



## When people disagree

By Joe Michael Feist  
NC News Service

When it was published in May 1983, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response" generated intense debate in church and in society. The U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace in the nuclear age was studied and discussed, praised and criticized.

It is interesting to note that the bishops invited dialogue on their letter. They called the letter "a first step toward a message of peace and hope."

In their letter, the bishops pointed to some universal moral principles. Then they applied those principles to specific situations, acknowledging that not all people of good will would reach the same specific conclusions they had reached.

For example, all would agree that war is evil and that a conscious effort must be made to work for peace. Those are general principles. There is room for discussion, however, on ways to avoid war.

Father J. Bryan Hehir offered this example: "There is room, as the bishops acknowledged, for a vigorous debate about the 'no-first-use' (of nuclear weapons) proposal of the pastoral; there is no alternative to the prohibition against the direct killing of civilians in a strategy of deterrence."

Father Hehir gave the commencement address this year at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He is secretary of the U.S. Catholic Conference Department of Social Development and World Peace.

What has emerged in the war and peace pastoral, and what continues to be discussed today, is the question of pluralism in the church — a variety of views on specific social issues.

"On some complex social questions, the church expects a certain diversity of views even though all hold the same universal moral principles," the U.S. bishops said in their pastoral.

"There is a framework of moral principles which constitute

the Catholic social vision; within this framework pluralism can, should and will persist," said Father Hehir. In the Catholic tradition, he continued, such "pluralism is not anarchy; it has content, limits and rules of discourse which produce a structured pluralism. The meaning of structured pluralism is being worked out in theory and practice in the postconciliar church."

Father Hehir turned to several areas of social concern for examples of what he meant.

—Labor and management: There can be differing views on the roles of labor and management. But, said Father Hehir, there can be no disagreement on the basic right of employees to form unions.

—Government's role: The size and style of the state's role in society can be debated. But "the principle that the state has a positive, active role to play, especially in defense of the poor, is beyond question in Catholic teaching," the priest stated.

Does this mean that the statements and pastoral letters of the bishops can be casually dismissed when they touch on specific points of public concern? In their peace pastoral, the U.S. bishops responded this way: "The moral judgments that we make in specific cases, while not binding in conscience, are to be given serious attention and consideration by Catholics as they determine whether their moral judgments are consistent with the Gospel."

There is little doubt that in the future the world's bishops will continue to issue statements on matters of public policy. Discussion and debate will continue to be heard.

Jesuit Father Joseph O'Hare, president of Fordham University in New York, has urged that a "Catholic style" mark this debate. That style, he said, should entail civility and a willingness to listen to opposing viewpoints.

(Feist is associate editor of Faith Today.)

## Transformation, yes.

By Father John Castelot  
NC News Service

Over and over again in the beginning of Genesis we hear the refrain: "God saw how good it was." At the end of the sixth day of creation, "God looked on everything he had made and he found it very good."

What is the message in this? Clearly it was the basic truth that the universe is good, indeed precious. The universe is God's handiwork. It is a gift to treasure and cherish.

In the modern age of space exploration, when we confront the overwhelming magnitude of the solar system, we react instinctively as the psalmist did. "When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you set in place

What is man that you should be mindful of him, or the son of

man that you should care for him?"

He continues: "You have made him little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet" (Psalm 8:4-8).

God entrusted this colossal yet delicate and finely tuned system to our care. He expects us not to exploit it with callous insensitivity, certainly not to vandalize and brutalize it. Instead, we are to use the universe constructively, to cherish and love it.

All of creation has been given to us as a sacred trust, for God has great plans for it. He has not revealed in detail just how he intends to bring those plans to fulfillment, but one thing seems certain. God plans to bring the universe to a glorious fulfillment involving a stunning transforma-

## Random reflection

By Ivan Kauffman  
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Have your feelings about nuclear weapons changed during the past year because of the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace?

That's the question I asked members of my parish recently, approximately one year after the bishops issued their letter examining many questions of a nuclear age and encouraging the people of the church to work for peace. Here are some answers I heard.

"It's raised consciousness on the issue," said a businessman who served in combat in World War II. "There is a supreme moral issue here, whether these weapons can ever be used because of the tremendous destructive power they have."

"It's all pretty scary," said one woman. "I've thought about it more because of the bishops' letter," she said, "but in a way I feel more helpless. I used to picket and march during the 1960s, but I don't know if it

does any good."

"My main concern is with human error," the parish secretary said. "There's too much chance of human breakdown. I'm from a military family — we're the ones who get killed if there's a war."

Her husband is a real-estate investor who once worked at the Pentagon. "I'm really stymied," he said. "We're spending enormous amounts of money we could spend somewhere else." But he indicated, "I'm afraid it's a necessary evil." He added that he doesn't think the Russians can be trusted.

"It was what I was feeling but couldn't put into words," a psychiatric nurse and mother said of the bishops' pastoral letter. "The symbolism of it was what mattered to me, that the church was willing to get involved. It made me very proud."

"I don't think men should ever have come to this place where they can just push a button and blow up everything," said an older woman with emotion.

A young mother active in the