

Mainstream Challenged On Peace Questions

By Jerry Filteau

Chicago (NC) — In the U.S. bishops' document on war and peace, the title starts with the word "challenge" and that is exactly what the document offers to mainstream Catholic thinking on the subject.

The pastoral is called, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," and the challenge is wide-ranging.

In the pastoral, the bishops endorse an immediate, negotiated halt to the development of new nuclear weapons and reject as immoral the U.S.-NATO policy of a nuclear response option if the Soviet Union launches a conventional attack.

The document criticizes other elements of U.S. policy as well as the nuclear defense build-up and the first-use doctrine in Western Europe.

It questions whether declared strategy truthfully reflects actual policy, particularly in the declared intention of not attacking civilian populations.

"It would be perverted political policy or moral casuistry which tried to justify using a weapon which indirectly or 'unintentionally' killed a million innocent people because they happened to live near a 'militarily significant target,'" the pastoral says.

It clearly and categorically rejects nuclear deterrence as an end in itself.

It rejects the concept of "limited nuclear war," saying that a high likelihood of escalation and uncontrollability in such an exchange entails "an unacceptable moral risk."

It specifically rejects first-strike strategic weapons systems, weapons that would lower the "nuclear threshold," planning for prolonged nuclear war, or any goal of nuclear superiority.

It declares progressive disarmament and prevention of any use the only acceptable goals in its "strictly conditioned moral acceptance" of nuclear deterrence.

Although those actions may seem to place the bishops

in the vanguard of thinking about war and peace in society today, a vignette which occurred at the meeting indicates that the bishops still feel themselves in the mainstream.

The scene was an elevator in Chicago's Palmer House May 2. The bishops had just roundly endorsed an immediate, negotiated halt to new nuclear weapons and rejected the U.S.-NATO first use policy as "morally unjustifiable." A 72-year-old archbishop, sharing a ride with a group of journalists gave his interpretation of the actions. "What strikes me is that the bishops are sticking to a centrist position. They're rejecting both extremes," he said.

One of the journalists observed, "That may be where the center is for the bishops, but it's not for the Catholics of this country."

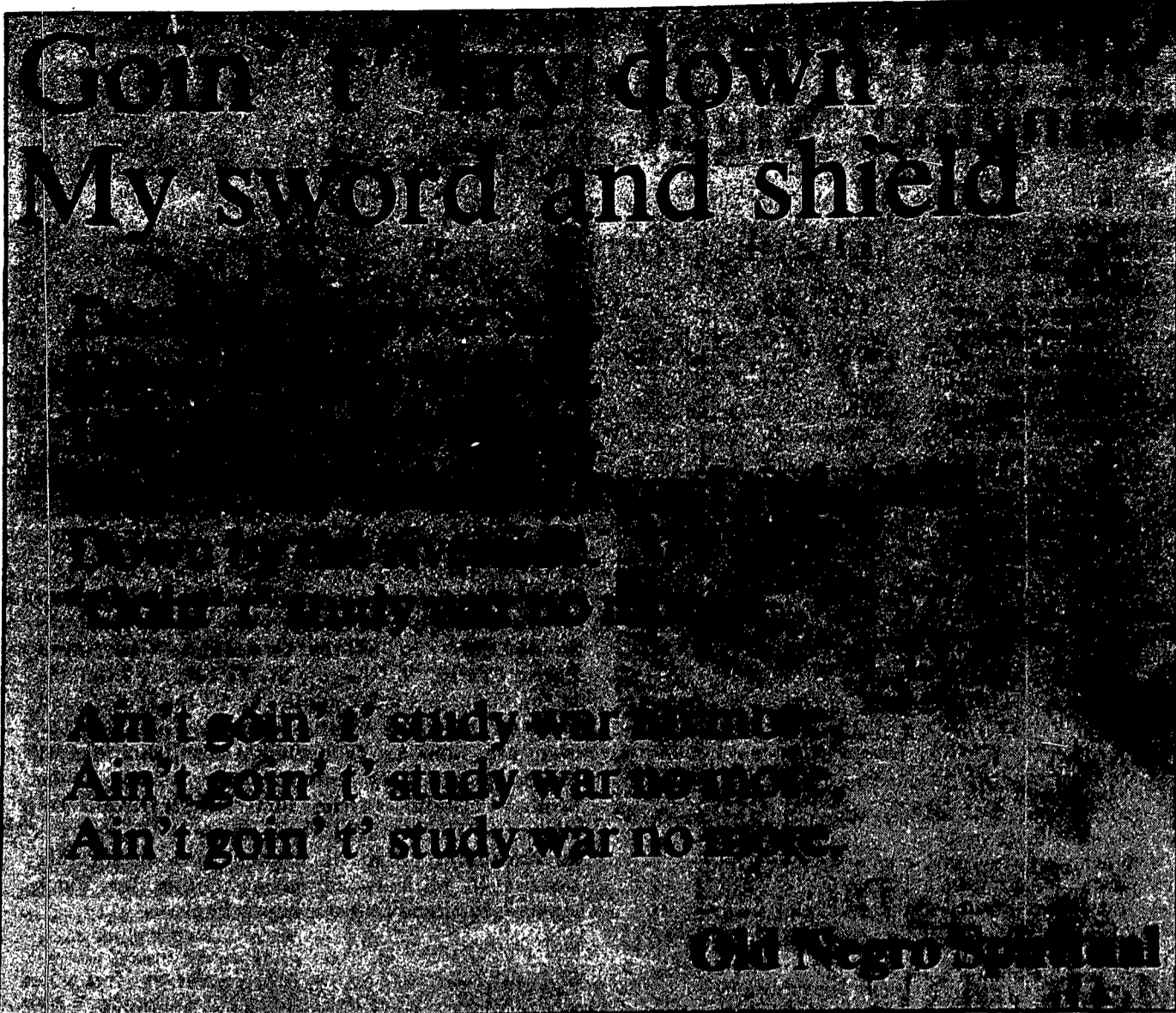
To anyone who has followed the debate over the past year, the positions on nuclear war, deterrence and disarmament adopted by the nation's hierarchy may still be controversial, but they will not be startling.

What may be startling is the degree of consensus they reached on the issues. They voted for the controversial language endorsing an immediate, bilateral, negotiated halt on new nuclear weapons by about a 10-1 margin.

Despite that and other changes that strengthened the pastoral's criticism of current U.S. policies, the final vote on the document was an overwhelming 238-9.

Going beyond issues of war and war prevention to the positive question of constructing peace, the pastoral urges comprehensive planning and implementation of international structures for non-violent conflict resolution and the building of trust, cooperation and justice in international relations.

Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago, chairman of the pastoral's drafting committee, declared at the beginning of the meeting that the "political and moral challenge" for building peace posed by the pasto-



ral may be its "most significant long-term teaching" despite the fact it has been "virtually ignored" in the general public debate on the document.

Much of the debate during the two-day meeting suggested that the major problem the few opponents of the pastoral may have had — and certainly the major reservation a number of its supporters had — was not with the pastoral's conclusions about defense policy issues.

Rather it was concern over the confusion surrounding the pastoral's teaching authority and the degree to which its various statements were binding on the consciences of Catholics.

In an effort to resolve the problem, the pastoral's drafting committee made extensive changes between the second and third drafts of the document in order to try to spell out clearly which statements were fundamental moral principles but subject to honest disagreement.

The resolution still left many bishops uncomfortable and concerned that their people would be confused.

On the one hand the bishops were clearly committed not to overreach their authority and create an unacceptable moral burden for people by appearing to bind consciences without adequate reason. On the other, they appeared uneasy that by repeatedly qualifying their judgments, they might seem to be saying, in effect, "This is just one viewpoint with no more particular merit than any other. You can agree or disagree as you please."

Letter Topic Of TV Show

A one-hour show on the pastoral letter will be shown at 1 p.m., Sunday, May 15, over Channel 8.

Archbishop John Roach, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Father L. Bryan Hehir, one of the framers of the document, will be on the show along with commentator Edwin Newman and others.

The program will include coverage of the Chicago as well as an analysis of the letter itself.


A less obvious positive result may follow from this renewed commitment to a true sharing of the Church's work among men and women. Many women who have turned reluctantly away from involvement in the Church because their particular gifts of service were rejected may be encouraged to try again. Clear evidence that the clergy are receptive and open to change should bring forward professional women and others previously discouraged by the narrow range of service open to them. Accountants might well prefer to assist with parish finances rather than teach CCD. But how many parishes have women auditors or trustees?

Leadership in a parish where the various burdens are shouldered by a cross section of the parish members may think this evident sharing of responsibility is invitation enough to draw women forward. However,

they may, as is often the case in gestures of reconciliation, need to take an extra step. Many women have had their willingness to serve in capacities appropriate to their training and background disparaged, even insulted by insensitive, perhaps defensive clergy. Rather than risk further humiliation, they may wait for a personal invitation. This reluctance may strike busy parish staff members as excessive, but that is most likely because they have never experienced these rebuffs.

The non-traditional but excellent contributions of women formerly alienated from Church involvement could be among the most significant results of Bishop Clark's call for reconciliation.

(Sara McLaughlin, co-chairperson, Task Force on Bishop Clark's Pastoral Letter on Women in the Church.)



The Fire in the Thornbush Dialogue

Reconciliation

#28 "In my judgment, we need constantly to reform attitudes and practices among us that fall short of recognizing the full dignity and stature of every person."

By Sara McLaughlin

The theme of reconciliation, expressed strongly in "The Fire in the Thornbush," assumed an important role also in the two recent liturgies celebrating the first anniversary of the letter's promulgation. Those present in Horseheads and in Rochester invoked the healing power of Christ to transform their offenses associated with sexism and its

backlash into co-operative efforts to harness the best energies and talents of all for the good of the Church.

Through this penitential rite, the many hundreds who participated in these Eucharistic celebrations were commissioned to bring this renewed spirit of reconciliation back to their parishes and agencies within the diocese. They and others who have struggled with the issues in the pastoral this past year can hope for greater mutual understanding and unity of purpose, however far in the future may be the realization of "the sacred worth and full vocation of both women and men," of which one of the prayers speaks.

Late in the meeting, Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza of San Angelo, Texas, introduced an amendment seeking to clarify the issue.

Adopted overwhelmingly by the bishops after being slightly modified in the discussion, it said that "the moral judgments that we make in specific cases, while not binding in conscience, are to be given serious consideration by Catholics as they determine whether their moral judgments are consistent with the Gospel."

The approved language highlighted traditional Church teaching both on the role of conscience, sincerely and properly formed in the light of the gospel and

Festival Saturday Benefits Notre Dame

Elmira — The annual Notre Dame High School Festival will take place on Saturday, May 14.

The event will begin at noon and run until 11 p.m. on the school grounds, Maple Avenue, Elmira.

Graduates Passed State Exam

Hornell — The six graduates of the St. James Mercy School of Nursing who took their state Board examination in February all passed.

The graduates received their notices from the state Education Department April 2.

The exam tests knowledge,

and on the special office of bishops as moral teachers whose considered views, even when not presented as binding Church teaching, challenge a person in a special way to restudy whether his own views are truly formed by and in accord with the gospel or are more influenced by more secular considerations.

That is the fundamental challenge of the bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace to American Catholics.

It is a challenge based on several years of study and prayer by bishops who tried to say what it means to observe one of the Ten Commandments in today's world: "Thou shalt not kill."

Among the special features will be helicopter rides, a fireworks display at 10 p.m., a chicken barbecue, a wide variety of foods and refreshments, and stagecoach, fire truck, antique car and hayrides.

comprehension, application and analysis of their nursing skills.

The six are Joseph Beaver and M. Eileen White of Hornell; Audrey Anne Goddard of Wayland; Michael Iven and Sharon Jones of Wellsville and Catherine Cummings of Syracuse.

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