

## The real problems facing the NHS

Your editorial on the NHS was welcome (22 April) but key issues are still obscured from the public. The Government, itself, may not fully understand the consequences of its own policies; there might be a deliberate attempt to deceive. The outcomes of current policies are likely to impact on the principles of social justice and social cohesion, outlined by the Catholic bishops of England and Wales in their 1997 document *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching*.

Current changes have the potential to put almost the whole of the NHS budget into the hands of the multinational, private sector. Once this happens, the NHS will no longer belong to the British public, and will be a "kite-mark" only. The pace of change is astonishingly rapid, and mostly going unnoticed.

The two policies that will complete the privatisation of the NHS are the giving of primary care contracts to multi-national private companies in order to develop "super-surgeries", and the policy of "practice-based commissioning". The commissioning budget constitutes 80 per cent of NHS spending; it pays for all hospital care, and certain types of community care. The budget is currently held by primary care trusts, but soon it is due to go out to general practitioners. Once multinational companies can run general practice, they will have control of these budgets and will be able to make huge profits for shareholders as well as shaping care and services. Companies like UnitedHealth from the US are applying for vacant contracts and trying to "buy" practices from GPs.

The Government believes that only the private sector can "rescue" the NHS. A demoralised workforce has all but lost the ability to defend itself, and the need to consult and persuade has been replaced by a strategy of denigration and devaluation. There is no evidence to show that the private sector will be better or cheaper: these policies are driven by market ideology rather than evidence.

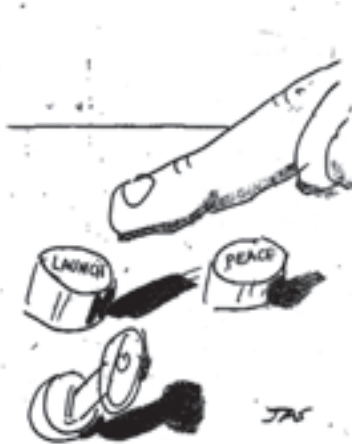
The NHS was founded on the principles of social justice; it looks after the whole population, according to need. It is a highly effective (though imperfect) tool for the delivery of public health policies and the equitable distribution of resources. The NHS is being torn apart, without the consent of the electorate to whom it belongs, by a Government that was going to restore our faith in the standards of public life. The Government has re-defined the meaning of the NHS as simply "free at the point of use", in order to obscure the reality of this process. I believe that the Church must express its view.

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### Controlled nuclear disarmament

It would be very nice for Fr Hughes and all of us if we could un-invent nuclear weapons, but sadly, we can't ("The real meaning of deterrence", 22 April).

We Catholics are used to mysteries, our faith being full of them. One is that Christianity is a peaceful faith, but not a pacifist one. Nuclear weapons are inherently immoral, as indeed are swords. But, without the swords of Martel at Tours, for instance, Christianity would not exist. Similarly, in 1957 as a National Serviceman in the "front line" in Germany, I saw at first hand that tactical nuclear weapons alone prevented the powerful armoured forces of the atheistic Communist Warsaw Pact from overwhelming the outnumbered and ill-equipped Nato units. Without those weapons Christianity would have been eliminated, in Europe at least.

The reality is that no British government is going to unilaterally disarm. Nor is Russia, China, or France. Other nuclear countries such as Pakistan and Israel will not. Iran and Islamic terrorist groups will continue their efforts to acquire nuclear weapons.

May I offer Fr Hughes this consolation? The world will come to an end. We do not know when, although Christ made it clear that he does. God allows much in the way of free will to mankind but I suspect that the lifespan of the human race is something that he, and he alone, will decide. We should all therefore, fear less, have faith and guard against a slide into moral paralysis or, that most unchristian escape, moral cowardice.

In the meantime the major powers will continue with progressive, controlled nuclear disarmament just as they have done from the 1970s, while trying to restrain the loose cannons of this world, and this is the policy we should support.

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The issue of whether or not to replace Trident with another generation of British nuclear weapons has an important legal dimension.

Those nuclear armed states which signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) nearly 40 years ago undertook a clear legal obligation. It was that they would "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race and to nuclear disarmament ...".

More recently the International Court of Justice in 1996 unanimously advised that "there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control".

There are no negotiations going on aimed at the elimination of all nuclear weapons and no suggestion that they should start, despite the existence of a draft treaty lodged with the UN which covers all the difficult issues of verification and inspection.

Both the NPT itself and the International Court refer to "good faith". There can be no good faith in planning yet another generation of nuclear weapons while failing to begin overdue negotiations aimed at their global elimination. Just as Canada once took the landmine issue out of "normal" stalled negotiating channels, so Britain is well placed to do the same for nuclear weapons. There is no hope of such an initiative being taken seriously if, at the same time, this country plans to be equipped with nuclear weapons until at least the second half of this century.

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### Over-population is no myth

His Eminence Cardinal López Trujillo is right (Letters, 8 April), that certain quite major problems will need to be faced due to the fall in Total Fertility Rate (TFR) to below the replacement level (2.1) in much of Europe. Indeed as he correctly quotes, one-third of the 200 countries on earth have a TFR (meaning essentially "average family size") of less than this. But that obviously implies there are over 130 countries above this replacement level, including almost all in the continent of my birth (Africa). The under-population crisis pales into insignificance in the light of the over-population crisis of the world as a whole. The latter is no myth; it is based upon the very facts he quotes.

How can he be so unconcerned about the present human population of the earth, now exceeding 6,500 billion, and the UN projection of 9.3 billion by 2050? The current annual increment is c. 75 million humans per year and equates to a city to accommodate one million persons having to be built every five days.

The Global Footprint Network calculates that 97 per cent of all vertebrate flesh is now human flesh, plus that of our food animals (cows, pigs,

sheep, etc.) – meaning all other vertebrates, whether land animals, birds or fish, are down to three per cent of the total.

Studies supported by the Worldwide Fund for Nature show that humanity is currently using 120-140 per cent of the biological resources (fisheries, forests, croplands) that the Earth can sustainably provide – that's already a 20-40 per cent "overshoot". By 2050 we are on track to be requiring at least 230 per cent of what's actually available, long-term. We will be trying to use the biological capacity of 2.3 earth-like planets. How can we ever expect to do that?

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### Christ's presence 'par excellence'

Christ is indeed present in the worshipping assembly and in the celebrant at Mass (Letters, 22 April), and it is good that we recognise this. He is also present within my own heart, which is where I normally converse with him. But his presence in my heart, in the celebrant and in the assembly is not a presence "body, blood, soul and divinity", as in the Blessed Sacrament. Surely this is why Cardinal Arinze spoke of Christ's presence in the Eucharist as being "par excellence"?

If I jumped up and sat on the altar, no one would stare at me, to worship Christ present in my heart, as they stare at the monstrance. So we speak of the "Real Presence", from the Latin word *res*, a thing. This doesn't mean that other forms of Christ's presence are not real (indeed, we have his word for it that he is present in the poor and suffering) but the Blessed Sacrament is a "thingly" form of Christ's presence. In my heart, in the celebrant, his presence is real but spiritual.

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Martin Pendergast (Letters, 22 April) voices shock at Cardinal Arinze's statement that in the Eucharist Christ is present "par excellence" and that this surpasses all other forms of presence; in spite of the absence of any claim to this effect in the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. His shock is in my opinion uncalled for, being due to his inflating what I imagine was that document's recovery of emphasis on Christ's mystical presence in the Church, into a "development of doctrine", for which status I think the Constitution had also not made any claim.

Nor would I think it possible that the Constitution could consider the Church's concept of the eucharistic presence at any time "narrow" or "minimalist" by comparison; just as it could not regard Christ's bodily presence in his lifetime at all as less real than his presence throughout the Church. If anything the reverse is true. About the latter presence he said: "Whenever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them", whereas about the former he said "This is my body". So, even though the two forms of his

presence are surely complementary, it is his eucharistic presence that feeds his mystical presence throughout the Church, rather than the other way round.

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### Slippery Slope

It is reassuring to learn – albeit in tongue in cheek fashion – that the Bishops' Conference has formed "a crack rebuttal unit" in anticipation of the release of the film *The Da Vinci Code* (Notebook, 22 April).

It is encouraging to know that our bishops have learned from the similar timely and successful rebuttal 150 years ago by a committee established by the Church of England to counteract a slanderous portrayal of their Church. The committee of that day contended with not just one but a set of defamatory novels from the pen of one Anthony Trollope.

It was obvious to everyone that among a succession of grotesques, the red hair, red face, thin bloodless lips, spongy red nose and sweaty palms of the Revd Obadiah Slope – the evangelical domestic chaplain to Bishop Proudie – was written with the intention of pillorying every decent clerical gentleman in Holy Orders. Or was it? To my knowledge, there never was any such Church of England committee because the Victorians could distinguish their novels from their navels. Isn't it interesting that Roman Catholics, starting from the Vatican, can become so exercised in informing the rest of us, who would never have known so unless instructed, that a novel is a novel?

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### Willing sacrificial lambs

So the Vatican commends the Diocese of Lancaster for its foresight (News from Britain and Ireland, 22 April). It's a pity that in the development of this plan no one thought to consult those expected to offer themselves as sacrificial lambs – "two clergy from every deanery should be invited to volunteer to care for the sick and dying and live together in the same house. If they become sick or die, two other volunteers could replace them". Indeed they could. We must keep reading *The Tablet* in order to ensure that we are ready for the call.

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The item about contingency plans for an influenza pandemic reminded me of the memorial plaques on the walls of St Peter's Church, Seel Street, Liverpool, dating from 1788. They commemorated priests who had died of typhus or cholera after ministering to people who had come over from Ireland at the time of the famines in the late 1840s. It seems that priests are as ready today to meet the challenges of such situations, despite the risks to themselves.

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## The living Spirit

"Man is placed above all creatures, and not beneath them, and he cannot be satisfied or content except in something greater than himself. Greater than himself there is nothing but Myself, the Eternal God. Therefore I alone can satisfy him, and, because he is deprived of this satisfaction by his guilt, he remains in continual torment and pain. Weeping follows pain, and when he begins to weep, the wind strikes the tree of self-love, which he has made the principle of all his being."

"Presumption and trust in oneself, because they come from selfish love, darken the mind's eye by depriving it of the light of most holy faith. Then the soul walks without the light of reason and therefore does not discern My providence."

**St Catherine of Siena**

(1347-1380)

*Dialogues*

Saviour God, you have set us free:  
we shall trust you and not be afraid.

You are our strength and our song:  
you have become our salvation,  
leading us to wide open spaces of freedom.

With joy we draw living water  
slaking our thirst from the deep cool  
wells,  
the hidden springs of your love that  
redeems.

We thank you, O God,  
and we call upon your name.

We shall make your deeds known among  
the nations,  
the mysterious and harrowing struggle,

a face at peace, full of compassion,  
alight and alive, death swallowed for  
ever.

Most marvellously have you triumphed:  
let it be known all over the earth.

Let us shout and sing for joy:  
Great in our midst is the beloved and  
holy God.

**Jim Cotter**

*Out of the Silence ... Into the Silence*

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