

Historic Letter ... The Just War

Second in a Series
By Jim Lackey

Washington (NC) — With nuclear conflagration looming on the horizon, is it possible in this modern age to wage a "just war" in the traditional theological sense?

That is one of the major issues that the U.S. bishops faced when they began preparing their war and peace pastoral, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response."

Their answer: While a firm "no" must be said to nuclear war, the Church's just war tradition cannot be rejected out of hand. Though the conditions which govern a just war are numerous and rigorous, the tradition still has a contribution to make to the pursuit of peace.

Though the Church always has had critics of the just war teaching, today hardly a week goes by without someone arguing that the just war theory is outmoded and that the followers of Christ should embrace non-violence instead.

The bishops in their new pastoral letter do not go quite that far. Instead, they explore the origins of the just war theory, lay out the criteria that govern the execution of a just war, and conclude that both the just war teaching and non-violence are "distinct but interdependent methods of evaluating warfare," both with roots in Christian theological tradition.

The bishops also make clear that nations have a legitimate right to self-defense.

"The Christian has no choice but to defend peace, properly understood, from aggression. This is an inalienable obligation," the pastoral states. "It is the 'how' of defending peace which offers moral options."

Christians also are morally bound to do no harm to their neighbors. "How we treat our enemy is the key test of whether we love our neighbor, and the possibility of taking even one human life is a prospect we should consider in fear and trembling."

The pastoral notes that the clearest answer to the question of justifiable use of lethal force has come from St. Augustine, the fourth and fifth century bishop and theologian to whom much credit is given for conceiving the basis of the just war theory. Augustine taught that war was the result of sin but that war also could be used to restrain evil and protect the innocent.

The bishops also present the just war teaching from two distinct but interrelated perspectives. First there are criteria for judging why and when recourse to war is permissible. But second, there are criteria for how the war is to be conducted once recourse to war has been taken.

The pastoral lists seven criteria that must be met before recourse to war can be justified:



- Just cause. The war must be fought only to confront "a real and certain danger," such as to protect innocent life, to preserve decent human existence, and to secure basic human rights. "If war of retribution was ever justifiable, the risks of modern war negate such a claim today," the pastoral remarks.

- Competent authority. War must be declared "by those with responsibility for public order, not by private groups or individuals." This, the pastoral notes, is particularly important in a democratic society and raises significant questions when a president involves a nation in war even though war may not have been formally declared.

- In addition, this section also raises the question of the "just revolution." The just war theory has recognized that a government may lose its claim to legitimacy, the pastoral notes, but revolutionary wars must also adhere rigorously to the just war theory, including the need for a competent authority to lead the revolution.

- Comparative justice. According to the bishops, war should be fought only when the rights and values involved are so great that they justify killing. Even when the conflict is "justified," comparative justice means that there are limits to how the war can be waged.

- Right intention. Like the "just cause" criterion, the war must be fought for legitimate intentions. During the conflict there must also be pursuit of peace and reconciliation, "including avoiding unnecessarily destructive acts or imposing unreasonable conditions."

- Last resort. All peaceful alternatives to war must have been exhausted. The bishops also cite what they say is a tendency among nations to prevent peaceful settlement of a war when they see continued conflict among other nations as advantageous to themselves.

Anniversary Celebrated

Mr. and Mrs. James G. Izzo of 428 Washington Ave., celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary with Mass last Sunday, July 3, at St. Thomas the Apostle Church. A reception for the couple followed.

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Bishop States MX Opposition

By Pat Windsor

Washington (NC) — Auxiliary Bishop P. Francis Murphy of Baltimore June 28 joined members of more than 25 religious and professional groups opposing the development and deployment of the MX missile.

At a press conference planned by more than 50 groups which oppose the MX, Bishop Murphy and four others spoke as part of an effort to show the broad range of opposition to the MX in the United States.

The MX (for "missile experimental") is a land-based intercontinental nuclear missile system which would be aimed at the Soviet Union.

Congress in May voted in favor of funding for the MX missile, reversing its previous opposition.

"Those who support the MX within the halls of Congress are out of touch with the national sentiment," said Fred Wertheimer, president of Common Cause, a 250,000-member citizen's group.

"Those members who have supported the MX in return for a so-called new administration approach to arms control must now see, that there is no reasonable basis for expecting this to happen," Wertheimer said.

Bishop Murphy used "The Challenge of Peace, God's Promise and Our Response," the pastoral letter by the United States bishops on war and peace, as the basis for his remarks.

Bishop Murphy said that his specific statement on the MX "is a stronger one" than

the footnoted reference in the pastoral, and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the conference of bishops. But the existence of the MX reference in the pastoral indicates that "the bishops have serious questions about the MX," Bishop Murphy said.

Calling the arms race "a supreme crisis," Bishop Murphy said that it is the bishops' "firm purpose to join with the interfaith community and leaders from science, labor, medicine and political life, in raising public awareness of this crisis."

The proposed MX missile, according to the bishop, does not fall under the provisional acceptance of deterrence put forth in the pastoral.

The pastoral accepts deterrence as "a long-term basis for peace." This acceptance rests on two provisions: that serious efforts at arms control are being made toward their elimination, and that there is a balance between the two super-powers in quantity and quality of weapons, the bishop said.

"The MX missile would fail the test of provisional acceptability," Bishop Murphy said.

The MX is a "destabilizing weapon," he said. "It is likely to be vulnerable to attack — yet it possesses a 'hard target kill' capability which threatens to make the other side vulnerable." Therefore, the MX "seems useful primarily as a first strike weapon," he said.

Besides first strike capability, the deployment of the MX upsets the balance be-

tween the superpowers and heightens the risk of nuclear war. "To term such a

weapon as 'peace-keeper' is a blasphemy," said Bishop Murphy.

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