the envoy work to encourage prompt commencement of the peace process to allow for the sharing of the honest fears and aspirations of all parties. Let us make our best mediation talents available to the process and commit American industrial know-how and financial aid in accomplishing mutually acceptable goals. Get the process moving. Make your contribution for peace now. This has to be stressed with telegrams and letters to congressional representatives.

Possibly the children in this complex arena of violence could be the motivating factor for us to help them find a peaceful solution. Otherwise, the children and young people will be at it again next August, with violent demonstrations as they commemorate Internment every year.

Writer questions thrust of 'liberation' in Mexico

To the Editor:

I read the article about Bishop Rafael Garcia Gonzales ("Ministry vs. politics: A question of prudence," C-J Sept. 4) and Tabasco, Mexico. If we (the diocesan mission team in Tabasco) had illegal visas, let's keep the law. It's Christian. If they hail us in court, the governor or judge will not have an excuse in conscience for his acts.

I'd also like to ask what the bishop meant about evangelization, liberation and (religion as) an opiate. Does he mean that preaching the gospel frees (people) from sin, stopping sleepiness to eternal values? Or does freeing (people) from physical, political injustice come first? Jesus said one time that His kingdom is not of this world or else His disciples would have fought. Then, by the end of the week, He liberated from sin those who believed, and revealed the resurrection of the just and the unjust. The power is in the sacraments.

Stephen McManus
42½ Seneca St.
P.O. Box 441
Hornell

Guidelines

The Courier-Journal welcomes your opinions. Letters must bear the writers' signatures, full addresses and telephone numbers. They should be sent to: Opinion, Courier-Journal, 114 S. Union St., Rochester, N.Y. 14607

Opinions should be brief, typed, double-spaced, and no longer than 1½ pages.

We routinely condense letters, edit offensive words and libelous statements, and reserve the right to reject letters. Generally speaking, however, only limited grammatical corrections will be made, and the letters will reflect the writers' own styles.

Because submitted opinions exceed the space reserved for letters, we publish only original letters addressed to us. We will not use poetry, open letters, or copies of letters sent to other publications or persons. To ensure diversity, we limit each writer to one letter per month.