

Personal reflections



By MARY WEST

Can there be a just war? Can the conditions laid down by St. Thomas ever be fulfilled? What does God want me to do? And what am I capable of doing? Can I stand out against state and Church? Is it pride, presumption, to think I have the spiritual capacity to use spiritual weapons in the face of the most gigantic tyranny the world has ever seen? Am I capable of enduring suffering, facing martyrdom? And alone?

*Again the long loneliness to be faced.
(Dorothy Day, The Long Loneliness)*

So novel, so different, so unique was the Catholic Worker tradition of Gospel non-violence and direct action that, throughout most of its history, the movement's founders as well as its followers were considered alien and suspect by country and church.

Relying principally on the words of Jesus, Dorothy Day had espoused pacifism since the earliest publication of the Catholic Worker newspaper, through the tumult of class war, race war, the Ethiopian War, the Spanish Civil War, World War II and the Korean war. Although relentlessly courteous and loyal in describing her relationship with the Church hierarchy in general and the New York chancery in particular, Dorothy nonetheless acknowledged that even the bishops who supported her work with the poor and with trade unions did not agree with her on non-violence. (Some bishops refused altogether to have Catholic Worker houses in their dioceses.)

In her own city, she repeatedly made it clear that the New York Chancery had given the Catholic Worker freedom in its efforts to inform the consciences of its readers; in fact, two Catholic Worker pamphlets entitled "The Weapons of the Spirit" and "The Gospel of Peace" carried the "imprimatur" of the New York Archdiocese.



Dorothy Day

For developing and living out a doctrine that was a clear departure from the Just-War theory, she relied on her own reading of the Gospel for inspiration, and her Catholic Worker associates like Ammon Hennacy for companionship and support.

She saw political issues in light of her Christian non-violence. Her solution to the advent of the cold war arms race was starkly simple:

"...destroy the two billion dollars worth of equipment that was built up to make the atomic bomb; destroy all the formulas, put on sack cloth and ashes, weep and mourn. And God will not forget to show mercy."

Then in the 1960s came a sign of hope and encouragement. The last session of the Second Vatican Council took up the issue of modern warfare as part of its document on the Church in the

Modern World.

Dorothy Day, (then 68), along with a score of other women, made a pilgrimage to Rome; and there fasted and prayed that the bishops would issue a strong statement against nuclear warfare and in support of conscientious objection. For Dorothy, the document passed by the Council was "happy news ... (the) statement for which we had been working and praying."

One can imagine Dorothy joining others in prayer for the U.S. bishops as they developed their pastoral letter on peace. Certainly her example influenced the section on non-violence, as the letter itself notes. The bishops' pastoral letter reaffirms the Council's support for non-violence as a valid Christian lifestyle.

We can hope that the way of non-violence might be less lonely for us than for Dorothy.



By BISHOP KENNETH POVISH

My personal transformation from a "hawk" to a "dove" is of no special importance. However, now that the U.S. bishops, by a 96 percent majority, have called American Catholics to take the same journey they did, my story may be of some interest.

When I was appointed bishop in the summer of 1970, I was pastor of St. Stanislaus parish in Bay City. The Vietnam War was raging, and the service flag on the church wall displayed 43 stars for the number of parish sons in Indochina at that time. We were all hawkish.

Strangely enough, it was some of those same parish sons, once they returned from combat, who began to change my mind. Those who would talk about their experiences made me question the sense of courting detente with Russia and China and doing terrible things to little, distant Vietnam. I also saw what terrible things this war had done to some of the 100 or more boys who went to Vietnam during my pastorate.

The next difficult step for me came when approval of selective conscientious objection was proposed in the bishops' conference in 1971. My memories of the young men in Bay City and conversations with students at Moorhead and Bemidji State colleges in Minnesota were influential in my decision to vote for it.

The Diocese of Crookston bordered on North Dakota, often referred to as third after the rest of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. as a nuclear power. This was because so many nuclear warheads are hidden in underground silos all over the North Dakota prairie. Only a few voices protested and warned about them, but we were all aware of their danger to the Upper Midwest.

My New Year's resolution in 1976 was to join Pax Christi-USA. I was not and still am not a total pacifist; but the popes were talking disarmament constantly, and the Pax Christi people seemed to be the only ones taking the popes seriously.

Since then there have been other milestones on the way to the Palmer House in Chicago. They include the unemotional, matter-of-fact discourses of Dr. Helen Caldicott of the Harvard Medical School, whose field is pediatrics and whose description of what nuclear heat and radiation would do to future generations numbs the mind.

They include the Physicians for Social Responsibility, who tell us flatly that there is nothing doctors and hospitals can do in a nuclear war. They include the report made to Pope John Paul in the fall of 1981 by the Pontifical Academy of Science. This report on the effects of a nuclear exchange so disturbed the Holy Father that he sent it by personal representative in December that year to Reagan and Brezhnev.

As you see, this journey took me almost 13 years. I don't believe we have that much time for people to make the journey now. But the purpose of the pastoral letter approved in Chicago is to invite all American Catholics; indeed to urge them, to undertake their own pilgrimage to peace.



By ANGELA CERNA-PLATA, IHM

As people of faith and as people confronted with the evil of nuclear war, we cannot lose our hope in the promises of peace that our Lord gave to us. Now, more than any time in our history, we have to strengthen our faith through prayer.

Peace has to start in our everyday life. This is what the signs of our times call us to: To be persons of prayer, asking God to help us realize the gift of peace that Jesus left us.

In their pastoral letter the bishops encourage various forms of prayer for peace. They direct attention to the sacrament of reconciliation and communal penance services and especially to the Mass. They also encourage the reading of Scripture and the praying of the Rosary. They call upon all of us to make our sign of peace at Mass an authentic sign of our peace with God and with one another.

We also have to remember that our prayer will be incomplete if it is not accompanied by sacrifices and penance. Such penance enables us to make reparation for the violence in our own lives and the violence in the world.

As an example of what such penance can involve, the bishops focus upon the

day Friday. They commit themselves to fast and abstain on Friday and ask us all to eat less food and abstain from meat on that day.

Because, in one way or another, we are all capable of violence and injustice, we are always in need of conversion. By taking advantage of opportunities for prayer and penance — on Fridays but not only on Fridays — we can become more strongly committed to move in the direction of a peaceful world.

We Hispanics are known as religious people. Prayer and sacrifice are part of our everyday life. It comes naturally to us and we now have the duty to channel those special gifts toward the challenge of peace that is threatening our world. Our prayer, fast and abstinence are needed today together with the offering of ourselves toward the service of others in our neighborhoods and our communities and in that way to embrace and build a world of peace.