PROTEST:

Pacifism & Politics

Some Passionate Views on War & Nonviolence

By JAMES FINN

BASED ON CONVERSATIONS WITH ■ JOAN BAEZ ■ A. J. MUSTE

GORDON ZAHN ■ STAUGHTON LYND ■ JULIAN BOND

BAYARD RUSTIN ■ DANIEL BERRIGAN, S.J.

ABRAHAM HESCHEL ■ DOROTHY DAY ■ PAUL RAMSEY

JOHN C. BENNETT ■ Continued on back of cover

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PROTEST:

PACIFISM AND POLITICS

To Tom Merton
with affection
Jim Forest

James Finn

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Some Passionate Views on War and Nonviolence


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JUSTUS GEORGE LAWLER

The title of Justus George Lawler's most recent book is *Nuclear War: The Ethic, the Rhetoric, the Reality*. The title indicates a good deal about the author, for Mr. Lawler is a practiced rhetorician who is intent upon discerning in the welter of conflicting opinions those issues which most merit serious attention and ethical judgment. Those who take him on in debate are unlikely to forget the experience, for he is capable of pursuing a contested point with tenacity and increasing refinement of analysis. I was particularly interested in speaking with Mr. Lawler because he had, in his book and in subsequent articles, established his position as that of the nuclear pacifist, that is, a person who believes that nuclear weapons can have no sanctioned use, that the intrusion of such weapons into a conflict is morally unacceptable.

Lawler, who was born in Chicago in 1927, has taught in a number of schools in the Midwest. He has been a Fellow of the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago and of the Faculty of Letters at the Sorbonne. He is a member of the Board of the Institute of Judeo-Christian Studies and a Fellow of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education. Among his books are *The Christian Imagination: Studies in Religious Thought* and *The Catholic Dimension in Higher Education*. He was, for four years, editor of the quarterly *Journal of Arts and Letters* and is presently editor of *Continuum*, an independent quarterly sponsored by the Saint Xavier College in Chicago, where he is now Professor of the Humanities.

Because a trip out to the College presents a few complications

for me, Lawler kindly offers to meet in midtown Chicago. I am surprised, as he enters my rather indifferent hotel room, to see someone so young, for I have known him by reputation for years and have some vague expectation of greeting an older person. With his brown hair and clothes of differing shades of brown and tan, he provides a study in gradation and tone. As he relaxes into the armchair he seems not so much tall as long.

I have recently refreshed my memory by referring to a *Continuum* editorial in which Lawler had analyzed an address by a Catholic political scientist who had written critically of pacifists. The editorial read, in part: "Pacifists, nuclear pacifists, those who accept the just-war theory as valid but condemnatory of American nuclear strategy, those who believe the just-war theory is obsolete—all are globally grouped together and bombarded by this overkill rhetoric. Like the weapons systems he approves . . . [the author] does not seem able to discriminate between the combatants and the noncombatants, between the cities and the launching pads, between the clearly defined and significantly different positions, for example, of Gordon Zahn, Leslie Dewart, Thomas Merton, James Douglass, Robert James Fox, Archbishop Roberts, and a great number of others who have questioned the morality of the present deterrent. All are massed together and assaulted under the noisome rubric 'pacifist.' "

I ask Mr. Lawler to make some of the distinctions that are appropriate.

LAWLER: I would never see myself as a radical pacifist. In other words, I don't find even the philosophical and the historical grounds for saying simply that all war is evil. But I do think that, given the presence of such extraordinary weapons, it is quite certain that any conceivable major war in the future would be a nuclear war. And *any* use of nuclear weapons—even on a target which is military—constitutes an immoral act because once these weapons have been brought into play the *proximity* of the total war is heightened immeasurably. And as I said in the book [*Nuclear War: The Ethic, the Rhetoric, the Reality*], I *know* that this can't be logically certified, but there are scores of things in human life that aren't logically demonstrable.

FINN: Would you say the same thing would be true about the introduction of chemical and bacteriological war?

When I ask Daniel Berrigan what were the most important factors in the development of his judgments about war and peace today, he separates out from the many which he acknowledges three that seem most crucial.

BERRIGAN: I think the first factor would be the civil rights movement. The light it shed upon, first of all, the human person himself, the new light it shed upon the creation of persons and the creation of community, the way this kind of new building of human life and the human person had to come about by way of the acceptance of suffering—I think that was very important —a kind of symbol of a universal attitude toward man, not just a national attitude toward a minority.

Then, I can remember, really to the day, when I read a certain article by [Thomas] Merton which landed in my brain like a bullet; it exploded there and really helped me very greatly to bridge the difficult gap between this national movement and an attitude of nonviolence toward man in general, man in the world. I remember being profoundly disturbed by the article and finally writing him, not really expecting an answer. But he did answer at some length and helped me to clarify what I had tried to say and suggested some reading and so on.

And then, thirdly, I would mark the influence of the worker-priests, especially as they had gone through the Algerian experience and the French experience of colonialism and helped, I think, France understand herself as a post-colonial power. I think their contribution solidified my idea that perhaps we had accepted a kind of Marxist mystique without analyzing it, and that we ourselves were unconsciously and perhaps in a betraying sense dedicating our conscience to an ideal of warfare as inevitable.

FINN: We, meaning which people?

BERRIGAN: Christians, I would say. Especially, yes. And it was a great kind of purifying of my own mind just to see that men like that could be peaceable and sources of peace for others, not merely by talking but by the sort of life they had adopted.

FINN: Did your experiences in the civil rights movement have much to do with your own ideas about the uses of violence or nonviolence, or did you even think of your actions at that time in these particular terms?

BERRIGAN: Well, my own experience in civil rights began in the North, which is of course a limiting and very specific factor. Meantime, my brother Philip was operating in the deep South and we were able, I think, to share a great deal, mainly along student lines. I guess I learned a great deal from the university students who were just beginning nonviolent methods in the freedom rides and the picketing and sit-ins, North and South. And without reflecting a great deal upon it, I think it had great impact on me.

FINN: Did you write to Merton specifically about issues involving war, peace, violence?

BERRIGAN: As I recall it now, his article had mainly to do with the beginnings of his thesis that limited violence, strictly limited violence, was practically speaking impossible in a nuclear age, and that therefore the incursions of the United States into Latin America—I don't think Vietnam had really erupted then —that the economic and military adventuring of the United States abroad was indicative of something much deeper in a national malaise, a national kind of loss of spirit and of identity. He said that recourse to violence was an increasingly seductive temptation for us and, as a nuclear power, a particularly dangerous thing. And I remember being struck especially by his analysis of violence as an illness, because I had never really seen it put this way before.

Berrigan had mentioned Merton's analysis which suggested that recourse to violence is an illness. And I recall the *Pacem in Terris* Convocation of February 1965 at which statesmen, politicians, intellectuals and diplomats from twenty nations discussed and debated the way to peace. Only toward the end of the discussion did a participant touch on this question. "No one at the conference," Eugene Burdick said, "has addressed himself to the problem of whether the human animal is pacific. Does he want peace rather than war?"

More recently I had read a passage which impressed me sufficiently to clip it out. Reviewing *A Passionate Prodigality,* G. Chapman's memoirs of World War I, George Steiner wondered whether the noted scholar "was ever again as happy, as wholly alive, as he had been in the mud of Flanders." And Steiner goes on to speculate about the vision expressed in that book,

comparing it with Homer and Tolstoy. "It is a recognition," he writes, "both wry and zestful, of the fact that war matches certain rhythms inherent in man, that battle calls forth potentialities of nobility, of ingenuity, of endurance, left unrealized in the gray routine of ordinary life." I read the clipping to Berrigan and ask for his response.*

BERRIGAN: A quote like that, it seems to me, brings up a great deal of history that has to be confronted. An acceptance of this history, as a fact, you know—that neither the history of Western civilization nor the history of the Catholic Church is a history of nonviolence. You have this kind of marvelous landmark of the figure of Christ, and the imitation of Christ, and then a very early deflection away from that, sort of by-passing it on the part of actual history. So the quote you bring up, it seems to me, is part of an enormously powerful and persuasive folklore which I find almost totally imbedded in the consciousness of modern men. Warmaking is an honorable way of life. It's imbedded in all sorts of national history, in shrines and battle grounds. Perhaps the greatest symbol of it all is the vitality of the Pentagon itself and the thinking there. And I keep thinking, especially flying out of Washington, if only some day this incredible concentration of talent, resources, energy, could be applied to the making of peace. What a day!

But I think realistically, especially after this tour of Latin America, that we are *not* going to have an end to certain kinds of limited warfare, at least in our lifetime. I don't see any real-

* The question has, of course, a long and still unfinished history. Quincy Wright in his monumental *A Study of War* cites various theories and mentions as oversimplified those attributing to man a primitive fighting instinct. He does, however, cite a minority of psychologists who hold this view and quotes one, G. W. Crile:

"Soldiers say that they find relief in any muscular action; but the supreme bliss of forgetfulness is in an orgy of lustful satisfying killing in a hand-to-hand bayonet action, when the grunted breath of the enemy is heard and his blood flows warm on the hand. . . .

"As I reflected upon the intensive application of man to war in cold, rain, and mud; in rivers, canals, and lakes; under ground, in the air, and under the sea; infected with vermin, covered with scabs, adding the stench of his own filthy body to that of his decomposing comrades; hairy, begrimed, bedraggled, yet with unflagging zeal striving eagerly to kill his fellows; and as I felt within myself the mystical urge of the sound of great cannon I realized that war is a normal state of man. . . . The impulse to war . . . is stronger than the fear of death." Abridged edition. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 320.

CURRENT EVENTS

PROTEST: PACIFISM AND POLITICS

Some Passionate Views on War and Nonviolence

This dramatic and highly personal report on the protest movement in the U.S. today shows the vast range of tactics and ideas within the movement and makes clear the relationship between individual protesters and organizations and the realities of politics. The author held extended conversations with individuals of extremely varied background and occupation—activists and theoreticians in the peace movement, the anti-Vietnam movement, and the Civil Rights movement. They include pacifists, peacemakers, war resisters, draft-card burners as well as Negro rights leaders, teachers, clergymen, and artists.

Though some of the participants relate their concern to the established tradition of pacifism and nonviolence, the emphasis throughout is on the immediate and emotional commitment to ideas and acts that now challenge national policy, domestic and foreign.

James Finn's extensive commentary places these points of view in context, supplies the background of the participants, and points out the significance of a growing phenomenon at a time when this country faces the threat and temptation of other Vietnams.

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PAUL DEATS ■ PAUL PEACHEY ■ JOHN L. McKENZIE, S.J.

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