

Is the Catholic Church in Australia Supporting Communism?

The issue facing the Bishops' Conference on the CCJP

Rightwing propagandists have been having a field day in their attacks on the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and on the work of Australian Catholic Relief. But while the media have tended to accept these attacks uncritically, there is another dimension which needs consideration by the Bishops' Conference meeting this month writes Fr BRUCE DUNCAN, CSsR, a member of the *Outlook* board.

REMARKABLE accusations have been made against several Catholic organisations in the Australian media recently.

The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and Australian Catholic Relief (ACR) are 'being used for outrightly political and revolutionary causes', wrote Michael Barnard in *The Age* on 18 March 1986. ACR is funding Communist organisations in the Philippines, said Anthony McAdam in *The Bulletin*, of February 25, (48). The CCJP has fallen under 'Marxist' influence, says B. A. Santamaria in his *News Weekly* of January 8, 1986. Santamaria has also called for a boycott of ACR's fund-raising Lenten appeal, Project Compassion.

The accusations began with attacks on the 1985 CCJP Social Justice document, *Work for a Just Peace*, and have now moved on to attacking the funding policies of ACR. So far the Catholic bishops have been rather quiet on the issues, but they will need to come to grips with them at their annual meeting this month.

Other Catholics are very concerned about what appears to be a systematic campaign. As *Outlook* said in March, if the bishops were to cave in to this campaign, it would demonstrate that Santa maria had 'a de facto power of veto' over them.

Two-thirds of Bishops did not approve CCJP's statement **POINT OF VIEW**

In a kind of way, history was made in Australia during the past month. The American Embassy in Canberra took the unprecedented step of writing a strong six page letter of protest against a document on nuclear issues recently prepared and published by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. When the latter body replied, the American Embassy did not let the matter drop, but restated its position, despoiling its arguments further.

The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace is obviously pleased that it has been taken seriously by the United States itself. Whether the Catholic Bishops appoint its members, and finance its activities to the extent of a quarter of a million dollars annually, should congratulate themselves equally is another question.

The Catholic Commission's document *Work for a Just Peace: Reflections on Post-making in an Armed World*, falls into the category of the familiar attacks made by the extreme Left in Australia on the general Western policy of preparedness to meet a possible military attack by the Soviet Union.

The CCJP covers itself by using a few mildly critical words against the Soviet Union. The impact of its whole statement, however, as of all of the CCJP's statements on these questions over the past decade, is anti-Western, and particularly anti-American.

Unilateralist

On the present state of the nuclear question, it attacks President Reagan's policy of building an anti-missile defensive screen. It alleges that President Reagan's SDI is not aimed at defence but at offence. If SDI is not permissible, the only alternative is to continue the present policy of deterrence. Yet the statement itself clearly implies that deterrence itself is intrinsically immoral. If both SDI and nuclear deterrence are excluded, it logically follows that there is no acceptable policy other than unilateral disarmament, regardless of what the Soviet does.

Neither the Pope, nor even the American Bishops, Twenty-four Australian Catholic Bishops, Twenty-two of whom voted for it, which variety of reasons they obtained. But since the statement in the

the installations at Pine Gap and their control over to an international authority, which, of course, the cannot possibly do. It is thus demanding, the same kind of neutralist course as New Zealand. That is what the document means in theory and practice, despite all the hair-splitting.

The document, of course, would not have excited any notice unless it seemed behind it. The lay members of the Commission are completely unknown to the Catholic public who have never had any say in their appointment, although the Catholic public contributes the money which maintains them.

It is fair to say that not one Catholic in fifty thousand would even have heard their names.

The document derives its authority from a single statement that has been approved for discussion and reflection by more than two-thirds majority vote of the Catholic Bishops of Australia. On the authority of that "more than two-thirds" majority vote, its contents have passed into the Catholic schools system, where they are presumably learnt by children on the basis of that authority. Any criticisms are immediately attacked as coming only from "extremists".

In substance that claim of approval by more than two-thirds of the Bishops is fraudulent. When I put the question of whether two-thirds of the Bishops actually approved the statement to one Bishop, he replied "Contrary to one persistent claim by the CCJP and its supporters that two-thirds of the Australian Bishops approved the 1985 statement of the CCJP, *Work for a Just Peace*, I affirm that this is not so, and I categorically deny that two-thirds of the Australian Bishops gave a positive approval to such a statement."

What happened was this. There are forty-four Australian Catholic Bishops. Twenty-two of whom voted for it, which is bad enough. One voted against it, which is bad enough. One voted against it, which variety of reasons they obtained. But since the statement in the

Since the CCJP has, knowingly, involved the vast mass of Catholics who maintain it, in an attack on Australia's relationships with the U.S., since children in Catholic schools are to be brainwashed with this policy on the fraudulent claim that it is supported by more than two-thirds of the Bishops, it becomes inevitable that a further issue must be raised.

The people who, each Lent, contribute over \$2 million to Project Compassion, the Catholic Lenten collection for overseas helping the poor, I have heard that they are made from several pulpits.

A quarter of a million dollars of that money goes to maintain the CCJP, an expenditure which has no relationship whatsoever with helping the poor. Other quite dubious expenditures are made for instance in relation to certain projects run by the Cambodian government.

Surely, there is a question of elementary honesty in this, as there is in making essentially fraudulent claims as to the number of Bishops who voted for the statement, as distinct from abstaining.

Obligation

Two years ago, when a group of Catholic parents protested to Cardinal Gagnon, now President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, at the widespread disobedience in Catholic schools to the norms established by Pope John Paul II in the matter of sex instruction, the Cardinal "referred to the obligation of the ordinary faithful to the obedience of the ordinary faithful to ensure that they can say," Cardinal Gagnon reported, "we are not going to give the more to the parents."

Santamaria attack on the CCJP in News Weekly.

Distortion by *News Weekly*

The present attack on the CCJP began with an article in *News Weekly* (May 15, 1985) headed 'C.C.J.P.'s draft "peace" statement backs unilateral disarmament'. It claimed that 'The statement explicitly advocates *unilateral* nuclear disarmament', and said it could 'almost have been written by the Communist Party'. A look at the draft document, however, reveals these criticisms as being grossly distorted and blatantly untrue.

The draft, which was here approved by the bishops unchanged, explicitly quoted from the US bishops' 1983 statement, *The Challenge of Peace*:

While we do not advocate a policy of unilateral disarmament, we believe the urgent need for control of the arms race requires a willingness for each side to take some first steps . . . By independent initiatives we mean carefully chosen limited steps which the United States could take for a defined period of time seeking to elicit a comparable step from the Soviet Union (p 27).

The CCJP understood its 1981 call for a 'unilateral step' towards disarmament as 'an independent initiative such as the United States Catholic Bishops have proposed' (p 28). Again it explicitly disavowed unilateral disarmament. It called for a review of the 'relationship with the United States in the hope that this will lead to further Australian initiatives to promote gradual, mutual, balanced, verifiable disarmament' (p 33).

'The accusations . . . have now moved on to attacking the funding policies of ACR. So far the Catholic bishops have been rather quiet on the issues, but they will need to come to grips with them . . .'

It is immediately obvious that the *News Weekly* article completely misrepresented the CCJP's position. Nor does it seem to have apologised for or corrected these remarkable errors.

Many letter writers to the newspapers seem to have believed the *News Weekly* version without checking with the CCJP document itself, and repeated the accusations of unilateralism and anti-Americanism. Even an editorial in *The Australian* (February 5) reported the accusations without refutation.

Despite attempts to clarify the issues by the CCJP and the responsible bishops, the flood of letters to *The Australian* illustrated the success of the distortion in the minds of many people.

Bishops guilty of sin?

News Weekly even began attacking bishops. It quoted Ken Gott, a member of the Victorian ALP, saying that 'One does not lightly accuse Catholic Bishops of sin, but in the light of their endorsement of the [CCJP] report . . . the charge must be seriously considered' (October 23, 1985, 4).

Bishop Mulkearns of Ballarat protested to *News Weekly* about this article's charge that he had described critics of CCJP as anti-communist ideologues. What Mulkearns had said was; 'A *number* [italics added] of vehemently anti-communist correspondents are not above using the communist technique of fixing labels on people, denigrating them and summarily dismissing their arguments'.

News Weekly in reply asserted that 'the ordinary citizen's reading of the Bishop's condemnation "a *number* . . ." would in fact conclude that *most* critics of the CCJP statement belong to the group' (November 6). It made no apology.

Santamaria's objections

B. A. Santamaria's disagreements with the CCJP go back some years. In 1977 he argued that the CCJP was making partisan political statements and should not be funded by the bishops through Australian Catholic Relief (cf. *The Australian*, February 18, 1977).

Archbishop Gleeson of Adelaide replied that the Commission was set up by the Australian bishops in 1968 in line with the wishes of Pope Paul VI and was funded in similar fashion to its counterparts in other countries. Full reports of what happened to ACR money were available to Catholics in their churches.

Mr Santamaria rejoined that the CCJP was not genuinely educational but propagandist. 'That is the essential point . . . There is a role for propaganda, but it should be privately financed', he said (*Catholic Weekly*, March 3, 1977, 11).

Referring to his own experience when running the Catholic Social Movement during the 1950s, he said that in January 1958 he had accepted the view that official Catholic bodies should not hold particular political views.

My impression was that this issue was settled as far back as the mid-fifties when the Bishops ceased to assist the Catholic Social Movement on the basis that while the fight against Communism was incumbent on every Catholic as a matter of principle, the particular political attitudes which that body believed to be essential to an effective contest could not be officially supported by the Church.

He said that this also meant that the Church could not fund the 'propagandist' CCJP (*Catholic Weekly*, March 3, 1977, 11). In other words, if the bishops decided that Santamaria himself could not do it, why should they let CCJP?

An Assessment

I would suggest that the positions of CCJP and the old Movement are altogether different. First, the CCJP is not involved in partisan political activity as was the old Movement.

Secondly, the CCJP does not claim that all loyal Catholics must agree with it or follow its directives, as the Movement appeared to do.

Thirdly, the CCJP is not a secret organisation with political objectives, but a body appointed by the bishops to promote discussion and debate among Catholics on social issues from an ethical viewpoint. Unavoidably, these will have political implications but that is incidental.

The aim is to improve ethical debate among Catholics, not to secure political or industrial power, such as the old Movement intended.

Finally, the status of the Commission is clear. It has none of the ambiguity of the old Movement about whether it was Catholic Action or not. The CCJP has no party political role at all. For these reasons, Mr Santamaria's comparison of CCJP with the Movement is misleading.

This long debate throws a fresh light on Santamaria's claim that Catholics have never had the education function of ACR explained, inferring that they have been misled (cf. *News Weekly*, January 8, 1986).

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Michael Whitely, director of ACR replied that it had distributed hundreds of thousands of copies of reports at all Catholic churches giving full details of ACR funding, a fact well known to Santamaria. Santamaria's argument that Catholics have not been informed is clearly quite untenable.

More seriously, he charges the CCJP with basing its statements on 'Marxist or quasi-Marxist propositions and assumptions'. But the central question concerns the authority of the CCJP: 'Perhaps the most objectionable aspect of this year's Statement was the authority it claimed, since it is on the basis of this authority that its quasi-Marxist postures are funnelled into Catholic seminaries, religious orders', etc (*News Weekly*, January 8, 1986).

The authority of the Commission

Some Catholics are confused about whether they are required to agree as Catholics with the statements of the CCJP. The problem is a real one, for it is only in recent decades that theologians have made clear what degree of assent the Church required for different types of statements, and consequently the legitimacy and scope of dissent.

This was not well understood in the past in Australia. Up to the 1950s many Catholic social activists, for instance, thought that everything in papal encyclicals was binding in faith, and so they championed papal proposals such as the corporate state.

More surprising was the claim of the Catholic bishops in their 1949 statement *Catholic Action in Australia*, which said that those who disagreed with the policy or directives of the National Secretariat, at that time headed by B. A. Santamaria, were disloyal to their religion.

'Hence any antipathy or even lukewarmness towards Catholic Action on the part of any Catholic could not be reconciled with a deep and fervent Catholic spirit' (italics in original). The bishops insisted that all in Catholic Action were to support the National Secretariat, and an 'offence against this spirit [of co-operation and unity] must be viewed in a most serious light in the crisis of the present day'.

Hence it is understandable if some Catholics are confused about the standing of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace today, nearly four decades after such a vigorous endorsement of the Movement.

In general, the degree and type of assent which Catholics are required to give to

Church statements varies with the level of authority making the statement, the closeness of its content to the core of Christian faith, and the significance of the statement in the circumstances.

In practice, there are very few statements which Catholics are obliged to accept *de fide*. Most statements require 'religious assent', but this allows for the possibility of dissent in varying degrees.

The US Bishops

The US Bishops in their 1983 statement *The Challenge of Peace*, anticipated this problem of the authority of the statement and what assent they required of Catholics. They referred to the Vatican Council, saying that general moral principles had greater authority than concrete applications. In this letter

we address many concrete questions concerning the arms race, contemporary warfare, weapons systems, and negotiating strategies. We do not intend that our treatment of each of these issues carry the same moral authority as our statements of universal moral principle. At times we re-assert universally binding moral principles (e.g., non-combatant immunity and proportionality). At still other times we re-affirm statements of recent popes and the teaching of Vatican II. Again, at other times we apply moral principles to specific cases.

The US bishops continued that in applying moral principles to concrete situations 'we realize — and we wish readers to recognize — that prudential judgments are involved based on specific circumstances which can change or which can be interpreted differently by people of good will (e.g. the treatment of "No First

Use").'

However, the moral judgments that we make in specific cases, while not binding in conscience, are to be given serious attention and consideration by Catholics as they determine whether their moral judgments are consistent with the Gospel.

The US bishops said that some Catholics may legitimately and with sincerity disagree with their conclusions; in complex issues like this, a variety of views was to be expected though all hold the same moral principles. They urged 'mutual respect among different groups in the church'.

'Not only conviction and commitment are needed in the church, but also civility and charity'.

The CCJP Position

The Australian CCJP document *Work for a Just Peace* did not spell this out quite so clearly. It recognised that in trying to apply moral principles 'many Christians will come to other conclusions. It offers its views for the consideration of all people of goodwill' (p 30).

The CCJP document was approved 'for discussion and reflection' by more than two-thirds of the bishops in line with their agreed voting system, but they did not intend it to bind Catholics in faith to all its details.

'In practice, there are very few statements which Catholics are obliged to accept *de fide*. Most statements require "religious assent", but this allows for the possibility of dissent in varying degrees.'

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What can we say about the CCJP? It has a certain authority, since it was established by the Australian bishops in line with the wishes of Pope Paul VI and continues to be funded by them. The CCJP does not speak with the same authority as the bishops, but in its own right as a body they appointed to investigate social problems. Its authority derives in great part from the intrinsic worth of its arguments and the supporting evidence.

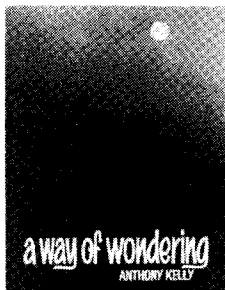
In preparing *Work for a Just Peace*, the CCJP consulted widely among informed Catholic and non-Catholic specialists, as well as theologians. In the light of their comments and under the detailed supervision of the responsible bishops, a final draft was approved by the Catholic bishops.

It is quite clear that Catholics are not bound in faith to agree with everything in such a document. But it retains a certain authority as the most considered official

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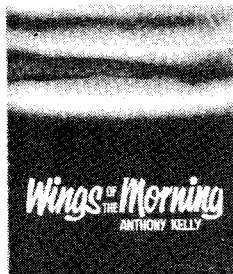


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Catholic effort to date to understand the nuclear dilemma as it affects Australia; it requires and deserves a fair hearing. Dissenters can make a positive contribution by advancing better arguments.

Politics/morality division inadequate

Some CCJP critics have said that the Church has no role to play in social criticism or issues which touch on politics, and that they should speak only to the individual conscience. This is a version of the old 'back-to-the-sacristies' argument, often resulting in the complete privatisation of religion.

The Catholic Church has clearly rejected such arguments, for they imply that political or social problems may not also be ethical problems, that the Church has no right to speak on them or that the Church cannot apply moral principles to particular circumstances.

The value of this argument can be seen by testing it in the case of Hitler's Germany. Who would seriously deny that the Church was justified in speaking out against Nazi policies? Clearly the Church cannot simply vacate the political arena.

The Church undoubtedly had the duty not only to speak about abstract moral principles, but to drive home their application in Nazi Germany. Obviously such statements would have political significance, but the Church would be primarily addressing the moral or ethical issues involved.

It seems that the Church felt constrained against opposing the Nazis more directly because of the fear of a mass apostasy from Catholicism.

Who also today would deny that, despite at times great courage and severe persecution, German Catholics should have opposed the Nazis, particularly their anti-Semitism, earlier and with even more determination?

The example shows clearly how moral issues can underlie political ones, and how the Church must then speak out precisely on the moral grounds, even at the risk of alienating some of its own members. To deny the Church a right to speak on issues which touch politics, to restrict its statements to abstract principles or to allow it to appeal solely to individual conscience, provides no solution to the difficulty.

Nuclear War

The US, German and French bishops have all endorsed the Pope's view that nuclear deterrence can be justified only on condition that it provides a context for disarmament. This concern with the *conditional* acceptance of the legitimacy of deterrence is well stressed by the CCJP. What does this mean for Australia?

It is not only proper but essential for the Catholic Church to review the ANZUS alliance in the light of this question. The

nature of the ANZUS alliance has changed dramatically as Australia has become more closely linked with US military and communication systems, B52 flights and visits from nuclear-powered and possibly nuclear-armed ships.

Why should it be anti-American to ask such questions when the US bishops have done likewise? The question of nuclear war is perhaps the most threatening of all moral issues today, and the bishops and their agencies must both address it on moral grounds and suggest applications.

Not just the credibility of the CCJP has been placed in question, but that of the bishops themselves, and their right to speak on moral issues which impinge on the political arena. Indeed, in my view, it is the bishops who should have been making this statement on peace, not simply the CCJP.

'It is quite clear that Catholics are not bound in faith to agree with everything in such a document. But it retains a certain authority as the most considered official Catholic effort to understand the nuclear dilemma as it affects Australia. It requires and deserves a fair hearing.'

Why could they not do what the US bishops have done, spelling out the different levels of authority in the statement and indicating the scope for informed debate and dissent?

The bishops then must reaffirm the legitimacy of the CCJP statement prepared on their instructions. While recognising the CCJP's status as an official Church body, they should clarify, as have the US bishops, the scope for informed dissent in the suggested application of moral principles.

This could clear the air and improve the quality of debate. Intelligent disagreement and courteous dissent could lead to more positive contributions to the discussion.

Meanwhile the campaign against ACR has turned to allegations of funding for Communist organisations. Santamaria has now accused 'Task Force Detainees' in the Philippines of being Communist. This is much the same sort of charge that the Marcos regime used to make.

Missionaries recently returned from the Philippines have insisted, on the contrary, the TFD is one of the most respected Church organisations for human rights in the country and far from being Communist. Who's credibility is at stake here, ACR's, the bishops' or Santamaria's? ■