

THE ISSUE OF "SURVIVAL"

The Fund for the Republic has recently published a 116-page pamphlet on "Foreign Policy and the Free Society." This study contains essays by Walter Millis and John Courtney Murray, S. J., and comments on the essays by such distinguished Americans as A. A. Berle, Jr., Reinhold Niebuhr, Scott Buchanan, and Robert Redfield. The following is an excerpt from Father Murray's essay.

All the confusions in American thinking come to a focus in the opinion that the issue [facing America in its contest with the Soviet Union is] "survival" . . . This opinion is entirely disastrous. We may be sure that the Communist mind, with its realistic and strategic habits of thought, has carefully separated the problem of the "survival" of the Communist Revolution from the problem of war. The Communist leadership has no slightest intention of making "survival" the issue to be settled by force of arms. In fact, it is prepared to abandon resort to arms, as soon as the issue of "survival" is raised. Survival is the one thing it is not willing to risk. In contrast, America is not prepared to resort to arms until the issue of "survival" is raised. Survival is the only thing it is willing to risk. Not the least irony in the current situation is the fact that the West has surrendered to the East its own traditional doctrine, that "survival" is not, and should never be allowed to become, the issue at stake in war.

The major problem put to American policy at the moment is the problem that the Soviet Union has already solved in terms of policy, namely, how to be prepared to use force on all necessary or useful occasions, and at the same time to withdraw "survival" from the issues at stake in the use of force. "The children of this world are shrewder than the children of light in their dealings with their own kind" (Luke 16:9). The children of this world understand better the uses, and the uselessness, of this world's darkest thing, force. They are shrewd enough to know that the institutions of this world can be advanced by force, but that their survival should not be put to the test of force.

The irony in the Gospel saying seems to be magnificently fulfilled in the American nuclear armament program. It seems to have been conceived to insure "survival" but not to fight a legitimate war for limited and justifiable ends. Perhaps one should not blame the Department of Defense or the Atomic Energy Commission. They could not get their budgets

through the Congress unless they "proved" that "survival" is the issue at stake. And the Congress could not levy taxes on the people unless it "proved" that the "survival" of the people is at stake. But this is moral absurdity, not least because it is military absurdity. We have got the problem of "survival" and the problem of war so mixed up that we may finally be incapable of solving either.

Nor will it do to say that we have been forced into this position by the Communist menace. It would be almost impossible to set limits to the danger of Communism as a spiritual menace. It has induced not simply a crisis in history but perhaps the crisis of history. Its dream of the Third Epoch that will cancel Western and Christian history and the major institutions of that history (notably the rule of law and the spiritual supremacy of the Church) has gone too far toward realization over too wide a sweep of earth to be lightly dismissed as a mere dream. On the other hand, as a sheerly military menace Communism is strictly limited. It is limited in the first instance by its own doctrine. This doctrine has always assigned to military force a real role in the advancement of the World Revolution. Nevertheless, the role of force has always been ancillary, subordinate, supportive of political, economic, and ideological initiatives. Force is to be employed only when the historical moment is right and the military or political risk is minimal. Moreover, there is every reason to believe that in the nuclear age, in which all risks are enhanced most horribly, Communist doctrine has set a still more diminished value on the use of force. By a sort of perverse genius, proper to the children of darkness, it has at the same time set a higher value on the sheer threat of force.

The Soviet Union as a power-imperialism must be confronted by power, steadily and at every point. But when the question is military engagement it is quite false to say that the issue is "survival." And American persistence in thinking this could easily reduce American power to impotence. The real issue is to know how and why "survival" got to be thought of as the military issue, and then to withdraw it from the limited political and moral issues at stake in our military engagement with the Soviet Union. It is impossible to think of any other way in which our nuclear armament program can be reduced to rationality—to some sensible conformity to the canons of moral reason (which look to justice in war), and to a hardly less desirable conformity to the rules of military reason (which look to success in war).