

Hope for a world at peace

NCR Staff | Aug. 3, 2009

Editorial

In the pantheon of Christian virtues -- faith, hope and charity -- it is hope that moves us forward. It is forward-looking. In the July issue of *Celebration*, the *National Catholic Reporter's* liturgical magazine, Fr. James Smith writes: "Faith tells us what to believe and charity tells us how to love. But without hope, faith and charity just keep sputtering away in the present time. Faith only sees what is, and charity only loves what is -- while hope sees what will be." Hope, so essential for the Christian soul, envisions a future wrapped in the love of God.

In all times, especially discouraging times, we must nourish hope.

On another level, we do some envisioning in this issue of *NCR*. We envision a world at peace. We bring attention to visions of peace, beginning with our collective vision of a world without nuclear weapons. President Barack Obama ([see story](#)) says that achieving this world is "the greatest challenge of the 21st century."

It will not come easy; it already meets much resistance from naysayers. In 1983, the U.S. bishops did some envisioning of their own when they published "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," quickly dubbed their "peace pastoral." It was an antiwar statement that painted a vision of a world without nuclear weapons, but gave nuclear deterrence a "limited, qualified moral acceptance" as "a step on the way toward a progressive disarmament." They called deterrence a "transitional strategy justifiable only in conjunction with resolute determination to pursue arms control and disarmament."

We have had five presidents since the U.S. bishops issued that document. Yet arsenals so large as to challenge the human imagination remain in place. Mindlessly, the United States' intercontinental ballistic missiles remain pointed at cities in Russia, perhaps for almost no other reason than Russian missiles continue to target U.S. cities. Meanwhile, at a time when our financial resources are scarce, especially in the areas of health, education, fighting climate change and world hunger, billions of precious dollars continue to go into upgrading our nuclear arsenals.

For his part, Obama, speaking in Prague, Czech Republic, in April, denounced the "fatalism" of critics who maintain the nuclear weapons genie is out of the bottle forever. "Some argue that the spread of these weapons cannot be stopped, cannot be checked -- that we are destined to live in a world where more nations and more people possess the ultimate tools of destruction. Such fatalism is a deadly adversary, for if we believe that the spread of nuclear weapons is inevitable, then in some way we are admitting to ourselves that the use of nuclear weapons is inevitable."

As an advocate for nuclear disarmament, Obama is not alone. In January 2007, four high-level diplomats out of the "realist" school -- two Republicans, former secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, and two Democrats, William J. Perry, secretary of defense under President Bill Clinton, and former Sen. Sam Nunn -- made a compelling case for "a world free of nuclear weapons." In doing so they showed that envisioning such a world was no pie-in-the-sky dream, but a pressing human goal.

President George W. Bush never invited them to the White House to make their case. But Obama embraced the four wholeheartedly, echoing their message in campaign speeches in places like Chicago and Denver and in Berlin, where he spoke in July 2008 as the presumptive Democratic nominee.

Before something can be built it must first be envisioned. Achieving a world without nuclear weapons will not be easy. But we must continue to make it our goal. We must continue to envision it and work for it relentlessly. Meanwhile, hope will continue to guide us forward.

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