

COLUMNISTS

Pacifism an unfit response to this war

There are three standard arguments against those who hold that some wars are just: "violence begets violence," "violence begets more violence" and "violence begets only violence." These arguments have been analyzed and critiqued in a thoughtful column by Peter Steinfeld in *The New York Times* ("Beliefs," 10/27/01).

The first argument — violence begets violence — is a matter of common sense. As such, it does not advance the discussion one inch. No one denies that violence begets violence. There is always some price to pay.

The second — violence begets "more" violence — is ambiguous. How can one say that with certainty? "After all," Steinfeld asks, "did World War I itself beget World War II, or was it the Treaty of Versailles or the Great Depression or German political culture or a great many other things, all in hard-to-determine proportions?"

The third — violence begets "only" violence — is simply false. Violence begets many things, including sometimes even justice. The Civil War begot the end of slavery, although not racial inequality. World War II begot the end of Nazi genocide, but also gave us the Iron Curtain.

But that's not the end of it, Steinfeld suggests. Pacifists themselves are challenged by a fourth argument, namely, that "non-



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

violence sometimes begets violence."

It has been pointed out, for example, that if the democratic nations of Europe and North America had resisted Hitler's serial aggressions with military force in the 1930s, the Second World War and the Holocaust might never have happened.

The president of Duke University, Nan Keohane, has made a parallel case with regard to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11: "We are currently in a situation where violence indeed begets violence, but in a different way: if the violence goes unchecked, it begets yet more violence from those who originally launched it."

Nevertheless, many Christians seem to take it for granted that the true follower of Christ, who once described himself as meek and humble of heart and who rebuked his chief apostle, Peter, for drawing

a sword against those who came to arrest him, must always reject the use of military force, even in the cause of justice and in the defense of the innocent.

The pacifist insists that the only effective — and morally legitimate — weapon against unjust aggression is nonviolent resistance, which was the way of Gandhi and of Martin Luther King Jr.

The problem with nonviolent resistance is that it can work only against those who have moral limits to their behavior. Whatever the failings of the British in colonial India, there were limits to how far they would go to crush Gandhi's movement.

Such was the case with the 1960s civil rights movement. Not even racist state officials and local police forces in the South would have dared to switch from high-powered hoses and cattle prods to live bullets to combat the marches and the sit-ins.

Until now, Adolf Hitler has been the principal reason why significant numbers of Christians have not embraced pacifism as a one-size-fits-all response to acts of violence and aggression. If ever there was a just war, it was the war against Hitler.

The latest wave of terrorism — planned, funded and executed by forces in the Middle East associated with Islamic fundamentalism — descends to the same depths of utter immorality to which Hitler and

the Nazis descended. Hitler also deliberately targeted innocent noncombatants for death. Six million Jews and thousands of non-Jewish civilians were murdered upon his command. Not one of the victims had the military wherewithal to resist, even if they chose to do so. They were, in the biblical sense, lambs led to the slaughter.

There were conscientious objectors even during the Second World War, and no one should challenge their moral sincerity. But they were a tiny minority with no impact on national policy, and they accepted and rendered alternative forms of service to their country.

In situations of moral ambiguity or worse (as with the Vietnam War), pacifism and selective conscientious objection can be prophetic acts that challenge the conventional moral assumptions of governments and the general citizenry alike.

But in situations like those posed by Hitler and today's terrorists, pacifism and the way of absolute nonviolence may be moral luxuries in which only the few can indulge. The many have not only the right but the duty to defend themselves.

The last time anyone looked that was still the official teaching of the church.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Renew allegiance to Christ the King

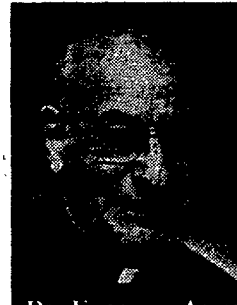
34th or Last Sunday of the Year, Christ the King (November 25): (R3) Luke 23:35-43; (R1) 2 Samuel 5:1-3; (R2) Colossians 1:12-20.

David Johnson was one of America's Olympic decathletes during the 1992 Olympics. Growing up, David was known for his drinking and wild, destructive behavior. He used to get kicks out of stealing pizza trucks that were carrying beer. Then just before he entered college, David found Christ. Christ changed his whole life: Johnson's Olympic coach claims that David, after his conversion, dedicated all his talents to God and that this was the motivation behind his decathlon success.

David is one of millions of persons who have been delivered from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of light through faith in Christ. That's the first thing St. Paul tells us about Christ: "He delivers us from the power of darkness and brings us into the kingdom of light."

The second thing Paul tells us about Christ is that "He is the image of the invisible God." "In him everything in heaven and on earth was created... through him and for him." In other words Paul is telling us that Jesus is God-made-man.

When a negligent landlord did not clean up his broken-down apartment hous-



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

ing, he was sentenced to live in one of them while some of those who had lived in the slums were able to occupy his house. According to *Newsweek*, the judge believed this was the only way the owner could be persuaded to make the necessary repairs.

An interesting story, but it pales in comparison with the Incarnation. God humbled himself and took the form of a servant to save us. He walked where we walked, lived as we live, to raise us up to become children of God.

We live in a God-invaded world, which says we are vitally important in the whole scheme of creation. God's Son became one of us and died for us, which ought to tell us how we matter in the eyes of God!

One final thing Paul says is that Christ is "the head of the body, the Church."

A professional organist was asked to play for a wedding. Unfamiliar with the church's organ, she went to the church to practice. She discovered a small keyboard that slid out from under the two regular keyboards. She tapped out some bars of children songs but heard no organ music. Then the janitor came running into the church, shouting, "Who's playing 'Three Blind Mice' on the church steeple bells?" Unwittingly, she had been playing on the carillon for all the community to hear.

Are bells all some of us hear at church? What an impact all the people who come to church would have on the community if they truly realized that Christ is in the church; if all of us truly realized that it is Jesus we come to visit, to adore, and to receive at church. When we truly see Christ as the heart of the church, as our head, then our life will have more purpose, more meaning and more beauty.

On the beautiful feast of Christ the King, why not renew our allegiance to Christ, why not accept him as the one who delivers us from darkness into the light, the one who is the image of the invisible God, the one who is the head of the church — the Lord and King of our lives!

A playwright looked at the hundreds of pages in the New York City telephone di-

rectory. "Not much of a plot, but what a cast," he said. What a cast the church community has and what it could do if all her children got motivated and acted!

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

- Monday, November 26**
Daniel 1:1-6, 8-20; (Ps)
Daniel 3:52-56; Luke 21:1-4
- Tuesday, November 27**
Daniel 2:31-45; (Ps) Daniel 3:57-61;
Luke 21:5-11
- Wednesday, November 28**
Daniel 5:1-6, 13-14, 16-17, 23-28;
(Ps) Daniel 3:62-67; Luke 21:12-19
- Thursday, November 29**
Daniel 6:12-28; (Ps)
Daniel 3:68-74; Luke 21:20-28
- Friday, November 30**
Romans 10:9-18; Psalms 19:2-5;
Matthew 4:18-22
- Saturday, December 1**
Daniel 7:15-27; (Ps)
Daniel 3:82-87; Luke 21:34-36

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