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crossfire

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**Youth committed to the
poor through prayer
and action**

Welcome back after what was hopefully a happy and restful holiday, space enough to assess the year's work and to renew one's sense of direction and purpose. A special welcome to all freshers joining NCFS through their Cathsocs.

This edition of Crossfire is geared for Orientation, to give new-comers a foretaste of NCFS and to catch up on the happenings during the vacation, most especially the CASA/NCFS Leadership Course held during December.

Our editor, Debbie Cabion, is in Europe and we hope to have a report of her visit to the IMCS office in Paris before going to press. Meanwhile, the rest of the publication's team is finding that Crossfire is quite a feat without her able supervision.

We would like to say a special thank-you to those who wrote to Crossfire expressing their views on the last edition. Remember that this is your publication — we rely

development, peace and honesty.

EDITORIAL

Thomas Plastow.

on you for letters and articles.

At the outset of International Youth Year, it may do us all good to remember our own year theme: "Youth committed to the poor through prayer and action", and to ask ourselves how much we, as individuals and as Cathsocs, are praying and acting for the poor and oppressed. In short — How much are we committed?

A good way to start the term might be to read Crossfire — the honesty expressed in the articles and letters is revealing, encouraging and, hopefully, infectious. To begin any commitment, especially that to Christ and His Kingdom, we must be honest with ourselves and with our sisters and brothers in Christ.

All at Crossfire join me in wishing you a year filled with participation,

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Many thanks to Phyllis.

Praise Indeed

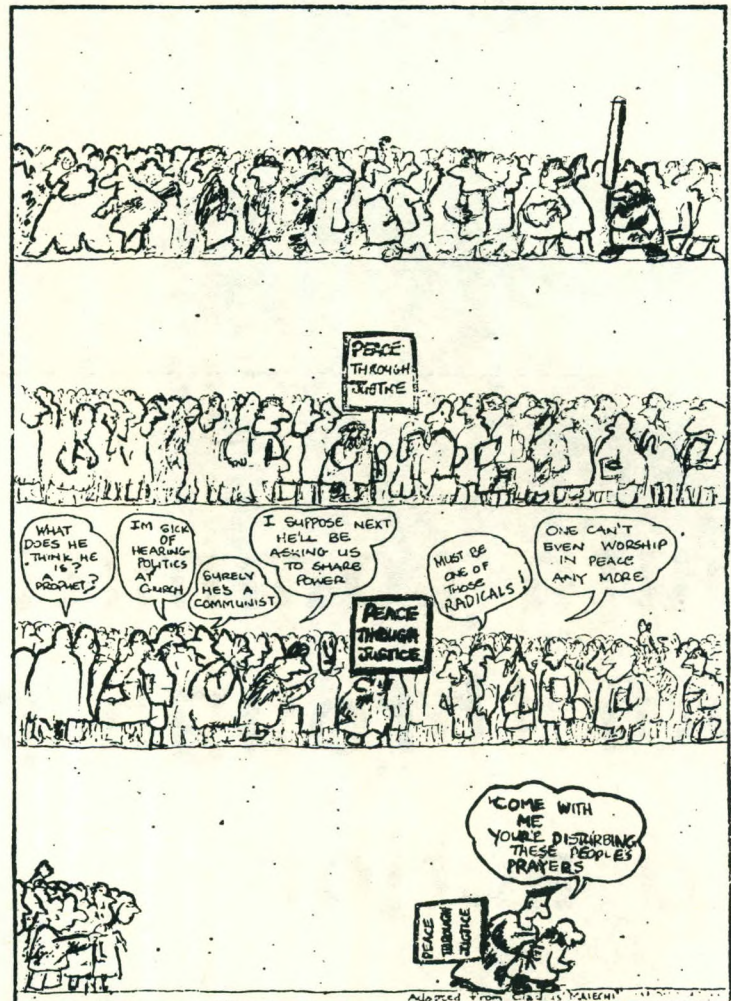
Dear Crossfire

I have experienced Crossfire for the first time and to say the least, I have been impressed. The varied context of the publication provides a balanced diversity for all. The well-researched articles were informative and I felt I had learnt something by reading them.

Crossfire provides a necessary exchange between campuses and this is healthy in terms of individual, group and national growth. What I really enjoy about this publication is that it provides an opportunity for the individual to express his/her own views, independent of those of any organisation.

I really recommend Crossfire and hope that you reading this will contribute to its continued success by means of articles, snippets of information and juicy letters!

Yours
Happy
University of Natal-Durban



Encounter Cathsoc

When I arrived at University, I remember feeling very lost and intimidated by all that went on around me. During the orientation programme I was inundated with student society members trying to recruit me. I ended up joining the Mountain Club, the Student Christian Association, NUSAS projects committee and Cathsoc. The only society that I really got involved in was Cathsoc.

I found in Cathsoc a group of people who were a real community of friends. Being at university, which is so different to school, I was really looking for a place to belong, a place where I could find friends who were going to help me get through my university career. I also found it a committed community of people learning what their faith means to them in the context of the university.

The university can be a very cold and lonely place. It is very easy to get lost and withdraw. It is easy

to fall into the trap of coming onto campus, meeting one's own little group of friends, going to lectures and running back home at the end of the day. The responsible position we find ourselves in after school or the army can be frightening. Our response is often to escape from university life and to withdraw into our own sheltered circle where we feel secure.

An alternative is, of course, to get involved in student activities and consciously try to meet new people. Involvement means learning more about ourselves, other people and the work in general. It is important to continue the process of our development, outside the lecture theatre. We need to develop on various levels. Our academic programme must be supplemented with physical, social, psychological and spiritual progress.

The Catholic Students' Society on your campus, and through this the National Catholic Federation of



Students (NCFS), aims to help people develop in these other areas of life. It aims to be a society where all can feel accepted and supported, and where all can grow together in a spirit of mutual acceptance and challenge.

We all find this very exciting and fulfilling. Why not come to Cathsoc and see for yourself?

Yours in Christ
Stephen Lowry
NCFS President

Coordinating Cathsoc.....

I have officially begun work as National Co-ordinator of NCFS, and I need to know as soon as possible, the needs of the Cathsoc branches and especially the ways in which I can be of assistance. I am not employed just for "national" work, but also for local work. This means that my skills are to be put at the service of the local Cathsocs in what ever way they see fit.

I have access in Johannesburg and other regions to a number of people or organisations from which I can learn skills to share with you through workshops or whatever. I could, for instance, liaise with other people or organisations if your Cathsoc wanted to hold a media workshop or one on public speaking or leadership. I might be able to help you find speakers on different topics, or come and speak to you myself about issues within

our movement or the student milieu. But the kind of work I enjoy most is small group or one-to-one contact. I've had a fair amount of experience in different small groups within Wits Cathsoc as well as committee experiences. I believe I've been through almost every kind of crisis a Cathsoc branch can have, from mass apathy, committee tensions and parental resistance to poor financial relations with the SRC and sensitive negotiations with members of the church hierarchy.

Remember that International Youth Year should provide opportunities for youth organisations like ours to flower over the next twelve months. There should be a multitude of activities organised by church and other youth movements which can strengthen us both nationally and locally, by the enduring links that can be forged with other similar movements.



I can usually be reached at (011) 837-5924 during the day or at my new home : "Habiru" 41 Olivia Road, Berea, Jhb. 2198, phone (011) 643-4689 in the evenings.

May Christ's energy and peace be with you over the next few weeks.

With love
Rosemary Hunter
NCFS National Co-ordinator

DIFFERENT ROLES ONE GOAL

The question is often raised by parents and friends why CASA and NCFS do not join and form one unified body representing Catholic students in South Africa. This was the situation prior to 1971 when black students broke away from NCFS to form CASA — the Catholic Students' Association.

The reasons for this split were complex, but related to the emerging black consciousness ideology in the broader South African context and the need for black Catholic students to establish a movement within which they could express and develop an identity of their own.

It is now 1985 and at the December '84 CASA - NCFS leadership course, I approached Joe Samuels, President of CASA, to find out more about CASA — how it sees itself, its problems and the direction in which it is moving. The CASA - NCFS relationship was also discussed.

Joe said he saw CASA as a broad movement bringing together students from different backgrounds to work towards the bringing about of God's Kingdom in South Africa. He also sees it as an institute of learning and growth in which people are not seen merely as political

units, but as total beings. The movement must provide an environment in which the full potential of each student can be realised. It is important that students do not feel threatened or alienated within CASA since one of its aims is to allow its members to grow in maturity and to build self-confidence.

The one thing that all CASA students have in common is that they have all, to a greater or lesser extent, experienced the oppression and discrimination of the racial system of government. In this sense, it is fair to say that there is a greater level of awareness amongst CASA members than amongst those at NCFS. They also have a stronger conviction of the church's call to South Africa: to take an option for the poor and oppressed. The movement is very much concerned with developing strategies in which it, as a church-student body, can work towards a transformed society which does not structurally oppress its people.

On the other hand, as students who lived privileged lives in secluded white suburbs, NCFS often needs to be made aware of the realities of our country, before we are able to accept the challenge of our

faith to side with the poor and oppressed in their struggle for justice and freedom. However, as Joe stressed, it is impossible to generalise with heterogeneous movements as well as those who are still growing towards an understanding of their faith as a response to social reality.

Both movements strive to accommodate all students and to promote community values of sharing, acceptance, working out of differences and constructive problem solving. The development of good leadership is another of the shared concerns. Joe prefers the term "facilitator" as an expression of the essence of good leadership qualities. A facilitator has the skill to bring out the best in every member of the group so that a task is achieved effectively with the co-operation of all. The end product must be truly representative of the group's combined effort.

It was clear from our talk that NCFS and CASA have a lot to offer each other in terms of learning and sharing of experiences. However, it is also important to realise that although the ultimate goal of God's Kingdom in this country is the same for both movements, each has a different role to play. We must not attempt to create a unity which both movements are not yet ready for and which does not reflect the student reality in an apartheid society. It is better to direct our efforts towards establishing areas of co-operation and working together on regional and national levels on projects of common interest. Already the full-time workers share an office, there is a common car and annual leadership conference. Last year a delegate from the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS) was invited to South Africa by both movements. Other areas of co-operation include regional get togethers, joint statements and publications and closer liaison between the two executives.

Let us hope and pray that the vision of a united movement of Catholic students in a united South Africa soon becomes a reality.

SANDRA LIEBENBERG



CASA and NCFS members demonstrate an economic collapse.

DEVELOPING ACTION FOR LIBERATION

GEOFF VAN DER LINDEN

At the beginning of December last year, about 50 students from NCFS and CASA met for a 10-day leadership conference at a community centre in Ga-Rankuwa, about 50km north of Pretoria. They came from Fort Hare, the Universities of the Western Cape, Cape Town, Natal, Durban-Westville, the Witwatersrand, Pretoria and from Turfloop, Ongoye, Mendunsa and Rhodes. The course was in Christian Development and Education.

The CDE course is a programme aiming to make people critically aware of their society by analysis of its economic and power structures and their effects. It also aims to give people skills in group work and participatory education and an understanding of how these are used for change in oppressed third world countries. Throughout the course there is theological input and community building exercises such as sharing at Masses. The aim is to build up trust and openness between everyone so that all may grow and learn together over the 10 days.

I must admit that while on the train to Pretoria, I was not looking forward to a 10-day course. I felt I'd rather be relaxing at the coast somewhere. How wrong I was! It turned out to be an invaluable experience, one that was a privilege to have.

The most valuable part of the time for many was the openness and free sharing amongst people from widely diverse backgrounds. It is a sign of hope for the future that people of such different beliefs and perspectives could get on so well together. It also emphasises the extent to which the structures of this society spiritually impoverish its people by separating them from each other and instilling in them a fear of change. This fear is paralysing and results in the continuation of an unjust status quo, benefitting only the rich and powerful. The CDE programme tries to confront and overcome this fear and to plant in its participants a commitment to working for



Smiles all round while planning the next input session.

change, because it believes this is how Christians will realise God's Kingdom and His will.

The NCFS students, being white and therefore automatically part of the oppressive class, had to do some soul-searching to analyse their role in society in the light of the Gospel. This is quite painful as God (according to the theological input we had) and the CASA members totally reject the kind of society we are part of. This is not to say that individuals are rejected. The person must be separated from the structure when discussing evil. We were challenged and indeed, in some cases, begged to take sides actively, because to be neutral is to opt for the status quo, regardless of one's intentions. Taking sides (opting for the poor) involves suffering and is therefore a difficult decision to make. (conscientious objection is an example). Few make this decision. Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when he said that it is impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.

Some of the feelings confronted were: one's gut reactions to freedom songs, the fear that Christ's message was being too politicised

(why do we fear that?), the fear of potential loss or suffering resulting from one's options, and the fears arising from the frequent inadequacy of our faith.

So how does one report on this course? It was long, quick, exciting, tiring, fun, challenging, hard, depressing, hopeful and even joyful. Issues discussed include: Christian participation in the armed struggle, Christian response to repression and the problems of students at the "bush colleges" (black universities), the question as to whether the commitments to people (as in marriage) and to the cause are compatible, and our understanding of the Bible and theology and how this is influenced by our class position. Key questions were: can we change our class position? should we? on whose side is God? and most importantly, what is one to do about these issues? A study of the prophet Jeremiah focussed on Christianity in a time of crisis.

For me, and many others, the course was a time of reflection on where one stands in the Christian struggle for a transformed society. To those who are brave enough, I thoroughly recommend the experience.

LIBERATING THEME

MARK JAMES

The 1984 NCFS year theme "Youth Committed to the Poor Through Prayer and Action" expresses a definite search for unity and a deeper integration of faith and life in the NCFS. Vague though it may seem, the year theme does express the way we as NCFS see our faith; as grappling with questions like the relevance faith has to our lives, to issues that arise in our country, and in the world. What is the role of the Christian in a world of poverty and hunger? Can our faith answer these questions? Are they questions for us? Is our faith merely a profession of beliefs and doctrines or is it more part of our everyday lives?

The year theme can be seen as our profession of faith. It reminds us of our Christian life. It doesn't explain our faith and thus we have to unpack the year theme, discuss and debate the issues it raises, thereby making it more visible in our work and actions in NCFS.

The year theme is trying to express a liberating spirituality. A search for life which is truly Christian and truly liberating. A life in search of the path to God.

Last year's year theme was an exploration of the theme of Church of the Poor. Our commitment to the poor is central to our understanding of the church. A church which like Christ, is committed to the little ones, the sinners, the outcasts, the poor. Jesus' commitment was totally to those rejected by society.

Who are the poor? In Jesus' time the poor were those denied human dignity. Those who did not keep the law, the unclean, the sick, the Samaritans, tax collectors. Today the poor are the materially poor, the hungry, the aged, those in the homelands, forced to live in absolute poverty, the unemployed, those who are forced to turn to theft and prostitution in order to survive. They are the exploited workers in the factories who lose their human dignity to machines which determine their pace of work, their

income, their creativity.

It is to these people that God reveals himself. We see it in the revelation of Yahweh (God of Israel) to the slaves (poor) of Egypt. Yahweh's concern was to liberate them from the oppression of Pharaoh.

"And Yahweh said, I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow." (Exodus 3:7-8)

Thus he sent Moses as their leader and liberator. Similarly God also sent his only son. To the poor, Jesus promised God's kingdom (Lk 6:20-21):

"But alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now. Alas for you who have your fill now, you shall go hungry. Alas for you who laugh now; you shall mourn and weep." (Lk 6:24-25)

Nevertheless, Jesus came to save all people. Certainly, God loves all people, why else would he have loved us into existence through creation? His demands for repentance are not the same for all classes of people, however. God's sympathies lie most particularly with the poor, the down-trodden, the poor of the third world.

This is not to say that because you are poor you are instantly canonised. No, the poor do sin and do perpetuate evil. What is meant is that God supports the cause of the poor in contrast to the cause of the rich. The cause of the poor is a way to liberation, of throwing off the shackles of oppression and exploitation, of the poverty and misery which denies their human dignity. The dignity of being

created in the image of God. (Gen.1:27)

The cause of the rich, in contrast, is an individualistic search for self-gratification. Wealth and power are sought to enhance personal status and used to dominate and oppress the poor. The rich will be excluded from God's kingdom because they will choose to place their trust in wealth and power

it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." (Lk18:24-27)

A commitment to the poor demands a decision to stand up for God's justice and love and to side with the poor. It is only by participating in struggles from the perspective of the poor that the rich can be liberated.



than in God's concern for the poor. They will be like the rich aristocrat who had kept all God's commandments from his youth but was unable to give his wealth to the poor (Lk 18:18-23).

"Jesus looked at him and said, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to make their way into the Kingdom of God! Yes,

and temptations.

"Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to perdition is wide and spacious, and many take it but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life and only a few find it." (Mtt.7:13-14).

But he also promises us that his yoke is easy and his burden light (Mtt.11:30).

To keep to the path of God and of life, we have to pray. Thomas Merton, a contemplative, has this to say about prayer:

"As a man is, so he prays. We make ourselves what we are by the way we address God. The man who never prays is one who has tried to run away from himself because he has run away from God. But unreal though he be, he is more real than the man who prays to God with a false and lying heart." (No Man is an Island, p 36.)

The function of prayer is to try to know God intimately and thereby ourselves as well. It is trying to see God "face to face" so we will become aware of His will for us in life. God's will needs to become so part of our lives that what God wills, we will and, therefore, we live no longer by our own selfish whims.

We come to realise God's will through Jesus, the human face of God. It is Jesus who is our model and the example we have to follow. To know Jesus and to develop a close friendship with him, we need to reflect on his life as presented in the Gospels. Prayer allows us to see and experience God working in and transforming our lives.

Prayer cannot just stop here. If it is true prayer, it will move us to go out and love other people. If action is not part of our prayer, then it is false prayer which is being misused for our own selfish ends. Hypocritical prayer seeks to draw attention to ourselves that

others might speak well of us and us "good Christians". It is also convenient to restrict our Christian duty to reciting the Angelus and the Rosary and forgetting the major demands of justice and love. This form of prayer is escapist when it becomes a substitute for action. It is also fatalistic "God's will be done", we do not take responsibility for even our own lives. This is not the prayer God wants, this prayer is revolting to him. (Isaiah 1:11-16). God's concern, therefore, is that our prayer affects the way we relate to our neighbours. We need to love them and treat them justly. Prayer must prepare us to love and love is always active in its expression.

"If one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to them, 'I wish you well; keep yourself warm and eat plenty' without giving them these bare necessities of life, then what good is that. It is by doing something good, and not only be believing, that a man is justified." (James 2:15-16,24)

Similarly, prayer without action is useless.

As youth, we in NCFS are searching for a faith that is relevant to our lives. We are no longer content to merely accept the glib answers of the past. Our faith must, therefore, become a conscious decision to change and struggle in search of truth and justice. This struggle will bring us to wholeness and unity in God. It is this conscious decision to take on suffering and struggle that makes our faith militant, because now we have a passionate interest in life. It is the life that Jesus brings and not the life the world offers. It is God's will that we have life and have it to the full (Jn10:10). It is the eternal life which we can choose to have now, we don't have to wait for after death. Thus we are obliged, as Christians, to make it a reality in our lives, in our country and in our world, NOW.

Women Learning from Each Other

The first leadership training course for young Catholic women held in Johannesburg was undoubtedly a success. The course was run by the Grail — a non-racial, international Christian movement recognised by the Catholic bishops — and aimed to teach young women leadership skills relevant to their Catholic and South African environments. Early January of this year saw eighteen of us from all over the country and from a variety of different universities, teachers' colleges and jobs, converging on the Catholic Conference Centre in Victory Park.

The programme focussed on four main concerns: 1) the bible; 2) feminism and problems facing women; 3) South African political and social realities and 4) leadership skills. These were integrated with remarkable skill and good organisation into a most interesting and challenging week. Most sessions took the form of discussion in groups, while at others, guest speakers were invited, or videos, films and tape/slide shows were

screened.

Prayer in the mornings and evenings set the tone of the course. Regular sing-songs were enjoyed and an interesting talk on the Bible was given.

The course attendants were engrossed in the discussions concerning women's status in today's society, as well as problems surrounding their sexuality — including contraception, pre-marital sex, venereal disease and abortion. A definite highlight of the week was the sharing about their marriage, of a married Grail member and her husband. They illuminated the problems and joys of their married life as well as the difficulties encountered in trying to frame a life in keeping with their religious and political beliefs, while society pressured them to do otherwise.

The focus on South African politics was possibly central to the course and was certainly a very educating experience. BBC and CBS videos on South African happenings gave

HELENE PATTEN

very different sides to that of the SABC. Discussion on the government's policy of relocations was held and Helen Joseph's visit and talk on the history of South African women's resistance was also a high point. Possibly the most valuable time spent in this respect was the informal discussion, argument and exchange of ideas happening in free time. The conference afforded an excellent and rare opportunity for black, brown and white to meet on neutral ground and get to know one another — something essential for the solution to South Africa's problems.

The course was a success not so much because of the programme's contents as because of the manner in which they were presented. The emphasis was on learning from one another and from an exploration of self, rather than from didactic lectures or textbooks. Real contact and communication with people very different from myself, taught me more in that week than I have learnt in a very long time.

diary of a stupid cupid.....

From the diary of a Stupid Cupid:

6 December

Three years in NCFS and still neither a husband nor a vocation. Something must be done about it! Two faint-hearted feminists (faint-hearted because they are just slightly concerned by the above state of (lack of) affairs) set off to investigate.

7 December

Paris, the city of romance and revolution — it is left and fitting that the IMCS Head Office is here. The workers of IMCS (the International Married Couples Society) set the trend by their own relationships. For example, Claude and Aurelia married three times but always to each other.

8 December



To satisfy your curiosity, Estelle Caron and her much love husband Laurier.

The IMCS office is on the 5th floor and IYCS (International Young Couples Society) is found on the 4th floor of the same building. The significance of being at a higher 'étage' (locally translated as a higher step up the ladder) is left for personal discernment — for help regarding discernment, visit your local Jesuit.

The ideological level to which the state of Holy Matrimony is raised, reveals a fundamental difference between the two movements. Yet the matrimonial strategy of IMCS is to make all their visitors share a bed.

9 December

Gay Parée — well, what our faint-hearted feminists saw was fairly straight but still a great deal of fun. They are still single.

IMCS: kingdom living

A member of the International team of the Movement for Catholic Students, Claude Akpokavie, was interviewed for Crossfire at the Movement's headoffices in Paris. The other members of the team include Iris Almida (the president), Bernado Bassanco (the secretary-general), Laurier Caron (who visited South Africa last year) and Father Daniel Laperre (the international chaplain).

The International Movement of Catholic students was formed in 1921. It is a branch of Pax Romana and is made up of approximately 75 national movements, NCFCS being one of them.

Claude's vision of the IMCS is that of a community, which is "not a ghetto closed in on itself, but rather a community that reaches out and has a special and privileged place for the poor". Claude says the spirituality which the movement affirms is that of the God of Life, He who promises to give life abundantly. This vision is antagonistic to the injustices in the world, which creates death. Claude emphasises that our spirituality should not be one of evasion but one that is committed to deep prayer and concrete action. He says it is important to realise God's incarnation into history and that He is present in our day-to-day struggles. He believes that Christians are called to eradicate sin in the world. This sin is manifest in many ways, in individuals, communities and structures that we live in.

Claude then described the international team's work. He said that reports are kept to a minimum and the priority lies with the National movements. They see it as one of their central tasks to co-ordinate the national and regional experiences of the movements on different continents. This is done by accompanying the processes lived at national level, visiting, following-up, introducing new elements into national reflection and facilitating dialogue between national movements. He says that for the international team to loose contact



IMCS leaders Iris and Claude with Debbie and Terry.

with the national teams would mean that their work has no meaning.

Claude says they also analyse and reflect theologically on the local situations because they often find that injustices at the local level have roots in the international level. They are then in a better position to take-up issues — local, regional and continental and involve themselves in relevant activities.

The International team has a presence inside the Vatican and on regional church bodies such as SECAM — The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar. In Claude's words they see their role in the Vatican, the congregation of the Laity and Justice and Peace Commission, as a "militant and prophetic presence" who "brings up the preoccupations of the base".

The international team also collaborates with other Catholic Youth Organisations such as YCS and YCW.

IMCS has a tradition of an international presence so they organise sessions on issues facing the church and society. They work with all

groups, with the option of promoting justice and social harmony. In the UN, they work mainly with UNESCO and the UN Commission on Human Rights. In Europe, they are working with a group called ATD 4th World, who are concerned about the poor in Europe and are organising a conference on marginalised youth. They are also participating in the International Year of the Youth, whose theme is "Peace, Participation and Development". The team have even participated in flower planting. However, in whatever group they have participated in, they have desired to be present in a prophetic manner and remain faithful to the poor and have youth as their priority.

"The most boring" part of their work, in Claude's words, is the administration which involves such things as writing reports and applications for funding.

One of the teams' greatest challenges is to build the team's community where all the team members' different experiences of faith and spirituality are synthesised. As Claude says: "The Kingdom begins with us."

Debbie Cabion

Under the banner of Christ

One of things that angers me most about right-wing politicians are the constant platitudes towards this "Christian Civilisation" we live in and the need to protect it. I would contend that this government is not Christian, let alone civilised, unless one considers the following to be marks of civilisation:

1. the forced removals of millions of people;
2. detention without trial and the number of people who die while detained;
3. the bannings and banishment of people who speak out;
4. the illegal occupation and rape of Namibia;
5. the shooting of children by police;
6. the migratory labour system which breaks up families;
7. the unequal education system;
8. the legislating of racist discrimination through, for example, the Immorality Act, the Mixed Marriages Act, Group Areas Act, Pass Laws etc.

In short, the heresy of apartheid.

But this does not only happen in South Africa — Ronald Reagan offers the same tokenism, but this is not the track record of the USA which shows more directly the truth behind the sham. For example:

1. the constant pushing up of nuclear arms;
2. the role of the USA in Latin America has also been constantly bad and repressive, taking for example the role of America in engineering a military coup in Chile against a democratically-elected government, resulting in the killing

of thousands. Reagan has lived up to this tradition by continuing and, in fact, increasing aid to the repressive regimes, the invasion of Granada and the harassment of the people of Nicaragua.

The church especially has felt the brunt of this with by 1978, 79 priests, brothers and sisters having been killed and countless being jailed and tortured by the American-backed regime;

3. similarly their role in Vietnam;
4. in South Africa, they continue to support the present govern-



ment with their policy of "constructive engagement".

This cannot be seen as the role of Christians, nor can the blanket excuse of being a defence against communism be used.

Christians should rather be taking up their true role in directing social issues and taking sides with the poor and oppressed in their struggle. In the words of Pope John Paul II: "The voice of the church, echoing the voice of human conscience . . . deserves and needs to be heard in our time when the growing wealth of a few parallels the growing poverty of the masses."

Yours
A Disillusioned Christian

Student Action For Peace

The 62nd Nusas Congress, held in Durban in December, began on a high note with Kate Philip being released from detention and the recently unbanned Rev Beyers Naude delivering the opening address.

Beyers' presence at the Congress was particularly significant as it was the first time in seven years that he could accept his position as Nusas honorary president.

The Congress was the culmination of an eventful year for Nusas, during which stronger working ties were built up with other student organisations. Delegates from Stellenbosch and RAU attended the congress and messages of support were received from AZASO, COSAS and the newly-formed Namibian National Students Organisation.

Much discussion and planning took place over the six days, including plans around "International Year of the Youth", in which possible co-operation with NCFS was discussed. The extension and improvement of Nusas-administered student benefit schemes were examined, such as the Swift Lift and National Discount Schemes. Other campaigns looked at centered around faculty councils, the Education Charter and the End Conscription Campaign.

In the early hours of Saturday morning the Congress ended with Brendan Barry, past WITS SRC president, being elected as the 1985 Nusas president, and "Student Action for Peace" being chosen as this year's theme.

More than merely aware

Dear Crossfire

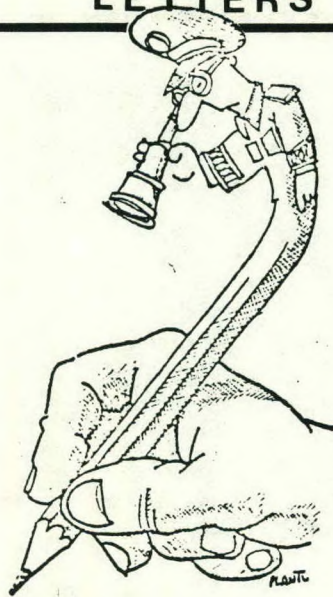
Since I encountered Cathsoc and NCFS two years ago, they have always meant "unanimous agreements" and unbounded freedom in giving and receiving ideas, aspirations, feelings and fears. It was a discovery, an eye-opener revealing another, better way of life while showing that as Christians we must be more than merely aware of the suffering poor, those who are deprived both materially and spiritually. Perhaps the most significant find was the amazing definitions given distinguishing between a radical and a liberal. We should never forget the vast difference that does show and which is the true generosity of heart which Jesus displayed.

A radical resents injustice to any man and shares the sufferings of his fellow men. He faces issues squarely and does not hide his cowardice behind the convenient cloak of rationalisation. He refuses to be diverted by superficial problems and is concerned with fundamental causes rather than current manifestations. He wants a world in which the individual's worth is recognised. He makes a definite contribution to their social welfare.

A liberal is a "Mr But", broad-minded, sensible, proud of his Christianity. He uses his head, so he is dispassionate, judging all sides of issues with the result that he does nothing but protest, agreeing with objectives, but not with tactics.

When faced with dilemmas we inevitably do encounter at Conference, the cultural clash etc., I feel it is simply wonderful that we can accept the differences and be sparked up to give spontaneously of ourselves and experience such harmony. Thank you.

With love
Sylvie Montignies
University of Port Elizabeth



The Empire Strikes Back

Dear Crossfire

I read and read again, but still cannot believe the narrow-minded context of the letter submitted by "An Angry Catholic" (Crossfire, November 1984), condemning the Pope for certain "indiscretions".

Let us examine each of these "indiscretions" in turn. Firstly, our angry Catholic takes exception to the Pope's condemnation of contraception. This issue is a controversial one, but we need to investigate it with our personal understanding with regard to the vulnerability of the Pope's position. Officially and publicly, he must oppose contraception.

His motive must be to encourage the morality of chastity and continence within marriage, something which is being eroded in our society where the "love equals sex" syndrome defaces the essential dignity of people.

Contraception is also a precursor of other moral issues, eg: pre-marital sex and abortion. I believe that God's blessings increase if people can perhaps curtail their carnal passions and mortify themselves.

Secondly, the Pope's "unfounded" condemnation of the priests in Nicaragua. In our world, many priests seem to have forgotten that they are priests and not

government officials, politicians or soap-opera heroes. I am not suggesting that religion and politics are polar opposites, it is rather a question of priorities. There are other mitigating circumstances as well. The Pope has to consider the image the church projects.

Thirdly, the Pope's "attack" on Liberation Theology: the Pope has not condemned Liberation Theology, rather he expresses reservations about this Theology's Marxist tendencies and class analysis. Our colleague reveals his/her ignorance of Liberation Theology when he/she states that this theology "revolves around building equality and justice". I suggest he/she reads the Encyclical in L'Osservatore Romano entitled "Theology of Liberation", published by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (September 1984).

Fourthly, the Pope's meeting with "heinous individuals" such as P W Botha. Surely if the Pope can converse with Russian officials and shake hands with Arafat, then he can meet Botha? Who did Christ fraternise with? The "moral elite"? It would be presumptuous and self-righteous to suggest that the Pope should not meet such characters. Interaction may achieve more than alienation. Our "angry Catholic" needs to climb down off his/her pedestal, placate his/her anger and practise a little Christian charity which he/she so generously suggests the Pope is lacking.

Yours
A Concerned Catholic
University of Natal-Durban



Ade Bethune

Reflecting priorities

Dear Crossfire

I would like to express my extreme dissatisfaction with the present administering of NCFS.

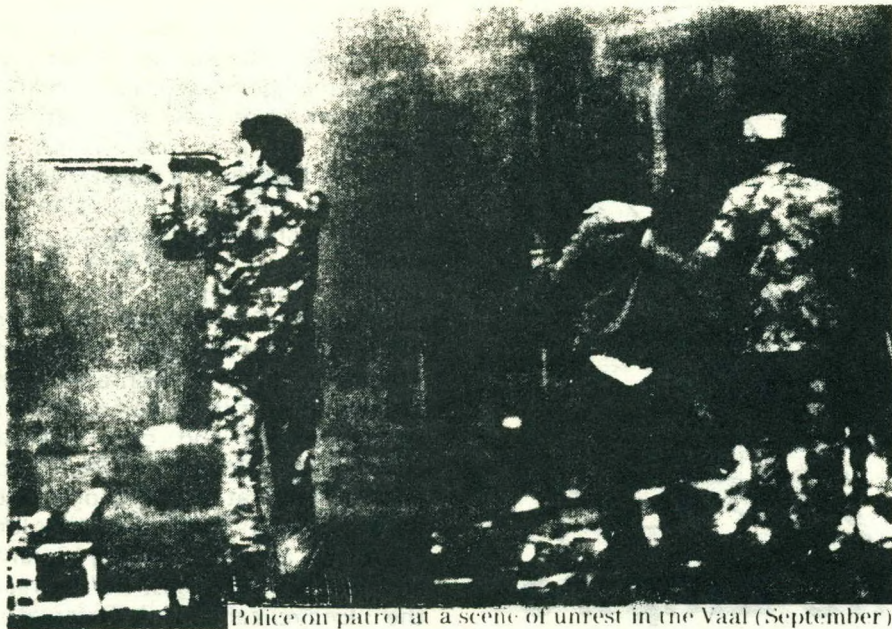
At the risk of losing would-be first year members, I feel I must speak out against those preoccupied with all-night Reflection Team meetings which discuss minor issues such as the supposed "tensions" in the higher ranks of the NCFS Executive, like those between President and National Co-ordinator, or between Wits Cathsoc and "nationally-minded" Vaalies.

If these Reflection Team session did anything to further the coming of Christ's Kingdom, they would be well worthwhile. The fact remains, however, that our industrious Witsies have become engrossed in their own little world, as their ludicrous analysis of other campuses' problems illustrates. One has only to read the minutes of these meetings to find priceless gems of misconstruction.

The tragedy behind this masquerade is that many enthusiastic Catholic students at the smaller universities are becoming confused and are feeling unwanted. A Port Elizabeth friend said as much to me last week. The very ones who need this "wonderful support system" which we are promising, are being turned away or largely ignored.

I trust my call will be heard.

An Alert Capetonian
University of Cape Town



Police on patrol at a scene of unrest in the Vaal (September).

Voice of the Church

Dear Crossfire

It was with shock and horror that I read the SACBC's report on police conduct during the township protests of August-November last year. The underlying causes of the unrest in black townships are to be found in the daily grievances of black people living under the apartheid form of government in South Africa. Catalysts of the late-1984 unrest include protest against the new constitution, unpopular and unrepresentative local authorities, rent increases, working conditions and low wages on the mines and conditions in black schools and on black campuses. However, the point which the SACBC's report wishes to emphasise is that police conduct in the Vaal townships at the time (especially during the Sebokeng uprising in October) was provocative and extreme, making a mockery of its claims to be maintaining "law and order". I quote from page 5 of the report: "The overwhelming impression created by the affidavits as a whole is that the police behaviour in the townships resembled that of an occupying foreign army controlling enemy territory by force without regard for the civilian population and, it appears, without regard for the law."

The report consists of statements collected from residents in the various townships which vividly describe numerous incidents of police misconduct reminiscent of

the authoritarian brutality of the Nazi regime. The allegations against the police can be summarised as follows:

1. Allegations of reckless or wanton violence, including:
 - 1.1 Indiscriminate use of firearms
 - 1.2 Assaults and beatings
 - 1.3 Assaults on mineworkers
2. Allegations of damage to property.
3. Provocative, callous or insensitive conduct
4. Indiscriminate or reckless use of teargas
5. Police conduct at funerals
6. Other allegations (p 5 SACBC report).

The Bishops's Report is a powerful indication that the church in South Africa is beginning to take its role seriously. In a time of structural injustice, repression, civil war and widespread violence, the church is called upon to side with the oppressed, to be a voice for the voiceless, to be the conscience of its apathetic congregations, and to boldly proclaim the uncompromised truth of things. Through their report the church hierarchy in South Africa have made a powerful statement on abuse of state power. It is now up to us, the body of the church, to decide whether we are going to respond to this challenging leadership or whether we dare to turn a blind eye once again.

Sandra Liebenberg
University of Cape Town

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