LEST WE BECOME THE EVIL WE DEPLORE

Mr. Robert Tonge broke the news that planes were crashing in certain important buildings in the USA. I followed him to his office and saw the collapse of the twin towers, live. It all seemed very disturbing, very unreal, like the film that portrays the plotting of some megalomaniac. Save that this time, the hero failed to come in and foil the scheme on time, leaving the villain the victor.

I never dreamed its like before; I hope never to see its likeness more. The image of human beings leaping to certain death from some of the 43,600 windows of the World Trade Centre refuses to go away. No innocent human being deserves such tragedy.

If by the attack on New York and on Washington the intention was to sow confusion and panic in America the attackers succeeded. Remove the diplomatic language and the cosmetics; and we are left with the fact that the President was hiding in Louisiana and in Nebraska. For many moments on September 11, 2001, government seemed powerless or even non-existent. The White House had been evacuated, as was Congress, and the Pentagon, and the FBI headquarters and the Supreme Court.

The crashing of an aircraft at the Pentagon was an attack on the raw nerve and the pulse of the American defence system, the most formidable on the planet. So, when the churchman at the splendid cathedral in Washington prayed for wisdom, “lest when we act we become the evil we deplore” and pleaded for God to save America from “blind vengeance,” it is unclear how many people present including President Bush, heard and digested those prayers.

That morning, the terrorists killed some 6,750 people and effectively brought America to a standstill. Understandably, the initial instinct will be outrage and anger, and unmentioned embarrassment and shame, all fuelling the “need” to respond with an exercise in naked power, using “all the resources at our command” (including, presumably, nuclear weapons???

For those of us who required a reminder, we were jolted into thoughts of our own inevitable mortality. Many Americans for the first time became cognizant of their own sad vulnerability. The day after the incidents one of them said on CNN: “President Bush wants to spend billions on a defence shield that would have been useless yesterday.” And one BBC commentator expressed the view that “no walls, however high or high-tech, can protect us now.”

This savage time generated its own rhetoric. Dan Rather of CBS apologized as he showed a video-tape of the second aircraft slamming into the WTC. The exclamation of an onlooker was unmistakable: “Fucking Jesus!” All my life I had never heard anyone, however irreverent put that handle to a sacred name. At times of deep anguish, all sins are forgiven.

Reverend the conservative Jerry Falwell, by the grace of God, is not God. He said that God allowed America to be visited by such terror as a punishment for homosexualism, abortion and other misdeeds. As if chastened by some superior power, he quickly apologized, saying that those same remarks of his were “ill-timed, insensitive, and divisive.” Presumably, it is o.k. to antagonize and to divide people at any other time.
President Bush and other members of his administration referred to the terrorists as cowards. It is difficult to accept that this description fits those who take their own lives in pursuit of their cause, but not those who went into hiding.

Vice-President Dick Cheney advocated a return to the old days of the Cold War. America, he said needs to have on its payroll “some very unsavoury characters.” (Meet the Press, NBC, Sunday September 16, 2001). Senator John Kerry justified the same statement in these words: “When trying the devil, you don’t go to heaven for your witnesses.”

So much for the disturbing rhetoric.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair while expressing support and commitment to the cause of eradicating terrorism was quoted as saying that “any retaliation must be based on hard evidence.” In light of this the request by the Afghan Taliban for “proof” before handing over of Osaman Bin Laden seems reasonable. It appears that if Blair makes the request, it is fine; if the Taliban makes the same request, it is bad because America wants to bomb Afghanistan.

I hate war and I hate the killing regardless of who does the killing. I relate absolutely to Victor Hugo who in 1870 said: “Glorious war does not exist... It benefits no one anything to call oneself Caesar or Napoleon. No, oh mothers that surround me, it cannot be that war the robber should continue to take away from you your children!” At least Caesar and Napoleon led their armies to battle. These days the brave political leaders stay home in the relative comfort of their homes and in the love of their families, and ask children of the poor to make “sacrifices”.

The names of Saddam, and Hitler and Bin Laden evoke a cry of horror from the spirit. But if we are to be even-handed in our judgement, we should recall with the same anguish the dropping of an atomic bomb in Hiroshima that killed 130,000 in one day plus the same number in the next five years. We should also condemn the wholesale slaughter of the native American Indians, including the Caribs.

How can the world deal with terrorism without degenerating into a sub-human state as did the terrorists? First, we can accept that the 19 who directly committed the crime are dead. Then we should professionally seek those who aided and abetted them in any way and behave like responsible people who believe in the rule of law. There has already been too much suffering. Further slaughter of innocent people is not a satisfactory answer.

If we want Bin Laden tried for the crimes he has admitted and for any atrocities for which he has taken responsibility, let us demand extradition on those grounds. If we do not yet have evidence as to who, besides the 19 dead men, are responsible for the attacks of September 11, let us continue the investigation, or we run the risk of allowing most dangerous criminals to walk free in America and elsewhere.

“After World War II in Germany, the local population outside the extermination camps would gather around us correspondents with tears in their eyes. They claimed they had no knowledge of what went on inside there. It’s just possible some of them were telling the truth. But they all bore responsibility nonetheless. They had cheered when Hitler turned the press from the free pursuit of truth to propaganda. They had chosen not to know. By their innocence, they shared the guilt.” (Walter Cronkite).
The American people have a right and a duty to know and to educate themselves about matters that are not in the USA media:

- **Overwhelmingly, the rest of the world loves America.** “If you hear them talk about their love for America, it will make your dick hard for America...” (Richard Prior).
- **This does not mean that they approve of all your methods.** USA administrations have not been always good to those people. For example, the micro states called the Windward Islands in the Caribbean have gone to ridiculous lengths supporting the USA through thick and thin. Yet, because Chickita made financial contributions to both the leading parties in Congress, the USA administration destroyed the banana industry, the sole economic means of most farmers in those small island states.
- **Not even such a major betrayal has diluted our sympathy for the victims and our support for America in its effort to correct the problem of terrorism.**
- **People like Bin Laden and the Taliban are creatures of former USA administrations, and all what this implies.**
- **Many Arabs and Muslims in the Middle East are reportedly angry because after World War II, the Allies, including the USA, gave Israel lands which were not theirs to give.** If anybody took your land and gave it away, you too would be at least as aggrieved as the Palestinians. It is that anger that fuels much of the conflicts in the Middle East.
- **While all that is no excuse for the irrational slaughter of the innocent, America should review its policies towards its friends in the Middle East and elsewhere.**