

## PANEL: TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF PEACE

### INTRODUCTION

Today's plenary session on a positive theology of peace is not only historic in the annals of the CTSA, it also coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the publication of Pope John XXIII's encyclical letter *Pacem in terris* and with the publication on May 3, 1983 of the Roman Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on War and Peace, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*. Peace is demonstrably very high on the theological and moral agenda of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and leadership and it is time for Catholic theologians to heed the call of the people and the bishops to construct a positive theology of peace which will minimize war and violence through the advancement of social justice and human dignity. In the words of the bishops:

We address theologians in a particular way because we know that we have only begun the journey toward a theology of peace; without your specific contributions this desperately needed dimension of our faith will not be realized. Through your help we may provide new vision and wisdom for church and state.

The purpose of today's plenary session is in one sense to celebrate the great advances made in a theology of peace by our popes and bishops and in another sense to acknowledge that the full unfolding of a positive theology of peace is only in its very beginning stages. We must not forget that if on the political and strategic levels "we are giants when it comes to making war but mere pygmies when it comes to making peace" so we on the theological level are not much further advanced. For too long we have tied our theology of peace to the nation-state or the *status quo*; the nuclear age demands that theology free itself from such restraints.

In the past our meager treatment of peace was generally limited to the Just War principles and relegated to a sub-section of moral theology. Today we must come to see that a positive theology of peace is the concern of every field of theology from biblical and historical studies through liturgical and systematic theology. If the quest for the kingdom of God is the central principle for all of theology then all of our speculative and research efforts must be directed at examining the nature of the kingdom and the demands it makes on Christians in this nuclear age. A theology of the kingdom should also examine the "enemy" of the kingdom in history: the demonic temptation to destruction and despair. Since the enemies of the kingdom are spiritual in nature, it is the task of theology to identify spiritual weapons of defense against the demonic. It is essential that a positive theology of peace result in a positive spirituality which will equip the Christian to defend that which is sacred with the weapons of nonviolence which alone can fulfill the kingdom's call to reconciliation of enemies.

In the spirit of understanding the development of a positive theology of peace as the task of every field of theology, we have invited four scholars from different fields to explore with us and to challenge us to develop a positive theology of peace.

JOSEPH J. FAHEY  
*Manhattan College*

### FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN PEACE

The appearance of the American bishops' pastoral letter on peace is, perhaps, one of the most urgent among many factors challenging scholars to address in a new way the entire Christian peace tradition. We ask spontaneously: What do the Scriptures have to tell us about peace? How did the early Christians understand their responsibility to promote peace?

In an attempt to contribute to the ongoing discussion, I propose, at this time, to pursue a threefold task: 1) to review, in a general manner, the biblical concepts of peace; 2) to examine, again in a general way, the evidences for a Christian understanding of peace in the patristic era; 3) to suggest some points of departure for reflection on the theological significance of a commitment to peace and justice which seeks to assure convergence between the struggle for human rights and the coming of the reign of God.

#### I. BIBLICAL CONCEPTS OF PEACE

Any effort to identify the foundations of peace, as it is to be understood by Christians, must take two realities into account. The first is the recognition that the biblical foundations for a teaching on peace can be found in both the Old and the New Testaments. The second is that questions put to the past by the present must be articulated in terms of a situation and an experience that are "new," because they are contemporary, that is, conditioned by factors of a "different" time and space in human history.

##### *Old Testament*

There seems to be agreement among scripture scholars that a general, composite statement on peace can be derived from the books of the Old Testament. At a first level, biblical peace can be said to indicate "the well-being of daily existence." It is harmony with God, with nature, with others, with oneself. "Concretely, it is blessing, rest, glory, riches, salvation, life." At the same time, we find a more specific, experiential notion of peace that develops throughout the Old Testament. The Psalmist pleads for a peace that is deliverance from the sufferings and trials that mark a time of invasion and war; a peace that is freedom from strife and anxiety; a peace that is equated with a life of happiness, harmony and well-being. The