

Be Heard

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behind the facade of government. We have no way of directly influencing the decisions and policies taken by these people. In practice, we must fall back on a blinder and blinder faith which more and more resigns itself to trusting the "legitimately constituted authority" without having the vaguest notion what that authority is liable to do next. This condition of irresponsibility and passivity is extremely dangerous.

An entirely new dimension is opened up by the fantastic processes and techniques involved in modern war. An American President can speak of warfare in outer space and nobody bursts out laughing—he is perfectly serious. Science fiction and the comic strip have all suddenly come true. When a missile armed with an H-bomb warhead is fired by the pressing of a button and its target is a whole city, the number of its victims is estimated in "mega-corpses"—millions of dead human beings. A thousand or ten thousand more here and there are not even matter for comment. Can we assume that all who make such terrible decisions, will make them in accordance with Christian moral standards? Obviously not! To what extent then can we assume that in passively following their lead and concurring in their decision—at least by default—we are acting as Christians?

Ed. Note—This article contains fragments of one that appeared in *The Commonwealth* on Feb. 9, 1962, revised and expanded.

TO BE CONTINUED

Global Destruction

evil of universal destruction. We face moral responsibility of global dimensions. Much more than that, we are going to face ourselves. We are going to be judged. In which we are practically compelled by the "logic of circumstances" deliberately to choose the course that leads to destruction.

The great danger is then the savage and self-destructive commitment to a policy of nationalism and blind hate, and the refusal of all other policies more constructive and more in accordance with Christian ethical tradition. Let us realize that this is a matter of choice, not of pure blind determinism.

We all know the logic of temptation. We all know the confused, vague, hesitant irresponsibility which leads us into the situation where it is no longer possible to turn back, and how, arrived in that situation, we have a moment of clear-sighted desperation in which we freely commit ourselves to the course we recognize as evil. That may well be happening now to the whole world.

The free choice of global suicide, made in desperation by the world's leaders and ratified by the consent and cooperation of their citizens, would be a moral evil second only to the Crucifixion. The fact that such a choice might be made with the highest motives and the most urgent purpose would do nothing whatever to mitigate it. The fact that it might be made as a gamble, in the hope that some miracle would occur, would not matter. After all, the purposes of Calphas were, in his own eyes, perfectly noble. He thought it was necessary to let "one man die for the people."

It is to a larger necessity of our time is therefore not merely to prevent the destruction of the human race by nuclear war. Even if it should happen to be no longer possible to prevent the disaster, (which God forbid) there is still a matter of choice, namely, whether or not it will be possible for every free man to refuse his consent and deny his cooperation to the greatest of crimes.

6. The Christian Choice.

In what does his cooperation and his greatest refusal of consent consist? How does one "resist" the sin of genocide? Ideally speaking, in the imaginary case where all-out nuclear war seemed inevitable and the world's leaders were sincerely trying to prevent it, the only morally legitimate and even obligatory for all sane and conscientious men everywhere in the world to lay down their weapons and their tools and starve and be shot rather than take part in the killing, and the only morally legitimate should spontaneously arise in all parts of the world, in Russia and America, in China and France, in Africa and Germany, the human race could be saved from extinction. If that is not possible, the only choice that is more than that. It would be folly to suppose that

7. A Shot Story

spoken to by strangers. That's why she gave up her nickel: to be rid of me as quickly as possible.

Next day, a handsome sailor with merry drunken eyes headed me a quarter and, before I had time to approach him with my questions, jumped on a conveniently stopping bus. Later, a busy old man, slovenly and unshaven, presented me with a nickel and a cigarette and topped the gift with quite a lecture: I had chosen a bad pitch on the hot, sunny side of the street; they were too busy with their second, besides; it was the wrong time of day. His manner was condescending and benevolent, like a famous virtuoso in the company of a bungling amateur.

A trim, kindly old lady turned up on the third day. She parted with a dime, and made me write down the address of a charitable organization where they were sure to find me a suitable job. . . . But when she found out that I was engaged in statistical research she demanded my dime, and in releasing me she was duly satisfied. There was another man, no longer young, with a cruel stone-hewn face, legacy of many peasant generations, and with light, transparent eyes, who bestowed a coin on me. His answer was: "My Saviour taught us so."

After work, the Professor and I used to settle down at a cafeteria table. I fortified myself with sandwiches and coffee, and he with his "strong" whiskey. He never did not upset him at all, on the contrary; his intuition was proving correct. The basic idea of his learned work found its corroboration in figures,—so he asserted, "that's the way it goes." One day, he was made a third day, rubbing his plump little hands with pleasure. "Just think. They claim they had built up a Christian civilization, yet what do we find? Less than twenty percent give us reason, less than twenty percent give us duty. These twenty percent not one, you hear, not one that had helped you for the sake of love, love for you, his brother, love for the image of Christ in your person."

After that, he got into a rage. He was made a party to an outrageous crime and temptation. The Professor paid me punctually every night, and as he handed me my third ten dollar bill, I felt like Judas. Personally I am not much interested in religion, and he would not get to church very often. But it is good to know that somewhere, in his own place, there is God; and that the poor folk who are having a tough time of it, my sister and I, are not alone. There is a place, a place to turn to; help shall be given! And now, suddenly, everything toppled, crashed headlong upside down. The soul was no more than a table filled with figures and percentages. No more. No more. No more. No more. No more. Something had to be done about it, for certain, to shame this arrogant theorist, to upset his calculations. But what I couldn't quite figure out.

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men hitherto passive, inert, morally indifferent and irresponsible might suddenly recover their sense of obligation and the conscience of their own power when the world was on the very brink of war.

In any case, as has been said above, the ordinary man has no access to vital information. Indeed, even the politician has only a most relatively little about what is really going on. How would it be possible to know when and how it was necessary to refuse cooperation? Can we draw a line clearly, and say precisely when nuclear war becomes so dangerous that it is suicidal? If a war of missiles breaks out, we have at the most thirty minutes to come to our momentous conclusions.—If I ever know what is happening at any time. The time to form our conscience and to decide upon our course of action is NOW.

It is one thing to form one's conscience and another to adopt a specific policy and line of action. It is highly regrettable that the important decision is overlooked and indeed deliberately obscured. To decide, in the forum of conscience, that one is obligated in every way, as a Christian, to avoid actions that would contribute to a world-wide conflict, does not mean that one is necessarily committed to absolute and unqualified pacifism. One may start from this moral principle, which is repeatedly set before us by the Pope and which cannot be seriously challenged, and then go on to seek various means to preserve peace. About these different means, there may be considerable debate.

It seems to me, however, that the enormous danger represented by nuclear weapons and the near impossibility of controlling them and limiting them to a scale that would fit the traditional ethical theory of a just war, makes it both logical and likely for a Catholic to see the futility of insisting on consent to at least relative pacifism, and to a policy of nuclear disarmament.

In so doing, however, he has a strict obligation to see that he does not permit his own conscience to be ruthlessly exploited by the politicians of another nuclear power. The logic of all serious efforts to preserve peace demands that our very endeavors themselves do not help the war effort of another nation, and that we do not precipitate war. There is sometimes a danger that our pacifism may be somewhat short sighted and immature. It may consequently be more an expression of rebellion against the status quo in our own country, than an expression of opposition to war.

In a word, there are three things to be considered: 1) Christian moral principles, which by their very nature favor peace, and according to which nuclear war is evil, if not the gravest of evils; 2) at least, a seemingly dubious morality; 2) The facts about weapons systems and

In-law was expecting me. I had promised to bring her some money, and I also had to see a friend, to pay back an old debt.

Well now, just fancy, the very next day a miracle did come to pass. We were working at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifth Street. In this populous crossing, as the Professor signalled to me, I always had the chance to choose among two or three passersby. . . . And all of them, this time, responded warmly to my need.

They gave me silver, then bills, offered addresses, a room for the night. One woman, obviously a widow, begged me to take her late husband's suits; they would be just the right size for me. And those people proclaimed, at that they were ashamed, that they suffered for me, felt their responsibility,—for this sin is common to all; and that they loved,—I loved, loved me.

"The Professor had joined me by now; he listened, asked intricate questions, argued, pleaded, parried. But he would not say anything. He gave me no answer, prompted by a deep inner knowledge: things like that cannot be learned by heart.

Later on, we sat in the 57th Street cafeteria. The Professor gloomily made his final calculations, his adjusted figures, swore, frowned, groaned. . . .

"No matter," he said, "we've come across an unfavorable sense. That's all there is to it. All this could hardly affect the metaphysical essentials. One more law; the law of the spirit. It follows that the spiritual law, too, is governed by material laws.

He babbled on. But I was paying no attention. He seemed pitiful to me: I had him in the hollow of my hand, that presumption sage. Everything in me was jubilant, I felt free again.

"By the way, I went to the address that little old lady gave me, the philanthropic agency. They found a job for me all right. I start tomorrow." I announced coolly, repeating something else to note down in your little book, Professor.

"Forty-six dollars a week?"

"Fifty."

The Professor waved it off with a contemptuous gesture.

We parted coolly. I did not tell him the most important part of it though. . . . The people who, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifth Street, protested their love for me, are my friends,—I managed to round them all up. They had refused to lend me any more money; but today, they put off their work, traveled hours in the subway, and they stood around me, and they offered me their order to take part in a cause the importance of which they realized at once. The woman who offered the suits is my sister-in-law, and the two boys who filled my pocket with silver are her children.

It is a miracle, Professor, a miracle indeed.

defense policies. Our moral decision, and the morality of our participation in the economic and social life of a society geared for nuclear war, demand imperatively that we realize the real nature of the military policies to which we contribute by taxation and perhaps also by our work in the military. The center of our life is today centered on the greatest arms race in the history of man. Everything points to the fact that these frightful weapons of destruction must and will be used, most probably on the Jewish people, and that the order factors by which these military policies are dictated.

The Christian moral principles are relatively clear. While there is still intense debate over details, no Christian moralist worthy of the name can seriously defend against a nuclear war of unqualified and massive aggression.

The facts about ABC warfare are also clear enough. There is no question of the immense destructiveness of the weapons available to us. There is no question that the destruction of civilization and even global suicide are both possible. There is no question that the policies of the nuclear powers are geared for an all-out war of irreversible savagery and destructive power.

What remains to be explored by the Christian is the area that is least considered, which also happens to be the area that most needs to be examined and is perhaps the most difficult to understand.

By what are our policies of hatred and destructiveness dictated? What seems to drive us inexorably on to the fate which we all dread and seek to avoid? This question is not to be confused with the question, "What is the Second World War? What started the Second World War? The answer is, simply, the rabid, short sighted, irrational and stubborn forces which tend to come to a head in nationalism. Christian moralists do not ask the question, "What does not mean that we have seen the end of such movements. In our modern democratic world, irrational forces lie very near the surface, and their sudden eruption is not surprising. The moralists of the modern world are the greatest of all the dangers that threaten the modern world. . . . It is at this point that the need for a reassertion of Christian principles becomes evident. . . .

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