Nuclear weapons and the Cold War Challenge to the Christian Churches

In conversation: Bruce Kent and Brian Wicker.

Chair: Dianne Kirby

London Metropolitan University, 11 March 2013.

Bruce Kent: Former General Secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).

Brian Wicker: Former Chairman of Pax Christi and of the Council on Christian Approaches to Defense and Disarmament (CCCADD)

Dianne Kirby, Reader in International History, Ulster University.

Dianne Kirby:

Welcome to the second witness seminar in the British research project on Nuclear Weapons and the Cold War Challenge to the Christian Churches, linked to the global research project World Christian Community and the Cold War.

I would like to begin by thanking Professor Jeff Haynes and Mark Sydserff and London Metropolitan University for facilitating this event

The particular focus of today's seminar is the dilemma with which nuclear weapons confronted the Churches in the context of the Cold War, a conflict in which the West portrayed the Soviet Union as the ultimate enemy and it could only be deterred by the ultimate weapon.

Our two conversationalists today are Bruce Kent on my left, and Brian Wicker on my right, who were, and I believe still are, peace activists. I am going to begin by asking each to talk a little about how you came to be involved in peace activity, the organisations with which you are each involved, and the extent to which you feel it was your personal Christian convictions and values that led to your involvement

I'm going to begin by asking Brian Wicker to speak:

Brian Wicker: I became a Catholic in the early 1950s under the influence of the Dominicans in Oxford. The Dominicans have always been the group within the Catholic Church who are, and have been for a long time, interested in peace issues. The man who I got to know best was Father Illtyd Evans OP who was, or has been, a member of the circle at Ditchling - Eric Gill and all that crowd - before the war. He was a member of an organisation called Pax Christi, a Catholic peace movement before the Second World War supporting Catholic conscientious objectors. I was introduced to this body in the mid-1950s; they used to meet every year at Spode House, a Dominican conference centre near Rugeley in Staffordshire. I used to go every year to these conferences which were held by Dominicans, because it was run by another well-known Dominican, Conrad Pepler. It was at those meetings that I first became fully aware of what was happening in the field of nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence. And we met a whole lot of people, including Archbishop Roberts, who had been Archbishop of Bombay and who was extremely helpful in thinking things out, and Henry St. John, another Dominican. In particular, the people who came to these meetings included a man called Walter Stein from the University of Leeds who, later in the early 1960s, edited a book which was extremely important to me in this respect, *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience,* which couldn't be published by a Catholic publisher, they wouldn't do it, so it was published by the Merlin Press. It included an extremely valuable collection of essays by a lot of very eminent people and in particular an essay called 'War and Murder' by a key person, Elizabeth Anscombe, the philosopher who translated Wittgenstein. That was how I got to know the people who formed the anti-nuclear movement, and it just sort of moved on from there and that's how I got involved in it.

Bruce Kent:

Mine was less of a long term connection. I became a Curate in a parish in London in 1958 and these young people wanted to go on a holiday somewhere and I saw this advertisement for a group called Pax Christi, which I'd never heard of, so I got them to go on this Route[1] in Europe going around various countries and they had a lovely time. And when they came back, someone from Pax Christi got in touch with me and said I was the first priest to take an interest in Pax Christi, and asked would you mind being the Chaplain. Well I was a bit bored – they (Pax Christi) had (committee) meetings once a month when they discussed Papal Encyclicals and this couldn't get more boring, one Papal Encyclical after another because there was one a month. And then I sharpened up over the Spanish and Portuguese behaviour and treatment of young men who refused to fight in their wars and Pax Christi got tied up. My Church said, 'You have a right to conscientious objection, why don't these Spaniards understand it'? A First Secretary at the Spanish embassy came out to see me, and he was very deferential because I had a dog collar on and he said, 'Father you don't understand that to be a Spaniard and to be a Catholic is to be a soldier'. And I thought, 'Oh yes, I've been in the army myself and didn't realise that connection'.

Then I got interested in CND on moral grounds only, precisely because of the man Archbishop Roberts that Brian has talked about who said, 'To do something like mass murder is wicked, and to intend to do it is wicked'. He's absolutely right, you can't have an intention to do something, a real intention, and it's not morally neutral. It's completely wrong. So I got involved in that way. I didn't know anything about weaponry or bombs or whatever, it was purely that.

[1] Route was the Pax Christi term for youth outings.

And then it spun on and on and I suppose I got notorious in about 1965 or 1966 when they launched the first Polaris submarine and there was some Bishop there blessing the blooming thing. And I wrote to *The Times* and I said, 'Does this mean that these are not indiscriminate weapons? Or that the sailors have decided not to use them?' A double question. And the correspondence went on for about three weeks with the Church people all trying to show that it was alright to threaten to do something as long as you wouldn't actually do it. But it wasn't in their control as to whether you wouldn't do it. So that's how I got started. And then I got into lots of campaigns against the arms trade, as a result of going to the Biafran war, I was out there for a bit, and conscientious objection, and lots of other organisations, as a consequence. Right now I'm in the Movement for the Abolition of War, but I'm still involved in Pax Christi and CND and all these other organisations as well.

Dianne Kirby

To the both of you, the Christian ethics are very important to you, and these would be the motivating factors - your own personal Christianity and what you believed Christian values required of you?

And that leads on very nicely to the next question.

This research project has conclusively now shown that Christianity was very important to the propaganda for both sides, the Soviet bloc as well as the Western bloc, and that each side was looking to mobilise its own religious resources and its own Christian Churches and so on. Now the Soviets, of course, had a peace campaign, and support of their Churches - what the West calls the Soviet inspired peace movement - is critical. Were you aware, as Churchmen involved in peace activity, that the Cold War to a certain extent was being portrayed as a political

religious enterprise? And, because of the way in which the Soviets in particular mobilised their Churchmen, that made you as Churchmen suspect and made your peace activities suspect in terms of national security in the context of the Cold War?

Bruce Kent

Well I don't think it was that the Soviet Union mobilised its Churches. We all knew perfectly well that there was no question of free speech in the Soviet Union. And we all knew that the Russian Orthodox Church was under the thumb of the Soviet Union, some of them unhappily under the thumb and some willingly under the thumb. I remember a Soviet Archbishop coming here and I asked him about conscientious objection, he swallowed and moved away down the room; he didn't want to talk about it. And I felt that man knows that what's going on is wrong. So that was known, that was up front.

What people did not know was how Churches in the West were mobilised by the West, and during the hot time when I was around we had Pope John Paul II, who was incredibly anti-Communist because of his background. And religion was being used as part of the Western Cold War approach to the Soviet Union. Unlike his predecessor, Pope John XXIII, who did his best to diffuse this - he invited Khrushchev's Son-in-Law to come to the Vatican, he was trying to open up and his Papal Encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, which was addressed to all men of good will, including Communists. There was a difference under John Paul II. It became very hard line. I was aware of that and we were very unpopular in Church circles. And people were quite polite – no Churchmen said, 'You are a silly idiot'. They moved away; they didn't talk about it; they didn't sign petitions; they didn't give you money. We knew that we were outside

Brian Wicker

Just to add to that, one of the people who was involved in helping Churches, particularly in Britain, to mobilise in favour of nuclear weapons was Sir Michael Quinlan. Bruce and I both knew him, he was at Oxford at the same time as both of us. He went into the Ministry of Defence and he became the Policy Director in the MOD designing the British Nuclear Weapons Programme. He was an interesting man, I actually quite liked him. He was educated by the Jesuits in Wimbledon and my wife's cousin played rugby with him. He was a very senior Civil Servant – the cleverest Civil Servant in the country, everybody said he was extremely sharp. He spent a lot of time trying to persuade all sorts of people, including people in the Churches, that nuclear weapons were OK. Bruce and I got to know him. He had the ear, not only of the government - he became Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Defence eventually - but also the ear of Bishops, being a senior Catholic Jesuit-educated chap. I always thought the Dominicans were right and the Jesuits were wrong on this, despite Bruce's education ...

Bruce Kent

Now let's not get personal Brian!

Brian Wicker

Michael Quinlan was a key factor in the whole of this, from some time in the 1960s onwards. I remember going to a meeting in London with Walter Stein at which Quinlan was talking with a whole lot of Bishops and all sorts of people. And I remember Walter saying, 'He's our problem'.

Bruce Kent

He was. He was. Can I add to that? I don't want to make this too personal - poor old Michael's up there somewhere. In Antony Howard's book about Cardinal Hume there's a letter quoted of Quinlan writing to Hume, and saying, 'I'm a loyal Catholic and I'm in the Ministry of Defence. I know a lot about nuclear weapons and perhaps I can possibly be of help to you in your decision making.' Hume writes back immediately, Hume was conservative by nature, 'How wonderful. Come along'. And from then on Quinlan had absolute access to Hume, who was a key Cardinal in the whole of the hot days of the Cold War, to the point that the Chaplains - I've always been opposed to paid Chaplains and always think that they should be servants of the Church not Civil Servants - in the Cruise missile days got 3 or 4 pages of question and answer headed, 'How to deal with CND'; so Christian ministers serving the Armed Forces were getting their briefing from the state. Church and state – Caesar and Jesus: Caesar telling Christ what to do with things. I've always thought that was the high point of collusion between Church and state. There are many other examples as we went along, but that was an important one

Never in all my time did I get anything like support from any Bishop, well one, Guazelli perhaps, or two at most. In Scotland it's rather different, but down here none of them. They're all, 'How lovely to see you Bruce, God bless the work'. But nothing about what we were doing. Or indeed support for people who were going to prison as result of various forms of direct action.

I remember at Greenham Common, the Chaplain from nearby Douai Abbey driving through to say Mass in Greenham Common with the Cruise missiles. And

there were all these women there and I remember saying, ‘Is there a Chaplain for the women as well?’ The Church was on one side, no question.

Dianne Kirby

It’s very interesting that the Churches in the Soviet bloc could be discounted because people recognised that peace activists had no choice, including the people in the Soviet bloc and including the Churchmen. Certainly, in the first seminar we had, this is what came across talking to Paul Oestreicher and John Arnold, that they knew that peace activists had no choice. Their task was easier, because surely it’s easier, if you are a Christian, to be able to comply with a government that wants you to preach peace than to be a Christian in the West with a government that doesn’t want you to preach peace.

Bruce Kent

Yes, I think they didn’t have much choice. Unless they wanted to go to the gulag they didn’t have any choice at all. But actually we were quite a good thing for the right wing here. They could always say, ‘We are a free society, look at old Kent down there blathering away, and nobody has locked him up, so we are a wonderfully free, democratic society.’ But the marginalisation was much cleverer: they could let that happen but actually discount anything that we were doing.

Brian Wicker

I can remember going to a meeting, I can't remember when, in Westminster House next door to the Cathedral with a whole lot of Bishops. Michael Quinlan and Paul Schulte, who was another Civil Servant in the MoD, were on one side, and Paul Rogers of Bradford University Peace Studies Department and I were on the other. We were each asked to say what we thought about all this. What the bishops themselves ultimately thought about it I don't know, but they certainly listened quite a lot. But this was after the main Cold War thing, probably about late 1990s or 2000 something, but that was a very interesting session. So the Bishops have not really been very interested, and they still aren't at all - they are just hoping it will go away

Bruce Kent

We are now in a position in this country where we are about to spend a £100 billion on more nuclear weapons, and can you get an answer out of the Bishops? No you can't. And can you get an answer out of the development agencies like OXFAM, CAFOD and Christian Aid? No you can't. We live in compartments of social concern, and its fine to be raising money to dig a well and to buy some tractors, but don't muck about with defence issues as well because that brings you into unpopularity. But there was a lot of that going on.

You mentioned John Arnold, where does he come in to it?

Dianne Kirby

John Arnold and Paul Oestreicher were on the East-West Relations Group for the British Council of Churches because, as part of the ecumenical movement, they wanted to reach out to the Churches in the Soviet bloc; and part of that for them was

to try to understand the difficulties and the dilemmas. They worked very closely with the Foreign Office…

Bruce Kent

Of course.

Dianne Kirby

…in terms of keeping them aware and so on and so forth, and that made their task that bit easier. But, even there, there were differences because Michael Bourdeaux was also on the East-West Relations Committee and he was very much for challenging and indicting Soviet bloc Christians (who worked with communist regimes.) John Arnold I think was more moderate and in the middle, but Paul Oestreicher felt that the West had a lot of responsibility and culpability for what was going on.

Bruce Kent

I have to say that until John Arnold became a Bishop I'd never heard of him ...

Dianne Kirby

No John Arnold never became a Bishop. He was a Canon in the Church of England and became Dean of Durham, but he's now retired.

Bruce Kent

Perhaps there are two different John Arnolds then. I've never heard that name in terms of East West dialogue ...

Dianne Kirby

What is interesting from what I know of your career Bruce, and Brian you can tell me if the same is true for you, you Bruce mentioned earlier that one of the tactics for dealing with you as Christians acting on the basis of your Christianity and opposing in particular nuclear weapons, was that you were marginalised. But my research has shown that it could often be more than marginalisation, and that you were also being smeared. You were also made suspect as a Soviet agent. Certainly I did research on Hewlett Johnson, the Dean of Canterbury back in the 1950s, and it was quite vicious. They used to have debates in the House of Lords about him; they talked about trying him for treason. Their preferred method was clearly marginalisation but, if they thought you were getting too much attention or perhaps had some credibility, you were attacked. Remember Hewlett Johnson was attacked during the Korean War when he came back with Chinese allegations, made by a Christian Chinese leader, that the Americans were using germ warfare, then it was suggested that he was a Soviet agent or that he was just plain stupid, or that he was a dupe.

Brian, do your experiences correlate with any of that?

Brian Wicker

I personally not. But then I was not a public figure in the way that Bruce was when he became Secretary of CND. I wasn't in that sort of field. I can't remember whether I was slandered; I was criticised in various ways, but not in any significant way, I was just an academic.

Dianne Kirby

(Laughing) Just an academic…

Bruce Kent

Well yes because I was front runner, wasn't I, with a high profile; so they went for me. Here's the *Daily Mail.* (Holds up a copy with the headline 'The Stasi's Star') The Stasi – the key supporter – Bruce Kent, based on nothing at all. One man, Vic Allen, was a member of the Communist party and was fined for being Stasi - one out of a hundred - but we didn't know much about it.[2] But to answer your question, the smears came from the politicos and from the journalists; there were all sorts of cartoons with me taking money from the Soviet Union. Lord Chalfont in the House of Lords said that we were funded by the Soviet Union, all that sort of thing went on at a strong level. But that wasn't from my Church: my Church didn't do that very much, except on one famous occasion. The Apostolic Delegate in 1985 came out and said that I was 'a tool of Lenin and a stooge'. And to give Hume credit he defended me and said, 'He isn't a stooge of Lenin', which was a bit weak really, though it was nice to have that anyway. But that was the real hot Vatican dislike of anybody who was taking a different kind of line. But the abuse? It was ostracization from the Churches really, it wasn't abuse. Someone like Richard Harries would come up front, he's a Church of England Bishop now, he just toed the government line all the way, and still does on this, which surprised me because he didn't on apartheid or Palestine, but on this issue

[2] After the Cold War ended, it was discovered that Vic Allen was briefly a member of CND council, elected by one of the regions.

he was completely conformist. But I don't have any bruised feelings from my Church, I just wish they'd taken an opportunity that was there to do something for the world.

Dianne Kirby

Do you think this difference between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church was because the Church of England is the established Church so it felt a greater need to adhere to the government line?

Brian Wicker

Not entirely. If you think of the recent statement just made by Justin Welby to 40 other Anglican Bishops about child poverty, he had no hesitation about coming out against the government. So I don't think the Church of England are automatically in favour of the government because they are the established Church. It's a state of mind, a failure to actually look at the moral issue at all, that's really my point.

Dianne Kirby

Certainly I agree with you. And certainly during Margaret Thatcher's era, the Church of England behaved very well concerning certain of her policies and the damage that her policies did to ordinary people, but in the arena of nuclear weapons and national security that was a bit different, they were more nervous.

Bruce Kent

Exactly, there is a separate compartment marked 'national security and defence' and the Church there kowtows to the government. On poverty or housing or race, it's

done some very good things, but on national security their obsession is not to be labelled unpatriotic. And I remember when the Church of England Synod was presented with a report in 1981 or 82 which concluded that Britain should not have nuclear weapons, it was immediately set upon by Bishop Montefiore, by Richard Harries, by all these people in the Synod, and was watered down to nothing. They finally passed a resolution that we should adopt a 'no first use' policy, and nobody knew what that meant anyway and nothing happened as a consequence. But the idea that the Church of England would get out of line with the government on nuclear matters, I think that was too much for them.

Brian Wicker

But the Catholic Bishops in England, not Scotland, have never gone against the government line either, certainly not in public, except Archbishop Roberts ...

Bruce Kent

No they haven't ... Archbishop Roberts, the old Jesuit, was the only one who spoke articulately and sensibly and argued his case. He was a wonderful man.

Brian Wicker

Keith O'Brien in Scotland was another. And it's a tragedy, I think, what's happened to him now, because his stance on all that will get lost.

Bruce Kent

We're not here to talk about all that ...[3]

Dianne Kirby

Why do you think there was this difference between the English hierarchy and the Scottish hierarchy? Is it just personalities?

Brian Wicker

It's partly because the weapons are stationed in Scotland - I mean that's a major factor.

Bruce Kent

Even before they were only stationed in Scotland - before that they were stationed all over the place during the Cold War days - even then they were independent because they are Scots and they're not going to be pushed around by Westminster, and they're not going to take this blah coming out of Michael Quinlan. I think that's a crudery, but that's what it was. And they are mentally independent on this issue. And nowadays, of course, in Glasgow its 15 miles down the road to Faslane and you could blow the world up if you feel like it, so it's rather more pressing on their doorstep.

Dianne Kirby

[3]Brian and Bruce added for the record that in November 2006, seven months after their Scottish counterparts announced their opposition to renewing the Trident nuclear missile system, the Catholic bishops of England and Wales called on the government to decommission nuclear weapons. In April 2006 Scotland's eight bishops had declared: 'The use of weapons of mass destruction would be a crime against God and against humanity. It must never happen.' *The Tablet* noted that in addition to not mentioning Trident, the statement from the English and Welsh bishops did not make the moral case against nuclear deterrence with the same level of passion adopted by the Scottish bishops. It further observed: 'Historically the bishops of England and Wales have been more muted in their criticism of nuclear weapons.' Elena Curti, 'English bishops call for nuclear weapons to be scrapped,' *The Tablet*, 26 November 2006, p. 37.

(Brian), you didn't feel this marginalisation and certainly didn't have any negative experiences. However, Bruce, for instance, you were telling me that someone in MI5 had six boxes on you.

Bruce Kent

Six boxes I think.

Dianne Kirby

Were you aware that you were under surveillance by the Intelligence services?

Bruce Kent

No, I suspected. And whenever we had to do something really that was close to the law, we went for a walk in the local park where presumably they didn't have any phone taps. But I knew that people, some of them now Conservative MPs, tried to put a spy in our office, and they did - MI5 succeeded in putting a spy in our office, an old man called Harry Newton was in our office and reported on me. And when Cathy Massiter, who worked for MI5, defected after the Falklands, I think, or Cruise missiles, she said there are 6 box files and Harry Newton says that you are a pseudo-Marxist. I know what a pseudo-Marxist is, I'm not sure what a Marxist is ... a pseudo-Marxist… (laughter) anyway, six boxes on me!

Brian Wicker

The very interesting thing about what Bruce has just said is that Harry Newton was a tutor in the college that I became Principal of in 1980 and he was a Communist party

member who was also a spy for the government, - he's dead now so we can't ask him, but it was an extraordinary tale that Harry Newton of all people should go and do this. I had no idea that any of this was going on until it all came out in the wash.

Bruce Kent

I think it was clever of government. He may well have been a government agent then, I don't know if you had any industrial trouble in your college ...And I think these people are groomed and looked after. We had one very extraordinary thing, I don't think it was possibly a government thing, we had a bomb one day in the office and police came: I thought there was something suspicious about this parcel, and they came and said yes, it was a postal bomb and they took it away, and they then finger-printed every single member in the office. Why? We didn't send the parcel, but they finger-printed everybody

And we had another occasion up in Carlisle when the Chief Police Commissioner was having a cocktail party and I think they all got a bit over the top. And then he boasted, 'I can tell you who is the CND Secretary in every area in the North West'. And he took them into his office, pressed a button and up came the screen: Chair of CND in Preston, Secretary in Preston, Secretary in Wigan ... He had the whole lot, they were all there.

Dianne Kirby

So, clearly the Intelligence services did see anybody involved in peace activities, for whatever reason, as undermining ...

Brian Wicker

I have no idea whether I have any documents in the files against me, I doubt it, but I'm not important ...

Dianne Kirby

You don't know – you'll have to check it out ...

Brian Wicker

But there's one point I want to make: I think there's an interesting difference between the attitude of the Bishops in England and Wales and the Bishops in the United States. Now, in the early 1980s, when Bruce became CND Director and the whole nuclear thing blew up again into the public eye, a whole lot of Bishops in countries all over Europe wrote encyclicals about this, about the moral teaching on this. The American Bishops produced a document, partly written by a friend of mine called Tom (Gumbleton)… The man who was a Bishop in Detroit. He was a peacenik if you like, and the Bishops produced an encyclical the first draft of which was anti-nuclear against the American nuclear weapons.[4] But the first draft was watered down after they had all sorts of hearings with Colonels, Generals and Diplomats and so on. But the first version of that document was actually really bang on; but it got wiped away. This is what happens: the Bishops get got at by Diplomats and Generals and so on

Dianne Kirby

Which does suggest as well that, for Diplomats and Generals and governments, the Church is something that they need to control.

[4] NB 'Encyclical' is the wrong word. Only Popes write encyclicals. Bishops write 'pastoral letters'.

Bruce Kent

Exactly.

Dianne Kirby

Which is precisely what, in their very clumsy and also very open way, the Soviets were doing. They wanted to control their churches and they are indicted.

That's interesting, what you said earlier, the way you were a gift, the fact that they can point to you and say, 'We let him talk'. But on the other hand there must have been personal cost to being called, certainly in the newspapers, a Stasi agent. During the research I did on Hewlett Johnson, one of the things that came across, particularly in his later years, was the fact that people would be nice to him on a personal level, conversationally, but behind the scenes be quite awful about him, and he felt totally isolated, very lonely and very hurt by the way in which he was treated. And of course, he was made a laughing stock: the marginalisation, made to look a fool, ridiculed. Did you pay those costs? Or were you able to deal with it? Or did you feel that ...

Bruce Kent

Well, I had a lot of good friends, including Brian, and I felt supported. Sometimes I realised that I had myself given them the opportunity, and those were the most painful moments. I remember once going to the annual meeting of the Communist Party of Britain and I said, 'During the lean years when no one was interested in disarmament, the two groups that kept us going were the Society of Friends – the Quakers - and the Communist Party'. Well that was an absolute gift to the right wing. And I realised

what an idiot I'd been because the whole right wing were saying: 'Kent admits great debt to Communists, etc', which it clearly was.

And on another occasion, I said that Pope John Paul II was primarily a nationalistic Pole. Well, that was not a good thing to say, in the right wing context. So those were the occasions when I felt like an idiot and I let myself down. But, for the rest, I had good friends. But I didn't pay. The people who paid the price were people who applied for jobs in schools or as public servants, because it was all on their files: member of CND. People were not getting jobs because they were members of CND. You wouldn't go into meeting or an appointment with a CND badge on: take it off before you go in. They were the unknown people, the ones who really suffered. I felt lonely sometimes, but I was well supported. I just thought it something I had to do. I wasn't going to stop.

Brian Wicker

I became Principal of a College of Adult Education in Birmingham in 1980 that was founded by Cadburys, who were Quakers. In 1982 or 1983 we started a course in Peace Studies because the whole issue had become a public matter and we decided students should be informed about it. Bruce came to talk to them, and [this should read Arthur Hockaday, who was second permanent secretary of the MoD, not Michael Quinlan], and a whole lot of other people. This college was, in the 1960s, a Trade Union College, and most of the students came from the trade unions, but in 1982 the commonest thing they belonged to was CND not trade unions and that was in itself a turn up for the book.

Dianne Kirby

That's actually very interesting. Something that the media and the government were able to do was to identify peace with left wing causes and, in a Cold War context, left wing causes are suspect and subversive and undermine national security.

Brian Wicker

Only last week, on the BBC programme 'Any Questions', they were talking about government spending and how to pay for it, and Peter Tatchell - (Green Party Canada) he was one person on this team of people on the radio - said we could pay for all this now by not buying a new Trident submarine. He was the only person who said it. No Catholic or Anglican Bishop in England had ever said such a thing. But Peter Tatchell of all people said it - an absolute example of what happens.

Bruce Kent

You're right, but the Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, United Reform Church, they have put out a statement saying, 'Don't replace Trident'. But the main Churches have kept quiet, said nothing at all about it.

Dianne Kirby.

One of the things I think is important to bring up - certainly I remember as a young woman growing up and being aware of nuclear weapons - people were frightened. We used to talk about what we would do if we had our three minute warning, and you really thought this could happen in your lifetime, that you could be incinerated. And I think that's the concern of government, that there is a visceral fear by most ordinary people of nuclear weapons, so logically or theoretically it shouldn't be hard to mobilise people to be against them; so that you need to make them afraid to want the

protection of something that's actually compromising their security and putting them more at risk.

The Cold War is something that comes and goes, in terms of being hot or not so hot, and sometimes a little bit cool, so did you find that your experience as peace activists changed over time, for example the Cuban Missile Crisis, which frightened everyone to bits, even the Americans and the Soviets? Did you find that, at certain times, you were more acceptable and treated perhaps a little more gently than at other times?

Bruce Kent

Once the Soviet Union dissolved itself the heat disappeared. People would say to me, 'I've never seen you on television', because you weren't seen as a political challenge, so that changed a great deal. In terms of tactics, the film that we used most of all to get people thinking was a thing called 'The War Game', by Peter Watkins, which was in a sense a fear film: this is what could happen if there were a nuclear war. An excellent production, very cool in a way. Now nobody believes there's going to be a nuclear war today, so there's no point in playing the fear card. But now people are talking, as Brian was, about the economic side of it, so in terms of approaches to the problem, for me, as a Christian, the issue is not whether I'm frightened or whether it's expensive, but whether it's right or wrong to do this. And you used the term 'undermining national security', one of the problems is to get people, and the Bishops don't help, to realise that none of this assists national security. Actually it's progressively making us more insecure because more countries will want nuclear weapons and accidents happen, and terrorists will get nuclear weapons. So the

assumption, which is a government assumption, that everything we're doing protects you, is one that I think we should be challenging – it's just the opposite.

Brian Wicker

One of the problems about all this, for Catholics, is that the Catholic Church has got itself organised, I don't know how far back, into things called National Conferences of Bishops, that is to say Bishops of individual sovereign states. And that group of Bishops in England, or Scotland or France or wherever, are the people who really make policy as it were. And the trouble is that they see themselves, I think, as identified with the interests of the state that they are part of. Now I don't think there ought to be such things as National Conferences of Bishops, I think they're a great mistake. After all, in theory, each individual Bishop reports to the Pope, nobody else. And these National Conferences of Bishops are part of the problem because they automatically tend to think of themselves as the Church in this sovereign state organisation. And I think we need to get away from this somehow, though heaven knows how.

Bruce Kent

I absolutely agree with you, national sovereignty is a dangerous picture. In countries like Spain and Portugal, when I was involved there, I discovered that the Bishops in colonial countries, Angola and Mozambique, were being paid like governors, they were in effect Civil Servants of the Portuguese or Spanish government. We've never got quite that bad, I don't think, but the Church of England is, to a degree or so, involved in the House of Lords and so on. I agree with you, a Bishop is a successor to the Apostles, that's his function, or her function one day, it's not a territorial thing,

he's not the Bishop of Galatia or the Bishop of Galilee: they should not be representing their national perspective, as the Church is a transnational body as the URC once said.

Dianne Kirby

As British Churchmen, did you feel that British policy was dictated by the Americans, particularly in the Cold War era and in the realm of nuclear weapons? Because we were very vulnerable, being where we were strategically in relation to the Soviet Union, so, in any nuclear war, you could guarantee that Britain would have been obliterated, so it was less in our interests.

Brian Wicker

To some extent this may be true. As I've said earlier, there was this time in the early 1980s when Bishops from all over the place were writing pastoral letters about the nuclear issue, and by far the longest and the most thorough, and in some ways the most interesting, was the American one. We didn't produce one in Britain, all that happened was that Cardinal Home wrote an article in *The Times* about it. The American letter on this issue, although it was watered down from the original draft, was by far the most thorough and the longest. And though in the end the final version of it was quite self-contradictory and didn't amount to anything: Michael Quinlan was quite right to say this, which he did, he saw that it didn't really add up. Although it didn't add up in that sense, the American letter was probably more influential and more significant than any of the other letters. The French produced a pro-French

piece of nonsense and the Germans did the same, and various people like this, but the American letter was the one that mattered. So, to that extent, what happens in the States does have significance.

Bruce Kent

Militarily, our Bishops have not only said nothing about anything on this issue, but no-one has ever faced up to the fact that our so-called British weapons are not independent anyway. We get the missiles from the Americans and guidance systems, and there's a great kind of cover up goes on in all the posh papers as well as in the religious papers, that they are our nuclear weapons. They absolutely are not. We have accepted that they are. It's complete nonsense.

If I'm rambling a bit tell me, but on the question of Church/state mutual involvement the last Cardinal, Cormac Murphy O'Connor, actually employed someone directly from the Foreign Office as his foreign advisor in Archbishops House. When I asked about this he said, 'Oh', he's a very nice chap, he knows his stuff.' Well, of course he knows his stuff, that's what he's in the Foreign Office for. And he was really quite cross with me for bringing this up at all.

Now there's a further case, Archbishop Carey, an Anglican Archbishop: I learned that somebody in Cambridge, on the staff of MI5, was going down to Lambeth Palace once a week to help Carey write his international documents. I don't know whether Carey realised what he had, but he had an MI5 person. The government does its very best to get in everywhere that they can be influential. And they're not going to put a flag on themselves saying 'I'm a government agent', they're just going to be there. I think sometimes Church people are totally naive about what is actually going on.

Dianne Kirby

Again, what I find interesting here is if you go to the Soviet example, they would very openly have somebody there: 'We are here from the Ministry of Church affairs to keep you right.'

Bruce Kent

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Dianne Kirby

And you'll see the correspondence from delegations that had been to the Soviet Union, and they'd come back and write a report for the Foreign Office, 'We suspect that our Christian counterparts in the Soviet bloc will be writing a report to the Kremlin.' And you're thinking, that's what you're doing. And they make no analogy, they don't see what they're doing as having any parallel.

Bruce Kent

I went to South Africa once, and there's Beyers Naude , a very great man, a radical anti-apartheid priest, and we had a meeting with about 50 people in the room. And he said, 'Bruce, I'd like you to meet the government spy'. I said, 'What'. He said, 'He always comes to all of our meetings and writes them up. Come and meet him'. Then he said, 'Hans, I'd like you to meet Bruce Kent, he's here from London. You'll be taking his stuff down shortly. But, like you, he's a good chap really'. So he went back and we started the meeting. But, we knew who the spy was.

Dianne Kirby

In a way, it's almost a more honest relationship: you're here to control us, and we know you're controlling us. Whereas I think it's far more subtle on the Western side: it's all done with persuasion, and nice relationships ...

Brian Wicker

It's also the ideology of the Civil Service in Britain is that it's neutral: whichever party wins an election the Civil Service will do whatever that party says. That's broadly speaking true. The trouble is that all parties that matter, whoever is going to get elected in Britain, are all on the same side as far as nuclear weapons are concerned. They fiddle about a bit: the Labour Party are wondering whether we can buy a cheaper version and stick them on some different kind of vessel or something. I did a course in War Studies at Kings College in London after I retired – it's very interesting to be a retired person of 60 as a student and I knew what I was talking about - it bothered some of the staff of the College when I was there.

Dianne Kirby

Especially if you are a peace activist in a War Studies Department ...

Brian Wicker

The thing is that I had to write an essay on what did I think about the future of nuclear weapons. And I said, if you've got to have these damn weapons, buy the submarines but put the old weapons on them, because there's no point in buying a whole lot of new nuclear weapons that are of no use, why not put the old weapons on the new submarines, the submarine might be of some use?

Bruce Kent

I don't think I can go with that Brian!

Brian Wicker

I was only being sarcastic about it, but actually I got quite a good mark for that essay!

Bruce Kent

They're probably going to put it into policy now. It's probably in the Foreign Office somewhere.

Dianne Kirby

I suppose there's a distinction between East and West in the way they use their Churches. In the West we can justify the relationship with the Churches on the basis of the concept of Christian anti-Communism: that all Christians theoretically should be against Communism because of the atheism of Marx. And the atheism of Marx is used to indict Communism/Marxism, to suggest it's evil: if you are atheistic you have no Christian values, hence you have no moral restraints, and hence you are more likely to want to conquer the world. There is that justification in the way that the West developed an anti-Communist doctrine. What about this idea of Christian anti-Communism being the natural state, and hence you ought to have supported the West because it was Christian resisting evil?

Bruce Kent

It's a perversion of Christianity. Christianity doesn't belong to the West or the East. It has its own thought process and vision of humanity. It's exactly what as a school boy I grew up with. I went to the Jesuits, and I'm sure it would be the same with the Dominicans (excuse me saying that). I remember very well: How do you deal with the Communists? Because a Communist doesn't believe in God, therefore he has no morality, and therefore, whatever a Communist says you can't rely on as being true or false because they are Communists. That's the way we were brought up. I remember the first time at College, as a young man just out of the Army, someone said, 'That man walking across the Quad is a Communist', and I looked at him as if there was a tail going to sprout and two horns going to come up. That was my indoctrination as a child: anti-Communism equalled Christianity equalled my Catholicism, and in a way they were mirror images. Catholicism was a dominant, thought-controlling set up, with a number of old men running it. And I'm afraid the Communist set-up was rather similar

Brian Wicker

Thankfully I didn't go to a Catholic school, so I escaped most of that side. In fact, the History master at our school was a Labour Party candidate ...

Bruce Kent

Really? We wouldn't have had that ...

Brian Wicker

He was quite a nice bloke. We didn't get any of that anti-Communist stuff.

Bruce Kent

Well, we were rich in it. The Catholic Church was deeply, deeply anti-Communist. Which accounts for Italian politics after the war, and the separation of the Communist Party, and the tolerance of so many horrible things done by the West in Central and South America, in spying and so on, and torture; it's all not really talked about very much. Whereas what the Communists did, that was awful, really dreadful.

I remember the invasion of Afghanistan: Cardinal Hume was due to go to Moscow in January 1981, or 1979, and of course this country was in absolute outrage that the Soviets were in Afghanistan. The Soviets were doing exactly what the Americans had done in Vietnam: they said, 'We were invited in, and we're here', that was the same thing. And Hume writes to the Foreign Secretary at that time, Lord Carrington, and says, 'Should I go to Moscow at this stage?' And Carrington writes back and says, 'No, I don't think it's a good idea to go at this stage', so Hume doesn't go. Exactly what Hume should have done was go, and make clear his position. But he was in the hands of the Foreign Office, and he thought that was the right place to be. He came out of Ampleforth, a great public school in this country, and of course they trained a lot of Civil Servants and military people - it's all their bag. It's very rare that you get a Catholic Bishop in this country who has an independent mind on so-called national security, very rare.

Brian Wicker

The only person I knew who had an independent mind and who was prepared to talk about it - privately – was Arthur Hockaday, he was Second Permanent Secretary at

the Ministry of Defence. He was a very top Civil Servant, but he was a very open-minded bloke, and he used to come to our students to talk about it.

Bruce Kent

Did he really? ... Very good ...

His Brother is on the Faculty at Brasenose, he's retired now. I went to one of these dinners up there and his Brother called me over and said, 'I'd like to thank you very much for being so fair and decent with my Brother. Arthur's dead now.' I was quite touched, but you get things like that.

You talked about being unpopular, or whatever. The compensations - this is probably not in your programme. I remember once I was on a train and I went and got a cup of coffee from the bar and was drinking in. And suddenly the man in the white uniform who had given me the coffee walked down and I thought, 'This man's going to knock my head off'. And he said, 'You're Bruce Kent'. He held his hand out and shook my hand, and I could feel something in my hand, it felt like a piece of paper, and he dropped it and walked off. And I looked at it and it was £20 - just like that, an ordinary simple bloke, appreciating. And I get that an awful lot now. People come up and say, 'Thank you for what you did'. I don't know what they think I did, but that's very warming indeed.

Dianne Kirby

There's all sorts of speculation around the relationship between Ronald Reagan and John Paul II, so in some popular histories there is this idea that the 'good' American empire and the 'good' Catholic Pope – between them these empires of 'good' brought down the 'evil' Soviet bloc. But one of the things I find interesting is that, after the

demise of the Soviet bloc and the rampant crony capitalism that we see now and the terrible damage that it inflicted on ordinary people, John Paul did actually voice some regret and then say that there some good things in Marxism and there were some terrible things in Communism (*meant to say Capitalism*). And again, it brings us back to this idea of Christian anti-Communism and what it's all meant to be about. So what's your take on that relationship between John Paul II and Ronald Reagan?

Brian Wicker

I don't know anything about the relationship between Reagan and John Paul II. What was interesting to me was Reagan and Gorbachev, who very nearly came to an agreement at Reykjavik that was just wrecked at the end. But Reagan and Gorbachev actually were a much more interesting thing. I don't know what John Paul thought about Gorbachev; do you know what he thought?

Bruce Kent

I have no idea, but John Paul and Reagan were partners in their Central American experiment and putting down so-called Advance Thinking or whatever they used to call it. But a high point was when they went to Nicaragua and met a Sandanista priest in the government, and the priest knelt in front of him and John Paul wouldn't bless him and told him, in front of all these hundreds of people, 'You shouldn't be in this job'. Yet he was tolerating people who were running the Contras going into Nicaragua and killing all kinds of people. It was a very blood-letting time.

But I do think - but I've never read any more Papal documents, I've read enough Papal documents – but I believe that, in the later years, some of his stuff on capitalism was much more nuanced than it was before. I'm not one of these who

think that you can look up the latest bit of God's will in some encyclical that came out last week. I don't bother with that really.

Dianne Kirby

Do you think that part of the problem for Bishops and Church leaders, who at the end of the day are citizens of the country, is they are subjected to the same media propaganda as everybody else? And that to a certain extent you can sympathise with them conceding 'you know what you're doing' to the security forces and intelligence forces who are, after all, feeding them with confidential information – 'be aware'. What we see after the Cold War is that they become more aware of the commercial interests and the capitalist interests behind nuclear weapons: that a lot of people are making substantial fortunes from the defence industry, and that's a whole new ball game, and that the Church can condemn because that's nothing to do with Communism. The big problem here was the fact that Communism became such a bogeyman and, as you said earlier, the ultimate enemy, so that there is some justification perhaps during the Cold War for their pusillanimous, if you will, attitude. But what about since then? The Cold War is now over. Is it easier now to be a peace activist?

Bruce Kent

If what you said followed through, one of the leading supporters of the campaign against the arms trade would be the Catholic Church. It is not. It has an aid agency called CAFOD that will refer to it occasionally. But the main thrust of the billions we send every year to other countries goes without any criticism of our Church. They are not being whispered at and it's not a Cold War issue, but they just go along with what

the government is saying. I think everybody in a powerful position has to keep their ears open to alternative voices, and to investigate alternative voices. All through the Cold War period there were alternative sources of information if you wanted to find them, if you wanted to look for them. But the Bishops didn't want to. They read *The Daily Telegraph* most of them, or *The Times*, or one in ten would read *The Guardian*, and that would be the end of it. And they'd have a number of advisers planted in - and I'm not naming names in case I get sued - a number of advisers on permanent commissions, who appear from somewhere who never say anything about anything that's relevant to what I'm talking about, but they'd certainly give the Bishops their line of thought. If you were talking about the high-speed train to Birmingham, you'd want to know what the alternative people were saying if you were in a position to make a moral judgement about it, but they don't say anything as far as I can see.

Brian Wicker

I think there are two issues which are current that the Bishops have not, as far as I know, addressed at all. One is the possible collapse of the European Union. If Ukip got their way the European Union would disintegrate, and it seems to me that, if this were to happen, the richer states in the EU like Sweden and Germany would feel it necessary to acquire nuclear weapons, just like the French and British who have got them. I think it would be an absolute catastrophe. The whole point of the European Union is peace - that's the whole point of it. You never hear Ukip say that's the point of it. But that is indeed the point of it, and it always has been and it still is. So that's one issue that I've never heard the Bishops talk about.

The other one of course is that in the nuclear age warfare itself has totally changed. We don't really have war in the old sense - that is conflict between states, we have terrorism. And God knows what the Iranians think they are going to do with a nuclear weapon when they've got them. Terrorism, as such, is a new phenomenon. It's not war, it's a form of suicide really, but the point is the Bishops have never, as far as I know, significantly addressed that issue either

Bruce Kent

More deeply important, in a way, is the question of education. We have put billions into independent schools, our Catholic schools in this country. Why? Because you are meant to be getting a Catholic formation, doctrinal, etc. But in terms of the value system you are getting out of the schools, it's exactly the same as the state system which is now, under the present government, more and more militaristic. I don't think I've ever been into a school where, when I've asked them, 'Have you read the UN Charter and studied it?' most have never even seen the UN Charter. If they are global citizens and Christianity is a global religion, this should be like the Highway Code of international life. It's just not there. The Declaration of Human Rights? Not there. If I was building a Christian educational system these would be fundamental.

There's a wonderful thing, the Synod of 1971, which was the one independent Synod from Rome that said, 'What we are doing with education is creating a carbon copy image of the man society wants' And that's what we are doing: a carbon copy image, not the one we want. Catholic education now, at secondary school level, is past its sell-by date. It doesn't even produce Catholics nowadays -it's nothing to do with this subject. Nowadays you can confirm kids at 15 and you never see them again,

they appear at 35 and they've got some babies to get baptised because it's a cultural thing, that's all

Brian Wicker

I was going to ask Bruce a question. One of the things that's happened in the last decades is the relaxation of various things that the Church used to insist on, like not eating meat on Fridays. Now, having got rid of all that stuff, what should they have put in its place? What should a Catholic do, so to speak, to make public that you are a Catholic? Now, I would have said, personally, if you want to be a Catholic you have got to join Pax Christi or CND. But nothing's been put in its place. They've taken all this stuff away so that what you might call Catholic identity has been disintegrating because they haven't thought about what do you put in its place. It should be something like actually supporting certain peace causes.

Bruce Kent

I think there was no need whatever to take away meat on Friday, that was a mark of what we were about. And to wipe out all the Holy Days of Obligation and move them to Sundays ... peoples' culture goes on for centuries, you can't just change it. They don't think about it. I think they are terribly casual in the reforms that they make. Now, because we are so centralised - this is a long way from nuclear weapons - we have a liturgy which is in appalling language, dreadful language in translation, done by a whole bunch of foreigners and imposed on this country. And the Bishops say, 'Yes'.

And most churches now, and I'm active in them, very active in my Parish, say there's an enormous swathe of absentees from 15 to 40. The average age in my Parish would be 60, apart from a whole lot of squeaking babies who appear at the time of their Baptism.

Dianne Kirby

Do you think, to a certain extent, the Cold War in many ways is an ideological conflict? Thank goodness it didn't become a hot conflict. And there are those who have suggested that the role the Churches played – and peace activists, like the man who gave you £20 – they did actually play a role in terms of making people more aware that at least there was a peace movement that is identified with Christian value systems. And that did make it more difficult for either side to use nuclear weapons, in an ideological conflict where each is claiming morality to be on their side. The other problem there, though, is that there can be a positive view that comes out of that, that the Christian Churches played a crucial role, and I think you can argue that. But equally the fact that they didn't do more, that they were identified each side, leadership-wise at least, with government hierarchies also can compromise them. So, where does the balance lie for each of you when you look back at the role the Churches played in what was an ideological conflict? Did they achieve some good…? Some bad….?

Bruce Kent

By Churches do you mean official Churches or people? In the peace movement generally the Christian influence was very strong. They didn't have support from their Bishops, from the Church leadership, but it was very influential. And I think that

counts. And I think perhaps the same on the other side, for all I know, I really don't know about that. So I think that's a positive, a plus.

For me it wasn't one side or the other going to do it. I've always thought that the most dreadful likelihood would be some catastrophic accident or miscalculation. And we have no right morally to say, 'Your security is guaranteed', because we are going to do a high wire act with nuclear bombs on each side, and one of them is going to drop one day. But this accidental side of things is never played up, even by the peace movement, as it could have been.

Dianne Kirby

In effect, what you are suggesting, and I think it makes a lot of sense, is that Christians, particularly in the peace movement, were trying to maintain Christian values. What we do know is that people still adhere to those values, even if they don't go to Church. So that the Churches themselves, as institutions, were damaged by the Cold War, but that Christian values have still been able to transcend that.

Bruce Kent

That's right. I gave the last speech. Over to Brian.

Brian Wicker

I agree with that. That's fair enough.

Dianne Kirby

This is a good note on which to end. Thank you very much Brian and Bruce.