

Politics & Religion in present day Curacao

by Jim on s/v Windsong

POLITICS

By coincidence, our return to Curacao that hot afternoon in early May just happened to be on an important local election day. Ever since the rum-inspired political revolt of 1969 brought down the government on this laid-back tropical island, with widespread rioting and parts of the capital city Willemstad set ablaze, local law has banned the sale of liquor on all election days, when emotions seem to run high. This law has never really had much effect, however, since the local populous responded by simply buying all their beer and rum the day before, in order to fully prepare for the occasion. It wouldn't really effect us much either, because restaurants and bars are exempt from the law, and all I wanted was a couple of cold beers that night during happy hour at Seri Fundy's, our favorite restaurant in Spanish Water.

Political flags were flying everywhere; from car antennas to rooftops, window eaves to tall trees, and makeshift flagpoles erected in people's yards. Neighbors vied with each other to have taller flags than anyone else on the block. The flags came in many different colors - red, green, blue, yellow, purple, orange, etc. - and each color represented a different political party in this fractious little five-island confederation tucked firmly under the protective wing of mother Holland. Cars and pickup trucks filled with supporters of the various groups cruised the streets, blaring their horns, waving their arms, and shouting slogans. Some of the vehicles were so completely covered with political bumper stickers it was hard to imagine how they could even see out the windshield in order to drive.

By early that evening election results were starting to come in, and all the local guys and Dutch expatriates gathered around the bar at Seri Fundy's were glumly assessing the preliminary vote count. The 'orange' party seemed to be the runaway balloting favorite that day. (I refer to each party by the color of their flag, since their names in the local language of Papiamentu are mostly unpronounceable)

Many of the local people we know were very unhappy about the apparent outcome, preferring instead to see 'green', or at least 'purple', win the election. 'Orange' was strongly opposed by anyone who was white, or Dutch, or had money, or owned property or a business, or even had a good white-collar job. The party drew support, however, from non-whites, the poor, the unemployed, the disenfranchised, the landless, and union-organized labor. The leader of the 'orange' party, Anthony Godett, whom the voters were indirectly selecting as Prime Minister and head of government for the entire Netherlands Antilles, had been granted temporary release from prison only the day before, just in time for the election. He had originally been jailed for suspicion of bribery, corruption, and embezzlement during his previous term as a Commissioner for the Curacao island government. There is said to be a massive amount of evidence to ensure his eventual conviction in a court of law.

Mr. Godett's political rise was a direct result of his family legacy. His father Wilson, better known as 'Papa' Godett, is a local icon. 'Papa' Godett was born in Curacao in 1932 and died there in 1995. He and his wife raised a large family of four boys and three girls. In the 1960's, he was elected President of the Harbour Workers Union and, as head of this most powerful union on Curacao, he was a central figure who, on May 30, 1969, led a march on government buildings that brought down the government then in power. Of course, the rioting, looting, arson, and lawlessness that occurred simultaneously may have played some part as well. In the July 5, 1969 elections that followed, 'Papa' was elected to a position in the Central Government, the first of several powerful political positions he held from 1969 to 1992. His picture has even appeared on a postage stamp. Papa's son, Anthony, now aspires to continue in his footsteps and establish a dynasty of notable public service. One of Anthony's brothers is widely believed to be among the wealthiest and most powerful smugglers and drug-dealers on the island. Anthony was elected on a platform of socialist economic reform, being openly anti-Dutch (whose enormous financial support is the only thing that keeps the local economy afloat), pro drug smuggling (for 'economic reasons', he says, despite the large U.S. and Dutch military presence here for the War on Drugs, mostly directed toward Columbia), and supports "status apart" (a sort of quasi-independence) for the island of St. Martin. If he becomes Prime Minister, the Antilles are in for some interesting times.

A short-wave news report on Radio Netherlands two nights ago reported that the Dutch government has declared Anthony Godett 'unfit' to become Prime Minister, however, due to the allegations of 'official corrupt practices' during his tenure as Commissioner. Locally, though, his supporters vow to overturn that ruling. Under both local and Dutch law, he cannot be Prime Minister if he is convicted of the charges, but he and his supporters say he won't be since he's innocent. The impending trial should be very interesting indeed, and will no doubt generate a political storm to rival any other during the current hurricane season.

Even by U.S. standards, politics down here can be pretty crazy. And don't even get me started on the situation in Venezuela! But can such political fiasco occur only in a tropical, third-world country? Consider the following, as gleefully reported in a local English-language newspaper:

"Of all current members in the U.S. Congress, seven have been arrested for fraud, three have done time for assault, 14 have been arrested on drug-related charges, eight have been arrested for shoplifting, and 21 are currently defendants in lawsuits. In addition, 84 have been arrested for drunk driving in the last year alone"...

RELIGION

Although predominantly Roman Catholic, the Netherlands Antilles is a very tolerant society where many different religions co-exist in relative harmony. Willemstad, the capital city on Curacao, is the location of the

oldest continuously used synagogue in the entire Western Hemisphere (over 300 years), and less than two miles away is the largest mosque in the Caribbean. Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, heathen, and New Age are all represented in some way or another down here. Even the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons have managed to establish congregations on the island of Bonaire, with its relatively small population of about 8,000 people. But the presence of one other particular 'religious organization' caught me by surprise.

Right now is low season in the Caribbean, so there aren't as many cruise ships visiting the islands as there are in the winter. But here on Bonaire, there is one cruise ship that still visits frequently this time of year, and even stays for several days at a time on each visit. The 440-foot FREEWINDS, based out of Curacao, is only a medium-sized cruise ship when compared to the huge new vessels being sailed by well-known cruise lines such as Carnival and Royal Caribbean, but it is still unique in several respects. Usually, when a cruise ship makes a port call here in Bonaire or anywhere else, the streets are soon swarming with passengers exploring the town, shopping, and eating lunch in local restaurants. But not the FREEWINDS - the streets remain ghostly quiet when it is in port, with few, if any, of its passengers roaming around town. The passengers do seem to scuba-dive a lot though, with local dive boats picking them up in large groups directly from the ship and delivering them straight back there immediately after the dive is over. Occasionally, one or two of the ship's crewmembers can be seen shopping for personal items in the local Botikas (drugstores), easily identifiable in their starched all-white uniforms, white shoes, and very pale white skin to match. It always seems odd to see crewmembers of a ship in the tropics that never appear to get out in the sun or show even the faintest sign of a tan. The most notable distinction, however, is the fact that FREEWINDS is owned and operated by the Church of Scientology. Scientology, of course, is recognized and fully certified by the I.R.S. as a completely tax-exempt 'religious' organization. Based upon the writings of the 1950's best-selling science-fiction writer (what does that tell you?) L. Ron Hubbard, its beginnings were more in the area of psychoanalysis than religion. The central premise was to make every 'believer' a perfect human being by slowly ridding each individual of his or her own particular hang-ups and personal demons (called "engrams"). A complex and unique vocabulary has evolved to describe their practices and beliefs, to the point that no uninitiated outsider (called a "preclear") can even begin to fathom what they're talking about. Certainly, a lot of indoctrination (did I hear someone say "brainwashing"?) is required just to understand their peculiar language. There are many levels of training and "auditing"(this is the term they use) to rid you of your problems and make you "clear"(again, their own term), with each level, coincidentally, becoming more and more expensive, in both a monetary and spiritual sense.

Their official glossary is lengthy, somewhat dense, and mostly incomprehensible. Here are some examples directly from the official website of the Church of Scientology on the Internet:

(definition) "alter-isness: the consideration which introduces change, and

therefore time and persistence, into an as-isness to obtain persistency. (One of the basic manifestations of alter-isness is a lie or deceit: when someone lies he changes the truth into a lie in order to maintain the existence of the lie.).

(definition) "as-isness: the condition of immediate creation without persistence, and is the condition of existence which exists at the moment of creation and the moment of destruction, and is different from other considerations in that it does not contain survival.

(definition) "E-meter: the Hubbard Electrometer is a religious artifact used in the Church confessional. It, in itself does nothing, and is used by ministers only, to assist parishioners in locating areas of spiritual distress or travail. The E-meter is not intended or effective for diagnosis, treatment or prevention of any disease. It passes a tiny current through the preclear's body. This current is influenced by the mental masses, pictures, circuits and machinery. When the unclear pre-clear thinks of something, these mental items shift and this registers on the meter.

(definition) "Classification, Gradation and Awareness Chart: the route to Clear and the OT [Operating Thetan] states beyond, also called The Bridge to Total Freedom, or The Bridge. Classification means that there are certain actions required to be done or conditions to be attained before an individual is classified for a particular training level and allowed to progress up. Gradation means a gradual grade up, just as there are grades to a road or there are grades to steps. Awareness refers to one's own awareness, which improves as one progresses up. On the right side of this chart there are various steps called the States of Release. The left-hand side of the chart describes the very important steps of training on which one gains the knowledge and abilities necessary to deliver the Grades of Release to another. It is a guide for the individual from the point where he first becomes dimly aware of a Scientologist or Scientology and shows him how and where he should move up in order to make it. Scientology contains the entire map for getting the individual through all the various points on this gradation scale and for getting him across the Bridge to higher states of existence.

(definition) "pre-OT: a thetan beyond the state of Clear who, through the pre-OT levels, is advancing to the full state of Operating Thetan (OT).

(definition) "Operating Thetan (OT): it is a state of beingness. It is a being "at cause over matter, energy, space, time, form and life." Operating comes from "able to operate without dependency on things," and Thetan is the Greek letter Theta (Θ), which the Greeks used to represent thought or perhaps spirit, to which an n is added to make a noun in the modern style used to create words in engineering. It is also n or "theta to the nth degree," meaning unlimited or vast. Abbreviation: OT."

I remember several years ago a news article out of Denver about a

high-ranking member who had a falling out with the Church and left, taking with him a top-secret manuscript. Despite the vigorous efforts by the Church of Scientology and their lawyers to stop him, and in direct violation of a court-ordered injunction, he released the contents of that manuscript on the Internet. This resulted in his house getting raided, his computer and other belongings confiscated, and he was even arrested and thrown in jail. He got in a lot of legal trouble, and probably even broke sacred vows, by making that secret manuscript public. But too late - the cat was already out of the bag, since once it hit the Internet, it could no longer be kept secret.

The story told in that novel-length manuscript, supposedly written by the holy prophet L. Ron Hubbard himself, was something about how our planet was originally settled by beings from outer space, and how we are all descended from them. There are supposedly many specific details revealed about those original beings and their planet-of-origin, to which we all naturally share a kinship and to which we shall eventually return. Such knowledge, of course, requires a total dedication and devotion to the Church, justifying the need to sign over to it all our worldly assets and shun all our old family and friends who do not also 'believe'. This manuscript and its teachings were only intended for adherents at the very highest level of "auditing", after many years of training and indoctrination, and cost the qualified 'believer' something like \$150,000. Such profound information concerning the true meaning of life is apparently very expensive, and one must be thoroughly prepared to receive it. It also kind of helps explain the notion that 'believers' are said to adhere to - that even though L. Ron Hubbard died a number of years ago, he is actually still alive and with us in some way. I've never been sure if they mean he has somehow been reincarnated from the dead, or simply exists now back on the planet his forebears came from, and communicates with us somehow. Maybe somebody out there who knows more about this can enlighten me sometime.

And the cruise ship FREEWINDS, it would appear, is one of the highest and most Holy Temples of this religious sect. (Although many others might, I will avoid using the term 'cult' here, since one man's cult is another man's religion.) Here is some more information on the ship, again from the official website of the Church of Scientology:

"The Flag Ship Service Organization (FSSO) is a unique church of Scientology which is located aboard the Motor Vessel Freewinds, a 440-foot ship based in the Caribbean, with the home port of Curaçao. The ship was acquired in the mid-1980s shortly before the release of the highest advanced auditing level currently available, New OT VIII.

Needing a safe, aesthetic, distraction-free environment appropriate for ministrations of this profoundly spiritual level of auditing, this church of Scientology returned to the sea, far from the crossroads of the workaday world. And while the Flag Service Organization ministers the highest levels of training and auditing from the bottom of the Bridge up to New OT VII, the most advanced OT level - OT VIII - is entrusted exclusively to the FSSO. To a Scientologist, coming to the Freewinds for New OT VIII is the pinnacle of a deeply spiritual journey. Years of training and auditing have brought him to this ultimate point. It is the most significant spiritual

accomplishment of his lifetime and brings with it the full realization of his immortality.

The Freewinds is a very special place. It is the one place on this planet that a Scientologist can go and be certain that he will be able to devote all of his attention to his religious practice and, at the same time, share the company of people who share his religious commitment and outlook on life in general. A voyage on the Freewinds is nowhere close to a vacation. Rather, it is the perfect religious retreat dedicated to enabling one to devote his full attention to spiritual growth.

The Freewinds is like no other place on Earth. It truly marks the beginning of a voyage to all eternity."

How many other religions do you know that own their own luxury cruise ship, and conduct their most sacred services onboard? Now you can understand why this particular cruise ship is so different from all others. Just imagine the Vatican, or the Grand Mosque in Mecca transported onto a barge and set afloat! FREEWINDS is the place of supreme worship and pinnacle of spiritual fulfillment for the highest-ranking members, the grandest of Grand Poobahs, within the Church of Scientology. They come here for the most advanced of all possible training and "auditing" levels, to learn the ultimate knowledge about our ancestors in outer space. This is a ship full of superior elevated beings, "Operating Thetans", the clearest of the "Clear", descended directly down the line of immortal creatures from other planets! A vortex of immense power and knowledge right here in the southern Caribbean, only a few hundred yards away from where my own boat is moored! It's such an awesome and overpowering thought, I sometimes wonder why the water around here isn't boiling, with so much profound religious intensity nearby. It's enough to take your breath away!

I wonder if they might let me onboard the FREEWINDS sometime, to bask in the aura of such a sacred place. Maybe I could even make a quick visit to the gift shop and buy one of those L. Ron Hubbard bobble-headed dolls to take back to my own boat as an inspirational souvenir.

Best Regards to All,
Jim, Kris, and AJ Rose
S/V 'WIND SONG'