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## Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and Pax Christi USA's Contribution to the 1983 United States Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response"

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**Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and Pax Christi USA's Contribution to the 1983 United States Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response"**

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*This essay is a personal reflection on the contribution that Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and Pax Christi USA made to the creation of the U.S. Bishops' 1983 pastoral letter on peace. It begins with the early history of Pax Christi USA and discusses activities through the years that led to the U.S. Bishops' letter on peace in 1983. These activities include: Call to Action 1976; Bishops' Masses for Peace; the Pax Christi USA Disarmament Commission; a discussion of the debate on May 1-3, 1983 on the letter that resulted in a 238-9 vote in favor of the letter; pastoral letters published by European nations and Japan in 1983; and the impact the letter had on the careers of Bishop John O'Connor and Bishop Thomas Gumbleton. The essay concludes with a reflection on the necessity for global governance.*

**Introduction**

I am grateful to the editors of this distinguished journal--especially to Dr. Ron Pagnucco-- for the opportunity to offer a personal reflection on the contribution of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and Pax Christi USA to the United States Catholic Bishops' 1983 Pastoral Letter, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response."

It is appropriate to begin this essay with the visionary role played by Ms. Eileen Egan and Dr. Gordon Zahn, who transformed the peace group "Pax" into Pax Christi USA through affiliation with Pax Christi International in 1972. Pax Christi USA was strongly supported by Dorothy Day, who understood that the Catholic peace movement needed to reach the millions of Catholics who were not pacifists but who wanted to work for Christ's peace in the world principally through their home parishes. Hence, from the beginning, Pax Christi USA has welcomed all people who were "on pilgrimage" to the Gospel of Peace.

Although Pax Christi International required a Bishop President for each section, Eileen and Gordon enlisted the support first of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit, Michigan, and then of Bishop Carroll Dozier of Memphis, Tennessee, who insisted on being called "Episcopal Moderators." Eventually, however, Pax Christi USA did have a single Bishop President, the first of whom was Bishop Gumbleton. In 1971 Bishop Dozier published a diocesan pastoral letter on peace that criticized the war in Vietnam and the global arms race. Also, in 1971, Bishop Gumbleton published a letter in the New York Times that challenged the morality of the war in Vietnam. In part, because of this notoriety, both bishops were invited by Eileen and Gordon to become active in Pax Christi USA in 1972. Bishop Gumbleton played a key role in the creation of the 1983 bishops' peace pastoral letter and served on the committee that wrote the pastoral. From the beginning, they sought to enlist other bishops at Pax Christi USA meetings and encouraged activities (such as the three Bishops' Day of Peace gatherings in 1977 and 1978) that would both educate bishops and enlist their support for Pax Christi USA's statements and actions.

I had the good fortune to serve on Pax Christi's foundational National Council beginning in 1973 and was General Secretary from 1975-1978. During the 1970s and 1980s, I also served on the International Council of Pax Christi in Europe and on the Disarmament Commissions of both Pax Christi USA and Pax Christi International. I attended many meetings in the United States and in several European countries with Eileen Egan and Dr. Gordon Zahn and Bishops Dozier and Gumbleton. It was a distinct honor to work with such thoughtful and joyful people. During those years I taught theological ethics at Manhattan College and served as Director of the BA Program in Peace Studies, which I co-founded there in 1971. An indication of his strong commitment to peace, Pope Paul VI sent a telegram of congratulations and support upon the founding of the Peace Studies program, the first at a Catholic college in the United States. I retired in 2016 after 50 years in peace education and peace advocacy.

My reflections on Pax Christi USA's influence on the creation of the 1983 bishops' pastoral letter are initially inspired by *The Radical Gospel of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton*, a 120- page biography on Bishop Gumbleton's public ministry by Peter Feuerherd (Orbis Books, 2019). This is a good introduction to Bishop Gumbleton's life and ministry, but it is essentially a long journalistic piece that necessarily leaves out many of the historical details of the bishop's life and of those with whom he worked closely in his many endeavors. Since I (along with many others) worked closely both with the bishop and Pax Christi USA on several drafts of the peace pastoral, I consulted several other sources that were rich in historical documentation and offered a wider context to understand those of Bishop Gumbleton and Pax Christi USA in the creation of the peace pastoral.

These sources included the following: (1) Dr. Gerard A. Vanderhaar's "Pax Christi USA: The Early Years 1972-78"; (2) Minutes of meetings of the Pax Christi USA Disarmament Commission that suggested substantive changes in the second and third drafts of "The Challenge of Peace"; (3) An eleven-page letter by the author to Fr. Brian Hehir, Associate Secretary of the Office on International Justice and Peace of the United States Catholic Conference that responded to Fr. Hehir's request for comments and suggestions on the first draft of "The Challenge of Peace"; (4) Pax Christi USA and Bishop Gumbleton's papers in the Archives at the University of Notre Dame; (5) recent conversations with, and 1983 diary entries from, Fr. Paul Dinter (Archdiocese of New York) concerning the bishops' final vote on "The Challenge of Peace" in Chicago on May 3, 1983; (6) my own papers in the Archives at the Catholic University of America; (7) Jim Castelli's excellently researched and insightful book, *The Bishops and the Bomb: Waging Peace in a Nuclear Age* (Doubleday Image Books, 1983); (8) a special issue of *Cross Currents* (1983, Vol. XXIII, No. 3) on "from nuclear war to the abolition of war" (*sic*) that examined the U.S. bishops' pastoral from an international perspective; (9) I found invaluable information on the influence of the Reagan Administration on Pope John Paul II and the bishops of the United States in Jared McBrady (2015), "Ronald Reagan, John Paul II, and the American Bishops," *The Journal of Cold War Studies*: Vol 17, No 1, Winter 2015, pp.129-152; (10) I had the good fortune of reviewing two chapters from Frank Fromherz's and Suzanne Sattler IHM's forthcoming biography of Bishop Gumbleton, *No Guilty Bystander* for Orbis Books; (11) Several

conversations with Pax Christi USA member Walt Grazer who served on Bishop Walter Sullivan's diocesan staff and as a staff member of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; (12) finally, I recently enjoyed several telephone conversations with Bishop Gumbleton in which we talked about the "old days" and reminisced about his and Pax Christi USA's role in the historic pastoral letter on peace.

### **The Foundation of Pax Christi USA**

Since Pax Christi USA's role in the creation of the 1983 bishops' pastoral on peace began from its earlier days, a brief review of that history is necessary.

Pax Christi USA (PCUSA) was founded in the United States in 1972 by Ms. Eileen Egan and Dr. Gordon Zahn with the staunch support of Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker. One of the first steps Eileen took in organizing PCUSA was to invite Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton (Detroit) to serve as Episcopal Moderator of PCUSA. Bishop Gumbleton enthusiastically accepted and was joined by Co-Moderator Bishop Carroll Dozier (Memphis TN).

After a year of further organizing, PCUSA held its first national assembly on Oct. 5-7, 1973 at George Washington University (GWU) in Washington, D.C. From the beginning there was a serious communication problem between the secretariat headed by General Secretary Fr. Edward Guinan, C.S.P. of the Community of Creative Nonviolence (CCNV) and the founders and board of PCUSA. In 1973, the Board consisted of Episcopal Moderators Carroll Dozier (Memphis, TN) and Thomas Gumbleton (Detroit, MI), Co-Chairs Eileen Egan and Dr. Gordon Zahn, and members Claire Danielsson, Dr. Joseph Fahey, Sr. Gloria Fitzgerald, Patrick W. Jordan, Roger Lederer, and Dr. Gerard Vanderhaar.

The CCNV neglected to invite Bishops Dozier and Gumbleton to the GWU meeting. I was told by the secretariat that they did not approve of any episcopal involvement in Pax Christi because the bishops would never approve of radical action including civil disobedience. Also, the Board of PCUSA did not have a formal meeting at that first assembly. It was the secretariat's conviction that the CCNV was the core of Pax Christi USA and that the Board functioned as something of an advisory committee. Hence, decisions were made by the CCNV, and the Board was often left out of the communication loop. This came to a head later in 1973 and into 1974 when the Board regained control of Pax Christi USA and Fr. Ed Guinan resigned as General Secretary (for more detail on this matter see Dr. Vanderhaar's "Pax Christi USA: The Early Years 1972-78." Found in Pax Christi USA's archives at the University of Notre Dame).

Over one hundred people attended the 1973 inaugural meeting in Washington DC and some of us, including myself, were quite surprised to learn that we were to conduct workshops on assorted topics (mine was on Peace Studies in the university). It was there that I met Dr. Gerard Vanderhaar of Christian Brothers University in Memphis, Tennessee. We immediately formed a bond that was to last until his death. I knew that Gerry was the principal author of Bishop Dozier's 1971 diocesan pastoral letter on peace, and we discussed a long-term goal of Pax Christi USA to encourage the United States bishops to issue a strong statement on peacemaking. We didn't at the time envision an actual pastoral letter on peace but did hope

some formal statement by all the bishops could be made. The matter also was discussed informally with Eileen Egan, Gordon Zahn, and several others who shared that vision. Sadly, however, Pax Christi USA fell apart after the 1973 meeting due to the above-mentioned communication problems with the secretariat.

On November 9, 1974, a small meeting was hosted by Bishop Carroll Dozier in Memphis, Tennessee to discuss the reorganization of Pax Christi USA. The group decided to accept the invitation of Dr. Joseph Fahey of Manhattan College in New York City to host a national meeting of Pax Christi members to chart the course for a renewed Pax Christi USA. The meeting was held on May 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> 1975 and a newly restructured Pax Christi USA emerged with a National Council and a new General Secretary, Dr. Joseph Fahey. New priorities were also chosen: Disarmament, Amnesty, Selective Conscientious Objection, and support for the United Nations.

These priorities were deliberately chosen to work *within* the structure of the Catholic Church to influence everyone from parishioners to bishops to make the Catholic church in the United States a “peace” church. Hence, a cooperative movement replaced the earlier confrontational model. This decision caused some division in the Catholic peace movement with those who pursued nonviolent direct action—including Fr. Daniel Berrigan, SJ—who publicly criticized Pax Christi USA for the more institutional path it had chosen. (This controversy is discussed in some detail in Dr. Vanderhaar’s “Pax Christi USA: The Early Years, 1972-78”)

A Pax Christi USA National Assembly was held on November 21-23 at the Bergamo Center in Dayton, Ohio, and Pax Christi USA was reborn. Bernard Cardinal Alfrink, the President of Pax Christi International, sent a warm message of greetings, and Charles Ter Maat, Pax Christi’s International Secretary, traveled to join us from Pax Christi headquarters in The Netherlands. At that meeting, seven Pax Christi regions were formed, and it was decided that Bishops Dozier and Gumbleton would write letters of invitation to all the members of the US hierarchy to join Pax Christi USA. This step eventually resulted in over one hundred episcopal members by the early 1980s and it was crucial in forming a basis of support for the 1983 pastoral letter on peace.

### **Call to Action 1976**

Inspired by Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (1965), and the World Synod of Bishops’ *Justice in the World* (1971), the bishops approved a national conference to apply Catholic Social Teaching to the United States. The bishops organized a conference to celebrate the bicentennial of the foundation of the United States in 1776. This resulted in “A Call to Action: U.S. Bishops Conference on Liberty and Justice for All.” The Call to Action conference was held in Detroit, Michigan from October 21-23, 1976. It was hosted by Cardinal John Dearden with staunch support from his Auxiliary Bishop, Thomas Gumbleton. Some 1,340 delegates and 1,000 observers heard proposals and recommendations that had been developed over a two-year period at 152 dioceses across the country. A total of 182 “Recommendations” were approved at the conference that ranged from church reform (women’s ordination and voluntary celibacy) to social justice (support for immigrants and workers, to world peace (nonviolence and nuclear disarmament).

The Call to Action recommendations were voted on democratically, although some groups opted for consensus as a form of decision-making. Hence a layperson's vote was equal to that of a bishop, and this caused no end of controversy in the wider Catholic Church in the United States. Conservative critics immediately pounced on the democratic nature of decision-making at the conference and saw to it that it would never happen again. To this date, there have been no other official Catholic Church conferences that were modeled on Call to Action.

Among the Pax Christi USA members who contributed to the recommendations on the "Humankind" section that included a sub-committee on "Disarmament and Peace" were Eileen Egan, Gerard Vanderhaar, Sister Mary Evelyn Jegen, Fr. Richard McSorely, SJ, Gordon Zahn, and Joseph Fahey. Together with Bishop Gumbleton, we worked on a proposal that would call for disarmament, especially of nuclear weapons along with a forthright condemnation of the policy of deterrence. I chaired the "Disarmament and Peace" sub-committee. From the very beginning of the conference, we noticed many in military uniforms representing the United States Army, Navy, and Air Force. These men were Catholic military chaplains who quite visibly represented the Military Ordinariate of the United States Department of Defense at the Call to Action.

At the various meetings of "Disarmament and Peace" the military chaplains spoke in support of just war principles that would allow for the limited or "tactical" use of battlefield nuclear weapons. They also spoke in favor of nuclear deterrence as situated within the just war tradition. The most vocal of these chaplains at our subcommittee hearing was Chief of Chaplains, Admiral Msgr. John O'Connor. (Since they wore their military uniforms rather than clerical dress some of us decided to call them by their military titles.) In the sub-committee that I chaired, Admiral O'Connor proposed an amendment to the motion on the floor to condemn the use of nuclear weapons and the policy of deterrence. He moved that it be amended to allow for the "tactical use of nuclear weapons" that were aimed at soldiers and not at civilians. I ruled the motion out of order since it was a substantive change in the motion on the floor. Admiral O'Connor and his military associates were not at all happy with my ruling. I informed Admiral O'Connor that according to Roberts Rules of Order, he could challenge the ruling of the chair. He promptly did this, and the body upheld the ruling of the chair.

Walt Grazer, a staff member of the Diocese of Richmond, chaired a debate between Admiral O'Connor and Bishop Dozier at the Call to Action meeting and had a similar experience: Admiral O'Connor insisted on the tactical use of nuclear weapons and vigorously supported the doctrine of deterrence as morally acceptable. The military chaplains did not get their way at Call to Action as any use of nuclear weapons and the doctrine of deterrence were condemned.

### **Bishops' Masses for Peace**

Following the Call to Action Conference in 1976, Pax Christi USA took several additional actions that enhanced its visibility with Catholics in the United States, particularly the bishops. In January 1977, the first of three Pax Christi USA "Bishops' Mass for Peace" was hosted by Archbishop Borders of Baltimore. The Mass celebrated Pope Paul VI's Day of Peace message, "If You Want Peace, Defend Life." Two Cardinals (Dearden of Detroit and Shehan of Baltimore), three Archbishops, the Apostolic Delegate to the United States, eighteen bishops, and 13,000 laity and clergy including, ironically, the Knights of Columbus who lined the main aisle in their regalia with crossed swords as the bishops processed down the main aisle for the Mass. Archbishop Borders

was surprised and upset to see the Knights with drawn swords at a Mass for Peace and told me that he did not invite them.

After the Mass, Archbishop Borders hosted a private dinner for the bishops that was followed by a talk by Fr. John Lucal, S.J. of The Joint Committee for Society, Development and Peace (SODEPAX) on the history of the church's attitudes toward war and peace. The next morning a presentation was made by Dr. Joseph J. Fahey, General Secretary of Pax Christi USA on "THE ARMS RACE AND THE CHURCH: A Theological/Pastoral Reflection." Both presentations were warmly received by the bishops and many frankly stated that they simply were unaware of the depth of Church teaching on matters of war and peace; "This is the Church's best-kept secret," one bishop told me.

Bishop Walter Sullivan of the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia was present, and he immediately joined Pax Christi USA and was later to give many active years of service including as President of the US movement. Another new bishop Pax Christi member present was Auxiliary Bishop Frank Murphy of Baltimore. In 1980 Bishop Murphy responded to the request for "varia" (new business) and proposed a discussion on Church teaching on war and peace that eventually became the 1983 pastoral letter on peace.

Later in 1977 Pax Christi USA published a pamphlet entitled, "The Church and the Arms Race" that included Pope Paul's 1977 World Day of Peace message, Cardinal Dearden's Homily at the Baltimore Mass, Joseph Fahey's lecture to the bishops, and the 1976 disarmament message of the Holy See to the United Nations. Bishop Gumbleton secured a small grant to arrange for its publication and a copy was sent to every bishop in the United States along with an invitation to join Pax Christi USA. The pamphlet was also used in Catholic parishes and in Catholic schools and universities. Several dozen bishops joined Pax Christi after the publication of "The Church and the Arms Race." ("The Church and the Arms Race" can be found in the Pax Christi USA Archives at the University of Notre Dame.)

In 1978 two Masses for Peace were held at which many more bishops were present. One was held in San Francisco that was hosted by Archbishop John Quinn who later became an active spokesperson for nuclear disarmament during the process that led to the 1983 US bishops' pastoral on peace. Archbishop Peter Gerety of Newark, New Jersey hosted the third Bishops' Mass for Peace, which was attended by Terence Cardinal Cooke of the Archdiocese of New York, who served at the head of the United States Military Ordinariate that consisted of Catholic priests who served as salaried commissioned officers in the armed forces of the United States.

A World War II Catholic pacifist and conscientious objector, Dr. Gordon Zahn, gave the keynote address at the dinner that followed the Newark Mass for Peace. At the conclusion of his address, everyone including the several dozen bishops and Cardinal Cooke gave Gordon a standing ovation. Gordon later commented to me, "I could not get one Catholic priest to support my stand as a conscientious objector in World War II, and now I saw many bishops giving me a standing ovation, including Cardinal Cooke. I never thought I'd see this!"

The Bishops' Masses for Peace were carefully arranged by Bishops Gumbleton and Dozier (with the assistance of the National Council), and thus began the active involvement of many United

States bishops in Pax Christi USA. Bishop Gumbleton commented, “We were beginning to establish some sort of credibility with the (US) Bishops’ Conference.” The new Pax Christi USA bishops were to serve as a critical mass that eventually resulted in strong episcopal support for what became the 1983 bishops’ peace pastoral letter.

Beginning in 1974 Bishops Gumbleton and Dozier gathered new member bishops in small groups at the US bishops’ annual meetings, at US regional bishops’ meetings, at Pax Christi national meetings, and at the 1979 United Nations Special Session on Disarmament. By now their number included Archbishops William Borders (Baltimore MD), Peter Gerety (Newark NJ), Raymond Hunthausen (Seattle WA), and John Quinn (San Francisco CA). In addition to Bishops Carroll Dozier (Memphis TN) and Thomas Gumbleton (Detroit MI), many Bishops and Auxiliary Bishops who became active in Pax Christi USA included Charles Buswell (Pueblo CO), Matthew Clark (Rochester NY), Maurice Dingman (Des Moines IA), Joseph Fiorenza (Galveston-Houston TX), Joseph Howze (Biloxi, MS), Raymond Lucker (New Ulm MN), James Lyke (Cleveland OH), Leroy Matthiesen (Amarillo TX), Francis Murphy (Baltimore MD), Edward O’Donnell (Lafayette LA), Kenneth Povish (Lansing MI), Peter Rosazza (Hartford CT), John Snyder (St. Augustine FL), Joseph Sullivan (Brooklyn NY), Walter Sullivan (Richmond VA), and Kenneth Untener (Saginaw MI). Eventually over 100 bishops joined Pax Christi’s episcopal ranks. A complete list can be found in the Pax Christi USA Archives at the University of Notre Dame.

There was now a solid episcopal foundation for a major U.S. Catholic Bishops’ statement on peace.

#### **Pax Christi USA Disarmament Commission**

In 1981, the National Council of Pax Christi USA, through Sister Mary Evelyn Jegen, SND, National Coordinator, formed a Disarmament Commission that was tasked as a “research arm” of PCUSA. From its inception, a central task of the Commission was to offer drafts of items that could be included in the pastoral letter on peace. The members of the Commission included: Mr. Robert Aldridge, Sister Mary Collins OSB, Mr. Thomas Cornell, Sister Patricia Deignan, SSND, Fr. Paul Dinter, Dr. Joseph Fahey (convenor), Ms. Rose Gorman (chair), Fr. Peter Henriot SJ, Dr. James McGinnis, Fr. Francis Meehan, Dr. James Muller MD, Sister Dorothy Vidulich CSJP, and Dr. Gordon Zahn.

Beginning with a 4000+ word reflection on the first draft of the bishops’ peace pastoral by Joseph Fahey to Fr. Bryan Hehir on July 19, 1982, the Pax Christi Disarmament Commission offered papers, critiques, amendments, and editorial suggestions to the bishops as they prepared their pastoral letter. (These documents can be found in the Pax Christi USA archives at the University of Notre Dame and in the papers of Joseph Fahey at the Archives of The Catholic University of America.) Commission members met with Bishop Gumbleton on several occasions to discuss the pastoral and to support his good efforts to strengthen the document. They also worked closely with Sister Mary Evelyn Jegen SSND (National Coordinator, PCUSA) and with Sister Mary Lou Kownacki OSB (Chairperson, PCUSA Executive Council) to assist the Executive Council to improve the pastoral letter. Commission members also met with Fr. J. Bryan Hehir and Mr. Edward Doherty of the USCCB staff who expertly advised and assisted the bishops as they prepared the pastoral letter.

In a July 7, 1983, letter from Sister Mary Lou Kownacki OSB to the Disarmament Commission,



Sister Mary Lou thanked the Disarmament Commission for their work on the pastoral letter:

The Pax Christi National Council is pleased with, and proud of, the work done by the Disarmament Commission on the Bishops' Pastoral. The plan of action which you suggested, the list of amendments you proposed, the telegram to Bishop Bernardin—these were all well-thought-out and proved to be effective. We can rejoice that the bishops did endorse most of the amendments Pax Christi offered for their consideration.

In this letter, Sister Mary Lou was referring to the passage of the pastoral letter on peace in Chicago IL on May 3, 1983, by a vote of 238-9. We turn now to a brief discussion of the pastoral letter.

**The U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on War and Peace:  
"The Challenge of Peace:  
God's Promise and our Response"**

(The pastoral letter can be found on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: <https://www.usccb.org/upload/challenge-peace-gods-promise-our-response-1983.pdf>]. The reader is strongly encouraged to study this historic document. In addition, the reader will find Jim Castelli's Book *The Bishops and the Bomb: Waging Peace in a Nuclear Age* an invaluable source for the events leading up to the pastoral letter and the heated debate that followed.)

In 1980 the Pax Christi bishops were ready to propose a pastoral letter on peace from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Several Pax Christi bishops, including Bishops Gumbleton, Dozier, Murphy, and Lyke, decided that Auxiliary Bishop Frank Murphy of Baltimore should offer a *varium* (new business agenda item) to a request from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for the November USCCB meeting.

Bishop Murphy's request was honored, and a session was scheduled at the meeting that resulted in the approval to begin work on a US bishops' pastoral letter on peace. The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 to the Presidency partially served as a stimulus for the peace pastoral with his talk of "getting tough with the Russians" and a massive arms buildup that would drain funds from the nation's social programs that aided the poor and needy. The *varium* was inspired by, and would not have been approved without, the dedicated support of the nation's Pax Christi bishops.

At their November 1980 USCCB meeting Bishop Gumbleton spoke in support of Bishop Murphy's *varium*:

We've just elected a President who has stated his conviction that we can have superiority in nuclear weapons, an utter impossibility. We have a Vice-President who has clearly stated that one side could win a nuclear war and that we must be prepared to fight one and to win it. When we have that kind of thinking going on, it seems to me we are getting ever more close to the day when we will wage that nuclear war and it will be the war that will end the world as we know it. We are at a point of urgent crisis. We have to face this question and face it very clearly.

Bishop Gumbleton's intervention received sustained applause from the body of Bishops. Clearly, the United States Bishops were prepared to take on the militarists in the White House and in the

Defense Department...and in their own ranks.

After approval by the U.S. Bishops of Bishop Murphy's *varium* in 1980, Conference President Archbishop John Roach appointed five members to an "Ad Hoc Committee on War and Peace" to draft the pastoral letter. The members were: Archbishop Joseph Bernardin (Chicago IL), Chair, and George Fulcher (Lafayette LA), Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton (Detroit MI), Auxiliary Bishop John O'Connor (Military Vicariate), and Bishop Daniel Reilly (Norwich CT). It was immediately noted that Bishop Gumbleton was viewed as a "peace" bishop who opposed deterrence and military spending, and Bishop O'Connor was viewed as a "military" bishop due to his long service as an armed services chaplain and his support for deterrence.

From the beginning, Gumbleton urged the committee to move beyond a "just war" mentality and to return to the long tradition of pacifism and nonviolence that characterized both the Gospels, the early church and later monastic history. Bishop O'Connor strongly supported the "just war" tradition of Sts. Ambrose and Augustine --as noted earlier—and sought approval for the use of tactical nuclear weapons that would be directed at soldiers and not civilians. The lines were drawn as there were sharp differences of opinion between Bishops Gumbleton and O'Connor.

Mr. Edward Doherty (a WWII combat Naval Officer and retired U.S. Foreign Service official) of the USCC Office of Justice and Peace, who assisted in the preparation of the pastoral letter, told me that Bishop O'Connor often cited U.S. Department of Defense and Pentagon sources with whom he was in constant contact, while Bishop Gumbleton's primary sources were Catholic theologians and the Disarmament Commission of Pax Christi USA. Mr. Doherty told me he knew that Bishop O'Connor was "leaking" information from drafts of the pastoral letter to Defense Department officials in violation of the confidentiality that was expected of the bishops who prepared the document.

The first draft of the pastoral was composed by the USCCB staff principally under the expert guidance of Fr. J. Bryan Hehir, U.S. Catholic Conference Associate Secretary for International Justice and Peace. This draft was criticized as being too focused on the just war tradition in the Catholic Church. A second draft was then developed that included much wider consultation with theologians, scholars, defense experts, and peace activists. It was in this draft that Pax Christi USA and its Disarmament Commission contributed substantive amendments on a positive theology of peace, the legitimacy of nonviolence and conscientious objection, a moral critique of U.S. nuclear war policy, education for peace, and the necessity for global governance. Pax Christi USA worked closely with Bishop Gumbleton as he persisted in offering amendments that significantly strengthened the pastoral from its first draft (see the Disarmament Commission documents in Pax Christi USA's papers in the Archives of the University of Notre Dame and Joseph Fahey's papers in the Archives at The Catholic University of America).

After extensive changes were incorporated in the second draft, a third draft was created that would become the document that was presented to the bishops for their vote on May 3, 1983. Since many Pax Christi USA's amendments were accepted in the second draft, the Disarmament Commission had only fifteen proposed amendments for the third and final draft. These amendments were sent to the bishops' committee through Bishop Gumbleton on April 20, 1983. Almost all of these were accepted, and the third draft was ready to be presented to the May 3, 1983, plenary session of the

bishops' that would approve the pastoral letter on peace at their meeting in Chicago IL.

The 44,000-word, 105-page pastoral letter consisted of four chapters:

- I. Peace in the Modern World: Religious Perspectives and Principles.
- II. War and Peace in the Modern World: Problems and Principles.
- III. The Promotion of Peace: Proposals and Policies.
- IV. The Pastoral Challenge and Response

After several hours of floor debate in which many amendments were offered, the bishops approved the pastoral letter. I was present for that debate. Archbishop Hannan (a former WWII U.S. military chaplain) and Bishop O'Connor offered 40 amendments to strengthen the "just war" tenor of the document and to strengthen support for the use of strategic nuclear weapons. All but one of these amendments were strongly rejected by the assembled bishops as the Pax Christi bishops, one after another, voiced opposition to the Hannon/O'Connor proposals.

Perhaps the most hotly debated amendment was to a change in the third draft that Bishop O'Connor introduced that changed the word from "halt" to "curb" the "testing, production, and development of strategic nuclear weapons." The change from "halt" to "curb" was influenced by the Vatican and had the support of the Reagan Administration. The bishops immediately voiced objection to the change from "halt" to "curb" since "curb" was ambiguous and could be interpreted as "slow down" which was contrary to the intent to completely stop all things nuclear "now," "at this moment," "immediately." Simply stated, curbing the development of nuclear weapons would have done nothing to stop their continued development. Hence, the arms race would continue, and more weapons and their delivery systems would be built with considerable profit for the munitions industry. As one critic commented, "As long as wars are profitable, we shall see more of them."

Hence, the very first amendment to come to the floor was to change back "curb" to "halt." Archbishop Hannan and Bishop O'Connor vigorously opposed the change. In a standing vote they were overwhelmingly defeated. The final version read, "We urge negotiations to halt the testing, production, and development of new nuclear weapons systems." This change placed the U.S. Bishops squarely in the camp of the Nuclear Freeze Movement that was strongly opposed by the Reagan Administration, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. arms manufacturers. Following this, many other Pax Christi bishops led by Archbishop John Quinn (San Francisco) made numerous amendments to strengthen the pastoral.

In his diary for May 3, 1983, Father Paul Dinter summed up quite well the extensive debate of May 2:

...The large majority of bishops...handed Cardinal Cooke (New York), Bishop O'Connor and their 'point man' "(Bishop) Paddy Ahearn (New York) one defeat after another. They were, substantive points, not stylistic. The hero of the day was (Archbishop) John Quinn of San Francisco who teamed up with a number of others to restore the stronger version of the language. Archbishop Hannon of New Orleans kept painting himself into a smaller and smaller corner but he wasn't that far from our vocal New Yorkers.

Of the 40 amendments introduced by Bishop O'Connor and Archbishop Hannan to weaken the pastoral only one was passed. And only one bishop, Auxiliary Bishop Austin Vaughn (New York) stated publicly that he would vote against the final document.

The pastoral letter was approved by an overwhelming vote of 238-9. Father Dinter and I went down onto the floor after the vote to congratulate the many Pax Christi bishops who patiently and prophetically worked on and supported this historic document. By chance, Father Dinter and I met Bishop Bernard Law (who would become the Cardinal Archbishop of Boston) who told us he was quite unhappy with the pastoral: "It's going to weaken our national defense," he said. Two of the nine votes against the pastoral letter went on to become cardinals.

In an otherwise excellent document, there was one major item that did not get the approval of the bishops. This was the hotly debated question of nuclear deterrence. In June 1982 Pope John Paul II addressed the United Nations and stated, "In current conditions 'deterrence' based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself but as a step on the way toward a progressive disarmament, may still be judged morally acceptable." This statement doomed any attempt by the U.S. bishops a year later to condemn outright the policy of deterrence as heinously immoral. It was believed that the Reagan administration had an influence on the Pope's statement since it was known that the U.S. bishops were seriously contemplating an absolute condemnation of deterrence. (For an in-depth analysis of the influence the Reagan Administration had on Pope John Paul II see, Jared McBrady, Winter 2015 "The Challenge of Peace: Ronald Reagan, John Paul II and the American Bishops," *The Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 129-152.)

Indeed, many of us in Pax Christi USA believed the votes were there in the U.S. bishops' conference to condemn outright everything to do with nuclear weapons, from their design to their construction, to their possession, and of course to their use and certainly for deterrence purposes. For many, many bishops this was a bitter pill to swallow since they knew the U.S. government had no intention of working toward a "progressive disarmament." The bishops knew that this concept was scorned by U.S. Defense Department and Reagan administration officials who were actively pursuing lucrative contracts worth billions of dollars for new nuclear weapons and their delivery systems from submarines to aircraft, to missiles, and even to weapons in space.

With the election of Pope Francis in 2013 the acceptance of deterrence as official Church teaching began to change. Pax Christi USA and Pax Christi International made formal and informal efforts to ask the Holy Father to declare that deterrence is intrinsically immoral. In 2017 the Holy Father condemned the possession of nuclear weapons and the doctrine of deterrence. He tersely stated that "the threat of their use, as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned" (see Nov. 10, 2017, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the International Symposium 'Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament'").

The pastoral implications of the Pope's condemnation are far-reaching. Strictly interpreted it means that faithful Catholics may not design nuclear weapons, they may not work in the nuclear weapons industry, legislators may not pass legislation to create nuclear weapons, and citizens may not pay taxes that fund nuclear weapons (see Joseph J. Fahey, (2020), "Catholic Conscience and Nuclear Weapons," *The Journal of Social Encounters*: Vol. 4: Iss. 2, 42-49. Available at: [https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social\\_encounters/vol4/iss2/4](https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/vol4/iss2/4)).

### **International Pastoral Letters on Peace**

The massive military buildup—including nuclear weapons—that took place with Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 caused a great deal of concern beyond the shores of the United States, particularly in Europe. It was the Western Europeans who had hundreds of American Cruise Missiles in their backyards, and it was they who would be among the first attacked if there was to be a war between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. Those of us who marched in Europe against the placement of American nuclear-armed cruise missiles in England, France, Holland, and Belgium recall how deeply frightened the people of these countries were about the bellicose rhetoric and the active arms buildup that took place during the early Reagan years in the White House. I served on the International Council of Pax Christi and then on the International Pax Christi Disarmament Commission and witnessed the profound concern that the citizens of both West and East Europe had about the reckless arms buildup of the Reagan administration.

Just as the U.S. Bishops began preparing a letter on war and peace shortly after Ronald Reagan's election in 1980, several European Catholic Conferences of Bishops began their own pastoral letters. In 1983, they included episcopal conferences from both East and West Europe; the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), Hungary, Austria, Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), Holland, Belgium, Ireland, and France. Japan also published a pastoral letter on peace on July 9, 1983. All were deeply concerned about the arms race that was vigorously pursued by the Reagan administration.

The content of the letters was remarkably similar, and this should not surprise us since they employed common sources from the New Testament to official Church teaching as found in Vatican II and papal encyclicals. There was strong support for arms reduction, nonviolence, and peace education. One issue that stands out prominently, however, is their unanimous support for Pope John Paul II's 1982 Statement to the United Nations disarmament session: "In current conditions, deterrence, based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself but as a step toward progressive disarmament can still be judged morally acceptable" (see Mark Heirman, "Bishops Conferences on War and Peace in 1983," *Cross Currents*, Fall 1983, 275-288). The French and Germans gave strong support for Pope John Paul II's position on deterrence while others, including the Americans, included the passage on deterrence only because they were instructed to do so by the Vatican.

### **The Fate of Two Auxiliary Bishops**

On May 2, 1983, a group of about fifteen Pax Christi bishops gathered in the hotel suite of a mid-Western bishop in Chicago to plan their final amendments that would be made to the peace pastoral the next day. I was present at that meeting when the phone rang and the bishop picked up the phone. After listening to the message, the bishop hung up the phone and stated that Auxiliary Bishop O'Connor had been elevated to become the Bishop of the Scranton, Pennsylvania diocese. Many in the room welcomed the news that although Bishop O'Connor was being promoted, he would leave his influential post in the Military Ordinariate and go to a lesser-known diocese. However, Bishop O'Connor did not remain in Scranton for long. Just six months after his appointment to Scranton he was appointed by Pope John Paul II to the prestigious post of Archbishop of New York. Soon after that, he became a Cardinal.

The next day, on May 3, 1983—the day the bishops voted on the pastoral letter—Archbishop

Pio Laghi, Apostolic Delegate of the Vatican to the United States, informed the bishops that Bishop O'Connor had been elevated by the Holy Father to become the "Ordinary" of the Diocese of Scranton. The message was lost on no one. After all, it could have been Bishop Gumbleton who was rewarded with a step up to become an Ordinary but that was never to happen. Rome, in rewarding Bishop O'Connor, sent a powerful message to all assembled. Bishop O'Connor and Bishop Law were two of only nine votes against the pastoral letter and both became archbishops and Cardinals.

Bishop Gumbleton remained an Auxiliary Bishop (an Auxiliary Bishop is an "assistant" bishop with little authority of his own, who does what the "Ordinary" Bishop of the diocese tells him to do). Unlike Bishop O'Connor, Bishop Gumbleton never became an Ordinary, or an archbishop, or a cardinal. Simply stated, he never went anywhere in church leadership for the rest of his career.

On January 11, 2006, Bishop Gumbleton testified before the Ohio General Assembly about sex abuse in the Catholic Church. He endorsed a bill that would have extended the statute of limitations for victims of sex abuse. The Catholic bishops of Ohio vigorously opposed the bill and immediately complained to the Vatican about Gumbleton's testimony. Almost immediately Bishop Gumbleton received a letter from Cardinal Giovanni Re in Rome telling him that he had violated the *communio Episcoporum* (communion of bishops) by testifying without the approval of the local bishop. Cardinal Re through the Roman *Curia* ordered Bishop Gumbleton to resign immediately as Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit and as pastor of St. Leo's parish. On Feb. 6, 2006, he submitted his resignation to Pope Benedict XVI. Bishop Gumbleton was permitted to live in the parish he had long served, but was ordered to leave his home in 2013 by his archbishop. Since then, Bishop Gumbleton lives in an apartment in Detroit.

After the peace pastoral Bishop Gumbleton's ministry extended to working for justice in Central America, Asia, Haiti, and the Middle East and advocacy for the gay and lesbian Catholic community. His work with gay and lesbian Catholics over the years resulted in his being backlisted by some of his fellow bishops in the United States.

Hence, the bishop who did the most to inspire and guide the 1983 pastoral letter on peace and the bishop who was at that time enthusiastically supported by his fellow bishops in the United States, was ignored by the Vatican for the rest of his career and never rose above his "Auxiliary Bishop" rank. And the bishop who did the most to add a bellicose tenor to the 1983 pastoral letter on peace, and who even supported the possession and possible use of nuclear weapons along with the making of more weapons through the doctrine of "deterrence," was rewarded with a prestigious archbishopric in New York and further elevation to the College of Cardinals. Cardinal O'Connor was even eligible to be elected Pope.

Quite clearly both the Reagan Administration and Pope John Paul II had been "burned" by the 238-9 vote of the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on peace. Almost immediately, the Vatican took steps to see that this never happened again. That involved the appointment of new conservative bishops in the United States (and around the world). Pope John Paul II appointed many bishops who were less focused on opposition to war and support for labor unions as top ministerial

priorities. This change to more conservative policies saw a rise in support for Republican Party platform issues in the United States and a retreat from the social justice path that had been charted by the earlier “Jadot” bishops. (The “Jadot Bishops” were those appointed during the papacy of Pope Paul VI who voiced clear support for the progressive agenda of the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965)).

The Vatican also responded by severely limiting the teaching authority of national bishops' conferences both theologically and canonically. Pope John Paul II's Secretary of State, Cardinal Ratzinger, played a key role in diminishing the authority of national bishops' conferences and continued this policy when he became Pope Benedict XVI (2005-2013). Pope Francis, however, in addition to appointing more progressive bishops endorses the teaching authority of national conferences (see *Laudato Si*, 2015).

### **The Path Ahead**

The Western legacy of (1) Total War and the doctrine of “Manifest Destiny” that began with the Crusades in 1095, (2) the capitalist economic system based on greed and profit that originated in the Calvinist theological doctrine of “election” in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and (3) the sovereign nation-state and international anarchy that followed Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, has resulted in never-ending global war, never-ending profits, and never-ending poverty. The sovereign nation-state, with few restraints in international law, has invaded country after country and devastated the world's children in the name of God, or profit, or “Manifest Destiny.” As long as war, environmental destruction, and cheap labor are profitable our small planet faces almost certain extinction.

There have, of course, been many reform movements to curb the evils of war, capitalism, and international anarchy and while they have at times achieved notable success, war, the quest to maximize profit, and environmental destruction remain with us still.

We do well to remember that human social institutions are created by human beings, and they can be changed by human beings. Hence, we can reform existing social entities and even transform them into new social entities that serve the universal common good. Also, we know that people tend to adapt to the social, economic, and political mores and structures in which they find themselves. Hence, war, profits, and poverty can—through human industry--become systems of global peace, economic cooperation, and democratic socialism for all. It has happened before in history and it can happen again; indeed, it must happen again (see the *Encyclopedia of Peaceful Societies*. [www.peacefulsocieties.ununcg.edu](http://www.peacefulsocieties.ununcg.edu) and, The Greater Social Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley, [www.ggsc.berkeley.edu](http://www.ggsc.berkeley.edu)). For a scholarly examination of peaceful societies, see: Douglas P. Fry. 2013. *War, Peace, and Human Nature: The Convergence of Evolutionary and Cultural Views*. Oxford University Press.

There is hope. It lies in the United Nations ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org)) and the 5,451 United Nations Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs: [www.un.org/ecosoc/en/ngo#](http://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/ngo#)) that labor daily to see that our global village ensures international peace and sees to it that the purpose of economic life is to provide for the universal common good. Hope is found in the research being conducted in many universities on every continent on global cooperation; peace and justice organizations that labor for planetary survival; and teachers around the world who open their students' minds and hearts to a vision of a governed world.

To young people I say: consider an international career with one of the UN's 5,451 NGOs!

As to the future, I humbly suggest that a major focus of the Catholic peace movement should be on the necessity for global governance. In *Pacem in Terris* Pope John states:

Today the universal common good poses problems of worldwide dimensions, which cannot be adequately tackled or solved except by the efforts of public authority endowed with a wideness of powers, structure, and means of the same proportions: that is, of public authority which is in a position to operate in an effective manner on a world-wide basis. The moral order, itself, demands that such a form of public authority be established (par. 137).

This is followed by a strong statement of support for the United Nations ... "may the time come as quickly as possible when every human being may find an effective safeguard for the rights which derive directly from his dignity as a person, and which therefore are universal, inviolable and inalienable rights" (par. 145).

The reader is encouraged to study the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to understand how UN agencies accomplish so much to abolish war and promote economic, and political rights for all. In addition, the reader will benefit from consulting the World Federalist Movement/Institute for Global Policy ([www.wfm-ipg.org](http://www.wfm-ipg.org)) for strategies that can achieve world governance. I also recommend the classic book on this subject: Patricia and Gerald Mische's *Toward a Human World Order: Beyond the National Security Straitjacket* (Paulist Press, 1977).

A peace ministry that began with the witness of one solitary bishop in 1971 and of a small Catholic peace movement that began in 1972 in the United States contributed mightily to the creation of the U.S. Bishops' pastoral letter on peace, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Challenge and Our Response*. Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and Pax Christi USA helped sow the seeds that resulted in this historic peace pastoral letter. May the seeds planted in *The Challenge of Peace* bear fruit as together we pursue the peaceful Reign of God here on earth.

***It always seems impossible until it is done.***

Nelson Mandela