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SOUTH AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
PLENARY SESSION - FEBRUARY 1977.

REPORT ON THE CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION ISSUE

presented by Fr. Albert Nolan, O.P. as "ad hoc" consultant to S.A.C.B.C. - 1977

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Introduction

Two resolutions about violence and conscientious objection were taken at the Bishops' Conference in February 1976:

CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE AND VIOLENCE

- 1.0.2 The Conference directs the Administrative Board to arrange for an on-going reflection on the situation of violence that may arise in South West Africa and the Republic of South Africa with a view to publishing studies and informative pamphlets aimed at helping pastors and lay leaders in the promotion of a Christian conscience in the developing situation.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

- 1.0.3 The Conference directs the Administrative Board to arrange for the investigation of the accepted attitude to conscientious objection in the South African armed forces and to explore the need for, and possibility of, the establishment of an ecumenical agency to help safeguard the position of conscientious objectors; to take what practical steps seem necessary in the circumstances, and to report to the next Plenary Session.

This report was compiled in order to assist the Bishops in their further deliberations and ongoing reflection. It is not a theological paper. The theological principles relevant to this matter have been adequately spelt out by the Theology Advisory Commission. (See Fr. O. Magrath's paper in 1975 and Fr. B. Gaybba's paper in 1976).

This is a report on the developments which have taken place in the Churches and in society since the famous SACC Hammanskraal resolution of August 1974. It was deemed necessary to include some information about the very closely related issues of military chaplains and military service for young priests. The report ends with some comments on the nature of the whole problem and a few recommendations.

The Bishops' statement on conscientious objection

(AT THEIR MEETING in April the Bishops of the Church of the Province of South Africa issued the statement on Conscientious Objection and identified themselves with the statement of the Roman Catholic Bishops in Southern Africa. The full text of the Bishops' statements is set out below. EDITOR)

EPISCOPAL SYNOD

WE, the Bishops of the Church of the Province of South Africa, recognize that the place and role of Army Chaplains is a matter of concern and controversy in the Church, particularly the part played by such Chaplains on the northern borders of South Africa and South West Africa.

We recall that the great majority of membership in the Church of the Province is black, and that many black people find it virtually impossible to be identified with the army. At the same time, we recognize the need to minister to all men. The Church must minister pastorally both to men in the South African Defence Force and to those opposing them. This the Church is attempting to do.

It is important that the consciences of men accepting the call to minister on either side of the present conflict should be respected. Chaplains need to be seen as primarily servants of Christ and his Church; as such they should receive the support of the Church's prayers.

We, the Bishops of the Church of the Province of South Africa, express our appreciation of and identify ourselves with the Statement on Conscientious Objection made by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, as set out below:

APPROVED TEXT OF STATEMENT ON CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION ISSUE BY THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, RELEASED ON FEBRUARY 9, 1977

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 on-going 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 human provision for the case of conscientious objectors who refuse to carry arms, provided they accept some other form of community service" (Constitution of 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 services 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 ac-

commodated, 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 service as is done in other countries in the world.

New house for Bishop in exile

LONDON

AN APPEAL launched last month has so far raised £1 600 towards providing a small house for the Right Rev. Colin Winter, the exiled Bishop of Damaraland.

The appeal is being organised by the Rev. John Wheeler, Vicar of St Paul's Truro, and a commissary for the Diocese of Damaraland which covers the country of Namibia (South West Africa).

Mr Wheeler and his "support group" hope eventually to raise about £7 000. He describes the project as "a low pressure appeal," but says that he is pleased with the progress so far made - contributions have come from all over Britain and also from overseas.

The appeal is the group's "act of thanksgiving" for Bishop Winter's restoration to health following his recent illness while on a visit to America.

The Bishop's present home - The Abbey, Sutton Courtenay - which also operates as a centre for visiting students from Namibia and other areas - is proving too much for him to cope with.

It is expected that he will leave the Abbey later this summer, after alternative arrangements have been made for the students, and that he will try to find a small house in the Abingdon area.

(News: CHURCH TIMES)



British Nation and Commonwealth give thanks

AMIDST all the celebrations, the British Nation and the Commonwealth turned its attention for an hour to God in thanksgiving, when it gave thanks for the first twenty-five years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, at a service of great splendour in St Paul's Cathedral in the City of London.

All the flawless ceremonial which Britain specialises in was for that hour offered to God - and to the Queen. It was a formal demonstration and acknowledgement of those deeper feelings and realities which the traditionally reserved British people otherwise find it so hard to express.

As the Queen entered the great building she was greeted by a splendid fanfare from the State Trumpeters which rang round the building. Pausing just inside the west door of the cathedral she was received by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London and the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's. She then moved slowly down the aisle in a long glittering procession.

The unassuming demeanour of the central figure and the relative simplicity of her dress made all the uniformed and ecclesiastical finery seem a trifle overdone. However despite the brilliance of the occasion the service itself was quite simple, and also comparatively short.

The preacher at the service was the Archbishop of Canterbury.

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Guidelines from the Primate

THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY gave the nation three words as guidelines for what he saw as an unpredictable future - penitence, dedication and thanksgiving.

The Primate was preaching at the thanksgiving service held in St Paul's Cathedral to commemorate the Queen's silver jubilee.

He said of the Queen: "Our nation and Commonwealth have been blessed beyond measure by having at their head an example of service untiringly done, of duty faithfully fulfilled, and of a home life stable and wonderfully happy."

The Archbishop, who took as his theme the need for solid foundations, then turned to the new millennium which would be starting within the next twenty-five years.

"None of us can tell what those years will bring," he said. "Pray God they will be years free from war. Doubtless they will see developments in the realm of the physical sciences which will surprise us. Knowledge will increase. The superstructure of society will change - possibly beyond recognition."

"But what about the foundations? Will there be an increase in wisdom as well as in knowledge for the two are by no means the same?"

Dr Coggan said that many today were seeing through the hollowness of a way of life built on materialism, and seeing instead the supreme need for reconciliation and understanding.

Archbishop back from Mozambique

JOHANNESBURG

The Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, the Most Rev. Bill Burnett, who has returned from a weeklong visit to Mozambique described his visit as "most successful".

Mozambique falls within the province of the Archbishop of Cape Town and he had gone there in the course of his duties.

He was the guest of the Bishop of Lebombo, the Rt Rev. Dinis Sengulane, who visited Cape Town last year.

Bishop Burnett said: "I went principally to preach the Gospel and to assist Bishop Sengulane. The welcome I got was overwhelming, not only in words but in special songs that were made up."

During his stay he visited the three southern provinces of Maputo, Gaza and Inhambane. He went to five mission stations and two urban parishes in Maputo.

Bishop Burnett said the Church in Mozambique was pleased the old regime had gone. He was impressed by the deeply-



The Archbishop of Cape Town

rooted faith, particularly in the young people.

The Anglican Church was established in Mozambique at the beginning of this century when Shangaans who were converted to Christianity while working on mines in Johannesburg returned to Mozambique.

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