

Pierre Elliott Trudeau said of Canada's relationship with the USA at a gathering in Washington DC - 'Living next to you is like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt.' which is why the Associate Priest at the Cathedral looked at me with envious disbelief when she said to me ' you really don't care what the US think do you?' - she was envious because I was so confident in my own views - perhaps a common failing of the clergy - and disbelieving that anyone could be so naive.

Her reaction to me was a little kinder than the vicar of a thriving parish near the Airport - she intererrupted my careful reading about the dreadful abuse of First Nations children in the old Residential Schools to tell me without a shadow of doubt that it is all my fault - my fault because I represent the old colonising empire - but also my fault because I had come to Canada from the Church of England - here was the mother church being imperialistic and colonising and abusive all over again. It boosted my ego to realise that I am such a very important player in church and state foreign policy!

So you can see I had a lot to learn ! I thought of choosing the hymn 'Hills of the North rejoice' not only because Little Cornard is such a good tune - but because of the old words - the words which I grew up with and sang as a child.

"Shores of the utmost west - that's Canada and the USA to you and me - ye who have waited long - unvisited, unblest it really is no wonder that the shores of the utmost west think us arrogant and disrespectful - - and even worse, it's no wonder that we are arrogant and disrespectful - we we're taught to be so from such an early age and we kept on singing it until the 1990's !

I lamented with the same priest only a couple sundays ago that three years in Canada has made me unhappily sensitive to all this. She suggested that I may have become more sensitive to the power of language in the mouth of a white anglo-saxon protestant male, but my unhappiness is surely because I'm not allowed to get away with it. And I'm not - I have become - it seems - a stranger and a pilgrim - with no homeland to call my own. I have not lived in Canada long enough for its long winters, vast distances, magnificent landscapes and generous hospitality to have become my home and yet I have been away from England long enough to feel uncomfortable and confused here where I

was born and grew up - struggling with the exchange rate and with a cultural alienation so great that I don't even know how to ask for a 'un cafe corse' in a UK Starbucks ! I am stranded mid-atlantic - either all at sea or stuck in frozen immobility, somewhere near Greenland.

But the dangers of imperialistic superiority is not limited to the remnants of the British Empire, the might of the USA or - in the minds of most quebecers - to the superiority of all things french. "Only the Lord had a delight in thy forebears to love them, and God chose their seed after them, even you above all people. "

In the Judeo-Christian context of a college chapel, we freely use chosen race language about the people of Israel. The First Testament story of election - from the call of Abraham and Sarah through the exodus from Egypt - has been read and taught by many as if it has only one meaning - one chosen people - one promised land.

It is a reading of texts developed in the 19th century by leading figures such as Lord Shaftsbury, (*19th Century Zionist and later Christian Zionist theology*) - no doubt because it was so easy to transfer what they saw as

God's singular blessing on the Jewish people in the Old Testament to a new singular blessing on the British Empire and onto the Church of England in particular in these latter days - "he chose our seed after us, even us above all people' - you can hear the British political elite saying as they plotted to carve up Africa and the Middle East.

And yet old texts can look very different in a new political light and the story of a mighty conquest and occupation of the promised land by hundreds of thousands of Hebrew Slaves that we read in the book of Numbers and the subsequent removal of the Canaanites is pretty well discredited and nowadays we prefer to speak in terms of conversion, intermarriage, the rise of the agricultural classes, the decline of urban communities - and all of it a long and slow process of a developing cultural identity longing for a future rather than finding a home in a perfect kingdom - why else were the prophets so angry ! Even in the reign of King Solomon the priests did not want to be at home with his wives.

And so, although many Christians still prefer to believe a simple 'one people, one land' theology of promise, - a theology of being 'at home' - other Christians see complexity from the start and this theology of the alien

not as a mistake, which we have to avoid, but as part of God's creation vision of diversity - the very reason why God had to intervene when humanity tried to build the Tower of Babel.

For, from a Christian post-Jesus perspective, - as we have sung in the hymn 'Jerusalem the golden' just now - the promised land is no longer seen a physical geographical reality - be that Israel, the United Kingdom or the Great American Dream - for as the writer to the Hebrews so eloquently says : 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises but having seen them far off.' - For the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, these promises are not the Kingdom of Solomon and David restored, but the promise of the better country, - the heavenly city.

Hard though this would be to hear for many a nationalist, (*can you / should you have an Islamic Republic, a Christian Europe, a Jewish State?*) this letting go of our geographical home is even harder for the Church of England to hear - when so much of its identity is so explicitly national. The Church of England enjoys being the Established Church - but what would it become if it were not !

When I suggested that Anglicans in Montreal might have a role to play in bringing together politicians, the police and the occupiers during the

Occupy movement on our streets, I was accused of hubris - that I thought that the church could even begin to tell politicians how they should do their job. It was quite a clash of cultures.

And a clash which continues - for it seems, according to some newspapers, that the Church of England is once more the Tory party at prayer. If that is so, - and I don't think it is - then surely it must be the new, diverse, multicultural 21st Century Tory Party of our new diverse, multicultural 21st world not a return to Queen Anne. (*cf. The Vicar of Bray* !) Neither the UK nor Canada are the Promised Land - and we must remember always to love the city of God for which we long more than we love this sceptered isle which we possess. Even Sir Cecil Spring Rice recognised that we vow our love to our country above all earthly competitors, and that there is always the higher call to 'another country' . (*cf. I vow to thee my country, all earthly things above ...etc*)

And so, something I have learned as a minority Anglican in French Speaking Roman Catholic Quebec, - if a place where everyone is a persecuted minority - where anglophones are a minority in a francophone province and where francophones are a minority in an anglophone

America. Something I have learned from the experience of being a resident alien in a minority and non-established church situated numerically somewhere between the Presbyterians and the Ukrainian Orthodox is that identity - the promised land of being at home - is something that we can only long for, something that we seek - but it is not something that we possess. We love the alien, not just because we once were aliens in a foreign land, but because we are all aliens, longing to phone home. And, of course, as St Augustine and Albert Camus tell us, that sense of alienation and longing goes deep into our very identity as human beings. (*cf. Augustine : Our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in thee ... etc. - Camus : L'Etranger*)

And so perhaps this happy 'theology of alienation' can give us a new insight and a bit of help for the future of the Anglican Communion.

As many of you who are from other churches in the Communion already know Anglican identity is no longer about England or the Queen or the Commonwealth - nor is it to be found any more in the Book of Common Prayer and the King James Bible - many anglicans are struggling to know who they are - they want a home, finding the theological nomadic life too unsettling. Perhaps the Communion, rather like the Dean of Montreal - is

also mid-Atlantic between Africa and America - (*GAFCON and TEC*) all at sea or in the frozen wastelands, struggling to build houses and be at home when we are not yet there.

The Anglican Covenant was one such attempt to build a house and make a home - and I - like most Anglicans on the other side of the pond - am pleased that it has been put on the shelf to gather dust - another such attempt at building a house - a home - is a growing moral conservatism - and I - like most Anglicans on the other side of the pond, and I hope most here too, are horrified at the violent homophobia of much of the Anglican Hierarchy in Uganda and Nigeria.

Like many Anglicans - I am pleased that we are living in a bit of a flimsy tent. I hope for a morally generous and theologically questioning sacramental church which is prepared to live with incarnational messiness rather than within the fixed solid walls of doctrinal purity, totally safe and at home with itself. - I seek a church which enjoys the risk of eating and drinking with sinners, rather than one which worries too much about keeping it's baptismal garment spotless : a church of incarnation and grace, not a holy remnant - a church which, in faith, (*like Sarah and*

Abraham) is walking into God's future and is not afraid of learning what that future will bring - a church which is searching, researching.

In the end we are called to be not only a church of people who are strangers and pilgrims in the world, - in the world but not of it - but to be a people who feel strange and ever on pilgrimage - aliens - even inside the visible church. (cf. *BCP 39 articles - article 19* :) - that, dare I say it, the Church of England, the Anglican Church of Canada, the whole Anglican Communion - with perhaps the exception of Wales - even the Roman Catholic Church under its new pope Francis, and the Russian Church with its new found power - is not the promised land flowing with milk and honey, but is merely a tent on our desert journey - less divine even than a hippopotamus in the mud - if I can misappropriate T.S. Elliot - (*The Hippopotamus*) for we always desire a better country, we always desire a better Church.

And - if the writer to the Hebrews is right and if I can be allowed to put far far too much emphasis than I ought on just one little word in tonight's second lesson - *dio* - Therefore - it is precisely because we know that we

desire better, that is an heavenly one, - for this very reason - dio - that God is not ashamed to be called our God.

(thought - and is God therefore ashamed to be called our God when we attempt to fix truth within our own boundaries and are not open to discovering God's future?)