

Living the Faith under the Red Flag



Young people meet to do penance before going to confession in this poor Ukrainian chapel.

We lose our credibility as Christians if we fail to accept our responsibility for the priests, nuns and ordinary faithful whom the communists oppress.

Christ sweats blood in all outcasts who find no apostle or priest to keep watch with them in the agony of death. As in Pilate's prison he is flogged in all the countries where dictators tramp on justice and freedom. He wears a crown of thorns woven from the barbed wire of thousands of concentration camps. Falling under the weight of the cross he looks in vain for the help of Veronica and Simon of Cyrene. His cross stands in the Gulag Archipelago.

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Letters

A question for disarmament

Sir: Cecilia Hatt in *Viewpoint* asks a question and I hasten to answer. The point I made at the London meeting on 20 March and at other times as well was quite a simple one. If Catholics and others concerned for peace do not agree with the policies of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, then why do they not instead become active members of one of the many organisations with more general aims?

From the Freeze Coalition to the Campaign against the Arms Trade, from Pax Christi to the United Nations Association, such movements exist in quite large numbers and they ought to have solid Catholic support. That they do not is simply a matter of observation. I am still almost the only British priest with concern for the entirely non-controversial World Conference of Religions for Peace.

It is good news that Cecilia Hatt and I can at least agree on the excellence of the American bishops' pastoral letter, so well prepared and presented. If we were to apply its conclusions to government policy here, we would very soon be in collision with government policy. It calls for a halt on further nuclear weapons deployment, an end to nuclear war-fighting doctrines, and opposes deterrent policies resting on a willingness to target cities. Julian Critchley MP, by no means an enthusiast for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, has recently agreed that our present policies in this area can be summed up as "population extermination".

Of course, we can all do things sometimes which others will judge to be silly, extreme or over-judgmental, though Catholic Peace Action must answer for itself. I can only speak for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament which has clearly made mistakes in its time. But no one ought to expect perfection from an organisation before getting involved. Or even afterwards, as the failings of the Vatican Bank may serve to remind us. . . .

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Sir: Cecilia Hatt has given the wrong impression of Catholic Peace Action and also reveals a lack of understanding of Christian civil disobedience (*Viewpoint*, 7 April).

Her charge against CPA of "self-righteousness" and "uncharitable language" is based on two quotes. The first quote does not support her in the least and the second is not only taken out of context but is a misquote.

We do not consider people "hostile or bewildered" simply because they are out-

siders. CPA's relationship with the police, courts and so on have always been cordial and sometimes quite friendly. To mention three examples: After our second act of civil disobedience on 11 October 1983, CPA supporters and many of the police exchanged handshakes of peace. Our twice-monthly leafletting of the Ministry of Defence workers now elicits friendly greetings, smiles, written responses and often a civil dialogue or two. And when the magistrate sentenced two of us to prison over the Christmas period last year, we did not feel any ill-will toward him; indeed, he acted with more patience and understanding during this, our second trial, than he did during our first one.

Mrs Hatt goes on to take out of context and misquote a statement of ours which explained our Ash Wednesday act of civil disobedience. The full quote, in the proper context, is: "Today we pray for the conversion of this nation and for all those involved with nuclear war preparations. We pray in the place where planning for genocide continues day after day, the Ministry of Defence building in Whitehall. In sorrow and love, we bring a message of repentance to the Ministry of Defence workers and through them the government and nation: 'Repent; in the name of God and life stop preparing for death and destruction.'"

As the actual sentence reads, we did not single out the Ministry of Defence workers as the only ones in need of repentance. During the action, the four members of Catholic Peace Action who wrote on the pillars the word "Repent" also daubed their own foreheads, along with the 40 people praying with us. Our statement further read: "We sin by omission if we fail to do what we can to stop this nuclear madness." Sins of omission and commission cover, I presume, everyone, including ourselves.

Mrs Hatt seems to think that the word "genocide" cannot correctly be applied to nuclear weapons or nuclear war preparations. She and others can believe what they like, but perhaps an even more appropriate word is "omnicide". What other consequences would follow the use of nuclear weapons? How else could their use be described?

Let us not delude ourselves. Nuclear weapons are here to be used. During the last elections, Mrs Thatcher was quite clear that she would, under certain circumstances, "of course" push the button. So thousands of military personnel and many civil servants are involved in maintaining a certain level of readiness so that the button can be pushed (even if they personally do not have the *intention* to use nuclear weapons themselves). And these people, of course, are not acting alone — they do their job as servants of the people; the Government sincerely threatens to use nuclear weapons in our name.

Even if every person in this country agreed with such a position it would not, in our opinion, make it right. One of our responses to this situation is non-violent resistance and civil disobedience. We would sin by omission if we did not say "no" as clearly and as powerfully as we could. And we believe that there is nothing more powerful than actions based on love and non-violence.

On a point of agreement with Mrs Hatt, I also "take heart" from the American bishops' pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace*. In the section "The Value of Non-violence", they mention Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King, as having a "profound impact on the life of the Church in the United States". It may not be well known, but Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, engaged in civil disobedience over many issues. It was during the fifties that she went to jail for resistance to nuclear "defence" preparations.

My heart was most taken, however, when one of the principal authors of the pastoral letter, Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, met two members of Catholic Peace Action and thanked them for what we were doing and wished that he could do it also. He was very supportive.

We are encouraged also by the statements and actions of Bishop Matthiesen of Amarillo and Archbishop Hunthausen of Seattle. These bishops are active in a campaign to stop the shipment by rail of Trident warheads from Amarillo, where they are assembled, to Seattle, home of the Trident submarine. In a recent joint statement they encouraged people to "monitor and offer non-violent resistance to each successive violation of our pastoral letter. Our stand in the pastoral letter is that no further deployment of nuclear weapons can possibly be justified. Every missile and nuclear weapons shipment is both a significant step toward a first-strike holocaust and a violation of the moral stand we have taken. . . . What we can all do along the tracks when these shipments come through is stand in prayerful witness to the alternative power of divine love and non-violent action."

Non-violent civil disobedience may be "unintelligent" to Mrs Hatt, but it has a long Christian tradition and a growing number of Christian practitioners, both in this country and in the United States.

Dan Martin

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Protestant pastor

Sir: One person who recognised the existence of and consequences stemming from the traditional Christian anti-Semitism to which C. C. Aronsfeld refers in his letter to you (*The Tablet*, 31 March) was Pope John XXIII. In his Preface to *Gottes erste Liebe* (Munich, 1967) he wrote as follows: "Now we recognise, O Lord, that many,

many centuries of blindness have covered our eyes, wherefor we could not see the beauty of your Chosen People any more, and did not find the features of our first-born brother in his face. The mark of Cain, O Lord, is imprinted on our forehead. For centuries Abel our brother was slain and lay on the ground in tears and in blood because we had forgotten your love.

"Forgive us, O Lord, the curse we so wrongfully pronounced upon the name of the Jews. Forgive us that — with our curse — we crucified you for the second time. For we knew not what we did."

(Dr) T. A. FitzPatrick

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The seekers

Sir: May I add a further comment to the notes from an ashram which you published in *The Tablet* of 24 March? We have had the same experience here in our ashram in south India of people coming from the West in "search of God". They are of all ages from 20 and even under to over 70, of both sexes and from many countries. They are almost all sincere seekers of a deeper meaning in life than the West seems to give them. They go to Hindu ashrams and Buddhist monasteries and to any Guru who will teach them a method of Yoga or meditation which will enable them to find the truth and the life which they are seeking. Those who come to our ashram are nearly all Christians, mostly Catholic, though some are Jewish and some have no particular religion. What is disconcerting is that so many Christians, especially Catholics, seem to find their religion an obstacle to their search for truth and reality. For most of them Christianity is deemed to be identified with a formal, dogmatic, moralistic religion, which is a positive obstacle to their interior growth.

What is the reason for this? I suggest that it may be that in the past, when western society was nominally Christian, a formal religion was normally sufficient to give one a sense of direction in life. But now that this is no longer so, a formal religion simply breaks down in contact with the realities of life. What people today are seeking is an interior religion, a religion of the heart and not of the head, which at the same time gives a sense of meaning and direction in life. This is what Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufism and other forms of eastern doctrine give and Christianity in the way it is now presented seems unable to give to many people. May this not be a sign that Christianity today needs to come to terms with oriental religion? Is biblical Christianity, as interpreted by the West, any longer an adequate religion for the world today? The Bible belongs to the history of humanity as a whole and needs to be interpreted in the light of eastern experience no less than western.

It is perhaps significant that Donald Nicholl is at present conducting a seminar

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