

veal in full daylight both the reality and the meaning of this world. In the words of the Quran (*sura* 82):

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. When the sky is rent asunder; when the stars scatter and the oceans roll together; when the graves are hurled about; each soul shall know what it has done and what it has failed to do.

EXCURSUS III

Richard John Neuhaus on Religion and Disarmament

This May the U.N. General Assembly convenes a special session to focus on disarmament. As Homer Jack argues in his "Excursus," the session is a special opportunity also for nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs, as they are called. Jack's argument is notable for its sense both of urgency and of modesty. "Unless the arms race is halted and then reversed," he writes, "it is hard to expect humankind to survive the rest of the century." At the same time, the "success" of the special assembly must be measured in limited terms. Even if not a single weapon is demolished, says Jack, the assembly will be a success if it creates a "new impetus" for disarmament.

For twenty years now this journal has tried to address disarmament and other issues with a mix of urgency and modesty; with a restless patience that rejects excuses for delay and challenges accepted definitions of the possible—while always understanding that every solution is partial. In the petitioning and demonstrating that various groups will conduct around the U.N. special assembly it is appropriate that restlessness be more in evidence than patience. If such voices are to be effective, however, they should be voices of reflective restlessness. The lucidity and fairness with which they present the case for disarmament will have a lot to do with whether they are taken seriously or are justly dismissed as moralistic posturers.

The special opportunity for churches and synagogues to do something good about disarmament is highlighted by contrast with one sure formula for missing that opportunity. The sure formula for failure is represented by the initial appeal issued by the Religious Task Force of the Mobilization for Survival (MFS). Under the letterhead of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Task Force asks for the signatures of a hundred "religious leaders" on an "inspirational" pastoral letter to be read in the churches and synagogues of America. Already signed up are people who have frequently been in the forefront of religious witness for social justice; Bishops Paul Moore and James Armstrong, Dorothy Day, Sister Mary Luke Tobin, Lucius Walker, and

Professor Robert McAfee Brown.

Unfortunately, the pastoral letter is, not to put too fine a point on it, an instance of simplism verging on deception. However honorable the intention, it employs ultimate symbols to advance partisan causes. Its error in substance and arrogance in tone guarantee its easy dismissal by political decisionmakers. In addition it will undoubtedly feed the popular cynicism that, as Homer Jack notes, so sorely mars American attitudes toward disarmament.

The "inspirational" pastoral letter leaves no doubt as to the causes of the arms race. Leaders are "indifferent to the arms blizzard and its fallout on our people." This presumably includes leaders such as Jimmy Carter and Paul Warnke, the chief U.S. disarmament negotiator. Ah, but the signers of the letter are not speaking merely of individuals and their intentions but of larger and more systemic wrongs: "Governments have become the instruments of corporate greed. War is their business, and business is flourishing; so what's the problem?" This is not an anarchist jeremiad against government as such. The guilty governments are those that have become the tools of "the corporations [that] sell abroad...the big buck leading to the big bang." One assumes this does not include the Soviet Union, which has not gone so far down the road of détente as to become captive to the profit lust of ITT.

The epistle of pastoral edification continues: "The situation is beyond control." If true, one wonders about the point of a letter calling for "mobilization." Unless of course it is simply "to announce the word of Isaiah and Jesus [and] to include ourselves in the circle of faithful witness." That, however, is not mobilization to change anything but a call to the pure of heart to separate themselves from a hopeless situation that "mocks the spirit of the Lord." One part of the letter calls down the judgment of God upon an evil beyond repair, while another calls us to "common action" to "drive out the noon-day demon of despair and give flesh to our hope for a habitable future." The rhetoric is that of apocalyptic withdrawal, but the proposed remedy is that of an easily identifiable partisan agenda.

American policy is the unqualified culprit of the arms race. "Our No. 1 export is—death." It might be countered that our No. 1 export is food, or technology, or bourgeois democratic ideals, or Hollywood images of consumer paradise—but these too are presumably all "instruments of corporate greed" and therefore, in the terms set by the letter, aptly summed up in the one word "death." The signers go on to deplore "an ever new, more hellish parade of weapons; Trident, Cruise Missiles, now the Neutron Bomb." The Fastback Bomber and Russia's massive military buildup in Eastern Europe—to mention but two factors on "the other side"—apparently do not count in the equation. Some revisionist writers on the cold war argue that the Soviet Union has, for the most part, simply

responded to U.S. belligerency. But these pastoral revisionists go further. There is a reference to the arms race as "a grotesque Olympics" in which "we're running well ahead," but the main impression is that there is nobody else in the race. We are racing with ourselves.

This suggestion seems less curious if we understand the power of "corporate greed" in capitalist society. For all the talk about disarmament over the years, "the cover up continues" because weapons are good business. The profit motive alone, however, does not explain why leaders "are blind, deaf, dumb, to the voice, agony, privations of their people." The root problem is a profoundly spiritual perversion. Our leaders have fallen victim to a "fascination with death"; our enemies are "the nuclear idols and their benighted adorers." Thus spiritual perversity combines with corporate greed: "The nuked conscience of political, military and economic interests has seized on the lives of our people, [and] with astonishing arrogance would seize on the sovereignty of our God."

The signers are confident about their having located the voice of righteousness. "A passionate cry must be raised, straight from the heart of the religious community...." "The religious communities must speak up." It is not clear which religious communities are meant. Certainly not the churches and synagogues involving those millions of Americans and their leaders who, we are told, are so fascinated with death and have bowed the knee to the idols of nuclear weaponry. Nor, since the Religious Task Force is part of the more secularized Mobilization for Survival, do the signers likely think that salvation is from the religious communities alone. Righteousness obviously rests with those who share the signers' political and economic analysis of world affairs. In that company the signers happily include distinguished figures such as Isaiah, Jesus, and sundry prophets. "Did not the prophets and Jesus proclaim at the risk of their good reputes, their very lives, this word to the nations, as well as to their own communities?" The simple answer is, No they did not proclaim "the word" of this pastoral letter. Isaiah acclaimed the work of God in the military conquests of Cyrus of Persia, and Jesus was extremely reticent about the militarism implicit in capitalist economies. True, the signers do risk their good reputes in some more thoughtful circles, but the lives they imperil by the course they advocate are mainly the lives of others.

It would be a mistake to interpret this letter as a pacifist appeal. While some signers may be absolute pacifists—an honorable commitment, to be sure—others are distinguished for their passionate defense of violence when employed by "liberation struggles" in Latin America, South Africa, and elsewhere. These signers condemn "the spirit of money, the spirit of violence symbolized in the boiling frenzy of nuclear weaponry [that] mocks the spirit of the Lord," but Robert Brown, Lucius Walker,

and others have had much nicer things to say about liberation violence that is directed against "the spirit of money" and American militarism. (For a critique of this odd alliance between pacifists and militant liberationists see Gordon Zahn's "The Bondage of Liberation: A Pacifist Reflection," *Worldview*, March.)

While focusing on disarmament, the inspirational letter also catches up other pieces of an agenda for social reform. The four objectives for "this year of disarmament" are: "Zero Nuclear Weapons, Ban Nuclear Power, Stop the Arms Race, and Fund Human Needs." Under the umbrella of "funding human needs" the particular dilemma of nuclear weaponry becomes diffused and trivialized: "The bombs fall now, on neglected ghettos, on children, on the ill and aged and unemployed." Whatever the problems of the disadvantaged in America—and they are many and severe—it is absurd, maybe even obscene, to compare them with the consequences of nuclear holocaust. It is an absurdity mandated, however, by the rationale of the letter at hand. That rationale, all too apparently, is to seize on the disarmament issue as but another occasion to assail the evil of American society in general and of capitalism in particular.

By attempting to exploit the disarmament dilemma and religious rhetoric for the advancement of a particular ideological agenda, the pastoral letter is a grave disservice both to disarmament and to moral discourse in our society. People sign public letters with varying degrees of thoughtfulness. One signer who does not share the ideology explicit and implicit in the letter admitted when questioned: "I guess I didn't really read it that carefully. But I did see some good people had signed up." People who do not read carefully what they sign invite others not to take seriously what they say. Good people sometimes sign very bad statements.

The pastoral letter of the Religious Task Force makes no effort to understand those who differ from its view. Its sponsors say it is part of "the broadest coalition of peace, social justice, and environmental groups working together on common goals since the Indochina war." Perhaps so, but it is unlikely this letter will be read in very many churches and synagogues. (Significantly, as of this writing no Jewish leaders have signed. Concern for the security of Israel has a curious way of illuminating the subtle connections between peace and the threat of violence.) That this letter will not be read widely may be consoling to some, but in another sense it is also regrettable. A pastoral letter—definitely not *this* pastoral letter—might be helpful in stirring the religious communities, and thus also stirring political leadership, to a more reflective restlessness about diminishing the threat of nuclear war. Concern about nuclear war must not be taken captive by any one agenda for social reform or revolution. It should enlist new energies and ideas from every point on the political spectrum. The threat of nuclear holocaust—whether that holocaust would come by design, mistake, or madness—is a common con-

cern that should spark a new and broader coalition of thought and action. The U.N. special session indeed offers an opportunity for such a coalition to be formed. Setting aside the cheap prophecy and partisan deceits reflected in the Mobilization for Survival's pastoral letter, the religious communities could play an important part in forming such a coalition.

A more effective coalition will be marked by several virtues, none of which should be alien to the religious communities. First, it will acknowledge as legitimate the concern for the security of the United States and of those who depend on us, together with concern for the prosperity and well-being of all the American people. The arguments for security and domestic well-being can and should be turned in favor of disarmament. Second, such a coalition will be scrupulously honest about the ambiguities and risks involved in disarmament. Against those who cite disastrous precedents *and* against those who offer guarantees of success it must be clearly understood that we have not been down this road before. Honesty also means a fair apportionment of blame for our present dilemma, especially in relation to the U.S. and the USSR. More important than apportioning blame, the focus must be on the commonality of the threatening terror.

Third, a new and more effective coalition will acknowledge that the problem is not new, nor have all efforts to resolve it been totally ineffective. It will respect the many people, including political leaders, who have been wrestling with the problem for many years. They need support, not anathemas. Finally, it will be a coalition whose urgency of intention will be sustained by modesty of expectation. It will not collapse in disillusionment if nuclear weapons are not banished in "the year of disarmament." A coalition that needs to be sustained by the achievement of utopia is unsustainable. To diminish the terror now in the hope of a world beyond terror—that is a vision immodest enough to inspire and modest enough to sustain a renewed devotion to disarmament.

EXCURSUS IV

Wilson Carey McWilliams on The Crown of St. Stephen, the Panama Canal, and Other Sacred Objects

The Carter administration has its troubles with sacred objects. Recently the president announced that on January 6 he intends to return to Hungary the Crown of St. Stephen, in American custody since 1945. He and his advisors must have expected public protest, especially by Hungarian-Americans. The Hungarian regime was built on the suppression

of 1956, and something like 200,000 Soviet troops are still in Hungary. The "recent improvements in human rights" discerned by the administration seem real enough, especially in the relations between Church and State, but they can neither erase grim memories nor write real guarantees for the future. But there is no great disagreement between the administration and its critics about the character of the Hungarian regime. The real issue is the importance of St. Stephen's Crown.



Stephanskrone (f. S. 937).

To the administration's critics the value of the Crown is incalculable. It confers legitimacy and majesty; it represents the sanction of the past on the present, the judgment of the enduring and the eternal on the transient and temporal. The Carter administration doubtless included the "symbolic value" of the Crown in its calculations, but its reckonings were secular, cerebral, and mercantile, unsuited—its critics argue—to assessing something sacred, affective, and priceless. As one Hungarian-American, Stephen M. Vijdaj, put it, the Crown is not "an amusement piece which should be displayed in a museum."

Such domestic attacks were anticipated and discounted, but the Hungarian Government *also* has had occasion to complain that the administration is too flippant in its treatment of the Crown, which seems to have taken Washington rather by surprise. Reacting to rumors that Rosalynn Carter would return the Crown, a Hungarian official noted that the president probably regarded sending his wife as a "nice gesture," but he protested that the Crown of St. Stephen is not "just a bunch of flowers."

I sympathize with the (probably foredoomed) struggle of the administration's critics to keep the Crown in America, but it is hard to argue with the case for sending it back to Hungary. More than one tyrannous head has worn it. The Habsburgs had the Crown when Windischgrätz conquered Budapest and Paskievitch laid vanquished Hungary "at the feet of the czar." The last Hungarian government to