

It is good to see that the Pope has shown his support for 'young students in the United States and in the rest of the world' who are doing what they can to put an end to what he calls the 'murderous and senseless destruction' of the war in Vietnam. We should remind ourselves from time to time of just what lies behind a phrase like that. We in Britain and Ireland reasonably regard the Provisional wing of the IRA as men of violence and we are rightly shocked when one of their explosions results in horrible injuries or loss of life; but at least their main targets are inanimate and they make some clumsy attempt to protect the lives of civilians. It is instructive to compare their technique with what is going on every day in South-East Asia. There is, for example, the WAAPM, an ingenious device developed at a cost of over thirty million pounds by the 'Defence Communications Planning Group' in the United States. This consists of a large canister containing hundreds of small pellet bombs. These are fitted with a delay mechanism so that they will not explode until activated by someone walking near them. They are specially designed to inflict damage which is 'very difficult to correct even with surgery'. The U.S. Air Force speaks calmly of 'seeding' areas with these weapons. There is the Dragontooth, dropped in thousands over Vietnam, about which Major Raymond Anderson announced proudly before a Senate Committee: 'It is purely anti-personnel. If a person steps on it, it could blow his foot off. If a truck rolls over it, it won't blow the tyre.' There are what they call 'People-sniffers' which can direct fire towards a human being by registering the smell of sweat. It seems that this device is not yet quite sensitive enough to distinguish between people and water buffalo; the question of distinguishing between enemy soldiers and civilians simply doesn't arise.

These weapons are worth special mention simply because they are specifically and ingeniously designed to do maximum damage to human beings. There is no need to catalogue the better known and even more lethal weapons. You do not have to think of the north Vietnamese or the National Liberation Front as angels of light in order to be appalled at the indiscriminate violence of the attempt to suppress them. The really amazing thing is that after a quarter of a century of continuous warfare and after ten years of the most savage attack ever mounted in the history of mankind, inflicted on a country rather smaller than Britain, the people are still resisting and, moreover, resisting successfully. There are sure to be those who underline this fact and complain that the Pope's call for peace comes just at the time when the Saigon regime is in real danger, but this would be quite unfair. This is by no means the first Vatican move for peace in

Vietnam; the record is quite good, and certainly a great deal better than that of any British government, whether Conservative or Labour.

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The Pope says: 'We are obliged to deplore all war, its cause, its inhuman violence. . . .' If there is one generalization we can safely make about the 'cause' of war it is that violent conflict develops only when reasonable criticism is ignored and when moderate protest is suppressed. The lesson is being taught in Vietnam itself and in other places nearer home; it also needs to be learned nearer Rome. In March a group of Canadian and European theologians published an extremely moderate and cautious statement about certain dangerous tendencies they detected in the Church. They said they believed that the promise of Vatican II had not been fulfilled. The document was specifically directed to finding 'a middle road between revolution and resignation' and it attacked as 'a convenient alibi . . . the excuse that effort is useless, that no progress is being made, that it is better to quit altogether'. The worries they had about the organization of the Church were all extremely familiar—authoritarianism, the secret appointment of bishops, the lack of 'any constructive solutions with regard to such burning issues as peace and justice'. . . and so on. The document was not, in fact, in itself, particularly new or interesting except in its emphasis on getting something done and not simply whining and waiting for some solution to drop down from above. It invites us, in certain circumstances, to 'initiate provisional solutions with prudence, moderation and concern for Church unity' and, above all, requires us to 'hold anew to the Church's own centre and foundation; the gospel of Jesus Christ'. The interesting but depressing thing was the reaction from the Vatican. The Secretary of the International Theological Commission permitted himself to speak of the theologians as 'a small minority who strive, in raising their voices, to undermine by trickery the value of theological scope and method' and said that 'To defend themselves personally and to muster their dispersed troops, the partisans of an "aftermath of the Council were forced to launch themselves on a new road; that of contest".' Some of the meaning of this riposte by Mgr Delhaye may (surely must) have got lost in the translation but it should be clear who is talking the language of war and who the language of peace.

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