

Violence and Communion: Why the World Looks to Anglicanism, Or Will Pass It By

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This talk was originally given in January, 2007 at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, at a continuing education conference on the future of the Anglican Communion. As the Episcopal Church's House of Bishops meets during these days to assess their own relation to the Communion, and the Communion's leadership – either together or in smaller, more localized or even autonomous groups – seeks to respond and chart their own way forward as a Communion or as something else, some of the elements discussed in this talk seem to be pertinent: will Anglicanism be an instrument of God's providential work for peace, in Christ Jesus' power, within a fragmented world? or will she submit to that world's own dynamics of violence? Who will be the beneficiaries or the victims of these choices? What responsibilities do the societies – and churches – of the West and of the Global South owe each other and themselves in the answering of these questions?

Introduction

I am a public defender of the Windsor Report – the Report, not as an abstraction, but as received and commended by Primates and the Archbishop of Canterbury. I am also a proponent of the proposed Anglican Covenant, at least in a broad sense. And in what follows, I want in part to offer an apology for these things, although in a somewhat indirect manner. My support, in this case, has little to do with particular views about sexuality, or the Bible, for that matter (although I have particular views on these). Rather, my support is tied quite simply to a sense that the world needs this, and that God wants it, for the sake of life. So I will talk about why communion is important to me, not so much as a personal reflection; but not simply in terms of a theological analysis either. My concern is life, as I said, – the life of God shared with human beings in creating us, and in renewing us through his own self-offering, shared now in the church. But a life yearned after by countless persons caught in the turmoil of the nations' social upheavals, and the alternative to which is the dark emptiness of human social suicide.

One of the presuppositions to my remarks – one that I will not argue, although I have done so in the past – is that there has been a providential emergence of concern with something we call “communion” during this era in part because communion is tied to the providential rise of democracy in the world. By “providential” I mean simply that it is “of God”, as human history unfolds. A key Christian understanding of the godly relationship between democracy and communion is outlined in Galatians 5 and 6, where Paul links the divine purpose of human freedom with individual accountability and with bearing the burden of others. The dignity of the individual is expressed in this place, as it were, in terms of a certain kind of social love. In general the democratic impulse has been historically justified on the basis of the first side of the matter – human dignity as associated with personal freedom; but the second side of Paul's linkage is what is now

coming to the fore in public social discussion: that is, not only that there is a “common good” that must restrain the impulses of personal freedom, but more profoundly, that the notion of the individual’s created *dignity* itself is fulfilled in a particular relation to the common good. This essential and generative relation is what is in part bound up with the reality of “communion”. Without the latter, the first element in the linkage, personal freedom, becomes “bare” democracy, which is nothing other than a commonwealth of violence.

And what I want to say here, more by way of illustration than of argument, is that “communion” – communion as discussed in the Windsor Report and that the Covenant proposal is designed to strengthen and preserve -- is a particularly Christian response to the violence that is at the heart of the democratic impulse. Democracy may be a providential movement – and I believe it is, for a host of reasons -- but only because it is bound to the effective witness of the Church of Jesus Christ in her life in communion.

Return to Burundi: the shape of democratization

I want to use as a context for my discussion a nation and church where I spent 4 years of my life working, just after I was ordained a deacon back in the early 1980’s – that is to say, the country to Burundi, and the Anglican (then called “Episcopal”) Church of Burundi, in Central East Africa. In the summer of 2006, I returned to Burundi for the first time in 21 years, and spent a month there with my family – I was single when I worked there – visiting churches and church leaders, preaching, learning, listening.

I had left Burundi the last time in 1985, having been arrested, interrogated, and put on a plane out in a space of 5 hours. It was the beginning of a period of intense government persecution of the churches at the time, relieved for a brief moment only before the country as a whole descended into 11 years of civil war, set off concurrently with the terrible events of 1994 in Rwanda, and preceded by its own spasms of brutality. I suppose I could have gone back before 2006; but when a family of close friends from Britain who had also worked there returned in the mid-‘90’s, and were almost all killed, I thought it prudent to wait.

So I returned the summer of 2006 – the civil war recently over, the last major rebel group, one of many, having just signed a peace agreement, a new President having been democratically elected a year before. It promised to be a different place. And it was – and although there have been some recent setbacks, it seems to remain so. When I left Burundi in 1985, it was ruled by a small military clique, drawn from a regional clan more or less. After a previous 20 years beginning in the 1960’s of struggle, genocidal bloodshed and coup d’états, the government ran things with an iron fist – quietly, discreetly, but firmly. There were no opposition parties, there was no free press, no open (or even much quiet) criticism; difficult people simply disappeared; the ethnic imbalances, injustices, and often Macchievellian racial machinations according to which 15% of the population – the Batutsi, especially of a certain region -- held a kind of power, and 85% -

- the Bahutu -- did not, were glaringly obvious, but never permitted discussion.¹ The churches themselves, not only the small Anglican church, but the majority Roman Catholic church, had adjusted to this state of affairs. Over the entire country, there hung a leaden and oppressive cloud of silence and immobility, and the Christian communities for the most part reflected this. They were filled with genuine believers, along with many compromised individuals, frightened, collaborators, spies, and the desolate. I had always heard of the great East African Revival of the 1930's and afterwards that had sparked the spread of Anglicanism in Burundi; but its traces, in the 1980's, were difficult to apprehend; you had to uncover rocks and glance into the corners of the church, among the elderly mostly, and some young people, so see the glimmer of this remarkable spirit of openness, light, joy, and forgiveness that marked the Revival. Prayer was often monotonous, even among the "saved"; and music was sparse and droning in its constrained repression of the heart. Attendance at prayer and worship was sullen. As I sat on the plane of my deportation, looking down on the continent as I left it, I remember wondering how God was going to maintain and renew this beaten community of faith I was leaving behind.

I had kept in touch with a few Burundi, both church people and others, over the years since my deportation in 1985. But my arrest and departure had tainted me, and most of my ongoing contact was limited to a few former seminary students whom I had taught, and refugees from the wars and killings whom I had met and befriended. So my return in 2006 was truly to an unknown land. And what a change I encountered! Although 11 years of civil war and 200,000 to 300,000 deaths have left the nation's economy and infrastructure almost bereft, not to mention its psyche and heart battered, and there are few cars on the roads, and simple subsistence is difficult – nonetheless, there was a new air and sky: fresh, blowing, clear, lightened. The pall over the country and people had somehow lifted, at least to some significant degree. People were talking; there were smiles; the taboo subjects of politics and family, region and race, were being discussed; there was an energy fueled not only by desperation, but also by expectancy and, dare one say, hope itself. The President could be seen traveling about the country, riding his bicycle through the countryside. Schools were filled and overflowing – with a new decree mandating universal primary education. People had places to go.

Some of this change was palpably visible in the church and in her services. They are now filled with young people, as well as old. A confirmation service I attended with my daughter in a decrepit center near Lake Tanganyika, had 1400 people packing the mud church and standing outside, while 600 of them had hands laid upon them by the bishop. A weekend diocesan youth gathering – in a diocese 1/5 the size of New Hampshire -- brought together 3 to 4,000 young people, who spent three days and nights in prayer and song. The large new churches in the capital, Bujumbura, are being erected with the contributions of members, not gifts from outside. Catechetical work and lay education by

¹ For a deeply sorrowful, but brilliantly exposing, dossier of this situation, see Herménégilde Niyonzima, *Burundi: Terre des héros non-chantés, du crime et de l'impunité* (Vernier: Éditions Remesha, 2005). The book (published in Switzerland) is now for sale in Burundi, despite the fact that many of the political criminals – former government officials among many -- carefully detailed in the volume continue to live openly and at liberty within the country.

extension is being carried out all across the hillsides, with hundreds of local adults learning the Bible even as they learn to read. Most impressive was the change in worship: in the place of the almost mournful reiteration of the old Prayer Book, eyes downcast, melody squelched, there is now an outpouring of music, in song and dance both. Most congregations I visited had a least 3 separate choirs, of young people and of older people, of women and of men or mixed together. The cathedral in Makamba had 5 choirs. Instruments of every kind, from drums and homemade fiddles, to ancient electric guitars run by halting generators, accompanied these varied and numerous groups of singers, some in carefully sewn uniforms, others in cast-off clothing held together by pins and string. The songs are often biblical narratives, enacted dance-like with gestures and call and response exhortations. And they intersperse the same ancient prayer book service, now salted into a glorious banquet at the center of which is a new style of almost Pentecostal preaching, attended to with care, bibles opened, faces attentive.

One could say that this is simply what happens after a civil war: the young who are left look for some kind of hope, and religion is a good offer. And Burundi is young, with a third of its population under the age of 5, and half under the age of 18. Still, there is a very particular political context to all this, that goes beyond social upheaval and destruction in general. The music, for instance, derives from a very particular phenomenon: the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees from neighboring Tanzania, where much of this musical style in worship comes from. This is about a *return* of people, formed in a very peculiar setting, and their reintegration within the church and society. It is about, not only a civil war's destruction now ended, but the very nature of a civil war itself, wherein trust and obedience are dismantled while at the same time specific goals are pressed by previously disenfranchised persons and groups. This is about how AIDS, spread in the dislocation and hurly-burly of refugee encampments over years, has rendered young people desirous of a different kind of salvation than physical indulgence. This is about people expressing themselves, freely, wantonly, exuberantly, after years of constraint. This is about the rise of democracy in a previously barren land. I saw with my own eyes the raising of democracy, with its particular shape and sounds: the gifts of returning refugees, the power of physical self-expression, the open articulation of desire and hope.

21 years may sound long enough. But this revolution, enacted in only the last 10 to 5 years, has been far more rapid than anything we might imagine, sweeping along with it a host of elements that are ones we too know intimately, if with conjunctions of less perturbing events: with the presence in Burundi now of a host of foreign groups and interests, visibly marked by the signs on their vehicles – we are indeed seeing what we might call “globalization” that has opened the country inexorably to a range of democratizing forces previously kept at bay. There were always cassette tapes, and now there are CD's. But in the 1980's, you would go to a few select offices in the capital to copy your tapes; now you can download them and disseminate them around the country in minutes. In a country where the electricity rarely functions at all, and in the capital only every other day, yet there are cell phones and internet links in every village. I watched for 10 days the laborious process by which the bishop of Makamba tried to set up a satellite TV dish on his home, brought over from Tanzania with great risk, and

barely functioning – yet finally, when the generator hummed and the angle was manually adjusted, Mexican soap operas, Nigerian gothic dramas, Ugandan TV evangelists, and CNN and the BBC were able to slip into his home. An undesignated gift to the Anglican seminary of Matana three years ago was used, we discovered, for a satellite dish that, on the day of the World Cup final, brought hundreds of local villagers to the lawn in front of the seminary dining hall, where a small TV screen placed in the doorway gave them a view of Italy and France going at it. Burundi now figures as an international special interest to places like South Africa and the European Union, the Great Lakes Regional alliance of East African countries realizes that larger interests are at stake in that part of the continent and common issues must drive policy, the WHO and USAID struggle over a broad AIDS, HIV, and malaria policy that links Burundi to the world, and in two decades the country has emerged from the shadows of marginal studies of “tribal” conflict to being a gear within the great machine of global policy creation. Over and over again, I would relate my experiences in the “old days” of just 21 years ago – “remember how the Commune used to do *x*?”, I would say. And the response was always, “This is not how things are done anymore”.

Violence and democracy

Well, one might say, this is what is happening everywhere. Vignettes of the Apple-ization of the world, the UN-ization of large swaths of what used to be called the “Third World”, and so on. But it is worth going deeper. The “natural” character of the changes we see in Burundi, however rapid – “natural” in the sense that it is continuous with things we are seeing in countries from Haiti to the Philippines -- points to something coherent going on, something that is emerging, perhaps even predictably, from the past and moving according to some ordered form into the future. Perhaps we are not talking so much of a revolution as an evolution, an unfolding process of change that links past to present to future in a coherent movement. And one of the most obvious features in Burundi – as in many other nations in the last two decades – is the way that this evolution comprehends burgeoning and expanding popular violence – civil war, genocide even, and engulfing geographical ranges of conflict (in the case of Burundi, obviously including Rwanda to the north and the Congo to the West, but also Uganda and, if one wants to follow the links of the chain, the Sudan to the north). One can trace the ripples of violence in this region, but also an actual cartography of violence’s generation, according to which armies, militias, bands of roving rebels, arms shipments, money to pay for it all, and the rest travel across borders and join disparate groups in a network of insurgency and domino effects. As I have said, all this is coincident with, is concurrent with, the lifting of the leaden veil of dictatorship. What we see is violence not *opposed* to democracy, as many used to say; but as a very feature of its emergent expression. Violence itself, democratized, along with everything else.

When I left Burundi in 1985, no one had guns except the army and a few straggling rebel groups living in the mountains of Zaire across Lake Tanganyika. Today, there are rifles and pistols hidden in huts around the country. When the Papal Nuncio to Burundi, Michael Courtney, was assassinated in 2002 along with some nuns, on his way back from a diocesan visit, the murder was all carefully orchestrated through the use of cell-

phones and a cyber-ruse that was able to provide instant information from across the mountains. One of the accompaniments, indeed I would argue, one of the very elements of the rise of a democratic system in Burundi, is the spread of arms and communication technology to a range of the populace that has in the past had little access to the instruments of power that these represent.² Instead of cattle simply serving as the epitome of local prestige through their use as bride-price and such like, in the 1990's they became the currency of a widespread arms trade that moved surreptitiously across the borders of Tanzania and up into Kenya or across the Indian ocean to Arabia. Japanese and Chinese communications technology, at its cheapest, took the place of local and limited ties of authority and obedience, and gave power to individuals and separated groups to assert their interests through a range of cooperative ventures, otherwise known as resistance groups and their reactive outcomes – militias or refugees. When the Primus of Scotland, the Most Rev. Idris Jones, asserted in a November 2006 statement that “one of the best ways to help Africa is to stop the arms trade”, in particular small arms, he was no doubt underlining a reality observed by many that the international community puts more restrictions on the trade of “stamps and dinosaur bones” than on arms, to the detriment of thousands and thousands of lives. But when the Primus went on to say, in a blanket fashion, that this trade’s evil is to put arms in the hands of “irresponsible and brutal men”, as if restricting that trade has as its main benefit the restriction of brutality, that is quite false; for the arms trade puts arms into the hands of people seeking to assert their own destinies, *whoever they may be*, “democrats” of a sort, if you will, whether brutal, just, or simply confused. Here is where we see the deep connection between the rise of democracy and violence, for this is what civil war is all about: whoever you are, however you were formed, you are now free to assert your will in the face of those who would deny it. This is what the Nigerian journalist Obi Nwakamna recently pointed out in an article about his country entitled “Murder, Murder, Everywhere” (*Vanguard*, 8.20.06), where he underlined that the opening up of the Nigerian society to new freedoms after years of “brutal” military dictatorship has had the effect of arming and unleashing a citizenry, yes, one raised on brutality, but a citizenry unleashed nonetheless. The phrase “democratization of violence” is one he uses just to describe this situation.

What was brought home to me almost viscerally on my return to Burundi, then, was the way that violence and democratization go hand in hand, insofar as the former is distributed as an instrument of popular expression. And we dare not ignore the effectual companionship here. What Burundi has experienced, like so many other nations – if in different ways and according to varied timetables – is the movement from an “ordered” violence of concentrated oppression, to a dispersed violence that reflects the assertion of the breadth of a population’s diversities; the movement from a regional junta of control to the unleashed flourishing of self-assertion in civil war. Violence is always the expression of self-rule. That is the Scriptural claim of the human genealogy in Genesis, from Cain to Lamech to Noah. Engulfing violence is the expression of the spread of self-rulers.

² A list of online resources to information on small-arms and global violence, can be found at the site assembled by Anup Shah at <http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/ArmsTrade/SmallArms>.

Democratic self-assertion and its restraints

Now let me step back for moment and offer some broad definitions. I am happy to use a rather detailed description of a certain form of government to refer to democracy. It could be something like Rudolph Rummel's conservative definition, to be used as a benchmark for the historical study of governments, that "by democracy is meant liberal democracy, where those who hold power are elected in competitive elections with a secret ballot and wide franchise (loosely understood as including at least 2/3rds of adult males); where there is freedom of speech, religion, and organization; and a constitutional framework of law to which the government is subordinate and that guarantees equal rights."³ Some have referred to this kind of definition as an "institutional" description, in that it describes the existence of particular social structures according to which a democracy functions. But more recently scholars have begun to take a serious interest in the *process* by which such "stable" or "coherent" institutional democracies come about. This process, often known as "democratization", can be traced both historically and in the current experiences of contemporary peoples and nations.

Edward Mansfield of the University of Pennsylvania and Jack Snyder of Columbia University have focused, for instance, on what is involved in making the transition from, say, an autocratic dictatorship, to a "coherent" democracy stabilized by strong central "institutions" (courts, impartial executive corps and therefore security, habits of electorate, etc.). Their conclusion is that the process of democratization -- this transitional movement -- is fraught with the likelihood of violence. As we see in Iraq, without institutions of restraint, enormous powers of self-assertion are set loose. "We have found", they write, that "the heightened danger of war grows primarily out of the transition from an autocratic regime to one that is partly democratic. The specter of war during this phase of democratization looms especially large when governmental institutions, including those regulating political participation, are especially weak." "The early stages of democratization unleash intense competition among myriad social groups and interests. Many transitional democracies lack state institutions that are sufficiently strong and coherent to effectively regulate this mass political competition. To use Samuel Huntington's terminology, such countries frequently suffer from a gap between high levels of political participation and weak political institutions."⁴

By looking at democracy in terms of its coming-to-be, specific elements of purpose are identified, rather than stable structures, and these can rightly be viewed as essential aspects of democratic identity in a general way. Democratization, then, can uncover the "personality" of democracy. And in this light, definitions of democracy of a more general kind have been given, such as this: democracy is the free expression of self-assertion, and represents a context that is somehow receptively sensitive to that expression's embodiment (a summary of Mansfield and Snyder). What makes this more than a Hobbesian "state-of-nature" definition is precisely the contextual character of the

³ Rummel, Rudolph J., *Power Kills: Democracy as a Method of Nonviolence* (Somerset [NJ]Transaction Publishers, 1997).

⁴ Mansfield, Edward D. & Snyder, Jack (2002), "Democratic Transitions, Institutional Strength, and War", *International Organization*, vol. 56, no. 2, p. 297–337; citations from pp. 2 and 3.

“receptiveness”; but it must be admitted that the Hobbesian element is still present – something that, from a Christian standpoint at least, is hardly surprising. In any case, there are potential philosophical consequences to this kind of definition, of course, for better or for worse. They are ones that can move in a more “institutional” direction; they can also move in a more libertarian socialist direction, such as we see in many progressivist movements of the present. The Greek political economist Takis Fotopoulos, for instance, construes democracy in terms of a radical autonomy in which we effect “the creation of our own truth” at every turn, through “the constant questioning of institutions”.⁵ “Autonomy” here is equated with a kind of assertive subversion of the *status quo* that arises out of the individual standing over and against some corporate reality that is a “given” within society. And the democratic process is somehow the concretised enablement of this autonomous questioning.

The relationship between violence and democracy is not a standard observation. De Tocqueville wondered whether democratic nations, in their levelling of inequalities and transforming of human desire into self-protective defense of propertied *status quo*, might in fact prove *less* belligerent than others.⁶ And more recently a whole school of thought has arisen, enmeshed in current international policy debate, to put Tocqueville’s thesis to the test, something known as “democratic peace theory”. But, as de Tocqueville himself noted, the process of democratization is suffused with “revolutionary” upheaval, and (though he disagreed) many observers of his time wondered if democracies must *always* be driven by the dynamics of such upheaval, as a matter of course (ch. 21) even once they have achieved some institutional stability. And so, even today, an increasing number of scholars have not only begun studying the intrinsic character of violence within the process of democratization, as we have already noted; but they have wondered if democratic life itself is not necessarily infused with ongoing violence. The Australian Daniel Ross, for instance, has argued that the democratic ideal is by definition violent, in that it asserts a “sovereignty” – of the “people”, whoever they might be in a given instance – whose embodiment must always engage in a kind of foundational “rupture” of the *status quo* if it is to be effective at all; it is therefore a perpetual dynamic, wherein the “boundaries” between autonomous individuals and groups are constantly being reasserted

⁵ Takis Fotopoulos, *Towards an Inclusive Democracy. The Crisis of the Growth Economy and the Need for a New Liberatory Project* (London:Cassell, 1997). “The fundamental element of autonomy is the creation of our own truth,” he writes, “something that social individuals can only achieve through direct democracy, that is, the process through which they continually question any institution, tradition or ‘truth’. In a democracy, there are simply no given truths. The practice of individual and collective autonomy presupposes autonomy in thought, in other words, the constant questioning of institutions and truths.” See the material at www.inclusivedemocracy.org/index.html

⁶De Tocqueville, for instance in his famous 22nd Chapter of Section 3 of *Democracy in America*, noted that armies in democratic nations often become “restless” seekers after war, because, in a non-militaristic culture of wealth accumulation, armies tend to attract the least successful and resentful. However, this was in contrast to democratic nations as a whole, whose individualistic disciplines imbued the country with an abhorrence for violence in general, and war in particular. De Tocqueville believed that the pursuit and protection of property, among relatively equal citizens, would so consume their passions, that the culture as a whole would sink into a monotonous desire to defend the *status quo*, and violence would slowly dissipate within long-lived democracies (ch. 21).

in new patterns.⁷ Internal to a democratic nation, then, there is an inherent instability. And furthermore, today, in a globalizing network of relations, this unstable dynamic is moving democratic nations into a contradiction of de Tocqueville's thesis, that is, towards *initiating* wars, as we see in the case of the United States in Iraq.

Within the United States itself we see a society that maintains a coexistence between the ongoing forces of democratization – the violence of self-assertion in the face of resistant bodies – and the slowing current of democratic “senility”, in which the contracted defense of property desires provides little creative scope for self-assertion, but which nonetheless relies on conflictive self-protection. And the United States, as we know, is a significantly violent society⁸, wherein a tension-filled struggle exists between the energy and conflicts of self-assertion and the restraining forces of corporate and individual discipline, increasingly questioned and even attacked.

For when we speak of the “democratization of violence” we are pointing to the irony inherent in empowering the democratic process. If indeed “democracy” is bound up with expressed self-assertion, however ordered, at its best its stability is determined by the control of its “sensitive” receipt within a society. A multiplicity of asserting selves must, by definition, involve resistance somewhere, unless all selves are by nature identical (which we know they are not). That is to say, a stable democracy is dependent upon limits to its own character. A stable democracy cannot be a *pure* democracy, a condition of pure autonomy, for lived out in a social setting, such autonomy must always come into conflict with the autonomy of others. Students of the process of democratization within various societies have therefore been confronted with the measurement, not so much of democracy's achievement, as of various levels of restraint established over time upon the process itself. The level of violence in the process of democratization is tied to the level of resistance among various groups and individuals within the process; but a multiplied and dispersed resistance – the spreading out of democratic expression – also means a dispersed violence. In a sense, the more successfully democratic freedoms are embodied across a diverse range of the population, the more widely will the violence of autonomous resistance be expressed in some fashion or another. Violence is “democratized” when it is embodied as the widely diffused reaction of autonomous individuals and groups at odds with one another.

This is the case, unless something else comes into play, that is: the *accountability* of self-assertion. Obviously, then, the nature of a “stable” or “coherent” democracy, is that it have the institutional structures by which individual autonomy is both shaped and restrained according to some embodied and formative vision of the “common good”.

⁷ Daniel Ross, *Violent Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁸For international comparisons, see *World report on violence and health*, eds. Etienne G.Krug, Linda L.Dahlberg, James A.Mercy, Anthony B.Zwi and Rafael Lozano (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002). The measurement of these matters is complex and debated, including such basic questions as what kinds of deaths should even be included (suicide? accidents of a certain kind? and so on). Self assertion, and the violence of its expression, is also linked by some to the existence of inequalities – although often the violence itself arises only when those inequalities are confronted and are in the process of being overcome. See Pablo Fajnzylber, Daniel Lederman, and Norman Loayza “Inequality and Violent Crime”, *Journal of Law and Economics*, vol. 24 (2002), pp. 1-39.

This, of course, has always been the understanding of the Christian Catholic position, not to mention the “republican” vision of the United States. As the great 19th-century Episcopalian political scientist Francis Lieber wrote, the stability of democratic regimes is primarily fueled by the stability of “public opinion”. It is such “integrative” and “assimilable and transmissible” popular perspective that stands as the guarantee over time of the system of mutual interdependence upon which diverse autonomies alone can coexist.⁹ But it is just this “stability of public opinion” that is now subverted by the rapidity of economic and geographical dislocation, transition, and transformation.

This is a clearly grasped reality among African public servants, whose way of putting this is properly informed by their own communal sensibilities, now articulated in more general terms. For instance, Clarisse Ouoba Merindol, a judge and legal activist in the area of human rights from Burkina Faso, has written with great vigor about the need for a formative culture of “citizenship” if democracy in Africa is both to take shape and achieve continuity. “Citizenship”, she writes, “defined as a culture of quality and values that go beyond self-interest and foster a conformist attitude towards community laws and values and, above all, complete interactive solidarity, is one of the key elements of social integration, wherever it is situated”, but especially within democracies¹⁰. “Citizenship”, as we know, is a category with a long American history of application, although one sees it less and less appealed to. But the notion that there is a way of life and a set of commitments that are essential to the individuals who make up a democracy is almost a truism. The point I would make here, however, is that such a formative identity is, in a sense, also something that can appear as an alien force of constraint upon the very characteristics that drive the process of democratization.

Burundi’s movement into democracy has been a movement from ordered oppression (by a military clique), within which violence was limited in its agency, and therefore to which responsibility, in a Christian sense, was attached to a few. It has been a movement from this, to a landscape in which violence was increasingly shared as to agency. And as both a goal and an outcome responsibility has thereby been dispersed among a larger and larger swath of the populace. From the late 1980’s at least, this movement was tied to the diversification of information and through it agency itself, via a proliferation of political and military groups, newsletters, regionalisms, economic interests and so on, each seeking ways to finance and at various points, to arm themselves and press their particular self-concerns. The enormous question for Burundi, given both the desirability of democracy, and its violent character, is the nature of the internal restraint by which the violent dynamic of democratization will in fact be transformed, and emerging Burundian democracy tempered. A “pure” democracy, after all, is either completely violent or completely impotent, depending on the nature of the self that is allowed scope for self-

9 Francis Lieber, *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government* (3rd ed., Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1877), p. 375. See also his *Manual of Political Ethics, Designed Chiefly for the Use of Colleges and Students at Law* (2nd ed., Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1888), vol. 1, on the difference between “public” and “general opinion”.

10 Merindol, Clarisse Ouoba, “Democracy, Citizenship and Social Integration”, *Intergenerational Forum on Endogenous Governance in West Africa*, June 26-28, 2006, Ougadougou. *Interge en ne er ra at ti io on na*

determination; and neither outcome is desirable for a nation struggling to feed itself and provide its citizens with the possibilities of human flourishing.

In America, we are perhaps moving towards the impotent self, as de Tocqueville speculated. But Burundi can look at its own life, and across the border to Rwanda, to see the extreme of pure democracy as violent *anomie*, the loss of all individual restraint, and its conflagratory result. There are major arguments over how to explain the Rwandan genocide, and these arguments generally seek explanation within the categories of historical oppressions or popular habits of perception and feeling. The most notable exegesis, in my mind, is that the genocide represented the apex of an uncontrolled democratizing force. For, interestingly enough, the desire for a larger “social” explanation stands in sharp contradiction to the celebrated judicial mechanisms the genocide engendered. Indeed, the international trials of genocide perpetrators in Rwanda have been seen as a triumph of a new universal commitment to *individual* accountability. Journalistic records of these trials have spectacularly emphasized, in almost grotesque detail, the way that attempts by the accused to avoid responsibility have been systematically exposed in the course of public interrogation. Some commentators, like Bill Berkeley, have spoken of the context of the genocide as a “culture of obedience”, where individuals simply submitted themselves to the commands of local and regional authorities who ordered the killings. But at the same time, Berkeley argues, and in continuity with other African regimes, Rwanda had promoted a culture of “impunity”, whereby individual leaders were granted a free pass to pursue their racketeering oppressions (see. 256ff.).¹¹ By 1990, that culture had been swept up into a democratizing dynamic in which various groups began pressing for their freedoms, understood quite differently vis a vis their resisting neighbors. The groups armed themselves, and in the civil war that gained steam, restraints upon self-assertion were quickly dismantled on all sides. Kagame the liberator and savior, was also “reckless” in his liberation, setting loose a violence that swelled into the floods of 1994. As one journalist attempted to interview the accused about their thoughts on God, one of them, Léopard Twagirayezu, brushed aside any attempt by others to make sense of their crimes. He had been a devout Roman Catholic since childhood. But now he had admitted to killing dozens of persons with his machete. “Through killing well, eating well, looting well, we felt so puffed up and important, we didn’t even care about the presence of God. Those who say otherwise are half-witted liars. Some claim today that they sent up prayers during the killings. They’re lying also... In truth, we thought that from then on we could manage for ourselves without God. The proof – we killed even on Sunday without ever noticing it. That’s all” (Hatzfeld, p. 147).¹² That is all. In Rwanda, pure autonomy led to the moral vacuum of pure violence. Said Léopard again: “we had stopped seeing the world as it is, that is, as an expression of *God’s* will” (p. 144). Only of human will, Faustian, lonely, pointless.

Dispersed accountability

11 Bill Berkeley, *The Graves Are Not Yet Full: Race, Tribe, and Power in the Heart of Africa* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

12 Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak* (New York: Farrer, Straus, Giroux, 2005; Fr. original 2003)

The final issue in the process of democratization and democracy, from a Christian perspective therefore, is this: who, finally, will be not only responsible – responsible for violence -- but also *accountable*? And how can that be in a world where self-assertion is the guarantor of democratic energy? Thus, although Pope John Paul II pressed the issue of accountability in Rwanda for individuals, he refused to accept it for the Church itself. In May 1996, for instance, speaking to the Rwandan people, he stated that “the Church ... cannot be held responsible for the guilt of its members that have acted against the evangelical law”. In this, he was only half-right: for the basis of individual accountability, rather simply than responsibility, is the *community* that both forms them as responsible – the world “as it is” – and responsibly bears the burden of maintaining that accountability as an instrument of “God’s will”. Is this not the context of human personhood in the Church of Christ that St. Paul outlines when, in Galatians 6, he states that “each person will have to bear his or her own load” (6:3) and “whatever someone reaps, that he or she will sow” (6:7), on the one hand, yet also “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (6:2)?

In the evolution of democracy through violence – a violence that seems inevitable within a condition of oppression or resistance – there are three possible outcomes based on the nature of accountability’s potential:

- a. one can avoid accountability by simply shifting blame in a uniform fashion away from oneself: the “other” is always responsible and we shall hold them accountable. This kind of retrenchment of blame is in fact what we see in Rwanda today, which, after 1994, carried out a series of wars and slaughters in the Congo, and established a quasi-dictatorship of Batutsi liberators and survivors under Kagame. Genocidal memory and responsibility have become the touchstones of one group’s maintenance of freedom. This represents not only a constraint upon democracy, but a complete retreat from it.
- b. one can also deal with the violence of democratic life through the dissolution of accountability altogether; this represents the direction of American society, as another kind of “culture of impunity” takes hold in a sort of steady-state, whereby responsibility has morphed more decidedly into the form of victimization. There is blame aplenty in our culture, but it is so diffused as to protect the realms of individual freedom and leave relatively untouched the forces of violence that assert themselves haphazardly within the consumer economy of the nation: suicide, murder, and accidental death are reduced to resented invaders of private security and unencumbered self-regard.

Obviously, neither of these two outcomes appear morally desirable – attractive though they are in fact on the ground to many. But clearly, as Paul indicates, the Christian purpose of created humanity moves in the direction of a third and different outcome, namely

- c. the dispersal of accountability itself among the free individuals of the society. If it is to be a democratic society, in at least a fundamental if not complete sense, then a nation like Burundi will require the kinds of resources and skills that both permit and effectuate the expression of individual self-assertion within the broad network of relations that can provide scope for this: that is, openness of communication, access to information, the

practice of critical analysis. There are, as we know, a range of structures and institutions that can promote all of this. But if a country like Burundi is to be democratic society that can restrain its own democratizing violence, rooted perhaps in the very yearning of the individual self (as a Christian would admit), there must also be some shared or persuasive moral structure that can both discipline and orient the individual's self-expression in a way that profoundly tempers and transforms the expressive character that itself constitutes the human spirit.

The last is a matter of Christian vocation – leaving aside the question of a common political vocation for a nation – it is at least a *Christian* vocation for individual and church. And to observe this is to move directly into the realm of “communion”'s providential character within the formation of the nations.

Democratizing the church

So let us move back to the reality of the Church's life in Burundi, now from this perspective of the nation's democratic challenges. For there is, as should be obvious now, a relationship between the violence of Burundian society, and not only the context in which the Christian Church's ecclesial life takes its shape, but the purpose of that life's aim.

In fact, there has been a democratization of the Burundian church at the same time as there has been movement into and through the violence of the nation's life. And the church therefore becomes a special case in which to examine the nature and possibilities of democratization itself. Not surprisingly, we find two dynamics at work in the church that are parallel to the political scene. From one perspective, we see a new openness – of discussion, engagement, and debate among ethnic and regional groups, among economically diverse groups, and among sexes. Where, in 1985, there was only one woman ordained – a student of mine – who went on initially to work in a non-sacramental setting, 21 years later there are at least a couple of dozen women priests, many of them working pastorally in parish leadership. Where there had been none before, there are now 2 Hutu bishops (among 6). Where there had been little integration among diocesan clergy, there is now a good deal of interchange and movement. We could go on. Attendant with this has been a strong witness by the Anglican Church, and others, to press for “reconciliation” among groups and parties within the nation, in a way that has been concretely stated and embodied by the church's leadership, with a public voice that is novel.

But these changes are also continuous with a movement into violence, at least of a sort, among and within churches: they are a part of a single dynamic in which the nature of Christian moral accountability is given breath to be apprehended, yet only within a context of dispersed violence, the salt of democratization. Thus, in the last few years, there has been a vast multiplication of churches and denominations in Burundi – in contrast to the strictly controlled and limited character of church presence 21 years ago. This multiplication – Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostal and Baptist groups, free churches, Moravians, etc. – has come not only through the flourishing of international missions and

money. It has also arisen through factions in traditional churches, ethnic separations within them, doctrinal and political schisms, resentments, and enormous financial competition. The new president of Burundi, Pierre Nkurunziza, is an Anglican ‘born-again’ Christian of now looser affiliation. He commented on the extraordinary proliferation and fragmentation of the churches that have accompanied the Civil War and democratization, and remarked: “this is what democracy means; if we accept it in political life, we must accept it in Christian life. Let us not worry: God will show what is worth lasting among these groups.”

But Burundi’s democratic future depends precisely on whether the democratizing forces that embody ongoing violence can be restrained and transformed. If the churches themselves become prey exactly to the same dynamics, what will become of the “persuasive moral structures” upon which coherent democracies themselves can depend? It was interesting for me to hear varying interpretation of how different denominations themselves fared within the Civil War as vessels of dispersed accountability. One measure – and one I cannot claim to have verified – was the question of *where*, as a pastor, leader, or even simple member, one was most or least likely to be killed. The Anglican Church, I was told, was the “safest” church, in the midst of competing groups of armed self-assertion. Some of this correlates with the aspects of democratic resources and structures noted above. There was much insecurity within the Pentecostal churches. Why? Because their lack of critical openness, both intellectually and ecclesially, organized their churches around individual pastors and smaller homogeneous groups. It was a form of life whose expression of self-assertion was bound to put them at odds with many others. Similarly, the Roman Catholic church was, for the average person, an insecure church home, this despite the heroic witness of several of its leaders, like the martyred Archbishop Joachim Ruhuna. Here the problem was paradoxically one of scale – a church so broad and large, including the majority of the population, that it was unable to establish a “persuasive moral framework” on a communal level sufficiently distinct to restrain the forces of violence dispersed within the larger community: it was, after all, that community’s religious mirror, in ways similar to Rwanda.

Discounting the contrastive chauvinism of my Anglican interlocutors, some things at least seemed clearly peculiar to their church during the last decade and a half of democratization and war. In an earlier era, the Anglican Church’s evangelical orientation was viewed as overly otherworldly, and hence incapable to dealing honestly with the oppressive regimes of the 70’s and 80’s¹³ But in the context of the movement into democracy of the 1990’s and beyond, steeped in massacres and slow bleeding both, other elements of the Anglican church’s life apparently came into the fore. First, there was the structure and order of its worship, still according to a literal Kirundi translation of the 1662 English Prayerbook, however interspersed with the developing kinds of music and dance I described earlier. This provided a framework of commonality and tradition that stripped individualism of its ability to overtake prayer and thereby manipulate local groups according to individual needs. Second, people mentioned the episcopal ordering

13 See Roger Bowen, “Genocide in Rwanda 1994 – An Anglican Perspective”, in Carol Rittner, John K. Roth, and Wendy Whitworth (eds.), *Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches?*, (St. Paul [MN]: Paragom House, 2004), pp. 37-47.

of the church, that – at least in the context of leaders of relative integrity, and sometimes extravagant holiness – bound localities together, insisted upon a shared teaching and witness, and placed the occurrences of quotidian existence within a network of a larger church and purpose that went beyond individual interest. Finally, there was the living heritage of the Revival itself, seemingly inert in the 1980s, yet breathed new life as it linked up with the movements of freedom that were also killing so many. The East African Revival stressed a faith formed by “light” – that is, honesty, confession, and repentance – by love and forgiveness, and by martyrdom for the sake of such light and love. As violence spread, the expression of these gifts also flourished, and created in many churches a kind of hedge against the very real desires many Christians felt in favor of this or that group.

One pastor put it to me in terms of the “evangelical” message of Paul in the latter part of Romans, i.e. chapters 12-15. Growing out of his discussion of the Church as the human race taken up in Christ through the grafting of the Gentiles upon the “natural” root of Jewish Israel, Paul presents a vision of the Body of Christ in action, with all of its spiritual demands and possibilities. Gifts are shared, freedom is exercised, yet life is given over to the other -- the strong to the weak, the wise for the unlearned, the rich for the poor -- as an act of growing conformity to and in Jesus Christ himself. “Jesus gave our church these gifts”, the pastor explained, “and the times, God in his providence, let us use them”.

As leaders consider the future of the Anglican church in Burundi and in other parts of Africa, many of the challenges they identify are based on whether this movement towards such a church as this, gifted in these *particular* ways, is actually sustainable. The wonderful changes I saw in 2006 are, as I have argued, part of a larger historical movement as well, and with that movement come the host of pressures bound to competition and violence. There are enormous stakes in this matter, upon which individual lives, regional stability, and the Church’s own ministry depend. There certainly is not yet a stable or coherent democracy in Burundi.¹⁴ Government opponents are still summarily arrested, and some simply disappear, to be discovered washed up along the banks of rivers. Rumors of *coups d’états* not only abound, but are acted upon. Recently, there has been a systematic harassment of the Press, including arrests and imprisonment of journalists. Ongoing rebel activity and military response still brings death and dislocates whole communities. Famine, AIDS, lack of infrastructure and of the means to gain cash, all contributing to an incredible poverty, are strangling the populace. And there are still all the guns, more than ever before. The Anglican Archbishop of Burundi, Bernard Ntahoturi, has described Burundi’s precipice: *how shall we disarm?* That is a larger question simply than getting people to turn in their guns. It points to the deeper challenge of how a people who has tasted the freedom of the self through the empowering of the self -- how shall we disarm our desires and give way to one another? This is not only Burundi’s challenge, but the challenge of all democratizing countries,

¹⁴ For a recent overview of the current political dangers, with good references, see René Lemarchand, “Burundi’s Endangered Transition” (Bern: SwissPeace, 2006). Recent conflict and political response raises some major concerns.

from Uganda to Nigeria to Zimbabwe. It is a challenge for the United States, in its own way.

The search for democracy in Burundi, within the Church especially, is therefore groping after something that lies beyond the list of democratic qualities that political scientists use to measure institutions and regimes. In part, this search is based on the recognition that democratization's violent heart is itself a reflection of human sinfulness, not necessarily something from which to stand aloof as a result, for fear of "dirty hands". But still, democratization as a religious goal, as founded on the apprehension of its providential charisms as it were, can only be pursued legitimately by de-fanging its temporal character, by "pacifying" its inherent brutality. Roman Catholic theologians, for instance, have been pressing for the re-establishment of a traditional form of decision-making and judicial evaluation, the local counsel of "elders" or *bashingantahe*, as a means of reconnecting political legitimacy and authority with the network of familial relations upon which Burundi's pre-independence society was founded and provided peaceful coexistence to a diversity of clans and regions.¹⁵ The point is, more broadly, that the Christian Church, at any rate, has realized that there is a desperate need for the reconstruction of some structure of wisdom within the nation, a wisdom that is formed, shared, and asserted in concrete ways.

It is squarely within this context, and not any other, that one should seek to understand the change of name a couple of years ago from "The Episcopal Church of Burundi" to "The Anglican Church of Burundi". Far from simply wishing to disassociate itself from the American Episcopal Church, as a sign of solidarity with the commitments of other African Anglican churches in the midst of the current battle over sexuality, the issue here was precisely the irrelevance of the American church's name-brand for establishing an integrated structure of moral commitment that rose beyond the assertions of local autonomy. If the church in Burundi had something to offer the process of democratization in its nation, it was bound to a vision of formative commonalities that embraced a larger view of human responsibility and accountability than local desires. Here is precisely where not only membership, but integrated expression and witness to a coherent church Communion is so central to the Christian purpose of reconciliation within a struggling democratic environment. When I conversed with the Anglican House of Bishops in Burundi, this theme emerged over and over again: the reality of the Communion as a teaching, witnessing, and mutually accountable body, is crucial to the persuasiveness of the Gospel of Jesus' peace that alone makes democracy worth grasping after. If such a coherently ordered accountability is sacrificed in the Communion, the Church's own ability to form a people willing to hold their own actions accountable is horrendously undercut. One is left, as von Balthasar has said, with the desiccated outline of an "international" church, rather than with the vital embodiment of a "supranational" church whose being, precisely in its receipt of offered autonomies, can reveal the true weight of individual human dignity.¹⁶

15 See the entire issue of *Au Coeur de l'Afrique*, the Roman Catholic Burundian journal, for Jan.-Je 2003 (69:1-2), "Former a l'édification de la paix" (Bujumbura: Presses Lavigerie).

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Communion transfiguring democratic violence

Clearly, the debated vision of “communion” present in our Anglican turmoil is tied to this, not only historically, but conceptually and theologically. We are in the midst of a grand movement towards and through democratization: its gifts are potentially and really (in many cases) great, especially in terms of the kinds of democratic charisms that we rightly cherish here and wish to support elsewhere: individual freedoms, protection of rights, the coherent rule of law and appeal, and accountability. The Church’s place in this movement is not peripheral, however, since – at least as we believe, and indeed even as students of democratization recognize with or without a religious lens – the persuasive moral frameworks by which the violence of autonomy is checked and transformed are not only the special charism of the Church, but is also a divine imperative for human history’s ordering.

The current Covenant process can be seen in terms of those elements bound to the choices we earlier claimed face all democratizing movements: we can choose to move towards a retrenchment of confrontative blame, whereby the boundaries of a pure confessionalism deny the possibility of open discussion and engagement across local units; we can choose a path that leads to the dissolution of accountability altogether, through a kind of the federalist model of autonomous units that merely talk to one another across local divides, but that cannot hold each other accountable to some broader formative molding of the self and its assertions; or we can choose some kind of structure that can uphold dispersed accountability, where truth is bound to a way of life and to the persuasive moral framework of accountable actions. I would obviously argue for the last option as our calling as well. One can see that the Covenant proposal that was presented to the Primates in Dar es Salaam, and through them to the Communion at large, takes this last road. (And the Primates’ Communiqué from Dar falls squarely within this perspective.) One need only look at the current debate over human rights in Nigeria, and the Church’s proper duties within this debate, to realize that unless Christian Communion is able to bring its formative weight to bear upon these matters, the process of democratization will indeed become a weapon in the hand of forces whose destiny will simply be the re-expression of Cain and Abel’s long-standing conflict, where power means simply giving each brother a chance to have his say and do his thing, with whatever results.

In sum, I invite us to see the relationship of Communion to democratization in a special way: as the embodied work of transfiguring the violence inherent in the dispersal of power. We are aware of what this means Scripturally, if nothing else: it is, in the terms of Ephesians 2, the breaking down of a “wall” of separation, and of making what were once “two” hostile and estranged bodies, “one” body in the “one new man” who is Christ. But this reality, as Paul emphasized, is achieved through the Cross and the shedding of blood, Jesus’ own. Not surprisingly, Paul is here speaking of an act by which violence itself is exposed before the world to be seen for what it is, and then comprehended within the being and heart of God. If power is dispersed in this context, it is also given over to God, who bears its chaotic assertion. Only here is the seeming contradiction of Galatians 6, where each is accountable only for his or her own actions yet is also called to bear the

burdens of others, resolved. If we are to think of Communion, it is from this base, and in the context of those seeking to see such a foundation exposed before the world. The buzz-words of “mutual accountability” and “interdependence”, so important to the Windsor Report, yet based on a long tradition of discussion dating to the 1960’s at least, are not mere jargon in this light. They go to the center of the Gospel’s particular summons to this age. And so I have no hesitation in commending this vision of Anglicanism. There are few gifts more filled with promise that God has given his people in this regard for the service of the nations, *at this point in history most especially*.

As a gift to the American church in particular, it poses an enormous challenge. We are loath to admit that pure autonomy embodies the violence of death. And few of us, in any context, are ready to admit that the death of self leads to the resurrection of the self’s life as a common life. Yet in such an admission lies the promise of God’s peace.