

# Arms Against a Sea of Troubles

by Ann Dummett

It was said of the distinguished actor Alfred Lunt that, without uttering a word, and with his back to the audience, he could convey emotions. His is a grand, but not a solitary, example of how expressive silence can be. A silent response can convey respect to the suffering, concentration in prayer, love and understanding to the lover, courage under interrogation. Silence can, in short, be the perfect response, but only if its meaning is absolutely clear, at a time when words would shatter a fragile truth.

Silence can, however, be a confusion, a cowardice, or a sin of omission. There is a time for keeping silent, a time for speaking. It may not always be easy to know which is which, but it is very important for the Christian, in good conscience, to try to know. Men have been martyred, sometimes for the words they have uttered, sometimes for the silence they have kept; in both cases their persecutors have understood, and the rest of the world has understood, exactly what they meant, because the issue on which their words, or their silence, committed them, has been a clear one, and the meaning of their response, in the context of other people's responses one way or the other, obvious.

We have in England now one serious issue, of great importance, on which many people have expressed views one way or the other: the issue of the provision of weapons of war to the government of South Africa. The issue appears to some to be a complex one; to others, it appears very simple and straightforward. Those who find it complex may be in genuine puzzlement; or they may be anxious to deceive themselves by using the complexities as an excuse for avoiding a decision; those who are thus anxious to deceive themselves are in the uncomfortable position of fearing that they ought to say it would be wrong to sell these weapons, but being afraid to say it is wrong, and so they seize upon all the reasons that can be found for finding it expedient, rather than wrong. We learn, as Christians, to execrate the name of Caiaphas, but we usually forget that Caiaphas was, after all, a High Priest, a man no doubt of many virtues, just as the scribes and Pharisees had many virtues; he was a politician, too, seeking the best for his country; he was a very ordinary human being, and there are countless well-meaning decent people who share his qualities; there is a Caiaphas in all of us, murmuring, 'After all, wouldn't it be better? Think of the possible bad results to the whole country? Surely—it is expedient for one man to die for the good of the people.' Surely, when you weigh up all the factors and the possible consequences, it would be better to do this one wrong. Well, you couldn't really call it *wrong*. Yes, Caiaphas lives in us all, and more

particularly in politicians who are faced with the same temptations that he had. The grandeur of the Gospels' story often makes us forget the ordinariness of the responses of all the human actors in it, the similarities of their nobility and their corruption to our own.

But in judging the meaning of responses to this issue of weapons being sold to the South African government, it is a very important fact that this is generally recognized, explicitly in some cases, deep down and confusedly in others, to be a simple issue of *saying which side you are on*. Are you against racism, or are you willing to accept it? That is how every black person sees it, whatever country he belongs to. Without doubt, it is also how the South African government sees it. For them, supply of certain weapons by the British government is important as a gesture of support rather than as a practical matter of how much, and what kind of, ironmongery they buy from Britain. After all, South Africa's economy, though it may have its difficulties, is hardly incapable of a war effort. They have bought some useful military devices already from a British Labour Government; they have built up very powerful armed forces and can lend, of their superfluity, forces to kill Africans in Rhodesia as well as within their own borders. South Africa is not a defenceless country actually suffering from a Russian blockade; it is a very powerful and rich country and the greatest threat to its security is an internal one, as its own government's actions bear very convincing witness. If the threat was from Russian submarines, why did the South African government buy mortar-detecting devices from the British Labour Government? I admit to being no military expert, but it does seem clear to anyone that a mortar-detecting device is of great importance against guerrillas and about as useful as a bean bag against a submarine, or a battleship, or a rocket.

It would be possible to argue for a long time, to little purpose, about the military importance to Britain itself of supplying arms to South Africa. But it is surely a very important point here that Britain's own Foreign Office, which is presumably mindful to some extent of Britain's security, has all along been totally opposed to the sale of arms to South Africa by Britain, for very strong political reasons. President Nixon, whom none surely will accuse of being a trendy Lefty, a dreamer or a man unconcerned with the security of the West, is also opposed to the sale on political grounds. Those actually in favour of the sale, apart from the South African government and its supporters at home, are people strongly sympathetic to the South African government for *political* reasons, usually believing it to be a bastion against Communism whose fall will let chaos loose upon the world. They are prepared to be friends with racism; it is expedient that many should suffer, so long as they are black, for the sake of 'Western civilization'. Opponents of their point of view on practical or political grounds have argued that the best way to repel Communism is to make friends with black African governments before the

South African and Rhodesian white governments, because the blacks are more likely on balance to be the more important force in the end. This is a political argument which may or may not be a good one. It does not cut much ice with black people. Their concern is: are you against racism or ready to accept it? For justice or injustice? That is the test, and your reaction to the issue of the sale of arms to South Africa will tell us the answer, which side you are on.

What has been the reaction of the Catholic Church in England to this question, a question that has been before us for a long time and which there has been plenty of time to consider? Silence. A resounding, eloquent, silence. There can be no doubt, in the context of other responses, what this silence has signified. The World Council of Churches has expressed itself in a gesture whose practical importance is not great, but whose moral meaning is absolutely clear: providing money to Southern African liberation organizations, and opposing the sale of arms to the South African government. The Anglican Church has condemned the sale, through the vast majority of the Bench of bishops. The Archbishop of Canterbury has succeeded in failing to please rather a lot of people; he has annoyed Anglican sympathizers with South African government, while angering many black people with his visit to Vorster and his addressing of an all-white meeting from which Coloureds were ejected. None the less, in a rather muddled British way, he has said what side he is on: he is against racism even if he has not chosen words and actions that are what black people could have asked from him.

The Catholic Church, up to the time of writing, has remained silent. More than I can express, I hope that this silence will have been broken by a clear statement before these words appear in print. For when other churchmen have spoken, when well-known Catholic M.P.s have explicitly supported the sale of arms with not a word of comment from the English bishops, when other lay Catholics have protested against the sale, again without a word of comment, the silence of the Catholic bishops can only mean that they do not see this issue as a moral issue at all; they do not think it requires any response from them as shepherds or as preachers of the Word. It cannot be that the bishops believe all political matters to be outside their ministry. Bishops have been willing to talk about Communism, which is not an unpolitical ideology. They have referred to industrial relations, and student protest: Cardinal Heenan made a strong statement against the Smith régime in Rhodesia after UDI.

Whatever their own reasons, the Catholic hierarchy's silence can, alas, only be interpreted as a gesture of consent towards the sale of arms. If other religious bodies had been divided on the issue, silence might have been taken to mean uncertainty. But when other Christians with an official voice have all condemned the sale, silence can only mean consent. To the world at large, the Catholic Church

in England, by its silence, is willing to accept or tolerate the racism of the South African government if it remains silent upon this issue. This is no small matter. For one thing, the Catholic Church's voice is quite a powerful one. It could really make some practical difference to policy. For another, black people in England will be more than ever convinced that the Catholic Church here is not against racism: is on the other side, against them.

No amount of doing good by stealth to black people in England can remedy this. No parish suppers, multi-racial youth clubs sponsored by kindly white Catholics—even if we had a lot of these, which we do not—no Catholic housing aid, even, can wipe out the memory that the Catholic Church chose to keep quiet when the situation invited a statement about racism. A statement is not a gesture that costs diocesan funds money. Its cost would be this: that if the bishops spoke out unequivocally about racism, by commenting on the arms issue instead of making broad statements about brotherly love that the listener can comfortably interpret in his own manner, there would be violent contention within the church. There are a lot of white Catholics with racist beliefs who would be very angry. Some of these would be prosperous and well-known laymen, the sort of people whose movements the *Catholic Herald* faithfully chronicles, along with news of Bing Crosby and Tessie O'Shea, just because they are (a) Catholics and (b) famous. There would be a rift within the Church more bitter than the rift between proponents of the old liturgy and the new. But I personally believe that the time is far overdue for the Catholic Church in England to make it plain: is racism a doctrine totally opposed to the Christian doctrine or is it not? Because the longer we keep silent on this matter, the more sure it is that the Catholic Church will find itself giving way to racist pressures until it is irrevocably on the wrong side of the most serious moral question of our time.

## **Whatever Became of Artukovitch?**

### **Reflections on a Croatian crusade**

by Hubert Butler

#### I.

I have been reading an 84-page pamphlet called 'Artukovitch, the Himmler of Yugoslavia', by three New Yorkers, called Gaffney, Starchevitch and McHugh. Artukovitch was Minister of the Interior, 1941 to 1945, under the dictator Pavelitch in the independent state of Croatia. Very few people have heard of him, yet if his story were told with remorseless candour, we would have a picture not only of