CORRESPONDENCE

Pie-a-la-Callahan

Cambridge, Mass.

To the Editors: Daniel Callahan's analysis and evaluation of the Davis-Küng-Ruether approach to ecclesiology ("Pie-in-the-Sky Theology?" Mar. 29) was magnificent. He touched upon several points that highlight the malaise in the present attempt at ecclesial understanding, viz. determining the nature of the Church and deciding who really speaks for it . . .

A great debt of gratitude is no doubt owed to Davis, Küng and Ruether for presenting their views of the Church. But the struggle for discovery goes on. Hopefully, we can soon achieve the fuller understanding of the "community in service" about which Christ so strongly hints in the Gospels so that the contemporary Christian can give a more directive force to his desire to help others . . .

I suggest that Daniel Callahan write a treatise on the Church. I'm sure his aspect will be of the surprising variety.

(REV.) GILBERT ROMERO

Buffalo, N.Y.

To the Editors: In "Pie-in-the-Sky Theology?" Daniel Callahan invokes from Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* a version of Popper's principle of "reinforced dogmatism," a self-sealing device against any possible attempt at refutation: the theory predicts it and explains it away. As Berger puts it: "the less firm the plausibility structure becomes, the more acute will be the need for world-maintaining legitimations." In an interesting and very thought-provoking tour de force, Callahan exposes the uncriticized absolute hidden in Lawler's, Küng's and Ruether's presentations. What Callahan seems not to realize is that he is vulnerable too. His strategy:

(1) Deny that the others have isolated the true nature of the Church;

(2) Attack their effort to locate the reality of the Church in one or other last-ditch absolute legitimation;

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DR. KING'S LEGACY

There have long been two telling arguments against an ethic of non-violence. The first is that it cannot work, since it seems to suppose an angelic conception of man's dignity rarely encountered in reality. Even in the case of Gandhi, many have said, the success of his non-violence was only made possible by England's lukewarm desire to hold on to India, and by the coincidence that the English were enough a part of the moral tradition he evoked to make them susceptible to his tactics. In short, non-violence will not work and, if it does, that is just an ad hoc historical accident which cannot be repeated. The death of Martin Luther King, one could say, simply proved the irrelevance of non-violence: the fate of the non-violent is a violent death at the hands of those who live in the real and not hoped-for human world. Reality caught up with Dr. King just as it did with Gandhi.

The second telling argument is that the concept of non-violence can easily become just another instrument of subjugation. Faced with rising, utterly just Negro demands, stridently pushed, expensive to meet, unnerving to confront, what is more natural than for whites to embrace Dr. King's non-violence? The nice thing about it, from a nervous white viewpoint, is that it doesn't endanger property, doesn't promote costly rioting, doesn't allow blacks to get out of hand. It also means that whites can meet Negro demands at their leisure, being reasonably sure that nothing too drastic will happen in the meantime. Many blacks of course saw this kind of effect in Dr. King's non-violence. They felt it played only too nicely into white hands—and they rejected it, casting about instead for an ethic with more bite to it, one which would allow whites less chance to put off what had to be done, less chance to go about business as usual. And violence does have bite.

What has Martin Luther King's death proved? Does it just add one more bit of data against the value of non-violence? Was it really "ironical," as many commentators put it, that the champion of non-violence should die a

violent death? Not at all, if one has already decided that non-violence is hopelessly unrealistic anyway. A goodly number of those white mayors and governors who praised Dr. King's non-violent philosophy felt little compunction about dispatching troops to the ghettos to quell rioting. That was only to say, in so many words, that while non-violence is a splendid philosophy for blacks to cope with whites, some old-fashioned violence is still the best way for whites to cope with blacks. When any number of white civic spokesmen went on the air or TV after Dr. King's assassination to say "we must not resort to violence," one might well have wondered—and immediately guessed—which "we" they particularly had in mind.

The last years of Dr. King's life were confused and confusing. Negro leadership had passed from his hands into those of the violent militants; younger blacks just didn't listen to him much anymore. The whites he addressed, whites who had seemed amenable to Negro demands in the early sixties when more blacks than whites were being killed, showed a far uglier face by the middle of the decade. The old white self, hesitant for a moment after Birmingham and Selma, reasserted itself after Watts and Newark and Detroit; "law and order," the classic device for keeping minorities in their place in a democracy, became the white preoccupation. So far as the Negro was concerned, life was, after a brief flirtation with justice, returning to normal; "normal" means "repression."

And yet, perhaps something more was there to be released. And perhaps it took Dr. King's death to do it. True, the troops were dispatched to put down the rioting which foll[o]wed the assassination. True, too, that some blacks quic[k]ly said that Dr. King's death marked the final demise [o]f Negro non-violence; and they didn't sound unhappy. [A]nd, true, there seemed no inevitable likelihood that th[e] various civil rights and poverty bills in Congress and state legislatures (weak bills at that) would now quickly be pushed through.

But there were other signs, more subtle but still telling. There was very little sniping in any of the riot areas in any of the cities. By the standards of Watts, Detroit and Newark, the police and the troops showed an unaccustomed restraint; as long as life was not being directly threatened, looters were given considerable leeway. For once, looting was not made a crime punishable by instant death as it had been too frequently last summer. Maybe we read too much into this restraint, but it was present and it could have a meaning. That meaning, we'd like to hope, is that the white guilt over Dr. King's death ran deep; it made white officials hesitant about bloody suppression. Even the black militants were on the whole restrained; the assassination gave them a grand chance to make their point, but the actual point they made was closer to King's than what they had been saying previously. The death of a non-violent man, it seemed, could have a bite for a moment stronger than that of the violence which killed him.

Will it last? Will the guilt and the restraint take hold, or will it be business as usual in a few weeks? Just about everything depends. White America has had another chance thrust before it, the chance provided by the violent death of a just man. The Kerner report, acknowledged and then quickly brushed aside a few weeks ago, is still there with its plethora of useful recommendations. The money being spent on the Vietnamese war proves that money is available to do just about anything the country wants to do or thinks it has to do. Here and there, business and the churches—the two great conservative institutions in American society—have begun to move. Both are beginning to see that the money must be spent; but they don't yet see how much, sharing with Congress and state legislatures the belief that they can buy Negro justice and equality with spare change.

If the new chance is not accepted, then the violence will return and Dr. King's life will have been confounded. Yet Martin Luther King was not just an advocate of non-violence. He was an advocate of justice and equality. Few persecuted minorities in history have ever won these things by non-violence. Dr. King was looking for a miracle, the kind that breaks all the usual rules of reality. At the moment he died, reality seemed to be winning; the usual rules killed him. Yet the miracle remains possible. God will not bring it about, though. Men will. White men. Or it will not happen, not at all.

PEACE: FIRST STEPS

President Johnson's announcement on March 31 that he was ordering a reduction in the bombing of North Vietnam was such welcome, and surprising, news that the vagueness of the limitation—to an area north of the demilitarized zone where enemy build-up and movement of troops and supplies threatened allied forward positions—was at first overlooked. Then, under prodding by Senator Fulbright, the Administration explained that air strikes would be permitted up to 225 miles above the DMZ, around the 20th parallel. Despite skepticism that this would lead to peace talks, Hanoi responded to the U.S. initiative, indicating a willingness at least to discuss a total halt to the bombing and all other acts of war against North Vietnam. The subsequent lifting of the siege of Khesanh, with the apparent withdrawal of most of North Vietnam's troops from the immediate vicinity of the base, plus President Johnson's further reduction of the bombing to within 170 miles of the DMZ, quickly, almost incredibly, raised the chances of peace to a level that would have been unthinkable even a month ago. There is hope now for an end to the war, but surely no reason for euphoria.

Although it is arguable whether the U.S. or Hanoi is presently acting from greater strength, it should be clear that there will be no outright capitulation on either side.

The elaborate dance of preparation that began after Hanoi's response is only a hint of the complexities that negotiations will involve. Even the question of where the preliminary negotiators should meet—Cambodia, Geneva, New Delhi, Burma or Tokyo—is fraught with psychological and political as well as practical considerations. And, on questions of substance, the possible ways of settling the war, whether ceding a couple of northern provinces of South Vietnam to Hanoi in exchange for withdrawal of the North's forces plus its effort to reduce the Vietcong's insurgency, or a coalition government in the South to include the National Liberation Front, there is revealed the basic dilemma common to Hanoi and Washington. We must both contend with our allies, we with the Saigon government, North Vietnam with the NLF and, in the background, with the Soviet Union, but especially with China, which seems adamantly opposed to negotiations.

Our relations with the Saigon government, never strong at any period, seem to have deteriorated badly since the Tet offensive. However powerful the desire for peace in the South Vietnamese countryside, the Saigon government, military, middle class and civil servants are exhibiting the "peace jitters," a determination to get on with the war combined with a fear that the U.S. is preparing to sell them out to the Communists. President Thieu, lately seized with a sense of urgency about the war, seems to be moving toward general mobilization, increasing the size of the armed forces and extending the draft to younger and older men. He has also fired a few of the most corrupt province chiefs. Beyond that, Saigon's stance seems little changed. Thieu has approved the arrest and suppression of several of his more prominent political opponents, and, if they agree on little else, Thieu and Ky stand together in rejecting the notion of having NLF representatives at peace negotiations. The U.S. will have to engage in some very firm but delicate diplomatic maneuvering to get Saigon to change its mind on this point. Regardless of our client's sensitivities, no peace settlement is possible without NLF representation.

Anyone who has ever doubted that the war in Vietnam is essentially a civil war will have ample proof of it in the months to come when the various factions of the country try to reconcile their opposing views about how Vietnam should be organized politically, economically, socially. Thus, we have come full cycle in Vietnam. We are face to face with the same political realities that confronted us when we first intervened: who shall govern Vietnam? Who shall own the land? How shall the people be heard?

Since there has been no talk of total cease-fire while the peace talks are going on, the war will continue. It is to be hoped that it will be waged with more restraint than it has been, but still men, women and children on both sides will continue to be killed and maimed. If the peace talks are protracted, there is the danger that one or the other side will lose patience and succumb to the temptation to raise again the level of violence. For our part, we should anticipate considerable pressure from our own and the South Vietnamese military establishments to escalate, and we should be prepared to resist them. However difficult the negotiations or intractable the issues seem, we should not lose sight of the one lesson to have emerged from the past three years: we cannot impose a miltary solution on Vietnam's political problems.

Finally, hoping that the peace talks will ultimately succeed, we should take measures to insure that there is a minimum of reprisals after our withdrawal. Perhaps a neutral international presence would help to limit the retaliations against all the little people who have worked with the Americans. As for the powerful, if we have to airlift Thieu and Ky and hundreds of their associates out of Vietnam and settle them in Thailand, Paris or the banks of the Pedernales in order to save their lives, let us do so. And let us be quick to offer assistance to rebuild a country, north and south, that we have savagely laid waste. In that sense, peace and the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam will not signal the end of our responsibilities but a beginning.

NEXT WEEK

Louis Dupré probes whether a true Marxist can be a religious believer:

"Atheism as denial of supernatural *reality* is merely a conclusion concerning the independence of man's *being* which is implied in his independence of *acting*. That is the only reason why Marx supports his practical humanism by some atheistic considerations."

Black Power Roots on Black Campuses

On Feb. 8, police and national guardsmen in Orangeburg, S.C., opened fire on a group of black college students gathered around a bonfire on the campus of South Carolina State College. Three students were shot to death, 37 more wounded. Two of the dead students were later found to have been shot in the back, as were a majority of the wounded. One student died of loss of blood after he was refused admission to segregated Orangeburg Regional Hospital. Two weeks later, police shot into a crowd of 200 black students demonstrating at Mississippi's Alcorn A&M College. Six were wounded, two hospitalized.

The shooting in South Carolina was reported in the press as the "Orangeburg riot," although reporters and faculty members confirmed that there had been no sniper