

A VIEW OF THE WORLD

Abraham Martin Murray

CATHOLIC BISHOPS, MORAL VALUES, AND WAR. Sex, as usual, got most attention from the critics and commentators, but they may have overlooked the most interesting item. The Pastoral Letter on Moral Values that the Catholic bishops of the United States issued in November reaffirmed the Church's social teaching and the traditional teaching on marriage, family life, and sexuality. Predictably, a number of critics reached for their handy, inflated pig bladders with which to lambaste the bishops. The bishops, it was said, failed to move from entrenched positions and had not taken into account the judgments and opinions expressed by the hundreds of Catholic delegates who had met in an historic meeting in Detroit one month earlier.

It is true that the bishops' letter did not reflect that meeting, the letter having been in preparation for two years. And it is also true that many of the positions enunciated in the letter are both very familiar and heavily controverted. Others are familiar but valuable. The statement on human rights, for instance, has obvious relevance at a time when so many governments are employing torture, imprisonment, and assignment to psychiatric clinics as standard procedures to silence domestic critics. For instance: "There is a direct, decisive bond between the values we espouse in our nation and the world we seek to build internationally....Our own rights are less secure if we condone or contribute even by passive silence to the repression of human rights in other countries."

But it is in their statement on nuclear weapons that the bishops have staked out a new and inevitably controversial position. They have stated a principle that goes beyond any document from Vatican II and beyond any previous position developed by the U.S. bishops:

"With respect to nuclear weapons, at least those with massive destructive capability, the first imperative is to prevent their use. As possessors of a vast nuclear arsenal, we must also be aware that not only is it wrong to attack civilian populations but *it is also wrong to threaten to attack them as part of the strategy of deterrence.* We urge the continued development and implementation of policies which seek to bring these weapons more securely under control, progressively reduce their presence in the world, and ultimately remove them entirely." (italics added).

In that italicized portion, imbedded in the by now conventional approach to nuclear armament, is a direct challenge to U.S. deterrent policy. The question arises: How serious are the bishops on this issue? do they intend to foster and support this position among the Catholic community? will it lead to political action and—a necessary corollary—to confrontation with present U.S. policies?

WAY OUT. Don't make a sound. Somebody out there—way out there—may be listening. At least according to Sir Martin Ryle, Nobel Laureate in physics and Britain's Astronomer Royal. Sir Martin has addressed an appeal to the International Astronomical Union urging that this planet make no attempts to communicate with possible civilizations on other planets. The danger he sees is that if the existence of intelligent life on this planet gets bruited about, the earth might be invaded by hostile beings....Still, it might be one way of sharing our problems.

KOFI AWOONOR. The good news about a *Worldview* contributor, the internationally known African poet, Kofi Awoonor, is that he has been released from prison. On leave from Stony Brook (State University of New York), he returned to Ghana in the fall of 1975. Charged with harboring and aiding a man the government accused of instigating a coup, Awoonor was convicted and sentenced to a year's imprisonment. International protests had some effect, however, and his sentence was remitted to the seven months he had already spent in jail. Awoonor, who has continued to maintain his innocence—he simply aided a friend against whom no charges had been brought at the time—has resumed his teaching post in Ghana.

AND SOME BAD NEWS. Donal F. Lamont, a Roman Catholic bishop, has been a frequent critic of the policies of the Rhodesian Government, including the torture of black tribesmen by government troops. Since he is the head of the diocese of Umtali, a Rhodesian city between Rhodesia and Mozambique, his criticism has jarred the authorities, and they have reacted accordingly. On August 26 the government announced that Bishop Lamont had been charged with failures to report to the authorities the presence of nationalist guerrillas. Later in the year he was sentenced to ten years in prison. Despite many protests, the sentence still stands.

Two paragraphs from an open letter he wrote to the government convey the tone of Bishop Lamont's criticism:

"Conscience compels me to state that your Administration by its clearly racist and oppressive policies and by its stubborn refusal to change, is largely responsible for the injustices which have provoked the present disorder and it must in that measure be considered guilty of whatever misery or bloodshed may follow.

"Far from your policies defending Christianity and Western civilization, as you claim, they mock the law of Christ and make Communism attractive to the African people. God wills His world and its peoples to be ruled with justice. He desires that men should

do to their fellowmen what they would like done to themselves. Such will is openly disregarded and deliberately frustrated by the manner in which you rule Rhodesia."

HOME TRUTHS. It's not enough that Socialists of the non-Communist world are having a tough time at the polls. Now they must assimilate some harsh home truths. At the recent meeting of the Socialist International, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of West Germany stated flatly that it was not ideology but bad management by governments that is to blame for the general economic crisis. The crisis, he pointed out, affected all countries—capitalist, Social Democratic, or Communist. *Tant pis* for those who see the world through ideological lenses.

And then came Willy Brandt, newly elected President of the International, who also rejected some familiar dogmas. "People like me," he said, "renounced long ago the outdated utopia of shaping the new man. What we work and struggle for is the survival of man and humanity." For many people such statements, overthrowing old, familiar, and oh-so-comfortable dogmas, are hard to take. Why, it's enough to drive one to think.

CHINA. News about China is news indeed. We still have much to learn. Why, then, the closing of Western media agencies in Peking, including *The Times* of London? According to David Bonavia of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, who has spent three and a half years in Peking, the reasons include the consistent failure of the Chinese Foreign Ministry to fulfill its repeated promises to provide greater access to information.

EXCHANGING POLITICAL PRISONERS. Huber Matos is one of the Cuban prisoners discussed at some length in Theodore Jacqueney's article in this issue of *Worldview*. And Huber Matos is one of two men that Pinochet, Chile's reigning President, asked for in an exchange of prisoners. Specifically, Pinochet said he would release from the jails of Chile Luis Corvalán Lepe and Jorge Montes (leading Communist opponents of Chile's government) in exchange for the release of Vladimir Bukovsky, imprisoned in Russia, and Matos, imprisoned in Cuba.

Bukovsky, who has spent ten of the last fifteen years in Soviet prisons or in psychiatric clinics, was released in exchange for Corvalán in the middle of December. When released he said: "I regard this exchange as an extraordinary event as it is the first time that the Soviet Government officially recognized that it has political prisoners." And going beyond the issue of political prisoners, he attacked the Helsinki accord, saying that the Soviets planned to use it to curb human rights in the Soviet Union—directly contradicting stated purposes of the accord—and to disarm the West.

The exchange of prisoners, captured spies, and hostages of various kinds is not new. But it can

seldom be a savory business, and Pinochet's offer doesn't make it look any better. In fact, his offer smells—in spite of the release of these two prisoners and the undoubted merit of some of Bukovsky's statements. We would not want to see established a practice wherein heads of state would bargain over their respective detainees or prisoners. Nevertheless, he has served well his own purposes. Chile under Pinochet has extensively violated human rights, and extensively has that violation been publicized. Violations in other countries have not always been publicized as widely. In the U.N., for example, the USSR and Cuba are much less likely to come in for heavy criticism. Pinochet has succeeded in forcing on many groups the recognition that political prisoners exist in many countries, Right and Left. (As this goes to press we still await word about Matos.)

THE NOBEL BELLOW. In accepting his award, Saul Bellow, the Nobel Laureate for literature, delivered what he described as a "rather dense" essay. Without additional comment, because they need none, some excerpts from the essay:

"But I am drawing attention to the fact that there is in the intellectual community a sizable inventory of attitudes that have become respectable—notions about society, human nature, class, politics, sex; about mind, about the physical universe, the evolution of life. Few writers, even among the best, have taken the trouble to reexamine these attitudes or orthodoxies....

"Writers are greatly respected. The intelligent public is wonderfully patient with them, continues to read and endures disappointment after disappointment, waiting to hear from art what it does not hear from theology, philosophy, social theory, and what it cannot hear from pure science. Out of the struggle at the center has come an immense, painful longing for a broader, more flexible, fuller, more coherent, more comprehensive account of what we human beings are, who we are, and what this life is for. At the center humankind struggles with collective powers for its freedom, the individual struggles with dehumanization for the possession of his soul....

"The essence of our real condition, the complexity, the confusion, the pain of it is shown to us in glimpses, in what Proust and Tolstoy thought of as 'true impressions.' This essence reveals, and then conceals itself. When it goes away it leaves us again in doubt. But we never seem to lose our connection with the depths from which these glimpses come. The sense of our real powers, powers we seem to derive from the universe itself, also comes and goes. We are reluctant to talk about this because there is nothing we can prove, because our language is inadequate and because few people are willing to risk talking about it. They would have to say 'there is a spirit' and that is taboo."...

Abraham Martin Murray is the collective name of those who contribute to "A View of the World." The opinions expressed sometimes coincide with those of the editors.