

# THE MORAL DILEMMA OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

*Essays from*

*worldview*

A JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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# MORALITY AND MODERN WAR

*John Courtney Murray, S.J.*

There are three distinct standpoints from which it is possible to launch a discussion of the problem of war in this strange and perilous age of ours that has yet to find its name. My initial assertion will be that it is a mistake to adopt any one of them exclusively and to carry the argument on to its logical conclusion. If this is done, the argument will end in serious difficulties.

First, one might begin by considering the possibilities of destruction and ruin, both physical and human, that are afforded by existent and projected developments in weapons technology. Here the essential fact is that there are no inherent limits to the measure of destruction and ruin that war might entail, whether by the use of nuclear arms or possibly by the methods of bacteriological and chemical warfare.

Carried to its logical conclusion an argument made exclusively from this standpoint leads toward the position that war has become a moral absurdity, not to be justified in any circumstances. In its most respectable form this position may be called relative Christian pacifism.

It does not assert that war is intrinsically evil simply because it is a use of force and violence and therefore a contravention of the Christian law of love promulgated in the Sermon on the Mount. This is the absolute pacifism, the unqualified embrace of the principle of non-violence, that is more characteristic of certain Protestant sects.

The relative pacifists are content to affirm that war has now become an evil that may no longer be justified, given the fact that no adequate justification can be offered for the ruinous effects of today's weapons of war. Even this position is not to be squared with the public doctrine of the Catholic Church.

Second, one might begin the argument by considering the present historical situation of humanity as dominated by the fact of Communism. The essential fact here is that Communism, as an ideology and as a power-system, constitutes the gravest possible menace to the moral and civilizational values that form the basis of "the West," understanding the

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The complete text of this essay has been published in pamphlet form by The Church Peace Union in cooperation with the Catholic Association for International Peace.

term to designate, not a geographical entity but an order of temporal life that has been the product of valid human dynamisms tempered by the spirit of the Gospel.

Arguing from this standpoint alone one could well posit, in all logic, the present validity of the concept of the "holy war." Or one might come to some advocacy of "preventive" war or "pre-emptive" war. Or one might be led to assert that, since the adversary is completely unprincipled, and since our duty in face of him is success in the service of civilization itself, we must jettison the tradition of civilized warfare and be prepared to use any means that promises success.

None of these conclusions is morally acceptable.

Third, one might choose as a starting point the fact that today there exists a mode of international organization that is committed by its charter to the preservation of peace by pacific settlement of international disputes. One might then argue that the validity of war even as a legal institution has now vanished, with the passing of the hypothesis under which its legal validity was once defended, namely, the absence of a juridically organized international community.

But this conclusion seems, at very best, too rapid, for several reasons. The United Nations is not, properly speaking, a juridical organization with adequate legal authority to govern in the international community. It is basically a power organization. And its decisions, like those rendered by war itself, are naïvely apt to sanction injustice as well as justice.

It is not at all clear that the existence of the United Nations, as presently constituted, definitely destroys the hypothesis on which the validity of war as a legal institution has traditionally been predicated.

It is not at all clear that the United Nations, in its present stage of development, will be able to cope justly and effectively with the underlying causes of international disputes today or with the particular situations in which the basic conflict rises to the surface.

If therefore one adopts a single standpoint of argument, and adheres to it narrowly and exclusively, one will not find one's way to an integral and morally defensible position on the problem of war. On the other hand, all of the three standpoints mentioned do derive from real aspects of the problem itself. In consequence, each of them must be exploited, if the problem is to be understood in its full scope.

This is my second assertion. It is not possible here to develop it in detail. I shall merely suggest that there are three basic questions that must be explored at length and in detail. Moreover, there is an order among these questions.

The first question concerns the exact nature of the conflict that is the very definition of international life today. This is the first question be-



cause it sets the perspectives in which all other questions must be considered.

I would note here that Pius XII, in contrast with some other Catholic theorists, has fairly steadily considered the problem of war and of the weapons of war, as well as the problem of international organization, within the perspectives of what he called "the line of rupture which divides the entire international community into opposed blocks," with the result that "coexistence in truth" is not possible, since there is no common acceptance of a "norm recognized by all as morally obligatory and therefore inviolable."

*coexistence  
impossible.*

I would further note that the exact nature of the international conflict is not easily and simply defined. The line of rupture is not in the first instance geographic but spiritual and moral, and it runs through the West as well as between East and West.

It cannot be a question of locating on "our" side of the rupture those who are virtuous and intelligent, and, over against "us," those who are evil and morally blind. In contrast, it cannot be a question, as with certain neo-Lutheran theorists, of maintaining that both East and West are so full of moral ambiguities that the line of rupture between them either does not exist or is impossible to discern.

In a word, one must avoid both a moral simplism and a moral nihilism in the analysis of the international conflict.

Finally, it is most important to distinguish, with Dr. William H. Roberts, between the mainsprings of the conflict and its concrete manifestations; or, with Sir David Kelly, between the relatively superficial facts of change in our revolutionary world and the underlying currents of change. Moreover, it is important to relate the two levels of analysis, in so far as this can be done without artificiality.

The tendency of this whole line of analysis will be to furnish a full answer to a complex of questions that must be answered before it is possible to consider the more narrow problem of war.

What precisely are the values, in what hierarchical scale, that today are at stake in the international conflict? What is the degree of danger in which they stand?

What is the mode of the menace itself—in particular, to what extent is it military, and to what extent is it posed by forms of force that are more subtle?

If these questions are not carefully answered, one will have no standard against which to match the evils of war. And terror, rather than reason, will command one's judgments on the military problem.

This is the danger to which the seven moral theologians in Germany pointed in their statement of May 5, 1958: "A part of the confusion among



our people has its source in the fact that there is an insufficient realization of the reach of values that are endangered today, and of the hierarchical order among them, and of the degree of danger in which they stand. On the other hand, from the *Unheimlichkeit* of the technical problems (of war itself) there results a crippling of intelligence and of will."

The second basic question concerns the means that are available for insuring the defense of the values that are at stake in the international conflict. This too is a large and complex question.

A whole array of means is available, in correspondence with the multifaceted character of the conflict itself. It is a matter of understanding both the usefulness and the limitations of each of them, from spectacular "summit meetings" across the gamut to the wholly unspectacular work, say, of agricultural experts engaged in increasing the food supply of so-called underdeveloped nations.

This whole complex question must be fully explored antecedently to the consideration of the problem of war. The basic reason is that otherwise one can give no concrete meaning to the concept of war as *ultima ratio*.

Moreover, the value of the use of force, even as *ultima ratio*, will be either overestimated or underestimated, in proportion as too much or too little value is attached to other means of sustaining and pressing the international conflict.

The third and final question concerns the *ultima ratio* itself, the arbitrament of arms as the last resort.

Here we confront the third uniqueness in the total problem. The historical situation of international conflict is unique: "Never," said Pius XII, "has human history known a more gigantic disorder." The uniqueness of the disorder resides, I take it, in the unparalleled depth of its vertical dimension; it goes to the very roots of order and disorder in the world—the nature of man, his destiny, and the meaning of human history. There is a uniqueness too in the second basic question posited above, sc., the unprecedented scope of the conflict in its horizontal dimension, given the variety of means whereby it may be, and is being, waged.

A special uniqueness resides too in the existence of the United Nations, as an arena of conflict, indeed, but also as an instrument of peacemaking to some degree.

However, the most immediate striking uniqueness comes to view when one considers the weapons for war-making that are now in hand or within grasp.

There are two subordinate questions under this general heading of the nature of war today.

The first concerns the actual state of progress (if it be progress and

not a regress to barbarism) in the technology of defensive and offensive weapons of war. The second concerns the military usefulness, for any intelligible military and political purposes, of the variety of weapons developed; this latter question therefore raises the issue of the strategic and tactical concepts that are to govern the use of these various weapons.

The facts that would furnish answers to these questions are to a considerable extent hidden from the public knowledge; and, to the extent to which they are known, they have been generative of confusion in the public mind. In any case, these questions must have some reasonably satisfactory answer, if the moral problem of war is to be sensibly discussed.

Here then are three preliminary lines of inquiry to be pursued before the moral issues involved in warfare today can be dealt with, even in their generality. I hasten on to my third assertion, sc., that an initial, not necessarily complete, exploration of these three lines is sufficient to suggest the outlines of a general moral theory.

Whether Catholic thought can be content to stop with a moral theory cast simply in the mode of abstractness that characterizes the following propositions will be a further question. In any case, it is necessary in the first instance to state the general propositions.

(1) All wars of aggression, whether just or unjust, fall under the ban of moral proscription.

The use of force (and presumably one would include the threat of force) is not a moral means for the redress of violated legal rights. The justness of the cause is irrelevant; there simply is no longer a right of self-redress; no individual State may presume to take even the cause of justice into its own hands. Whatever the grievance of the State may be, and however objectionable it may find the status quo, warfare is an immoral means for settling the grievance and for altering existent conditions.

(2) A defensive war against unjust aggression is morally admissible both in principle and in fact.

In its abstractness this principle has always formed part of Catholic doctrine; by its assertion the Church finds a sure way between the false extremes of pacifism and bellicism. Moreover, the assertion itself, far from being a contradiction of the basic Christian will to peace, is the strongest possible affirmation of this will.

These are statements of the principles of the traditional doctrine on war. It is not difficult to state them. The difficulty begins after the statement has been made. What is questioned today is the usefulness of the doctrine, its relevance to the concrete actualities of our historical moment.

I think that the tendency to question the uses of the Catholic doctrine

principles

aggression  
illegal

defensive  
war  
admissible

?

problem



on war initially rises from the fact that it has for so long not been used, even by Catholics. That is, it has not been made the basis for a sound critique of public policies and as a means for the formation of right public opinion.

The classic example, of course, was the policy of "unconditional surrender" during the last war. This policy clearly violated the requirement of the "right intention" that has always been a principle in the traditional doctrine of war. Yet no sustained criticism was made of the policy by Catholic publicists or even by Catholic bishops.

Nor was any substantial effort made to clarify by moral judgments the thickening mood of savage violence that made possible the atrocities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

I think it is true to say that the traditional doctrine was irrelevant during World War II. This is no argument against the traditional doctrine. The Ten Commandments do not lose their imperative relevance by reason of the fact that they are violated. But there is place for an indictment of all of us who failed to make the tradition relevant.

The initial relevance of the traditional doctrine today lies in its value as the solvent of false dilemmas. Our fragmented culture seems to be the native soil of this fallacious and dangerous type of thinking.

There are, first of all, the two extreme positions, a softly sentimental pacifism and a cynically hard realism. Both of these views which are also "feelings" are formative factors in the moral climate of the moment. Both of them are condemned by the traditional doctrine of the Church as false and pernicious.

The problem is to refute by argument the false antimony between war and morality that they assert in common, though in different ways. The further and more difficult problem is to purify the public climate of the miasma that emanates from each of them and tends to smother the public conscience.

The second false dilemma has threatened to dominate the argument on national defense in Germany. It sloganized itself thus: "*Lieber rot als tot.*" It has made the same threat in England where it has been developed in a symposium by 23 distinguished Englishmen entitled *The Fearful Choice: A Debate on Nuclear Policy*.

The choice, of course, is between the desperate alternatives, either universal atomic death or complete surrender to Communism. The Catholic mind, schooled in the traditional doctrine of war and peace, rejects the dangerous fallacy involved in this casting up of desperate alternatives. Hidden beneath the fallacy is an abdication of the moral reason and a craven submission to some manner of technological or historical determinism.



It is not, of course, that the traditional doctrine rejects the extreme alternatives as possibilities. Anything in history is possible. Moreover, on grounds of the moral principle of proportion the doctrine supports the grave recommendation of the greatest theorist of war in modern times, von Clausewitz: "We must therefore familiarize ourselves with the thought of an honorable defeat."

Conversely, the doctrine condemns the hysteria that swept Washington in 1958 when the Senate voted 82 to 2 to deny government funds to any person or institution who ever proposes or actually conducts any study regarding the "surrender of the government of the U.S."

"Losing," said von Clausewitz, "is a function of winning," thus stating in his own military idiom the moral calculus prescribed by traditional moral doctrine. The moralist agrees with the military theorist that the essence of a military situation is uncertainty. And when he requires, with Pius XII, a solid probability of success as a moral ground for a legitimate use of arms, he must reckon with the possibility of failure and be prepared to accept it.

But this is a moral decision, worthy of a man and of a civilized nation. It is a free and responsible act, and therefore it inflicts no stigma of dishonor.

It is not that "weary resignation," condemned by Pius XII (Christmas Message, 1948), which is basic to the inner attitude of the theorists of the desperate alternatives, no matter which one they argue for or accept. On the contrary, the single inner attitude which is nourished by the traditional doctrine is a will to peace, which, in the extremity, bears within itself a will to enforce the precept of peace by arms.

But this will to arms is a moral will, controlled by reason; for it is identically a will to justice. It is formed under the judgment of reason. And the first possibility contemplated by reason, as it forms the will to justice through the use of force, is not the possibility of surrender, which would mean the victory of injustice. This is the ultimate extremity, beyond even the extremity of war itself.

Similarly, the alternate possibility considered by reason is not a general annihilation, even of the enemy. This would be worse than injustice; it would be sheer folly. In a word, a debate on nuclear policy that is guided by the traditional doctrine of war does not move between the alternatives of surrender or annihilation.

If it means simply an honorable defeat, surrender may be morally tolerable; but it is not to be tolerated save on reasonable calculus of proportionate moral costs. In contrast, annihilation is on every count morally intolerable; it is to be averted at all costs, that is, at the cost of every effort, in every field, that the spirit of men can put forth.

*Not of the question, who is just? who determines that he has a right & duty to defend peace? Every body is "defending peace" with the threat of nuclear weapons.*

*here we go again.*

*yeah! sure it is.*

Value of traditional doctrine?

Precisely here the proximate and practical value, use, and relevance of the traditional doctrine begin to appear.

Its remote value lies in its service as a standard of casuistry on various kinds of war and in its general formation of the private and public conscience and of the climate of moral opinion in the midst of today's international conflict. But its proximate value is felt at the crucial point where the moral and political orders meet.

Primarily, its value resides in its capacity to set the right terms for rational debate on public policies bearing on the problem of war and peace in this age, characterized by international conflict and by advanced technology. This is no mean value, if you consider the damage that is being presently done by argument carried on in the wrong terms.

The traditional doctrine disqualifies as irrelevant and dangerous the false dilemmas of which I have spoken. It also rejects the notion that the immediate problem is to "abolish war" or "ban the bomb."

It is true that the traditional doctrine looks forward to its own disappearance as a chapter in Catholic moral theology. The effort of the moral reason to fit the use of violence into the objective order of justice is paradoxical enough; but the paradox is heightened when this effort takes place at the interior of the Christian religion of love.

In any case, the principles of the doctrine themselves make clear that our historical moment is not destined to see the doctrine discarded as unnecessary. War is still the possibility, not to be exorcised by prayer and fasting. The Church does not look immediately to the abolition of war. Her doctrine still seeks to fulfill its triple traditional function: to condemn war as evil, to limit the evils it entails, and to humanize its conduct as far as possible.

In the light of the traditional doctrine and the no less necessary light of the facts of international life and technological development today, what are the right terms for argument on public policy? These are readily reached.

The doctrine asserts, in principle and in fact, that force is still the ultima ratio in human affairs, and that its use in extreme circumstances may be morally obligatory ad repellendam injuriam. The facts assert that today this *ultima ratio* takes the form of nuclear force.

The doctrine asserts that an unlimited use of nuclear force is immoral. The facts assert that nevertheless the use of nuclear force remains possible and may prove to be necessary, lest a free field be granted to brutal violence and lack of conscience.

The doctrine concludes that the use of nuclear force must be limited, the principle of limitation being the exigencies of legitimate defense against injustice. Thus the terms of public debate are set in two words,

indeed it is

There is the question. Is this position sufficient? Is it left with any meaning in the present situation or is it only a faint hope. How can you bank on a limited war staying limited? When policy makers declare they intend annihilation.



"limited war." All other terms of argument are either fanciful or fallacious.

I shall not attempt to construct the debate itself. But two points may be made.

First, there are those who say that the limitation of nuclear war, or any war, is today impossible, for a variety of reasons—technical, political, etc. In the face of this position, the traditional doctrine simply asserts again, "the problem today is limited war." *i.e. no solution: you made the issue.*

But notice that the assertion is on a higher plane than that of sheer fact. It is a moral proposition, or better, a moral imperative. In other words, since nuclear war may be a necessity, it must be made a possibility. Its possibility must be created. *!! q. This is where you end up.*

And the creation of its possibility requires a work of intelligence, and the development of manifold action, on a whole series of levels—political (foreign and domestic), diplomatic, military, technological, scientific, fiscal, etc., with the important inclusion of the levels of public opinion and popular education. To say that the possibility cannot be created by intelligence and energy, under the direction of a moral imperative, is to succumb to some sort of determinism in human affairs.

My second point is that the problem of limited war would seem to require solution in two stages.

One stage consists in the construction of a sort of "model" of the limited war. It is largely a problem in conceptual analysis. Its value consists in making clear the requirements of limited war in terms of policy on various levels. Notably it makes clear, for instance, that the limitation of war becomes difficult or impossible if fiscal policy assumes the primacy over military policy.

The second stage is even more difficult. It centers on a *quaestio facti*. The fact is that the international conflict, in its ideological as in its power dimension, comes to concrete expression in certain localized situations, each of which has its own peculiarities. The question then is, where and under what circumstances is the eruption of violence possible or likely, and how is the limitation of the conflict to be effected in these circumstances?

The answer to this question is precisely what is meant by the formation of policy. Policy is the hand of reason set firmly upon events. Policy is what you do in this given situation. In the concreteness of policy therefore the assertion of the possibility of limited war is finally made, and made good.

Policy is the meeting-place of the world of power and the world of morality, in which there takes place the concrete reconciliation of the duty of success that rests upon the statesmen and the duty of justice that rests upon the civilized nation that he serves.



# THEOLOGIANS AND THE BOMB

*Steven S. Schwarzschild*

In sophisticated theological circles of all religious communions unqualified rejection of war is not even argued against anymore. It is just insulted. The word "pacifists" is apparently never used without the adjective "sentimental," if not worse.

The reason for this attitude is a little difficult to understand. It would seem that there must be more deserving objects of scorn than people who are so revolted by the shedding of human blood that, sometimes perhaps without lengthy casuistic cogitations, they raise their hands heavenward and swear to abstain from all forms of direct or indirect military action.

Let it be granted that such people are unrealistic, utopian, emotional, and all the other faults which are ascribed to them by the hard-headed empiricists of religion. For the sake of the argument, let it be assumed that they are totally wrong and may cause a great deal of harm to the relatively good society which is to be safeguarded by war. Still, from the point of view of religion—which, it may be taken for granted, abhors war even when war is inevitable and necessary—surely in a world haunted by the constant threat of annihilation there must be men and ideologies and institutions and impulses which more properly and greatly merit imprecations and refutations: namely, all those which tend to cause the reality and possibly also the necessity of organized killings.

It is a quality of moral revulsion which one finds lacking in Father John Courtney Murray's "Morality and Modern War." Father Murray would, of course, pray and reason and exert himself for the prevention of war as much as any pacifist, but he is so preoccupied with his taxonomical endeavors in the field of military morality and social catastrophes that in his writing one does not find any sense of what nuclear war really is. The ghastly vision of thousands of charred and disintegrated human bodies is effectively hidden behind elaborate ethical charts. And in his article "Religion and the Bomb" (April 1959), Professor Julian Hartt shows that he does not like pacifists any better, even though he loses control of himself at one point to execrate war and denounce those whose systems of values foster it.

My comments, to be sure, are pretty subjective. But on the subject of nuclear war a large dose of subjectivism is called for. In the first place, unless there be a demand for peace so violent that it will shake the

heavens and thrones of the mighty, the necessary intellectual and social efforts will not be undertaken to ensure peace. And let it not be said again, as is said nowadays invariably when this point in the discussion is reached, that the belief that peace can be ensured is in and of itself idolatrously utopian: we are speaking not of the establishment of the Kingdom of God but only, and modestly, of preventing the outbreak of international atomic warfare.

One must, in the second place, begin one's arguments on this subject with a personal reaction because one has the impression that the proponents of religious realism and of theological permissiveness in regard to "limited war" have heard all the logical arguments against their views and have not been persuaded, even as—contrary to the assumption often made—most "idealists" have listened to and rationally concluded that they must reject the arguments of the realists.

What good will it do to go through the whole roster of considerations once again? Surely Father Murray had previously heard Professor Hartt's question about who can be expected or trusted to define the limits of "limited war" and the specific application of the concepts of aggressive or defensive war. It may be presumed that he has found an answer satisfactory to himself either in philosophical terms or within the authority of the Catholic Church. By the same token, it would not be too difficult to go through Father Murray's tight conceptual development and, approaching it from another perspective, point out its inadequacies. This would do equally little good. He has unquestionably been confronted with all these issues before and has, at least for himself, overcome them.

In other ways, the same probable ineffectiveness of argumentation looms up before Professor Hartt. It is not very easy to understand his ultimate concern. This seems to be that if men do not possess loftier commitments than their own lives they will not be prepared to wage war for any but egotistical goals. But men must be reminded that their egotistical goals will be destroyed by war and that loftier goals than egotistical ones are unattainable through war. And theologians must not ponderously cover under their heavy academic blankets the straightforward divine command to sanctify life, not to abandon it to the powers of human sinfulness.

(One sometimes wonders whether our insistence on theological deepening of religion and life is justified when one observes the contrast between theological subtlety and the uncomplicated, healthy human desire for dignified existence. Under such conditions an appeal to the animalic fear of pain and death and to the untrained, uncritical wish for personal security may be entirely warranted.)

By the time Father Murray has run the course of his argument against



## THE PACIFIST'S CHOICE

*Stephen G. Cary*

Ever since the time of Constantine, Christian theologians have been trying to find a way to wrap up the gospel of Christ and the institution of war in the same package. Sometimes they have enjoyed moderate success. When war was the private monopoly of various princes and was conducted according to well-defined rules with limited objectives, it was possible to rationalize it. But as the institution has grown in scope and ferocity, and its weapons in destructive power, the task has become more difficult. The ethic of love and the ICBM are simply not compatible, regardless of the theological garb in which they are presented.

Yet the Church, rightly concerned with the problem of justice, cannot let go of the notion that the only way justice can be assured is through the amassing of military power. This being so, it must continue the struggle to justify it, however tortuous and winding the road may be. None but the most hardy attempts any longer to bless full-blown, full-megaton nuclear war. The more manageable concept of limited war appears to offer some way out, and Father John Courtney Murray's article represents a brilliant attempt to establish it. His pleas for a restatement of the traditional position of the Church regarding the conditions under which it can support war is an appealing one, and his delineation of the role of the moralist in providing the necessary framework of restraint is admirably logical.

But it seems to me that even Father Murray fails in his task. Dr. Hartt, Rabbi Schwarzschild and, more recently, Walter Millis, have all raised grave doubts about his thesis, and they are doubts that I share. To talk of limited war in the atomic age is to try to turn back the clock. When survival is at stake, as it would be in any major war, it appears the height of folly to talk of applying reason to the situation. War's necessity is terrible and, once released, its course lies almost wholly beyond the compass of those who seek to make it the servant of their ends. To suggest that it is possible to control it requires a rosier view of human nature than I am able to support. One is therefore driven to the conclusion that limited war offers no hiding place for the moralist; if so, there seems to be no other course for the Church but the final rejection of war as an instrument for achieving justice.

One other possible escape hatch does, however, remain: the concept



of armament as a deterrent. Can the Church justify the amassing of military power on the ground that the *threat* of its use will prevent the greater evil of Soviet aggression? There is no doubt that a strong moral case can be built for accepting the necessity for military power if it prevents war and if the time thereby gained can be used to work for the achievement of justice. Politically too, the deterrent concept has solid support. George Kennan, the father of containment, leaned heavily on it in suggesting that the United States develop a shield of strength to deter aggression at the same time that it sought through various positive approaches to eliminate the sources of conflict and lift the level of human life and dignity. This dual concept has in fact been at the root of our foreign policy ever since 1947.

Finally, there is good historical precedent for such an approach. The British employed a similar policy with striking success during much of the last century, using their navy as a shield (and occasionally as an instrument of conquest) at the same time that they advanced democratic freedoms and human welfare at home and, to a certain extent, abroad. Pacifists could inveigh against this use of power, but they were hard put to it to support their case on grounds other than the pure teaching of the gospels. Logic and history were on the side of the realists, and the theologian could answer convincingly that the benefits to man outweighed the evil that might be involved in the application of military power.

Unfortunately, however, we are no longer living in the nineteenth century, and this historical precedent, as well as the theological and political framework that sustains its modern counterpart, rests on assumptions that in my judgment are no longer valid. The whole case depends on the possibility of simultaneously providing military security with one hand while we work for the achievement of peace and justice with the other. I suggest that this cannot now be done. The advances in science have changed fundamentally the nature of security demands, and in a world in which power is both polarized and limitless the old rules and the old assumptions no longer apply. Military and strategic considerations will not stay neatly compartmentalized as they once would. Their demands are becoming pervasive and all-engulfing, to the point where every important national decision must be taken in their terms.

This is what has been happening during the past decade. Where, during this period, has the United States been able to make its important foreign policy decisions on the basis of justice or human welfare? Where is the limited use of power that George Kennan counseled in advocating his twin-pillared program? In area after area—Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, South East Asia, Japan, China—we have been driven by the relentless demands of the Cold War to make our choices in strategic

terms. Economic policies, involving aid programs and world trade, have been dominated by military considerations. So has our policy toward the United Nations. The image of America in the eyes of the world has unhappily changed from that of champion of the oppressed to military giant, and we are bewildered because we have meant only to serve the ends of justice.

This is our dilemma, and it goes much deeper than the intentions or the competence of our leadership. It goes to the question of choice—choice between continuing to seek security in our capacity to destroy, or seeking it through developing our capacity to change. It is perhaps a reflection of our times that the choice is forced on us by logic and history rather than by morality, but the theologian no less than the rest of us must face it, for there appears to be no refuge in deterrence any more than in nuclear war, limited or otherwise.

It is a hard choice, involving the ultimate rejection of violence, but it is the only way to be free of the crippling limitations imposed by commitment to the bomb. Once made, it provides a new basis for day-to-day decisions, and adds another voice to a minority calling for a new approach to foreign relations. This is its political relevance, for change in America is not produced by fiat but by the ever-shifting interaction of diverse interest groups. The pacifist minority, like any other, is politically important because it serves as a pole of discussion through which it has a voice in the ultimate determination of policy. Obviously its influence is modest, but the vigor and depth of its commitment provide a dynamic for change that is lacking in middle-of-the-road approaches. Is it possible that the bankruptcy of liberalism today is due at least in part to the fact that the liberal still clings to the idea that defense programs and welfare programs can be carried on together, with the result that he contributes not to change but only to the schizophrenia of our times?

Of course, a rejection of violence does not in itself release us from our problems. We must still recognize the reality of evil, and discover how to deal with it in a way that preserves our values. It is somehow assumed that these questions do not concern the pacist, that his position represents abandonment of values and abject surrender to evil. Father Murray eschews both nuclear war and pacifism because "these desperate alternatives [mean] either universal death or complete surrender to Communism." The pacifist does not propose to surrender, and he is well aware that power is necessary in this world, but he seeks to develop a conception of power appropriate for our Christian purposes and our nuclear times. He believes that organized, disciplined good will can be both a massive instrument for justice and a potent weapon of defense, as indeed it has become in the hands of a Gandhi or a Martin King. Men are



not saints; neither are they devils. To suggest that they could rise to the challenge of non-violent resistance on the one hand or be moved by it on the other is not to look through rose-colored glasses. Is it so impossible to conceive of man, still nasty to his neighbor, still on occasion beating his wife, but reacting with horror to the suggestion that he launch a missile to destroy a million lives? Our problem lies in the ironic fact that today the general rule is just the opposite.

My plea for men of conscience to face at last the necessity for a personal rejection of war is made without any hope that it offers a panacea. The pacifist must recognize the possibility of invasion, just as the non-pacifist must recognize the possibility that he may have to *use* the bomb—and both must decide how they would face these ultimate failures. The pacifist must admit that he has no answer when the fire breaks out, but he can logically argue that no one else has either.

These arguments only emphasize the fact that the pacifist, like other men, can only see a little way down the road. Politically, he insists only that there is more creative potential and less risk in massive efforts to secure justice than in massive efforts to secure military power, and since he believes a choice must be made between them he is compelled to throw his individual weight on the side of justice. He rests his case there, with the suggestion that the time to start making a new approach is now, and the place to start is with ourselves. He thinks the Church would more adequately fulfill its mission in these tragic times if it abandoned the impossible search for a moral justification for militarism, and turned its attention to discovering alternative sources for national security. When a society reaches the kind of impasse in which ours finds itself today—when it talks about “safety as the twin brother of annihilation” and would betray its values in the name of protecting them—salvation is not to be gained by more calculation of expediency but by rebirth.

posals for easing tension in Europe and his more recent implied proposals for ending nuclear tests were not based on moral maxims alone. They emerged from a rational attempt to relate facts to values, which certainly included a calculation of the probable consequences of competing policies.

The larger fact is that everyone instinctively makes moral-political calculations when dealing with world politics. The real issue is not: shall we calculate or shall we not? The real question is: what factors shall we take into account when we calculate and what weight shall we give them when we make policy?

Sir Winston Churchill once said that "facts are better than dreams." What he meant is that neither the statesman nor the citizen can make politically wise and morally responsible judgments by consulting only his goals. He must consult the facts—the universal facts about man and history, and the particular facts about a political situation. The dream without the fact leads to this-worldly nightmares or to other-worldly escape. The fact without the dream leads to boredom and despair.

Mr. Kennan's nonchalant attitude toward facts and calculation in the area of nuclear weapons leads to less than adequate moral and political judgments. This same nonchalance has crept into some of the previous essays in *Worldview* on the same subject.

After quoting a "random sampling" of press reports on the dangers of nuclear fallout, Mr. Kennan concludes: "But whoever gave us the right, as Christians, to take even one innocent life?" His implied judgment that all bomb tests under all circumstances are morally wrong seems to be based in part upon a picture of fallout danger that bears little resemblance to the findings of leading research institutions here and abroad.

Earlier contributors to this debate in the pages of *Worldview* have also made rather unqualified generalizations about the destructiveness of nuclear weapons. John Cogley says: "Modern war means that the defended will die as surely as the defenders; it means that nothing will remain for the aggressors to grab." Walter Millis seems to share the same view: "We are faced with a situation in which *any* war seems likely to escape entirely from the control of man . . . so far as we know now, *resort* to [nuclear weapons] can never promote defense." Stephen G. Cary says: "To talk of limited war in the atomic age is to try to turn back the clock. When survival is at stake . . . it appears the height of folly to talk of applying reason to the situation. War's necessity is terrible and, once released, its course lies almost wholly beyond the compass of those who seek to make it a servant of their ends." He adds: "To suggest that it is possible to control it requires a rosier view of human nature than I am able to support."



## WAR AND THE ABSOLUTISTS

*for limited  
nuclear war -  
as J. C. Murray.*

*Kenneth W. Thompson*

No problem facing contemporary world leaders tests political intelligence and moral imagination more severely than the issue of nuclear weapons. The awesome question of what is a viable armaments policy perplexes men no less in 1960 than it did in 1945. What are responsible governments to do with instruments of lethal destruction? What programs can international institutions devise that will broaden the narrow spectrum of security that nations have enjoyed since World War II? Who is prepared to gamble on another's restraint with growing stockpiles of ever more deadly weapons? If there is no security in national weakness can states find safety in national strength? If so, what has happened to criteria of national power when thermonuclear devices can in fatal strikes wipe out whole populations, armies and industrial potentials? How is the moralist to find his way between the shoals of a heedless compassion that asks too much of collective virtue and a harsh cynicism that denies the prospect of national suicide and mutual annihilation? What are the points of convergence of justice and security and how can they be kept in balance when technology continually alters crucial elements in the equation?

To approach the armaments field through a set of baffling questions is hardly reassuring, for no other realm of international relationships more desperately requires clearcut answers and solutions. We reassure one another that reasonable men can find a way out of the present impasse if they but contrive more imaginative policies. Those who admit stalemate or protracted uncertainty in political, economic, moral or social conflicts instinctively prefer more precise designs and overall blueprints for the armaments problem. For example, many who see no abatement in political tensions between Moscow and Washington affirm that one action or another will assure an early end to the arms race, for failing this all men will perish. Disarmament commends itself as a sensible way out when the problems of Berlin, Formosa or Cuba prove insoluble. To this approach most lend assent up to the point our policymakers carry new programs into the international arena. When their efforts fail, however, we look to explanations that question their good will, motivation, or intelligence, but rarely the stubborn quality of the problem itself. Fifteen years of disappointment and frustration in negotiating an end to the arms race

inherent in his task. If all patients were free of disease at all times, the doctor's place could appropriately be filled by someone else with other training and skills. If the international stage were not plagued by rivalry, distrust and suspicion, negotiators who have learned to take conflict in stride would quickly become obsolete. Incidentally, no diplomatist worthy of the name believes that warfare is inevitable. It is conflict and rivalry, particularly among those who contend for influence and authority, that is taken for granted, and the search is unremitting for ways and means to limit rivalries and prevent the struggle for power from crossing over into open strife and war. The vocation and the commitment of the negotiator compel him to believe that war is not inevitable. When the inflammation caused by tension and rivalry grows too intense, he must apply a poultice to relieve the infection until time and circumstances can restore health to the body politic. If he were to act as if the infection were imaginary or could be "reasoned" away, he should have failed in his calling, however humane and civilized his motives might be. The doctor can hardly assume that health will supplant disease once and for all; neither can the diplomat proceed as if virtue were obliterating sinfulness or cooperation had superseded conflict.

I accept the fact that for any sensitive conscience the need to recognize the dual reality of good and evil can be profoundly distressing. Few liberal Christians and humanists deny the reality of imperfect virtue and they labor faithfully in social reform and aid to the oppressed to reduce, not eliminate, human suffering. They accept the necessity of charity even within blatantly oppressive and unjust social systems whose purposes they must ultimately condemn. Here liberals and particularly pacifists link the "incompatible" forces of an ethic of love and coexistence with tyrannical regimes. Because I believe they are right in striving to bring aid and comfort to victims of an unjust political order even at the expense of strengthening that order, I am puzzled by their austere rejection of ethical pragmatism in confronting the armaments problem. Surely limited war is morally superior to total war and the Cold War is to be preferred to a shooting war. Yet moral relativists who see some justice in the most tyrannical regimes become moral absolutists in the claim that there is "no other course for the Church but the final rejection of war as an instrument for achieving justice." I would not ask men to form an unholy alliance with evil nor justify what is wrong, but I would only hope they might consider that cooperation with evil in the interests of the good cannot be defended in political and social relations and utterly condemned in the military realm.

I suspect the source of this illusion rests in the belief that men can draw an absolute distinction between strategies of violence and non-vio-



lence. Non-violent resistance is often equated with the pure gospel of love. Sometimes indeed, it may be morally superior to violence. Yet the Holy Gospel has nothing to say about strategems of non-violence through which one group seeks to impose its will on another. The seeds of evil group themselves around a man's desire and necessity, as he sees it, to have his way with someone else, restricting thereby the self-fulfillment of human personality. The basis of wrong-doing would seem to be the encroachment of one will on another and the denial of self-realization and individuality. Violence is a more egregious form of this evil but is not fundamentally a thing apart.

I fear moral absolutism in the face of the nuclear problem partly because the resources of Christian ethics are so desperately needed in the proximate decisions of military policy. I must agree with the statement of the British Council of Churches that "restraint is a major Christian objective." Yet if Christians can only condemn military programs, as some have traditionally denounced all forms of politics, who will defend that objective? Who will speak for reason, self-limitation and restricting the build-up of defenses to proportions that will deter and inhibit a reckless enemy without endless striving to surpass him in every weapon within a vast armory of destructiveness? Who will hold the reins on policies of unconditional surrender and programs aimed at liquidating an opponent? Who will pursue the goal of limiting conflict in scope and character? If Christians or Jews restrict themselves to condemning and denouncing all politics and military measures, they leave to others, as we must sadly confess has too often been the case, the pursuit of Judeo-Christian objectives like restraint. I say this not to condemn those who hold honestly and sincerely to another viewpoint but because this issue seems fundamental to me, as apparently it also does to the British Council of Churches.

If moral certainty in the control and elimination of nuclear weapons exceeds the wit and attainment of man, no one who would responsibly serve his nation and the world can abandon the search for more viable policies for limited problems. The irony of the nuclear age is that all-out war has lost its inner logic but no major power across the vast chasm of mutual distrust can afford to be the first to found its policies upon this premise. However, the first level at which moral compulsion properly takes the stage is at the point where man's necessity to control and eliminate warfare conflicts with his insufficiency to do so. Those who assert that the practical man must "accept war in the abstract as a fact of life" are doubtless correct as are those who point out that most choices the statesman makes are practical ones at several stages removed from the moral issue. Yet moral man faced with mankind's extinction has an obligation

by virtue of common humanity to resist in every practical way the unfolding of a chain of events leading to disaster. Moral responsibility for others no less than himself requires him to act with moral and political discrimination to prevent war from breaking out, to restrict its spread once it erupts, and to bring it to an end as promptly and decisively as possible. Moral discrimination is an unending process and those who would restrict it to outlawing war and the instruments of warfare confine it within too narrow limits. The compulsion to seek moral distinctions across a wide spectrum of war and peace is generated by a morality comprehensive enough to embrace both means and ends.

Secondly, the moralist for these reasons is entitled to speak not merely about war in the abstract but about particular wars and the military and political conditions that either increase the likelihood of war or threaten to carry a struggle beyond the point of self-defense or legitimate national or international interests. We know enough about the tendencies of men and nations, so we can assert that great weakness has almost always invited expansion and aggression by those possessing great strength. The duty of statesmen is to reduce the temptation for dynamic expansionist movements to spread their influence and their cause. At the same time, under circumstances of present-day technology, nations can ill-afford to build defense systems capable alone of wars of last recourse. Despite repeated claims that conventional wars had been rendered obsolete, outbreaks since World War II have all been conventional in nature. Military conflict and the threat of conflict in Korea, Hungary, Suez, Vietnam and Lebanon have followed the conventional pattern. Nor is the argument convincing that the West has no practical alternative. A leading military analyst writes: "Many of the assumptions regarding the impossibility of conventional defense and of the 'hordes' of Communist manpower, are either fallacious or exaggerated. Both in total available manpower and in its industrial potential the free world still is superior."

Neither national necessity nor military logic excuses American diplomatic and intellectual leaders from considering principles defining the limits of military preparation and conduct. An armaments program aimed at overwhelming nuclear superiority must be questioned both on military and ethical grounds, for the purpose of thermonuclear strength is to confront an adversary "with the certainty of severe retaliation, sufficient to make the adventure too costly." The goal under present-day conditions cannot be organizing the means of victory since "the real defeat is the war itself, for it involves a common fate which will be visited on all who have anything to do with it." Yet reasonable prudence in establishing limited nuclear strength may prove a deterrent to those who might otherwise dare to use weapons they monopolized. Even a great and hu-



mane people succumbed to such a temptation, and we are constrained to speculate over what course we might have followed at Hiroshima if others had possessed the bomb.

The United States cannot afford to reject cavalierly "the principle of proportion." Whatever the difficulties of enforcing restraint, the ancient truth holds good that grave injustices may not be repressed by means bringing greater injustice than the perpetuation of the injustice. I am not convinced that a reexamination of the classic texts on the conditions of a just war or of defensive wars is outmoded in our time. The great publicists of the past were more inclined than some of our latter-day international lawyers to view law and justice in context. They searched their souls and the practice of states to ascertain when and how states and princes could be expected to keep their commitments. Circumstances led them to write less of enforcement systems and more of conditions of self-interest and mutual trust. They talked of levels and orders of justice and were not above accepting the compromises absolute justice was compelled to make if a tolerable order was to be preserved. I find in such writings and in much of the historic Catholic literature, partly because its precepts are rooted both in heaven and earth, a greater sense of moral discrimination and attention to proximate orders of justice than in the writings of many Christian or Jewish perfectionists.

A brilliant philosopher viewing the contemporary scene asks, "Where are the ethical principles to fix the appropriate limits?" If he had broadened his question to read "where are the ethical *and political* principles" he might have obtained an answer. Any system of limitation must serve the national interests of both parties. We are told that an armaments agreement will be self-enforcing if compliance serves such interests better than evasion or violation. The underpinnings of every international arrangement are, of course, moral in character. There must be a semblance of mutual trust. The basic problem in East-West relations has been and remains the conspicuous absence of such trust. If this trust is to be created, however, it must grow from the discovery of mutual interests so overpowering as to transcend sharp ideological cleavages. Do Russians and Americans have a common interest in attacking the problem of wheat-borne virus? Do they share a mutual interest in restricting the spread and diffusion of atomic weapons among the smaller powers? Should they both cut off the risk of contaminating the atmosphere by ending nuclear tests? Do they have an equal stake in restraining buoyant and reckless powers who on ideological or political grounds would plunge the world into a deathly atomic holocaust? The truth is that answers will come as part of a slow, gradual process the direction of which cannot be measured by the collapse of the Paris talks any more than by the