

THE CATHOLIC C.O.

In a statement on "The Catholic Conscientious Objector" bearing the date October 15, 1969, an official American Catholic body, the Division of World Justice and Peace of the United States Catholic Conference, upheld the view "that a Catholic . . . can be a conscientious objector 'because of religious training and belief.'" A major part of the text is reprinted below.

The theory of just war, beginning with St. Augustine and later developed by Catholic theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas and Francis Suarez, required that certain conditions be met: The war must be declared only as a last resort by a lawful authority, for a just cause, using just means, and with reasonable expectation of success. The military action cannot produce a greater evil than it seeks to correct. In applying an evolving just war theory to the contemporary world, the person who is sincerely trying to form his conscience must judge whether or not the end achieved by a particular war or all-out war is proportionate, in any degree, to the devastation wrought by that war. On the basis of this judgment, he would justify either participation in or abstention from war.

In abstaining, some might conclude that just war in the modern world is not possible, citing Pope John's statement in *Pacem in Terris*: "Therefore, in this age of ours which prides itself on its atomic power, it is irrational to believe that war is still an apt means of vindicating violated rights." (n. 127) "No more war, war never again," were the words of Pope Paul VI to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

In the continuing condemnation of total warfare by recent popes, the Second Vatican Council declared that

every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation. (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 80)

A Catholic viewing his tradition, the message of the Gospel statements, could validly question and abstain from participation in war or the preparations for war.

The Second Vatican Council, therefore, endorsed laws that would

make human provision for the care of those who for reasons of conscience refuse to bear arms, provided,

however, that they accept some other form of service to the human community. (*Ibid.*, n. 79)

From the previously stated documents and traditions, it is clear that a Catholic (either in-service or out-of-service) can be a conscientious objector "because of religious training and belief."

We are, therefore, concerned when we hear that some boards and military tribunals do not recognize a Catholic claim for military exemption by reason of conscience. On the other hand, we are encouraged by recent court decisions and the actions of draft boards which uphold the primacy of conscience in this regard.

But it is not enough merely to declare that a Catholic can be a conscientious objector. Christians must "make humane provisions" for the conscientious objector and aid him in his "service to the human community." What he often lacks is basic information about the draft and its alternatives. He meets opposition from those who should, in fact, be counseling and aiding him. Once granted the status of a conscientious objector, he often finds himself in a menial and degrading alternative service in order to "test his sincerity." We therefore recommend:

1. That each diocese initiate or cooperate in providing draft information and counseling;

2. That Catholic Organizations which could qualify as alternative service agencies consider applying for that status, and support and provide meaningful employment for the conscientious objector.

We are not only concerned about the status of the conscientious objector, but also concerned about that of the Selective Conscientious Objector. His status is complicated by the fact that his claim for exemption is not upheld by law. The American bishops spoke at some length in their pastoral letter of November, 1968, *Human Life in Our Day*, of the Selective Conscientious Objector, recommending

a modification of the Selective Service Act, making it possible, although not easy, for so-called selective conscientious objectors to refuse — without fear of imprisonment or loss of citizenship — to serve in wars which they consider unjust or in branches of service (e.g., the strategic nuclear forces) which would subject them to the performance of actions contrary to deeply held moral convictions about indiscriminate killing.

In reaffirming this recommendation, we are reminded of the number of individuals who have suffered imprisonment or have left the country because they felt compelled to follow their conscience rather than the law. In a continuing pastoral concern for their welfare, we urge civil officials, as part of a revision of

the law as regards to the Selective Conscientious Objector, to consider granting amnesty to those who have suffered imprisonment and give those who have left the country an opportunity to demonstrate that they are sincere objectors.

In conclusion, we encourage clergy and laymen alike, especially parents, to be sympathetic and understanding to those who in good conscience are compelled to object to military service, even if one were not in total agreement with the objector. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council wrote

We cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights and who

resort to methods of defense which are otherwise available to weaker parties, provided that this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community itself. (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 78)

We should look upon conscientious objection not as a scandal, but rather as a healthy sign. War will still not be replaced by more humane institutions for regulating conflict until citizens insist on principles of non-violence. John F. Kennedy once said, "War will exist until the distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same reputation and prestige as the warrior does today."

Church Reform, Protestant Mode

Can These Bones Live? by Robert Lecky and H. Elliott Wright. Sheed & Ward. 201 pp. \$5.95

by Kip Zegers

Can These Bones Live? is a journalistic history of the movement for church reform which began among clerics and students in the late 1950's and which has now become policy for the major denominations. It is an important subject for two reasons: first, because the language and issues of renewal remain so central to religious conversation that their absence would leave a vacuum; and second, because of the relation of this reform movement—in time and spirit—to a larger liberal awakening which connects the Peace Corps, civil rights, the New Frontier and a general impulse to involvement/commitment.

The authors' argument is that the contemporary reform impulse finds its cause in the delayed impact on American religion of the great Modern Crisis: the two wars, the revolutions, and related intellectual movements. In the midst of postwar prosperity and the religious revival of the 1950's, some

combination of affluence, European post-liberal theology, and undodgeable domestic and foreign crises set a number of Protestants off in a new direction—non-optimist, self-consciously modern, and reforming. The problem was (and is) that the religious institutions were stronger and more alive than the reform spirit. Renewal never achieved independence; now, endorsed and blessed by its intended target, and sharing many of its weaknesses, the movement stumbles on.

What has survived, based on the authors' summary of renewal experiments, is a movement of varying sophistication, quality, and success; a movement which has been widely co-opted; which has foundered on the political issues of the 1960's; whose main hope has become the liberal-suburban style of the underground church. In the current era of institutional apostasy, say the authors, "these bones" can only live in people who choose to go it alone religiously. These are persons living in the Christian tradition but concerned with political and social issues, not with renewal and the church.

The authors see "going it alone" as an exercise in the "church/non-church" option exercised by the prophets in a previous age of institutional apostasy. Their stance

is traditional, and it is within the scope of the tradition that a new age and new crises could reawaken the institution and raise new leaders. While the authors' account of renewal tells what happened and where the impulse for renewal came from, they do not, in the end, make an historical analysis of renewal. Their analysis remains theological.

Theirs is certainly a fair option. We have new prophets and we have events of contemporary history leading to the cyclical idea of institutional apostasy. We also have, in the existence of such a book (with its evidence that the religious tradition remains an ego-involving, personal, and stylistic force), an example of the predicament of a generation of Christians.

With its concise account of the events of the movement for church reform, and with the insights it offers into the Christian elements in the American Left, *Can These Bones Live?* is valuable. What is needed beyond what they offer are answers to such questions as these: What is the relation between renewal and mid-twentieth-century liberalism? And, if it is true that the meaning of events is seen only in their consequences, what would a preliminary investigation reveal about the impact of renewal on the "children" of the reformers?

Mr. Zegers attended Union Theological Seminary and is now a member of the CRIA staff.