

11-1-1965

## The Ethics of Nuclear Warfare

Martin H. Scharlemann  
*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Scharlemann, Martin H. (1965) "The Ethics of Nuclear Warfare," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 36, Article 56.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol36/iss1/56>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact [seitzw@csl.edu](mailto:seitzw@csl.edu).

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

---

**The Ethics of Nuclear Warfare**  
**MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN**

**The Status of Societal Religion  
in the United States**  
**MARTIN E. MARTY**

**Theology and Modern Literature — Survey**  
**DONALD L. DEFFNER**

**Homiletics**

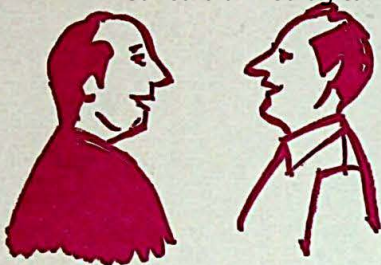
**Book Review**

**Vol. XXXVI**

**November 1965**

**No. 10**





**PASTOR:** "New job, Otto? Thought work was out after the coronary."

**LAYMAN:** "Who's working? I'm visiting a few of our members here at the hospital."



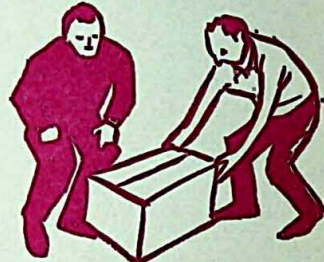
**PASTOR:** "You mean you do this regularly? What those bundles stacked up in your back seat?"

**LAYMAN:** "Our elderly and shut-in members have got to expect me. I leave them all copies of *Strength the Day*. That's what's in the bundles."



**PASTOR:** "We've got over 20 shut-ins and lots of hospital patients. Aren't you overdoing it?"

**LAYMAN:** "Never felt better. Besides, leaving these devotional pamphlets keeps me in touch with friends."



**PASTOR:** "I can use the help. Mind if I break off one of these bundles? Mmmm. Nice large type."

**LAYMAN:** "I've been wanting to suggest *Strength the Day* to you and some of the church groups."



**PASTOR:** "Not a bad idea. A devotional tool like this helps you leave a lot more than a handshake. Cost much?"

**LAYMAN:** "The bulk rates keep the price down. Chaplain Charles Behnke edits the monthly issues; content is good."



**PASTOR:** "Say, Otto. I could use 10 or 20 copies *Strength for the Day* for City Hospital chapel."

**LAYMAN:** "Grab a bundle. You can get more from CPH. You'll have to excuse me, pastor. I've got a few more calls to make."

A fictitious conversation based on an actual service rendered by a Milwaukee, Wis., layman, as reported in the September 1965 issue of the *CPH Commentator*.

Order a monthly supply of *Strength for the Day* for yourself and church groups  
Leave them with patients, shut-ins; in tract racks, doctors' offices, waiting rooms, and narthex. Use the enclosed order card for ordering a year's supply today.

**Concordia**  
PUBLISHING HOUSE  
SAINT LOUIS 18, MISSOURI

"A growing ministry in print"





# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

---

Volume XXXVI

November 1965

Number 10

---

*Published by*  
THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

*Edited by*  
THE FACULTY OF CONCORDIA SEMINARY  
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY is published monthly, except July-August when bimonthly, by Concordia Publishing House, 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63118, to which all business correspondence is to be addressed. \$3.50 per annum, anywhere in the world, payable in advance. Second-class postage paid at St. Louis, Mo. © 1965 Concordia Publishing House. Printed in U. S. A.

CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE  
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

# Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| The Ethics of Nuclear Warfare<br>MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN                  | 675 |
| The Status of Societal Religion in the United States<br>MARTIN E. MARTY | 687 |
| Theology and Modern Literature—Survey<br>DONALD L. DEFFNER              | 706 |
| Homiletics  | 721 |
| Book Review   | 733 |

---

## EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

VICTOR BARTLING, PAUL M. BRETSCHER  
ALFRED O. FUERBRINGER, GEORGE W. HOYER, HERBERT T. MAYER  
ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN  
LEWIS W. SPITZ, GILBERT A. THIELE

---

*Address all communications to the Editorial Committee in care of  
Herbert T. Mayer, 801 De Mun Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63105*

### CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY *now available on Microfilm*

One of the most pressing problems facing libraries today is adequate storage space for the ever-increasing flow of publications. To help librarians plagued with this problem we have entered into an agreement with University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Mich., to make CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY available to libraries in microfilm form. Microfilm makes it possible for libraries to use and store an entire volume of 12 issues of this magazine on a single roll.

For further details concerning purchase and date when volumes will be available, write to University Microfilms, 313 N. First Street, Ann Arbor, Mich.



# The Ethics of Nuclear Warfare

MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN

**EDITORIAL NOTE:** This paper was read at a conference sponsored by the Lutheran Academy for Scholarship and held at Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill., Nov. 27 and 28, 1964.

At the beginning of this atomic age Einstein once remarked, "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything except our ways of thinking. Thus, we are drifting toward a catastrophe beyond comparison. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive." Fission, fusion, radar, television, automation, miniaturization, jets, rockets, satellites — all of these discoveries and inventions have come tumbling out toward us with such speed that we have not had the time fully to digest the significance of this rapid pace and to reflect on its consequences. During the few years of our nuclear age, scientists have penetrated more mysteries and broken more barriers than men dreamed of during the rest of their recorded history. And the end is not in sight. Admiral Hyman Rickover has reminded us that the body of technological information which becomes available to men doubles in less than 15 years. We find ourselves caught on an escalator that moves by geometric progression, doubling its rise every decade and a half. This alone is enough to make us feel trapped by our own inventions. We find ourselves in the frustrating and frightening position of the sorcerer's apprentice, un-

---

*Martin H. Scharlemann is graduate professor of exegetical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.*

able to stop the monster we have had a hand in creating.

Moreover, our world is kept at peace only by a "balance of terror," so enormous has been the revolution in the technology of which we are a part. About the only sense of community that remains among men is a vague feeling of involvement in a worldwide predicament and possible universal disaster. The stupendous size of our problem often escapes even the most literate and articulate mind in our midst. Nevertheless the words of Bernard Baruch, spoken at the opening of the first session of the UN Commission on Atomic Energy continue to haunt us:

We are here to make a choice between the quick and the dead. That is our business. Behind the black portent of the new atomic age lies a hope which, seized upon with faith, can work our salvation. If we fail, then we have damned every man to be the slave of fear. Let us not deceive ourselves; we must elect world peace or world destruction.

Science has torn from nature a secret so vast in its potentialities that our minds cower from the terror it creates. Yet terror is not enough to inhibit the use of the atomic bomb. . . . Science, which gave us this dread power, shows that it can be made a giant help to humanity, but science does not show us how to prevent its baleful use.

The last sentence in Mr. Baruch's statement is of particular significance for us here, it would seem; for it is a frank acknowledgment that more than science is required to handle the problem of "the



bomb." All of us are church members; and so we have some interest in raising the question as to whether our theology has something to say to the issue. Our presentation will consist of three major sections. In the first one we propose to provide a brief historical sketch on the question of war itself as an ethical problem in the church and some of the effects of this background on current national policy. After that we shall address ourselves to an inquiry as to whether a discussion of mere ethics is adequate. Then, in the last part, we want to take up the issues of a just war and of the double effect.

### I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

We begin, then, with a brief review of war as a moral predicament for the church, indebted as it was in this matter to the Judaism of our Lord's day. When Julius Caesar was murdered, some 40 years before the birth of Jesus, Jews wept. They knew that they had lost a friend. Caesar had understood some of their religious scruples and arranged not only to excuse Jews from sacrificing to his image but also to exempt them from military service. Despite the record of bloody wars of extermination fought in ancient days against the enemies of Israel, war had become a problem of conscience in the Judaism of a later age as it reflected on God's clear command, "Thou shalt not kill."

Christians inherited from Israel the revelation of God's will. Consequently, participating in military campaigns, or serving the army in any capacity, confronted the earliest Christians with a serious dilemma. They were caught between the command to be subject to government and the injunction to refrain from shed-

ding human blood. At the beginning of the third century, Tertullian wrote a tract to demonstrate why a Christian could not in good conscience serve in the Roman army. To be sure, he wrote this work when he was on the verge of leaving the mainstream of the church's tradition and life; yet there were many who shared his point of view. In fact, to this day he has followers in the church; for pacifism remains part of the total Christian tradition, even though by far the larger segment of Christendom criticizes the consistent pacifist for his failure to distinguish between shedding innocent blood and shedding any human blood, regardless of circumstances!

In the early Middle Ages the church tried to impose certain restrictions on fighting. It devised a method of limiting the number of people engaged in a particular conflict. This instrument of control was known as the Peace of God. There followed the Truce of God, which forbade fighting from Saturday evening to Monday morning and on all festivals as well as during Advent and Lent. In time only one third of the year was left for engaging in battle. Frequently the arrangement of the truce only resulted in increasing the intensity of fighting during the "open" season. In time much of this energy was diverted into a gigantic effort to wrest Jerusalem from the infidel. To the disgrace of the church, the Crusaders observed few moral scruples in their skirmishes with the followers of Mohammed. Incredible atrocities were committed in the name of Christianity — a fact which haunts every Christian in the Middle East to this day; for Islam has not forgotten and will not



soon forget how Christian soldiers once treated their ancestors.

The Crusades enjoyed the blessing of the church. The individual Crusader normally spent the night before his departure in church, at the high altar, praying for success and receiving the priest's benediction for his interest in redeeming the Holy City. The bloody campaigns in which the Crusaders engaged failed to accomplish their stated purpose. Europe was thrown back upon itself to lick its wounds. Before long gunpowder was invented, and the destructive potential of the new weapons posed new problems in the field of Christian morality.

Theologians devised the formula of the double effect, arguing that at times it might be not only necessary but even desirable to engage in warfare for the purpose of preventing an even greater evil. A state might properly defend itself if it were attacked, because the effect of surrender would be worse than that of doing battle. As long as such states were not yet nations in our modern sense, they could, to some extent, be restrained from moral recklessness by their common loyalty to church authority.

The Religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555, however, changed the relationship of the state to the church on the basis of the principle expressed in the formula *cujus regio, ejus religio*. Nations became independent. The moral authority of the papacy declined. Yet the influence of the Christian tradition remained. As much as two centuries later the Geneva Convention of 1864 provided for the neutrality of the personnel of the medical services of the armed forces, the humane treatment of the wounded, and the neutrality of civilians who voluntarily assisted them. The signa-

tures to this instrument and to its later revisions quite properly assumed that troops could be distinguished from non-combatants during actual warfare.

The invention of the airplane, however, created a new dimension. At first, of course, planes were used chiefly for purposes of reconnaissance. Before long, though, they became another category of weapons, ultimately one that was capable of destroying cities, the very centers of culture. A new set of moral problems confronted men of good will. Yet the size of these issues fades into insignificance when viewed in the light of the discovery of atomic energy and the development of nuclear warheads. The incredible destructive power of these instruments has upset all previous rules and thinking on the subject of warfare; for the only alternatives seem to be either a worldwide holocaust or abject surrender.

To underline the enormity of the dilemma with which we live, it will be useful to remind ourselves of the size of the destructive potential with which we live. This can, probably, best be done by stating that World War II was a three-megaton affair. That is to say, if we add up all of the explosive power of all the weapons used by all nations engaged in that war, including the atomic bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, their destructive power would amount to three megatons of explosive power. Some time ago the Russians arbitrarily broke an agreement on a nuclear ban and exploded a bomb that released more than 60 megatons of destructive force. This one bomb contained the power to create 20 times more havoc than all the weapons of World War II. One reason Nikita Khrushchev,



the Russian leader, backed away from the crisis in Cuba, as he himself later admitted, was to avoid starting a universal conflagration. In that context he referred to the 40,000 warheads at the disposal of the United States. It has been estimated that our nation has some 200,000 megatons of destructive power to use against its enemies. That is almost 65,000 (sic!) times the force of all the explosives used in World War II. We live no longer with mere "blockbusters"; possible worldwide disaster is our daily companion.

Less than one-fourth of our vast arsenal would suffice to obliterate the Soviet Union and all that is in it. It has been estimated, in fact, that if all the destructive potential of both the United States and the Soviet Union were released, this act of annihilation would be the equivalent of dropping 10 tons of TNT on every inhabitant of our tragic planet. Hence we can speak of overkill, which in itself presents ethical difficulties of the kind men have not had to face before. Small wonder that an optimist is described today as the man who believes that the future is still reasonably uncertain!

There were years when our government threatened its enemies with massive retaliation, with a kind of thermonuclear spasm designed to reduce the other side to a "vast howling wilderness." To many thoughtful people this sounded somewhat irrational, even though they realized that such a threat might serve as an effective deterrent while we revised our own military posture. The criticism leveled against a policy of wholesale destruction provided evidence for the fact that respect for moral principle had not entirely evaporated from our highly secularized society. Further

proof of our nation's concern for ethical considerations may be found in the fact that two new strategic doctrines have been developed by the present Secretary of Defense. These are known as "controlled response" and "conventional option."

According to the first doctrine, the United States must avoid what has been called the "hair-trigger response." Instead our nation has set out to develop the kind of armed forces that could ride out a nuclear attack and could then be applied with deliberation and always under the complete control of properly constituted authority. This point of view, of course, becomes more meaningful on the recognition that the United States has chosen not to be the first to launch a nuclear attack, since it holds that such an assault would betray our moral traditions.

There are dissenting voices, of course, to this policy of accepting a surprise attack before making the irrevocable decision to launch a counterattack. These voices urge a reversal of American strategy toward preemption, arguing that our present force is based on concepts of scaring rather than of winning. They insist, moreover, that our retaliatory force could not win by striking second. However, there are studies to show that it may eventually be easier to retaliate and win than to attack first and win, provided the defender has deployed his forces wisely, as we have every reason to believe we have. The United States, therefore, is committed at present to a policy of counterforce. That is to say, it proposes to deal with the enemy's military forces and not to attack indiscriminately. It is our government's conviction that the wholesale destruction of cities and their civilian population would be unethical.



Now, it has been argued that creating a second-strike or counterforce capability leads to an arms race. This need not follow, however, in view of the fact that the present stock of nuclear weapons is more than enough to destroy any attacker. Such power now serves as a shield, so to speak, behind which it is possible to engage in other pursuits, including the strengthening of conventional forces to handle the kind of brush fires which threaten international order.

With the concept of "conventional option," Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara means, in his own words, "that the decision to employ tactical nuclear weapons in limited conflict should not be forced upon us." That is to say, if we wish to do so, we must be able to respond to limited aggression without using nuclear weapons. This approach clearly takes into account the ethical perversion inherent in the notion of wholesale destruction. It is also a repudiation of the argument that it is impossible to limit a war, the latter being a point of view which implies some sort of technological or historical determinism in human affairs.

The Christian conscience is clearly at work in the argument for limitations; for all thoughtful men are agreed that unlimited warfare is wrong. On the other hand, unilateral disarmament and non-violent resistance constitute pure folly within the context of our age. Those persons, therefore, who carry the burden of organizing for our national security have chosen to attempt the creation of conditions where only limited war can be waged; frankly recognizing, on the one hand, that this is the only alternative to inducing the annihilation of civilization itself, and, on

the other, that the possibility of overkill can be countered effectively only by retaining a maximum number of options behind the threat of universal thermonuclear extinction.

Mr. McNamara's twin doctrines rest on the assumption that some measure of reason will prevail among those national leaders who have access to the release of nuclear destruction. The Cuba crisis demonstrated that Khrushchev could exercise a large measure of responsibility when faced with the possibility of the extinction of life here on earth. In his own irreverent way he expressed a preference for a Communist paradise here to a kingdom of heaven hereafter. He withdrew, therefore, from the full consequences of a confrontation with United States military might.

Whether the present Russian leadership has arranged the same kind of elaborate precautions that our government has for preventing an accidental attack cannot be ascertained. And whether Red Chinese leadership is as sensitive to disaster as is that of Russia remains a question mark. Some Chinese generals have expressed complete indifference to the prospect of destroying from 300 to 700 million people in a nuclear exchange. "After it is all over," they have pointed out, "we shall still have more people left than the United States had to start with." It would seem, therefore, that an age of real terror is dawning with Red China's successful development of a nuclear device. Not so long ago, in fact, the French ambassador is reported to have said at an informal reception, "If the Chinese ever develop the bomb, Khrushchev will be well advised to join NATO;



for the days of the Apocalypse will be upon us."

What protection is there against thermo-nuclear power wielded by men indifferent to our whole ethical heritage? Only adequate strength to survive in sufficient number to recreate a free world; and that will require not only plans and policies for effective dispersal to launch a counter-attack but also sufficient shelters to keep enough manpower available for the tragic task of reconstructing a viable world order, free of terror and oppression. We shall do well, therefore, to increase the fervency of our prayers that God will, in the words of George Washington, "keep the United States in His holy protection." For the end is certainly very near. The option of total trust in God always remains open. In fact, there may soon be no other. For to cry to the mountains, "Hide us!" and to the hills "Cover us!" may one day come rather late.

## II. IS ETHICS ENOUGH?

You will recognize this last statement as an allusion to a passage from the Gospels (Luke 23:30) that points to the terrors of the end time. We have included it chiefly for the purpose of suggesting that there is a dimension to the discussion on the ethics of nuclear warfare which ranges beyond that of the specific moral issues involved. We would not be doing justice to this very complex problem if we limited ourselves to ethics in the usual sense of the word. For beyond the level of moral principle lies the question of the locus of our personal trust and hope.

Nuclear warfare is commonly presented in both secular and Christian treatments of the subject as an ultimate calamity so completely terrible in its consequences that

mankind can continue to have hope only so long as it does not occur. Lewis Mumford's *In the Name of Sanity*, Philip Toynbee's *The Fearful Choice*, and Norman Cousins' *In Place of Folly* would be cases in point. There is, of course, no value in attempting to belittle the case made in these books for the really catastrophic character of nuclear warfare, nor for the wickedness and sheer madness which we would have to impute to men if ever they resorted to this kind of warfare.

But let us suppose that men will unleash this terror. Do we really want to imply that the people who survived such a disaster would have to conclude that God had utterly abandoned them? Do we want to reduce them to being men without hope? Of course not! Hence we must keep in mind that Christian hope is something different from the humanistic faith which pervades some of the finest literature on this subject. Our hope cannot be destroyed by any conceivable calamity, not even by nuclear warfare. The many Christians killed in such a catastrophe would, like their brethren before them, die in the Lord, while those who remained would, like us now, go on living in the Lord to the praise and glory of God. There would be no reason why they would not be able to say with the psalmist with just as sure confidence and trust as we now enjoy, "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

Our hope is based on the conviction that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is in control of history, and that He has entrusted the interval between the Ascension and our Lord's return to this Jesus Christ, who is our Lord. There is



nothing whatsoever in what our incarnate Lord said during His ministry to suggest that the human race was intended to go on living forever in this kind of life. In fact, there is a great deal in His words to support the contrary conclusion.

Some years ago the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, expressed the thought that for all he knew it might be within God's providence that the human race come to an end in a nuclear holocaust. You may recall the storm of protest produced by this perfectly legitimate observation, made in an addendum which commented on Philip Toynbee's *The Fearful Choice*.

Part of this clamor has its source in man's reluctance to acknowledge the fact of judgment as an element in God's dealings with men. Now, we would not want to say that God directly wills the end of the human race in this way. A nuclear holocaust, like lesser catastrophes, would be the direct consequence of man's sin. Just as it would be terrible to assert of any lesser calamity that it took place beyond the scope of God's care, so it would seem unthinkable to think of the end of our civilization as occurring outside the providence of God. For the very heart of the Gospel proclamation is that even so awful an event as the crucifixion of our Lord did not take place outside the knowledge and control of almighty God.

A few years ago I had the great good fortune to participate in a study program on nuclear warfare held at Sandia Base, Albuquerque, New Mexico. My partner for that occasion was Dr. William Pollard, who is both the executive director of the Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies and a Protestant Episcopal priest. At this

occasion Dr. Pollard pointed out that an exclusive concern with the ethics of nuclear warfare tends to obscure the fact that we have the responsibility of viewing history not only in terms of what men ought or ought not to do but also with respect to what God, in the exercise of His governance over His creation, purposes for it.

Perhaps you, too, have noticed that atomic energy is often discussed not in terms of God's creation but rather in terms of man's will and purpose. This is done, moreover, in such a way as to imply that it was subject to our determination as to whether the world should contain nuclear energy or not. Such arguments sound as though nuclear power were the product of some strange esoteric alchemy quite unrelated to the normal world given us to inhabit. But this is not the case. Our own sun is a natural hydrogen bomb, in whose central core some 650 million tons of hydrogen are consumed every second to form about 645 million tons of helium with nearly five million tons of heat and light radiated away from the surface of the sun each second. That's what keeps this planet illuminated, warmed, and energized.

You will recall, possibly, that there are over 200 billion stars in our own galaxy, the Milky Way. Moreover, all the other galaxies in the universe are equally populated with such fiery stars. God has made hydrogen bombs in profuse abundance and scattered them throughout His vast creation. In fact, a universe without hydrogen bombs would be a dead world, with neither light, nor warmth, nor life.

Nuclear energy itself is not the world's greatest problem. Man is. He is his own worst enemy. This is true in several respects; man is more tempted than ever,



for one thing, to declare himself independent of God; secondly, he tends to exaggerate his own significance even more than previously. Let us have a look at these two points in greater detail.

As Henry Adams once pondered the phenomenal industrial growth of our country, he remarked that in time every American would control enough energy to make him "a sort of god." We shall do well to reflect on this observation in our present context; for, in a very real sense, the atomic age may be spoken of as the time of man's second great temptation. You will recall the essence of the first one: man proposed to be like God, "knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). He was determined to be autonomous, making his own rules and finding his own way.

Today man has at his disposal an incredible resource of raw power. Furthermore, he has invented and is using instruments of mass production that supply him with vast quantities of goods. He is, therefore, tempted more than ever to exclude any thought of God from his life and to renounce his dependence on the Lord of heaven and earth. He is determined to assert himself in what he calls a new freedom, not realizing that God's greatest judgment may consist in turning man over to himself and burdening him with the very liberty he so brashly claims as his due.

Do you recall the legend of Prometheus stealing fire from heaven? This was an act of insolence, for which he was chained to Mount Caucasus, where an eagle preyed on his liver all day. He had violated the realm of the gods by snatching from them the secret of fire. Is it not possible that this story dates from an age like ours? To have wrested from nature

the secret of the atom may well constitute the *hybris* of our age, unless this discovery can be turned into the means of renouncing our autonomy and learning to serve that God of whom one of our matin prayers says *cui servire regnare est* (which the exquisite liturgical English of Thomas Cranmer rendered as "whose service is perfect freedom").

Our own sacred Scriptures tell the story of the Tower of Babel — a quaint story, in a way! It, too, speaks of another day, when men were determined to build a tower "with its top in the heavens" (Gen. 11:4). This was a cooperative venture until the very fabric of intercommunication dissolved in the fires of divine judgment. We shall do well to mark the outcome of this previous attempt to scale the heights of heaven.

We shall not go far wrong, therefore, in suggesting that the first major principle of living in our nuclear age is to discover the great secret of humble obedience to God as the path to full freedom. Such service most certainly constitutes the very keystone in the arch of our responsibilities in the task of confronting and dealing with man's massive drive toward personal autonomy. Otherwise God may grant man's requests for autonomy and send even greater leanness into our souls. (Ps. 106:15)

We must now turn to our second consideration: man tends to exaggerate his importance for history. Now, to be sure, God's providence is exercised to a large extent through human decision. God puts it in the hearts of men to act in various ways to affect the course of human events. But the total operation of providence involves many different and even conflicting



decisions in interaction with each other. Accordingly, the man who finds his Christian service in a vocation to pacifism contributes no more to the development of events in contemporary history than the statesman or general who finds his Christian service in the maintenance of a strong and powerful defense establishment for the preservation of the free world.

But having said all this we must remind ourselves that the conscious influence of men on history may be very negligible. One of the basic fallacies in books and treatises on the ethics of nuclear warfare is the underlying assumption that it is entirely possible for mankind to steer the course of history in a particular direction toward the achievement of predetermined ends. Accordingly, these authors argue their proposals for universal peace very cogently and persuasively with a view to having reasonable men accept them and implement them. It has been some years now since some of the best books on this subject were published; yet as we look back on the actual course of events since they appeared in print, it is difficult to detect even a ripple which they may have caused on the surface of contemporary history. In the face of the hard facts in the case, those who cling to the belief in man's mastering history can only conclude that the blame for our predicament rests not on the nature of history but on those they believe control it, the militarists and the politicians, who stubbornly refuse to run things in accordance with their carefully argued plans.

Such a view of the nature of history runs directly counter to the Biblical understanding of Providence, and, I would also add, to what is clearly the real nature of history itself. To see this last point one need

only contrast the man who in the seclusion of his study works out in complete detail a nuclear weapons policy and a plan of action for putting it into effect and the man who actually serves in an official capacity as a member of a United Nations nuclear test ban or disarmament committee. The latter also makes detailed and carefully worked out plans, but they are for him only ingredients in the total process of negotiation in a continually shifting situation. Here the reality of history becomes acutely apparent: its fundamental indeterminacy, its constant movement, which is forever confronting plans and policies made in earlier contexts with new and unanticipated developments, and above all the deep and mysterious undercurrent of purpose and destiny which sweeps everyone along toward unknown goals. The more highly placed a man becomes in the process by which the actual course of events is determined, the more conscious he becomes of his own finitude and incapacity to master history. Such a man discovers that what seemed before, from the outside, like a process of continual intervention in the course of events in order to make them come out according to some plan is rather, when experienced from the inside, a matter of continually listening for that which in its need of him is striving to emerge and be actualized. If he is a Christian, this means he discovers the actuality and reality of Providence. If he is not, he discovers the same thing, only then it must be in the form of a vague and undefined sense of destiny.

It is not true, for example, that a nuclear war is now impossible. Thomas Finletter, former Secretary of the Air Force, pointed out a few years ago:

It is not true that war—the big war—



is now impossible. It is not true that because we have such dreadful weapons some miracle has changed man's soul so that he will never, not even accidentally, make war. It is reckless and evil to base a nation's foreign policy on any such idea. Men who know what they are talking about have pointed out that the danger of accidental war has never been greater than now—and that it is going to become more likely as atomic weapons and missiles get into the hands of the Communist Chinese and the rest of the world. The possibility of a limited war growing into the big blow-up, the innumerable possibilities of miscalculation or blunder in the forthcoming era of rocket and satellite warfare, or the deliberate act of a fanatic or idiot, all add up to an alarming danger of an accidental big war.

### III. CAN ANY WAR BE JUST?

Returning full circle now to the question of ethics proper, you have heard it said that the question of whether a nuclear war could ever be just is irrelevant. There is abroad a tendency to believe that any talk about just wars and the application of the principle of double effect sounds like a quaint echo of some "dear dead days beyond recall." I am not so sure that these issues are no longer relevant. In fact, I have learned to appreciate the notice in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (IV, 191) that David was engaged in holy works when he engaged in wars, for his foes were the enemies of God.

If ever in history there was a blatant conspiracy against God and His works, it is now. What we know as Communism is by its own noisy profession an assault against everything divine. Personally, therefore, I can conceive of very few situations in which an active defense against

a massive attack on our way of life would not be justified even if it involved the use of nuclear weapons. There are circumstances under which it would be better to be dead than Red!

It might be suggested that people, Christian people, manage to survive in Red East Germany. They do, indeed, somehow, partly on the hope that under American leadership of the free world the tyranny they know will be broken. Many of them, as you know, risk life and limb to get out, despite a wall, 100,000 policemen, barbed wires, land mines, police dogs, searchlights, ditches, and tanks! Why? They know how impossible it is to remain human under the kind of dictatorship that has been imposed on them. They have experienced life in the kind of totalitarian state which 20th-century means of mass communication and devices of psychological manipulation can thrust on whole populations.

To be Red is deliberately to deny and consciously to subvert what the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions hold on the matter of civic righteousness. Luther did not hesitate to include good government in a catalog of items to remember when we pray the petition "Give us this day our daily bread." According to the Augsburg Confession (XXVIII, 4) both the church power and the civil power "are to be held in reverence and honor as the chief blessings of God on earth." In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (IV, 24), Melancthon quotes from Aristotle to describe civic righteousness as being more beautiful than the evening or the morning star.

And what is this concept called "civic righteousness"? In our contemporary world it is compounded of that political



climate, of those structures, those methods, those attitudes that make freedom possible. Liberty, of course, is not an unlimited quantity; it is not license. In our culture we understand freedom to be the opportunity to do what one ought to do. Such a view of liberty creates the kind of elbowroom which permits a measure of personal choice. For it is a frank recognition of the fact that there is a set of moral principles, there is an "ought," which lies outside and beyond individual existence and human history, on the basis of which the individual, as a creature of God, is permitted and encouraged to make his choices.

How important this principle is may be gauged from the vehemence with which Communism rejects the existence of such a higher law. Said Lenin to the Young Communist League in 1920: "We deny that there is a moral law which comes to men from outside history. It is a fraud. We deduce our morality from the needs of the class struggle." How could one be more explicit on this point? To the Communist, freedom is the responsibility to do what one must do. And how does a person know what he must do? The Party tells him. Its business is to diagnose a given historical situation and to prescribe the rules. And there is no appeal beyond these decisions and decrees.

A government or state that operates on such principles of moral relativism can only be called demonic. It denies the existence of God as it draws a circle around itself, declaring that there is nothing outside and nothing beyond this circle. Any talk about "civic *righteousness*" breaks down right at this point; for, by definition, "righteousness" can exist only where there is a point of reference beyond oneself and

beyond society. Our legal philosophers call this the "Archimedean point," according to which any possible injustice of a specific law may be corrected by an appeal to a higher law.

Now, anything demonic in life or society deserves to be contested and eliminated, even at the cost of one's life. A war against such an enemy, whether hot or cold, is just, I would submit. The extra dimension that has been introduced into the ethical problem of the double effect is the magnitude of the destruction and contamination which would follow in the wake of a nuclear exchange. The devastating potential of nuclear warfare, it has been said, has reduced the principle of double effect to the level of irrelevance. In fact, in 1957 some of the German ecclesiastical leaders, bishops of the Evangelical Church in the Palatinate and in Hesse-Nassau, went so far as to declare that the church has the responsibility to warn men that any participation in the manufacture of the means of mass destruction, including those of biochemical warfare, amounts to blasphemy and a betrayal of the image of God in which men were created.

Let us look at the argument for this point of view. One of the most thorough presentations of this opinion that I know of is found in a symposium known as *Christlicher Glaube und atomare Waffen*, published by the Evangelische Verlagsanstalt Berlin in 1959. The essay by Fritz Heidler, "Zwei-Reiche-Lehre und atomare Bewaffnung," presents the points most succinctly. Heidler points out that the ethical question in this instance lies at a point where the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of power bisect each other. Then he proceeds to argue that in the use of nuclear weapons a government would be



guilty of doing the very opposite of what it was created to accomplish. It would be pursuing destructive instead of creative ends. Life would be extinguished rather than preserved in a nuclear exchange. Christians, therefore, must forswear every interest in the development of any program which is designed to manufacture the atomic-biological-chemical weapons, the ABC-weapons, as they are called.

There are two fallacies in this kind of argumentation. First of all, it is not a foregone conclusion that human life would be fully extinguished. Adequate shelters might make it possible for a remnant to survive and begin the task of rebuilding. Secondly, as we have indicated previously, it may well be that the Lord of history will permit the destruction of humanity in this way as His method of bringing history to an end as He concurs in the results of man's folly.

One other consideration needs to be added at this juncture: a worldwide totalitarian state, left completely unchallenged by any significant forces of freedom, would pervert and distort all human values to the point described in such "utopias in reverse" as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Would this not be worse than obliteration? I think so. Hence the doctrine of double effect would be quite relevant even today; namely, that the horrors of a universal tyranny would be greater than the consequences of a nuclear exchange, and that therefore a situation could conceivably develop in God's kingdom of power in which the use of nuclear weapons would be justified as the choice of a lesser evil.

I keep thinking at this point of a paragraph from a kind of travelog on the Soviet Union written for *The Cresset* a

few years ago by Professor Alan Graebner. He and Mrs. Graebner undertook an extensive tour of Russia and got to know a number of people rather well. One young Russian wife confided to them: "When my husband and I were born in the thirties, abortion was illegal. He and I are victims of that law. We, on our part, are not going to bring children into a world that is without hope."

You and I do not think that way. We live in hope, for we are citizens of an open society. Any conspiracy which sets out to close our world and to deprive men of an open future merits only resistance even by nuclear weapons, if these should first be directed and released against us. At that point, as Christians, you and I would have no real choice except to support such a massive effort at defense with the conviction that the issues of freedom are so great that the controlled use of nuclear weapons in terms of counterforce would be justified. At that point the words of the prophet Amos would become rather meaningful:

Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it? (5:20)

St. Louis, Mo.

Norman Cousins, *In Place of Folly*. New York: Harper and Bros., 1961.

Clark Grenville and Louis B. Sohn, *World Peace Through World Law*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.

Fritz Heidler, Heinrich Vogel, Helmut Gollwitzer, *Christlicher Glaube und atomare Waffen*. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959.

Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War*. Princeton University Press, 1960.

Eugene Rabinowitch (ed.), *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Washington: Government Printing Office.

Helmut Thielicke, *Die Atomwaffe als Frage an die christliche Ethik*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1958.