

WARS WILL OCCUR AS LONG AS . . .

Reflections on Morality and the Milieu

Gordon Zahn

It might be well to begin with a confession. I have something of an intellectual "investment" in the book I propose to discuss here. Carl Amery's principal thesis finds a rather neat summary in the title given the English edition of his book, *Capitulation: The Lesson of German Catholicism* (Herder and Herder, 1967). In the course of developing his thesis and teaching the "lesson," he reinforces and broadens the findings of some of my own published efforts of the past and, to make matters more embarrassing under the circumstances, includes a generous number of citations from those works. The occasional differences in interpretation between us are minor; and in the general implications he draws from the history of the "capitulation" of German Catholics of all ranks to the demands of National Socialism we are in almost total agreement.

Heinrich Boll apparently faced much the same problem in the preparation of his incisive Epilogue. He, too, recognized that anything he might have to say about the book was almost certain to be dismissed by those he describes as "officious nightingales" of the ecclesiastical establishment "intoning their song about the naughty boys who take one another's part." Of course, the writer of an epilogue is ordinarily not as likely to be taken to task for failing to maintain the detachment deemed essential to a fully objective assessment of the merits or failings of a given work. It is different for one who assumes the task of reviewing or discussing it. It is well, therefore, that it be understood from the very beginning that objectivity of this kind is not promised here. Amery writes from a clearly defined point of view. Like Boll, I share that point of view.

This becomes particularly important when we realize that Amery's focus upon the record of this one body of Catholics at a given place and time is merely incidental to a much broader set of assumptions concerning the appropriate relationships that should obtain between Church and World. The original German

title of this best-seller was *Die Capitulation: oder deutsche Katholizismus heute (The Capitulation: Or German Catholicism Today)*, making this point more explicit. Thus, while much of its popularity, even notoriety, was undoubtedly due to the fact that the book represented a "Catholic leftist" analysis of the tragic events of the 1930's and 1940's and the responsibility the German Catholics bore for them, at least as much can be traced to its other aspect, the scathing indictment of the Church's subsequent "capitulation" to the Adenauer regime and its rigidly Western orientation in the cold-war years following the collapse of Hitler's Third Reich.

The Amery thesis has an even broader and more salient meaning and application for the reader of the American edition. One need only turn to an article like that of James V. Schall, S.J. in the May 1967 issue of *worldview* to see the relevance of this analysis to our own present situation. Indeed, Schall's dismissal of the admittedly utopian principle that "Wars will cease when men refuse to fight" is based on a set of arguments which almost forces one to the cynical conclusion that wars (and an ever-recurring series of capitulations of the kind Amery describes) will occur as long as churchmen can be found who are ready to make such generous allowances for "the world as it exists" that they end up with little more than a blend of fatalistic resignation and "realistic," even approving, permissiveness as the ultimate guides for Christian behavior.

The question is not so much whether the realist's assessment is sound but, rather, whether realism is enough. The lesson we can draw from the German experience is that it is not, at least not for a church which bears a mission to redeem the world.

Amery's bill of particulars against the German Catholic record does not rest so much upon the fact that the Church capitulated to Hitler specifically (and certainly not that it capitulated to the evil he represented). Instead, he sets out to show that it surrendered too easily and too completely to the milieu that produced and sustained Hitler and his regime — and that it proved only too happy to do so again when order was re-established under the Occupation. Milieu, in this context, involves something more than a spatial-

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temporal setting or even the total environmental situation in which a person or an institution must operate; it includes the element of the psychological orientation to that setting or environment and emphasizes the mode of relationship even more than the fact of the relationship.

In Germany, of course, and in the whole of the "Christian West," the issue is complicated somewhat by the fact that the milieu in which the Church is obliged to exist and with which it must come to some terms is, in part at least, her own creation. Thus the premium placed by the German secular milieu upon "middle-class respectability" (a weak approximation of the German term, *anständig*) and all it implied, including the appropriate display of docility and subservience to those placed over one in the hierarchy of authority coupled with firmness and even arrogance toward those below, is to a very large degree a Christian contribution to the German character.

The Church's self-image plays a part in this too. In the German milieu, Catholics (leaders and followers) tend to take the familiar shepherd-flock metaphor in an almost literal sense, so that it becomes at once a source and a reflection of the ideal of the almost obsessively obedient "good" citizen in the secular order. Amery quotes Mayer-Pfannholz, adding his own emphasis, to establish this point:

The essential impression in the nineteenth century is indeed of the motif of the *institution, the educational establishment*, of the well-guarded fold, where the faithful are watched over and directed by solicitous guardians making use of ordinances, prescriptions, rubrics, and instructions: for most people the Christian life, the life of the church, is the sum-total of all these ordinances, prescriptions and instructions. Not *what* they are, not *that* they are the church, fills their consciousness, but whether and whom and where they obey. . . .

Carried over into the individual's everyday life in the world, the values and virtues that make for such a stable and secure sheepfold of the faithful can indeed produce the ultra-respectable murderer who, in Amery's telling examples, "can appear punctually for service in the priest's house or in the Gestapo cellar" or, again, can wash his hands after an honest day's work in the cornfield or after his activities in the crematorium of the concentration camp. Taken out of context, these may seem forced and grossly exaggerated illustrations, but Amery makes them stick.

The problem is not merely one of charting the relationship between individual unit (whether citizen or "sheep") and the dominating institution of state or church. There is the far more subtle problem to be

considered of the appropriate — or, at least, the *real* — relationship between these two macro-structures themselves. In Germany, as this analysis has it, the Catholic Church finds itself faced with a paradox of power and powerlessness. On the one hand, public opinion generally ascribes a disproportionate amount of power over secular affairs to the ecclesiastical establishment. This, of course, is familiar stuff to American Catholics who have felt the lash of Blanshard and the other earlier nativist critics. In the German setting, this widespread assumption, false though it may be, finds whatever substance it can claim in German historical experience.

But, Amery contends, it is false today. In actual fact, as he sees it, the influence of the Catholic Church is now so limited (and, even then, restricted to certain carefully defined spheres of activity) that, when the really important chips are down, it finds itself quite powerless to determine or alter the course of events. Institutionally this can be read in certain sociological data: in the decline in number of churchgoers; in the increase in civil marriages and mixed marriages; in the slow but constant erosion of the confessional schools; and in the quantitative and qualitative decline in priestly vocations. The changes introduced by Vatican II since this volume first appeared in its original form have probably enhanced rather than diminished the trends cited. Even after we have passed through the difficult period of adjustment the Catholic Church is now experiencing in its "renewal" efforts and the shift of emphasis from "triumphalist" to "pilgrim" formulations of its nature and work, its powerlessness as measured in terms of the older and more familiar modes of church-state relationships will probably remain.

I suspect that Amery, like myself, is prepared to welcome this as a not altogether unhappy development. History provides evidence enough that when the Church was able to exercise a measure of domination over the affairs of nations, the results were usually none too salutary when viewed from the perspective of spiritual values and objectives. Because of this, it is unfortunate that the reduction to her present state of powerlessness has not been graciously acknowledged and met with a frank renunciation of ambition in this respect. Instead — and the record of the prudential judgments and manipulations which constitute the capitulation of which Amery writes shows this only too well — the responsible officials of the institutional church have sought to maintain the facade of power and have all but lost themselves in the exercise of diplomacy in their dealings with the established powers of the secular order. In short, they, too, have allowed

themselves to be trapped by the misguided and quite hopeless attempt to breathe life into an illusion and to restore the "good, old days" when the illusion came closer to reality. This is the key to the frantic effort that was made, and (if Amery is correct) is still being made to create and preserve a united front among German Catholics and a sense of solidarity as an important *political* force.

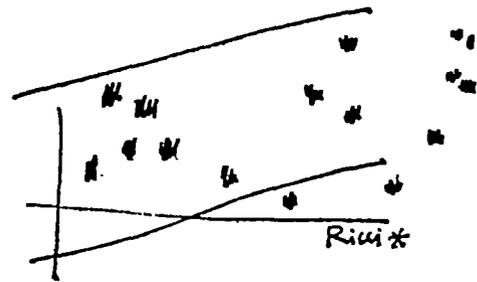
In his extremely perceptive Foreword to *Capitulation*, J. M. Cameron draws a conclusion from this that reaches beyond the German events and provides more than a passing hint of explanation for the stand taken today by our own Spellmans, Luceys and Catholics of lesser rank who have expressed themselves as ready to give a blank check to those who are charged with responsibility for bringing the war in Vietnam to an early (and presumably "victorious") end. He writes:

It follows from this that the Catholic community not only conforms to the will of the secular authorities in matters of war and peace; it also places a high value upon those kinds of social solidarity, notably the solidarity of the national community, that help to make citizens tractable and orderly within their own frontiers, potentially ferocious towards "the others" within the frontiers (the minority racial and religious groups) and beyond the frontiers. Where the Catholic community is well integrated with the national community, an attack of whatever kind upon national solidarity will automatically produce a defensive reaction in the Catholic community, for, given the intimate connection between the two communities, a threat to one is a threat to the other.

It is only when the "naughty boys" like Amery and Boll dare to question whether this is the way it *should* be that the Church and its leaders are forced to reassess and redefine its proper role in the world. For their questions do not concern themselves with any prudent political calculation of the balance between sacrifices required and gains to be recorded if they are made. What they are asking is something much more profound, something that goes beyond the assumed imperatives of any existential situation to the essential meaning of the Christian witness itself. And it is precisely here that the cutting edge cuts deepest. This is why the reaction against those who raise the questions is usually so immediate and so severe. Indeed, the cynic might be moved to suggest that, had the "official nightingales" of the German Catholic establishment been as devoted to preserving the faithful from the attractions of Nazism in the 1930's as they are today to countering the criticisms of the Amerys, the Bockenfordes, the Bolls, the Lewys (and yes, the Zahns), the capitulation might never have taken place.

Be that as it may, what the critics have done is to propose an alternative to "milieu Catholicism," a Catholicism in which particularistic solidarity is replaced by universality of concern and prophetic commitment is given precedence over prudential and diplomatic surrender to "realistic" or "practical" solutions to morally charged social issues.

This brings us back to Father Schall's article mentioned earlier. As I understand it, the alternative proposed by the critics I mention would not hesitate to "protest against the very possibility of war." Nor would those who accept it feel the least bit embarrassed by the suggestion that this implies "protest against the world itself as it actually is" — that is, with all the "sin, death, suffering, injustice and evil" it contains. Such protest, they would be more likely to insist, is precisely what the Christian commitment should imply. And as we follow through the list of logical consequences Schall presents in his series of rhetorical questions, I, for one, find myself answering most of them in the affirmative. If we were to answer them all in the negative, as I take it Schall assumes we should, we will have set the stage for the kind of capitulation Amery has described.



Whatever naivete this position might involve, it strikes me as being considerably less naive than that based on some of the premises scattered throughout the Schall article; nor is this a peculiarity of his exposition of the realist position. The tendency to reduce extremely complicated issues to narrow and one-sided affirmations is not a monopoly of the impractical pacifist. We read here that it is the "associates" of the Communist student-demonstrators all over the world who "cause" the war against which they are protesting. The opponents of the Vietnam involvement are the ones who display "iron intransigence," not the war-making Administration which refuses to give them a serious hearing. Responsible critics throughout the world have questioned the sincerity of some of the American peace offers; to Schall these proposals are referred to as "even the best efforts." Secretary Rusk's rejoinder to Senator Fulbright ("Is it just possible that

there is something wrong with them?") is accorded "the greatest significance" – with no thought apparently being given to the possibility that *both* sides just might be inflexibly committed to positions that are objectively wrong. Or take the flat statement that a conscientious objector "cannot" lay down his life for his friend. Even a superficial reading of the tragic yet inspiring record of martyrdom of the few German Catholics who did just that should be refutation enough – especially when the "friend" in their case might have been some American "brother-in-Christ" who is alive today because one of them refused to accept service in the Nazi armed forces.

It is not at all surprising that what started out as a serious theological commentary on the religious and moral perspectives of current warfare finally degenerated into a cluster of pious and self-righteous effusions about "the failing light of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in this generation, which it is this nation's historic mission to keep burning before men." Apparently this is not just a momentary lapse into rhetorical flourish, for the same reference to this nation's "historic mission to liberty" is repeated with the dire warning that, if we fail now, "there will be no one else in our generation" to further that mission in Vietnam or, presumably, the entire world. What is striking here is the clear evidence that the commitment to the American milieu and its self-proclaimed values and objectives is so total that there is no room for even the slightest possibility that others – members of the N.L.F., let us say – can see themselves and their efforts in almost exactly the same terms. One would not have to look too far either to find chilling parallels to these statements in the pastoral directives issued by the official spokesmen for German Catholicism at the time when Nazi forces were forcing virtually all of Europe under Hitler's domination.

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Fortunately, with but a few notable exceptions (though their number may be expected to increase), the American bishops have shown laudable restraint as far as voicing similar public approval of the war in Vietnam; but this restraint has taken the form of saying nothing – or, at least, nothing of any real significance. Not one, for example, has found it possible (or prudent?) to align himself with the position taken by Cardinal Alfrink, among others, most recently in his strong declaration that "The existence of nuclear weapons excludes the existence of a just war, because the means that could be used to fight injustice would cause much greater injustice." Even at the Council, while Alfrink, Patriarch Maximos, members of the British and French hierarchies were willing to speak

out in this vein, nothing was heard from the Americans beyond Archbishop Hannan's rather forced defense of "little" nuclear weapons and the last-minute (and happily unsuccessful) move on the part of American prelates to block final approval of the disputed passage and, if need be, of the entire Schema 13 which was to become the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Significantly enough, the rationale behind this move was their belief that the Schema as written implied too strong a criticism of American defense policies and posture. Once again ecclesiastical leaders had made themselves spokesmen for their national milieu.

It is no surprise, then, that one looks in vain for any strong echoes from the American bishops of the continuing and ever more fervent peace appeals from Pope Paul in Rome. As a fitting touch of irony perhaps, it is likely that American Catholicism will provide the final refutation of one of the weaker points in Rolf Hochhuth's controversial indictment of Pope Pius XII. To the extent that Paul has been unable to stir any significant response to his appeal among bishops, priests, or laymen in the United States, we may conclude that any effort by his illustrious predecessor (in a much more dangerous situation, let me add) publicly to denounce the Nazi program of genocide would probably not have had any more telling effect upon German Catholics or their leaders.

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Objection will be raised that the two issues are not comparable, but I would insist they are. True, they are not equivalent: The "incidental," though foreseen, killing of helpless civilians through planned area bombings with napalm or guava-type anti-personnel explosives is not the same as the intentional and scientifically engineered extermination of the Jews. Nevertheless, however much one may agree that one is more immoral than the other, this would not excuse in the slightest a policy of acquiescent silence before the fact of the lesser crime. So we must face the challenge implicit in the Amery study: Spokesmen for American Catholics have been silent; they, like their German counterparts before them, have capitulated.

There were German Catholics who did protest, but they were the "unofficial" voice of the Church: the Delps, the Jägerstätters, and others of the heroic remnant. Many of them will never be known, simply because they took their stand as they knew they would have to take it. Alone, unsupported and unencouraged by the representatives of that same religious community on whose behalf their witness was made. True, once the war was over and the Nazis gone, some of them (but by no means all!) were resurrected and

singled out for lavish praise and honor by the Church which had abandoned them to their fate. It is almost as though by so doing the institutional church could free itself from the taint of its acquiescent conformity and lay claim to a kind of innocence by association. Amery has a word to say on this score, too.

... we may certainly thank God for the strength of the confessors, who came forward in spite of everything; we may thank him, too, for the shining example of the few; thank him for those martyrs who found their lonely way to the sacrifice of their lives out of the undergrowth of tactics and reservations, of complex feelings of loyalty and oblique front-positions. But *we have nothing to be proud of—not we!*

Or, even more to the point being stressed here, "If the Catholic heroes—to whom so much importance is attached today—were prophets, then they were *prophets against the milieu of their own church no less than against the superior power of the heathen.*"

Americans, and especially American Catholics, should be troubled by this thought. Here too and now we can say that the Church is speaking, but once again its voice is that of the "unofficial" minority which has chosen to disregard the seductions and reject the threats and demands of the American milieu. Not in the words of Cardinal Spellman or Archbishops Lucey or Hannan, but in the acts of the much-maligned draft card burner or the "peacenik" on the picketline might some future writer find the proper witness of the

American Church. Even so disturbing a "word" as Roger LaPorte's self-immolation by fire (laying down his life, as it were, for some unknown friend in Vietnam who might perish in the fire loosed upon the earth by some American Catholic pilot carrying forth his "nation's historic mission to liberty") may have earned greater merit in some eternal reckoning than all the carefully non-committal utterances of the American hierarchy taken together. One questions whether even they are impressed by what they say. Certainly none of them took their November statement seriously enough to testify before Congress on behalf of a draft-law revision which would have protected the rights of the "just war" or, if you will, "selective" conscientious objector, who just might have come to that position by following the recommendations included in that statement. Could this, too, we must ask, be evidence of capitulation to the milieu?

I think it is, and that is why I feel it is essential that the Amery book be read widely and taken seriously. When the day comes (as it almost certainly must) for someone to describe and analyze Catholicism's failure to give adequate witness in "the world as it is" for Americans in these 1960's, let us hope he will do so with the same combination of intellectual honesty and truly pious concern Amery has brought to his analysis of German Catholicism's "capitulation" to the "world as it was" under National Socialism.

correspondence

MORE ON THE "NUCLEAR OBSESSION"

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Dear Sir: I have only recently started reading *worldview* and was fascinated to read the last article in the series of five by Jack Walker on "The 'Stately Minuet' of the A.B.M. Debate" (April). After explaining the position taken by various civilian and military leaders with some brief reasonings backing these positions, he arbitrarily states that he "... rejects the idea that thermonuclear weapons have become 'ultimate,' i.e.,

that it will *never* be possible to devise an effective defense against them. And the neutralization of ICBM's, moreover, ought to be an attractive objective. Yet the nuclear obsession seems to have imbued too many otherwise discerning individuals with an unreasoning fear of the unknown."

Unfortunately, he has set up a straw man to knock down. Secretary McNamara has only said he counsels against setting up an A.B.M. system now because it