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THE PACIFIST QUESTION

For the past several months a controversy on religious pacifism has been conducted in the pages of *Worldview*. The controversy is not academic: it involves, rather, the basic questions that every man of religious conscience must grapple with in his approach to contemporary events: to what extent should religion be the uncompromising judge of political orders? To what extent should it tailor its insights to the "realisms" of the world?

These are questions that religion has been called upon to face in every age, but history does not testify that it has often faced them honestly—much less heroically. The story of organized religion in Western society is, on the whole, a story of evasion and adaptation—of the triumph of "prudence" over principle. This story has not ended in our generation.

Last month in Spain, for example, over three hundred priests sent a letter to their bishops protesting the iniquities of the Franco regime. The present Spanish government, they said, violates fundamental rights of man, and the support it receives from the Church is a scandal for which the Church will surely pay dearly. But shortly after the letter was circulated and publicized its signers were rebuked by several of the Spanish bishops for their "imprudence" in involving the Church in a potential conflict with the civil authorities. Thus one more footnote was added to the history of "official" religious compromise with injustice.

It is because of this history that the renewed examination of the claims of pacifism by many religious men must be welcomed—whether or not one agrees with the conclusions these men reach. Nuclear warfare may or may not differ "in kind" from previous forms of warfare. No one can doubt, however, that its difference "in degree" is so great that previous norms for the "just" war have, for most practical purposes, been rendered obsolete. In this situation religion must make a radical reappraisal of its traditional doctrine on warfare, and in this reappraisal the claims of religious pacifism must be reconsidered. A major function of this journal is to provide a forum for this.

Several years ago a distinguished American sociologist, C. Wright Mills, published an impassioned indictment of what he saw as the failure of religion to speak prophetically against the nations' race to destruction. He called his indictment "A Pagan Sermon to the Christian Clergy" and in it he said that religion, swallowed up in complacency, had made a complete surrender to the power struggles of the age. It is only a few Humanists, he wrote, who speak the word against preparations for massive annihilation that religion should speak.

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If this were true (and to a certain extent it surely is true), then religion in the twentieth century would have made its final retreat from responsibility—its final compromise. In world War II, long before the first atom bomb was dropped, horrors of saturation bombing were perpetrated by both sides that were undreamed of when the norms for a "just" war were laid down. But in the face of these horrors religion's voice was mostly still. Since World War II the nations have reached a potential for destruction that makes the earlier horrors seem somehow bearable, somehow manageable. Does religion have anything to say about these, or will it turn away from them, close its eyes to them, and salve its conscience by repeating the ancient rules for a "just" war—rules which have as much relationship to an all-out modern war as such a war would have to the bow and arrow.

To say these things does not mean that the problem for religion is solved by a hasty flight to pacifism. As the famous Niebuhr-Dun statement reminded us, God wills *both* justice and peace, and however pacifism may meet the problem of peace, it certainly fails to meet the problem of justice. But the development of modern weapons has given religious pacifists powerful new arguments, and these arguments have not been adequately answered. There must be a continuing dialogue on the question of morality and modern war. We hope it will go forward in this journal.