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CABINET OFFICE
70 WHITEHALL
LONDON SW1A 2AS

01-~~XXXXXXXX~~ 233 8378

14th January 1983

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Dear John,

Meeting with Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales: Nuclear Defence Issues

Many thanks for your letter of 31st December and for the useful material you supplied for my talk to the Roman Catholic Bishops at their "In-Service Course" on nuclear defence issues.

The talk took place yesterday. Virtually all the Bishops were present, including the Archbishops of Westminster, Liverpool and Cardiff, and they certainly constituted a most attentive and sympathetic audience. I enclose for your records a copy of the text on which I based my remarks: but, as you can guess, I freewheeled a certain amount in places.

The talk and ensuing discussion ran for about two hours and the Cardinal then invited me to sit in on their short winding up meeting, which meant that I was able to hear some of the Bishops' reactions to the conference as a whole and also the Cardinal's summing up. You may find it useful to have one or two impressions as background to the contacts you will be having with the Bishops following their call on Mr Pym.

My impression is that no more than two or three out of the thirty or so Bishops who were there are outright unilateralists, notably Bishop Butler and Bishop Guazzelli (East London). But these are both much respected by their colleagues, the former as a theologian and elder statesman and the latter for his lively and forceful personality. Several more are waverers (including, I think, Bishop O'Brien, the Chairman of the Justice and Peace Commission); and there is a significant group which is satisfied that nuclear deterrence is both sensible and morally justified. This includes the Bishop of Salford, Dr Holland (also a theologian), and Bishop Mahon (West London). The majority are, I should judge, somewhere in between: they recognise the force of the practical and prudential arguments for the Government's present policies and want to be convinced that they are morally justified; but they are genuinely puzzled by the complexities of the problem. They are worried by the moral arguments, and aware of the mounting anti-nuclear pressures from sections of their flock. The Pope's pronouncements have clearly had a steadying effect against any trend towards unilateralism: at the same time most of the Bishops feel that his qualified acceptance of nuclear deterrence as licit for the time being is heavily conditional on progress being made towards nuclear disarmament, and that Britain, whose national deterrent they see as somewhat marginal to NATO's, ought to be in a position to give some sort of lead in this direction. (I expended a lot of energy in dealing with questions directed towards probing the feasibility of "leading by example".) They seem to have been impressed by a presentation which they had received the

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J S Chick Esq.
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

previous day from Dr Paul Rogers of the Bradford University School of Peace Studies, who had apparently argued in favour of Britain conditionally offering to abandon Trident (and Polaris) in return for some matching move from the Soviet Union. Dr Rogers had also produced facts and figures purporting to show that technological advance was accelerating, and that by the 1990s it would be possible for either side to destroy the entire military capability of the other (including submarines) in a single first strike, thus undermining the basis for deterrence; and that this lent great urgency to the need for early progress on arms control/disarmament.

On the level of principle, the Bishops were predictably wrestling with the morality of conditional intention: ie could it ever be right to have the intention to commit a morally monstrous act, however justifiable and desirable the objective. Another problem (not bearing directly on the nuclear issue) which clearly loomed large for those of them with first hand experience of the developing world was the morality of devoting so much of our resources to defence at a time when many millions of people in the Third World are starving.

In the winding up session, the point was made that they would need a public line to take in response to the Church of England working group's report (The Church and the Bomb); and the question was raised (by Bishop Butler) whether they should try to produce a considered pastoral document along the lines of the American Bishops' draft letter. The Cardinal's response to this was extremely cautious: he pointed out that there was as yet no unanimity of view among them on the subject and that it seemed unlikely that they would be able to reach a consensus. It would be a mistake to "canonise" the Church of England report, which had not yet been debated in the Synod: until that happened it only had the status of a draft. Before contemplating anything along the lines of the American Bishops' document, it would be essential to explore the thinking of the French and German Bishops' conferences, both of whom had so far been notably cautious in their utterances on the subject. Meanwhile it would be up to individual Bishops to decide the line they should take with their people in relation to the forthcoming "Peace Sunday" on 30th January. The Cardinal also commented that the contributions which they had heard from the two moral theologians (one unilateralist and the other not) had been disappointing and relatively unhelpful. The two lay contributions had been more illuminating, and they needed to seek a good deal more expert advice before trying to form a definitive view.

It seemed to me in the light of the discussion that the crucial area for most of the Bishops is the extent to which deterrence is stable; and the extent to which it really is the only sure way of avoiding the outbreak of a world war, nuclear or otherwise. Bishop Butler said that if it could be shown to be certain that deterrence would work, and that therefore the conditional intention to use nuclear weapons would never have to be realised, his objections would fall. Bishop Holland replied that certainty was not to be found in nature, and that the tradition of the Church back to Aquinas was that the certainty required for moral judgements was derived from what would happen in the generality of cases ("ut in pluribus"). On this criterion one could be reasonably "certain" that no government, whether Soviet or otherwise, would risk aggression in the face of nuclear deterrence: and the circumstances in which the West might have to use nuclear weapons would consequently not arise. The question of a conditional intention to do evil was therefore irrelevant. I rehearse this rather esoteric exchange because

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(a) it clearly impressed the other Bishops and (b) it suggests to me that the arguments to concentrate on in dealing with the Roman Catholic Bishops are the ones repeatedly emphasised by Michael Quinlan, namely that deterrence is inherently stable rather than precarious; that the whole objective of the exercise is to maintain peace; and that abandoning the nuclear deterrent would be destabilising and calculated to increase the risk of war. The more evidence we can produce to support these propositions, the greater the likelihood that the Roman Catholic Bishops will refrain from giving collective support to the Peace Movement in its present form.

A final point worth recording is the very favourable reactions of the Bishops to their recent call on the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary. Both the Cardinal and the Archbishop of Liverpool told me privately that they had been impressed and gratified by the seriousness with which Mr Pym had listened to them and by the attention he had paid to the concerns they had expressed. The Cardinal was particularly anxious to emphasise that he and his colleagues had wanted only to register their anxieties, not to lay down the law; that they recognised the heavy responsibilities the government carried for defence; and that the hastily cobbled together document which they had left with Mr Pym was in no sense a statement of the Bishops' considered views, but simply an indication of the sort of feelings which were current among the Catholic community.

I am sending a copy of this letter and enclosure to John Blelloch in the Ministry of Defence and without the enclosure to John Coles.

Yours ever

David

A D S GOODALL

Dual Key

DUAL KEY/CONTROL OF US NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN THE UK

The use of United States' bases in the United Kingdom in an emergency would be a matter for joint decision by Her Majesty's Government and the United States' Government in the light of circumstances prevailing at the time.

I am aware that concern has been expressed about the effectiveness of these arrangements. I have satisfied myself that they are effective.