

# A Draft for the Pastoral Letter

## I Role of Church Leaders in Issues of Public Policy

It has been suggested by some commentators that the bishops' statement covers a subject that they are not qualified to analyze. The following excerpts from the second draft of the document offer some of their reflections on the purpose and limitations in writing this letter.

*Why the bishops are writing this pastoral letter*

As bishops and pastors ministering in the midst of one of the major nuclear nations, we have experienced this terror in the minds and hearts of our people — indeed we share it ourselves. We write this letter because we agree that the world is at a moment of supreme crisis and the effect of this crisis is evident in the lives of the people. We do not wish to play on people's fear. Faith does not insulate us from the daily challenges of life, it rather intensifies our desire to contribute to them precisely in light of the good news which has come to us in the person of Jesus, the Lord of history. From our faith we seek to provide hope and strength to all those who seek a world free of the nuclear threat. Hope is the capacity to live with danger without being overwhelmed by it; hope is the ability to struggle against obstacles even when they appear larger than life. Ultimately our hope rests in the God who gave us life, sustains the world by his power and has called us to revere the life of each person and all people.

We are in a supreme crisis because nuclear war threatens the existence of our planet; it is a threat more devastating than anything the world has yet known. It is neither tolerable nor necessary that we should be doomed to live under such conditions. But overcoming them will require a major effort of intelligence and courage. Pope John Paul II said at Hiroshima: "From now on it is only through a conscious choice and through a deliberate policy that humanity can survive."

## II Traditional Catholic Positions on War

The pastoral letter reviews the church's teaching on the morality of war, articulating both the pacifist and the just war positions. The following excerpts explain these positions.

*Foundation of church's teaching on peace*

At the center of the church's teaching on peace and at the center of all Catholic social teaching is the dignity of the human person. The human person is the clearest reflection of the presence of God in the world; all of the church's work in pursuit of both justice and peace is designed to protect and promote the dignity of every person. For each person not only reflects God, but is the expression of God's creative work and the meaning of Christ's redemptive ministry. Christians approach the problem of war and peace with an attitude of both fear and reverence. To take a human life is to approximate the role reserved to God; modern warfare threatens the obliteration of human life on a scale previously not imaginable.

*Moral responses regarding peace*

1. Non-violence. From the earliest days of the church we have evidence of Christians, moved by the example of Jesus, his life and teaching, committing themselves to a non-violent lifestyle. The witnesses to non-violence and to Christian pacifism run from some church fathers through Francis of Assisi to Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King. Essentially this position holds that any use of military force is incompatible with the Christian vocation. This vision of Christian existence is not passive about injustice and the defense of the rights of others; it rather affirms and exemplifies what it means to resist injustice through non-violent methods. Today Christians who are convinced of the necessity and value of non-violent methods of defense of others and self-defense seek to demonstrate its usefulness on a wider scale.

The non-violent posture in the history of the church has always posed a substantial challenge to the whole community. Those espousing non-violence have called upon the church to see this charism as an imperative for all Christians. Some Christian churches have taken this position, for example, the Mennonites, Quakers and the Church of the

The following text consists of excerpts from and glosses on the second draft of the U.S. bishops' forthcoming pastoral letter on war and peace. The form was developed by the staff of the diocesan International Justice and Peace Commission.

As Americans, citizens of the first nation to produce atomic weapons, the only nation to use them and one of the handful of nations which today can directly affect the outcome of this supreme crisis, we have unique human, moral and political responsibilities to see that a "conscious choice" is made to save humanity. As Catholic bishops in the United States, we feel a special obligation to call our community of faith to shape this conscious choice. We write this pastoral letter to make available moral and religious resources of the Catholic tradition as an aid in making the many choices which must be made on war and peace today.

Catholics in the United States, comprising almost one quarter of our population, are imperiled as others by the nuclear threat, and have a moral and political responsibility to reduce the danger of nuclear war in the world. Hence this letter: As bishops we seek to fulfill a pastoral responsibility by drawing upon the teaching of the Roman Catholic traditions, using it to address the nuclear arms race and inviting Catholics and all members of our political community to dialogue and decision about this awesome question.

*Purpose of Catholic teaching on peace*

Catholic teaching on peace and war has two purposes: first, to help Catholics form their consciences; and second, to contribute to the public policy debate about the morality of war. These two purposes have led Catholic teaching to address two distinct but overlapping audiences. The first is the Catholic faithful, formed by the premises of

Brethren. In terms of moral analysis Christian pacifists have acknowledged that some legitimate goals can perhaps only be protected by using lethal force, but in such a case Christians, following the example of the non-violent crucified Christ, ought to forego the good in question rather than use violence to achieve or protect it.

As Catholic bishops it is important for us to stress to our own community and to the wider society that one characteristic of contemporary Catholic teaching on war and peace has been the re-emergence of support for a pacifist option in the teaching of Vatican II, and a re-affirmation by the popes of non-violent witness since the council. The council's clear endorsement of a position of conscientious objection to all war as a valid Christian position and its call to evaluate war "with an entirely new attitude" have paved the way for an extensive investigation into the tradition of Christian pacifism and Christian non-violence. Today in the Catholic community, when any issue of peace or war is addressed, the non-violent tradition must be part of the discussion.

2. Just War. The alternative moral response to the pacifist tradition is the just-war position. This moral theory begins with the same presumptions as the pacifist position: We should do no harm to our neighbor; our enemy is the key test of whether we love our neighbor; and the taking of even one human life is a prospect we should consider in fear and trembling. Read in the light of the New Testament these presumptions have produced two kinds of moral choice, pacifism and the justifiable use of force. What enters the moral equation to produce the idea a justifiable use of lethal force?

Historically and theologically the clearest answer to the question is found in St. Augustine. Augustine was impressed by the fact and the consequences of sin in history — the "not yet" dimension of the kingdom. In his view war was both the result of sin and a tragic remedy for sin in the life of political societies. War arose from disordered ambitions, but it could also be used, in some cases at least, to restrain evil and protect the innocent. The classic case which illustrated his view was the use of lethal force to

the Gospel and the principles of Catholic moral teaching. The second is the wider civil community, a more pluralistic audience in which Orthodox and Protestant Christians, Jews, Moslems, other religious communities and all people of good will also make up our polity. Since Catholic teaching has traditionally sought to address both audiences, we intend to speak to both in this letter, recognizing that Catholics are also members of the wider political community.

*To whom the letter is addressed*

As bishops we believe that the nature of Catholic moral teaching, the principles of Catholic ecclesiology and the demands of our pastoral ministry require that this letter speak both to Catholics in a specific way and to the wider political community in terms of public policy. We cannot afford to allow either opportunity to be lost when the issue has the cosmic dimensions of the nuclear arms race.

*Church's role*

The building of peace within and among nations is the work of many individuals and institutions; it is the fruit of ideas and decisions taken in the political, economic, social, military and legal sectors of life. We believe the church, as a community of faith and a social institution, has a proper, necessary and distinctive part to play in the pursuit of peace in the world.

*Overview of purpose and method*

We seek to encourage a public attitude which sets stringent limits on the kind of

prevent aggression against innocent victims. Faced with the fact of attack on the innocent, the presumption that we do no harm, even to our enemy, yielded to the command of love understood as the need to restrain an enemy who would injure the innocent.

The just-war argument has taken several forms in the history of Catholic theology, but this Augustinian insight remains its central premise. The defense of others (all that Augustine allowed) was expanded to include self-defense by Thomas Aquinas. In the 20th century, papal teaching has used the logic of Augustine and Aquinas to articulate a right of self-defense for states, in a decentralized international order. The essential position was stated by Vatican II: "As long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defense, once all peace efforts have failed."

The purpose of the moral theory is not, in the first place, to legitimize war but to prevent it. The presumption is against the use of force. This presumption against using force must be overridden before such use can be claimed to be "justified." How is such a claim validated — by what criteria? The just-war theory has been shaped in terms of three questions: Why (for what reasons) can force be used; when (under what conditions); and how (by what means) can force be employed? These questions are answered in terms of the following seven criteria:

a) Competent authority: In the Christian tradition the right to use force has always been joined to the common good; war must be declared by those with responsibility for public order, not by private groups or individuals. This matter of competent authority becomes particularly important in conditions of revolutionary war. Historically the just-war tradition has been open to a "just-revolution" position, recognizing that an oppressive government may lose its claim to legitimacy. Insufficient analytical attention has been given to the moral issues of revolutionary or unconventional warfare. A just-war framework for conflicts of this nature is sorely needed.

actions our government will take on nuclear policy in our name. We believe religious leaders have a task in concert with public officials, analysts, private organizations and the media to set the limits beyond which our military policy should not move in word or action. Charting a moral course in a complex public policy debate involves several steps. We will address four questions, offering our reflections on them as an invitation to a public moral dialogue: 1. the use of nuclear weapons; 2. the policy of deterrence in principle and in practice; 3. specific steps to reduce the danger of war; 4. long-term measures of policy and diplomacy.

*Perspectives on church and policy*

Questions of war and peace have a profoundly moral dimension which responsible Christians cannot ignore. They are questions of life and death. True, these questions also have a political dimension because they are embedded in public policy. But the fact that they are also political is no excuse for denying the church's obligation to provide its members with the help they need in forming their consciences. We must learn together how to make correct and responsible moral judgments. We reject, therefore, criticism of the church's concern with these issues on the ground that it "should not become involved in politics." We are called to move from discussion to witness and action.

At the same time we recognize that the church's authority does not carry the same force when it deals with technical solutions involving particular means as it does when it speaks of principles or ends. People may agree in abhorring an injustice, for instance, yet sincerely disagree as to what practical approach will achieve justice. Religious groups are as entitled as others to their opinion in such cases, but should not claim that their opinions are the only ones that people of good will may hold.

b) Just cause: War may be employed only to confront a "real and certain injury," i.e., to protect innocent life, to preserve conditions necessary for decent human existence and to secure basic human rights.

c) Right intention: Right intention is related to just cause — war is legitimately intended only for the reasons listed above, during the conflict; right intention means pursuit of peace and reconciliation, including avoidance of unnecessarily destructive acts or imposing unreasonable conditions (e.g., unconditional surrender).

d) Last resort: The physical, moral and spiritual consequences of any use of force are so detrimental that resort to arms is justified only when all other reasonable means of redress have been pursued.

e) Probability of success: This is a difficult criterion to apply, but its purpose is to prevent irrational resort to force or hopeless resistance when the outcome of either will clearly be disproportionate or futile. The determination of these terms is assessed with a recognition that at times defense of key values, even against great odds, may be a "proportionate" witness.

f) Proportionality: The damage to be inflicted and the costs incurred by war must be proportionate to the good expected by taking up arms; this principle asks under what conditions going to war can rationally be considered a lesser evil than not using force. In today's interdependent world even a local conflict can affect people everywhere; this is particularly the case when the nuclear powers are involved. Hence a nation cannot justly go to war today without considering the effect of its action on others and on the international community.

This principle of proportionality applies throughout the conduct of the war as well as to the decision to begin warfare. During the Vietnam War our bishops' conference ultimately concluded that the conflict had reached such a level of devastation to the adversary and damage to our own society, that continuing it could not be justified.

g) Just means: Even when the stringent

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*Moral rejections*

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