



# NEWS

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## ROMAN CATHOLIC/PRESBYTERIAN-REFORMED CONSULTATION EXAMINES NUCLEAR ARMS, GOVERNMENT INTRUSION ISSUES

WASHINGTON--Representatives of the Catholic and Reformed traditions, examining their communities' views of church-state issues, have discerned large areas of agreement on nuclear arms and church-government questions. The Catholic bishops' recent pastoral letter on peace and war and various similar Reformed and Presbyterian statements, Dr. Ronald C. White of Princeton Theological Seminary noted, revealed a "significant convergence on general theological and ethical grounds concerning questions of nuclear armament, and an increasing convergence on specifics as well."

"Both Catholic and Reformed bodies," added Dr. Eugene J. Fisher of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs staff, "have registered in their recent statements an increasing skepticism about the nuclear arms race and a strong affirmation that the issue is, at heart, not simply a technical-strategic one but equally a moral one. The national debate, both bodies believe, can only be illuminated by the involvement of an aware citizenry. The churches, then, have a clear responsibility to enter the public debate and to

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educate their congregations to participate actively in the decision-making process concerning it."

The two spokesmen commented at the conclusion of a meeting here, that was the latest in a series of dialogues under the sponsorship of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Father J. Bryan Hehir, who served as staff to the bishops' committee which prepared the pastoral letter, The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response, addressed the meeting.

The discussion of the nuclear arms issue in a formal ecumenical setting is believed to be a first, not only for the Catholic-Reformed bilateral but in ecumenical bilaterals in general. "It complements," said Dr. White, "the recent Lutheran-Catholic statement of agreement on the theology of justification by examining a "test case" of how varying theological tendencies manifest themselves in the practical moral order."

"What we can tolerate morally," Dr. Fisher added, "depends very much on the views we have of human nature, sin, and our ultimate hopes for humanity in the perspective of the Kingdom of God. Our theological presuppositions are tested daily in how we view the Church's role in society and the Church's role vis-a-vis the state."

The present round of the Catholic-Reformed discussion is a follow-up to the previous statement on "Ethics and the Search for Christian Unity." That round sought to examine whether the social-ethical policies of varying Church bodies constituted a possible hindrance to the goal of formal reconciliation between

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the Churches. It issued joint statements on abortion and South Africa. The present round continues the discussion in terms of each tradition's general views of "Church, State and Kingdom" and specific approaches to such urgent contemporary questions as war and peace.

In its next session the group will turn to the issue of government "intrusion" into religion and society in this country. Here, too, preliminary discussion has noted "surprising areas of convergence," according to Dr. Fisher, as well as some areas such as aid to education "which will require further examination."

The group meets twice yearly, alternating between Washington and Princeton Theological Seminary. The joint statement from the present round should be completed in late 1984 and issued in early 1985, it was announced.

Roman Catholic members of the consultation include Bishop Ernest L. Unterkoefler of Charleston, S.C., chairman, Father James Burtchaell of the University of Notre Dame, Father Daniel Harrington, Weston School of Theology, Dr. Monica Hellwig, Georgetown University, Father William J. Hill of the Catholic University of America, Father John Pawlikowski, OSM, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, Father Gerard S. Sloyan, Temple University, Philadelphia, and Dr. Fisher.

Reformed members of the Dialogue are Dr. Andrew Harsanyi, Chairman, Dr. Dorothy Dodge, Macalaster College, Dr. Anne Ewing Hickey, Rev. Elizabeth Johnson, Rev. Cornelius Plantinga, Calvin Theological Seminary, Professor Max Stackhouse, Andover-Newton Theological Seminary, Dr. Ronald Stone, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Dr. Robert A. White, Reformed Church in America, Dr. James E. Andrews, The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., and Dr. Ronald C. White Jr.

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