

# Priest outlines church's view of war

Jennifer Burke/Contributing writer

**BRIGHTON** — Even though the United States is considered a world superpower, it does not necessarily have the wisdom to match its might, and it is considered a bully in the eyes of many other nations, Msgr. William H. Shannon told an audience at Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish Dec. 12.

President George Bush, he said, "seems determined to bypass the United Nations and render that body inept. War should always be a last resort. Bush wants to use that when other diplomatic options still exist," said Msgr. Shannon, professor emeritus of Nazareth College in Rochester.

The theologian and noted expert on the writings of Thomas Merton explained the origins and history of the church's just-war theory, which originated with St. Augustine.

"The intent of St. Augustine was not to justify war, but to limit as much as possible the harm it would produce," Msgr. Shannon said.

War, Msgr. Shannon noted, "must be for a just cause, and it must be a last resort. There must be a reason-

able hope of success. It is morally unacceptable if war is likely to create a worse situation. The means used in conducting war must be just."

The nature of warfare changed forever, he noted, with the advent of modern weapons during World War II. War no longer took place one-on-one, between soldiers with guns, but between armies and large groups of innocent people.

According to Msgr. Shannon, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would not have met the requirements for a just war, since civilians, not just member of the military, lost their lives.

The theologian acknowledged that the church's teaching on warfare has evolved, especially since the Second Vatican Council.

"The council fathers did not have a very clear understanding of non-violence. They equated it with passivity, whereas it is a strong resistance to violence, using every possible resistance to evil except violence," Msgr. Shannon said.

Pax Christi, a non-profit and non-governmental Catholic peace movement founded in World War II France, opened its U.S. headquarters

in 1972, at about the same time new ways of looking at and dealing with war were developing at the Vatican. Those ideas have continued to develop into the stance the church takes today, Msgr. Shannon said. He added that Pope John Paul II has said that war must be a thing of the past and has no place in our life today.

"Nonviolence seeks to develop and enrich human life, not to maim and destroy it," he said. "It seeks to destroy evil, not evil people. Nonviolence is an active way of resisting evil, but it's a more creative and effective way."

Msgr. Shannon said nonviolence is a more effective tactic because those who practice it actually win over their opponents and create a mutual understanding, so that the opponent is no longer an opponent. Sensitivity and true dialogue, not debate, are also at the heart of nonviolence, he said.

He concluded by recognizing that true nonviolence might seem too hard for most people to practice.

"If that's your reaction, I would remind you that Jesus calls us to a non-violent, unconditional and all-inclusive love," Msgr. Shannon said. "We might feel this is too much, but Jesus' response is, 'Do it anyway,' and we can achieve this only through the grace of God."



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

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