

Bishops' nuclear meet held to talk, not vote, according to Mobilian

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Press Register Reporter

News reports of a meeting of Roman Catholic bishops in the United States last week wrongly gave a general impression that the bishops took a stance on nuclear arms.

THUS SAID Mobile Catholic Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb in a Press Register interview after returning from the meeting of 285 bishops in Washington, D.C.

Lipscomb said, "The bishops did not do anything. We met only to debate and to discuss."

Another meeting of the bishops is scheduled next May in Chicago, Lipscomb said, and the prelates could at that time vote on the nuclear-arms issue, or "I think they could put it off even till the following November."

LIPSCOMB SAID some news media, including The Press Register's editorial pages, have given the impression that the reason another meeting has been scheduled is that "the White House intervened," asking the bishops to accept nuclear-arms positions of President Reagan's administration.

Said the Mobile archbishop, "The possibility of our meeting again in Chicago was mentioned months ago." The new meeting did not come as a result of White House pressure.

IN THEIR Washington meeting, the bishops discussed a 110-page draft on nuclear arms drawn up by a committee headed by Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago.

Lipscomb said he was among bishops who expressed "serious reservations" about some parts of the draft and the tone of the document.

He said, "The committee is honestly doing its best to come

up with an acceptable document. If the committee listens to the bishops and what they have suggested, the tone of the document will change in many ways."

ACCORDING TO Lipscomb, a new draft that will be presented in May to the bishops will be debated, "and the final text will be changed, I am sure, from the floor" — that is, if the bishops vote in May.

Said Lipscomb, "This document needs a two-thirds majority vote to be passed and issued as a pastoral letter." Two-thirds of the bishops thus far have not reached an agreement.

Lipscomb was among bishops who were allocated time to present their views formally in the Washington meeting.

"I personally made an intervention that questioned the lack of historical perspective," he said.

FOR EXAMPLE, he noted the United States, which has had nuclear capability since 1945, was until 1949 the only nation with that capability. In 1949 the Soviet Union began producing its own atomic weapons.

When the United States alone had nuclear weapons, "we had a chance to take our will and thrust it upon people — to thrust democracy into the heart of the world — but we did not use it (the nuclear threat), and our history has been that we haven't as a people.... I don't see why we should suddenly feel we are now so aggressive that we are going to do this."

ANOTHER POINT he made in his presentation, Lipscomb said, focused on worldly vs. eternal values.

The Mobilian was quoted in The New York Times as presenting the point on eternal

values while The Press Register editorially was accusing the bishops of not making that point, according to Lipscomb.

The Press Register asked editorially, "Do the Catholic bishops ... believe that life at any price — even an anti-God existence under a communist regime — is better than a life lived under threat of a possible nuclear war to protect our precious beliefs?"

LIPSCOMB SAID he presented "precisely that point — that there are values which we must consider in this whole situation that we seem to have neglected, or at least we've spoken of temporal (worldly) values as if they were eternal values."

The archbishop was asked in the interview whether he would agree that the U.S. bishops generally favor the idea of a bi-lateral freeze

of nuclear weapons by the United States and the Soviet Union.

HE RESPONDED, "Freeze may be too strong, but I think the bishops feel the time has come that both sides stop.... The bishops never say 'unilateral.' They always say 'bi-lateral' and 'verifiable.'"

Lipscomb said the Reagan administration's talk about nuclear superiority of the Soviet Union adds fuel to the arms race. "We have now — what is it — the equivalent of three tons of TNT (the high explosive trinitrotoluene) for every human being on the planet. When you

see this, you ask, 'What is superiority?'"

THE ARCHBISHOP said, "I think it's worth taking a risk at this point in history to stop."

He added, however, "I've not let my name be used with the freeze because I dislike an attitude that wants more than a freeze. It wants a sort of unilateral initiative."

The document that finally is adopted, according to Lipscomb, should be "in keeping with the general tradition and accepted moral teaching of the (Catholic) Church as a whole."

IN KEEPING with teachings of Pope John Paul II, the document should allow for nuclear weapons as deterrents.

According to Lipscomb, the pope has said "that given the current conditions in the world, nuclear deterrents — as bad as they are — for the single purpose of preventing nuclear war are tolerable provided there are sincere efforts at achieving peace and disarmament. Once the pope has said that, it is very difficult for us to make a statement that strips deterrents of any reality."

Although some Americans have criticized the bishops for focusing on nuclear arms, Lipscomb said nuclear weaponry is both a political and ecclesiastical issue which has "serious moral ramifications."