

'We Must Disarm Our Own Hearts'

(Following is the Courier-Journal text of Bishop Matthew H. Clark's address at the rally for peace at Sampson State Park, Oct. 22, 1983.)

I am very grateful for your invitation to be here to speak as a religious leader. The Church which I serve is striving mightily, I think, to be faithful to the call of Jesus Christ to peacemaking. It is an urgent call to examine a complex issue which challenges people of all faiths to examine our ways of thinking and living. It is a call, as you well know, that touches such deep chords in our hearts that it can divide before it unites. But we must heed this call — the stakes are too high in this danger-filled, thermonuclear age for us not to act deliberately and decisively for peace.

Last May, as I stood with our country's Catholic bishops when we approved our pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace," we concluded that the "peace of a sort" that plagues our times is not enough. We cannot rest while the inability of the United States and the Soviet Union to agree on arms controls menaces the lives of hundreds of millions of human beings with Pershing II and SS-20 missiles, with

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Trident submarines and Backfire bombers. We cannot sit by idly while \$600 billion is being spent worldwide this year on weapons; and the poor in our own country, but most especially in the third world, suffer from lack of food, shelter and medical care. As Pope Paul VI said, "Peace cannot be limited to a mere absence of war... No, peace is something built up day after day, in pursuit of an order intended by God, which implies a more perfect form of justice among men and women."

Today, we come together at this rally for this true peace. We are here as citizens of the United States calling on our government to cancel the scheduled deployment of Cruise and Pershing II missiles to Europe and freeze the nuclear arms race.

We are here because we have found in these last 38 years that security based on the possession of atomic weapons cannot bring us true peace. Only that peace founded on a positive commitment to the sacredness of all human life on this earth can bring true security. To establish this peace we must struggle against all that demeans the sanctity of human life, against all that coolly and dispassionately converts human beings into objects. This is a killing conversion which happens among us every day — every time racism, sexism, lack of care for the infirm, abortion, disdain for the poor or pornography occur. They all weaken our capacity to make peace because they depersonalize all they touch.

Just as some Catholics have disagreed with me and my brother bishops over our stand against the arms race, a position taken most fundamentally because of the reverence our faith accords to human life, some of you may disagree with the strong position we have taken and will continue to take against abortion. Still others disagree with our stand against capital punishment. Above all, however, whether the issue is the arms race, abortion or capital punishment, our reverence for life demands public policy which acknowledges and protects the sanctity of human life. Reverence for life is not the sole possession of the ideologies of the right or the left. And so, like the prophets of Israel, and like Jesus Christ, we in the churches



you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life then, that you and your descendants may live... (Deut. 30:15-19).

Today, I am here to say with you, let us choose life. And to say to you, while I call myself to account, that we all must unendingly

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seek to cleanse our own hearts, so that we might turn away from the gods of greed, and the gods of convenience that tempt us away from the God of life. These gods lead to racism, and sexism, objectification of the unborn, to materialism and militarism. These gods upset the order of creation by making things more important than people and by turning people into things. These gods must be cast aside. We must, in short, be open to an ongoing conversion.

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Such conversion is the bedrock of peacemaking. If we are to work for peace based on justice, love, and respect for human life, we must resist the unloving impulses in ourselves that belie our commitment to peace. We must disarm our own hearts. We must heed the exhortation of Jesus to remove the beam in our own eyes before seeking to remove the speck in the eye of the other. In facing those with whom we disagree, we would be well served to remember the words of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., "Those whom we would change, we must first love." Without this love, we will make enemies of sisters and brothers and alienate those whose commitment to peace may lead on paths different from ours here today. Without this love, we cannot transmit the power of the God of life. But with this love, we can convert hearts numbed by despair into hearts able to build and sustain communities and nations which reflect the beauty and promise of God's creation. And strong in this love, let us not speak against or demote those who serve in our military, or who work in our defense industry, or who live in this region, to any status short of being our respected brothers and sisters.

Gathered as we are today, in this Finger Lakes region of New York State, we cannot help but be moved by the beauty of God's creation. And yet, we cannot avoid the alarm caused by knowing that, in the midst of many areas of the earth such as this, missiles are set poised in silos, always ready to unleash destructive power upon the earth and its people; that it is to areas like this that urban survivors half-alive would flee in agony after a nuclear exchange, and that the order of creation we see and rejoice in today could be destroyed by this awful power:

In closing, let me call us again to a "moral about-face" and a firm stand against nuclear arms. As we say in the conclusion of our pastoral letter, and I quote:

'The whole world must summon the moral courage and technical means to say no to nuclear conflict; no to weapons of mass destruction; no to an arms race which robs the poor and the vulnerable; and no to the moral danger of the nuclear age which places before humankind indefensible choices of constant terror or surrender. Peacemaking is not an optional commitment. It is a requirement of our faith.'

I thank you so much for inviting me to speak here, and I thank you for your support. And I ask you please join me in seeking to be faithful to this requirement.

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and synagogues must lift our voices in an unending chorus that resounds with reverence for human life and echoes decisively through the halls of Congress.

Tomorrow, many of you will assemble at the Presbyterian Church in Waterloo. The theme of your prayer will be the powerful and beautiful challenge set forth in the 30th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy:

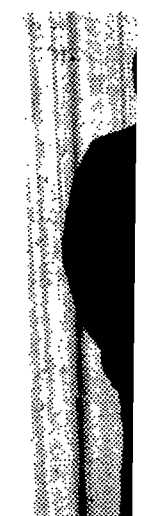
Here, then, I have today set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments of the Lord, your God, which I enjoin on you today; loving him, and walking in His ways, and keeping

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His commandments, statutes, and decrees, you will live and grow numerous... If, however, you turn away your hearts and will not listen, but are led astray and adore and serve other gods, I tell you now that you will certainly perish... I have set before



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