

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Bishop Morkovsky: SDI must be discussed

Retired Bishop John L. Morkovsky of the Galveston-Houston diocese granted an exclusive interview to this reporter during the National Conference of Catholic Bishops convention here in Washington, D.C. on Nov. 11:

EIR: Bishop Morkovsky, three years ago you presented a forum for priests in your diocese on the issue of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in which you invited spokesmen from the Fusion Energy Foundation to discuss the beam defense program that was proposed earlier that year by President Reagan. I know of no other case where a similar type of forum dealing specifically with this issue has been held among Catholic priests in the United States. Do you think there is need for more understanding of the SDI within the leadership of the church?

Morkovsky: I think there definitely is. I was impressed with the way it was explained to me, and I have no reason to change my opinion. SDI is really about the only defensive armament there is. Most of the arms to bring about deterrence are offensive, whereas SDI is exclusively defensive, to destroy the offensive missiles that come at us. So, I was very much impressed with that. This is the thing that should be promoted and made known. I think the fact that President Reagan is pushing it is the main reason why the Soviets are willing to negotiate right now.

EIR: The Catholic bishops have pre-

pared a statement on peace and disarmament, and there was no mention of the SDI in it. Do you think that is an oversight, something that should be corrected?

Morkovsky: I think possibly they weren't too much aware of it then. They spoke about defense, but SDI wasn't a household word yet. I'm a little puzzled myself. I think it is a question of sequence of events. The SDI wasn't in the government program until 1983, and this pastoral was issued around the same time. Possibly it wasn't even discussed.

EIR: Given this document now exists, would a new discussion which incorporates the role of the SDI in creating the basis for real disarmament be an appropriate thing for the bishops to discuss? Perhaps a revision of this document?

Morkovsky: Or a brief statement might be in order, if the bishops are made aware. I think generally the bishops are not too much aware of it. There are a number of bishops who are very, shall we say, violently fighting the offensive nuclear weapons. All the bishops need a way of becoming aware. Maybe you ought to send a letter out to all the bishops, a short statement about it from some authoritative source like yourself. It would be helpful if all the bishops were made aware that the SDI is really only defensive, because there are people apparently who question that it is all defensive.

EIR: It seems to me this would make for a useful debate. How would something like this actually become an agenda item in this case among the bishops?

Morkovsky: Some bishop would have to start the ball rolling, and if there was enough demand on the con-

ference, if they were to become aware that this is a very substantial subject that the bishops should discuss, it could come up. Retired bishops don't have a vote; we have a voice. I could make some of the bishops aware who are most interested in peace.

EIR: Up until now, the pro-peace bishops have simply called for disarmament, not the application of the SDI as a way to achieve that aim of disarmament.

Morkovsky: Right. I think some scientists question the total defensiveness of the system, as well.

EIR: Yes. However, the administration insists it is 100% defensive, and the Soviets have tried to argue otherwise. The other issue the bishops need to keep abreast of is that the Soviets themselves have a program like this, and the main danger to world peace and stability would be a lopsided situation in which a Soviet adversary would have a defensive capability like this and. . . .

Morkovsky: And we wouldn't. Yes. SDI is really an alternative to simply deterrence, keeping on building up of offensive arms for deterrence purposes. This is a defensive weapon instead of an offensive weapons build-up.

EIR: In 1983, you had a very productive forum, as I mentioned, in Houston in which you invited the priests in your diocese to come and hear a presentation and ask all the questions they had. Is this something you would recommend occur all over the country? Let all the questions, all the doubts come out, and actually have a good debate with some of the leading experts in the field on this?

Morkovsky: I think so. I think it would be a good item on the agenda of the next bishop's conference.