

Documents

Hungarian Catholics and Conscientious Objection.

Catholic conscientious objectors to military service have been a thorn in the flesh of both the Hungarian state and the country's Catholic hierarchy for over a decade. In August 1976 the dissident pacifist and environmentalist Károly Kiszely, then a corresponding student of Budapest's Catholic seminary, became the first known Hungarian Catholic to be arrested and convicted for refusing to bear arms. Three years later, Catholic pacifism took on the shape of an organised movement when Fr György Bulányi's federation of basis communities — "the Bush" — formally adopted principles of non-violence. Since then over twenty members of the Bush have been imprisoned because of their practice of pacifism, and again over twenty priests have informed the Ministry of Defence that they will not perform any kind of military service.

So far the Hungarian state has resisted calls for the provision of unarmed alternative service for all conscientious objectors, who currently number about seventy annually. The government's policy is to distinguish between churches for which pacifism is a fundamental article of faith and those for which it

is not. Thus at present the right to alternative service is only afforded to the Jehovah's Witnesses — who are still regarded as an illegal sect — and the Nazarenes. Catholic pacifists have the choice between acting against their conscience or going to prison. The government believes that an extension of alternative service to Catholics could interfere with its Warsaw Pact military obligation, the fulfilment of which is dependent upon universal male conscription.

Both Kiszely and Bulányi have called upon the Catholic bishops to support conscientious objectors. But, according to the Secretary of the Hungarian Bishops' Conference, Bishop József Cserháti, it would be tantamount to "suicide" for the hierarchy to ask the government for the introduction of alternative service for Catholics. For the bishops to do anything that might be construed as legitimising pacifism would be seen by the government as a violation of the existing church-state alliance. This demands political obedience from the church in return for a gradual lifting of restrictions on church activity. It is in the strengthening of this alliance that the hierarchy has pinned its hopes for the

future prosperity of the church. The late Cardinal Lékai strove to bolster the alliance by encouraging the faithful to engage willingly in the "construction of socialism", including military service. He supported his campaign by citing the Second Vatican Council, and especially the ancient patriotic traditions of the Hungarian Catholic Church.

In October 1986 the Bishops' Conference issued a circular letter, which placed the collective weight of the hierarchy behind the Cardinal's position on military service. It was widely applauded in the official Hungarian press, and particularly so in an article by István Soltész in the Patriotic People's Front daily, Magyar Nemzet. But it aroused much indignation on the part of the Catholic pacifist movement, which sees it as another sign of betrayal on the part of their bishops. This sentiment was expressed by Father Bulányi and 16 associates in a document entitled "Confessions of the Hungarian Non-violent Basis Communities". We print here in translation two of the above-mentioned documents.

The Declaration of the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Charges have been made recently against the Hungarian Bishops' Conference at home and to a greater extent abroad, claiming that it shows no concern for the plight of conscientious objectors, who refuse military service and are therefore punished by the state in accordance with its laws. The charges also add that the Bishops' Conference is not acting in accordance with the Second Vatican Council. It cannot be concealed that political factors are also involved in the accusation.

In questions of military service, as in all else, the Bishops' Conference

stands on the basis of the teachings of the Catholic Church and Vatican II. The social teachings of the Catholic Church state that it is the right and duty of the state to defend the motherland, to serve the public good, to uphold national and moral values and public security. By the same token, it can ask all citizens to share in the execution, defence and guaranteeing of those rights and duties. This includes military service.

In the document "The Church in the World Today" (*Gaudium et Spes*) the Second Vatican Council recognised the necessity of dealing with the topic of military service. In Article 79 we read the following:

War has not been rooted out of human affairs. Whilst the danger of war remains and there is no competent and sufficiently powerful authority at the international level, we cannot deny governments the right to legitimate defence once every means of peaceful settlement has been thoroughly essayed. It is therefore the responsibility and duty of statesmen and all who share public responsibility to protect the interests of the people entrusted to their care. These serious matters must be dealt with seriously.

In the same place we read the following about those who perform military service:

Those who serve their homeland as soldiers should not regard themselves as anything other than guardians of the security and freedom of the people. If their service is conducted in this spirit, they contribute to the consolidation of peace.

Thus the Council deems military service to be a good thing under appropriate conditions, which means above all that it should be directed towards security, the freedom of the people and the consolidation of

peace; that is to say, towards the just self-defence of the peoples and not the subjugation of other nations. All this follows from the obligation entailed by patriotism and national defence.

The murderous wars and human sacrifices of the present century have given rise to a powerful desire for peace on the part of a generation of young people, who want to be free from all war. Some young people refuse to do military service on the grounds of conscience. The Council's document also touches on this matter:

Moreover it seems right that humane provisions be made in law for those who will not bear arms for reasons of conscience, but who are prepared to serve the community of mankind in peaceful ways.

It is for the state, not the church, to specify and organise the objectives in the defence of the homeland. According to the Constitution of the Hungarian People's Republic, it is the duty of all citizens to defend the homeland. The discussions held hitherto underline the fact that in Hungary military service is expressly for the purpose of national defence, maintenance of peace, and strength-

ening of public security.

The fear of military conflict makes it the task and duty of all people of good will to use every legal means to guarantee peace. We are all glad that Europe has not seen war in the past forty years, despite tense situations. The popular desire for peace and circumspection on the part of leaders have played an important role in this. The faithful of the Catholic Church cannot forget about their special duty to be worthy of the peace which God sends through their own prayers and self-surrender. We profess that peace is a great gift of God, which we must earn by leading devout lives. The current year of peace* spurs us on to this, as does the invitation of the Holy Father, who called together representatives of all the religions of the world for a common day of prayer. The supplication which resounds in the holy Mass should rise up from our hearts with many prayers and much sacrifice: "Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world; grant us peace!"

Budapest, 17 October 1986.

*1986 was declared International Year of Peace — *Ed.*

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Confession of the Hungarian Non-violent Basis Communities

In the spring of 1961 120 members of the Hungarian Catholic basis communities who were in detention awaited a harsh sentence. On 15 March 1961, in a circular letter read out in the churches and published in the press, the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference publicly declared the detained believers to be enemies of the church as well as of the state. By doing this, the

Bishops' Conference aligned itself with the persecutors of the church. This attitude resurfaced on 23 October 1986 when, thirty years after the 1956 Hungarian uprising, the atheistic press brought to public notice the Declaration of the Bishops' Conference, in which *the Conference dissociates itself from those who reject military service on grounds of conscience*. This happened at a time when well over a hundred members of different denominations were serving harsh sentences in prison as

conscientious objectors. With this confession we now wish to dissociate ourselves in the eyes of the whole world from the Declaration of the Bishops' Conference. We also wish to proclaim our solidarity with all those, past, present, and future, who remain faithful, even at the cost of grievous suffering, to the commandment of Jesus Christ: "Love your enemies!"

The Bishops' Declaration claims that it represents the views of Vatican II. It quotes from Article 79 of the Council document *Gaudium et Spes*, the theme of which is how to put an end to the inhumanity of war. In Article 80, *Gaudium et Spes* completely dissociates itself from modern, all-out war. The Declaration quotes 12 lines from Article 79 which refer to the admissibility of military service, but only three lines referring to the refusal of service. It quotes the lines supporting military service first, and only then mentions the refusal of service, despite the fact that Article 79 is ordered the other way round. The Declaration emphasises one part of the Council's text on the subject of military service: "One cannot refuse or condemn the obligation to do military service . . . The Council deems military service to be a good thing." Having noted this, it does quote the three lines about refusal of military service, but this is glossed over. That is to say, it does not include the assertion that one cannot refuse or condemn conscientious objection, and the fact that the Council's teachings show objection to be a good thing. It is precisely these points which signify decisive and forward-looking innovation in the teachings of the Council. If the Council had rejected conscientious objection, it would not have at the same time praised those who have borne grave sacrifices for refusing to carry out orders, and it would not have expressed the wish

that the law should deal humanely with those who refuse to serve. *On these grounds, the Declaration stands in clear contradiction to the Council's teaching.*

The Declaration also refers to the accusation that the Bishops' Conference is not concerned with conscientious objectors. However, the Declaration provides further grounds for this charge, because it makes the situation of those not wishing to serve even more difficult. Hitherto, during judicial proceedings, such people could refer to the Council, whose teaching, as read out in court, the prosecutor or judge did not dispute. They would merely disregard it on the grounds that Cardinal Lékai preached the opposite in Hungarian cathedrals and in the press. Now, after the Declaration's analysis of the Council, references to the Council made by our fettered brethren will have even less weight. The first fruits of the Declaration are already manifest. At the time of its publication, two more Catholic brethren were sentenced for refusing to do military service. Both have been sent to a hard-regime prison instead of the usual light-regime camp. József Peller Jr got 36 months for refusing to serve 18 months in the army, whilst Imre Szalai got 24 months' imprisonment for refusing to serve a six-month term. Hitherto, a sentence of twice the length of outstanding service time had been considered severe, and four times has no precedent in legal practice. We may well wish for the return of those good old days when our bishops were not concerned about us!

The Declaration claims to be based on the teachings of the Catholic Church. Before us lie the statements of the Bishops' Conferences of various countries (Ireland, Holland, West Germany, USA, East Germany etc.), which have appeared in recent years, and which stand in sharp

contradiction to that of the Hungarian Catholic Bishops. To substantiate this, we will confine ourselves to quoting from the statement from the GDR, an Eastern-bloc country: "We would like to accord respect to those who refuse to bear arms in military service on religious grounds." In the light of the statements made by Catholic Bishops' Conferences, it is absolutely clear that the *Declaration is in complete contradiction to the teaching of the Catholic Church.*

The Declaration denies us the human right not to kill, yet on 4 January 1919, Lenin, in the most critical days of the Russian revolution guaranteed the right to be a conscientious objector on religious grounds. Some seventy years later, this Declaration seeks to justify military service, while the great thinkers of humanity unanimously declare that only freedom from violence will help the human race avoid the final catastrophe of total war.

Referring to "the discussions held up till now", the Declaration notes that in Hungary "military service is expressly directed . . . towards defence of the homeland and the maintenance of peace." Because the "is directed" is present tense and the present is only a fleeting moment, the Declaration must refer also to the past or the future, or both. With reference to the past, the Bishops' Conference must know perfectly well that in 1956 one part of the military supported the uprising, while the other supported those who suppressed it; and that in 1968 our army invaded Czechoslovakia to suppress an uprising there. With reference to the future, everyone knows that our country belongs to the Warsaw Pact, and that our army has an obligation to offer help to member states. Every state maintains an army ostensibly for the maintenance of peace, yet the history of mankind is full of wars

that destroy peace. Because of this, "conversations" which are in opposition to historical facts cannot offer any kind of basis for our bishops to exercise their teaching office. *The Declaration stands opposed to the facts too, for transparently political reasons.*

Finally, the Declaration stands in opposition to itself, because in its conclusion it refers to the "Lamb of God", Who, as everyone knows, put up His sword, and promised us peace through the setting aside of all swords.

Is it any wonder, then, that the government spokesman marked the publication of the Declaration with a great ovation in all the daily newspapers? The "lamb", who are prepared to sacrifice themselves to imprisonment because of the Hungarian Catholic Church, now turn anxiously to the Vatican to ask: can the Hungarian bishops continue the "small steps" policy without Cardinal Lékai?*

We turn for help to all people of good will who are concerned about the fate of humanity, and among these to the opinion of Christians who listen to Jesus. Let them do all they can to ensure that our bishops remain faithful to the Council, to the church, to Jesus's teaching, and also "tend the sheep" (John 10: 13).

Budapest, 5 November 1986.

In the name of the basis groups, which represent non-violence in Hungary:

Barna Barcza, chaplain

Mrs János Benyhe, professor

*Cardinal Lékai, who died on 30 June 1986 had followed a policy which bound the church closely to the communist party's political programme in return for a relaxation of restrictions on church activity — Ed.

György Bulányi, Piarist
 Tamás Bulkai, engineer
 Ferenc Dombi, priest
 András Ferenczi, electrician
 András Gromon, priest
 Mrs Márton Gyombolai, teacher
 Károly Hampel, engineer
 Ignác Király, carpenter

László Kovács, priest
 Teréz Kovács, linguist
 Dr József Merza, mathematician
 Angel Mlecsenkov, technician
 Gyula Simonyi, mathematician
 Ildikó Turiák, medical technician
 Éva Vadas, social worker.

Lithuanian Catholic Priests in Mass Protest

The following petitions from the clergy of two Lithuanian Catholic dioceses, addressed to the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Lithuania, were published in the most recent issue of the samizdat journal The Chronicle of the Lithuanian Catholic Church (No. 71).

They are in the tradition of mass petitions by the Catholic clergy in Lithuania which has been established over the last ten years and is unique in the Soviet Union in that the signatories represent an overwhelming majority of the priests in each diocese. In this case, the first petition is signed by 127 priests of Panevėžys diocese out of a total of 130 (1985), while the two petitions from the diocesan clergy of Vilkaiviškis diocese are signed by 72 and 79 priests respectively, out of a total of ninety (1986).

The request made by the petitioners for the return of three well-known churches confiscated by the Soviet authorities is undoubtedly linked with the official request to the Soviet authorities made by Bishop Preikša for the return of the same churches on the 600th anniversary of Christianity in Lithuania — a request which was refused. The call for the release of three imprisoned priests reiterates the appeal made to the Soviet authorities in 1983 by over

123,000 Lithuanian Catholics — a petition which was also turned down.

Declaration: To Mikhail Gorbachov, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. From the priests of Panevėžys diocese of the Lithuanian Catholic Church.

In 1987 the Catholics of Lithuania will celebrate the 600th anniversary of the establishment of Christianity in Lithuania. Over those six hundred years, Christian teachings have become deeply rooted in our nation. The Constitution of the USSR guarantees freedom of conscience, but atheist activists render this constitutional guarantee null and void.

1. The children of religious believers are victimised at school and morally terrorised for openly going to church; they are forced to join atheist organisations against the will of their religious parents. Those who do not join are threatened with exclusion from institutions of higher education. Those who do join are forbidden to carry out religious obligations or to take part actively in services, while some school-leavers have even been prevented from taking the final examinations. Those who wish to take part in religious activities have to conceal this fact, and so, from their youth, are forced to dissemble.