

# Who Decides If Particular War Is Unjust?

(RNS Special)

The U.S. Catholic Bishops favorably discussing recognition of selective conscientious objection to military service in Vietnam, in their pastoral letter of Nov. 15, have given new heat to draft-dissent and the peace movement.

Growing support for the right to object to military service, not universally but selectively, ("some" wars are unjust, not all) is raising a thorny problem for religion and politics. Who decides if a particular war is unjust?

The issue may be a long time away from a decision on the floor of the Congress.

On moral and religious levels, centuries of often-conflicting traditions are involved. These complexities are dealt with in a new volume called "The Just War" on force and political responsibility by Princeton, (N.J.) University theologian Paul Ramsey.

There can be no doubt that opposition to particular wars has emerged in 1968 as a most pressing moral concern. Not a new concept, selective objection was officially endorsed by no fewer than six national and international religious groups in the last six months.

Supporters included the U.S. Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops, the Lutheran Church in America, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the American Jewish Congress, the Reformed Church in America and the World Council of Churches.

The Vietnam situation has been a major factor moving both religious and secular units of society toward appeals for government allowance of objection to participation in specific military conflicts. Present draft laws do not recognize selective objection.

To many minds the Vietnam war is unjust and, therefore, may be opposed on moral grounds. The issue of "just war" vs. "unjust war" is the pivot on which discussions of selective conscientious objection revolve.

The U.S. Catholic bishops recommended "modification of the Selective Service Act making it possible, although not easy, for so-called selective conscientious objectors to refuse . . . to serve in wars which they consider unjust or in branches of the service . . . which would subject them to the performance of activities contrary to deeply held moral convictions about indiscriminate killing . . ."

In a pastoral letter, the bishops did not declare the Vietnam war unjust. They did ask whether the destruction and suffering in the Asian country have not developed out of proportion to the reasons for American intervention.

Their statement voiced religious conviction that opportunities to expand justice not be overlooked — in Vietnam or among U.S. young men whose consciences cause them to dissent from established military policy.

All religious endorsements of selective objection have not directly linked advocacy with theories of just and unjust wars. Yet the very word "selective" cannot escape the implications of ethical decision-making about the use of military force.

The word adds a flexibility to morality absent from universal objection to war whether total opposition is held by an individual or by historic peace Churches such as Brethren, Quaker, Adventist and Mennonite.

Universal objection has long been recognized in draft regulations. Once limited only to those with a belief in a supreme being, a 1965 U.S. Supreme Court decision, the U.S. vs. Seeger, replaced this criterion with one based on "religious training and belief."

None of the proposals that the privilege of objection be extended, without punitive results, to non-universal cases have advocated specific procedures for facilitating the decision over the justification of a particular war. Although there are those who disagree, Dr. Ramsey feels a legal structure for the question is essential and he declares: "No political society can be founded on a principle according absolute rights to possibly errant individual conscience."

The theologian is disturbed that "extremism in action, reaction and counter-reaction" surrounding Vietnam has muddled the whole mat-

ter of selective conscientious objection. He quotes the late Father John Courtney Murray, S.J., as saying that "the issue of selective conscientious objection must be distinguished from the issue of the justice of the South Vietnam war."

Emphasizing a point also made by the U.S. Catholic bishops, Dr. Ramsey goes further and sees no reason

"why conscientious objection to certain modes of warfare (such as nuclear) might not be allowable grounds . . . This would certainly become a ground if there were international conventions proscribing the use of nuclear weapons to which one's nation was a party."

In this connection it is germane to note that many of the same religious groups

which have endorsed selective objection have asked for speedy Senate passage of the U.S.-Soviet nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Should that treaty be approved and within Dr. Ramsey's perspective, a U.S. military engagement which spread the availability or danger of nuclear weapons would be justifiable occasion for young men to claim conscientious objector status.

The conditions for both selective and universal opposition to war, he writes, depend on the "discretion" — the "forming and informing influences upon political consciences" — found in society. He states that considerable upgrading in the level of political discourse is a necessary pre-condition for realization of the selective C.O. status.

Regardless of the eventual outcome of attempts to determine who decides the justice or injustice of war and wars, the discourse will go on. For the process, Father Murray offered a pertinent warning. If moral and political discourses are separated, he said, "the necessary public argument will degenerate into a useless and harmful quarrel."

## Trappist Sets Up 'Houses of Love'

Baltimore—(RNS)—A Trappist priest on leave from his order has established four "houses of love" here, basing his work on the needs of the local community and the writing of Jesuit Father Teilhard de Chardin.

Father George Bryan explains that the purpose of the houses he has established is to be a point of "convergence of love" in the neighborhood.

The native New Yorker established his first house in

April. The three-story brick house was followed by three other buildings and most of the money for the project comes from the earnings of the priest who has taken a job selling business copying machines.

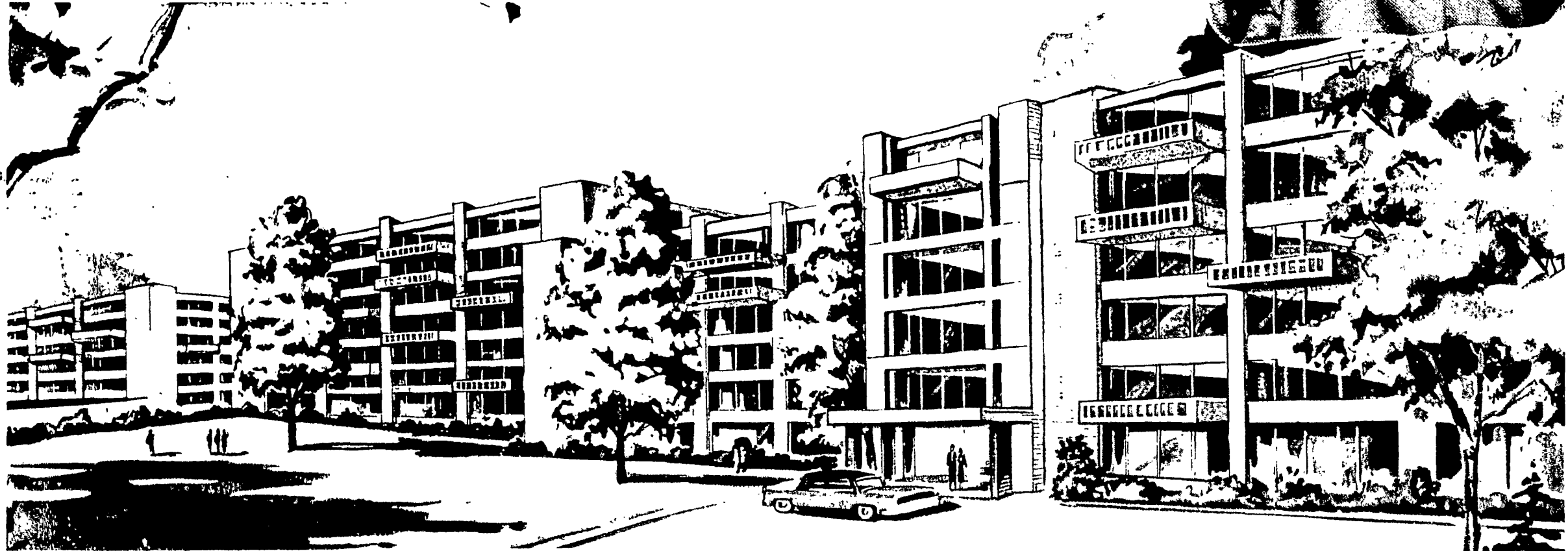
There are no rules for the houses, he explained, other than the rules drawn up by the people who use it. They are all in so-called problem areas of Baltimore and Father Bryan hopes to have a total of 10 in operation by January.

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**COMMUNION PRIVILEGES**  
New Orleans — (NC) — Holy Name Society members throughout the New Orleans archdiocese have been granted permission by Archbishop Phillip M. Hannan to receive Communion under both species.  
The privilege, which will become effective on Jan. 4, 1969, will apply during a Mass to be said on the first Saturday of each month.

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