

11-1-1988

A Just War No Longer Exists: The Teaching and Trial of Don Lorenzo Milani

Robert A. Kelly

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert A. (1988) "A Just War No Longer Exists: The Teaching and Trial of Don Lorenzo Milani," *Consensus*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 2 , Article 17.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol14/iss2/17>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

A Just War No Longer Exists: The Teaching and Trial of Don Lorenzo Milani

James Tunstead Burtchaell, C.S.C., editor and translator

Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988

128 pp. U.S. \$14.95

Father Lorenzo Milani spent most of his career as priest in the dying—now deserted—village of Barbiana in the Tuscan hills of Italy. He was placed there because officials of the Archdiocese of Florence thought him incapable of any more responsible position. He died in 1967 at the age of 44. Had he lived four months longer he would have been convicted of *apologia*, advocacy of crime and incitement to crime.

Don Lorenzo also gave his life to educating the youth of Barbiana and surrounding villages so that they would no longer have to stand silently while they were oppressed and exploited by the land and factory owners. Time after time he took the side of the poor and the underdog against the power structures of government, business, and church. He entered the last battle, which brought him notoriety, toward the end of his life when he was seriously ill with lymphogranuloma and leukemia.

At that time Italy had universal male conscription with no provision for conscientious objection. During the 1960s several young men—at least one a graduate of Milani's school—went to prison rather than serve in the army. A few priests supported their position and one priest was convicted of *apologia*. This inspired some retired military chaplains in Florence in 1965 to issue a statement calling conscientious objection an insult to the Fatherland (not quite an accurate translation of *patria*, which is feminine), alien to Christian love, and cowardly.

Milani responded with a closely reasoned rebuttal of the chaplains which he sent to the clergy of Tuscany and newspapers throughout Italy. Only one, a Communist journal in Rome, printed his open letter. Veterans' groups launched an attack against Milani and forced the courts to charge him and the journal editor with *apologia*. Since Don Lorenzo was too ill to travel, he wrote a long letter to the tribunal—again a compelling argument. The verdict was not guilty, but the decision was appealed to a higher court. Four months after Milani's death the editor was found guilty.

A Just War No Longer Exists is the translation of the relevant documents in this case together with commentary and notes. While Lorenzo Milani's arguments for the right—duty—of conscientious objection are an excellent study in themselves, this book is even more important because of the insights it gives into the problems created when the church allows the gospel to become entangled with and even co-opted by the reigning ideology. In Italy this was *patria*. In Germany it was *Volk* and *Vaterland*. In the Soviet Union it is communism. In Canada it is free enterprise. In every case unthinking allegiance to the national and cultural ideology silences the gospel and leads to persecution of those who try to inspire the rest of us to see through the ideology.

Get this book and read it. Perhaps we can all learn something from the thought and experience of a seemingly insignificant Italian priest.

Robert A. Kelly
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

The Unacceptable Face: The Modern Church in the Eyes of the Historian

John Kent

London: SCM, 1987

261 pp. 12.50 pounds

Over the past two decades historians interested in almost every period of the Christian past have been faced with a number of major changes, both in the interpretation previously established and in the methods used to arrive at those interpretations. So wide-sweeping have these changes been that it is impossible for most general readers of church history to keep up with them, an experience which is paralleled even among professional historians, who may maintain control over the massive growth in information concerning a particular historical era, but cannot any longer extend such control beyond their specialised interests.

In the face of such a situation John Kent's book serves a particular need. The volume surveys changing interpretations of post-Reformation Christianity in ten areas: general church history, early modern Europe—1500–1800, the English Reformation, the English church from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century—including a good discussion of Methodism and non-conformity, religion in modern Germany, religion in modern France, the church in the United States, Newman and Catholic Modernism, Christianity outside of Europe, and the Ecumenical movement. The changing historiography of each of these areas is well treated and the reader who wishes to extend study is served with highly valuable notes and an important bibliography.

Nevertheless, the volume suffers from a number of limitations. That Kent is writing in Great Britain and that the "eyes of the historian" noted in his sub-title are viewing the world from England and are for the most part directed to English interests is not, in an important sense one of these. His perspective is made clear: in light of the changes he documents he cannot be expected to choose some universal point from which to view the scholarship he chronicles, and in spite of his orientation, his study is remarkably comprehensive.

Where he does fall short, however, is, firstly, in clarity concerning his announced purpose for the book, and, secondly, an issue closely related to the first, in his failure to discuss fully the implications of a number of recent