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## EDITORIAL: NUCLEAR ARMAMENTS AND CATHOLIC ARGUMENTS: LEFT, RIGHT AND WRONG

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IN RECENT MONTHS THE DEBATE OVER THE MORALITY OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS and of America's strategic policy has assumed a pre-eminent place in the deliberations of Catholic bishops and has dominated the pages of Catholic periodicals. The peculiarly Catholic version of the debate has even spilled over into the secular media, provoking a *Newsweek* cover story, a *Sixty Minutes* feature on CBS television, and a lengthy report on **NPR's** *All Things Considered*. Regrettably, this "peculiarly Catholic version" of the nuclear controversy has hardly been Catholic at all. Perhaps more than on any other issue, Catholic opinion has divided along the left/right lines of secular politics, and each side has conducted the argument in pragmatic, political terms. This state of affairs in the Church is gravely scandalous: "liberal" Catholics have come close to equating Catholic morality with pacifism; "conservative" Catholics have been avidly, even jingoistically, favorable to an apparently limitless augmentation of our nation's nuclear arsenal, and at least one such commentator has described the atomic bomb as God's gift to the United States. Both sides have read papal documents and interpreted Catholic tradition after a fashion which is, to be charitable, selective. Church teaching has been manipulated to support a priori political positions rather than consulted as a means of judging these positions. Worst of all, both sides have generally pressed their claims on the basis of the supposed probable results of a nuclear war rather than the moral norms of the just war tradition.

Given the purpose of *Faith & Reason* to defend the Church's magisterium, it is appropriate that this discussion focus on the shortcomings of the Catholic right on the issue of nuclear weapons, since support of Catholic tradition is so often regarded as a "rightist" position. Still, it must first be acknowledged that much of the blame for the current agitation and confusion among the Catholic faithful must be attributed to the leftist sympathies of the majority of the American bishops and of the USCC bureaucracy. Back in the sixties, when the patently immoral defense policy of mutual assured destruction (with the fitting acronym, MAD) was instituted by a liberal Democratic administration, the bishops were strangely silent. But with the election of a conservative Republican to the presidency, the American bishops have suddenly become deeply troubled in conscience.

The timing of this "concern" and the bishops' fulsome efforts to win the favor and attention of the secular media have understandably enraged many patriotic Catholics. Remarks by individual bishops, who have inveighed against American materialism and nuclear "idolatry" without so much as a harsh word for communism, have done little to improve matters.

But even apart from the foibles of particular prelates, the style and content alike of the recently released draft of the proposed pastoral on nuclear warfare seem to owe more to the left wing of the Democratic party than to a careful examination of the just war tradition. The draft refuses to see a distinction between tactical nuclear weapons and strategic weapons, and condemns any first use of nuclear weapons without even acknowledging the existence of (for instance) the neutron bomb, which seems to be a potentially licit weapon for resisting aggression. No substantial

attention is given to the demonic evil of the Soviet regime and its client states, and to the very real threat to peace, freedom, and justice posed by the Soviet bloc. Finally, as John Mulloy has shrewdly observed in *The Wanderer* (18 Nov. 1982), by condemning all nuclear weapons as intrinsically immoral, and yet allowing their temporary retention as a deterrent pending full disarmament, the bishops have fallen into the consequentialist position that the end justifies the means, or that the lesser of two evils may be tolerated. Such, of course, is precisely the line of reasoning employed by many contemporary moral theologians to justify contraception, divorce, abortion, and euthanasia.

Not all Catholic critics of the peace movement or the bishops' proposed pastoral, however, are as careful as Mr. Mulloy. Germain Grisez make essentially the same point about the temporary tolerance of deterrent, deemed immoral, in the Newsletter of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars (September, 1982, pp. 13-18), but he is rather rudely attacked for his pains by another Wanderer writer, Frank Morris ("Noise from a Hollow Drum," 11 Nov. 1982-aren't all drums hollow?). Indeed, this article manifests an essential weakness of much of the conservative Catholic commentary on the issue of nuclear weapons: a refusal to acknowledge that the only war-time use of nuclear weapons that has so far occurred-the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the close of World War II-was thoroughly immoral, and that there is little to indicate that American policy on the use of nuclear weapons has changed significantly since then. Mr. Morris refers to "the bombing of two Japanese cities" as "perhaps immoral." "Perhaps"? *Perhaps*? If the deliberate massacre of two entire cities-men women, and children; undefended noncombatants-is not immoral, then what conceivably could be? To kill noncombatants deliberately is simply murder, and it is as sinful during war as during peace. It will not serve to argue that, in the long run, lives were saved. Murder under any circumstances, like abortion, is never justified. What is more, the slaughter of civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was carried out for an immoral purpose: to force the Japanese into unconditional surrender, which is never a licit aim and vitiates the justice of a war. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were nothing else but acts of terrorism, which cannot be justified by the (undeniable) wickedness of the Japanese government then in power, nor by the general rectitude of the American war aims.

Now those who favor the threat of massive nucle-

ar retaliation against enemy population centers as a form of deterrence have attempted to circumvent the objection to the intentional killing of noncombatants by what amounts to a quibble on the word "innocent." William G. Stanmeyer, in an article originally published in *The Policy Review* (summer, 1982) and reprinted in *The Wanderer* (21 Oct. 1982), makes a grudging concession to "a sharp dichotomy between civilians and military personnel" in his text, but in note 14 he assiduously undermines this distinction:

In modern times it is no longer clear that this conceptual distinction accurately reflects reality, both because in some sense many civilians do endorse and acquiesce in their nation's unjustified attack on the defending country, and because functional division of labor is such that many "civilians" such as scientists and farmers-feeding-soldiers are really engaged in military activity. (One might ask whether those German civilians who in World War II enthusiastically and knowingly supported Hitler's genocide and wars of aggression should be considered "innocent" even if not wearing a uniform or engaging in military tasks. How can an individual member of a collective body politic escape guilt for the immoral acts that body undertakes in his name?)

This argument is really inexcusable coming from an attorney like Mr. Stanmeyer, who ought to know that in such a context "innocent" retains its literal meaning ("not harming") and refers explicitly to those not bearing arms and not engaged in supplying munitions. The term does not imply a judgment on the personal responsibility or moral character of the person so designated. If we were all obliged to prove our innocence in the latter sense in order to escape murder, how many of us would survive? One is tempted to answer Mr. Stanmeyer as Hamlet answers Polonius when he offers to treat a group of traveling actors "according to their desert." Hamlet replies, "God's bodykins, man, much better. Use every man after his desert, and who shall scape whipping?" As for Mr. Stanmeyer's assertion that everyone in a society is functionally involved in the "war effort," the best answer to this line of reasoning was tendered more than 25 years ago by the British philosopher, G.E.M. Anscombe, who wondered "how children and the aged fitted into this story: probably they cheered the soldiers and the munitions workers up" (*Collected Philosophical Papers*, III, 63).

Of course most proponents of nuclear weapons

allow for a distinction in theory between soldiers and civilians (as Mr. Stanmeyer does in his text, as opposed to his note), but the distinction would seem to have little meaning. How is a “surgical nuclear strike” even possible with warheads of such explosive force that the Hiroshima bomb, compared to them, was little more than a firecracker? What licit military use is conceivable for a device which will literally obliterate an entire city and leave behind ground radiation and radioactive fallout that will continue to kill indiscriminately for months, possibly years? Given the fact that our nation possesses such weapons and is apparently willing to use them, it is difficult to see anything but presumption in this remark by Phyllis Schlafly: “In the hands of the United States of America, nuclear weapons are good because we know, without the question of a doubt, that our country will never use them for evil” (“The Virtue of Hope,” *The Wanderer*, 12 August 1982). But our country has already used nuclear weapons in an evil manner, if not altogether for an evil purpose; moreover, it is highly improbable that most of the arms in our nuclear arsenal could be used in a way that was not evil. Therefore Mrs. Schlafly’s equation of American possession of nuclear weapons with the virtue of hope borders on blasphemy.

What is advocated here is neither unilateral disarmament nor a freeze on nuclear weapons at current levels. Insofar as we are equipped with warheads whose sole conceivable use is to threaten or encompass the indiscriminate killing of civilians, and which therefore cannot be used licitly in a just war, they should simply be discarded, not “frozen” at current levels. But there is no reason to abandon nuclear weapons per se. The “area bombing” of German cities by the Allies at the end of World War II (e.g., the firebombing of Dresden) was quite as immoral as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On the other hand, we have every right to develop the neutron bomb if it can indeed be used strictly against legitimate military targets, and our government has a duty to attempt to develop adequate defenses against nuclear aggression—an effective ABM system, say, or a “High Frontier” satellite system. It would be immoral simply to surrender to communist imperialism.

It must be remembered, however, that the best efforts may fail. There may be no effective defense against a Soviet nuclear attack. Without the threat of massive nuclear retaliation against Soviet population centers we may be unable to resist a conventional attack by Soviet forces. It may be, in other words, that our national survival requires the use of immoral means. If that were the case, then faithful Catholics would have to be willing to face defeat rather than commit murder. This position is contrary to the exposition of the “nuclear freeze” movement, which argues basically from fear, or to the projected NCCB pastoral, which is aimed at preventing nuclear war at all costs on the assumption that such a war would virtually annihilate life on earth. The position of the broad peace coalition is thus a matter of “better red than dead.” Conservative Catholics have argued, rather inconsistently, that the horror of nuclear war is the best guarantee that it will not take place; that a nuclear war will not be so bad after all and could be won; that, even if all life were destroyed it is better to die than see all humanity enslaved by communism (“better dead than red”).

But as Professor Grisez has pointed out, “The issue is not our readiness to suffer evil, but rather our willingness to do it. It is not, finally, a matter of “better red than dead,” but of “better anything than mortal sin.” It is undoubtedly true that the current peace movement is infested with hypocrisy, communist influence, defeatism, and just plain foolishness. It is likewise true that the bishops’ handling of the matter has been something less than edifying. None of this, however, justifies closing our eyes to the real nature of America’s nuclear deterrent and the implications of current American military policy. Conservative Catholics have rightly pointed out that many of the American bishops seem headed towards willingness of conservatives to advocate the use of any means to defend America against the Soviet Union amounts to an attitude of “My country right or wrong, but my country.” Both attitudes are equally untenable for a Catholic faithful to the Church’s teachings.

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