

worldview

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WHAT PRICE "GOD'S CIVILIZATION"?

Algérie française has given way to Algerian peace. However welcome this long-awaited peace, it is not something over which one can unreservedly rejoice. It is not simply that Frenchmen and Moslems continue to be shot down on the streets and machine-gunned in the hospitals of Algiers, that the Organization de l'Armée Secrète continues its promised "fight to the death," or that "peace" in this context is likely to remain a highly qualified term. Even if attrition does finally take its expected toll on the O.A.S. and the ultras generally, and if the negotiated guarantees are carried out, the most profound questions raised by the French-Algerian war remain to be answered.

General de Gaulle is generally acknowledged to be a great man, not least of all by the General himself. He has maneuvered an end to a war which had rendered preceding governments almost impotent. And he has managed to accept as a personal mandate the majority vote which ratified the Algerian truce. But before the draining wound of that war will have completely healed, the cost of de Gaulle's Algerian policy will be totted up. Part of that cost, which has never been completely overlooked, is that he came to power illegally, by the threat of force and with the support of men who are now being hunted down as traitors. Part of that cost is that, in order to prosecute his policies forcefully, he has consolidated power in his own hands and has quashed any widespread participation in political decisions. Part of that cost is the formation of the O.A.S. itself, which has attempted to form a mystique in competition with that of de Gaulle, a mystique which would transform the epithets of treason and terrorism into the brave slogans of reason and resistance. Part of that cost is the very climate of violence which now pervades France as well as Algeria.

It would be foolish to search for close analogies between the situation of France and that of any of her Western allies. But these last cruel years of French history are not without meaning

for us. It was, for example, in the large context of human dignity that the Archbishop of Paris, Maurice Cardinal Feltin, recently called attention to "the grievously inhuman reactions of people today engaged in ideological conflict or political outrages. Men do not resist the temptation to do away with people who stand in the way of their goals."

And with particular reference to terrorism, he said that "when those who use such methods pretend to do so in defense of Christian civilization, they pay no heed to the fact that they are destroying the very thing they seek to save. Can a civilization rightfully claim to be Christian when it sets such store by violence and when such disregard for man prevails?"

These words of the Cardinal are hard words, for terrorism, torture and needless bloodshed were not limited to either side in the forces arrayed against each other in the Algerian war. And whether either side would have endured without using such methods remains debatable.

All who are concerned with human dignity and the rights of the person must face the same questions today: what is the line which separates legitimate from illegitimate means in defending that dignity and those rights? Is that dignity defended or compromised when it employs or even threatens the extreme and violent measures which are possible today? These are some of the questions raised by the excerpt from an article by the distinguished Czech Protestant theologian J. L. Hromádka, published elsewhere in this issue. These are also the questions which are raised—but not answered—by the increasing number of people in this country who speak of the West as "God's civilization" and imply that it must be defended at all costs. And these are some of the questions which are raised by the recently concluded Algerian war. Admittedly they are difficult and complex questions. But if we cannot answer them in respect to a particular historical event we can hardly answer them when they are raised to a more generalized level.