

Religious Leaders Blast Nixon's Bombing Policy

New York

A nationwide interfaith group of 44 religious leaders accused the Nixon administration yesterday of "aborting the possibility and betraying the duty of peace" by its stepped-up bombing in Vietnam.

"As Americans, we refuse to submit to the inevitability of this madness," they said in an unusual "pastoral letter," the first time this form of communicating important matters to believers has been used on an interfaith basis.

Declaring that the U.S. government has unleashed "new ferrors" in Indochina, the religious leaders said they refuse "to accept the fabric of deceit and arrogance with which our government would cloak the evasion of its duty to sign the understanding agreed to in October" with North Vietnam.

They called for a massive turnout of church and synagogue members at a national Religious Convocation for Peace in Washington on January 3 and 4 to insist that Congress act to block continued U.S. military action.

"We need no more brilliantly contrived explanations of diplomatic failures," the statement said. "The bombing must be stopped. The war must be ended."

Signers of the statement included top officials of four major religious bodies, 15 Episcopal, Roman Catholic,

Bishop Urges An End to New Bombing

Fresno

Calling the renewed bombing in Vietnam "irresponsible use of awesome military power," Bishop Hugh A. Donohoe yesterday urged citizens to protest the bombing.

Donohoe, of the Fresno Roman Catholic Diocese, issued a statement calling on Americans to send telegrams and letters to President Nixon showing their disapproval of the latest turn in the Southeast Asian conflict.

The bishop said further death and destruction raise serious moral questions about the quality of leadership of the nation.

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United Methodist and Menonite bishops, and several leading theologians.

They said:

"The intensified war in Indochina is an unspeakable assault upon the season's message of peace on earth. Previous restraints have been lifted, unleashing with vindictive barbarity the mightiest air force in the world to bomb and bomb again."

It was the first collective religious reaction since the government this week re-

sumed full-scale bombing over North Vietnam after a lapse in recent peace negotiations.

HURRY

The joint, interfaith letter, initiated by the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker-founded agency, and Clergy and Laymen Concerned, an interfaith group formed to oppose the war, was circulated hurriedly for signatures this week among theologians and leaders of various religious bodies.

"Recent events of renewed horror make clear the mandate for renewed action," the signers said. "We know that many of you who have opposed the war are weary, but we dare not permit our weariness to abet the continued course of wickedness."

Church people were urged to take part in the Washington convocation, timed to coincide with the opening of the 93rd Congress, or otherwise contact senators and representatives. They are to insist that the government sign the draft agreement reached with North Vietnam in October, and if it isn't done by January 20, Congress is to be asked to cut off funds for military operations.

"Promised a generation of peace, we have experienced not even one day of peace," the religious leaders said.

FORM

The Rev. Dr. John C. Bennett, cochairman of Clergy and Laymen Concerned, said the pastoral letter form was used "because we wanted to speak directly and clearly to the entire religious community about our sense of the Stone Age morality which the present escalation and bombings typify."

Pastoral letters traditionally are used by church leaders to guide its members on important matters. In an unprecedented usage of such a pastoral appeal, the interfaith group said:

"As we have in Indochina destroyed villages in order to 'save' them, so there are those who would destroy honor in order to 'save' honor. As the explosion of American bombs punctuates the singing of the carols of

this season, the honor of our country is . . . further violated."

SIGNERS

Signers included the Rev. Dr. Robert V. Moss, president of the United Church of Christ; William P. Thompson, chief executive of the United Presbyterian Church; Rabbi Dr. Maurice Eisendrath, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations; the Rev. Dr. Robert N. West, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Signers also included Dr. Cynthia Wedel, immediate past president of the National Council of Churches; Sister Ann Gillen, executive director of the National Coalition of American Nuns; Catholic Bishops John J. Dougherty, of Newark, N.J., and Thomas Gumbleton, of Detroit; the Rev. Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, recently retired chief executive of the World Council of Churches, a dozen Episcopal and Methodist bishops and a number of leading Protestant, Jewish and Catholic scholars, many known for their opposition to the war.

Other signers were: Marvin Stuart of the San Francisco area, Episcopal Bishop Kilmer C. Myers of Northern California and Robert McAfee Brown, a Presbyterian theologian of Stanford University.

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