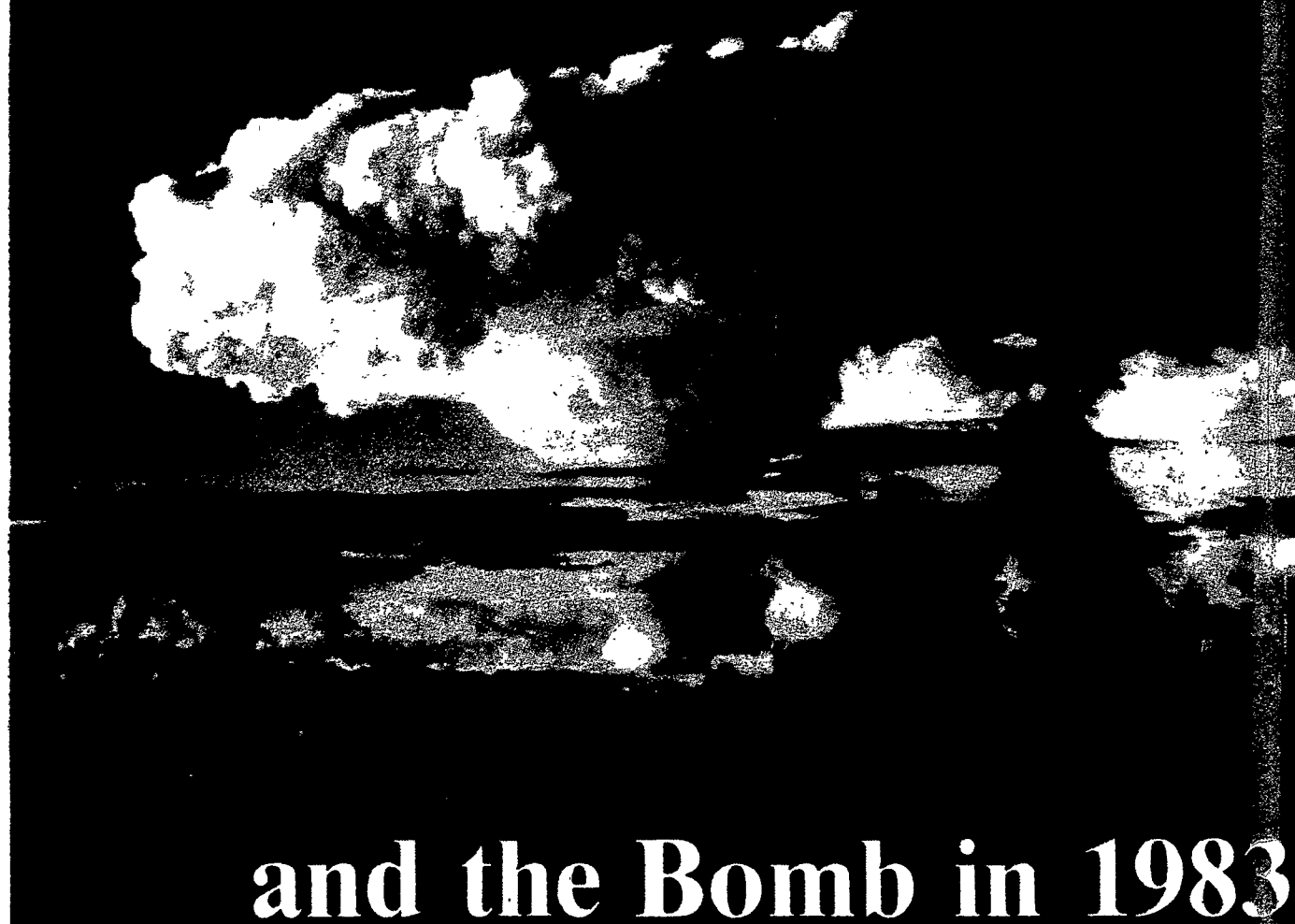


The Church



and the Bomb in 1983

U.S. Bishops Not Alone in Disarmament Stance

From Holland To Japan, Church Leaders Pressing For Arms Race End

By Jerry Filteau
NC News Service

One of the most significant Catholic news stories in 1983 was the church and the bomb -- not only in the United States, but in Western Europe.

It was the year the U.S. bishops issued their pastoral letter on nuclear deterrence, but statements on the subject also came from the Dutch, West German, Irish, British, Belgian, French and Japanese bishops.

Pope John Paul II spoke out on nuclear arms issues several times, and his secretary of state, Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, delivered a major speech on the topic during a visit to the United States. The head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, addressed the issue at length in an interview with a West German national news magazine.

Pope John Paul opened 1983 with a New Year's Day plea to world leaders "to work in common" for a "progressive reduction in armaments, nuclear or conventional." Disarmament cannot be "unilateral," he said, but must be done by "the powers which confront one another...in equal measure."

Two weeks later he addressed the same topic in his annual beginning-of-the-year meeting with the Vatican ambassadors of governments around the world. He urged governments to engage in disarmament negotiations, "forcing themselves to achieve, without delay, the maximum reduction."

Close on the heels of the papal pleas came a Jan. 18-19 meeting of Vatican, U.S. and European church representatives in Rome to discuss, behind closed doors, the controversial second draft of the U.S. pastoral, which had been released the previous October.

Although critics of the pastoral sought to portray the meeting as a high-powered Vatican-European effort to reverse its direction, confidential official reports on the meeting, which were leaked to the press in March, put it in a different light.

Those reports showed that the critiques by European churchmen and Vatican officials were essentially the same as criticisms offered by members of the U.S. hierarchy in discussing the draft two months earlier. In the main, these were aimed not at changing the basic directions of the document but at fine-tuning it and clarifying the difference between basic moral principles of Catholic teaching and the prudential application of those teachings to specific nuclear questions.

"The basic thrust of the document will remain intact. During the meeting, in fact, there was great support for that," Archbishop (now Cardinal) Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, chairman of the drafting committee, said after the Vatican meeting.

The third draft of the U.S. pastoral, released in early April, started another round of stormy headlines and national debate, comparable to those provoked the previous June and October with the distribution of the first two drafts of the letter.

Long before the May 2-3 Chicago meeting at which they finally voted on the pastoral, approving it by a 238-9 margin, the bishops had already achieved one of the chief aims of the pastoral: to make the moral dimensions of the nuclear

deterrence issue an integral part of the public debate on the subject.

Nor was the debate over the U.S. pastoral confined to the United States. In West Germany, where the bishops were at work on their own pastoral, successive drafts of the U.S. document were translated into German and widely distributed and debated. In France, when Father Gerard Defois, secretary general of the French Bishops' Conference, was quoted by a Paris daily to the effect that the January Vatican meeting had been a confrontation between U.S. and European bishops, it created a national stir. He wrote several articles and letters over the next month, repudiating the newspaper article as a misrepresentation of his views and praising the U.S. bishops for their "valuable" leadership and "courage" in addressing the issues.

The most substantive changes that the U.S. bishops made in the final document clearly strengthened their opposition to any nuclear policies or strategies that might allow for first use of nuclear weapons, massive nuclear retaliation to a nuclear attack, or the concept of "limited" nuclear war.

Meanwhile the West German bishops had finished the final touches on their own war and peace pastoral and released it April 27. Copies in English, translated by the German Bishops' Conference, became available in the United States in early May.

The West German bishops clearly took a different approach than their U.S. counterparts in many ways, most notably in their decision not to enter into an explicit moral debate over specific questions of nuclear policy or strategy. They also devoted more space and emphasis than the U.S. bishops did to the threat of Soviet domination and the political goals of nuclear deterrence, and they expressed greater skepticism about the total pacifist option as a choice for individuals.

In the face of the Soviet totalitarian threat, the West German hierarchy suggested a presumption in favor of the morality of the policies of free, democratic governments, while the U.S. bishops were clearly critical of specific policies currently in place, notably the inclusion of a nuclear first use option in U.S.-NATO "flexible response" defense policy.

But in fundamentals of moral evaluation of nuclear deterrence policy, the West German and U.S. pastorals were closely parallel. Both insisted that deterrence could be accepted only under strict moral conditions, among them that the only immediate goal could be preventing war, not waging it, that any "quest for (nuclear) superiority" was a morally unacceptable policy, and that nuclear deterrence policy must have as its final goal politically negotiated progressive disarmament.

Because they did not enter into detailed analysis of nuclear policy, the West German bishops' statement was only half the length of the 45,000-word U.S. document.

Another notable development in May was the appearance of a lengthy interview with German-born Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, by Der Spiegel, a West German national news magazine.

In the eight-page interview Cardinal Ratzinger defended the U.S. bishops' condemnation of the first use of nuclear weapons and said they were right in accepting only a temporary role of a first-use threat in defense policy "on the presupposition that it is made unnecessary as rapidly as possible."

The cardinal also articulated the Holy See's position in defending the right of bishops' conferences not only to reiterate general church teachings but to go beyond that and apply those teachings to concrete situations and conditions in their own country.

At the end of May, a long analysis of nuclear morality appeared in *Civiltà Cattolica*, a Rome-based Jesuit magazine

whose main editorials and articles are understood to reflect Vatican thinking.

The writer, Italian Jesuit Father Giuseppe Derosa, an editorialist for the magazine, agreed with the U.S. bishops' conclusions, quoted substantially from the U.S. pastoral, and said his analysis was "inspired" by that document.

In June the Dutch bishops added their views on nuclear deterrence by publishing their own pastoral letter. Although it was a far shorter letter, less than 10,000 words long, its spirit, thrust and major conclusions were virtually identical to those reached by the U.S. bishops. One of the few significant differences was the greater prominence the Dutch bishops gave to the potential role of the peace movement in creating the political and moral climate in the world for disarmament.

In July the Japanese and Irish bishops added their voices to the chorus of opposition to the arms race.

The Irish bishops called permanent reliance on nuclear deterrence "insane" and declared that current nuclear stockpiles "far exceed any rational estimate of what deterrence requires."

Citing the same "strict conditions" that the U.S., German and Dutch bishops had said must be met for a nuclear deterrence policy to be morally justifiable, the Irish hierarchy said that if elements of a nation's deterrence policy could not meet those criteria, the country would have a "strict moral obligation" to take steps, unilaterally if necessary, to change its policies.

The bishops of Japan, the only country to have suffered a nuclear attack, called for a halt to all further testing, deployment or production of nuclear weapons, the abolition of all existing nuclear weapons, and the establishment of nuclear-free zones in East Asia and other parts of the world.

The Canadian bishops, while not issuing a pastoral of their own, in July congratulated the U.S. bishops for issuing a statement that was "thoughtful, courageous and prophetic" and a "milestone in mankind's search for peace."

As deployment of U.S. nuclear tactical missiles in NATO countries of Western Europe approached, the Belgian bishops in July defended the deployment of those missiles as a legitimate option if disarmament talks failed, but they urged "new and repeated initiatives...so that the present disarmament talks succeed" and make deployment unnecessary.

The Catholic bishops of Scotland that same month joined leaders of other churches in their country to ask the British government to engage in "serious debate" over the planned deployment of "a whole new generation of nuclear arms" in Great Britain.

As the first Euromissiles began to arrive in Great Britain in November, the bishops of England and Wales issued a statement accepting the principle of nuclear deterrence as an interim policy on the way toward disarmament, but sharply questioning the seriousness of the government's commitment to disarmament in light of the decision to deploy the missiles.

The French bishops were the only ones to strike a significantly different note in the growing tide of anti-nuclear statements by Catholic bishops.

In a statement approved by a nearly unanimous vote in November, the French bishops agreed with others that nuclear deterrence must be "a temporary response, to halt a limited situation which we must get out of as soon as possible," but the major thrust of their document was to defend the legitimacy of nuclear deterrence "under current circumstances."

While France is one of the world's five major nuclear powers, it is not a member of the NATO alliance. Its independent nuclear force is far inferior to that of the Soviet Union and could only be used for defensive purposes as a deterrent against superior Soviet power -- a fact that Cardinal Ratzinger had taken pains to point out when he was interviewed by Der Spiegel six months earlier.

The French statement focused on the threat of totalitarian domination and warned that signs of weakness or capitulation by the West could provoke the very aggression that nuclear deterrence is designed to prevent. Citing Soviet domination as the alternative, they called the French nuclear deterrent the lesser evil, "without pretending that this begets a good."

In the course of 1983 Pope John Paul II made no major analytical statements about the morality of nuclear deterrence but spoke on a number of occasions about the dangers of arms race and about the incentive that "the frightening specter of nuclear holocaust" should give to peace efforts.

In October the pope wrote to U.S. President Reagan and Soviet President Yuri Andropov urging continuation of arms reduction negotiations. In November, when the Soviet Union broke off negotiations on medium-range negotiations, Cardinal Casaroli announced the Holy See's readiness "to make a mediation attempt to encourage dialogue between the superpowers in favor of peace."

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