

COLUMNISTS

Alternative model to war needs to be determined

Last week I taught a short course on morality and warfare. As participants introduced themselves before we got going, it became clear that the group included several pacifists committed to nonviolence, along with others who espoused the just war theory. This means that they hold that limited war may be employed for very specific purposes.

There were several fascinating discussions in the course of the 10 hours we spent together. Naturally, our attention turned often to the current "war on terrorism." Many of the questions raised had to do with the difficulties in labeling our current military action as a "war" at all. Students noted that as a nation we seem to use that term in many different ways. We are also engaged in a "war on drugs" and we've had a "war on poverty," for example.

In the current situation, certain elements like the use of military troops obviously have more in common with traditional warfare than these other examples. Still, many other elements associated with war are missing. There is no aggressor nation, for example. Instead, we must strike out against a secret transnational group, Al Qaeda. Ordinarily, there is a visible authority appointed as a head of state against whom we struggle. In this case, there is no duly-appointed government of Al Qaeda. A clear set of military goals ordinarily can be named in times of war. This time, except that we intend to "end terrorism" and put an end to "evildoers," clear goals are not avail-



the moral life

By Patricia Schoelles, SSJ

able. Thus, we can't know when they have been achieved so that the military action can be halted.

So we struggled in class to determine whether we are actually "at war" or not. As more and more questions surfaced about this issue, we seemed to be looking for a model other than "war" that would still allow us to defend innocent lives, protect national sovereignty and somehow stop the action of those who would attack us through terrorist attacks. Toward the end of the session we decided to develop an "alternative model" to war that would enable us to do these things.

I want to tell you right up front that we were not entirely successful. Our group included a variety of men and women, some church ministers, some teachers, a college student, a nurse practitioner, a "tekkie" who referred to the Bush presidents as "41" and "43," a college professor of international studies, a museum registrar, a law-school graduate studying for the bar and several others. It was a diverse group that

became committed to the task of developing an alternative model.

While we did not do this to everyone's satisfaction, and we do not claim to have solved the national crisis at hand, I still think there are elements offered by the class that may be worth your reading and thinking about.

First, the class thought that a model of public safety might be more suitable than the model of warfare for helping to understand and respond to our current situation. At a time when our country longs for heroes and examples, we find ourselves moved and inspired by members of the New York City fire and police departments, rescue workers in Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania, flight attendants on doomed flights, passengers travelling on a doomed jet. These are the people who saved two cities from turmoil, who showed us what being for others looks like, whose heroics came not in extraordinary pursuits, but in the ordinary course of their lives and their jobs.

The class suggested that the model we are searching for probably looks more like public safety than like "war." Protecting the public is the first duty. Tracking down the "enemies of public safety" looks like a police duty more than a military effort. It may have to use military resources, but its aim is to protect the public. Its behaviors and skills resemble a police force more than a war machine.

The class proposed that a "third party" is necessary to adjudicate conflict. The United Nations was men-

tioned often. The pathetic negligence of this organization by the United States was mentioned as well. Even in our squabbles as children, I can remember that my brother and I needed our parents to step in and listen "to both sides" in order to issue a judgment that would end the hostilities. Last week's class was convinced that the current "war" did not come as a "last resort" after all diplomatic means had failed. Instead, the class was certain that there simply had been no attempt at mediation.

People who drive commercial airlines into civilian buildings where innocent people are simply going to work to do their jobs are not engaged in negotiating whatever claims they have. They have not given anyone the chance to respond to their "demands." The class was absolutely certain about this. The fact that there is a United Nations, but that it has become ineffectual at helping small nations or powerful ones stay safe and still hear one another's "gripes" is a tragic loss for all of us.

At the end of this very short course, we felt that modeling the agencies of public safety would help us, and we became convinced that the entire planet needs a strong and effective "third party" to adjudicate claims of strong and weak nations. These two suggestions may someday become part of a model that will, indeed, save our planet from the horrors of war.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry.

Kids' Chronicle Answers from page 16: 1. Jesus, 2. David, 3. Peter, 4. Sam, 5. Adam, 6. Esau, 7. Moses, 8. Lucas, 9. Bart.

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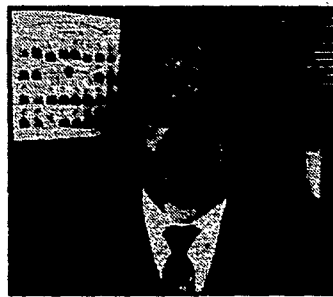
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Thoughts to Consider



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Funeral Director

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