

PATRIOTISM AND RELIGIOUS VALUE

The Problem is to Relate Ideals to Reality

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One of the great needs of our time is for a genuine meeting between religion and world affairs. The religious moralist and the political idealist often become so preoccupied with the imperatives of human responsibility, however, that they ignore the *conditions* of human existence. Ignorance of the limits and possibilities of man and history and ignorance of the more specific political facts of life have sometimes led them to utopian crusades which have ended in disaster. The long road from Versailles to Pearl Harbor and beyond is cluttered with the whitened bones of crusades that failed—the League of Nations, peace through economic planning, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, and peace through the renunciation of war.

The utopian crusades in which American religious leaders have invested so much energy and devotion failed not for lack of good intentions or enthusiasm but because the crusaders tended to believe that morally desirable goals were politically possible *because* they were desirable. They failed because these crusaders, in contrast to contemporary political leaders such as Winston Churchill, could not read the political signs of the times. They misread current history because they failed to understand the contingencies and tragedies of the whole realm of history. They misunderstood history because they did not understand the limits and possibilities of human nature. And they failed to understand human nature because they were poor observers of what went on around them and because eighteenth century rationalism and nineteenth century secular idealism had corrupted the classical Christian faith in large sectors of American religious life.

If it is essential, therefore, for political ethics to start with the political situation, it is also essential that ethics come to grips with all the major political and moral issues involved. Political decisions are seldom if ever made in simple black-white situations. They are made in complex, ever-changing, political-moral situations. The problem is not that of applying the right moral principles to the right political issues, but rather of coming to grips with a complex human

situation in its totality. Statesmen are constantly confronted with situations in which political issues are inextricably intertwined with moral implications. Such situations call more for moral sensitivity and political wisdom than they do for moral codes and political statistics. A politician with moral insight is a greater political moralist than a moralist who is politically innocent.

In dealing with foreign policy issues many religious leaders, together with many other Americans, have indulged in what one might call the single-issue approach. The single issue may be a moral ideal like love or peace or the absence of violence. Or it may be a means for achieving a desirable end, such as the League of Nations or the Kellogg Pact. The trouble with the single-issue approach—whether it is applied to ends or means—is that it leaves out other factors which are necessary to an understanding of the situation in its deepest dimensions.

During the pre-Pearl Harbor neutrality-isolationist debates in the United States, the advocates of neutrality emphasized non-involvement and the absence of violence as the supreme political goals for America. The advocates of intervention, while not denying that peace was a good thing, insisted that peace at the price of tyranny was not worth the price. In religious terms, one might say that the advocates of neutrality emphasized love and the advocates of intervention emphasized justice.

A contemporary problem will further illustrate the point: the problem of nuclear weapons, and more specifically, the problem of testing these weapons. At a recent conference, NBC commentator Martin Agronsky asserted that the United States government had absolutely no moral right to conduct nuclear tests which contaminate the stratosphere with dangerous fallout. The World Council of Churches has called for an international agreement to outlaw further tests, but in the absence of such an agreement the Council has urged the United States and other nuclear powers to stop tests unilaterally.

Now, every decent person is deeply concerned about the real risks of radioactive fallout incident to

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nuclear tests, but a responsible political ethic insists that he be equally concerned with the risks of not conducting nuclear tests.

The great concern of many sensitive persons about American bomb tests, to the virtual exclusion of other factors which bear even more directly upon international peace and security, illustrates the persistence of the single-issue approach. If one is interested in saving human life, preserving the values of Western civilization and in preventing a nuclear holocaust, one must be concerned with many other problems in addition to bomb testing.

I do not know if it is politically wise and morally responsible for the United States to continue its tests, but I do not think the problem has been substantially changed by the fact that the Soviet Union has unilaterally suspended its tests. The Soviet test suspension, in addition to its obvious propaganda implications, appears to be an open recognition by the U.S.S.R. that it has reached a situation of nuclear plenty and regards itself as well or better off than the United States and Britain combined. It probably means that the Soviets believe they have more nuclear weapons and a more varied arsenal than we have. In any event, the suspension announcement was a warning to the world that the Soviet Union now also has the capacity for massive retaliation.

This state of nuclear plenty has many ominous implications. One of the most important is that the Soviet Union now has more resources and greater freedom to pursue its international objectives by less-than-nuclear means, which include economic and political penetration, subversion, propaganda, and limited military action if she thinks she can get away with it.

Under this situation, is it wise for the United States to go ahead with its projected series of tests in the Pacific? I do not know. But I would suggest several factors which should be borne in mind before one pronounces judgment. Any test suspension, unilateral or multilateral, which involves the United States may increase the military potential of the Soviet Union in relation to the West and thus encourage further Soviet expansion. This may well enhance the probability of nuclear war or piecemeal surrender. If an international agreement could be achieved within the United Nations or otherwise, there is no assurance at this time that we have either the technical or political facilities for an adequate and enforceable inspection.

Since the limited military action is a more likely contingency than an all-out nuclear assault, the United States needs a balanced arsenal, including

small tactical atomic weapons, in order to deter Soviet adventures and to cope with them effectively without transforming them into general nuclear engagements. Administration spokesmen have insisted that further American testing is essential to the building of a balanced arsenal. They have insisted that tests are necessary to develop a family of smaller and more precise weapons as well as cleaner weapons with substantially less radioactive fallout. We also need new defensive devices to counter new Soviet offensive weapons. All of these developments will help us to deter Soviet attacks and to cope with them more effectively if our policy of deterrence fails. They give us greater capacity to limit the destructiveness of any hostilities which may be forced upon us.

This problem of nuclear weapons is a complex business, and I do not presume to write on it with any special competence. All I would say is that persons who do want to give relevant advice must pay the price of taking into account all the significant facets of the problem. This approach is sometimes characterized as an "ethic of responsibility" as opposed to an ethic of abstract principles or laws. Such an ethic insists that the actor (politician, statesman or ordinary citizen) respond to all relevant facets of a complex political situation. The claim of this ethic is not to be pure and uninvolved in sin, but to be responsible to God, to one's neighbor and to one's self, recognizing that for finite and sinful man there will always be an unbridgeable gulf between his highest aspirations and their temporal fulfillment.

This ethic might also be called an ethic of multiple-considerations, as opposed to the typically American single-issue approach to foreign policy issues. No political ethic can be relevant unless it is a multi-consideration ethic because all political problems have many aspects which bear upon the inevitable consequences of every political decision.

Now let us turn to the problem of how religious ethics actually bears upon the foreign policy decisions of the United States. It can be said that the effectiveness of ethics in the world of politics comes under the rubric of the incarnation. It deals with the problem of translating the word of God into the flesh of politics.

It may be instructive to look briefly at several facets of this problem as far as the American scene is concerned. A great deal of advice from official religious sources on specific foreign policy questions has, in the past, been at best irrelevant as a guide to those charged with political responsibility. Should churchmen and official church bodies, therefore, stop

writing political pronouncements or stop concerning themselves with the life-and-death issues of national security? Should we leave the grave issues of foreign policy to the politicians and the experts? In this highly complex business of international politics is the public automatically ruled out because of ignorance?

In his book, *The Public Philosophy*, Walter Lippmann declared that "prevailing public opinion" in the United States "has been destructively wrong at the critical junctures" in American foreign policy. "The people," he said, "have imposed a veto on the judgments of informed and responsible officials. They have compelled the governments, which usually knew what would have been wiser, or was necessary, or was more expedient, to be too late with too little, or too long with too much, too pacifist in peace and too bellicose in war, too neutralist or appeasing in negotiation or too intransigent."

Mr. Lippmann's charge that public opinion is ill-informed, tardy, and often wrong on international issues is shared by too many competent observers to be dismissed lightly. But it is not the whole story.

One possible implication of Lippmann's observation is the view that an elite of intellectuals should govern our affairs. I reject this view. I believe that the public, and specialized groups within it, have a positive role to play in the formulation of United States foreign policy. I believe especially that the religious community has an honorable and helpful task to perform. I must admit, however, that the churches have for the most part misunderstood this task with the consequence that their explicit and official witness has been largely irrelevant or negative.

The American people do determine the behavior of our country in world politics and will continue to do so as long as our free political institutions continue to function. Adult citizens make their basic contribution to foreign policy not by giving advice on day-by-day policy decisions, but by determining the values for which this nation stands, by creating a climate in which these values can effectively be pursued, and by choosing between alternative sets of leaders to run the government.

The primary responsibility of morally concerned citizens and of religious groups is to uphold and clarify the basic values of our society. The duty of experts and specialists in and out of government is to analyze the complex problems of foreign policy, to suggest alternative means of dealing with them, and to spell out the probable consequences of competing alternatives. The responsibility of the President and other policy makers is to choose and carry out those policies which they believe will best serve our common values and objectives. Individuals and groups

which understand the respective roles of these three elements in foreign policy formation can make a genuine contribution to politically wise and morally sound policies in Washington.

While traditional church pronouncements and lobbying on international issues in this country leave much to be desired, one should note that on a deeper and less intentional level religious groups have made a positive contribution to the direction and quality of America's foreign relations. They have been the custodians and interpreters of our basic values. Generations of our citizens have been brought up with some awareness of the social teachings of Judaism and Christianity. Preachers, priests and rabbis have upheld the social goals of peace, justice, good will and brotherhood, and have insisted on the sovereignty of a God who knows no favorites among men and nations. It is true that the social message of the churches has often been presented in terms of ideal goals which seemed to bear little relation to the realities of world politics. It is also true that social preaching and teaching was not tempered by an adequate understanding of human nature and history.

In spite of these shortcomings in the explicit witness of the churches since 1900, the churches did better than they knew. Somehow the major values and insights of the central Judeo-Christian tradition managed to get through the rose-colored shield of nineteenth century liberal idealism. Some of the men in positions of political responsibility have been wise enough and sensitive enough to see the relevance of the "ideal ends" of the moralist to the limited means of the politician. They had learned the art of relating ethics to political necessity without slipping into moral pretension on the one side or cynicism on the other.

The churches, perhaps unconsciously, have prepared men with enough courage and insight to reject the specific foreign policy advice of the churches, precisely because of their loyalty to what the churches fundamentally stand for. These statesmen have been able to relate the wisdom of the Judeo-Christian heritage to the tragic realm of world politics more effectively than most professional churchmen because the statesmen had been disciplined by a more profound understanding of history and chastened by political responsibility.

The grace of God works in mysterious ways. The church raises up men, endowing them with enough insight and nerve to resist the pressure of the church on specific foreign policy issues. This paradox has something to say about the concept of religious vocation in national affairs.