

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

AS.61-2

- the South African Bishops Conference.

The Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church met in Pretoria in February and during their comprehensive discussion of Christian living in our situation examined the question of those who refuse to support killing.

In the armed struggle that is developing on our borders and could easily spread internally a grievous situation arises for all who are concerned about the use of violence. On the one side the conviction grows in a significant sector of the oppressed majority that only violence will bring liberation. On the other, the minority in power sees itself threatened by indiscriminate violence supported by international Communism.

In these agonising circumstances we can only promise with God's help to give leadership in an ongoing Christian examination of this tragic situation. We intend to publish reflections from time to time as incentives to Christian prayer, thought and commitment and we hope to be able to do this with the representatives of other Christian churches and organisations. In the meantime we have resolved to say something about conscientious objection.

According to the teaching of the second Vatican Council, "it seems just that laws should make humane provision for the case of conscientious objectors who refuse to carry arms, provided they accept some other form of community service". (Constitution: "The Church in the modern world" No. 79.)

In order to understand the issue of conscientious objection, a careful distinction should be made between universal conscientious objection (the pacifist) and selective conscientious objection (e.g. on the grounds that a particular war is unjust); between combatant military service (carrying arms) and non-combatant military service (e.g. in the medical corps) and between military service (combatant or non-combatant) and national service (which could include service to the community, like social welfare, education, housing).

In South Africa the Defence Force Act (section 67 (3)):

- (a) makes no provision for any conscientious objector (universal or selective) to do non-military national service;
- (b) provides for universal conscientious objectors (those who belong to pacifist denominations) to do non-combatant military service;
- (c) makes no provision for selective conscientious objectors even to do non-combatant military service.

Such provisions are made in some way or another by almost every other non-communist country in the world which has conscription.

It should also be noted that objectors are sometimes accommodated, despite the lack of legal provision for it, by being given non-combatant tasks but never by being given non-military national service.

Consequently in South Africa the selective objector and the universal objector refusing to do non-combatant military service are liable to a fine and/or imprisonment (Section 126, 127 (c)).

In this matter of conscientious objection we defend the right of every individual to follow his own conscience, the right therefore to conscientious objection both on the grounds of universal pacifism and on the grounds that he seriously believes the war to be unjust. In this, as in every other matter, the individual is obliged to make a moral judgement in terms of the facts at his disposal after trying to ascertain these facts to the best of his ability. While we recognise that the conscientious objector will have to suffer the consequences of his own decision and the penalties imposed by the State, we uphold his right to do this and we urge the State to make provision for alternative forms of non-military national service as is done in other countries in the world.

"CITIZEN" ATTACKS C.I.

The 'Citizen' newspaper has been offered for sale to white South Africans since 1976, and delivered a broadside against the Christian Institute in its last editorial of the year. Someone drew our attention to it a couple of months later. PRO VERITATE reproduces it below.

If it seems quite incredible that the ordinary, intelligent, respectable people who publish the CITIZEN could write such nonsense, draw such conclusions, make such imputation, or exhibit such blatant

brain-washing, our readers should remember that this, after all, is what indoctrination is all about.

When men are free to think for themselves again, perhaps the CITIZEN will blush to remember — and wish they had had the courage to print our reply.

But what do you do to counteract this type of white "thinking"?

Readers might like to make some serious comments on how to conscientise the white population.

STICK TO RELIGION

Editorial in the Citizen, a newspaper in South Africa, 31.12.76.

We cannot say that we are overmuch impressed with the Christian Institute.

For a religious body, it has been far too radical in its attitudes for our liking.

And for the liking of others too.

But if it stuck to matters religious, one might at least find it a bearable cross to carry.

Unfortunately, it has impinged more and more, over the years, on purely political issues.

It will, of course, argue that it is the Government which, by its policies, has created a situation which requires every Christian to declare himself.

This argument may be acceptable when it is a matter of individual conscience.

But when a religious body takes up the cudgels against political policies, when it campaigns for this or that dispensation, or against this or that dispensation, in the political life of the country, it oversteps the mark.

SEES NOTHING RIGHT

Unfortunately, the Christian Institute is like the World Council of Churches — it sees nothing right in this country, especially its administration, and everything wrong.

Sad to say, not even an atrocity like the killing by terrorists of a former bishop, a priest and a nun, as happened in Rhodesia recently, will convince political clergymen that they are backing the wrong cause.

Nor will the slaying of 27 plantation workers in a massacre that revolted the rest of the world make them change their views.

To them, the system of White minority rule is brutal; therefore, brutality in the name of liberation is nothing to get overwrought about.

Sorry, we can't go along with this selective style of Christianity.

We would rather they cried for all God's children than only for those whom they believe to be oppressed.

We wonder also whether, if bodies like the Christian Institute saw a Marxist, non-religious heaven established on earth, they would be satisfied with the outcome of their own political meddling.

That is, if they were allowed to continue to preach opposition to the existing order and way of life.

It is not that we doubt the depth of their religious convictions.

It is that we doubt their right actively to engage in a campaign either against the Government or the country.

Particularly the country.

BOYCOTT CALL

Look at the latest call of the Christian Institute.

It is that a boycott of investment in South African industry should include local as well as overseas investment.

"Money invested in South Africa is money invested in apartheid and thus immoral, unjust and exploitive," says the Christian Institute's official journal.

Can you imagine that?

A Christian body calls for a boycott which it admits will cause hardship and unemployment.

Unemployment, it must know, will cause unrest.

Unrest will cause more violence.

More violence will not only cause the deaths of innocent men, women and children, but may tear apart the fabric of our society.

IF ONLY . . .

Ah, if the institute only preached goodwill, brotherly love, the brotherhood of man.

If only it did not advocate radical ideas which can harm all concerned.

If only it did not conduct itself in a way in which a Church-State confrontation begins to look more and more likely.

If only it appreciated that whatever hurts people of colour suffer now, and these hurts are many, they will be nothing like the terrible state in which the people of this country would find themselves if, heaven forbid, the Black terrorists or their Communist backers took over.

There is nothing in Marxism that will make anyone happier. Angola and Mozambique have demonstrated this.

All the terrorists will bring is death and destruction and a hopeless future to everyone.

Or does the Christian Institute believe that so long as the White regimes of the South are toppled, a heaven on earth — with Marxism as the new religion — will be created here?

THE C.I. REPLIES

Dear Sir,

An editorial dated 31.12.1976, being a bitter attack on the Christian Institute, has only recently been drawn to our attention.

Your criticism of the C.I. as being radical is one we readily accept if by radical is meant seeking to deal with the root and fundamental problems of our society. The non-radical approach to issues, whereby the symptoms and not the causes of social ailments are treated, is a major contributor to the steady deterioration in Black/White relationships in our land.

The failure of the C.I. to confine itself to "matters religious" is an obvious source of your indignation. Many who seek to confine the activity of God to a limited and so-called spiritual sphere would agree with you. But the revelation of Scripture is of a God who calls us to embrace His Lordship in all of life, social and political, legal and church, economic and educational; we can neither compartmentalise God nor reject His demands for allegiance to justice and truth in all spheres. We concede that our involvement in situational ethics can lead us to wrong decisions, but then the criticism ought surely to be of our decisions and not our involvement as Christians in the fullness of life.

Your condemning association of the C.I. with the oppressed we gratefully rejoice in as a mark of Christian authenticity, for it is so much part of the Biblical tradition. Hopefully we do not simply speak on behalf of the oppressed but in relationship and empathy with those who suffer the manifold injustices of our society. Only

then can one articulate a real situation which many, distanced by political structures, economic advantage, race and indifference, find difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend.

Anti-South Africa we are not, and the measure of our concern could be the measure of our love for all its peoples. We will reject no one. We will reject policies which are evil, and the nature of prophetic ministry (which is our calling) demands that we do not cry "peace, peace, where there is no peace."

In common with Government media, you seek to associate us with commending violence and "brutality in the name of liberation," as well as with Marxism. You do not quote chapter and verse to substantiate these allegations, and disregard our oft-repeated rejection of the ways of violence (institutionalised and overt) and Communism. Charity requires that we attribute this distortion of our beliefs to ignorance, and for your editorial team's edification we submit C.I. statements of opposition to both violence and Communism.

Your editorial concluded by asking the C.I. whether we believe that should Marxism topple our White regime, a new heaven on earth would be created? We abhor the possibility of a despotic Communist regime establishing its own peculiar hell, and we see the racist policies of our land contributing inexorably to its enthronement.

—Christian Institute of Southern Africa.

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