

worldview

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THE QUESTION OF RELIGION

In a now famous dictum, which was part of a 1952 Supreme Court decision, Justice William O. Douglas declared: "We are a religious people." Few Americans have quarreled with this; most of them, probably, view it as a simple statement of fact.

No nation in the modern world holds religion in more popular esteem than does the United States. In mid-twentieth century America, atheism and even agnosticism are unofficial bars to public office. Successful politicians keep their church membership in good order, and hold Sunday mornings open for public encounters with the Almighty. A people who officially separate Church and State have thus, unofficially, made "religion" one of their most cherished folkways.

And this approval of religion in America extends from personal behavior to public policy. What is good for the individual, after all, must be good for the State. Many U.S. policy statements, therefore, carry religious implications and are couched in moral terms. They suggest that "we" are on God's side and that anyone who opposes us is allied with the forces of darkness. The relating of transcendent principles to particular stratagems is thus made easy—a matter merely of sentiment and assertion.

All this has been criticized, widely and rightly, as dangerous self-deception in our people. The "religion" that is popular among us tends to be a vague thing, an evasion of, rather than an encounter with, the hard realities of faith and modern society. Because the attempt to adjust the demands of the one with the necessities of the other can never be easy, and in an age like our own, when situations of power are more complex and more threatening than ever before, the attempt must be heartbreaking.

We have traditional and sound principles; we have, perhaps, a minimum of goodwill. How to make these relevant to the recalcitrant world with which we must deal is not the easy task our popular mythology suggests. It is a problem with which religious thinkers have only begun

to deal. And it cannot be solved by the statement—heard so often among religious groups—that we are a religious people and should act like one. In the jungle world of 1958, *how*, exactly, should a religious people act? How, indeed, can they act at all?

It was to raise such questions as these that *Worldview* was founded twelve months ago, and it should surprise none of its readers that, after a year of publication, the journal has arrived at no answers. This magazine exists to explore the problems of religion and international life as they have arisen, in newly acute forms, today. It does not look for ready answers. It looks, rather, for intelligent concern.

Central to this concern is the question of morality and modern war. In no other area does the problem of religion and international life arise more clearly or with such sharpness. And nowhere else is it more painful. Its complexity is brilliantly outlined in the article by Father John Courtney Murray published elsewhere in this issue.

Father Murray believes that in this age of weapons of mass destruction the challenge both to moralists and to statesmen is to make the traditional Christian teaching on war relevant to the situations with which we must deal. No "single issue" approach, he believes, can solve the problems of conscience which modern warfare raises. He considers pacifism and bellicism the pernicious extremes to which we may be tempted. It is from these that a new analysis of moral doctrine must free us.

Father Murray is among the most distinguished of American Catholic theologians and his essay is an important, powerful statement of the tradition of the "just war." Other theologians hold that, with developments in modern technology, the very concept of the just war is an anachronism. *Worldview*, during 1959, will continue to explore this, the great moral problem of our time.