

# Policy adviser examines complexity of war

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — If the Persian Gulf War was fought principally to stop aggression, it may have passed the test for what constitutes a just war, according to Father J. Bryan Hehir, counselor for social policy to the United States Catholic Conference.

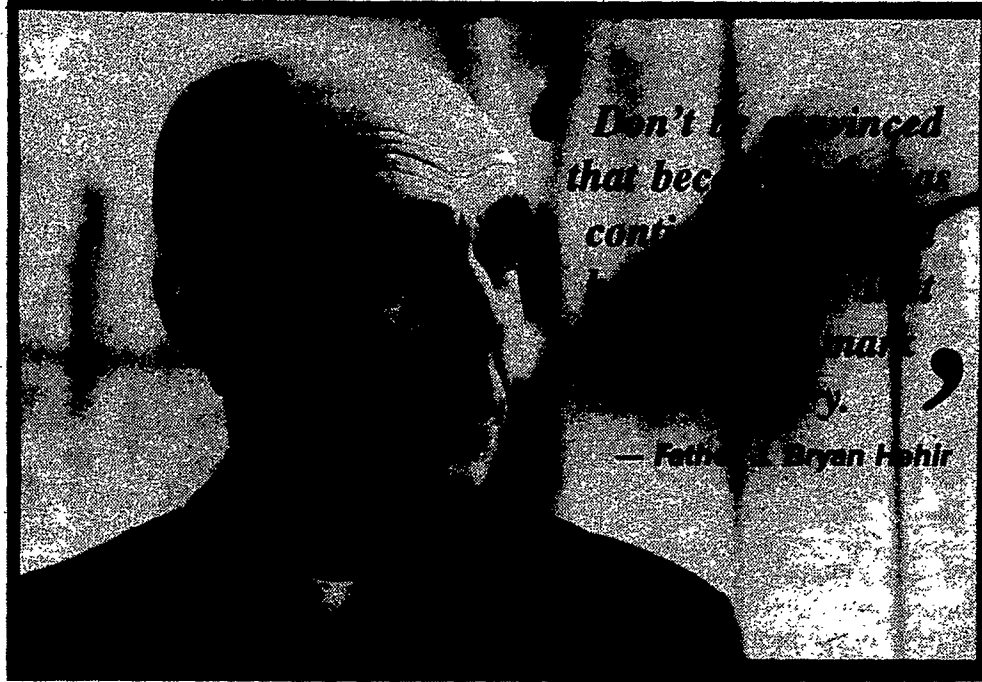
Father Hehir made that observation during a question-and-answer session following his presentation to St. Mary's Downtown Community Forum, Wednesday afternoon, May 29. His topic for the session was the role of religion in politics.

Following a luncheon at Rochester's Gateway Plaza Holiday Inn, the priest told his audience of approximately 50 people that making moral assessments of the Gulf war is a complex task — a complexity that played itself out in a public arena in which various religious leaders expressed support of, opposition to, and indecision about the war.

"Religious voices were very divided," Father Hehir noted, adding that before the war broke out, religious leaders were largely unanimous in their support of a search for alternatives to fighting.

If the war was fought over oil or to stop proliferation of nuclear weapons, the U.S.-led coalition may have fought the Iraqis for "much less solid reasons," than stopping aggression, Father Hehir added.

"What does religion teach us about war?" Father Hehir asked rhetorically.



The priest then answered his own question by citing two commands of Jesus: "Turn the other cheek" and "Go the extra mile." Christ's exhortation that his followers help carry the burdens of occupying Roman soldiers.

On the other hand, Father Hehir noted St. Augustine's argument that "in a world marked by sin ... war is the product of a sinful world, and the remedy for a sinful world." War will remain in the world as long as people want to dominate others,

which almost inevitably results in people violently resisting such domination, he commented.

But religious people should not despair that war will forever rage on the earth, the priest said.

"Don't be convinced that because war has continually marked human history that it will always mark human history," Father Hehir said, citing the abolition of U.S. slavery as an example of a centuries-old institution toppled by the weight of moral outrage. Sounding a cautionary note that abolishing war would not be easy, he noted, however, that "(slavery) was eliminated at the cost of war."

Today's world is glowing with examples of seemingly improbable change coming about — from the breakup of the Soviet Union to the reunification of Germany, the priest said. The radical breakdown of the oppressive communist regimes in Europe was one of the subjects covered in the recent papal encyclical *Centesimus Annus* — "The Hundredth Year" — Father Hehir pointed out to his audience.

Eastern Europe, in particular, provides pointed examples of how a peoples' faith can overcome seemingly invincible institutions, Father Hehir remarked. Commentators who tie Marxism's downfall to its failure to provide economic wealth to its people only skim the surface of what really happened in Eastern Europe, the priest said.

"You can't understand Marxism as a failed economic system," he said. "Marxism failed to understand the meaning of the

human person, because (Marxists) failed to have a vision of God."

Citing scholarly studies of revolutions in the former communist lands, Father Hehir concluded, "You can overthrow vast amounts of power without going to war." The reason for such success is that these revolutions — most notably, the overthrow of the communist regime in Poland — were shaped in large part by the revolutionaries' religious faith, Father Hehir said. Indeed, Pope John Paul II's early-1980s visit to Poland helped to ignite that nation's dramatic change, he argued.

To ignore the role of religion in world politics is to ignore a key actor on today's global stage, he emphasized.

"States are no longer the key actors in the world," Father Hehir asserted, explaining that such "transnational actors" as multi-national corporations and even religious orders are shaping the world today. Just as religious faith shaped political change in Eastern Europe, a people's belief in God has undergirded revolution, strife and debate in Latin America and the Middle East throughout the last 10-12 years.

He buttressed his contentions by observing that U.S. policy makers erred in the late 1970s when they overlooked the Iranians' desire to support the Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution against the Shah of Iran.

"People listened to Khomeini on tape recorders," Father Hehir said, showing the lengths to which a suppressed people will go to hear religious leader in whom they believe.

People turn to religion, Father Hehir said, "to resist torture, to keep alive hope in the midst of grinding poverty ... to hope for change."

As for U.S. citizens hoping to push their government to work for peace, Father Hehir asserted that it is the responsibility of ordinary citizens to voice their opinions. He recalled that an adviser to the late President Lyndon Johnson said the president dismissed many vehement protests of the Vietnam War because he thought the protesters didn't represent the country's mainstream.

"Johnson would be moved the day the demonstrations moved from Harvard, Princeton and Yale to Appalachia and ... (the Midwest) because that's where he thinks most of the people in the country live," Father Hehir recalled the adviser saying.

## Paper wins 10 press awards

The *Catholic Courier* won a total of 10 journalism awards in recent competitions sponsored by the Catholic Press Association and New York Press Association.

Presented Friday, May 22, during the CPA's annual convention in Tempe, Arizona, the Catholic press awards honored excellence in national and diocesan Catholic newspapers, magazines, books and newsletters during the year 1990.

Staff writer Barbara Ann Homick took first-place honors in the Best Investigative Reporting category for her article "Adoption of minority children sparks debate." Judges cited the story's "impressive" number of sources, calling it "timely, well researched and well written."

*Courier* photographer Babette G. Augustin received a third-place award in the Best Photo Story category for her "compelling" photos of Deacon Edward Sergeant's ministry to developmentally disabled adults.

The *Courier* received third-place recognition for Best Use of Color in a Special Section for the "Wanted" poster cover to its August, 1990, education supplement.

That supplement also received an honorable mention in the category Best Regular

Special Section.

Earlier this spring, the New York Press Association presented its Better Newspaper Contest awards during the association's convention in Tarrytown, N.Y.

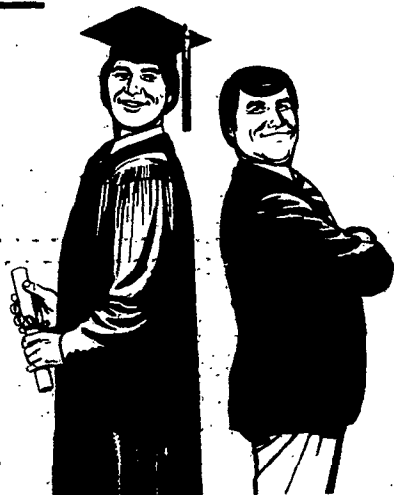
For the third time in the last five years, the NYPA again recognized the *Catholic Courier* as having the best overall photography of all weekly newspapers in New York state by presenting it with a first-place award for Photographic Excellence.

Observing that "you feel like you're the umpire," judges gave Augustin's June 7 picture of Bishop Kearney baseball a second-place award for Best Sports Action Photo. Augustin also took a third-place certificate for Best Pictorial Photo.

Staff writer Lee Strong claimed third-place honors in Best Sports Feature for his Aug. 16 profile of runner Beth Haag. Judges termed the story "an insightful piece on the up-and-down career of an Olympic caliber runner — and what is even more important to her than running."

The *Courier's* award tally was rounded out by two honorable mentions. One went to Homick in the "Rookie" Reporter of the Year category; the other was for Best Use of Color.

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