

The Churches on Peace  
Recent Development

President Reagan and his administration are now seriously worried about the Christian churches' resolute opposition to his war policies.

The most telling expression of such opposition came from the Pastoral Letter of the Roman Catholic Bishops of the USA which was approved and notified by the Bishops on May 30, 1983, in a historic meeting in Chicago. The vote was overwhelming 238 in favour and only 9 opposed.

The title of the document is "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response". The document, running to some hundred pages, was approved only after a long process of drafting and discussion and re-drafting for two years. It was the third draft that was approved in Chicago in May. There is a rumour going around that President Reagan was so scared of the First Draft and not having succeeded in putting direct pressure on the bishops to tone it down, sent Vice-President George Bush to see the Pope in Rome and ask him to use his authority to bring the bishops under control. The only facts we know are that Vice-President George Bush did go to Rome and see the Pope last year, and that Cardinal

of Chicago, the main architect of the document as well as Archbishop John Roach of Minneapolis, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the U.S.A. had been summoned to the Vatican around that time.

Speaking "as pastors, not politicians" the bishops urge a halt in production and development of new nuclear weapons. They rule out the first use of nuclear weapons, and cannot imagine a situation in which nuclear retaliation can be justified. They say they are "highly skeptical about the morality of a limited nuclear war". They state clearly that good ends, defending one's country, protecting freedom, cannot justify immoral means, the use of weapons which kill indiscriminately and threaten whole societies. The bishops endorse the right of conscientious objection to military service.

A similar, but milder, 70 page document has been issued by the 68 Roman Catholic bishops of West Germany. The document represents a liberal establishment point of view on nuclear weapons and on deterrence, and has been welcomed by representative politician from the major groupings in West Germany, the Social Democratic Party, the Christian Democratic Union, and the Greens.

The Dutch Roman Catholic Bishops and the Hungarian Catholic bishops also have issued statements condemning nuclear war, as also the Roman Catholic hierarchies of German Democratic Republic, Austria, France, as well as England and Wales. The Irish bishops' statement is in the L'osservatore Romano weekly edition of August 22-29, 1983.

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The non-Catholic Churches have been even more vocal and forthright in condemning nuclear war. The most recent such statement came from the Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Representatives of the 300 member churches came from 100 countries for the ACC's Sixth Assembly, in Vancouver, Canada, from July 24th to August 10th, 1983. We can only quote snippets from its thousands of pages of documentation:

"We call upon the Churches, especially those in Europe, both East and West, and in North America, to redouble their efforts to convince their governments to reach a negotiated settlement (on arms reduction), and to turn away, before it is too late, from plans to deploy additional or new nuclear weapons in Europe, and to begin immediately to reduce and then eliminate altogether present nuclear forces.

"We urge the Churches as well to intensify their efforts to stop the rapidly growing deployment of nuclear weapons and support systems in the Indian and Pacific Oceans and to press their governments to withdraw from

The same document asked the Churches to consider and adopt the following positions.

- (a) a nuclear war can never be justified;
- (b) a nuclear war is unlikely to remain "limited"; so talk about "limited nuclear war" is dangerous;
- (c) all nations potentially or actually possessing nuclear weapons should unequivocally renounce "first use";
- (d) The concept of deterrence, the credibility of which depends on the possible use of nuclear weapons, is to be rejected as morally unacceptable and as incapable of safeguarding peace and security in the long-term.
- (e) "the production and deployment of nuclear weapons as well as their use constitute a crime against humanity, and therefore there should be a complete halt in the production of nuclear weapons and in weapons research and development in all nations, to be expeditiously enforced through a treaty".

The general thrust of the Assembly was that nuclear weapons should be de-legitimised and banned by international treaty. There were several statements which took clear and unequivocal positions against the arms race and militarism in general and especially against nuclear weapons and delivery systems. The Assembly took strong stands on the unavailability of the churches confronting the minority government of South Africa, against the illegal South African occupation of Namibia, for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all territories occupied in 1967 and from ~~the territories occupied in 1967~~ Lebanon, and for "the implementation of the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination including the right of establishing a sovereign Palestinian state"

The Assembly approved a public statement on Central America, which said among other things.

"Guatemala in the past year has witnessed mass.

which defy belief. Despite the magnitude of economic, political and military resources provided to the regime by the U.S. Government, the El Salvadoran government has demonstrated an inability to curb human rights violations and to implement needed reform.....

The policies of the Honduran government threaten the territorial sovereignty of Nicaragua and cause considerable harassment to refugees from El Salvador" .....

"Approximately 500,000 human beings have been forced to flee their country and one million more have been displaced from their homes in Guatemala alone".

The assembly paid tribute to the life-affirming actions of the people of Nicaragua, commented their literacy and health programmes, their land reform and new civil liberties. It called Reagan's destabilization efforts in Nicaragua "an affront to life"...." fully capable of plunging not only the countries of Central America but also those of the Caribbean into deeper suffering and widespread loss of life,.... and undercuts the legitimate call and struggle of the poor throughout the region for an end to exploitation".

It is well known that the Russian Orthodox Church, with the co-operation of other churches and religions, has taken a leading role in the Peace Movement. In 1977 (June 6-10) the World Conference: Religions Workers for Lasting Peace, Disarmament and Just Relations Among Nations, made a major impact on the movement. This was followed by the equally important World Conference (600 participants from 90 countries) on saving the sacred Gift of Life from Nuclear Catastrophe (Moscow, 1981) and the Round Table on the Economic and Moral Consequences of a Nuclear Freeze (Moscow, 1982).

Practically all Eastern and western Churches are now highlighting the issue of Peace on their agenda, since all of them sense the imminent peril of a nuclear holocaust. Since that peril seems still only more imminent than before, it is to be expected that the Christian Churches will

4. The injustice is not only in the wastage of 6% of our gross production for destroying people rather than for building them up. The crux of the issue is that the remaining 94% is also unjustly distributed, through structures which ensure that a major portion of that 94% as well as of the 6% will flow directly into the pockets of the privileged classes of the world, i.e. about 800 million people among the world's 4000 million. The use of the 6% is not only to get profits from military production, but also to protect the structure which unjustly distributes a good part of the remaining 94%, especially outside the socialist economies.

5. The time is now to stop the escalation of military spending. The arms race has already entered space. Large sums are likely to be budgeted this year and in the coming years to finance a space-based defence system which will make all nations - the whole of humanity - insecure, more unjust and badly panic ridden. The research on space-based anti-missile and anti-satellite activity through Laser and Particle beams should be stopped now - if ever we are going to have a world without weapons of mass destruction and of mass war. It may be too late to take these things out of space, once they are launched.

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Conclusion

Justice and Peace are integrally related to each other. In India as well as elsewhere the Peace Movement should be simultaneously committed to disarmament and to just national and international economic orders. The struggle must begin at the level of helping the people become fully aware of the relation between war and injustice.

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