

DIOCESAN NEWS

Author: U. S. helped persecute Catholics overseas

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Throughout the 1980s, the United States and its Latin American allies conducted a war against the Catholic Church whenever and wherever the church decided to aid the poor, according to Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, author, university teacher and an outspoken critic of U.S. foreign policy.

"The fact that our hands were deeply involved in the bloodying of the progressive church is without question," he said.

Nelson-Pallmeyer made this statement during a question/answer session after his speech Jan. 18 at Nazareth College's Otto Shults Center Forum.

The speech was sponsored by Upstate N.Y. Pax Christi, Pax Christi Rochester, the campus ministries of Nazareth and St. John Fisher College, and St. Bernard's Institute in Rochester.

Titled "Brave New World Order: U.S. Foreign Policy and its Domestic Implications," Nelson-Pallmeyer's far-ranging speech was named for his most recent book. The speaker teaches about foreign policy, peace studies, theology and hunger issues at a number of colleges, including St. Thomas College in Minnesota. He has also written *Hunger for Justice: the Politics of Food and Faith*, and *War Against the Poor*. He lived in Nicaragua from 1984 to 1986.

In his Nazareth speech, the author said that under President Ronald Reagan the United States classified Catholic Church workers, religious and clergy in such countries as El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua as being in the same league as communist enemies of this country.

The church earned the disdain of U.S. foreign-policy makers when it began, in the late 1960s, to side with Latin America's poor against the rich elites who ruled much of the region, he noted. The result meant that the United States directly aided and trained armies — and the illegal death squads they often spawned — throughout the region in a war of repression against church members who worked with the poor, he said.

To support his contentions, Nelson-Pallmeyer quoted from a letter the Latin American Council of Churches produced after six Jesuit priests were killed in November 1989 in El Salvador:

"How long will the Christians and people of the United States have to contemplate the incongruity of its government ...

as it supports with over a million dollars a day another government that represses, kills bishops, religious workers, children, men and women, violates human rights, closes itself to dialogue and obstructs the pastoral task of the churches?"

Despite characterizing itself as a defender of democracy, and the Soviet Union as an "evil empire," the United States — like the Soviets — actually crushed democratic movements and overthrew constitutionally elected governments throughout the Cold War, he said, citing U.S.-backed dictatorships in Guatemala, Ethiopia and several other nations as examples.

"Despite our professed commitment to democracy here and elsewhere, U.S. foreign policy in the post-war period — with a few exceptions — was guided not by democracy but by a search for stability," he said.

Stability, according to Nelson-Pallmeyer, generally meant a world filled with

docile poor people repressed by governments that provided a good economic climate for U.S. investors.

Many Third World nations were — and still are — saddled with tremendous foreign debt, he noted. Their governments tailor their social and economic policies to meet the payback requirements of such lending institutions as the International Monetary Fund, rather than spend funds on their own citizens, he said.

Ironically, Nelson-Pallmeyer also forecast social and economic doom in the country he claimed was behind so much of the Third World's misery: the United States.

Due to the United States' own growing fiscal problems — caused, in part, by excessive military outlays during the Cold War — its middle and lower classes are already being asked to expect a decrease in government services, and a decline in the number of high-paying jobs because of the competitiveness fostered

by the "global market economy," he said.

But the global market economy is nothing more than a code phrase for concentrating capital in the hands of a minority that the rest of the planet will serve, he argued.

To illustrate his point, he recalled a conversation he had with Nicaraguans who had returned to their nation following the electoral ouster of the left-leaning Sandinista Party in 1990.

The generally wealthy group of people wondered aloud at how the social and geographical barriers between rich and poor had broken down in their native land while they were exiled in the United States.

"They were asking 'How do we get rid of the poor?'" Nelson-Pallmeyer said. "Not, 'How do we get rid of poverty,' but 'How do we get rid of the poor.'"

"I would suggest to you," he added, "that in the hidden heart of the global economy, that is the question."



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Follow the leader

Bill Crouse (far right), and Kerwin Dowdy from the Seneca Nation lead city and suburban school children in a traditional Indian dance Jan. 18 at the University of Rochester. Crouse and Dowdy were on hand for the Martin Luther King School Day program, designed to bring students together to learn about peace in the tradition of an Iroquois "Peacemaker" story told by Crouse and according to the teachings of Martin Luther King Jr.

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