

Missionary History Falsified¹

The past few years I have read a lot of dribble and pathetic secular nonsense about religion in Vancouver papers, but Charles Demers' review of the play *The Hungry Season* wins the prize *cum laude*, hands down. Plain crap! Coming close to hate literature. Based on nothing but hateful anger fired by total ignorance and prejudice. Complete blackout of facts. Well, I could go on....

Listen to what a guy who, I am almost absolutely sure, has never read a serious book about mission history, has no inkling about Christianity or about religious motives in general, describes missionaries and their activities. They represent "cartoonish anachronisms beset by destructive, blind faith in their own cultural superiority, and a patronizing, insensitive condescension toward the social capabilities and belief systems of others." The rest of his article is full of sarcasm from the high moral perch of secularism, with *its* blind faith in *its* superiority.

Demers knows nothing about mission history. Missionaries of earlier generations represented their societies and shared their values and religion. They were originally sent by huge home constituencies that were mainstream. Everything they did was representative of those constituencies. With his capacity for passionate involvement, Demers would have been among those sending them off or--horror the thought--even join them. They represented main stream, just as Demers represents today's mainstream, but with a flair for fanaticism. So, if you're going to berate those early missionaries, berate your own ancestors, the whole lot, for both the good and the bad. I do not deny the latter. The problem is, Demers denies the former. Trust me. I wrote a 530-page doctoral dissertation on the subject for a European mainstream university.

Since the play is about Nigeria, let's talk about that country. "Undermining [its] sovereignty and cultural integrity?" I worked there for 30 years and throughout I was responsible to Nigerians to whom I had to account and from whom I received instructions. Why do you think Nigerians flocked to both Christianity and Islam *after independence*? Because they were free to weigh the alternatives and choose accordingly.

¹ Letter to Editor, *West Ender*, 2006-02-11, in response to Charles Demer's assertions, 9-15 Feb/2006, pp. 14, 16).

They could have stuck to their traditional religions. They decided that would no longer do for them in the modern world. Demers' raving implies that Nigerians are immature children who lack the tools for responsible choices. Not only is his "review" full of hate for Christians and their emissaries, it is also full of contempt for 120 million Nigerians who till this very day are still in the process of choosing on their own terms. Who, did he say, was condescending?

The only part of the content of the play approved by Demers is that of Chinga, played by Stuart Pierre, an Aboriginal. Demers is not clear here, but he seems to suggest that Pierre had his own agenda that he brought into the play. Perhaps Demers had a discussion with him. This might explain why the part of Chinga was the most unrealistic of the entire play. The way he relates to the missionaries is totally un-African. This might be due to an intrusion of his foreign agenda into the play. It *could* also be due to the playwright herself.

As to Pierre's hope that "one day we can all sit together as equals," well, if you read missionary literature of a century ago, you will find that that was exactly the aim and hope of the missionaries. That's what they worked towards, making some serious mistakes along the way in the complicated vortex of world-changing cultural whirlwinds.

End result? The end is not yet in sight. However, Demers' conclusion regarding "religious proscriptions [that have] brought us everything from residential schools to massive cuts to social programmes in favour of 'faith-based initiatives'" shows he is mixing up totally unrelated circumstances and cultures. Suddenly we have moved away from Nigeria to Canadian Aboriginal history and to the secular political policies of BC's Liberal government! This mix up suggests that Demers is not guided by clear thought but by a swirl of angry emotions. He took advantage of a play about Nigeria to vent his rage about local situations and Christianity in general.

Having read all of this, perhaps your curiosity has been piqued enough for you to attend the play. After all his ranting and raving, Demers gives it high technical kudos, the very opposite from a review in the *Sun*.