WHAT'S IN A NAME?

by Bernard Zylstra

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One way of understanding the Christian Labour Association of Canada is to look seriously at its name. In this article I will present some reflections about each of the four main words that constitute that name. In no way will I try to be exhaustive.

Christian

With the word **Christian** in its name the CLAC breaks with the practice of identifying a labour union by its geographic habitat, as one finds in the **Canadian** Labour Congress and the **American** Federation of Labor. By daring to use the word **Christian** the CLAC is making its position clear about the nature of religion and the relationship of religion to society. For the CLAC religion is the human condition; it is the totality of mankind's existence on earth before God. One can say that this existence has three basic foci or directions: man's relation to himself, to his fellows, and to nature. The CLAC asserts that the covenantal bond between God the Creator and mankind the creature embraces all of the other relations. The bond with God is not *in addition* to the relation with one's self, one's fellow, and one's natural milieu. The bond with God is the *root* of them. In dealing with labour relations, the CLAC wants to start from this root. Herein lies its radicality. The CLAC confesses that the meaning of man's brief earthly existence lies in his openness to the love of God, which man is called upon to image in the way he values himself, his neighbour, and the earth with its wealth of resources.

Quite clearly, therefore, by the use of the word **Christian** in its name the CLAC is affirming the reality of God. It is not in the least satisfied with the vague moral content which just about everyone is willing to associate with this word. In affirming the reality of God, the CLAC posits a view of man, of society, and nature. For **Christian** does not only imply an affirmation of God's reality and the possibility that one might search for him by means of the intellect, emotions, or a mystical experience. No. The word **Christian** does not in the first place mean that men can seek after God; it means that God seeks mankind in the love manifest in sending Jesus Christ on earth to die on the cross, rise from the grave, and ascend into heaven, where he rules in redeeming majesty. Further, the CLAC confesses that God in Jesus Christ has revealed, made known, his good will for the life of men and women in Holy Writ, the Bible, *his* rule for *our* faith and life. "The Christian Labour Association of Canada bases its program and activities on the Christian principles of social justice and love as taught in the Bible." Thus stipulates Article 2 of the CLAC Constitution. It took a long time for the courts of Canada to acknowledge the rightful place in society of a labour union with such a basis. But the courts *have* acknowledged that right.

In wanting to be a Christian labour union, the CLAC is out of tune with the dominant direction of the modern age. By "the modern age" I mean that phase in history where the leaders of culture reject religion as the mainspring of life and claim to find that mainspring elsewhere, notably in the human will (either individual or collective) or in history (the accumulation of mankind's experience in time.) **Modernity** in this sense is *secular* because it entails the rejection of divine revelation as the guide for both private and public affairs. It replaces that guide with

the human will, and in that sense the modern age can be called the age of *humanism*, at least until 1900. By describing our age as modern I also have in mind the pervasive notion of *progress*, namely the largely unwarranted conception that today is better than yesterday, and that tomorrow will be better than today because the human will is bound to make it better. To be modern is to be progressive. To be modern is to eliminate the impact of revelation and religion, and to reorder society accordingly. Hence the leaders of culture in the modern age set out to build a new society which embodies the human will. In the building of a new society, the inheritance from the past that is considered not to be an expression of the human will must be destroyed. In this sense, modernity is *revolutionary:* it rejects the revelation of the divine rule as the foundation of human affairs; it sets out to eliminate the impact of such revelation in the culture inherited from the past; and it projects itself toward the future where it will erect an earthly paradise. Like the Christian spirit, the spirit of modernity is *radical*. It desires to go to the root of the matter. And the root of the matter in the modern age, as Marx once put it, is *man*. That is the heresy of modernity. Its horizon is confined to man.

In this dismantling of the old and in the erection of a new social order, the adherents of modernity are not of course equally radical. The most radical wing—the left—has indeed expressed itself in actual revolutions, in the attempted destruction of the old society and in the imagined reconstruction of a new society. Such attempts were made in France in 1789, in Russia in 1917, and in China in 1949. The conservative wing — the right — though it is fundamentally "modernistic" in outlook since it takes history as its autonomous guide, prefers to slow down the process of secularization and modernization. The moderate, liberal wing of modernity—the centre—wants to make sure that the social order indeed finds its basis in the will of man, preferably the individual will, but it wants to establish certain limits on the expression of that individual will so that the fruits of past civilizations are not entirely eliminated and that the common good is not entirely left out of consideration. What is left, centre,

Karl Marx (1818-1883)

or right in the options of modernity of course depends on the local situation. It is quite different in Canada from what it is in England, Poland, Russia, China, or Nigeria.

The modern age does not begin at the same time in every place. Roughly speaking, it began in Italy in the fifteenth century, in France in the sixteenth, in England in the seventeenth, in Germany and North America in the eighteenth, in Russia and South America in the nineteenth, in China and India and Japan in the twentieth century. The first great impact of modernity in the Arab world is occurring right now, with the acceptance of materialism along with the oil monies, and the silent subversion of Islamic religion and customs.

All of this does not mean that religion has disappeared in the modern age, certainly not in those countries where the conservative wing of modernity is predominant (Spain, South America), nor in those where the moderate modernists are in control (Western Europe, Great Britain, Canada and the United States). Even the most destructive expression of modernism in Russia, eastern Europe and probably in China, has not obliterated religion entirely, as the witness of Solzhenitsyn testifies. For the nature of man, though manipulable by political ideology and the experiments of the social "scientists," is not so readily revised. To be human, man needs the openness to the love of God and neighbour.

Nonetheless, the role of religion in the modern age has drastically changed. Religion has lost its true character as the channel of divinely revealed authority for the entirety of the human condition. This does not mean that one cannot believe in God in the modern age. Evidently millions of people—apparently the majority in Canada and the United States—do believe in God. But this subjective belief in God does not at all guarantee the acceptance of the revelation of God's good will for men, even on the part of those who do believe. And if revelation is accepted, it is limited to the spheres within which religion is still allowed to "play a role," namely in the private domains of one's life: personal devotions, the family, and the church. But religion is not allowed to enter decisively the more public spheres of education, politics, economics and the media unless—and here

we note an important phenomenon within modernity—unless religion can serve to provide additional power to the leaders of culture. In other words, religion is allowed to function as *civil* religion in the public realm, as an *ideological* support of the social order which the proponents of modernity desire at a particular time and place. Hence that curious synthesis between religion and the right as well as between religion and the left in the modern age. An instance of the former can be found in the support of Hitler by both Roman Catholics and Protestants; an instance of the latter can be found in the social gospel and in the theology of liberation.

In the light of the above it is clear that the major institutions in our society have a modern, post-Christian foundation. This is true of the state, whose foundation—justice—is equated with the consent of the governed, the will of the majority. This is true of education, where truth is the preference of teacher or student. It is true even of those areas that we have forced to become "private," such as the church which has been so broken in the modern age that we can indeed exercise the autonomy of the human will in selecting "the church of one's choice." And the family, without which no society can exist, is systematically undermined by the falsehoods not only of the departments of sociology and psychology in the modern university, but even more subtly by the distortions of the media, especially television.

Can the momentum of modernism be halted? Can our society find its roots, its moorings, its stability again? Can the order of the Creator be expressed in the order of society? The CLAC has **Christian** in its name in order to explore the answers to these questions.

Labour

In the Bible labour is given a dignity in the affairs of men, alongside of other facets of the human condition—worship, the rearing of children, the care of the poor, doing justice in the gates of the city, etc. Labour, like the rest of life, is considered holy before the Lord. God placed man in the Garden of Eden to till and to keep it. Work is a divine mandate, a sacred calling, to fill the needs of men and women, children and children's

Adam Smith (1723-1790)

children. In the brokenness of sin, work becomes toil performed in the sweat of our brow. But work itself is not a degrading activity. The work of our hands is not less significant in the hierarchy of human tasks than the contemplation of the mind and the attention of the heart. They are all equally the object of redemption, of God's blessing.

> *Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish thou the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*
>
> *(Psalm 90)*

In the context of the Biblical ethic, work is to be done in community. For we are members one of another. (Eph. 4:25). Work leads to fruits which are to be shared with those over whom we are responsible but also with the needy, the powerless—the orphan, the poor, the alien, the widow. Work extracts strength and fertility from the earth. Hence the earth must not be tilled only; it must also be kept, protected. It deserves its own rest, its sabbath once every seven years. In short, in the Bible the worker, his work, its products, and its recipients share in the holiness of creaturely peace.

In the modern age, work slowly loses its creaturely setting of peace. The modern age demands work, labour, toil. Without it, modernity is at a loss. Christianity offers the world peace, but having rejected that, what alternative can modernity offer? It is the "peace," the "satisfaction," the "happiness" of material abundance. The pursuit of that happiness is fortunately not the only but, I dare say, the most characteristic feature of modernity especially in its recent post-humanistic trends.

The pursuit of happiness via the acquisition of material abundance has passed through several stages in our society. With John Locke we had the phase of private property; with Adam Smith the phase of the free market; with Herbert Spencer the phase of the free enterpriser; with Karl Marx and Henry Ford the phase of industrial production; and today, as Daniel Bell puts it, we have the phase of post-industrial society, that is, the phase of leisure in which material abundance can be enjoyed more fully by more people than ever before.

But before leisure has become universal, labour is necessary for

the realization of material happiness. Thus with its materialist premise, the modern age always felt the need for glorifying labour. As a matter of fact, for a long time the Biblical view of the dignity of work readily provided an ideology, a rationalization for keeping the masses at work. He who does not work shall not eat! But it should be noted that there is a basic difference between the Biblical and the modern conception of work. In the Bible, work is a divinely given task to be performed for the good of the community. In modernity, work is necessary to acquire material abundance. For this reason even Marx, especially in his early years, praised labour highly. He then viewed man as *homo laborans,* a labouring being. For only through labour, through man's conquest of nature's potentials, can an earthly paradise be achieved.

But in reality modernism's praise of labour is contradictory. Labour itself is not dignified; only its fruits are and the consumption thereof. This means that deep down especially the work of our hands is despised as unworthy of man—unless he is a slave. It is tragically fascinating how easily the proponents of modernity defended and practised slavery, supported by an accommodating Christendom. But from this vantage point the great discovery of the modern age is the invention of the machine which could not only take the place of the slave but, so it was hoped, would one day take over all of the labouring tasks so that man himself can exercise the inalienable right of leisure.

Modernism's conception of labour brings with it a number of curious problems. Because work itself was viewed as unholy, as below the dignity of man, the technological apparatus that we devised since 1800 to take over the work of our hands is indeed unholy, unworthy of the dignity of God's image bearers. For one thing, it has proved to be an illusion to eliminate man entirely from the labour process. Millions are still involved in industrial production, and increasing millions are required for the production of leisure. But their involvement in the labour process is, in many cases, humanly demeaning, alienating. The machine that we have devised thus contributes to the further deterioration of man's creaturely status. This is not an inherent fault of the machine, but

John Locke (1632-1704)

it reveals the mistaken demands that we have placed upon the machine.

Moreover, since we demean work, we debase the worker. We do not expect the worker to take pride in the work of his hands, so we force him to be satisfied with his paycheque and a shorter workweek, bimonthly long weekends, summer as well as winter vacations, and early retirement. In these non-work factors we build the meaning of work. We live to play, hence we work to play, but then work as little as possible in order to play as much as possible. But in this light it is not at all surprising that neither the corporations nor the labour unions are much interested in making work and its conditions good. We see no sense in that goodness.

Further, because of the replacement of human work communities by technological apparatus (of which the human person is an objective, "thing" extension), it is extremely difficult for us to solve the problem of unemployment. It is generally considerably cheaper to pay the unemployed a minimum income than to restructure the work community in such a way that all who can work do indeed find employment. In any case, we do not want to lower our own income in order to create work for others.

At the same time, the very premise of modernity — happiness lies in the acquisition of ever more goods—is an obstruction to the solution of the inflation problem. For the pursuit of material abundance on the part of every major segment of the community—management; the workers; the so-called service 'industries'; the educational, medical, and legal professions; the unemployed; the senior citizens—is so intense that a balance between production and consumption has been impossible to maintain during the last ten years in every major industrial country. Especially since the depression and the second world war we want to consume more than we can possibly produce. Italy and England are symptoms of a shared disease.

Nevertheless, the laws of economizing cannot be permanently violated. This means that the costs of our materialism must be paid, if not by us then by others. The costs are paid by our natural envir-

onment which we are quite willing to exploit. The cost is paid by the weak and poor among us who are not members of one of the power blocks. The cost is paid by future generations, whom we deprive of their share of the earth's resources consumed today. (Who was concerned in 1950 about the fact that in the cold winter of 1977 there would not be enough energy for homes, schools and factories?) The cost is paid by those nations whose labour and whose resources serve our consumption *demands* often at the expense of their own consumption *needs*. (During the famine in countries south of the Sahara a few years ago natives died of hunger and thirst while agribusinesses in these same countries continued to export fancy foods for the markets of Rome, Vienna, and Paris.) In a real sense, we all pay the cost of our materialism, not just by hard cash but by the imbalance in our daily life created by the striving for a paradise that, like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, forever eludes our grasp. This imbalance is not corrected by the non-economic sectors of society; rather, the latter are intensely caught up in the monetization and commercialization of our culture. This can best be seen in the function of governments, whose former role as ministers of the rule of law has changed into agents of the welfare state. The central task of governments has become continuity and expansion in both production and consumption. In view of this our governments are virtually powerless to attack the root causes of inflation, unemployment, imbalance of payments, waste, third world poverty, arms production, etc.

Finally, modernity's view of property and labour entails not merely a demeaning of the worker but also the sacralisation of the technocrat. This results in the fracturing of the local work community between "management" and "workers." They are not viewed as members of a common work community but are placed at opposite poles of an adversary relationship, each group competing for the largest share of the proceeds of production—at the expense of harmony in the factory or at the jobsite, of quality in the products, and of the consumer. Unions in Canada and the United States have accepted this adversary character of labour relations, and our governments, notably since Franklin Roosevelt's Wagner Act of 1935, have inscribed this adversary system in our labour laws. Hence the the strike is not the weapon of last resort; it is gradually becoming the instrument we first resort to, in Canada even more so than in the United States, not only in the industrial sector but also in the areas of education, public services, police protection, and even hospital care.

Who was concerned in 1950 about the fact that in the cold winter of 1977 there would not be enough energy for homes, schools and factories?

Without a doubt, a very profound restoration of the meaning of labour is needed in our society. Its debasement functions like a leaven, affecting every segment of the social order. Its restoration can also function like a leaven, unnoticed perhaps but bringing healing where today there is so much suffering, material and spiritual. This is the challenge of a Christian **labour** association.

Association

That challenge can be met in a variety of ways. But why does it also require a Christian labour **association?** Are the available avenues not sufficient? Earlier we saw how modernity has greatly confined the role of religion in our society. But even then this restrictive impact of modernity has not destroyed every link between religion and labour, religion and politics, and religion and education. These links are mainly present in those spheres where religion is still allowed a home: in the life of the individual, the family, and the church. The significance of these links must not be underestimated. With respect to the sphere of labour, the personal commitment of the individual worker (in management, production and distribution) to honesty, fairness, good workmanship, dependability, efficiency, stewardship, and comradeship, can definitely alleviate the excesses of a materialistic culture. Especially in the smaller production units, in the area of distribution, and also in the pattern of consumption, such individual personality traits, often based on religious conviction, have contributed to the maintenance of genuinely human conditions in the economic sector.

Moreover, the family in our society has in many instances been the home where such traits of character, moral strength, and religious convictions have been nourished. Thus from the outside

the family has indeed made possible a healthier economic life. But since it is a prime unit of consumption, the family itself can still play a weighty role in the redirection of consumption patterns in an age of materialism. Whether the family will be able to do that in the context of its increasing fragility in our time—due to the moral erosion of home and school as well as the immense pressure of the media—all that remains to be seen!

Furthermore, the church, which is called upon to articulate the faith by which persons and societies are to live, and which for this reason clearly ought to be the institutional and spiritual vanguard of civilizations, should have a phenomenal impact on public life through its witness in word and deed. The church also bears that responsibility towards the world of labour and industry. The first place where the church as an institution ought to exercise that responsibility is the preaching of the Word, in the congregational setting of the Sunday morning worship service, and in the denominational setting of national and ecumenical "proclamations." The wisdom of the Bible on matters of labour and its products is so profound that preachers and priests will not readily exhaust it. And the churches, both locally and denominationally, can so reorder their internal economies that they are pointers of stewardship and economic responsibility in a time of waste.

Thus a defence of an association of Christian labourers, established to act as an agent of reconciliation and healing, should not occur at the expense of other agents of normative social change. Nevertheless, the Christian Labour Association of Canada from its inception has properly recognized that these avenues are not enough — either singly or together. Let us mention a few of its reasons.

19th century textile mill in England

In the first place, the CLAC has called our attention to a view of the church as the Body of Christ that we are not quite accustomed to. In its struggling with this immensely difficult question, the CLAC has thought it proper to reject the ecclesiocentric conception, found in the traditional Roman Catholic Church and in contemporary World Council circles, which holds that in the final analysis the institutional church and its organizations are the foremost agents of the gospel in the actual decisions of society in economic and political matters. Towards the other side of the ecclesiastical spectrum, the CLAC also rejects the individualistic ecclesiology dominant in the "nonconformist" churches, which holds that the individual believer, quite on his own, is the sole Christian agent of social change. Instead, the CLAC, without denying the indispensable role of the churches and its individual members, posits the thesis that Christians ought to band together within the supposed secular constellations where today the spirit of modernity dominates.

It does so on the basis of the assumption that Christians are members of the Body of Christ, which is the new humanity in which the spirit of the Gospel dwells. This new humanity is not identical with the institutional church, but is the body of people whose hearts are open to the love of God, who are willing to do the Master's bidding, and who for that reason are "members one of another" wherever they happen to be. That corporateness ties believers together first of all around the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, but also in the diverse structures within which we perform the tasks necessary to keep a highly complex society together. In other words, the CLAC recognizes that not only the way of being Christian persons but also the very manner of being the Body of Christ can, even must, vary with the changes in history and the different tasks that are placed before men and women in that history.

The CLAC does not condemn the attempts of individual Christians to make the very best of it in the pragmatic, materialistically oriented unions that dominate the labour scene. It throws out the

challenge for individual Christians to take a stance on the basis of their convictions wherever they can—within the secular union and within the secular corporation. But it is aware of the rule of history that, apart from exceptional circumstances, *social* change does not come about by *individual* witness. Hence it proposes a way of Christians being "members one of another" right within the sphere of labour in order to contribute, wherever possible, to a redirection of the work practice in the economy. Taking on even the smallest slice of that assignment requires that Christians hold hands together in an organized manner. That has been the method of every significant effort toward change in the modern era. Here Christians can learn from socialists.

The CLAC is searching for tactics of witness within the structures of the post-Christian era of western culture. That search is never finished. It is conscious of the dangers involved in placing the word **Christian** before **association.** How can an association be Christian? The risks are great. But the CLAC asserts, quite rightly I think, that the risks in being Christian are not inherently more dangerous for an association of believers — joined together in the realization of a Biblically directed aim — than it is to be Christian for a church congregation, a denomination or, for that matter, for an individual believer. They all face the perennial temptations of worldly prestige and power and hypocrisy; and none of them can escape the impact of our social milieu, the pitfalls of materialism. But in order to face these temptations and to escape these pitfalls, we are called to be a hand and a foot to one another, and we can never say "I have no need of you." (1 Cor. 12:21)

The CLAC knows that the collective bargaining contract puts the stamp of approval on the materialist demands of our time, negotiated in the compromise between the powers of management and the powers of the big unions. The CLAC does not discover much of the Biblical conception of work, profits, property, stewardship, and solidarity in the contracts bargained for during the last fifty years. It knows that a change must occur right there — at the bargaining table—to find out whether unionism can still escape the clutches of the materialist ethic.

We do not expect the worker to take pride in the work of his hands. . . .

The CLAC is small, since not many Christian workers are concerned about changing their commitment to the pursuit of material abundance. The CLAC is not represented when the collective bargaining contracts are negotiated and settled in the industrial centres — Oshawa, Toronto, Oakville, Hamilton, Calgary, Vancouver. But that predicament makes it all the more adamant in pointing to the lack of freedom of association where it really counts, namely where today the monopoly of workers' representation is given to the monolith of the majority union. Hence the CLAC is battling for the kind of plurality of representation in labour relations that we still enjoy in the political sphere, so that legally protected avenues can be opened to Christians and non-Christians for a concerted internal restoration of economic responsibility within the business enterprise.

Canada

The CLAC has been part of Canadian history for twenty-five years. That, even in the life of a new world nation, is short. It should of course not be forgotten that the CLAC did not fall out of the clear blue Canadian sky a quarter-century ago but that it grew out of a rich tradition of Christian social thought and action in western Europe. The CLAC is still nourished by that tradition, and is proud of it. But it knows that its contribution must be made *here*. And the CLAC knows that Canada is today one of

the greatest nations where the fight for social justice and economic stewardship can still be fought, tough though it may be. It desires to join that battle on the basis of its Christian premises, fully realizing that Christianity played a crucial role in the founding of this nation and in its evolution. The CLAC is conscious of the fact that during the last half century the movement for social justice in Canada was often led by Christians, ministers of the Gospel even, whose work contributed to the early developments of what is now the New Democratic Party. It only regrets that the Biblical teachings

concerning the Kingdom of God, which so clearly inspired the defenders of social justice, have been largely watered down in a lukewarm pragmatic socialism.

The CLAC is convinced that the time has come to pick up the threads of authentic Christian social concern in Canada's past and to create a tightly knit, flexible and enduring Christian cultural fabric as part of the future Canadian mosaic. With intense anticipation it observes the signs of spiritual renewal found in nearly every segment of the Christian church in Canada, hoping that these awakenings will not be merely emotional "ups" to be inevitably followed by

emotional "downs," but that this time they will have cultural and social staying power. At least for now the CLAC rejoices in the potential change in the attitude toward social and political issues even on the part of the evangelical wing of Canadian Christendom, with which it is spiritually akin but with which it has been at odds for so long because of the close link between evangelical piety and an individualistic stance in political and economic matters. The CLAC hopes that evangelicals can sever their bonds with the rightist wing of modernity without jumping on the bandwagon of its centre or left, as so many Christians in Europe and South America have done under the impact of the synthesis between Christianity and Marxism.

What is needed is a concerted effort on the part of Christians to arrive at a better understanding of the reality that is Canada today. This is essential because every effort toward social and political transformation can only concretely begin at one point: the present situation. I would like to mention a few facets that stand out in "the Canadian reality."

One way of understanding Canada is to take note of the fact that its overwhelming neighbour is the United States. I hate to limit myself largely to this point, but it does make sense. For the reality of Canada is that it has lived in shadows, first in the shadow of Great Britain and now in the shadow of the United States. How can that shadow become our challenge? How can Canada and other nations in the western hemisphere give shape to their own destiny in distinction from the destiny of the USA, which will remain for a long time the most powerful presence on our geographic horizon?

We force him to be satisfied with his paycheque and . . . winter vacation

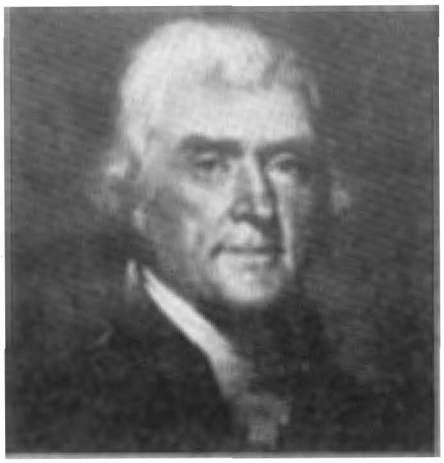
What is the USA all about? How are we to understand its magnitude? The USA is an extraordinary phenomenon in world history. Earlier I spoke of the three major directions within modernity: the radical left, the moderate centre, and the conservative right. The USA is the vanguard, not of modernity, but of its moderate centre. This in part explains its phenomenal success if we apply the measuring rod of modernity: the creation of material abundance for the greatest possible number of people. Because of its moderate stance within the "spiritual" spectrum of modernity, the USA never as much as flirted with a radical, once-and-for-all revolution which leaves the cultural heritage of the past in shambles and — because of the resultant social chaos and anarchy — establishes the demand for a centralized dictatorship that we find in Moscow and Peking.

Why did the USA opt for a moderate, centrist stance — a choice comparable with the one of English-speaking Canada? I will venture a few suggestions. Ever since the time of the Reformation, Anglo-Saxon culture entered the modern age with the tactic of accommodation: enough of past institutions and customs were maintained to guarantee social stability; but at the same time enough changes were realized in philosophy, science, inventions, technology, and economic expansion (both via the colonial regime abroad and industrial production at home) to satisfy most of the material needs of the masses as well as the acquisitive demands of the socially powerful segment of the population. Because of this *gradual* accommodation to the spirit of modernity, England provided the opportunity (except for a short hectic period which led to Cromwell's republic) for a very fundamental but slow political revolution and the proper atmosphere for the industrial revolution. This gradualism allowed the underlying shift from the classical-Christian view of man as a religious being with a spiritual centre to the

modern view of man as a psycho-biological entity with material needs to occur almost imperceptibly. But occur it did nonetheless, as the entire tradition of modern British philosophy, from Thomas Hobbes to A. J. Ayer, tellingly testifies.

The USA inherited the Anglo-Saxon accommodation with modernity. Its founding fathers felt more at ease with the reasonableness of John Locke than with the radicalism of Rousseau and Diderot. But why then did the USA develop into a great political and economic power precisely at the time when its spiritual ancestor declined, when the British Empire disintegrated? For one thing, the USA was not hampered by the cultural "ballast" that England always carries with it. The USA could almost start its empire from scratch. After the problem of government was settled with the Declaration of Independence from England in 1776 and adoption of an excellently functioning Constitution in 1789, the USA was ready to take on the North American continent. It was able to establish an empire right at home because the native population of Indians was sparse, and could thus be killed off or placed in reservations—something which was wellnigh impossible in Europe's colonies of Asia and Africa, and at least considerably more difficult in South America. The negro slaves constituted a substantial labour force, especially during the early agricultural phase. This was expanded by what is probably the most important migration of peoples in history: between 1820 and 1920 about thirty-five million immigrants, mainly from old Europe, entered the USA. As a result of this migration, these peoples largely lost their spiritual and cultural roots — they became "ethnic groups" — and were thus more readily prepared to join the pursuit of material happiness which the "new world" promised the "old." The immigrants supplied the labour force required to conquer the west and to work in the factories that began to dot the land in ever increasing numbers after the Civil War.

Because of the size of the land, the riches of its earth, the wide horizons toward the Pacific, the near absence of political frontiers, a "proper" mix of social stability and mobility, a sense of destiny, a



Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

spirit of self-reliance ("God helps those who help themselves") and self-determination to achieve that destiny, the proof of progress visibly present in the creation of an agricultural and an industrial apparatus, the USA had at its disposal just about all the ingredients needed to solve the economic problem of modernity, namely the creation and maintenance of a system that can produce the material goods considered essential for man's earthly happiness. The dynamism unleashed by the Faustian spirit of modernity requires channeling in a stable system of expanding economic production. This the USA has managed to accomplish in its bicentennial pilgrimage, and it has done so in a manner hitherto unparalleled in the history of the human race.

Having this kind of a neighbour makes it extremely difficult to maintain a distinct Canadian nationhood. In the first place, part of Canada shares with the USA a common Anglo-Saxon background as well as a similar centrist position within the spectrum of modernity. Secondly, the undermining of Canada's spiritual and cultural roots, not only in the English-speaking provinces but also in Quebec, has greatly contributed to the urge to pursue the materialism that marks the USA. Here it should be noted that Canadian unionism as a whole has for decades acted as an institutional link in this materialist homogenization of Canada. How many headquarters of Canadian unions are located south of the border? Thirdly, the USA giant, though not in need of the traditional trappings of a political empire, has increasingly assumed the character of an *economic empire:* it will attempt to impose its will on other countries when continuity in the supply of resources and stability of an international market require it. Winning two world wars greatly helped here. South America and Canada, the USA's closest neighbours, experience this imperial pressure most poignantly. The linkage of Canada's economy to USA decision-making centres, most notably via the multinational corporations, is but one example of this pressure.

Much more must be said under the heading of **Canada** in the name of the CLAC. But I have gone far beyond the space allotted to me.

Just this yet. In the light of this analysis of the position of the USA as the vanguard of industrial civilization, I think we can better understand Quebec separatism (as well as the separatist movements in the European industrialized countries). Quebec does not want to be a "French ethnic group" in a materialistically homogenized North American civilization. Neither do the native Indians. For indeed the question must be asked whether a materialist civilization, with its highly complex technological apparatus that tends to regard human nature and culture only in quantitative terms, and institutionalized in a political regime that will use its power to satisfy the demands of its economic system, can simultaneously protect the noneconomic spiritual and cultural rights of peoples within its *own* jurisdiction and *outside* of that within its wider sphere of "influence." That is a question President Carter should ask about America *itself*—its "manifest" destiny in its third century. It is also a question President Carter should ask about the role of the USA *abroad*. America pulled out of Viet Nam, not because it really understood why it shouldn't be there in the way it was there, but because America couldn't satisfy the aspirations of the Vietnamese people. But what about the role of the USA in South America and Canada? That is a question people in the USA will have to struggle with. Let us hope that a different destiny will be manifest to them at the end of that struggle.

But it is also a question for Canada. Not because Canada has to define itself — its "identity"— in terms of its relation to the United States but because Canada has to come to grips with the question *Who is man?* What are his legitimate aspirations? What freedoms and rights of persons and institutions and groupings must be acknowledged and maintained by the *single* Canadian state so that a nonmaterialist, multifacetted culture can flourish in North America—irrespective of what happens in the United States? If Canada can muster the *national* will to build *that* kind of a just society, then there might be room for what Quebec rightly asks and for what the Indians silently but longingly yearn. And *then* it might also be meaningful to keep the English-speaking provinces outside of the USA. In other words, I am suggesting that the problem of Quebec is the problem of Canada as a whole.

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It may seem as if I have strayed far away from my theme: the Christian Labour Association of **Canada.** Of course I have, in one sense. But in another sense I have not. For the small CLAC must humbly look toward the far horizons of the great land which is its home. Within that home work must be done. Labour must be performed. That is part of the human condition. That work can be a curse; it can also be a blessing. Work can be blessing if it is liberated from the materialist horizon of happiness. It can be a blessing if it is linked to the horizon of peace and joy implicit in the word **Christian** understood in its authentic and perennially pristine meaning. If the Christian Labour Association of Canada can be a pointer to the link between **labour** and **Christian** at this stage of the modern age, it will have made a great contribution to **Canada.** ■