

# Preface

In the Britain of the 1990's, will it be possible for you to be both a good Christian and a good citizen? This is the question we are trying to face in this special issue.

Over the past two decades British churches have tackled with greater honesty and competence global issues of justice, aid and development. We have learnt that the Gospel demands our involvement in the politics of world poverty, land reform and ecology—other people's politics. In these matters a remarkable consensus of opinion, of Church teaching, has emerged. Our Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops have travelled to South America and South Africa to show their solidarity with the persecuted, with the poor—the distant poor. They have embraced those who defy and break the laws of apartheid—foreign laws. It is when the churches are asked to speak out about what is happening in Britain that the ecclesiastical nerve appears to fail.

For Christians in this country still pride themselves on their impeccable obedience to the State. English Catholics, once tarred with treason and the smell of gunpowder, have traditionally served two masters. By observing a studied separation of powers, they showed obedience to the Church at Mass and within the family, but in their public lives sought to demonstrate their loyalty to the State, Government and the law. Long persecuted, they hoped for rights won through the respectability which now entraps them. Once those rights were granted, the duty of obedience to the State was presumed, and the State envisaged as protecting basic Christian, human, values and liberties. Criticism of Government policy was limited and behind the scenes, an attempt to influence the Establishment by identifying with it and educating its sons. The recusant aristocracy were the acceptable face of the Irish Catholic laity, and that aristocracy could be trusted to protect the Catholic Church's interests. Other politics could be left to Parliament, providing Parliament did not interfere in religion.

Such confidence in the State, and in prelates treading respectfully down the corridors of power, now seems misplaced, untenable. The poverty and human rights violations we have learnt to condemn in the third world have roots not just in British colonial history, but in current economic and foreign policies. The National Security State sanctions the vast, institutionalised evils of abortion and of the nuclear deterrent; while Government policies are increasingly destructive of the common good and civil liberties.

But churches and (with a very few notable exceptions) Church leaders are reluctant to take up the challenge. They may appoint select commissions to study the problems of deterrence; but if the results demand that deterrence be abandoned the commissions are swiftly

ignored and dismissed as 'unrepresentative'. Moral teaching is emaciated as 'family values' collapse into rules of private and sexual behaviour. When evils such as abortion are identified, scant attention is paid to the ethics of resistance. Through those parts of the Church press which are amenable, this distorted picture of Christian responsibility and vocation is strengthened and handed on. Our words betray us: we say that we are 'opposed' to poverty or militarism and mean nothing more than that we disapprove of evil. Christianity collapses into gnosticism, knowledge of right and wrong without the will to play our part. So Christians in this country need to rethink attitudes and re-organise their opposition to the State's injustices. We must show from a theological viewpoint what are the limits and conditions of Christian obedience, and what are the appropriate ways in which to organise to combat specific injustices.

In this special issue there is only space to focus on certain basic ideas and areas. Chris Rowland looks first at the New Testament, to see what light the Gospels can shed on the matter, as he tries to understand his own anger at the 'Community Charge' by interpreting Jesus' cryptic words in St Mark on Caesar's poll tax. Robert Markus then examines the steadfast refusal of St Augustine to bless the State or condemn the world, the insistence on outspoken prophecy. From there this number turns to an analysis of the present situation. John Finnis sets out the reasons why we must reject the nuclear deterrence the State has chosen for our defence, and what forms that rejection may take. Duncan MacLaren offers the outline of a Scottish Liberation theology as he records the achievements of the Scottish Catholic Bishops in preaching justice and peace. Gus John seeks to alert the Church to the true nature of the current attack on education rights and schooling, while recalling the Church to a fuller vision of what State education should be. Enda McDonagh sets out the case of Ireland, and in reflecting on the conflicts there sketches a new model for Church-State relations that builds on modern ecclesiology and politics.

'You go to your Lord, I will hold fast to God.' St Anselm in the eleventh century would brook no compromise in his quarrel with the king, William Rufus. In the end he won. English saints and theologians have not always given in to the wrongful claims of the secular power or kept a shameful silence. Anselm's jibe left his opponents in doubt of his stance and they would not support him. They were, after all, respectable men, the bishops of England and Wales ... We live in a different world from Anselm's, and in each age the battle must be fought anew. A Church which has no voice and takes the side of market forces has, for the price of respect, sold its soul.

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