

Attack on Human Rights, Freedom of Faith



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INDIA DEAF TO GLOBAL CENSURE



BY JOHN DAYAL

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Does India really respond to the “name and shame” strategies that International Human Rights organisations traditionally use to persuade or encourage national governments to clean up their act on human rights, civil liberties and constitutional guarantees on freedom of faith and conscience?

Past record shows that India does not really care. It has remained immune to criticism on the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, of Sikhs in New Delhi in 1984 and of Christians in Kandhamal, Orissa, in 2008. It has not winced when criticised for its terrible record on people in prison, on conditions of schools, hospitals and mental asylums. It also remains quiet when national

and international media call New Delhi the rape Capital of the world. India has not reacted when grassroots workers expose its record on hunger, on the suicide of farmers who cannot repay usurious loans when their crops fail, on its terrible record in infant health and care – India rates third from the bottom in infant malnutrition and mortality.

The human rights situation in India is “much poor”, international and national groups have said in documents prepared for the second Universal Periodic Review. India has yet to enact adequate laws or implement policies to protect marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, tribal groups, religious minorities, women, and children. The government routinely fails to take action in cases of serious human rights violations, particularly all

forms of sexual assault against women, communal violence, enforced disappearances in conflict areas, extrajudicial killings, torture, etc.

These issues, it is noted, are compounded by the widespread impunity for abuses and the corresponding problems of access to justice and adequate compensation, international groups such as Human Rights watch have said. They have demanded that the European Union should call for repeal of Indian laws that protect public officials from prosecution for violating human rights, effective implementation of policies to ensure social justice, and a commitment to ensure freedom of expression, including on the internet. They also called upon the EU to encourage India to use its increasing global influence to address human rights problems in other countries.

At the United Nations Conference on Race, Racism and Race-related issues at Durban, South Africa, India fought tooth and nail when the Dalits and their foreign friends sought to press their demand that the

ugly caste system be classified as a racial crime because it was birth derived. India would hear nothing of it even when indicted by its own National Human Rights Commission which, for once, came on the idea of the Dalits.

India continued to show this attitude when it came up for the first Universal Periodic Review at Geneva in 2008 soon after the creation of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Every member-state of the UN has its human rights queried. India repeated its litany of the number of laws it has and the large number of institutions created to take care of the human rights of the common people. What it did not do was to tell the world how inefficient and useless most of these institutions have been. While India boasts of a number of human rights organisations created by Parliament, the record in all areas of human rights, including freedom of faith, remains dismal. It will sing the same song when its diplomats face the Universal Periodic Review 2012 in Geneva in June this year, with a preliminary bout in March.

There is also a creeping suspicion in national and international human rights circles that though India has some sensitivity as it pretends to be a global power and is keen that others recognise its economic might, its majoritarian polity is so immersed in the strength of a mythical past that they do not care for any comment coming from the Islamic or Christian intelligentsia and international lobbies. They dismiss such comments as irrelevant for a democracy which has so many rules and laws in place.

Nonetheless, human rights activists across the world will be happy at the news that Italy has set up a Commission for Monitoring Religious Freedom in all countries. This is the second such commission in the world after the troubled United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

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which, in recent years, has been beset by funding problems despite a very good record in “naming and shaming” countries where religious minorities are persecuted by the State or by majority groups.

Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs Giulio Terzi and Mayor of Rome Gianni Alemanno signed a protocol of understanding this past week at the Foreign Ministry in Rome establishing the “Osservatorio della libertà religiosa” (Observatory for Religious Freedom) for the study, analysis and monitoring of freedom of worship around the world. During the signing ceremony, Minister Terzi reconfirmed Italy’s determination, along with the Holy See, to act in every international setting on behalf of the assertion of the universal values of interfaith dialogue and tolerance, underscoring the decisive role of the diplomatic network in maintaining Italy’s high profile in those countries where religious minorities continue to be the target of violence, discrimination and persecution.

Italy has committed in the UN and the EU to ensure that fostering freedom of worship and peaceful co-existence between faiths would continue to be one of the distinguishing features of the ethical dimension of Italian foreign policy. Human rights issue was part of the discussions at the European Union-India summit on strategic partnership in Delhi in early February. There had been demands internationally that the Presidents of the European Council and the European

Commission make human rights a central part of their discussions with Indian officials.

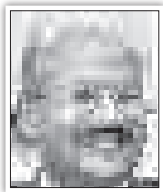
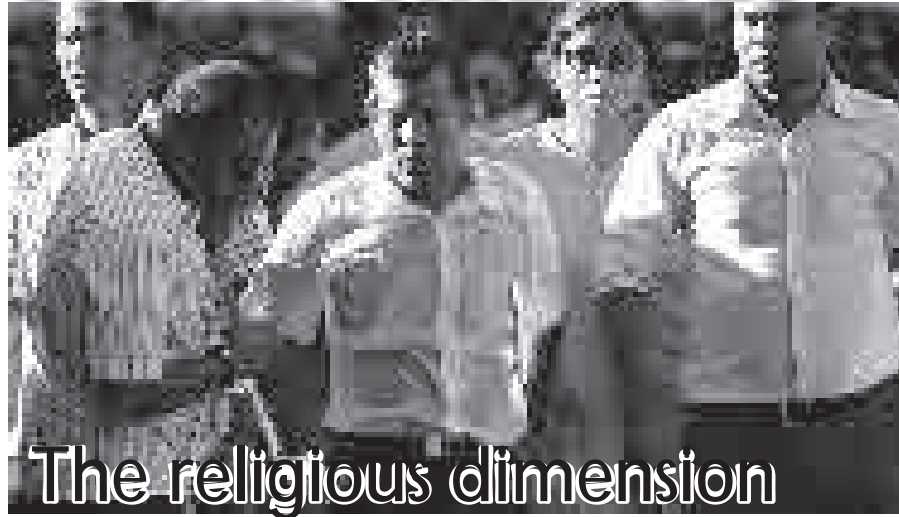
Will the Italian commission meet the same fate as USCIRF? It remains a moot question because USCIRF perpetually faces a step-motherly treatment. It is also questioned for the quality of its work and its approach to international affairs. India has always dismissed the annual report of USCIRF. Critics such as Chris Seiple of the Institute for Global Engagement say USCIRF has operated with a “lamentable approach: name, blame, and shame foreign governments,” which has kept the taxpayer-funded Commission from making as big a contribution to the cause of religious freedom worldwide as it might have otherwise.

In a time of budget cutbacks, critics advocate eliminating the independent commission -- and its \$4 million a year in federal funding. It prepares to shut down every time its budget comes up for review, but is reprieved at the last moment as an important instrument of US foreign policy. When originally created in 1998, USCIRF was intended to be “a sort of think tank” that could provide recommendations to the State Department and work cooperatively with the IRF office.

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COUP IN MALDIVES



BY A. J. PHILIP

Coups and military rules have become old-fashioned. In the sixties and the seventies, not a single month passed without a violent change of leadership taking place in some country. The standard practice was for the army to stage a flag march, kill or capture the ruler, occupy the national radio station and announce to the world that a coup d'état had taken place. That is how Idi Amin came to power in Uganda and a series of army generals like Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan, Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf ruled Pakistan.

The whole world believed that democracy had come to stay in the Maldives when following a direct presidential election in 2008, the young

Mohamed Nasheed was chosen for the highest post. He was able to capture the imagination of the people, who live in the archipelago comprising over a thousand islands, because he was a stout opponent of the former long-time dictatorial President Abdul Maumoon Gayoom.

The clean-shaven, suit wearing Gayoom is an epitome of diplomatic etiquette and civility when he appears on stages like that of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which he co-founded. But at home, he was a tyrant, who brooked no opposition, smothered public opinion, destroyed free Press and tortured his opponents. Petty charges like theft were used to keep Nasheed in jail, forcing him to seek political refuge in Britain. But he never relented in his fight against Gayoom, who knew how to cultivate powers like India.

When an attempt to overthrow Gayoom was made by his enemies who arrived at capital

Male in a few boats, Indian forces went to his rescue and averted a coup. Far from making amends for his dictatorial rule, he used his hold on power to persecute his critics and used religion as a smokescreen for his wrong-doings. The Maldives has a population of 330,000 comprising mostly Sunni Muslims. In terms of the religious identity of the people, the Maldives is the most Muslim nation in the world, after Saudi Arabia.

Yet, Gayoom thought it necessary to enact the Protection of Religious Unity Act of 1994 to unify the practice and preaching of Islam and to restrict practice and expression of any religion other than Islam. During his 30-year rule, Gayoom cracked down on Christian expats on suspicion of missionary work and deported them. He also imprisoned a few converts.

Though Nasheed could defeat Gayoom, his party failed to get majority in the elections held in 2009. But that did not affect his Presidency, as the Maldives

follows the American system, where it is not necessary for the President's party to have majority, either in the Senate or the House of Representatives. Gayoom may be out but he is certainly not down. He has his men holding high posts in the bureaucracy, the armed forces and the courts. In fact, the coup is believed to have originated in his mind.

Political immaturity and ministerial inexperience can certainly be cited as reasons for Nasheed's downfall. He made the blunder of his life when he ordered the arrest of the Chief Justice of the Criminal Court Abdulla Mohamed, who refused to order an inquiry into the corruption charges against Gayoom. It provided Nasheed's opponents a pretext to move against him.

Incidentally, it would be instructive to know how the mind of the judiciary works in the Maldives. In December last, a small group of people held a silent march to demand religious tolerance. The Maldivian Chief Justice Ahmed Faiz Hussein said the march "shocked the nation" and indicated the weakening of the country's Islamic faith.

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Maldives was evident when some of the monuments erected by SAARC nations at a park in the island where the SAARC summit was held last November, were vandalised. Used engine oil was thrown at the stone statue of a lion, erected by Sri Lanka. Incidentally, the lion is a part of the national emblem of Sri Lanka. So is that of India. But the worst treatment was meted out to the monument Pakistan, which literally means "the land of the pure", had erected at the park.

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The monument which features engraved symbols of the ancient civilization of Pakistan, known as the Indus Valley Civilization, and a bust of the country's founder Mohamed Ali Jinnah was described as "idolatrous" and burnt. Pakistan is the first country in the world which was formed on the basis of Islam and yet its monument was unacceptable in a fellow Islamic nation! By the way, within hours of the Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani unveiling the monument, the local city council decided to veil it.

During the SAARC Summit, a banner depicting the picture of Jesus, representing Christianity as one of the religions of South Asia, was vandalised, allegedly by the supporters of Gayoom. And on the day Nasheed was manhandled and removed from power, a mob rushed to the national museum and smashed to smithereens priceless artefacts that depicted the pre-Islamic civilization of the Maldives, which turned Islamic in the 12th century. Until then it was a predominantly Buddhist nation. Statues of Buddha were the prime target of the mob.

Whether the India-brokered truce would bring about lasting peace in the island nation or not, the Maldives has lost a part of its history when the Buddhist and the Hindu artefacts were destroyed. One wonders what harm they had done to



the nation, which thrives on tourism. While the Islamic injunctions against idol worship are understandable, why should idols in a museum come under attack? Once, on a visit to a museum at Nalanda, where one of the world's first and largest universities thrived, the curator explained to me why most of the statues of the Buddha were without their noses. "They were destroyed by the Muslims" was his quick answer.

At that time, I thought he was prejudiced against Islam but it kindled my interest in the subject. Now I am convinced that in most such cases of vandalism, a word that originated during the French Revolution to describe attacks on art, there is a religious angle to it. As the authors of "Blind Spot: When Journalists Don't Get Religion" argue, many stories become incomprehensible if they are divested of their religious content.

For nearly 1600 years, the monumental statues of the standing Buddha, carved into the side of a cliff in the Bamyán Valley in the Hazarajat region of Afghanistan, stood supremely

harmless, threatening none. Yet, the Taliban destroyed the statues on the orders of their leader Mulla Mohammed Omar, who found it endangering Islam.

Those statues were great specimens of Gandhara art. It took a lot of dynamite to destroy the sculptural work, which would have stood for thousands of years to let the world know about a man, who forsook his kingdom in pursuit of the truth, found enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya and died eating rotten pork given to him as supper by a poor Dalit in Vaishali at the age of 33.

Iconoclasm is not something new. The most famous iconoclastic episode in the Bible is the incident of the Golden Calf in which Moses led the destruction of the image the Israelites had constructed while he was on Mount Sinai. There were periods in religious history when people belonging to opposite sects destroyed images, worshipped or held in reverence by each other. One of the first acts of Prophet Mohammed on reaching Mecca was to destroy an idol worshipped there.

Though there have been many incidents of Muslim conquerors destroying Christian figurines and works of art, they were, by and large, tolerant towards Christianity. This became clear when I visited Istanbul for a conference. Because of inconvenient flights from Delhi, E.S. Issac, who heads the Sports channel of Doordarshan, Kay

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Benedict of 'Mail Today' and I reached our hotel early in the morning, only to find that the hotel booking was from the afternoon. We could have rested for a while but we preferred to walk down to Hagia Sophia, the

from the life of Jesus.

Why were the paintings allowed to remain in a mosque? The answer was obvious. The Muslims realised that the paintings were precious and should not be destroyed. So



what they did was to put cloth screens to hide them from the views of the worshipping faithful. Thus, they protected art, while preserving their religion. Today Chora Church stands as a symbol of tolerant Islam. Of course,

architectural wonder that was a church for over a thousand years, a mosque for 500 years and a museum for three-fourth of a century.

In the grand building, we saw specimens of pre-Christian, Christian and Islamic objects and paintings that could not be erased by plastering. After the conference, we had an occasion to visit some of the tourist spots in Istanbul, one part of which is in Europe and the other in Asia. The most interesting visit was to the Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora or simply Chora Church. It is not as large as some of the other Byzantine churches of Istanbul but what it lacks in size it makes up for the beauty of its interior. All over the walls are mosaics that depict incidents

Saudi-funded Wahabism that encourages destruction of even Sufi shrines had not come into being then.

Why is Islam averse to figurines and paintings? The Quran, I understand, does not proscribe paintings. However, there are some religious teachings that put a ban on depiction of the Prophet and his successors in any art form. But in an age of photography where you are constantly photographed by video cameras installed at malls, railway stations, banks and even road crossings, the aversion for photographs can reach ludicrous levels.

Recently, the Malayalam playback singer K.G. Markose had an unpleasant experience when he visited Saudi Arabia

for a light music programme. He was detained by the police, taken to the police station and would have been sent to jail but for the intervention of such worthies as Defence Minister A.K. Antony and Chief Minister Oommen Chandy. The crime he “committed” was that the organisers had printed pamphlets and tickets bearing his photographs! Fortunately, he knew some Arabic songs which helped him save his skin.

My friend N. Kunju, who is a poet, journalist and expert in bonsai cultivation, has in a poem in his latest work “Ecstasy” parodies the hatred for images. The poem is captioned “Taliban”. He portrays “the bearded Mullah”, who went to the well, found his image in the water, remembered that the “images were banned”, jumped into the well to “erase the image” and became a “Shahid, a martyr to the cause”, because he did not know swimming!

I had a colleague at The Searchlight-turned-Hindustan Times. He is Dr N.M.P. Shrivastava, who wanted to become a professor and ended up as a reporter. He believed, rightly or wrongly, that he did not get the recognition he deserved, for he had a Ph.D, which he earned by diligently working on his thesis that the revolutionary movement had as great a role in the freedom struggle as the non-violent satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhi. Lest it should be mistaken, Shrivastava is the most non-violent person I have ever come across.

Naturally enough, he had a disdain for the ordinary. But I found him charged up, whenever we discussed a statue called Didarganj Yakshi. For starters, the statue was discovered from

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Didarganj Yakshi

the banks of the Ganga in Patna in 1917. A washerwoman was using it to wash clothes.

When it was turned upside down, archaeologists realised that it was a Mauryan piece of sculpture. It is now kept in the Patna Museum. Dr Shrivastava took me to the museum to show the statue. One need not be an expert to know why it was a great piece of art. The prominent breasts, the narrow waist, the creases on the lower abdomen and broad hips are classic features of feminine beauty. Equally striking is the depiction

of the cloth with which her body is draped. She holds the fly-whisk.

Her nose was broken and so was her left hand. Who could have destroyed her and thrown into the Ganga? Dr Shrivastava allowed me to touch the statue, which I found as polished as a cup of porcelain. When a move was made to export the statue for a Festival of India exhibition in the US, he wrote several reports expressing fears that it might get damaged. His campaign forced the authorities to insure it for a large sum.

When the statue returned to Patna, Dr Shrivastava wrote extensively about some damage that had happened to the priceless statue. I do not know how much compensation the State Museum got but one thing is certain, nobody cared so much for the statue as Dr Shrivastava. Thanks to him, the government decided that it would never be shifted from the museum.

Now to conclude, a new church in Kerala was formed as a result of a controversy that the Metropolitan of the parent church, named after St. Thomas, was found using a cross that had a figure of Jesus on it in his prayer room! Less said about the iconoclasm of the 8th and 9th centuries and post-Reformation periods in the 16th century the better it would be. We need Shrivastavas in every community to protect art and culture.

(The writer can be reached at ajphilip@gmail.com)



Attack on Karnataka College Run by Jesuits

S REIGN OF TERROR S ANGH PARIVAR R



BY DR. AMBROSE PINTO SJ

As far as citizens are concerned, Karnataka is not a secular State. Ever since the BJP came to power, a little more than three years ago, the State has seen the largest number of attacks on Christian institutions and its personnel. The Muslim community is defamed. Women have been asked to follow traditions. Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes have been angered by anti-cow slaughter Bill, introduction of Gita in schools and other communal programmes. The Christian community has suffered the most.

According to the All India Christian Council, Karnataka is the most unsafe place for Christians, more unsafe than Orissa where the Kandhamal riots took place. The latest incident, a day after the Republic Day, was an attack on the Principal and students of St. Joseph's Pre-University College, a Jesuit

institution, situated 30 km away from Bangalore, on the pretext of not hoisting the national flag. Established in 2010, with strength of 378 students of whom 220 are dalits, the institution caters to the marginalized communities.

Flag hoisting on Republic Day

The Pre-University College had held a flag hoisting ceremony at its new premises on the morning of 26th January, according to the Principal. The attackers from various affiliates of the Sangh Parivar -- Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, Rashtra Sakthi Sene and Karnataka Rakshana Vedike -- forced their way into the Principal's office by noon accusing him of his lack of patriotism. When the Principal informed the crowd that the Pre-University College had their flag-hoisting in the premises of the Management, the group was insistent that the Principal had to be arrested for failing to perform the national obligation.

On the very next day, 27th January, a mob of about a 100 once again forced their way into the premises. They were shouting slogans, demanding the arrest of the Principal and closure of the college. The local police in spite of

being there refused to intervene. Students who came to protect the principal were beaten up. The mob paraded the principal for over a kilometre to the police station. The police went with the mob and did nothing to take action against the mob which was acting against the rule of law. In fact, they were following the orders of the anti-social goons. In the police station, the Principal was further abused and threatened. There were various allegations made against the Christians.

Sangh is an ideology

The attack took the Jesuits by surprise. The MLA from the constituency is a Dalit and a Minister in the State government. Though belongs to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a party that is determined to transform India's secular state into a Hindu one, he has been a friend of the Superior of the community. The community was sure that nothing would happen to them as long as he continues to represent the constituency. Without his express will, the incident would not have taken place. What the Jesuit community is yet to realize is as far as the BJP is concerned it is not a person but an ideology that they are determined to spread. Christians are a means to power since they are categorized as the 'other' and helps them to consolidate their vote banks.

The Jesuits claim that the attacks were because they are educating a large section of students from the Dalit community. That argument, however, is not logical. The local MLA is a Dalit and yet he is a member of the BJP. There are other Dalits in the party and they are comfortable with the BJP. Most Dalits still consider themselves as Hindus in spite of being dubbed as low, impure, untouchables and inferior.

While the BJP needs some Dalits to co-opt the community for purposes of election, the Sangh Parivar really does not desire their empowerment. The conscious Dalits know it. In the last general elections more than 70% of the Dalits in Karnataka did not vote for the saffron party. A significant section of the Dalit community has been in the forefront of resistance to the saffron agenda in the state. And yet it would be incorrect to state that the institution was attacked due to its commitment to Dalit education though the saffron brigade may not feel happy that Dalits get educated by Christians.

Egalitarian Agenda of the church

What angers the Sangh Parivar is the egalitarian agenda of Christian education that stands for rationality, modernity and equality. This agenda is in sharp opposition to the hierarchical agenda of the Sangh Parivar. While their agenda is one of exclusion, discrimination, irrationality and hate the Christian agenda is one of inclusion, compassion and concern. If one has to examine the kind of hate expressed through attacks on women, Muslims, Christians, the progressive citizens, churches, pastors and the poor in the state and the kind of moral policing that is done with imposition of moral codes, they are primitive and ancient.

The labelling of Christians as converters and the Muslims



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as terrorists has struck in a section of the public psyche. A section still thinks that the Sangh Parivar is the guardian of Indian culture and heritage in spite of continuously practicing hate, violence and hypocrisy. What is reprehensible is that the officials of the government have been colluding with the group and providing legitimacy to them.

How do we respond to these anti-secular and therefore anti-national forces? St. Joseph's Pre-University college is not the first institution to be attacked by these anti-constitutional forces. From the responses different groups that are attacked have made, one gets the impression that the church does not have a response. Most institutions have subordinated themselves to these groups. What would this subordination mean? It means that we do not have the courage to stand up to the constitutional values of secularism. Every attack of the forces of the Sangh on

the minorities or on any other groups is an attack on both the Constitution of India and liberalism which the Constitution holds dear.

In a democratic state there is a rule of law and no individual or group is allowed to take the law in their hands. The law permits young boys and girls to socialize. Women are permitted to go to pubs. It allows Christians to hold prayer meetings in their homes and churches. No citizen or group can attack individuals or their properties. Unfortunately, the victims have often not resisted them or challenged them and in the process helped these anti-nationals to expand their agenda. To allow them to go scot-free in spite of an open attack on the secular Constitution of India is a sin against the Constitution. As citizens, our national bible is our Constitution. It is the responsibility of all citizens to uphold that document against all anti-social groups.

Some have even appeased these groups without understanding the implications of such appeasement. When we give in to these saffron elements, we are allowing an attack on the nation. Their actions are anti-constitutional and anti-national. As a lunatic fringe, they have no business to attack churches, mosques, women, minorities or institutions. If people have erred, all have to submit to the rule of law. Submitting to their designs for temporary peace is to accept subordination and to encourage them to further their agenda.

How do we become the “other”?

We do not become the “other” when the affiliates of the Sangh Parivar define us so. But we may become the “other” when we fault against the Constitution of India that has defined the nation as a secular nation with freedom of thought and expression, freedom of religion and freedom of movement. Resistance to their agenda is to further the cause of secularism and the rule of law. How do we resist them? In Karnataka the police stations normally do not book cases against the family of the Sangh Parivar on the instructions of the state government. It is here the role of the civil society is the most important.

Every institution of ours has several stake-holders. The task of the institution should be to mobilise parents, social movements around the place, political groups that are averse to the sangh ideology and others. We are not the only ones that the Sangh Parivar has attacked. What hinders us to join all those who are attacked by these forces? The Church in spite of the adverse

If students are freely allowed to discuss and debate dogmas, rituals and beliefs, it will be impossible to construct a Hindu state premised on hierarchy >>>

propaganda by the forces of the Sangh Parivar still enjoys a very good reputation in the state. Given the public space that the community enjoys, it should be possible to the Church to work with other groups to establish



see that cases are booked on all those who forcibly entered the campus and those who beat up the students when they came to protect their principal. There are enough legal experts in the state who can easily assist. How can we allow lawlessness of the

anti-socials in society? Students as well as the public should be made aware that democracies work on the rule of law. Since the students beaten up are from the Dalit community, the culprits should be booked under the atrocity Act. If the police station refuses to book cases pressure needs to be brought on the police by the larger civil society

a common resistance and thus establish a human community of all people of goodwill.

It is unfortunate that in spite of large number of attacks on the society and the Church, the latter has either not organized itself or organized within itself without looking outside of it. It is due to the limited understanding of what communalism is all about. The attacks of the Sangh Parivar must not be seen merely as attacks on Christians or Muslims. They need to be looked at as attacks on citizens and the nation. That is why it is important to speak out and become a part of all those who are resisting communalism in the state.

Response of the Institutions

The response the institution has to make is at two levels for nation-building. As law abiding citizens, the institution should

and cases booked on the police as well in the courts and with the Human Rights Commission and SC/ST Commission. If the rights of women students are violated, there is a need to approach the women’s commission.

Secondly, the institution should not withdraw from the public realm. There are various Dalit organizations and other social movements in the place and around. They need to be mobilized for action and linked with the institution. And finally the institution has to move into the realm of culture and identity to educate the Dalits and to wean away the subaltern communities from the dominant caste structure which has made them experience discrimination and subordination for centuries. They need to be made aware of who they are and what their identity

is and what are the designs of the Sangh Parivar. And as long as the institution does not work on issues of identity and culture, our institutions are unlikely to empower them. Mere providing an education to pass is not a cultural education.

Why the Attacks on churches?

Why are these attacks on the Principal and the Institutions then? The very first reason of course is to humiliate a group of people who symbolize egalitarianism and modernity. The very Christian presence is a threat to the saffron psyche. A Christian institution by its very nature is a liberal institution that stands for the values of equality, liberty and community. These values are opposed by the communalists. They still hold on to caste, racism, dogmatism, inequality, discrimination and the doctrine of high and low. If students are freely allowed to discuss and debate dogmas, rituals and beliefs, it will be impossible to construct a Hindu state premised on hierarchy. And the fact is minorities and the subaltern communities are not included in the Hindu rastra. It is in fact, a rastra for a small minority. According to Dalit writers and scholars, they are not Hindus. The progressives among Dalits say that they are the original people of India and they are real citizens of the land. Those who claim as "pure" are outsiders and parasites who have not toiled in the fields and factories of India to be included as citizens of the land. They have lived on the exploitation of the laboring class.

Due to the system of education that was dominated by this class, the subaltern communities have been termed as impure, polluted and backward and the discriminated communities due to their lack of education and consciousness had internalized

If the design of the Sangh Parivar is to transform India into a Hindu state, they can never do this without the co-option of the Dalits. It is here that Christian institutions have a major role to play by exposing these groups to their own recent cultural literature >>>



these myths. In fact, the architect of India's Constitution, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, had no hesitation in saying "though born as a Hindu, I shall never die as one" and with lakhs of his followers converted to Buddhism in 1956. If the design of the Sangh Parivar is to transform India into a Hindu state, they can never do this without the co-option of the Dalits. It is here that Christian institutions have a major role to play by exposing these groups to their own recent cultural literature.

The attack on the institution places them on a higher pedestal of patriotism and the Christians on a lower pedestal since the institution has failed to hoist the national flag. But who are they to demand flag hoisting in any institution? Where do their powers to police Christian institutions come from? Is flag hoisting more important than the service of the needy and the poor? When does one become a patriot? And the truth is that for many years after independence, the RSS

hoisted the saffron flag and not the national flag on Republic Day as well as Independence Day. Those who have studied history surely would know that these elements were not a part of the freedom struggle at all. In fact, they had supported the British against the freedom fighters.

Christian institutions do not have to learn patriotism from these groups. Given the militancy of the group in Anekal, the group is likely to make more demands on the institution, asking them to celebrate Hindu feasts and festivals and be a part of their other Hindu activities in the locality. Instead of exposing their hypocrisy in a big way and working for a secular state, to subordinate to their designs is to provide encouragement to their hidden agenda and thus defeat the designs of the framers of the Constitution who have provided us an excellent document of governance.

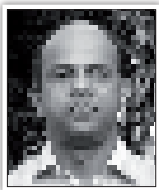
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BJP'S CUP OF WOES OVERFLOWS



The party's cup of woes has increased with the Supreme Court ordering a probe by the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) into complaints against former Chief Minister Yeddyurappa >>>



BY GEORGE PLATHOTTAM SDB

The three Karnataka Ministers caught watching porn on a cell phone in the Legislative Assembly have brought disrepute to themselves and to the country. The Speaker has now constituted a House Committee to look into the incident but the Congress and other Opposition parties have refused to be part of the Committee saying the matter is so self-evident that there is no need for any investigation.

In our jumbo democracy we have all kinds of characters from bona fide political leaders with values and principles to crooks

and criminals who are suited for prison cells. Then we have had Parliamentarians and members of Legislative Assemblies indulging in violence, rushing to the well of the House, snatching mikes and tearing papers, being absent during important debates, boycotting sessions, doing walk-outs, sleeping or not paying attention during the sessions. But this is probably the first time that a portal of democracy is tainted with ministers indulging in porn watching. One can only imagine what kind of thoughts flash through the minds of the average citizens when leaders elected and entrusted with the responsibility of legislation and governance demean themselves to this extent.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party which prides itself in calling it 'a party with a difference' is now red-faced. No doubt the Party was prompt to act against

the erring members. But will the BJP and its parent organizations, which claim to be the patrons of Indian culture and moral guardians, have the courage to show zero tolerance to the three ministers by removing them from the primary membership of the party? Or will they too wait for the public memory and the media attention to fade out before they are back on centre stage? We are not accustomed to probing into the private lives of our political leaders as the Americans and other westerners are wont to do. Our democracy is more concerned with demanding good governance and clean administration. But the 'pornagate', as the issue is now being referred to, can take a heavy toll on the BJP. The incident has only added to the woes of a party and its government in the State which have been accused of corruption, communal violence and bad governance.

As for the 'porn gate' we may blame the general deterioration of the moral conduct of society and the invasion of media prying into the lives and conduct of people. Educators and parents are often concerned about the growing tendency of the young to pornographic addiction. The internet and the new technological devices easily available to young people have increased access to pornography. Some have estimated that about one-third of internet content is pornographic. Today there are many new devices like the cell phones to make access to porn easy. There is a huge industry that earns millions of dollars in profit as a result of pushing pornographic materials. We are witnessing an alarming increase in sexual crimes like rape to lewd behaviour involving youth and even children. It is not uncommon for children to develop attraction toward pornography from the adults, including their parents.

But the conduct of the three ministers is like the crop eating the fence. Those who are supposed to be guardians and role models for good and decent behaviour have fallen victims of the malaise of indecency and misconduct. The question being asked is, can guardians of the law and Constitution be excused for such misdemeanor? What is more shocking is that one of the ministers holds the portfolio of women and child welfare. The issue is not only about the indulgence of political leaders in conducts that call into question their moral ineptitude. The matter assumes greater seriousness because the trio used the hallowed precincts of the Assembly to indulge in such offensive act. What is further shocking is the fact that the kind of debate among the guilty now is on who owned the phone and who prompted or instigated

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them to watch the porn than on more substantial issues like that of morality or guilt.

The incident has shocked the RSS and other affiliate bodies of the Sangh Parivar who usually act as the self-appointed moral guardians of the nation. The anger among the party cadres is strong as the three ministers hail from the coastal belt of Karnataka, considered a BJP-stronghold. The Sangh activists in the coastal belt are concerned about the impact of the incident on the forthcoming Udupi-Chikmagalur by-election to the Parliament. The party is also conscious of its image as elections to the Assembly is due over a year from now, and nothing short of a clean image and good governance can see the party thorough in the hustings. The party had a series of downward swings with the running conflict between B.S. Yeddyurappa, the former Chief Minister and the Governor and the Lokayukta. BSY had to relinquish office in spite of all out efforts to stay on in power.

The party's cup of woes has

only increased with the Supreme Court ordering a probe by the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) into complaints against former Chief Minister Yeddyurappa. His successor Sadananda Gowda rules by proxy with the BSY calling the shot. Gowda, beset with a series of scams and corruption charges against his cabinet colleagues, have no easy time. In fact, eleven of his ministers have stepped down or were forced to do so within a short span of time. At the moment Gowda himself holds 22 portfolios. Though he has promised a Cabinet expansion soon after the budget session, at this point of time it entails a lot of risk as it is likely to evoke revolt and dissention within the party and invite the ire of his predecessor. Earlier, the BJP also had to face a lot of embarrassment on account of the powerful Bellary Brothers against whom there are several charges of corruption. With such a heavy backlog of corruption charges involving ministers and political leaders, the BJP has a tough time to spruce up its image before the

State goes to the polls again.

As for strategies to deal with the 'porn gate' scandal the BJP has launched a campaign to support the three ministers and bring up allegations against the Opposition parties. The party has been distributing pamphlets in support of the trio and urging party units to work together to establish the "innocence of the ministers and expose the sex scandals of the Opposition parties". The list of charges against the Congress in the BJP kitty are escapades of former Andhra Pradesh governor N.D. Tiwari, former Rajasthan minister involving in the disappearance of Banwari Devi, Youth Congress leader Sushil Sharma who has been convicted and is behind the bars and Congress leader Venod Sharma's son Manu Sharma's involvement in the Jessica Lal case. The party is also targeting Janata Dal (S) leader and former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy. The party's campaign organisers have trained party cadres and armed them with 'researched data' and statistics on the misdemeanors of the Opposition leaders.

The incident involving the three ministers in Karnataka has also brought to the limelight the question of immunity given to the legislators and Parliamentarians against prosecution. The option of taking action against elected representative for what they say or do on the floor of the House rests with the presiding officer and not with any agency outside the legislature. This provision was put in place to ensure that the elected representatives are able to articulate the grievances of the people and represent their interests without fear or favour and is in no way inhibited from exercising their duties and obligations. While no one doubts the intention of those who built

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this provision of privileges into our Constitution, there have been increasing voices in favour of codifying the privileges enjoyed by the law makers.

C l e a r codifying of privileges of legislators, they feel, will ensure that those who indulge in misconduct or criminal

activities do not take shelter under the privilege of immunity which is provided as a tool to enable effective legislation. Political leaders, of course, feel that the system is perfect and there are provisions within the system to prosecute offenders. They feel that the privilege of immunity is not unbridled as the Speaker or the presiding officer has the power to decide on what is right and what is wrong and act against erring members.

The writing on the wall is clear for all political parties. This time round it may be the already beleaguered BJP that has to deal with a crisis like the porngate. But all political parties must deal with the misconduct of their leaders as well as cadres. As is being proved again and again, today it is not easy for any of them to indulge in immoral and corrupt practices and get away. The media is now on the



prowl with its new technological devices. The citizens are more watchful and alert about the conduct of their leaders. There is an increasing sense of frustration on the part of the public regarding politicians of all hues who fail to ensure good governance and address the legitimate grievances of the people who elect them.

There is a huge trust deficit between the people and their leaders. It is in the light of these that political parties must lay down clear rules and guidelines for their legislators and those in positions of power. Parties must also act decisively against those who flout accepted norms of conduct. An electoral victory or cabinet berth is not licence to act without any rules of behaviour or sense of responsibility.

In another disgraceful incident, the St Mary's Island at Malpe in Udupi district, considered a sacred place, was disgraced

with a rave drunken party. The usage of drugs, liquor and free indulgence in sexual activities there deserve to be condemned by all. Former Judge of the Mumbai and Karnataka High Court, Justice M F Saldanha described the incident a disgrace and called for the dismissal of the minister in-charge of the district and local MLA.

The State has also the dubious distinction of having the highest number of attacks on the Christian minority community ever since the BJP came to power. Hindu extremist groups led attacks on churches, schools and homes of Christians and physically beat hundreds of people. Minorities have been feeling insecure as they were attacked even in cities like Mangalore which has a strong Christian presence, and has a long tradition of inter-faith and communal harmony.

Justice Saldanha, who conducted an independent People's Tribunal Inquiry to investigate the violence, visited over 400 places and examined almost 3,000 witnesses and victims in addition to forensic evidence and media reports. The report said that the violence was covered up by the BJP government in the state. Instead of restraining the attackers, the administration colluded with the perpetrators of crime and violence or looked the other way when complaints were made. The former Chief Minister B. S. Yeddyappa, and former Home Minister Acharya, who died recently, have been accused for lending tacit support to criminal elements who indulged in such acts of vandalism. Christian leaders have blamed the State administration for using even the armed police,

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and the lower judiciary against Christians, their institutions and personnel to create "an atmosphere of anarchy."

As in other BJP-ruled States there is also a systematic attempt to saffronise education



by introducing biased lessons in the social sciences of Class V and VII from the next academic year. Several organizations like the Karnataka Komu Souhardha Vedike (Karnataka Communal Harmony Forum) are fighting against the government which is going to spend a whopping Rs 14 crore to print new textbooks. Several secular organizations as well as litterateurs like U R Ananthamurthy, and Chandrashekar Kambhar have expressed their support to the protests against the government's move to saffronise education.

Following the disgraceful incident of porn watching by the ministers, the government

and the party are seriously working on a major image makeover. The Chief Minister has announced a programme to educate his ministers and legislators on morality and discipline. The BJP, nay all political parties, need lessons in good governance, ethics, social responsibility and accountability. It is not that they lack knowledge of what is right and wrong, but once elected, they are carried away by the lure of power and riches and forget the salutary lessons of life. At a time when political leaders are facing a serious erosion of credibility before the public, it should be the task of those in the profession to do everything to restore the confidence of the people.

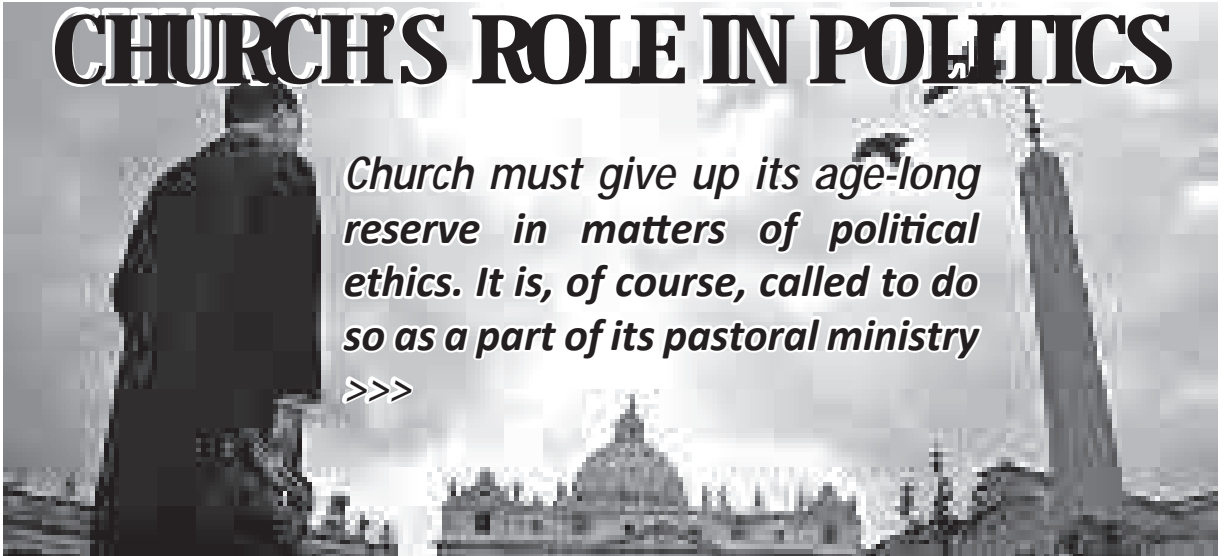
The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in Karnataka which is facing high level of corruption charges, communalism and attacks on minorities, will need to work very hard if it is to build up its image. The party needs to convince the voters of its integrity and competence to provide corruption-free governance. Karnataka was the first state in South India where the party came to power. But the dismal record of the party and its government in the state raise serious doubts whether the lotus will bloom again when Karnataka goes to the polls next year.

(The writer is Secretary, Social Communications, CBCI)

CHURCH'S ROLE IN POLITICS

Church must give up its age-long reserve in matters of political ethics. It is, of course, called to do so as a part of its pastoral ministry

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BY DR. FELIX PODIMATTAM

On February 8, regarding the Church and politics, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) president Cardinal Oswald Gracias said "the Church knows its limitations. It takes positions only to carry the voice of the voiceless".

Further, the Cardinal said the Church's mandate is to address issues like uplift of the poor, social development, empowerment of women and children, dalits, and the marginalized.

The Church neither supports nor associates with any political party but it will not ignore the plight of the oppressed and the downtrodden, said the CBCI vice-president, Major Archbishop Moran Mor Cleemis.

These prelates were replying to a question at a press conference on the conclusion of the CBCI plenary assembly in Bangalore.

The above views of the CBCI

president and vice-president may give the impression that the role of the Church regarding politics is only social, but never political. I shall argue that the Church can intervene in political matters as well.

Church's Obligations in the Sphere of Politics

The Church cannot refuse to take a stand on the political questions of the day. It is of course called to do so as a part of its pastoral ministry. Think, for example, of the highly political decisions the Christian has constantly to make in the totalitarian state, of the crises of conscience these decisions entail, and the pastoral obligation they impose upon the Church. Yet quite apart from this pastoral kind of concern, the Church is summoned to take a stand on the current political, economic, social, and cultural situation in order that it may not become the unwitting agent of the spirit of the age -- in whatever form -- instead of being impelled by the divine spirit.

The very destiny of men is constantly being decided in politics and social organization. How many lives are lost in a war! How deeply it affects the family!

What testing and temptation goes with it in the moral sphere, and even in the most intimate circles of faith. This is why the Church must be deeply concerned with this question of war and peace, a cardinal political question, precisely for the sake of man. For, the question involves life and death, love and hate, the building up and tearing down of the souls of men for whom Christ died. Obviously the Church must deal with these questions. Obviously it must speak out and make its confession in respect of them.

To take another example, the Church can question as to what role if any, labor should have in the management of industry. There is such a thing as the Christian answer to this question. Let no one say that these are purely technical questions unrelated to the humanity of man, that they are not directly a matter of conscience and hence that there is no need of pastoral direction here. In the last resort it is a question as to how the effective operation of the economy, which requires a measure of individual responsibility and free initiative on the part of the owner, can be harmonized with the need of the employees to share in the responsibility. The humanity

man is very much at stake in this question.

For we know -- and do not need Marxism to tell us -- that the technological age has put the prerogatives of power into the hands of those who control the means of production, so that those who are dependent upon them are in danger of being reduced to the inhuman status of being mere means to an end, of being valued solely in terms of the worth of their productivity. We also know that this threat becomes all the greater as business concerns become more impersonal, directed by managers rather than personally responsible owners. In face of these developments, who would dare to say that the Church is not involved in this question? Is it not a matter of protecting the members of a particular social class lest they be reduced to mere functioning objects and be treated as things rather than persons?

Limitations of Church in Politics

Nevertheless, it cannot be the Church's task to advance the Christian solution to the problem, and to recommend or even make obligatory a specific system in which responsibility is divided between owners and employees according to some "Christian" formula. For, a host of factual considerations also enter into this human question. The apparently simple and Christian recommendation that for the sake of the human dignity of the worker employees must share full responsibility with the employer is not only technically naive.

By its oversimplification it also constitutes a threat to true humanity from the opposite side. For the question at once arises: How can this co-responsibility be actualized, and who will represent the employees? Might



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it not be that in all but the larger firms and plants there would be a shortage of workers fitted for this task? And might it not be that in such instances representation would be taken over by union people who may know little or nothing of the local operation at first hand? And would not this perhaps mean - we are simply raising the question - the introduction of all sorts of ideological involvements and new political entanglements? Would the worker then be any less an object, any less a mere means to an end, than he was before as a pawn in the hands of the impersonal corporations?

We would only raise the question, and in this admittedly sketchy way. Merely to raise it, however, merely to mention even a small fraction of the problems involved, is to show clearly that in terms of its vocation the Church has no substantive solution to this problem. The individual Christian, however, whether as an indirect participant through the ballot or as a direct representative of one of the two social groups concerned, has to struggle to arrive at a concrete solution, a *modus convivendi* which at the same time is in accord with the postulate of an effectively operating economy. This cannot mean, of course, that the Church may pander to quietist reserve in respect of this

question. Indeed, the Church has three main tasks.

First, it can help man to gain a more precise knowledge of the real issues. It can clarify the interests, ethical intentions, and proposed solutions on both sides, thus assisting the individual in the decision of conscience which is his to make. It can free him from dependence on demagogic slogans by laying bare the substantive and human concerns which are really at stake. Conscience cannot be sharpened simply by making more or less abstract and general appeals. Conscience grows by the decisions -- indeed the substantive decisions -- it has to make. This means above all that the pastor must orient himself to the issues and be able to state them clearly.

Thus, to guide the conscience in the matter of taxes one must know the actual problems, including the institutional friction in which the conscience lives today. He must know the considerations that must be involved in the levying of taxes. The depressing failure of the Church's pastoral ministry is due not least of all to the fact that the Church is suspiciously bound by the fetters of an individualistic theology and ethics. It has not yet begun to see and to consider the extent to which individual decision of conscience is all mixed up with problems which derive from the

institutions of society and from the various social and political systems.

In a theological examination it can still happen that students will be able to spout endlessly about the duty of honesty, without having the faintest inkling of the real theological and ethical problems which can arise for the person who is trying to be honest in a dishonest system, e.g., a dubious tax system or a bad economic system. It is said that “even the best of us cannot live in peace unless the bad neighbour allows it.” Can I be righteous if I live in the midst of organized injustice? Can I be honest if I live in the sphere of institutional deception? One has only to consider the situation in a totalitarian state to see extremes of both. Thus it is that even the orders within which we live are a matter of ethics. This is why it is essential that the Church and its pastors know the facts and understand the situation.

Second, the Church has the duty of speaking to both sides -- e.g., to both labour and management -- and of showing them what is ultimately at stake. It can point out, e.g., that human dignity is the real issue, that human dignity derives from the fact that Man has been “bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23), that there is consequently more to man than just his capacity to produce. The aim will be, not to surprise both sides by coming up with an unexpected solution, but to address both sides with respect to the ultimate object of their decision. Once this is known, they can be left to argue the matter out. The fact is that there are questions which can be handled only by those directly concerned, or by the arbiter who has listened to both sides.

Third, the Church must see to it that the parties to the dispute

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meet face to face, and in an atmosphere charged with the influence of the living voice of the gospel, so that they confront one another as “neighbours.” For it is profoundly Christian to see in the other person not just the champion of an interest, ideology, or front, but the Man who is of value to God, who has cost God something. It is an eminently pastoral act, where a conflict of principles is involved, to relax the rigidity of the lines of opposition by transforming a confrontation of abstract positions into an encounter of living persons. One need not have lived very much to know that real results always follow from this kind of assistance, which is itself a product of the realism of the gospel.

If we have said that the Church as such is not competent to take a position regarding a particular political conception, and if we have strictly distinguished between the substantive questions involved in political action and the pastoral concerns which the Church must have in view, we must now consider whether this is still true in respect of modern totalitarian states. The answer must be negative.

In a totalitarian state things are radically different, because the totalitarian state is always an ideological state. A large proportion of its political acts have an ideological significance. Social measures, e.g., are taken and demanded in the name of ideological goals. The same is

true with respect to educational policy, the organization of the sciences, and foreign policy. It is also true with respect to the campaign against undesirables (e.g., the campaign to exterminate the Jews and the mentally unfit in the Third Reich).

This is why every time the Church confesses its faith over against the ideological confession of the totalitarian state it is logically construed by the state as a protest against its political measures, from which the ideological content cannot be separated. As a matter of fact, the totalitarian state’s diagnosis in such cases is quite accurate. This is why in the ideological state the Church is repeatedly forced to take a direct stand on political measures.

The question then becomes acute as to the obligation of confession thereby imposed on the Church. More precisely: Is it not the Church’s duty from the very outset, i.e., from the very inception of the ideological tyranny, to confess its faith by dissociating itself from the anti-Church, refusing to acknowledge it as state and secular kingdom, and abstaining from every kind of collaboration? Or, in virtue of certain functions of state which even the most perverted state still discharges (e.g., the regulation of traffic, the provision of a monetary system, etc.), should not even the most dubious state still be respected as a kind of emergency state, and accorded at least some measure of co-operation?

Can this limited co-operation be justified on the ground that even the pathological state is still to some extent a bulwark against chaos so that, however corrupt, one cannot do without it? Or should one withhold even limited collaboration on the ground that the seeming order of the totalitarian state is really “organized chaos,” and that the Church’s only option is to speak out against its sabotaging of the divinely willed functions of order?

One certainly has to respect a Church which answers that its obligation is to bear witness against the ideological dictatorship and to make no secret of the fact that it fundamentally rejects the totalitarian state as being anti-human in its very structure.

The crucial thing, of course, is that in its preaching of judgment and in its condemnation of actual injustice the Church should not be a mere moralist or defender of culture and civilization (though it may have to play this role as well). The Church has to preach real judgment, not mere morality.

How can it do this? It has to attack the crimes of the state in its preaching, confession, and pastoral work in such a way that they are seen to be not merely actions contrary to the moral law but the necessary result of a decision with respect to God. In terms of our present discussion, this means that when God is done away, and a deliberately atheistic state arises with the corresponding ideology, man too can no longer be esteemed. For the dignity of man consists exclusively in his alien dignity, i.e., in the fact that he is related to God as child, as image, as one who is bought with a price. He thus stands under the patronage of an eternal goodness. He cannot be touched, for he is “the apple

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of God’s eye” (Zech 2:8; Deut 32:10; Ps 17:8). If, however, he is dis severed from this sustaining relationship, then he can only be evaluated -- and must necessarily be valued -- in terms of his immanent worth, which means in practice his utility.

We may now sum up three main results of our discussion as follows. First, the Church must be careful not to let its political preaching consist only in abstract and empty appeals to conscience. For conscience grows and develops -- indeed first comes into being -- precisely in the making of decisions, including the substantive decisions.

Second, the Church must be informed on the facts that are pertinent to these decisions, e.g., labour-management relations, gender equality, defensive alliances, etc., and it must elaborate the pastoral concerns involved in these

controversial issues. Then too, the Church must be careful not to reject categorically specific judgments and programs, just as it must be careful not to endorse categorically certain others -- or set up its own -- on the ground that these alone are Christian and in keeping with God’s commandments. The Church has all Christians under its pastoral care, whatever it may think of their particular social or political convictions.

Third, theology and theologians, pastors included, must give up their age-long reserve in matters of political ethics. They must strive to answer from the standpoint of the theological center of the Christian faith -- the doctrine of salvation -- the question as to what a conscience which is taught by God and lives in the peace of God has to say and signify for the way of the Christian in the world, even the world of politics. □