

ROMAN CATHOLIC TRADITION AND PASSIVE RESISTANCE

Gabriel Moran

Catholic tradition has always embodied a precarious tension between condemnations of violence based on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and a philosophical/political tradition that has grappled with the reality of force, violence and war. In the earliest part of church history, non-cooperation with the war making powers was emphasized. After the fourth century, the church became part of the political, economic and military power of the Roman empire and its successors. Voices of dissent against the use of violence were never stilled but they have been in the minority.

This essay recounts the rebirth and expansion of traditional protesting against violence. I will comment briefly on Jesus' teachings and on the approach to nonviolence today. My main focus is on the past Century, more specifically on those who have witnessed nonviolence as a way of life. While Roman Catholic protest is rooted in New Testament teaching, it usually has a philosophical side. For better, and for worse, the last 2000 years of history is part of the tradition. Invoking Jesus' teaching and trying to bypass the past 2000 years will not work.

The Bible and Nonviolence

The Christian version of the Bible includes what Christians call the Old Testament as well as the books of the New Testament. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are set within the context of this complex literature. Each Christian group gives primary emphasis to some parts of the Bible, thereby arriving at various interpretations on how a Christian should live. While all Christians would claim to be followers of Jesus, the interpretive prism of St. Paul's letters or the importance of the fourth gospel may be determinative of how the Christian group or individual is defined as a follower.

During the 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush was asked who his favorite philosopher is. He answered, Jesus Christ. The response caused ridicule or horror in many places. But if one asks what is wrong with the answer, I think it is the second of the two words. If Bush had simply answered "Jesus", he would have found himself in the company of Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr. The reason for suspicion about Bush's answer is his addition of "Christ" which is

a Christian liturgical term. Although it is common to refer to “Jesus Christ”, anyone sensitive to the meaning of “Jesus (the) Christ” would not refer to a philosopher named Jesus Christ. If philosophers are the question, then the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth have to be placed in comparison with other thinkers rather than cited as words of God. That is a risk Christians take if they wish to enter the political arena in order to persuade people who are not Christians on the value of these teachings (Yoder 1972).

When Christians do believe, live and present the challenging teachings of Jesus, they find a positive response from many Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and people with no religion. Jewish scholars are particularly helpful in explaining the essence of Jesus’ teaching. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, which includes the Beatitudes, is often taken to be a summary of Jesus’ teaching (Lapide 1986).

There is little doubt that Jesus belonged to the peace party in the reformations of his day (Theissen 1964, 64). He opposed both Zealots who made war on the opposing Roman forces, as well as the Roman authorities who tried to appropriate a halo of divine approbation. The Sermon on the Mount is regularly given faint praise as a personal ideal but one that no state can live by. It is a practice common to both Christian and non-Christian to dismiss the Sermon on the Mount as irrelevant to the practice of “realistic” government policies.

The dismissers often show little knowledge of the teaching beyond a few phrases taken out of context. Jesus’ teaching needs to be set within a temporal and geographical context, wherein he was commenting on the texts of his people. He was not rejecting that tradition but emphasizing aspects of it. The assumption that he was advocating a supine attitude in the face of oppressors is not borne out by the Sermon as a whole, nor the tradition of which it is a part. The purpose of the teaching, as careful students through the centuries have recognized, is to de-hostilize enemies in order to win them over. “Do good to those who hate you” is a political strategy requiring skill, courage and persistence. Jesus recognized that there is no way out of an escalation of mutual retaliation unless someone refuses to act violently and instead responds asymmetrically. Reconciliation will benefit the hater as well as the hated.

“Love your neighbor,” so often repeated without much thought, would be better translated as “love to your neighbor.” Jesus commented on Leviticus 19:18: “Love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord”. Christian love is neither selfish nor altruistic; it is a love of both neighbor and self, grounded in recognition of God’s love for every creature. Special attention is given to victims of human unkindness, the disadvantaged, and those who come last. But, the fundamental

attitude is not pity, Nietzsche's complaint about Christianity, but a rousing call to action. Martin Luther King Jr. described his "nonviolent army" by saying that to be accepted in the armies that maim and kill, one must be physically sound, possessed of straight limbs and accurate vision. But in Birmingham, Alabama., the lame and the halt and the crippled could, and did, join up (King 1964, 38). Gandhi, another activist inspired by Jesus' teaching, found that "individuals who neither submit passively nor retaliate to violence find in themselves a new sense of strength, dignity and courage" (Gustafson 1999,101).

Post-biblical Tradition

The early Christian church believed that Christians should not take up arms in any war. The Greek Fathers of the Church were generally united in their attitude against war. Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr and Cyprian were among the outspoken opponents of Christian participation in war. The greatest of these writers, Origen, set out a theory in which he argued that Christians should not serve in the military but that they are still responsible for serving the commonwealth (Origen 1980).

The Christian writer's name most closely associated with the term "just war" is Augustine, an African bishop of the late fourth century who set the direction for much of Western Christianity. Augustine was no enthusiast for war (Wills 1999). He thought that the Christian, in imitation of Jesus, should not use violence to defend himself. However, he believed the Christian had a responsibility to aid a victim under attack. (Marcus 1983) It is difficult to argue with Augustine's principle. But it is even more difficult to move from the image of a man protecting his wife or child to the reality of a nation-state at war in the 21st century (Augustine 1972, 4:15, 19:7, 1:21). Thomas Aquinas, who always tried to avoid directly contradicting Augustine, worked at subtly adding changes in Augustinian teaching. Disappointingly, Aquinas raised little challenge to what became "just war" theory. He outlined six conditions for going to war and three conditions for how war is to be fought (Thomas Aquinas 1966, 1a, 2ae, 90-97).

Opposition to war survived in the Christian Middle Ages mainly in the mystical tradition. The mystics sought a unity beyond conflict. Mysticism is often dismissed as apolitical and "otherworldly". While mysticism does not fit in with ordinary politics, its political reverberations are considerable. As the Marxist, Ernst Bloch phrased it, "He who believes that he is in union with the Lord of Lords does not, when it comes down to it, make a very good serf" (Bloch 1986, 127). Cut loose from the moorings of ordinary life, mysticism can easily turn violent, as often happened in the late Middle Ages (Ozment 1973). For the same reason,

mysticism could also provide peaceful unity at the end, and peace as the means.

The greatest mystic of the Middle Ages was the fourteenth-century preacher, Meister Eckhart. His pleas for peaceful reconciliation went unheeded in his own day. However, Eckhart's writings continue to inspire people. At times, Eckhart has been pictured as a misplaced Buddhist but he was firmly rooted in the New Testament and Christian tradition. He was keenly aware that passionate preaching of justice for the poor might unleash more conflict but he was convinced that there was no true peace without justice (McGinn 1986).

The most outstanding medieval essay on peace, *Peace Protests*, belongs to Desiderius Erasmus. Erasmus was a great humanist of the 16th century, one of the world's first cosmopolitans. Erasmus was dissatisfied with a choice between "just war theory" and "pacifism". He was opposed to war but thought that simply stating that one is for peace is inadequate to the violence all around us. Erasmus presciently saw the need for structures of mediation that could work through international conflict. Almost four centuries later the world is slowly coming to accept what Erasmus saw as indispensable for peace making. (Chapiro 1950).

The 20th Century

The story of the Roman Catholic Church in the 20th century is one of a gradual shift towards skepticism about claims for any war being just. Some impetus for a Catholic Peace Party was provided by papal statements and individual bishops. More often, official statements lagged behind Catholic groups who were willing to take a radical stand against war.

Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) asserted the need for a new international order in which peace would be based on justice rather than military defense. He also raised the question of whether new technology made any just war unlikely. Pope Benedict XV in *Ad Beatissimum* (1916) outlined the causes of war and methods for obtaining peace. He condemned class warfare and gross materialism as underlying the failure to achieve a peaceful order.

When Pope John XXIII was elected pope at age 79, he was widely assumed to be a caretaker. He startled the world by moving swiftly to engage the Roman Catholic Church within the political and economic realities of the 20th century. Two of his outstanding accomplishments were the calling of an ecumenical council in 1959 and the publishing of an encyclical on peace in 1962.

Pope John XXIII's elegant plea for peace is entitled *Pacem in Terris* (Peace

on Earth). In this document, the pope expressed a hatred of nationalism and condemned the arms race. His emphasis on nonviolence was an attempt to transcend the opposition of just war theory and pacifism. He called for structural reform of the international political and legal systems. Notably missing from the document is an endorsement of the right of self-defense for peoples and states, a doctrine commonly put forward as justification for war. Pope John concluded that in an age such as ours, which prides itself on its atomic energy, it is contrary to reason to hold that war is now a suitable way to restore rights which have been violated (Pope John XXIII 1968, 127).

A year after the publication of *Pacem in Terris*, 2,500 bishops of the Roman Catholic Church met in Rome for what is known as the *Second Vatican Council*. A council, overseen by the pope, represents the highest teaching authority of the Church. Included on the agenda for Vatican II was the issue of peace and war. The topic was dealt with in one of the Council's most important documents, *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Second Vatican Council 1968).

A discussion of the ethics of war took place during the Council's third session in 1964. A condemnation of "total war" was accepted without debate. However, a similar condemnation of nuclear weapons initiated a vigorous debate that continued into the fourth session in 1965 (Anderson 1966). Conservative Catholic groups from the United States argued that the condemnation of nuclear weapons would put U.S. Catholics in the difficult position of opposing either their church or their government. The peace activists, however, had their own lobby (along with prayer and fasting) to convince the bishops that a radical stand for an ethic of peace was called for.

At the fourth session, several prominent U.S. bishops, including Cardinals Francis Spellman of New York and Patrick O'Boyle of Washington, criticized the proposed condemnation of total war. Bishop Philip Hannan was most vociferous in defending the controllability in the use of nuclear arms. The Council rejected their plea, noting "all these considerations compel us to undertake an evaluation of war with an entirely new attitude" (98). This new attitude included a recognition of nonviolence in resisting war: "We cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defense which are otherwise available to weaker parties, too, provided this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community itself". (85). This praise was hardly a rousing call to the whole church to pursue a policy of nonviolence. Nonetheless, it represented progress in that direction.

At the final session of the Council, Cardinal Joseph Ritter of St. Louis, spoke out against the possession of nuclear arms. (Douglass 1966, 118-19). The Council, accepting the right of a nation to defend itself, would not condemn war outright or the possession of nuclear weapons. (87). But it did condemn total war, the use of nuclear and other weapons that cause indiscriminate killing. In previous councils, the Church was often ready to pronounce condemnation of any perceived heresy. At the Second Vatican Council, the word condemnation was used only once: "Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities ... merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation" (Second Vatican Council 1968, 87).

Individual Leaders

In the United States, Catholic opposition to war slowly developed from the time of World War II. The opposition took the form of a communal movement in which individual protest was sustained by participation in a community's beliefs, rituals and mutual support. Nevertheless, it is helpful to focus on a few individuals who inspired these Catholic communities. During the second half of the twentieth century, small groups of people dedicated to nonviolent opposition to war eventually influenced the larger structures of the Catholic church.

Dorothy Day is a touchstone for all the groups who subsequently emerged in the U. S. Catholic church. Thomas Merton was and still is a strong literary voice from within the monastic tradition. Daniel Berrigan, since the 1960s, has represented direct, active protest against the war making powers of the government. The movement is not without its internal tensions regarding what constitutes violence and what are the limits in the methods used to oppose violence.

Dorothy Day. Together with Peter Maurin, Dorothy Day founded the Catholic Worker movement in 1933. Day was born of Scot-Irish Calvinist parents. She worked with the Anti-Conscription League in World War I and the women's suffrage movement, for which she was arrested and jailed in 1917. After conversion to Catholicism in 1927, Day wrote for several Catholic magazines (Day 1981).

The Catholic Worker movement began as a struggle for social justice and for the rights of the poor. Day took on voluntary poverty to side with workers and launch a social and moral regeneration. From 1933 to 1941, thirty-two Worker houses were founded. The houses were hospices for volunteers, soup kitchens, meeting rooms, clothing centers and schools rolled into a single "revolutionary

headquarters.” To spread the word, Day began *The Catholic Worker* which sold for a penny a copy and continues with the same price until today. Its circulation during the 1930s grew to 185, 000. (Cornell and Forest 1968).

People sometimes confused Day with isolationists (most notoriously with Father Coughlin who slid into anti-semitism) but Day was an internationalist or transnationalist. She based her convictions on the Christian gospel and maintained her opposition to war throughout World War II (Miller 1982). In August of 1940, Dorothy Day wrote an open letter in *The Catholic Worker* opposing all preparation for war (McNeal 1974, 75-77). She called for opposition to the manufacture of munitions and to the purchasing of defense bonds. Day had always seen the connection between the oppression of the poor and the destruction from war. However, many people who were ready to join with her in the fight against poverty were not prepared to stand against the United States government’s call to arms.

The immediate results of Day’s uncompromising pacifism were disastrous. Twenty of the thirty-two Worker houses were closed. *The Catholic Worker* lost over 100,000 subscribers (Piehl 1982, 195-98). The movement might have appeared finished, but instead Dorothy Day’s integrity and consistency under the most trying conditions provided a foundation both for a Catholic Worker movement that still attracts bright and dedicated people and for other communities that are trying to sustain a nonviolent way of life.

Some people within the Catholic Worker movement tried to articulate a “just war pacifism,” which did not reject “just war” theory but concluded that it was no longer applicable. While the Catholic Worker excluded that view after World War II, it became the position toward which many bishops and moralists slowly moved.

Day’s stands against the government were thought to be outlandish by most Catholics, including most bishops. But Day never portrayed herself as a radical Church reformer. She respectfully disagreed with bishops, but did not make them the enemy. She was not a theorizer of nonviolence but someone dedicated to living nonviolently and inspiring others to follow the same path.

Very few Catholics opposed the United State’s part in World War II. The war seemed to fulfill the traditional criteria for a just war. Toward the end of the war, however, as the United States engaged in “obliteration bombs,” some Catholics, including a few bishops, condemned these actions. The policy of firebombing Japanese cities reached its culmination with the bombing of Hiroshima and

Nagasaki. For most people at the time, the use of atomic bombs did not seem to cross any new boundary. A moral consensus against the use of nuclear weapons took several decades to develop among Catholic Church leaders.

The Vietnam War was the occasion for a significant shift in the attitude of Catholics toward war. At the start of the Vietnam War, Catholics were more hawkish than other U.S. citizens; at the end of the war, they were more dovish, and remained so (Gallup and Castelli 1987, 82). In contrast, U.S. bishops lagged behind the people and were resistant to condemning the war as immoral.

Thomas Merton. One of the leading voices of protest against the war was that of Thomas Merton, a Cistercian monk. Like Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton came to the Catholic peace movement in the United States from an unusual background. He was born in France of a Quaker mother. After studying at Cambridge University, he came to the United States and completed a master's degree in English at Columbia University. He became a Catholic in 1938 and entered a Trappist monastery in 1942.

Merton's autobiography and his books on spirituality had inspired many Catholics during the 1950s (Merton 1952). Cloistered in a Kentucky monastery, Merton was an unlikely candidate to lead a peace movement. But he drew upon a long Catholic tradition that he appropriated with critical intelligence. He provided a calm but penetrating view of the turbulent 1960s. Merton's writings have continued to inspire generations of Catholics.

Thomas Merton described the paradox of his being a "peace activist" in his monastic cell with these words: "To adopt a life that is essentially non-assertive, non-violent, a life of humility and peace is in itself a statement of one's position....It is my intention to make my entire life a rejection of, a protest against the crimes and injustices of war and political tyranny which threaten to destroy the whole race of man and the world with him"(Twomey 1978, 33).

In 1964, Thomas Merton wrote an open letter to the bishops of the Second Vatican Council. His two chief concerns were the right of Catholics to be conscientious objectors and the moral problem of using nuclear weapons. He found implicit support for his positions in the statements of Pope Pius XII and Pope John XXIII. Merton was instrumental in bringing the Council to condemn what it called "total war" (Zahn 1971, 257).

Merton did not live long enough to develop a complete theory of peace making. He was highly critical of the Augustinian theory with its stress on the

subjective purity of intention. He also found it impossible to call himself a pacifist because of the term's connotations, including sole dependence on the conscience of the individual and a lack of concern for the oppressed. (Merton 1964, 151,115). Toward the end of his life, Merton had begun a dialogue with Zen Buddhism and found support for nonviolence in traditional Eastern thinkers.

While he passionately pleaded for justice and peace, Merton refused to dabble in the hatred that often affected the 1960's movements. Inspired by Dorothy Day's gentle but unyielding stance and aware of Martin Luther King Jr's evolving tactics in the 1960s, Merton never lost sight of the aim of peace which requires a method of peace. Without criticizing by name some Catholic activists and their tactics during the protests of the late 1960s, Merton worried that direct political action against violence inevitably becomes entangled in violence. In one of the last statements of his life, he said: "The language of spurious nonviolence is merely another, more equivocal form of the language of power....Nonviolence is not for power but for truth. It is not pragmatic but prophetic. It is not aimed at immediate political results but at the manifestation of fundamental and critically important truth"(Zahn 1971,75).

In a letter commenting approvingly on this statement, Gordon Zahn notes Merton's "insistence that the action not be measured by results." (Meconis 1979, 38). I do not think that is quite right. The most crucial word in Merton's statement is *immediate*. Like anyone passionately dedicated to a cause, Merton wanted results but he was not prepared to sacrifice a disciplined and patient approach for the sake of getting instantaneous and impressive results. He was properly suspicious of how modern news media that can be used by protesters to get attention can also become an obstacle to a quiet, determined and long range search for peace.

Merton, in the company of Dorothy Day, was willing to stay with a course that many people dismiss as too passive. Like Day, Merton was not inclined to divide the world into friend and enemy. He wrote: "A test of our sincerity in the practice of nonviolence is this: are we willing to learn something from our adversary? If a new truth is made known to us by him, will we admit it? Are we willing to admit that he is not totally inhumane, wrong, unreasonable, cruel"? (Merton 1970, 23). The Catholic Church lost one of its strongest advocates of nonviolence when Merton was accidentally killed in 1967.

Daniel Berrigan. The Jesuit priest, Daniel Berrigan, is associated with the activist side of anti-war protest. With his brother, Philip, he will always be remembered for bold actions that directly confronted the United States government and sent

both men to prison for long stretches. It should nonetheless be noted that Dan Berrigan was a poet and a theologian before becoming a peace activist. And he never became a simple political activist. He maintained a serenity and a sense of humor in the midst of conflicts with the government and with his own church. He was sustained by his religious devotion to the scriptures and the religious practices of his community. It is an unusual activist who once said: "Don't just do something; stand there."

It cannot be denied, however, that the community of peace advocates, in which Dan Berrigan was prominent, tested the limits of what constitutes nonviolent protest. The question of legitimate means of protest is a perennial one but shaped by contemporary circumstances. The Vietnam War has often been called the first televised war. Television brought the horrors of war into the living room at home. It may also have deadened sensibilities by the nightly news repetition of images of suffering tucked between automobile ads and the latest Hollywood scandal. Protesters against the war tried to use the very institutions they were attacking to help them spread their message. A tiny band of people can get great publicity from the news media and the justice department, but the attempt to exploit these institutions can undermine the trust and integrity of communities professing peace.

What the news media called "the Catholic Left," had a brief history, emerging into public view with a break in of a government facility at Catonsville, Maryland in May, 1968, and effectively ending with the conclusion of a trial in Camden, New Jersey, in May, 1973. It is easy to see the whole period as a clumsy and unsuccessful attempt to stop a disastrous war (Greeley, 1971). But while most of the "radical left" in politics disappeared with the end of the Vietnam War, the Catholic peace movement has continued in communities of resistance, peace organizations, and an episcopal leadership that shifted its teaching on war and peace.

The favored form of protest during the Vietnam War was to break in to government offices and pour blood on draft records. This highly symbolic act, derived from the church's sacramental practice, was dramatically effective and caught the attention of the news media. But breaking into a building and destroying property raised serious problems, legally, ethically and strategically. Many passionate opponents of the war thought that such concerns were irrelevant but for people sensitive to how any violence can undermine a commitment to peace the issue has to be carefully addressed.

One way to justify destroying property is to limit the term violence to actions

directed against human beings. However, “property” is a term that takes its origin from the integrity of the human organism; at least some forms of property (food, clothing, shelter) are integrally tied to the human self. Some further distinctions concerning property are therefore needed. John Swomley of the Fellowship of Reconciliation tried to isolate a meaning of property that would not have the protection of nonviolence. He wrote: “It is necessary to recognize that property whose sole purpose is to degrade or destroy human beings has disvalue rather than value. Some who would agree to its disvalue would argue for action that ...uses the destruction of such property to expose the nature of the government” (Swomley 1972,181).

Many religious pacifists were skeptical about a manner of protest that was in danger of generating violence, whether intended or not. Both Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton expressed qualified support for the action of Dan Berrigan and his associates. Thomas Merton wrote of Catonsville: “This was an attempt at prophetic nonviolent provocation. It bordered on violence and was violent to the extent that it meant pushing some good ladies around and destroying some government property. On a long term basis, I think the peace movement needs to really study, practice and use nonviolence in its classic form with all that implies of religious and ethical grounds.”(Zahn 1971, 231).

The Catonsville break in got the attention of the government and much of the country. Dan Berrigan composed a play, *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*, based on the transcript of the trial in which the defendants were allowed to state their case against the government (Berrigan 2004). The government, and J. Edgar Hoover in particular, became infuriated at the tactics and the publicity of the group. Prosecutor William Lynch said that the government considered the Catholic Left to be a more serious threat to the country than organized crime (Meconis 1979, 101). For several months during 1970, Daniel Berrigan went underground and playfully mocked the FBI’s determination to arrest him. He was finally captured when an FBI informer infiltrated the overly trusting community.

The FBI was several times successful in planting informers. In the government’s most ambitious trial against the protesters, the case relied almost entirely on an informer, Robert Hardy. Strangely, however, Hardy ended up testifying for the defense. He said that FBI policy in making arrests was first “to make sure the defendants commit as many crimes as possible and destroy the draft files.” (New York Times 1973, 1) Hardy also testified of the people he informed on that “they are the finest group of Christian people I have ever been associated with. They are not even capable of hurting anyone.” But he concluded his description: “As far as mechanical skills and abilities, they were

totally inept....It definitely wouldn't have happened without me.”(Handy 1973, 7)
When the protesters were set up and captured in the Camden government office, J. Edgar Hoover and Attorney General John Mitchell exulted: “We have broken the back of the Catholic Left.”(Washington Post 1971, 1).

What the news media had called the Catholic Left may have come to an end in the early 1970s but numerous small groups continued to protest against the further militarization of the United States and a policy of nuclear retaliation. Basing their organization on the biblical text, “they shall beat their swords into plowshares” (Is. 2:4), the groups called themselves the Plowshares. Starting with a break in of the General Electric plant in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania on September 9, 1980, the group, led by Dan and Phil Berrigan, initiated a series of “plowshare actions” in Groton Connecticut, Wilmington, Delaware , and Orlando, Florida. The pouring of blood and the symbolic hammering of the missiles was the usual gesture of protest (Musto 1986, 259)

In less dramatic fashion, organizations such as Pax Christi, USA, have continued to awaken opposition to war and violence. Pax Christi was founded in France at the end of World War II; a U. S. branch was begun in 1973. Respectful of church tradition and sensitive to the range of feelings among Catholic believers, Pax Christi's mission is to educate Catholics to the realities of violence and to form alliances with other peace making groups. By 1981, the group had five thousand members, forty-six of whom were bishops. It openly criticized U. S. military policy and called for the end of draft legislation. Pax Christi has continued to be a strong voice for Catholics and an influence on the bishops even after the militarization that began in September, 2001(Musto 1986, 260).

U. S. Bishops

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops trailed behind some of the more radical Catholic communities. But the bishops had been moving toward a more critical stance on military policies since the 1970s. Pastoral letters in 1976, 1978, and 1979 condemned the threatened use of nuclear weapons and called for a test ban treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union. In 1982, the United States Catholic Conference issued *Statement on Central America*, affirming the call for liberation and peace. The bishops opposed the U.S. government's anti-communist crusade, declaring that “the dominant challenge is the internal condition of poverty and the denial of human rights“(U.S. Catholic Bishops 1982).

The bishops' pastoral letter in 1983 should not, therefore, have been a total

surprise. But much of the country, including the White House, were taken aback by *The Challenge of Peace* (U.S. Catholic Bishops 1983) and what seemed a drastic change of course. The government had counted on the staunch anti-communism of the bishops as a support for U.S. policy. The White House tried to influence the bishops in their writing of the letter. The government was concerned because the bishops were not young radicals who might reverse themselves when fashion dictated. The bishops had slowly and agonizingly argued themselves into the firm conviction that “just war theory” is inadequate in the age of nuclear weapons. Thomas Gumbleton was one of the most important voices in the bishops’ stand on peace. Bishop Gumbleton gave credit to Dan Berrigan and his associates for the evolution of his own thinking: “I have to face the question they faced: Is the war moral or immoral? I think people who are ready to put their whole lives on the line forced me to do some thinking”(National Catholic Reporter 1971).

During the composition of *The Challenge of Peace*, the document underwent three drafts, including a first draft published in *The National Catholic Reporter*. It produced widespread debate in the Catholic community, especially over the inclusion of pacifism. The bishops acknowledged that “the nonviolent witness of such figures as Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr. has had a profound impact upon the life of the church in the United States” (U. S. Catholic Bishops 1983,117).

The bishops edged away from their traditional reliance on just war theory, admitting “pacifism” as a complementary theory in the tradition. They concluded that “peacemaking is not an optional commitment. It is a requirement of our faithThe content and context of our peacemaking is set, not by some political agenda or ideological program, but by the teaching of the Church”(U.S. Catholic Bishops 1983, 333). The bishops condemned all use of nuclear weapons.

The bishops received praise for their document although they were not given the credit they deserved for their contribution to the emerging thaw in the Gorbachev-Reagan dialogue of the late 1980s. The bishops’ letter has continued to influence the thinking of U.S. Catholics about the issues of violence and war. The Catholic Church has tried to develop what Cardinal Joseph Bernadin named “a consistent ethic of life.” (Steinfels, 2003, 17-39). An opposition to war has been tied to opposition against the death penalty and abortion. For most of the country, including many Roman Catholics, the bishops are so obsessed with the abortion question that they do not pay enough attention to violence outside the womb. However, if liberal critics of war invite the support of the Roman Catholic Church, they are going to have to pay attention to the bishops’ concern with

abortion.

Conclusion

The overall record of the Roman Catholic Church in opposing war and advocating nonviolent tactics does not fare well when measured against the Sermon on the Mount. Starting with St. Augustine, the attempt to control the number of wars and the injustices inherent to war was well intentioned and may have had some good effects in earlier times. The Geneva Conventions are a modern variation on this tradition. But we are past the time when war itself should be declared illegal.

In the United States, Catholic anxiety about not being thought sufficiently patriotic often took precedence over the demands of the gospel. The Catholic bishops and clergy were all too ready to endorse the policies of the U.S. government, including its twentieth-century military build up. A population composed mainly of immigrants wanted to avoid the taint of being insufficiently American. Only a few brave souls protested the World Wars and the policies of the Cold War.

The expectation of a “peace dividend,” common at the beginning of the 1990s, now seems quaint and naïve. In 2001, the nation shifted into a war mentality that seems to be without end. In the Roman Catholic Church it can at least be said that the party of nonviolence is no longer relegated to the margin. Roman Catholics have to be restrained in their claim to be the party of peace but the testimony of Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton and Daniel Berrigan continues to sound in the land and call the nation to recognize that violence has to be resisted if the nation is to have a future at all.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, Floyd, ed. (1966). *The Council Daybook, Session III*. Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference.
- Augustine (1972). *Concerning the City of God*. Baltimore: Penguin.
- Berrigan, Daniel (2004). *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Bloc, Ernst (1986). *The Principle of Hope*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Cornell, Thomas and Forest, James (1968). *A Penny a Copy: Readings from the Catholic Worker*. New York: Macmillan.

Chapiro, Jose (1950). *Erasmus and Our Struggle for Peace*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Day, Dorothy (1981). *The Long Loneliness*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.

Douglass, James (1966). *The Non-Violent Cross*. New York: Macmillan.

Gallup, George and Castelli, Jim (1987). *The American Catholic People*. New York: Doubleday.

Greeley, Andrew (1971, Feb. 19). *L’Affaire Berrigan*. *New York Times*.

Gustafson, Carrie (1999). *Religion and Human Rights*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.

Handy, Robert (1973, April 7). *An Affidavit*. *American Report*.

King, Martin Luther Jr (1964). *Why We Can’t Wait*. New York: Harper and Row.

Lapide, Pinchas (1986). *The Sermon on the Mount*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986.

McGinn, Bernard (1986). *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*. New York: Paulist Press.

Marcus, R.A. (1983). *Saint Augustine’s Views on the Just War*. *The Church and War*. Ed.W.J. Sheils. Oxford: Blackwell.

Meconis, Charles (1979). *With Clumsy Grace: The American Catholic Left*. New York: Seabury Press.

McNeal, Patricia (1974). *The American Catholic Peace Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Merton, Thomas (1948). *The Seven Storey Mountain*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Merton, Thomas (1964). *Seeds of Destruction*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Merton, Thomas (1968). *Faith and Violence*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Miller, William (1982). *Dorothy Day: A Biography*. New York: Harper and Row.

Musto, Ronald (1986). *The Catholic Peace Tradition*. Orbis Books.

National Catholic Reporter (1972, February 11). Interview with Thomas Gumbleton.

New York Times (1973, April 1).

Origen (1980). *Contra Celsus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ozment, Steven (1973). *Mysticism and Dissent*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Pope John XXIII (1968). *Pacem in Terris*. New York: Macmillan.

Second Vatican Council (1968). *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*. Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor.

Steinfels, Peter (2003). *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*. New York: Simon and Schuster

Swomley, John (1972). *Liberation Ethics*. New York: Macmillan.

Theissen, Gerd (1964). *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Thomas Aquinas (1966). *Summa Theologiae*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
Twomey, Gerard (1978). *Thomas Merton: Prophet in the Belly of a Paradox*. New York: Paulist Press.
U.S. Catholic Bishops (1982). *Statement on Central America*. Washington: United States Catholic Conference;
U.S. Catholic Bishops (1983). *The Challenge of Peace*. Washington: United States Catholic Conference.
Washington Post (1971, April 23).
Wills, Garry (1999). *St. Augustine*. New York: Viking.
Yoder, John Howard (1972). *The Politics of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Zahn, Gordon (1971). *Thomas Merton on Peace*. New York: McCall.

Profile:

Gabriel Moran is Director of the Program in Philosophy of Education at New York University. He also teaches international ethics in the International Education Program. He has a PhD in religious education from the Catholic University of America. For the past forty years he has been a leading author in the field of religious education. His works have been translated into many languages. He has written essays on force, violence and war for several edited collections and journals. His books include *A Grammar of Responsibility* (1996) and *Both Sides: The Story of Revelation* (2002)