

OPINIONS

Catholic Courier

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Letters Policy

The *Catholic Courier* wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters for publication based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the letter writers' opinions.

Letters must not exceed 500 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

Mail letters to: *Catholic Courier*, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for purposes of verification.

Questions root of Gospel pacifism

To the editors:

I have read Father Jim Hewes' letter to the editor (Sept. 27: "Saint developed theory to limit war") regarding the Just War Theory and feel compelled to respond. I defer to his spirituality, as a "religious," his scholarship and his idealism as a Christian. As a graduate student in Theology, Roman Catholic tradition, groping my way towards graduation I feel duty-bound to offer another perspective — whether right or wrong. I invite further comment.

We both agree, Father, that Jesus never taught, hinted at nor condoned violence as a response to aggression. In fact he is the perfect paradigm of non-violence, i.e., obedience unto death, humble, meek, ready to make peace and to suffer for the sake of righteousness etc. The many New Testament passages which we both could quote referring to "love of one's enemies, turning the other cheek, not resisting an evil-doer" etc. must be understood in the context, historical period, community setting in which they were uttered and the audience for whom they were intended. We are forced to acknowledge that the Gospels were written at a time when Christians were suffering persecution at the hands of mobs — Jewish and Gentile — as well as state and religious authorities, Jew and Roman. No wonder the people are exhorted to follow Christ with courage and patient endurance. Mark and Matthew know that resistance would be futile!

You would agree, wouldn't you, that the "portraits" of Jesus presented in the Gospel traditions were crafted according to the needs of the community and the agenda of the evangelists? Of course the New Testament lacks a Just War Theory — but it doesn't say that one must never defend him/herself! Yes, Jesus prohibits one of his disciples from defending him when the crowds come to take him prisoner, cau-



tioning that one who "takes the sword shall perish by the sword" (Mt 26:52) but reading further you hear him ask, "How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled?" ... (Each evangelists' account) is followed by Jesus' concern that Scripture be fulfilled, i.e., Mark 14:49 "But let the Scriptures be fulfilled," John 18:11 "Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?" May not this suggest that Jesus acquiesces because of his awareness that his mission is paramount and Scripture needs fulfillment. I argue that Jesus' response is appropriate for that time and that need. This does not give one license to turn narrative into law!

You wrote that St. Augustine never said that war could be justified. In my research I discovered that Augustine believed that perfection on earth was impossible and that war and conflict were an inevitable part of life. He did justify war — as a last resort — if its purpose was just and peace was the ideal to be restored. Father, I abhor war and the loss of any and all lives. However, I am getting very upset with all the exhortations telling us what we as Christians

must not do. Would someone please find me a person with the courage to tell us what we should do! The closest I came to this was when my Pastor, in a very moving homily, spoke of his Christian struggle with recent events and a right response. He ended with, "But God bless the young men and women who may be called from their homes and their homelands to once again defend our freedoms — and God Bless America!"

Father I agree that violence is not in accord with Biblical teachings but if we want to live the text then New Testament principles must be adapted to the contemporary life situation. Imposing early Christian values on our world today is, in my opinion, historically naive. I would like to conclude with the words found in the Vatican document *Gaudium et Spes*: "All those who enter the military service in loyalty to their country shall look upon themselves as the custodians of the security and freedom of their fellow countrymen; they are contributing to the maintenance of peace."

Evelyn Dodd
Wind Mill Road, Pittsford

Interviewee calls article 'simplistic analysis'

To the editors:

The focus of the (Oct. 4 cover) article "How do we respond" offered a simplistic analysis of the non-violent response to the Sept. 11 tragedy. Focusing the discussion on the morality of response without a serious reflection on causes of the crisis, the United States and the church are avoiding rather than addressing the crisis.

The article opened with a story I shared at Corpus Christi Parish about a young boy named Ahmed from Iraq who wanted to bomb America. The article quickly moved

toward the appropriateness of the just-war theory without a serious reflection on the question of our own violence. As a church that begins every liturgy with a reflection on our own sinfulness, this question is one that we must be willing to explore. It must be the beginning of our response.

I believe there is a psychological reason that the U.S. has focused on "fundamentalist" Muslim faith as the cause of this crisis. Believing that the enemy is "crazy" keeps us from needing to deal with their rationale, with the very fact that they may

have reason for their violence just as we feel we have reason for our "just" violence. Even if their reaction is murderous and violent, it was thought through with tremendous clarity and conviction. As the article stated, bin Laden is seeking justice for U.S. aggression toward Iraq and other Arab countries.

What about Ahmed? This young boy had his home and village bombed by the U.S. for 10 years. Our planes have killed his family. He wants to retaliate. He wants to bomb us. He puts faith in justified violence. Why do they hate us? Because of our Democracy and freedom? No, because our bombs destroy their families. After being bombed for 10 years, would Ahmed's violence be justified toward us? The just war theory fails us. Has our violence primarily affected a civilian population? Yes. Has our violence inflicted a "lasting grave and certain danger" in his life? Yes. Has our violence been proven ineffective? Yes. Hussein is still there. Ahmed, in applying the just war theory, may be able to think his violence is justified.

The point is not to suggest that his violence is justified. Certainly it is not. Non-violence is not naive. It simply sees that violence begets itself. The only successful conclusion is to cease the historical path of violent human relationships. Violence is a lack of patience and faith in the ways of Christ. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Turn the other cheek." Is Christ so naive? No, he knew how to redeem human society. We must reflect on the causes of Sept. 11 and see why it is that Christ never advocated for a just war. Our Christian Catholic response must be Eucharistic, beginning with penitence, reflecting on the words of Christ in his Gospel and making those words flesh and blood.

John Doughty
South Goodman Street, Rochester

Who did priest count as Christian?

To the editors:

Father James Hewes' recent letter about Christians being "arguably the single largest destroyer of life in wars in the last 1700 years" is a statement that strains the credulity of anyone who has the most rudimentary knowledge of history.

Perhaps the confusion lies in Father Hewes' definition of the word "Christian." How about Genghis Khan and the millions he slaughtered in his conquest of Asia? Or, what about Joseph Stalin's murderous use of power over millions of his dead comrades, or Nikita Khrushchev's butchery of

3 million in the Ukraine? Hopefully, they would not fit into the good Father's definition. Would Pol Pot and the millions he systematically destroyed over the years in Southeast Asia count? Not to mention the Nazis' extermination of 9 million Jews.

Maybe Father Hewes' exuberance to forswear fighting for his country has clouded his objectivity. Taking his premise to its logical conclusion where Adolf Hitler was concerned, we would all today either be speaking German or be a bar of soap.

Edward Maloney
Shamrock Drive, Rochester

Prayer is most powerful response to terrorism

To the editors:

Right now, one of the most powerful and best ways to deal with our national emergency is to pray. Jesus tells us that wherever two or more are gathered in His name, He is there in our midst. I propose that each of our small Christian Groups in every parish in our diocese adopt a terrorist cell, perhaps that cell that is closest to its goal of death and destruction.

By holding our adopted cell in prayer,

we can effect profound changes in ourselves and in those for whom we pray, since it is impossible to harbor negativity when we pray. Our prayer should be not only that Jesus change the hearts and minds of our cell, but that He also change our hearts and minds that we be one in Him.

With God's grace, we have nothing to lose and so much to gain.

Kathleen Comella
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