

## THE SIGN OF PEACE: THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH TO THE NATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles: I leave you peace; my peace I give you. Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live for ever and ever. Amen.

Many of us last heard these words this past Sunday, the Feast of Corpus Christi. Or perhaps at a Mass this past week. Some of us heard these words only a few hours ago, at a nearby church or in the hotel room. Tomorrow evening, as we celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi, all of us in attendance will hear them, pray them. After this, the presider will greet us with the words, "The Peace of the Lord be with you always." To which we will respond, "And also with you." Then comes the invitation, offered by the deacon (if present), "Let us offer each other the sign of peace." And then, as the rubrics in the sacramentary indicate, "all make an appropriate sign of peace, according to local custom."<sup>1</sup> Local customs vary, of course, from the stiff, formal handshakes at Sunday Masses between people who don't know each other, to the effusive hugs and kisses of teen masses and college-dorm masses, to the silent waves or, now and then, peace signs coming from people located several pews away at a quiet daily Mass.

One of the most meaningful signs of peace occurred for me at Christmas Eve Mass at St. Therese de Lisieux Parish in Basra. I was there as part of a delegation sponsored by Voices in the Wilderness, an organization created to challenge the economic sanctions that had been imposed on Iraq since the summer of 1990 and, more pressingly at that point, the upcoming invasion by the United States.<sup>2</sup> The Mass was said according to the Chaldean Rite, making it exotic and hard to follow. Still, it was familiar enough to follow the basic parts: opening rites, liturgy of the word (including a strong homily on the angels' song, "peace on earth," I was told later), liturgy of the Eucharist, and then closing rites. The sign of peace came at the usual spot, and when the presider, Archbishop Gabriel Kassab, offered it, he held his hands out, palms out toward the assembly, and emphatically uttered the words, in Arabic or Aramaic (I'm not sure), "Peace be with you." It was as if the peace were physical, like in the Gospel where

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<sup>1</sup>*Sacramentary of the Roman Missal* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1985) 523.

<sup>2</sup>Information about Voices in the Wilderness can be found on the web at <http://vitw.org>.

Jesus instructs his disciples, "Whatever house you enter, let your first words be, 'Peace to this House!' And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you" (Luke 10:5-6).<sup>3</sup> The greeting, as performed in that rite on that night, had an ancient feel to it, which was appropriate, for those parishioners are heirs to some of the oldest Christian communities in the world, founded, as tradition has it, by the apostle Thomas, the doubter, on his way east from Jerusalem to India. At the same time, the greeting was all very familiar, smiling and shaking hands with these olive-skinned, almond-eyed, well-dressed Iraqis. But this only made the sign of peace that night all the more poignant. In a matter of weeks or months, these people would be enduring anything but peace. Flying out the next morning to Baghdad, I felt I was leaving them behind on the outer banks of North Carolina with a hurricane approaching. When the hurricane finally struck, some three months later, I placed photos of them on my desk at work.<sup>4</sup>

I mention this experience because it was such a profound example of the peace given by Christ to the church, a peace extending over borders and through embargoes, touching all nations and peoples and thus making the church into a sign of reconciliation and of the unity of humanity in a world broken by sin and division. I also mention it because this gift of peace is sadly neglected by Catholics in the United States, who all too often play a supporting role in this nation's warmaking. My point in this paper is that a constitutive aspect of the mission of the church to the nations is to be the sign of peace, and that this entails not just exchanging the sign of peace at Mass but embodying Christ's gift of peace in and throughout the world. I will make this point in three parts: first, by expositing on this mission to be the sign of peace as it was understood and practiced in the ancient church; second, by arguing that in this country, the church's peacemaking mission continues to be frustrated by a social ethic that is concerned almost exclusively with matters of public policy on the national level; and third, by proposing a shift away from this state-centered paradigm of social ethics toward one that is pastorally oriented, concerned first and foremost with the way the sign of peace is being embodied by people in the pews. Only by giving primacy to our identity as Catholics over Americans, to our role as disciples over citizens, will we be free enough to carry out our mission to be a sign of peace to the nations.

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<sup>3</sup>This and subsequent biblical quotations are from *The New Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1985).

<sup>4</sup>A brief description of my trip to Iraq and my reflections on it a year later can be found in "Christmas in Iraq," *Notre Dame Magazine* 33 (Spring 2004): 38-41.

### SIGN OF PEACE: MISSION OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH

The presider's prayer introducing the Sign of Peace refers to the words spoken by Jesus to his followers in John 14:27: "Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you." The use of the first-person possessive form—"my own peace," "my gift to you"—indicates that peace comes from Jesus; not from "the world" which cannot give it; but not from Jesus alone either (an oxymoron, theologically); it comes from Jesus in union with the Father and through the "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name," and who "will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you" (John 14:26). This gift of peace is part of the divine life they share with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. The implication is that the disciples receive Christ's gift of peace through participation in the divine life of the Trinity. This is shown later in John's Gospel, when Jesus appears to the disciples in the upper room and twice says to them, "peace be with you," and after the second time, commissions them with the words, "'As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.' After saying this, he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained'" (John 20:21-23). This scene, as Raymond Brown notes, is a central event in salvation history. It recalls Gideon's encounter with the angel (Jdgs 6:23) and the angelic apparition to Daniel (Dan 10:9).<sup>5</sup> Jesus' wounds also recalls the gift of peace promised on the night before he died.<sup>6</sup> And his breathing on the disciples recalls God breathing into and giving life to Adam in Genesis 2:7.<sup>7</sup> This is not an ordinary but a solemn greeting, consonant with the mission carried out, first, by the Son at the will of the Father and now, by the apostles at the will of the Son whose gift of the Spirit empowers them to bring forgiveness to the world. The greeting of peace in the so-called Johannine Pentecost is thus cast in fundamental terms: it is the peace of humanity being reconciled with God.

A similar understanding is evident in the letters of Paul which habitually include peace in the greeting, as in the letter to the Romans: "Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:7). The significance of peace is stated in chapter five, which begins: "So then, now that we have been justified by faith, we are at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1). Justified means "being admitted into God's favor in which we are living" (5:2). This favor was puzzling, Paul explains, because we were "godless" (5:6), "still sinners" (5:8), indeed "enemies," as he writes in verse 10: "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son, how much

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<sup>5</sup>Raymond Brown, trans., with introduction and commentary, *The Gospel according to John (XIII-XXI)*, Anchor Bible 29A (New York: Doubleday, 1970) 1021.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 1021-22.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 1022-23.

more can we be sure that, being now reconciled, we shall be saved by his life?" (5:10). Paul is articulating the reconciliation achieved by Christ as occurring between two enemies, God and humanity, with God forging the peace. Moreover, this is no purely interior peace. It is a peace between two peoples, Jews and Gentiles, brought together into one community.<sup>8</sup> This peace is ritualistically exchanged when Christians "greet each other with the holy kiss" (Rom 16:16), a closing instruction in Romans that appears in three other of his letters as well (1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26). This kiss was no ordinary expression. It was an exchange of the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup>

The kiss of peace can thus be traced back to the beginnings of Christian belief and practice. The historical development of this ritual kiss is too complex to rehearse, but it was of central importance. For instance, it was part of the first initiation rites, offered by the presider to the newly baptized. It was used as a rite to conclude what we now regard as the liturgy of the word. It was used to welcome back those who had broken away from the church due to serious sin. Later, it was incorporated into liturgies conferring holy orders and it was a regular part of the rites of entry into monastic communities.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, it served as a precommunion reconciliation rite, in accord with the teaching of Jesus: "if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering" (Matt 5:23).<sup>11</sup> Before we present our gifts, we must be reconciled with one another, which itself is a gift.

Scholars are divided as to whether or not a continuity should be affirmed between the original kiss of peace and the later sign of peace. Some scholars find continuity in this development. Others emphasize discontinuity, noting the shift in nature and purpose from the holy kiss, which was understood as a sharing of the Spirit, to the communal sign of peace, which functioned as a rite of communal reconciliation. One scholar, arguing for discontinuity, suggests that the kiss of peace be seen as a spiritual rite, not an ethical injunction. It should not be tied to communal reconciliation, he contends, as it did not signify peace *per se*, but the Spirit.<sup>12</sup> But this modern distinction between pneumatology and ethics obscures a central theological claim that prevailed in ancient Christian thought from apostolic times through the patristic period, the claim that Jesus, by the will

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<sup>8</sup>This social understanding of justification is in line with Paul's account in Galatians and Ephesians as well. See John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1972; repr., with new preface and comments, 1995) 218-26.

<sup>9</sup>L. Edward Phillips, *The Ritual Kiss in Early Christian Worship* (Cambridge: Grove Books Limited, 1996) 9-10.

<sup>10</sup>For a detailed account of this complex development, see *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>Phillips, *Ritual Kiss*, 36.

<sup>12</sup>Phillips, *Ritual Kiss*, 36.

of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, had brought peace to humanity, and that this peace—*his* peace—is now destined to transform the whole world.

This theological claim, according to Gerhard Lohfink in *Jesus and Community*, lies at the heart of the vision of Justin, Tertullian, and Irenaeus. The context is important here. Jewish critics of Christianity in this period argued that Jesus was not the Messiah because the world had not become peaceful, in accord with the prophecy in Isaiah 2:4. The Fathers took this argument seriously, rebutting it by contending that the world *has* changed, in that Christians live in accord with the law of Christ, preferring to be struck on the other cheek rather than retaliate. Thus the ancient prophecy is being fulfilled in the messianic people, the church.<sup>13</sup>

A similar claim was made by Athanasius, as part of his argument for the divinity of Christ. In *On the Incarnation*, he builds his case by pointing to the peaceable lives that Christians are living:

Who, then, is He Who has done these things and has united in peace those who hated each other, save the beloved Son of the Father, the common Savior of all, Jesus Christ? . . . [T]his peace that He was to administer was foretold, for Scripture says, "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles, and nation shall not take sword against nation, neither shall they learn any more to wage war" (Isaiah 2:4). Nor is this by any means incredible. The barbarians of the present day are naturally savage in their habits, and as long as they sacrifice to their idols they rage furiously against each other and cannot bear to be a single hour without weapons. But when they hear the teaching of Christ, forthwith they turn from fighting to farming, and instead of arming themselves with swords extend their hands in prayer. . . . These facts are proof of the Godhead of the Savior, for He has taught men what they could never learn among the idols.<sup>14</sup>

For Athanasius, as for Justin, Tertullian, and Irenaeus before him, the peaceable quality of Christians' lives is a proof of Christ's divinity. The fact that they have turned "from fighting to farming" is an effect of the incarnation.

It is true, as Helgeland, Daly, and Burns argued at this conference in 1982, that Christians rejected military service to avoid the idolatrous practices that were part of life in the Roman imperial army. But they overstate the case in contending that therefore the early church was not marked by a "pacifist" ethic.<sup>15</sup> As David Hunter notes in a review of the book that grew out of their presentation, while the main concern of early apologists was to avoid idol worship, it is

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<sup>13</sup>Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 170-76.

<sup>14</sup>Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 52. This translation is from *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation*, trans. and ed. by a Religious of the C.S.M.V., with an introduction by C. S. Lewis (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary Press, 1953) 90-91.

<sup>15</sup>Robert J. Daly, S.J., "Seminar on Patristics," *Proceedings of the Thirty-Seventh Annual Convention (CTSA)* 37 (1982): 178-81.

true that they wanted to avoid bloodshed as well.<sup>16</sup> Origen, for example, insisted that Christians not participate in war even for a just cause; as a priestly people, he explains, they pray, as part of a "special army of piety" (Origen's words) that is every bit as effective as the emperor's soldiers in establishing peace and security.<sup>17</sup> And as Hunter further notes, the presumption that idolatry was a "religious" concern and that participating in military service was an "ethical" concern is unwarranted.<sup>18</sup> Here again, we find a modern dichotomy—religion/ethics—projected back on to ancient Christian thought, so as to obscure the belief held by the early apologists that people become like the gods they worship. In this view, the worship of false gods produces a false peace, a "peace" generated by lust, greed, envy, and all other passions (or vices) and marked by injustice to the poor, civil strife, and wars; whereas worship of the true God produces true peace, empowering Christians to overcome vice and live virtuously and peaceably in society. And this goes not only for Origen, the "pacifist," but also for Augustine, "the just-war theorist," who was acutely aware of the dangers of deifying public authority, as had happened in imperial Rome, with its worship of false gods and consequent war making born out of lust for domination, and who with time grew increasingly dubious of all myths validating the authority of earthly cities.<sup>19</sup>

In view of this connection between idolatry and violence, on the one hand, and worship of the true God and peace on the other—a connection affirmed by Origen *and* by Augustine—perhaps it would be more fruitful to think of peace and peacemaking less in terms of a debate between pacifist and just-war ethics, and more in terms of the prior task of discerning the level of allegiance Christians can give to earthly cities while claiming to be at peace with Christians residing in other earthly cities. The church is indispensable for this discernment because it affords humanity a perspective that relativizes all earthly authorities and identities—relativizes, not destroys—by virtue of its catholicity, which establishes deeper bonds than any and all bonds of race, nation, or even family. Here it is important to be mindful of the patristic vision of humanity as dignified by an original and natural unity. With the fall, this unity was shattered into pieces, and humanity suffers a bitter exile of division, separation, and strife. As Origen put it, "where there is sin, there is multiplicity"; or in Augustine words, "Adam himself is now spread out over the whole face of the earth. Originally one, he has fallen, and, breaking up as it were, he has filled the whole earth with the pieces."<sup>20</sup> But with Christ, the New Adam, the original unity of humanity is

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<sup>16</sup>David G. Hunter, "A Decade of Research on Early Christians and Military Service," *Religious Studies Review* 18 (April 1992): 88.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>19</sup>This characterization of Augustine is from Hunter, *ibid.*, 89, 91.

<sup>20</sup>Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San

restored, and it extends throughout all the earth by means of the supernatural dignity bestowed through baptism.<sup>21</sup>

It is within the context of this world-embracing unity, this catholicity, of the church that both pacifism and just war must be placed. If placed there properly, and embodied accordingly, they can be a means of overcoming divisions among peoples and checking the warmaking tendencies of empires—and thus reveal the church as the sign of peace to the nations. But the church's mission to be the sign of peace has been thwarted in modern times, for reasons I will now explain.

### A SOCIAL ETHIC TOO NARROWLY FOCUSED

The reason, to put it bluntly, has to do with the rise of modern states and the concomitant rise of national churches. With this development, and the onset of modern warfare that came with it, Catholic thinking about peace and peacemaking gradually became captured by a state-centered paradigm that renders both the pacifist and just-war traditions unworkable, ineffective, marginal. But rather than embark on a critique of the modern state and the nationalization of the churches in the abstract, I want to show how the Catholic Church became nationalized under the sway of the United States, and then show how this nationalization created tensions in Catholic thinking that are reflected in the thought of John Ryan, John Courtney Murray, and the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letter on war and peace, *The Challenge of Peace*.

The defining moment in this process of nationalization came during World War I, when, two weeks after the United States entered the war, the archbishops of the Catholic Church in the United States, led by Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, pledged to President Wilson, "our people, as ever, will rise as one man to serve the nation." Over the next year and a half, they put that pledge into action by establishing the National Catholic War Council, the purpose of which was to mobilize the Catholics for what was called at the time "war and relief work." This included increasing the number of military chaplains from 24 to more than 1,000, establishing a Chaplain's Aid Association which provided religious supplies for chaplains and troops, constructing recreation houses with a chapel and reading for the troops, building "Visitors' Houses" for families and friends visiting soldiers, promoting the Student Army Training Corps (SATC) for developing military leadership skills among college students, establishing a Catholic Bureau of the Boy Scouts of America, founding a National Catholic Service School to train Catholic women for relief and reconstruction work at home and abroad, developing a process for marking the graves of Catholic soldiers and sailors buried in Europe, and gathering evidence of all Catholics

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Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988) 33, 34.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 25-29, 35-40, 45-47.

who served in the military and Catholic organizations that performed "war work" into an historical record of the church's activities in support of the war.

These activities were recorded by Michael Williams, an employee of the Press Department of the War Council, in a book entitled *American Catholics in the War*.<sup>22</sup> The book is revealing in the way it posits a fundamental harmony between the Catholic Church and the United States of America. It begins with a historical narrative showing that Catholics played a central role in the founding of the nation, first discovering the continent (Columbus), establishing the colony of Maryland, fighting in the Revolutionary War, and in every war since: the War of 1812, the Mexican American War, the Civil War, the Spanish American War, and the Great War.<sup>23</sup> Woven into this narrative is a political theory built around a twofold claim: one, that the Catholic Church has benefited from the U.S. Constitution's prohibition of established religion in that it has freed the church to carry out its mission in the world; two, that the nation has benefited from the church in that the church has the intellectual and moral principles needed to guide the nation in its affairs.<sup>24</sup> Thus there is harmony between church and nation and, as Williams tells it, this harmony is only now (in 1921) being realized. Catholics have passed the test of rising to serve the nation in war; now, after the war, they must rise again to serve the nation in the task of social reconstruction. And this task too is an urgent one, for the nation is now being threatened not from without, but from within, by various false philosophies, especially atheism.<sup>25</sup> This is why, in the final chapter, Williams summarizes the principles of justice and charity set forth in the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter of 1919.<sup>26</sup> The book closes with a dramatic scenario: the nation is in crisis and Catholics are the ones to rescue it, armed as they are with the Catholic Church's social-ethical vision, which provides the intellectual resources needed to return the nation to the principles on which it was founded.

Reading *American Catholics in the War* today, we might be tempted to write it off as an archaic piece of Catholic triumphalism and nationalist propaganda, the kind a minority, immigrant group would write in order to gain acceptance into the mainstream. But this would be a mistake for several reasons. For one thing, the author, Michael Williams, was no obscure bureaucrat who finished his days behind some desk. After publishing *American Catholics in the War*, he left the War Council for a new venture: founding an independent, lay-owned-and-operated Catholic periodical which he edited from 1924 until 1938. The periodical was called *The Commonweal*, and Williams, as founding editor, had a shaping impact on its editorial stance, as is evident when one peruses the early

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<sup>22</sup>Michael Williams, *American Catholics in the War: The National Catholic War Council, 1917-1921* (New York: Macmillan, 1921).

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 14-87.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 34-42, 72-75.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 10, 442-47.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 447-66.

issues.<sup>27</sup> For another thing, Williams' intellectual vision was standard fare in the world of Catholic scholarship in the decades after the war. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Catholic philosophers, political theorists, sociologists, and historians set out to demonstrate philosophically, historically, and scientifically that there exists a fundamental harmony between the church and the nation.<sup>28</sup> And this vision of harmony structured the discourse of what is now called "American Catholic social ethics." Showing how this worked is a task for another day. For now I want to make a related institutional point. The War Council was not disbanded after the war. It survived and in 1919 was reconstituted into a standing national organization and renamed the National Catholic Welfare Council. In 1922-1923, it was renamed again, this time the National Catholic Welfare Conference.<sup>29</sup> It retained this name until 1966 when it was divided into two organizations: the USCC/NCCB. In 2001, these two were joined back into a single organization: the USCCB. Institutionally, therefore, the origins of the USCCB reside in the National Catholic War Council. This is important because the Church's self-understood mission to America came to be shaped by a state-centered, nationalized agenda. The key player in this regard was John A. Ryan, who in 1920 took up the planning of the Social Action Department of the NCWC.

Ryan is known most for his contribution in the area of economic justice, but he was also active in the area of war and peace.<sup>30</sup> And one key feature of his thought in this area is that it was shaped and controlled by an assumed moral legitimacy of the state.<sup>31</sup> This was evident in his support of the U.S. entry into World War I on the grounds that the authority to make such decisions resides with the state.<sup>32</sup> It was also evident in his role in founding in 1927 the Catholic

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<sup>27</sup>Rodger Van Allen, *The Commonwealth and American Catholicism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 1-74.

<sup>28</sup>See William M. Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980); Phillip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) esp. 105-36.

<sup>29</sup>Elizabeth McKeown, *War and Welfare: American Catholics and World War I* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988); Douglas J. Slawson, *The Foundation and First Decade of the National Catholic Welfare Council* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992).

<sup>30</sup>Charles E. Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics: Twentieth-Century Approaches* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) 82.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 60-61, 67-75. Harlen Beckley, *Passion for Justice* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 185-86. See also John A. Ryan, "Comments on the 'Christian Constitution of States,'" in *The State and the Church*, ed. Moorhouse F. X. Millar, S.J. and John A. Ryan (New York: Macmillan, 1922) 26-28.

<sup>32</sup>Regarding his support of the U.S. entry into World War I, Ryan wrote, "I acquiesced in the declaration of war because I assumed that the president and Congress were in a better position than I to make the right decision." See Patricia McNeal, *Harder than War: Catholic Peacemaking in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers

Association for International Peace, which at the time was considered the "official" Catholic peace organization in the United States. As Patricia McNeal notes in her history of Catholic peacemaking in the twentieth century, CAIP, owing to the influence of John Ryan, was closely linked to the NCWC and thus approached the task of peacemaking by working for the reform of U.S. national policy and the amelioration of relations among nation-states in the international arena. With the rise of fascism in the thirties, it became clear that war would not be averted, so CAIP joined other "peace groups" in endorsing the principles of "collective security" and preparing the nation for war. When the United States entered in 1941, CAIP gave unqualified support.<sup>33</sup> After the war, CAIP and other proponents of "collective security," focused on planning for a postwar "community of nations."<sup>34</sup> In this context, it supported the U.S. entry into both the Korean War and the Vietnam War.<sup>35</sup> Generally, CAIP, under Ryan's influence, took a policy-reform approach to war and international relations. This approach compelled it to endorse a Catholic version of political realism.<sup>36</sup>

A similar approach can be found in the thought of John Courtney Murray who was also involved in CAIP.<sup>37</sup> Like scholars of the preceding generation, Murray's thought was deeply shaped by a vision of fundamental harmony between Catholicism and the United States. He called the U.S. founding "providential."<sup>38</sup> He saw the First Amendment of the Constitution, with its division between the spiritual and the temporal orders, as a fulfillment of the truths revealed in the incarnation.<sup>39</sup> And also like his predecessors, he believed that the nation was in crisis due to the onslaught of erroneous philosophical theories—materialism, naturalism, pragmatism, and atheism—and that Catholics should take the lead in returning the nation to its true moral and intellectual foundations. But in spite of his basic endorsement of "the American experiment" (or, he might say, because of it), he was a sharp and vocal critic of U.S. policy regarding war. This was clear by the fifties, when he emerged as a critic of U.S. policy on nuclear war, which he found reckless in its Cold War bellicism and nuclear brinksmanship.<sup>40</sup> This was also clear during the Vietnam War, which he supported on just-war grounds, while at the same time arguing strenuously for governmental recognition of the right of selective conscientious objectors to war. Shortly before his death he reported that his support was roundly rejected by a

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University Press, 1992) 6.

<sup>33</sup>McNeal, *Harder than War*, 10-20.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 52, 68-69.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 74, 155-56.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 71, 156.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 81-82,

<sup>38</sup>John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960)

30, 68.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 202-205.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 249-73.

Presidential Advisory Commission of which he was a member, to which he responded by calling for concerted efforts to put the issue before the nation.<sup>41</sup> But regarding both nuclear war and selective conscientious objection, his efforts were not successful. And as he saw it, they were not successful due to a failure of the American public to engage the important issues of the day on the basis of reason, by which he meant, of course, right reason.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, Murray, whose life's work is so often read as a success story due to its vindication at Vatican II, can also be read as a tragic figure, inasmuch as his vision of a nation whose war policy is guided by reason remained an unrealized ideal.

Perhaps the one moment that most vividly exemplified Murray's ideal of reasoned principles shaping public discourse came with the drafting and promulgation of the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace*.<sup>43</sup> After all, an avid Murray disciple, Bryan Hehir, shepherded the process and shaped the final product. The process was truly remarkable, bringing policy-makers, peace activists and scholars into a three-year-long discussion on what the United States should do to avert nuclear catastrophe. And in key respects, the result exemplified the "fresh new attitude" toward war called for by Vatican II.<sup>44</sup> The Letter contained, for example, a long, scripturally based exposition of peace and peacemaking.<sup>45</sup> It hailed the pacifism of Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, and Gandhi.<sup>46</sup> It stated that the just-war tradition is marked by a presumption for peace and nonviolent alternatives to conflict resolution.<sup>47</sup> And it called upon Catholics and others to discern seriously the moral implications of working in the military, in defense-related industries, in the media, in education, and so on.<sup>48</sup> The Letter was commended by historians as marking a turning point in the history of Catholicism in the United States.<sup>49</sup> And yet, in spite of these salutary developments, *The Challenge of Peace* failed to generate the hoped-for paradigm shift in the Church's witness to peace and peacemaking, and thus can be read, I would argue, along the tragic plotline that marks the work of Murray.

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<sup>41</sup>Murray, "Selective Conscientious Objection," in *Selected Writings of John Courtney Murray, S.J.*, ed. J. Leon Hooper, S.J. (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994) 91, 88-98.

<sup>42</sup>Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 82.

<sup>43</sup>National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1983).

<sup>44</sup>The phrase from *Guadium et Spes* (n. 80) is cited at the opening section of *The Challenge of Peace* (n. 23) and in the middle (n. 120).

<sup>45</sup>*The Challenge of Peace*, nos. 27-55.

<sup>46</sup>*The Challenge of Peace*, no. 117.

<sup>47</sup>*The Challenge of Peace*, nos. 120, 220-30.

<sup>48</sup>*The Challenge of Peace*, nos. 301-25.

<sup>49</sup>See, for example, David J. O'Brien, *Public Catholicism* (New York: Macmillan, 1989) 249-50. For an analysis of the plotline of this book, see Michael J. Baxter, "Writing History in a World without Ends: An Evangelical Catholic Critique of U.S. Catholic History," *Pro Ecclesia* 5 (Fall 1996): 458-63.

Key problems are reflected in the text of the Letter itself. The long exposition on scripture concludes with a startling statement that it provides no specific answers to the problems besetting the nation regarding nuclear weapons. Its significance is paranetic. It enjoins us to assume a certain attitude or disposition toward peace. It points us in certain directions for peacemaking. But it does not provide us with moral norms to be embodied in concrete action.<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, this understanding of scripture as paranetic is reinforced by a dichotomy between the kingdom and history, a dichotomy inherited, unfortunately, from the Christian realism of Reinhold Niebuhr. According to this view, those adhering to the teaching and example of Jesus place themselves in the realm of the kingdom rather than in the realm of history, or at best, on the edge of history, from where they witness to those directly and more responsibly involved in the ambiguities of the real world of power politics with its endless complexities, insoluble problems, and inevitable compromises.<sup>51</sup> Jesus, quite simply, is not the norm; neither are the lives of the saints; neither, for that matter, are people like King and Day. While commending their witness, the Letter notes that their pacifist convictions are personal choices that do not apply as valid options for whole societies. Here we find a correlative to Niebuhr's kingdom/history dichotomy: the dichotomy between the individual and society. Pacifism is confined to the realm of the individual whereas just-war principles pertain to society and thus serve as the only real basis for a genuine social ethic.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, because the application of these principles is played out in the realm of history with its unavoidable ambiguities, the recommendations put forth by the bishops are guided by what is morally responsible public policy. While the Letter rules out the use of nuclear weapons, it gives qualified approval to deterrence strategy, on combined realist and proportionalist grounds. They arrive at a "strictly conditioned moral acceptance of nuclear deterrence," so long as concerted efforts are being made to reduce nuclear armaments and diminish the threat of full-scale nuclear war.<sup>53</sup> But because any judgment as to how to apply principles to actual cases is so fraught with complexity and ambiguity, it was impossible to hold U.S. policymakers accountable to a natural-law ethic. As a result, the Letter had little palpable effect on Reagan- or Bush-administration policy.

Nor did it have lasting impact on Catholics at large. Indeed, in the years during which the Letter was prepared and disseminated, there emerged a neocon-

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<sup>50</sup>*The Challenge of Peace*, no. 55.

<sup>51</sup>*The Challenge of Peace*, no. 56. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Human Destiny*, vol. 2 of *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964) 68-97.

<sup>52</sup>*The Challenge of Peace*, no. 119.

<sup>53</sup>*The Challenge of Peace*, no. 186. The conditions are listed in nos. 188-93. For a critique of the acceptance of deterrence strategy as succumbing to consequentialist or proportionalist reasoning, see John Finnis, Joseph Boyle, and Germain Grisez, *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality, and Realism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

servative backlash, the effect of which was to neutralize the impact of the Letter.<sup>54</sup> Catholics divided on the issue of nuclear weapons along liberal and conservative lines or, even more superficially, between Democratic and Republican lines. Regarding whether or not to work at a nuclear weapons factory or stand ready to turn the launch key at a missile silo, a Catholic could go either way. Issues of conscience took a back seat to issues of public policymaking.

But, it might be insisted at this point, the policymaking question is a *real* one: what *should* we do about nuclear weapons? But when we accept this question as the most important one, we take up a set of problems that, morally speaking, should not be the ones we regard as primary. In pursuing this point, I want to raise the question, who do we mean by "we"? We Catholics? Or we Americans? And in raising this question, I am raising a question about the central premise of the Pastoral Letter itself, the premise that the issue of building, deploying, and threatening to use nuclear weapons can be taken up with these two identities—Catholic and American—intact.

As a way to lay bare the issues at stake, let me pose an analogous question that is admittedly provocative. It comes from the movie "The Godfather." What should "we," the Corleone family, do about the proposal made by Sollozzo "the Turk" that we provide protection for the other families in the mob as they pursue the emerging heroine trade in return for a cut in the profit? Do we refuse the offer in order to safeguard our contacts with politicians and the police, as Don Corleone originally, prudentially judged? Or do we provide the other families with protection so as to make peace, as the Don eventually decided after Sonny was killed on the causeway? Now, this analogy may be overstated, but not entirely so. After all, Mario Puzo has stated that one purpose of *The Godfather* was to suggest an analogy between the way things are done in the mob and politics in the United States.<sup>55</sup> And the political theorist Charles Tilley explains the nature of the state by using the same analogy with organized crime.<sup>56</sup>

On this note, who can forget the dialogue between Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) and Kay Adams (Diane Keaton), when Michael comes to whisk her away from the quiet life she leads as grade-school teacher and bring her back to New York to spend her life with him? Michael: "I'm working for my father now, Kay. He's been sick, very sick." Kay: "But you're not like him, Michael. I thought you weren't going to become a man like your father. That's what you told me. . . ." Michael: "My father's no different than any other powerful man.

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<sup>54</sup>The backlash against the bishops' pastoral is set forth at length in George Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis: The Present Failure and Future Promise of American Catholic Thought on War and Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>55</sup>Mario Puzo, *The Godfather Papers and Other Confessions* (New York: Putnam, 1972).

<sup>56</sup>Charles Tilley, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 169-91.

Any man who's responsible for other people. Like a senator or a president." Kay: "You know how naïve you sound?" Michael: "Why?" Kay: "Senators and presidents don't have men killed." Michael: "Oh, who's being naïve, Kay?"<sup>57</sup>

Again, I am aware that suggesting that U.S. policy on nuclear weapons is a form of organized crime might seem farfetched, but the Second Vatican Council did not flinch from this kind of language when it wrote in *Gaudium et Spes* that the use of nuclear weapons on population centers is "a crime against God and humanity that merits unhesitating condemnation."<sup>58</sup> And, in Catholic moral theology, if it is a crime to use nuclear weapons indiscriminately, then it is also wrong to intend to use them.<sup>59</sup>

It is a time-worn principle in Catholic moral theology that if a person is put into a situation in which doing evil is unavoidable, then the person should remove herself from the situation in order to avoid a near occasion of sin.<sup>60</sup> Had Kay adhered to this principle, she would have refused to go with Michael, painful as it would be to pass up marrying the man she loves, so as not to be involved in the evils of organized crime.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, if Catholics were to adhere to this principle, they would have to remove themselves from situations in which they would be required to perform the evil of using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, or to be involved in some way in the organized crime of nuclear war. These are complex matters, involving questions not only of performing evil, but also cooperating with evil. And there are numerous degrees of cooperation that must be discerned—formal or material, remote or proximate, mediate or immediate—and various combinations of each.<sup>62</sup> But what concerns me is that this kind of discernment does not go on among Catholics in the United States. And one reason why is that the discourse of Catholic social ethics in the United States is designed to address public policy questions; it is addressed first and foremost to policymakers, and thus neglects the task of helping Catholics address the questions that they, according to our moral teaching, should be addressing. In what

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<sup>57</sup>"The Godfather" script can be found on the web at <http://www.jgeoff.com/godfather/gf1/transcript/gf1transcript.html>.

<sup>58</sup>*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 80.

<sup>59</sup>Finnis, Boyle, and Grisez, *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality, and Realism*, 104-31.

<sup>60</sup>Anthony F. Alexander, *College Moral Theology* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1958) 43-46.

<sup>61</sup>Of course, the situation might not be quite that simple. Using the kind of reasoning in the moral manuals, one might suggest that the situation is complicated enough to admit of some judgment. It might be prudent for Kay to agree to spend six months with Michael, during which she would try to talk him out of entering further into the sinful life of the Corleone family business. After that point, it might be prudent for her to call the relationship off and go back to New England and forget him. These are the kinds of matters moral theologians used to think and write about.

<sup>62</sup>M. Cathleen Kaveny, "Appropriation of Evil: Cooperation's Mirror Image," *Theological Studies* 61 (June 2000): 280-313.

wars should I participate? In what operations within a war should I participate? In what wars or operations within wars should I refuse to participate? From what situations should I simply withdraw? I propose that these questions should be of primary concern to us as Catholics, and in the third and final section of this paper, I want to explain what is entailed theologically in taking up this pastoral task.

#### SOCIAL ETHICS: PASTORALLY FOCUSED SIGNS OF PEACE

I am aware that a shift of emphasis away from policymaking issues and toward pastoral concerns may sound quaint, if not churchy. Moreover, I risk opening myself up to the charge of being "sectarian." In his plenary address to this body in 1985, James Gustafson warned against the dangers of "the sectarian temptation," as he called it, a temptation that he associated with George Lindbeck and Stanley Hauerwas, among others.<sup>63</sup> His concern was with the emphasis these thinkers place on the distinctive identity of the Christian community, rooted in Jesus and the scriptural narratives, at the expense of Christian interaction with wider society, culture, other religions, and other modes of scholarly inquiry, especially the natural and human sciences which have a lot to teach us about the world in which we live and therefore the God who created it. If theology is not conversant with other modes of discourse, he warns, it will become narrow, calcified, and closed to other construals of reality that could lead to revisions of its own. Moreover, such a stance is an implicit denial of the doctrine of creation. In addition, sectarianism threatens to lead to a Christian withdrawal from public life and the difficult issues facing modern society. Here, Gustafson says frankly that

faithful witness to Jesus is not a sufficient theological and moral basis for addressing the moral and social problems of the twentieth century. The theologian addressing many issues—nuclear, social justice, ecology, and so forth—must do so as an outcome of a theology that develops God's relations to all aspects of life in the world, and develops those relations in terms which are not exclusively Christian in a sectarian form. Jesus is not God.<sup>64</sup>

Rereading this address, I was struck by the stark terms in which the argument is cast, as if we are obliged to choose between knowledge received by means of faith in Jesus and the knowledge we attain from scientific inquiry, or as if the great issues facing the world today can be seriously and consistently addressed by theologians only if they admit that Jesus is not God. To this statement, I feel compelled to register an objection: yes, Jesus *is* God, or more precisely, Jesus is the Son of God, or even more precisely, Jesus is the Son "one in being with the Father. Through Him all things were made"—and so on. But

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<sup>63</sup>James Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation," *Proceedings of the Fortieth Annual Convention (CTSA)* 40 (1985): 83-94. See esp. 86-87, 88.

<sup>64</sup>Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation," 93.

rather than engage in a doctrinal dispute, I want to argue that an unequivocal belief in the divinity of Christ need not lead to the problems that Gustafson associates with "the sectarian temptation," to communal narrowness or a disinterest in the problems facing humanity or an implicit denial of a doctrine of creation. On the contrary, it can lead to quite the opposite.

In order to show how this is the case, I want to return to the ancient concept of peace (set forth in part one), in particular that of Athanasius, who held that Jesus *is* God, uncreated, "begotten, not made, one in being with the Father. Through him all things were made." This last portion of the Nicene Creed is important, for if all things were made "through him," then faith in him should enhance our understanding of creation and the world. Moreover, it should not close us off to other cultures and perspectives. It should open us up to them. Remember, in Athanasius' view, as in patristic theology generally, Christ restores humanity to its true nature and original unity. And remember too that this restoration entails that we become peaceable, turning "from fighting to farming" and to other peaceful activities. What is important to note is that there is a dialectic involved here: recovering our true nature involves letting go of our "false nature," so to speak, those aspects of our personal, social lives that we took to be true but have now come to see that they are not. This is an arduous task. It requires that we learn how to name and resist demons—lust, gluttony, greed, anger—so as to allow God's grace to transform us into people of virtue. For Athanasius, the model in this task was Anthony of the desert. Anthony and the other early monks were not part of an antisocial withdrawal from the world (the picture of Murray's account of eschatological humanism<sup>65</sup>). Rather, in *The Life of Antony*, the desert becomes a city and Anthony becomes an advisor and counselor to the leaders of Egyptian society, including leaders in the military.<sup>66</sup>

This dialectical task of sorting out our true nature and false nature, a centerpiece of the patristic vision, is also a centerpiece in the moral theology of Aquinas. It is true, of course, that for Aquinas, grace perfects nature, does not destroy it. But it is a mistake, I think, to imagine that such a perfection of nature occurs smoothly and calmly, without radical transformation. Here again, one thinks of Murray's picture, derived from a neoscholastic reading of Aquinas, of people arriving at the truths of the natural law by the operations of a cool, dry reason.<sup>67</sup> But in the *Summa* and elsewhere, Aquinas works as a dialectical

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<sup>65</sup>Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 175-96, esp. 186-87.

<sup>66</sup>Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. with an introduction by Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980). Athanasius writes that "the name of the monk carries public weight" (29); that a divine voice came to Antony declaring "I will make you famous everywhere" (39); that "the desert was made a city by monks" (42). He also writes that Antony was often disconsolate at having to receive so many visitors, some of whom were judges, one of whom was a military commander (92).

<sup>67</sup>Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 7.

thinker. His teaching and writing is forged in the context of disputation. And in the process of arriving at the truth, sometimes grace disturbs nature, or what seemed to be "nature" but was in fact a false conception of nature. This is the picture of Aquinas presented in a recent article by Frederick Bauerschmidt who argues in favor of Flannery O'Connor's "Hillbilly Thomism" over Murray's "Gentleman Thomism."<sup>68</sup> A similarly nuanced reading of Aquinas can be found in *The Ascent to Truth* by Thomas Merton. Writing in the atmosphere of official suspicion toward the *nouvelle theologie*, which was indirectly but forcefully condemned in *Humanae Generis*, Merton was concerned that the writings of John of the Cross, his mentor and guide in the contemplative life, was coming under disrepute for denigrating nature and reason as genuine avenues to truth.<sup>69</sup> But John of the Cross, Merton argues in this plodding but important book, was a scholastic thinker. At the same time he shows Thomas to have been a mystical thinker, and he points to key moments in the *Summa* indicating that truth is to be grasped not by discursive reasoning and intellectual exercise alone, but also by allowing at key moments the intellect to grow dormant, to fall asleep, like the disciples at Gethsemane, so that we may proceed to truth by means of the will, by means of love, guided by the practices of contemplation.<sup>70</sup> Later, of course, one returns to the intellectual faculties and reintegrates what one has discovered while passing through the dark night of the soul into a natural and well-reasoned account of the truth. But this reintegration process entails discarding what was once thought to have been "natural" and "reasonable" but is now shown to have been *unnatural* in the lights of what is now seen to have been *misdirected* reason. Grace thus perfects nature by disturbing and transforming it.

What does this dialectical view of Thomism—this reading of Aquinas as a mystical theologian, this notion of grace perfecting nature by disturbing it—have to do with social ethics? For Merton, it laid the basis for calling into question the way the just-war theory was being applied to U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War era.<sup>71</sup> He sharply criticized the abstract casuistry of moral theologians in general, and of Murray in particular, for justifying the use of tactical nuclear

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<sup>68</sup>Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, "Shouting in the Land of the Hard of Hearing: On Being a Hillbilly Thomist," *Modern Theology* 20 (January 2004): 163-83, esp. 163-64.

<sup>69</sup>Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1951). On the interdependence of dogmatic and mystical theology in both Aquinas and John of the Cross, see 14-18. On *Humanae Generis* as it relates to the relation of acquired and infused knowledge, see 15, 258.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 276. The metaphor of dogmatic knowledge giving way to mystical knowledge being like the disciples falling asleep on the Mount of Olives comes not from Aquinas himself, but from Maritain, in an effort to explain the relationship between these two types of knowledge (see *ibid.*, 341).

<sup>71</sup>See, for example, Thomas Merton, *The Nonviolent Alternative*, ed. and with an introduction by Gordon Zahn (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1971) esp. 12-19.

weapons in certain battle situations.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, Merton was deeply opposed to the Vietnam War which was also, one could say, the product of an unperfected reason. In response to the total warfare scenarios that had marked the twentieth century, Merton called for a "spiritual revolution" as the only hope for a genuinely Christian civilization, a revolution beginning with contemplation, which, he insisted (here again, contrary to the official stance of neoscholastic authors), all Christians, laity, religious, secular clergy as well as monastics, are called to practice.<sup>73</sup>

It was this vision that led Merton to find common cause with Dorothy Day who likewise called for a spiritual revolution of the temporal order. And this was by no means a coincidence, for Day too, under the influence of the Canadian Jesuit priest Onesimus Lacouture and Fr. John J. Hugo of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, had also taken John of the Cross as her guide, attempting, amid the hustle and bustle and chaos of Catholic Worker Houses, to follow the contemplative way of love.<sup>74</sup> In *The Long Loneliness*, in the chapter entitled "Retreat," it is clear that she was very much aware of the controversies over the proper relation between nature and grace that were being hashed out by theologians at the time. She mentions Matthias Scheeben and Henri de Lubac by name, and wryly hints of her preference for de Lubac's emphasis on the need for nature to be transformed by the supernatural.<sup>75</sup> For Day, this theological stance afforded her the perspective to see U.S. foreign policy as a senseless and unholy perpetration of violence. Formed as she was in the philosophy of the Old Left, Day had long seen the state as a tool of the ruling classes for maintaining the status quo and the oppressive conditions of workers.<sup>76</sup> After converting to Catholicism and embracing a pacifism based on the Sermon on the Mount, Day only deepened her aversion to the state, including the modern liberal state. Even at the height of the Cold War, she scolded Catholics in the United States for assuming a posture of

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<sup>72</sup>McNeal, *Harder than War*, 110-11.

<sup>73</sup>Merton, *Ascent to Truth*, 3-8.

<sup>74</sup>Brigid Merriman, *Searching for Christ: The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 132-69).

<sup>75</sup>Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper, 1952) 246-60, 253, 258. For Hugo's account of the controversies surrounding his and Lacouture's theology, see John J. Hugo, *The Deliverance of Onesimus; The Retreat: Its Story*, vol. 1 of *Your Ways Are Not My Ways* (Pittsburgh: Mt. Nazareth Center/Encounters with Silence, 1986).

<sup>76</sup>See, for example, Day, *Long Loneliness*, 263-73. The title of this chapter, "War Is the Health of the State," comes from a line in an essay written by Randolph Bourne during World War I. See Randolph S. Bourne, "The State," in *War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays, 1915-1919*, ed. with an introduction by Carl Resek (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) 65-104, esp. 69, 71. Day's use of it more than thirty years later indicates the continuing impact of Bourne's ideas on her view of the state.

uncritical obedience to, as Day called it, "Holy Mother the State." It was, in her mind, a failure to maintain their identity as Catholics over Americans.<sup>77</sup>

Both Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day, then, chastised Catholics in the United States for acquiescing to their nation's bellicose foreign policy. They both did so by arguing that what was deemed "natural" and "reasonable" by U.S. policymakers, and by most Catholic moral theologians, was in fact unnatural and unreasonable. And yet, they were not of one mind on the morality of war. Merton espoused just-war theory, while Day of course was a pacifist. This goes to show that both the just-war and pacifist traditions have resources to maintain a critical distance from the claims of a war making state. It is true that Merton's just-war theory allows for a legitimacy of the state that is not found in the so-called Christian anarchism of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement in general. But this legitimacy is theoretical; it concerns the nature of the state in principle. In theory, the authority of the state is legitimate, but in fact, actual states, as we know all too well, can veer away from their obligation to conform to the natural law. They can be propagators of nationalist ideology and of false notions of "freedom" and "security," based on a misuse of reason, rather than protectors of the common good, the *universal* common good; and to the extent they do misuse reason, they lose their legitimate authority. In such situations, Merton's skepticism, along with Day's, is a crucial guide to the morality of war, especially *during* a war. For at no other time are citizens more likely to be blinded from the possibility that their nation has veered from the natural law than during a war, when old slogans are dusted off and brought back in to circulation, slogans so as to fabricate a consensus that "we" must "support our troops," that "we" are "one nation under God." Even after the promulgation of *The Challenge of Peace*, with its concerted attempt at generating a more critical attitude to war, Catholics still fall prey to nationalist rhetoric and ideology.

Consider, for example, the near unanimous support on the part of Catholics in the United States for the First Gulf War. The question then was: what are we going to do about Saddam? And in giving the supposedly obvious answer, "we" got involved in organized crime. For one thing, we committed the crime of firing on troops in retreat from Kuwait to Basra, of using weapons made in part of depleted uranium, of destroying water treatment and electrical power facilities so as to demoralize the Iraqi population. For another thing, we committed the crime of imposing (in concert with the United Nations in this case) one of the most stringent economic embargoes in modern history, leading to the deaths of hundreds of thousands, over the consistent and strenuous objections of the Holy See. And then, in an attempt to oust Baathist thugs, we hired thugs of our own, such as Sheik Gazi Ahmad Chalabi, who supposedly was informing us as to what

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<sup>77</sup>See the editorial by Dorothy Day, "We Are Un-American: We Are Catholics," which can be found on the web at <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/reprint.cfm?TextID=466>.

was really going on in Iraq even while, it turns out, he was selling intelligence information to Iran.

Consider, too, the support among Catholics for the so-called "Second Gulf War" (which actually is a misnomer in light of the intervening economic embargo, which itself was an act of war). The most vocal supporter of the so-called Second Gulf War has been George Weigel, who claims to have based his support on the reasoned tradition of just-war theory. The reasons he gave for supporting the U.S. invasion of Iraq have not born out, in the view of many (though he certainly disagrees). But for Weigel this is beside the point because at the heart of his argument for the justice of the Gulf War was the claim that the decision to go to war was a "prudential judgment" to be made by the head of state, in this case the president, who has the responsibility, authority, and charism to do so.<sup>78</sup> Here the response must be, yes and no: yes, in theory and in principle, the head of state is the one assigned to exercise the prudential judgment to go to war; but no, in practice and in fact, the particular judgment made by a particular head of state may not be an exercise of the virtue of prudence at all, but of the vice of cunning which, according to Aristotle and Aquinas, works under the guise of prudence.<sup>79</sup> Does the state have the right to wage war? The just-war tradition affirms that it does, in theory and in principle. But in practice and in fact, in the case of *this particular war*, the answer was and is: No.

This raises a couple of questions that the Pope and I would like to put to George Weigel: What exactly were the flaws in the reasoning of the Holy See in warning against this war? And what further facts and information would have to come out to cause you to revise your judgment on this war? This second question is important because it could lay the basis for concluding at some future point that Bush's judgment was wrong. If one cannot or will not answer this question, then one's stance on the justice of the war is not reasonable at all. But to this point, Weigel has been less interested in critically applying the just-war criteria to U.S. wars, and more interested in deferring to the "prudential judgment" to be made the president. And this deferral to the prudential judgment of the president is itself part of Weigel's broader deferral to the authority of the state which he assumes without ever really arguing.

This brings up another question: Is the state a "natural institution"? In theory, it is, insofar as it conforms to the natural law, as indicated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.<sup>80</sup> But in practice, inasmuch as it does not conform to the natural law, it is not natural at all and thus does not necessarily command our obedience; in fact, we may actually be called to conscientiously object to

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<sup>78</sup>George Weigel, "Moral Clarity in a Time of War," *First Things* 128 (January 2003): 20-27, esp. 27.

<sup>79</sup>Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a 21-36. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 55, 2-5.

<sup>80</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1897-98.

laws that run counter to the natural law, including laws involving the waging of war.<sup>81</sup>

The point I am pressing toward is this: when it comes to the United States waging war, Catholics should not give over their judgment to civil and military officials. Given the record of the United States departing from just war principles in the Second World War, the Vietnam War, the First Gulf War and embargo, and in the invasion and present occupation of Iraq, we should not assume the legitimate authority of the state. Rather, the burden of proof belongs to the state. Refusing to make this assumption marks a crucial departure from the tradition of deferring to state authority in waging war that goes back to Ryan and Murray and is endemic to the state-centered paradigm out of which they and worked.

It is in light of this skepticism regarding the legitimate authority of the state that we Catholics, in teaching on war and peace, should give primacy to pastoral concerns. Specifically, we should be helping Catholics answer concrete questions regarding their participation in particular wars and, in the case of a just war, regarding their participation in particular operations within that war. The pastoral focus here would be on Catholic soldiers, helping them to answer concrete moral questions. Should I participate in this war? Should I participate in this military operation? Should I refuse? These questions are on the minds of many of the 400,000 or so Catholics on active duty or in the reserves. And I think we—we Catholics and we Americans, we theologians and teachers—should help form them in the virtues needed to make these judgments and act accordingly.

Is it possible for a Catholic to serve honorably as a soldier? In principle, yes, as stated by the Second Vatican Council. But in fact, in practice, the answer may well be no. On the basis of what we have learned in recent months about how this war was and is being waged, about how Iraqi prisoners are being treated, we have to ask serious questions as to whether or not conditions exist today, in the United States military, that allow soldiers to wage war justly.<sup>82</sup> And for those soldiers in Iraq whose consciences raise moral objections to this war, they should request reassignment to another duty, apply for noncombatant status, seek discharge on conscientious objector grounds, in any case refuse to participate, if necessary by facing courts-martial and going to jail. As stated by the Second Vatican Council, the courage of those who openly and fearlessly resist orders to

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<sup>81</sup>John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, nos. 72-74.

<sup>82</sup>*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 79. The statement is nuanced according to the distinction between an in-principle affirmation and an in-fact negation: "Those who are pledged to the service of their country as members of its armed forces should regard themselves as agents of security and freedom on behalf of their people. *As long as they fulfill this role properly*, they are making a genuine contribution to the establishment of peace" (italics mine).

perform actions conflicting with the principles of the natural law merits "supreme commendation."<sup>83</sup>

I write this as a pacifist and as a Catholic, not a sectarian. As I see it, the most egregious form of sectarianism today comes in the form of an uncritical support for this nation's wars, often on the presumption that the narrow aims and purposes of the United States coincide with the mission of the church. Those who doubt that Americanism of this sort is alive and well need only consult the pages of *First Things*, particularly the editorial of the December 2001 issue, "In a Time of War."<sup>84</sup> And the most effective safeguard against this kind of nationalism is a critical distance from the claims of the state that is entailed in the just war and pacifist traditions. Neither tradition calls for a withdrawal from the political life of the nation. To the contrary, a consistent refusal to participate in this nation's unjust wars on the part of Catholics would generate a powerful and salutary check on U.S. foreign policy. At the same time, it would free us to embody true catholicity, an ability to see Christians from other lands, even from enemy territories, not as enemies or threats to our security, but as brothers and sisters in Christ. In this sense, both the just war and pacifist traditions, properly practiced, make it possible to recapture the ancient vision of a community gathering all people into a unity that was lost at the Fall but is now restored in Christ, making the church into a sign of peace for the nations.

#### CONCLUSION

This ancient vision of the church as the sign of peace comes vividly alive when Christians from different lands gather for liturgy, as it occurred on Christmas Eve 2002 in Basra. After arriving back from Basra to Baghdad the next day (Christmas Day), I talked about my time there with Cathy Breen, a friend from the New York Catholic Worker who had been in Iraq with Voices in the Wilderness since the previous October. We talked about how she would be staying in Iraq during the U.S. invasion and its aftermath to help in whatever she could, how being present in "enemy territory" during this time of war is important to the Iraqi people, how it is a way to embody the sign of peace. She said that the war makes her ashamed of her government but that we should not let this impede our call to pour out our lives in love. Unworthy as we may be, we are beckoned to love all the same. And to illustrate this point, she pulled out her journal and read the following poem by George Herbert, entitled simply "Love."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 79.

<sup>84</sup>"In a Time of War," *First Things* 18 (December 2001): 11-17.

<sup>85</sup>George Herbert, *The Country Parson, The Temple*, ed. with an introduction by John N. Wall, Jr. (New York: Paulist Press, 1981) 316.

Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back,  
    Guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack  
    From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,  
    If I lack'd anything.  
"A guest," I answer'd, "worthy to be here."  
    Love said, "You shall be he."  
"I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,  
    I cannot look on thee."  
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
    "Who made the eyes but I?"  
"Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame  
    Go where it doth deserve."  
"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"  
    "My dear, then I will serve."  
"You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my meat."  
    So I did sit and eat.

Whatever our past failures in receiving Christ's gift of peace, the promise of receiving it faithfully and allowing it to transform us into the sign of peace to the nations, is renewed each time we gather at Eucharist. As we will tomorrow, when once again, we will hear these words and pray: "Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles: I leave you peace; my peace I give you. Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live for ever and ever. Amen."

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