

Msgr. Shannon

Continued from Page 9.

being met today. The non-violent movement would arrive at this conclusion because they believe that the message of the Gospel is essentially a message of non-violence.

Up until the time of Constantine, Christians read the Gospel as opposing all forms of violence. When, after Constantine, the Church became involved in affairs of state — where war was accepted as a practical necessity — Christians tried to minimize the ravages of war by developing the "just war" theory. The "just war" theory which was not Christian in origin but taken over from Greek and Roman philosophers, was in a Christian context never intended primarily to "justify" war, but rather to limit the damages that war could cause.

The pages of history are strewn with wars that have brought untold suffering and misery to countries, cities and towns — war that often were "justified" by both sides on the theory of the "just war." It has been left for our page of history to introduce a way of waging war that is "qualitatively different" from wars in past ages. The nuclear age has unleashed what can only be called a demonic power. It is now possible for a few persons to push buttons — either deliberately or, what is even more frightening, accidentally — and release destructive forces that could threaten the existence of the planet earth as we know it. We are in a position the human race has never been in before: we are able to destroy not lives only, but life itself.

As the American bishops point out, the possibility of nuclear holocaust reveals the meaning of sin in its most graphic dimensions. "Every sinful act is a confrontation of the creature and the Creator." For sin brings disorder into the good creation that God has given us. But never before have we had the capacity to destroy totally the order that the Creator has placed in the universe. The Genesis creation story tells how in the beginning God brought order out of chaos. For the first time in human history we possess a horrible instrument that could enable us to reverse the creative act and return our entire globe to the primal chaos out of which it emerged.

Human history since Aug. 6, 1945 has become so radically different that Arthur Koestler has suggested that we ought to modify our calendar and change it from A.D. to P.H. — post-Hiroshima. By such reckoning we would be in the 38th year of the Nuclear Age.

The American bishops refuse to yield to such pessimism. Though they agree that we live in a time fraught with the danger of global destruction, they refuse to call it a "new age," rather they speak of it as a "New Moment." This "New Moment," though demonic in its possibilities, can also be seen, in the bishops' words, as "a creative opportunity and a moral imperative" to muster public opinion and to direct public policy — in order to relegate war, as Pope John Paul has said, to the past of our history and in order to construct a true and stable peace.

There is only one "New Age" and that is the age of the Kingdom inaugurated by the Lord Jesus. The "Age" of the Kingdom is big enough to include even the nuclear age. The post-Hiroshima era belongs still in the year of our Lord (A.D.). For the Gospel message is one of unification and peace. It calls us to work against all the forces among us and within us that create alienation, that make for violence, that oppress people and rob them of their dignity as human persons.

Pope John Paul has said so clearly that we cannot be satisfied with "peace of a sort" — a peace that is based on weapons and the threat of terror. We have to seek genuine peace that is based on the values of the Gospel and the common human values of personal dignity and justice. We have to be convinced that arms' escalation — the production of more weapons of violence — cannot bring peace. For this reason the endorsement which the bishops give to a policy of deterrence is given reluctantly and conditionally. One of several conditions they lay down (conditions without which they would have to reject "deterrence") is the nuclear freeze; namely, immediate, bilateral, verifiable agreements to halt the testing, production and deployment of new nuclear weapons.

With regard to the nuclear freeze, it is necessary for us to realize that for many months preparations have been in process for the deployment of new American missiles (the Pershing II and cruise missile) in western Europe in December of this year.

With this grim prospect in view — of a significant escalation in nuclear arms — peace movements on both sides of the Atlantic are stepping up efforts to muster public opinion to prevent the missile deployment or at least to delay that deployment, while keeping up pressure on the superpowers to take the initiative toward breaking the current arms' reduction stalemate at Geneva.

These efforts will culminate this Fall with a series of internationally conducted non-violent demonstrations across western Europe, Canada, Japan and the United States. The call has been issued for local, peaceful, non-violent demonstrations during the period from October 21-24. It is hoped that hundreds of communities throughout the world will participate in these demonstrations against the deployment of the Pershing IIs and the cruise missiles in a way that will mobilize and dramatize public sentiment. We the peoples of the world do not want war. We do not want nuclear deterrence as a dubious security blanket. As President Eisenhower once said: "If governments do not soon make peace, they will have to get out of the way and let the people make it."

Such demonstrations should not simply be against something; they should be an effort to make us more conscious of the moral and spiritual values that are at stake in a world that has become increasingly more violent. Thomas Merton wrote in 1962 words that are as pertinent today as when he wrote them 21 years ago:

"Meditations on a dangerous book, the Bible, have convinced me that when the human race gets itself into a major crisis, it shows a strong tendency to abdicate moral responsibility and to commit sin on an enormous scale. This is the kind of situation we face now. Unless we realize the moral and spiritual roots of the problem, our best efforts to solve it

in a positive and human way are bound to be meaningless. Unless we develop a moral, spiritual and political wisdom that is proportionate to our technological skill, our skill will end us.

Wonder if it has not always or at least frequently in history been the task of women to call us to this wisdom. It is surely significant that in the Bible Wisdom, Holy Sophia, is always represented as feminine. Wisdom is the feminine side of God. Perhaps it is the feminine side of humanity, too.

Men run the Pentagon. Men make decisions in the White House and in the Kremlin (10 Downing Street is perhaps an exception, England's prime minister being Britain's answer to Mr. Higgins' song in MY FAIR LADY: "Why Can't a Woman Act More Like a Man?") But if men rule the Pentagon and the White House and the Kremlin, perhaps it may be said that women are more in touch with the true well-springs of life, more ready to soothe the hurts of a frightened humanity and give it courage again, more able to reconcile a broken world. Perhaps because women throughout history have experienced oppression and violence, they are in a better position to understand how to deal with them.

Must it not be seen as providential that in our day, when our world is faced as never before with the threat of extinction, women have achieved as never before a position where they are able to influence the course of history's events? And they will not be prevented from doing so. There can be no question that women have been in the forefront of the peace movement in recent years. In 1981 a group of women walked 125 miles from Cardiff in Wales to the American Air Force base at Greenham Common. They called themselves "Women for Life on Earth." Women from all over Britain are still demonstrating there for peace.

Inspired by the women at Greenham Common, peace groups of women have set up camps in other areas of Britain, in Japan, in Canada and in the United States. For some time there has been a women's peace camp outside the Boeing Cruise Missile Plant at Kent in the state of Washington.

Given the impetus for women's involvement in demonstrations for peace, it was inevitable that sooner or later women would come, as they have, to the Seneca Depot near Romulus. The Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice is not the isolated action of a few women who have other axes to grind. It is part of a concerted effort of women throughout the world to show their concern for the terrible nuclear mess that we are in and from which we need to extricate ourselves.

I have been to the Romulus Peace Encampment only once. The people I was able to speak with there seemed to be very serious about their commitment to the cause of peace. I am sure there are some there who came with other motives. Movements almost always attract a variety of people who are working out their own personal problems. I am sure the encampment has its share of such people.

But, in evaluating the over-all significance of the encampment, I think we have to be like Pope John when in 1962 he received the women for peace in Rome. He accepted the honesty of their basic goal. He did not ask whether they were believers or non-believers. He did not inquire into the life-styles they were living. The over-all issue that mattered to him was that they were struggling to come to grips with what is

surely the crucial moral problem of our day: the issue of war and peace.

In the context of women all over the world crusading for peace, it is appropriate that mention be made of her whom we call Queen of Peace. A recent letter to the Courier-Journal criticized the American bishops for ignoring in their pastoral letter the message of Our Lady of Fatima. This is an unwarranted criticism. The bishops, of course, did not mention Fatima by name. There is good reason for this: the task of the bishops is to base their teaching on the public revelation of the Church that has come down to us in scripture and in the Church's living tradition. It was not their business, therefore, to speak about private revelations — whether at Fatima or anywhere else.

But surely it can be said that the message of Fatima is very much in the bishops' pastoral. For the all of Fatima is not just a call to say the words of the rosary and reflect on the life of Jesus without in any way connecting it with the way we live our lives. Saying the rosary each day will not help to bring peace, simply because we recite words that will help toward peace only if we are striving to live, in the spirit of penance and on-going conversion, what we say in the rosary and what we meditate on in its mysteries.

When we reflect on the mysteries of the rosary, we are thinking of the Lord Jesus who became one of us and accepted our human condition (the Joyful Mysteries — and who in doing this was at his very birth the victim of oppression by the Roman Emperor. Reflecting on the rosary means uniting ourselves with the Lord Jesus who throughout His ministry met with opposition and persecution and finally with the ultimate violence: He was put to death (Sorrowful Mysteries). Yet, though He was victimized by oppression and violence, He did not respond in violence. He responded in love. And because love is stronger than violence, His Father vindicated Him and raised Him from the dead and gave the possibility of such resurrection to all who follow the Lord Jesus in love and overcome violence through the power of love (Glorious Mysteries). This is the message of Jesus' life. It is this message we reflect on when we recite the rosary.

If one thinks of the message of Fatima as simply reciting the rosary without any relation to the world condition in which we live and simply believing that the prayers of the rosary will of themselves produce peace without our working, as Jesus and Mary did, to overcome oppression and violence, then we demean that message. If, however, by the message of Fatima we mean reflecting on and living out the life of Jesus who overcame violence by love — then surely this is a message of supreme importance for us. And it is a message that is very much contained in the bishops' pastoral letter. For the pastoral calls us to penance and on-going conversion. It calls us to a non-violent love that alone can overcome violence.

The fact that women are everywhere leaders in the movement against violence and for peace forces all of us — men and women alike — to become more attuned to the feminine that is in each of us. For too long a time the feminine element in men has been suppressed, as the feminine in God has been ignored. Today we need to open ourselves to both. For technology cannot save us from nuclear holocaust. Holy Wisdom can. And Wisdom is feminine.

New Baby Coming? Course May Help

New parents are often anxious about the added responsibility that comes with a newborn baby. To alleviate this concern, the Red Cross has scheduled a five-session infant course beginning Sept. 13. It will meet at the Red Cross, 46 Prince St., from 7 to 9 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays, Sept. 13-27.

The course is geared toward first-time expectant parents in their third trimester, according to Michael Logan, director of the Red Cross Assistant Nursing and Health Services. The course will focus on questions about infant development, nutrition, handling and more.

"Participants don't have to be parents," Logan said.

"Grandparents who mind the children when the parents are out might find the course valuable as well."

Anyone wishing to register or needing further information should contact Red Cross registration at 275-

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