

4. Christians cannot in good conscience, therefore, support physical methods of defense or deterrence. If they do so, they must acknowledge that they are participating in evil even if the cause is just and it is the lesser evil. The policy of Mutually Assured Destruction has no basis in biblical theology and is clearly contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. Christians are called to pursue a policy of Mutually Assured Survival (MAS) and this can only properly be pursued by laboring for justice and reconciliation.

5. Nuclear weapons, in particular, are an intolerable evil and pose the most severe threat to the Reign of God in our millions of years of existence. Not only is it clearly contrary to God's plan to have his creatures annihilate one another, it is also contrary to God's plan to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on armies and weapons which deprive the poor in every nation of the necessities of life. God gave us this universe so that we might use its resources to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and give sight to the blind. To squander God's resources on anything but the works of justice and human rights is a profound form of idolatry and injustice which directly contradicts the Reign of God.

As is obvious from the above assertions, I do not believe that either the Just War principles or the Crusades are securely based on a biblical understanding of the Reign of God. When the Church departed from the pacific tradition in the fourth and fifth centuries it did so at considerable cost to the theology of peace which was emerging in early Christianity. What Augustine viewed as mournful, Urban II viewed as necessary and some contemporary Christians even accept genocidal weapons of mass destruction as essential to the survival of given-nation states. A return to a biblical understanding of the Reign of God is a necessary corrective to the ever escalating cycle of violence which Christianity gradually adapted itself to through the ages.

Christians must defend themselves and others against those who would kill not only their bodies but their souls as well; Christians must deter the demonic forces of evil which threaten humane existence; but Christians must do so in a manner which will eventually lead to reconciliation between adversarial parties. Only the spiritual weapons of justice and truth which we find in the prophetic Hebrew and Christian Scriptures will eventually produce reconciliation. The test of our age is whether we shall place our faith in these spiritual weapons or whether we shall continue to prepare physical weapons which will almost certainly lead first to the destruction of our souls and then to our bodies as well.

God's peace is not the world's peace but it is nevertheless a true peace—the only authentic peace.

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## THE THEOLOGIAN'S ROLE IN DISARMAMENT

### *The Problem*

One key question in contemporary moral discernment of the arms race is this: How concretely can the theologian of the Church dare to speak? What is

the appropriate point where politics and morality meet? This is not a new question. In recent years renowned theologians such as John Bennett,<sup>1</sup> Paul Ramsey,<sup>2</sup> and Avery Dulles<sup>3</sup> have addressed this issue. Generally they caution theologians not to presume to venture too far into concrete policy issues lest they find themselves beyond their expertise and unduly dividing the Church.

I would be hard-put to argue with such longstanding wisdom.<sup>4</sup> As one involved in preaching and in training others for preaching, I sense the need for restraint and delicacy all too clearly. The adage that "every prophet may be a pain in the neck, but that not every pain in the neck may be a prophet," is a piece of wisdom especially applicable to social preaching and teaching.<sup>5</sup> Catholic moral discussion on disarmament needs this wisdom today as much as it ever did. Yet, there is another side of the issue that needs to be brought out. For the sake of a label I will call it "the problem of the concrete." It is expressed by asking a simple question, namely, when does our anxiety about speaking too concretely become an evasion of historic responsibility.

The problem can be put in the form of a simple dilemma: If the Church or the theologian tries to be too concrete, he or she risks being "in-over-their-head." If on the other hand we are not concrete enough, we become harmless purveyors of banalities and spectators to the historical process. We end up losing the sword of gospel division in the theologian's prophetic role in the Church. This problem, so long with the theological community, takes on a special accent in our day, for several reasons, two of which I would like to emphasize here.<sup>6</sup>

#### *A Contemporary Accentuation of the Problem*

The first is that today more than yesterday moral issues tend to be more easily politicized. Indeed it seems human nature is more politicized. Paul Ricoeur asks that we recognize today how humans are not only neighbor to one another but also "*socius*."<sup>7</sup> He means that we are related in structured ways so that moral questions tend to more quickly open out to the political.

The second contemporary accent to this problem of being more concrete is this: That certain social situations become so highly polarized that any decision of the Church to remain politically neutral ends up in fact being a political option itself in favor of the status quo.<sup>8</sup> In other words, in some issues there is

<sup>1</sup>John Bennett, *Christian Ethics and Social Policy* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1946), pp. 77 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), pp. 17 ff. While Ramsey is especially speaking about Church positions, the same points can be translated to the issue of theologians attempting to speak to the Church and for the Church.

<sup>3</sup>Avery Dulles, "The Meaning of Faith Considered in Relation to Justice," in J. Haughey (ed.), *The Faith that Does Justice* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p. 42. Also see his article, "Preaching The Dilemma," *Origins* May 15, 1975.

<sup>4</sup>The wisdom is perennial. Thomas Aquinas must have had good reason for giving similar cautions about our journey into uncertainty as we moved away from primary principles. See I-IIae, 14,3.

<sup>5</sup>I first ran across this phrase in James Finley's work on Merton, *Merton's Palace of Nowhere* (Ave Maria Press, 1978), p.52.

<sup>6</sup>When I speak of two contemporary accents to the problem I am helped greatly by Gustavo Gutierrez' treatment of this issue in *A Theology of Liberation*, (Orbis Press, 1973), pp. 45-50.

<sup>7</sup>Ricoeur's concept is alluded to in a secondary study. See Gutierrez, *op. cit.*, pp. 47 and 52.

<sup>8</sup>Gutierrez, *loc. cit.*

just little or no neutral political ground. In this situation not to choose is to choose. Indeed not to choose a new concrete historical option is in fact to choose the old—or vice versa. Now one does not have to be a liberation theologian to recognize this reality in at least some situations.<sup>9</sup>

The American bishops have clearly taken a concrete option in the abortion discussion even to the point of endorsing a particular constitutional amendment. They argue for this option precisely in a situation in which there is so little neutral ground, and in a context in which the amendment offers the only or the best historical opportunity to speak effectively for the child in the womb. It seems to be a perfect example of a polarized situation in which not to take the option would be in fact to rest with things as they are, namely with an abortion-on-demand situation.

There are those who fear that encouraging official church options in political issues is a tendency which risks a "new triumphalism" or which leans toward a "new Christendom."<sup>10</sup> In other words this critique is asking that theologians and church people should be wary of inviting official church pronouncements on so many complex issues which are better left to more autonomous secular resources or to the layperson's individual insertion of an "animated conscience" in temporal areas.<sup>11</sup>

In many issues, indeed perhaps in the majority of issues, I suspect such a concern is well placed. Yet I am suggesting here that each issue at each historical moment must stand or fall on its own merits. That is, only by careful analysis can we discover whether or not a theologian's refraining from a very concrete option is not simply disguising the more subtle option for the status quo. The disguised option becomes the chosen one by virtue of one's sociocultural position in society regardless of what one might like to intend in one's mind.

#### *An Example of the Failure To Be Concrete Enough*

In order to understand this point more clearly, let us take an issue from our nation's recent history. Take our saturation bombings of German and Japanese civilians in the latter part of the second world war. There is surely consensus among theologians that this was an egregious violation of the just-war ethic. The point here is that our failure was more than a problem of applying morality to a concrete situation. The point is that the failure so pervaded the social fabric

<sup>9</sup>John Langan has a helpful article on translating Latin American theology to North America though he does not deal with my point explicitly. See his "Liberation Theology in a Northern Context," *America*, Jan. 27, 1979.

<sup>10</sup>See Charles Curran's *Transition and Tradition in Moral Theology* (U. of Notre Dame Press, 1979), pp. 132–33. Curran has expressed appreciation for many of liberation theology's insights including the one I am speaking of in this article. His dissent is nuanced in its concern about triumphalism. The accusation of a "new Christendom" comes from Richard John Neuhaus specifically against Juan Luis Segundo's concern for the Church to embrace the liberation movement in concrete terms. See "A Theology for Artisans of a New Christendom," *Commonweal*, July 4, 1975. My own opinion is that while Segundo's points may call for purification, Neuhaus' critique tends to dualism.

<sup>11</sup>The concept of the official Church animating individual conscience leaving it to the layperson to intersect with the temporal world is of course a very important and mainstream theology. It is very much present in the teachings of Vatican II though not without some tension. See Gutierrez, *op. cit.*, pp. 56–78.

of even the Church and theological community that one would be hard-put to say that the just-war ethic continued to be taught in the United States with any recognizable bodily integrity. To put it technically we could say that we were in a situation of real "heteropraxis" in the fullest meaning of that term. That is, the silent neutrality of theologians and official Church was not really politically neutral at all. Our sociocultural posture was really speaking a new counter-teaching, namely that it was justifiable to kill innocent life as long as it would save more American lives. To paraphrase St. Jerome could we not say that the theological community in the United States "awoke to find itself" now not Arian, but *nationalist* in its most harmful form?

Mentioning this is not an attempt to simply open wounds of past failure. On the contrary Hiroshima and Dresden are not events merely in our past. For it does not seem that either as a Church or as a theological community we have named this sin for what it was, at least not in an insistent, loud and public manner. And this has everything to do with the present. For we all know the deep wisdom-truth—that "a sin un-named and unrepented will multiply itself."<sup>13</sup> In other words over the past thirty-seven years the theological community seems to have been itself "psychically numb"<sup>14</sup> in its lack of concrete imagination as to what our nuclear preparations are all about. As a result our people seem wholly unprepared for even elemental moral judgments regarding most fundamental issues such as the evil of retaliatory nuclear bombings and "first use" of nuclear weapons.<sup>15</sup>

#### *The Theologian Engaging the Historical Process*

This brings us to the role of the theologian in *today's* moral struggle about disarmament. In the next twenty-four months it seems to me that what is most to be feared is that theologians by their choice of issues and the manner of discussing them could end up speaking to themselves in a closed circle rather than concretely engaging real historical possibilities. Certain problems have a way of captivating the academic mind, but they may captivate in a way which does not provide a key to any real historical change. Our periodicals may be filled with issues relevant in their own way, issues such as "possession of nuclear weapons: legitimate or illegitimate," or "deterrence versus pacifism," or "Sect

<sup>12</sup>Paul Hanley Furfey's insight into our moral failures deserve to be required reading for all theologians who live during historical crises. See for example, *The Morality Gap*, (Macmillan, 1968) and *The Respectable Murderers*, (Herder and Herder, 1966).

<sup>13</sup>My source for this phrase is Bishop Thomas Gumbleton. An informal source, perhaps, but he does seem to mirror quite well the meaning of the first 12 chapters of Genesis.

<sup>14</sup>Robert Jay Lifton seems to have made the phrase "psychic numbing" popular. See his *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, (Simon and Schuster, 1967). He has made the point that not only did the survivors suffer from psychic numbing but so also do we by our inability to look concretely at the effects of a nuclear weapon. My point is that this is not only a psychic phenomenon, but a moral and spiritual concern.

<sup>15</sup>Brian Hehir is clear in condemning both retaliation and first use of nuclear weapons from a just-war teaching. See among his many fine contributions an exceptionally clear article, "The Just-War Ethic and Catholic Theology" in T. Shannon (Ed.), *War or Peace* (Orbis Press, 1980), pp. 15-39. I have tried to point out, however, that this fundamental moral evaluation of retaliation as evil has not yet been effectively preached to Catholic people. See "The Moral Dimensions of Disarmament," *New Catholic World*, March/April, 1982.

forms of witness versus 'Church' forms of witness."<sup>16</sup> I do not mean that such discussions are wrong-headed or un-needed; the fear is rather than they take place in a manner that is so un-historical, so unpolitical that their very "un-resolv-ability" turns out to be in fact an unwitting support for the ever increasing arms race. It can be even in a nuanced form a theological "fiddling" while the world threatens to burn.

Instead I propose that whatever we discuss we keep one eye on those concrete historical options which desperately cry out to be embraced—options which can be more clear and simple, and which flow from a consensus already achieved in the Church. David O'Brien's recent article, while written for bishops, carried an important wisdom for theologians; at least so it seemed to me.<sup>17</sup> On controverted questions he asked that their discussions yield not easy answers but a process of discussion for Catholics. But he emphasized that there was a large area of consensus teaching which calls out for concrete historical application. Allow me to draw this point out as it pertains to Catholic moral evaluation on the arms race.

If you look at recent literature on the morality of disarmament one will of course find areas of disagreement and areas of consensus. Take the issue of possession of nuclear weapons. Some feel this is in itself a clear dilution of Gospel principles and even of just-war principles. Others feel that, while possession cannot be justified in principle, there may still be a grudging acceptance as long as the deterrent framework is working toward the reduction and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons.<sup>18</sup> Now my point is this: That as theologians discuss this, it would be tragic to miss the large area of consensus, the least common denominator, if you will, of both positions. Both believe that *escalation of the arms race is morally wrong, that we must find a way of stopping it somehow, someday.*

Now this is where the concrete mind comes in. Both sides have to seize upon where their consensus finds some historical opening into the real world. And I propose that a perfect example of such an opening is the present political and social movement for an *immediate freeze on the production, testing and deployment of nuclear weapons.*

Let us grant that there may be many theological and political quarrels some might have with something as concrete as the Kennedy-Hatfield Amendment which calls for a freeze in language such as the above. But one must stop and analyze. If it is the only present possible historical activity which seriously challenges the arms race, then are we not precisely in the type of polarized social situation where there is no neutral ground? And if that is so, then as theologians are we not compelled to at least take a position one way or another? And if we do not do so explicitly, do we not do so implicitly? That is, given the

<sup>16</sup>Hehir deals with this issue of "sect" in a careful manner. No doubt his position which intersects church and government policy forces him to be conscious of this ever-present problem. See for example *art. cit.* pp. 32–35. Juan Luis Sugundo does a brilliant dialectic on the issue in both his works, *The Liberation of Theology*. (Orbis Press, 1976), pp. 183–240 and *The Community Called Church* (Orbis Press, 1973), pp. 78–97.

<sup>17</sup>David O'Brien, "An Open Letter to the Bishops," *Commonweal*, May 21, 1982, 295–301.

<sup>18</sup>Archbishop Bernadin's summary speech before the Bishop's Conference, 1981, summarized earlier testimony given by Cardinal Krol making this basic point. See Cardinal Krol's Testimony in *Origins* 9, (1979), 197.

present administration's de facto exorbitant increase in money and deployment of new weapons systems such as Trident II, Cruise and MX missiles, does not a failure to seize on the one dissenting political option constitute by virtue of our social position a vote in favor of escalation?

### *The "Church or Sect" Question*

Thus we see how a theological discussion in the Church on possession of nuclear weapons while well intentioned nevertheless could tend to be inward and un-historical. Let us go one step further to see how this same insight can apply to our discussions on what is called the ecclesiological question; namely, the question of how one moral posture tends to make the Christian community more inward and sect-like, while another posture would more befit a universal church-in-dialogue-with-the-world.

Sometimes when a theologian or an activist becomes more intensely resistant to our country's armament policy, they are often accused of becoming sect-like in their behavior. Certain forms of activism are said to imply a posture which is too pure, too eschatological, even apocalyptic. Some of these discussions are careful and nuanced. Some however seem to take place in a manner and context which makes one suspect some evasion may be at work. I would like to point out a paradox which I feel is sometimes present. The activist who seems on the surface to be speaking a more pacifist language and who therefore would seem to be more sect-like in his behavior, may in reality be the one who is seizing upon a real dialogue with history and real involvement with the culture of his day.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, some in theory seem to be more rational and just-war in their language; yet never seem to manage to translate their more "incarnational" language into political possibility. Let me be precise. Those who go along with possession of nuclear weapons, on the condition of meaningful reduction of weapons and eventual elimination, at first glance seem to be in dialogue with realistic policymakers. In this sense, their posture is not pure pacifist and sect-like. But suppose they do not in fact follow up on their own condition, namely that there be meaningful reductions of nuclear weapons. That is, what if the deterrent framework is not working towards reduction? Do they protest; and is their protest sustained, loud and passionate enough to at least touch upon the historical world? Is there any systematic effort to mobilize a movement of protest or a movement that seeks an alternative? In fact, is it not the opposite? Is it not that we are satisfied to utter our principle and somehow then seem to walk away shrinking as it were from the "scandal of the concrete"—to use Gabriel Marcel's phrase?

So the paradox is that the one who is supposedly too pure is the very one who is willing to shout a serious NO which really engages the de facto historical process which is rushing pell mell to ever more new and sinister forms of armament. I am suggesting that the sociological categories of "church" and "sect" are often used too broadly and, I fear, even evasively. Indeed it seems sometimes that anyone who becomes passionate over anything is quickly accused of being sectarian or apocalyptic. The question is, who is apocalyptic: Is it those who conduct all too quiet discussions while apocalyptic weapons are

<sup>19</sup>I have tried to show that it is the activist who is at times more "realistic" in "Disarmament in the Real World," *America*, December 17, 1980, 423-26.

being produced in ever increasing fashion, or is it those who actively dissent in a clear and public manner?

Albert Camus once put the issue very well. He spoke to a group of Dominicans in 1948, but he could well be directing his words to a group of theologians in 1982. He was expressing fear that in a choice between the forces of terror and the forces of dialogue, Christianity may not be up to the task. Then he said these important words:

Oh, not by your mouths, I am convinced. But it may be . . . that Christianity will insist on maintaining a compromise or else on giving its condemnations *the obscured form of the encyclical*. Possibly it will insist on losing once and for all the virtue of revolt and indignation that belonged to it long ago.<sup>20</sup>

So Camus uses his phrase "obscured form of the encyclical" to show his disdain for the excessive abstractness in our teaching. My point here is that we theologians are also guilty of our own "obscured forms."<sup>21</sup> We have our way of sinning against the concrete. In these future days before and after the American Bishops' Statement in November, this article expresses the hope that our discussions will keep an eye open for areas of consensus, which can open out to concrete historical engagement. At a time when the United States has over 26,000 nuclear warheads and the Soviet Union over 20,000 and at a time when the present leadership of our country projects thousands of more warheads for our new Trident II submarines, our B-1 bombers, our M-X missiles, our Pershing II and our cruise missiles—in such a time, we must strive amid all our differences to still find some room for shouting one passionate, indignant, resistant NO to that upward spiral of armaments which favors the "forces of terror." We can try to be at least that concrete.

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<sup>20</sup>Albert Camus, *Resistance Rebellion and Death*, (The Modern Library, Knopf, 1960), pp. 55–56.

<sup>21</sup>David Hollenbach in his *Claims in Conflict* (Paulist Press, 1979) singles out one weakness of Catholic Social Teaching which seems to haunt the tradition, namely, its inadequate handling of the *conflictual* dimensions of concrete, social reality. See especially pp. 164–67.