

## "A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO NUCLEAR WAR"

New York, N. Y.

Sir: "A Christian Approach to Nuclear War" (February) is an impressive statement. It is one of the strongest exposures we have had of the weaknesses in apologies for nuclear war and for retaining atomic capability as deterrence to aggression. One may believe, as I do, that in a few details the indictment of nuclear war and of preparations for it is not well supported, but these reservations do not affect the force of the main argument.

But what have the authors really accomplished? In addition to giving us a fresh and powerful statement of the morally intolerable nature of nuclear war, they have sharpened the moral discomfort of those of us "who oppose use but not possession of atomic weapons." It is good that they have done this. For although the recognition that they are in "an impossible position" does not by itself give Christians the wisdom to "extricate themselves" from it, they will be more likely to find suitable and possible alternative policies if the last shred of complacency with the present situation is destroyed. But when, in the latter part of the statement, the authors come to positive proposals, they must leave many of us—who share their agony and their rejection—with a sense of disappointment. And their failure is, I think, the consequence of an inadequate understanding of the nature of the struggle between Communist and liberal-humanist societies.

"We dare not," the authors say, "underestimate the positive effect that a policy of reconciliation might have upon hostile nations." Without promising immediately good results, they urge the United States to "abandon its reliance on nuclear weapons and [to] base its policy toward other peoples on *resolute good will and massive reconciliation*." (Emphasis mine.)

I would like to ask this question: If the Soviet Union and China were to approach the United States with "resolute good will and massive reconciliation" would we then abandon our defense of the ideas and institutions we hold indispensable to human welfare and accept their radically different ideas and institutions? Would there, indeed, be any real meaning in their good will and spirit of reconciliation unless they surrendered or drastically modified their basic ideas and policies? Now turn the question around. Could we expect that energetic displays of good will and all-out efforts at reconciliation on our part would dissuade the Communists from the conviction that capitalist democracy is doomed and that they must in every way possible hasten its end and the victory

of Communism? How, barring surrender of our fundamental beliefs and acceptance of their beliefs, do we show a good will that would put an end to their hostility?

To continue the questions, what or whom are the authors of this statement proposing to reconcile? What is the possible concrete substance of good will between national societies whose hostility does not grow out of personal psychological or spiritual states, but out of basically different conceptions of man and radically opposed ideas about the best way to organize society under modern conditions—compounded with deep-rooted and old nationalistic prides and ambitions? More good will we can certainly use! Christians can do much to abate the exacerbating effects of self-righteousness. We can recognize, more than we have, the legitimate interests of Communist nations. We should make massive efforts in the areas of economic aid and diplomacy. But to suppose that good will can bridge the gulf between Communist states and Western democracy, or that the spirit of Christian reconciliation can solve the great political problem of our time argues a superficial, even sentimental, interpretation of the nature of the conflict. The passing of the years may lessen the distance between the opposing forces, but I do not think we can find in specifically Christian ethics or doctrine directives for statesmen that will produce friendly cooperation where now there is conflict.

"Love," says the statement, "is the distinctively Christian way of dealing with evil-doers and overcoming injustice and violence . . . In so far . . . as resort to force can be justified on Christian grounds, it must aim to restrain evil and redeem the evil-doer rather than destroy him." This is incontrovertible, and it is worth saying again and again. But if we exclude those in our midst who would, apparently, be ready to acquiesce in universal destruction so long as the "evil" Communists were destroyed, what, one may ask, is the real purpose of our armaments, including nuclear arms? Surely, it is to restrain evil and evil-doers! And how, given the present state of military science and given the character and purpose of Communist regimes, do we restrain without threatening to destroy? That, precisely, is the awful dilemma. How, once it is admitted that love does not exclude forcible restraint, can love be made operative in a situation like this?

So, to repeat, we have here another strong presentation of the acute dilemma posed by nuclear weapons but not much help in overcoming it. The

failure is only emphasized by the seven "concrete proposals" that the signers of the statement endorse. They ask (1) for "the most serious and unremitting effort to achieve controlled multilateral disarmament." With this all but a very few in government and out of it will agree. It is doubtful if the present Washington administration needs this admonition. "Total and general disarmament down to police level" with security "to be sought in international agencies" should indeed be the goal. We must recognize this and work toward it, even though it will be some time before the nations are ready for such drastic abridgement of their sovereignty.

Affirmation by Christians (2) that they will not sanction the use of nuclear weapons nor their use for deterrence is a legitimate Christian position, but it makes no contribution to overcoming either the cause of the conflict or the dilemma given us by nuclear weapons.

United States "unilateral withdrawal from the nuclear arms race" (3) is an action many of us are sometimes tempted to advocate, but this really means the adoption by the government of an outright pacifist position. If even India, with her traditions and the powerful influence of Gandhi, does not renounce armed force, how can anyone suppose the United States could be induced to do it?

Disengagement of armed forces in certain areas (4) is a proposal in the area of strategy that Christians may advocate but whose value they have no special competence to determine.

Ending U.S. "military alliances with imperialist and reactionary regimes" and the substitution of policies that will make our country the symbol of hope to all the oppressed (5) has much to commend it, although one wonders from which "imperialist" regimes we should now disassociate ourselves.

Serious study of "the possibility of non-violent resistance to possible aggression and injustice" is urged (6). This, taking a long look ahead, seems worth doing. Pacifists, it may however be observed, have spent relatively little energy in training for non-violent resistance. And this statement seems to say that the real hope lies in "the establishment of international law by consent backed by discriminate use of police force under the direction of the United Nations or some form of world government."

The seventh of the proposals, while having the

strongest Christian ring, is actually an example of seriously confused thinking. It is terribly important to "disabuse the American people of the notion . . . that Christian values can be defended and our Lord and his teaching somehow vindicated by the extermination of Communists." At this task Christians should work unitedly and vigorously. But then we are urged to carry out "our primary task of winning adherents of Communism to Christ by the preaching of His Gospel and the daily practice of the ministry of reconciliation which He has entrusted to us." I certainly do not deny that this is the primary task of Christians, but, in the content of this statement, the plea supports the mistaken idea that the choice is "Christ or Communism," to quote the title of a book by a famous missionary. It is not that simple. Communism is not primarily or solely an outgrowth of unbelief, nor is democracy as we know it in the West a certain concomitant of Christian faith. The revolution of our time, including the technological revolution, runs wide and deep. The Christian, as Christian, does not have all the political, economic and cultural answers to the problems created by the revolution. In particular, he does not, as Christian, know how to "reconcile" Communism and democracy. The problem of finding the best politico-economic order for modern societies will have to be worked out over the years, with all kinds of conditions and forces coming into play. Christians can make important contributions, but winning people to Christ will not give the answers.

This leads to what, for me, is an important lesson to be drawn from this statement—so strong and true in its comments on nuclear war and reliance on the nuclear deterrent, yet so unsatisfactory in its alternative proposals. The statement demonstrates, I think, that Christian theologians cannot, so to speak, go off by themselves and devise a helpful foreign policy for the nation. Their religious convictions and insights can contribute to valid policy only if the policy is hammered out in constant consultation with experts in science, politics and economics and with those in government who deal with the problems at the point of decision. The statement proves that religious thinkers need the political scientists and statesmen fully as much as the political scientists and statesmen need the religious thinkers.

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