

NUCLEAR POWER AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

A time of unprecedented hazard and of unprecedented responsibility is upon us. The hazard lies in a new dimension of terror in human existence. It lies in the danger of a recklessness and callousness that can annihilate millions of men, women and children and other living creatures in nuclear death, reducing the human survivors to barbarism and transforming wide stretches of nature into radioactive dust and ash. The peoples of the earth are now one in their common fate; for the first time in history they find themselves together in the same valley of decision. Never before has the demand been placed so heavily upon the nations, that they preserve their sanity and the peace. In face of the hazard and the responsibility President Kennedy has forcefully reminded the United Nations that if mankind does not pursue a constructive policy of peace, "our strength, like that of the dinosaur, will become incapable of proper control, and, like the dinosaur, will vanish from the earth." Premier Khrushchev rightly asserts that we all live under the sword of Damocles. It is not surprising if some people fall into blank terror, and if others seek oversimple solutions.

Of the simple solutions offered in the United States today none is more deceptive than hysterical nationalism. We, and millions along with us, can be undone if we fall prey to the counsels of super-patriotism. The demand for total victory in the Cold War belongs to the logic of annihilation; at a crucial moment it can counsel disastrous provocation, or lead to the demand for preventive war—actually, a demand for total war, for monstrous holocaust. From these quarters comes also the spurious and divisive charge that rejection of this brand of patriotism bespeaks treason and subversion. In certain quarters these dark counsels even claim Christian sanction and their proponents are to be found in the shelter of the churches. It is urgent that Christians address themselves to the religious and moral issues at stake, lest we rely upon false securities.

The Christian seeks his security in the Lord of history whose purposes no nation can bring to naught and no man can thwart with impunity. Christian faith places its confidence in a strength that comes not from the world or from the atoms, in a strength that grows not old and that offers unseen resources in every extremity. This strength we rely upon. It alone is faithful. The faithfulness of God is hidden

and manifest within history. Working providentially, it makes the wrath of man to praise him, and it even brings good out of evil. God holds us under judgment, warning us against the temptation to usurp his place by identifying our parochial perspectives and interests with the divine will. At the same time he moves in mysterious ways, opening up new occasions for new response. Christian faith, then, is not blind to the tragic dimensions of history; but it is informed by hope. God gives us no guarantee that life will continue on earth, but he does give us the hope that through the timely decision of men new meaning may come to birth. He calls upon us to accept the situation in which we stand, and to find precisely there the resource and decision that lead to new life, to the fulfillment of his end, the common good of all.

Faith in the Lord of history places upon us the responsibility of recognizing that our national policies affect not only our own people but also the entire human race, including the smaller nations which we often overlook. This ultimate trust requires us to be faithful to the great tradition that cherishes the rights and the dignity of men. It is not compatible with the utopian idealism or the religious otherworldliness that renounces the responsibilities of political power, or that issues in inaction. Nor is it compatible with panic, nor with a feverish taking of events into our own hands. It demands of us the realism and the humility to try to see our nation as others see it—to recognize the limitations and faults of our own position, the miscarriages of justice which have been ours, the rightful claim of interests other than our own. We are given pause when we recall the words of Thomas Jefferson, "Indeed, I tremble when I reflect that God is just."

There is scarcely a greater danger than the disposition to view the rival ideology or the rival nation, however mistaken or threatening they may be, as an absolute evil. From such black-and-white fanaticism only irrepressible conflict can ensue. The alternative is the recognition among the nations of a valid pluralism of perspectives such as has been the strength of our nation. Without steadiness of heart and mind, we shall fall into the fatal error of supposing that there is only one course to follow, that of force. Christians must repel the demands of desperate men who accept war—even nuclear war—as inevitable, and who bid us destroy "the enemy" before he annihilates us. Abraham Lincoln expressed a wiser attitude when he confessed, "As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master."

We do not venture to speak here of specific policies with respect to weaponry, offensive or defensive. Questions such as the strategy of disarmament and deterrence are in part technical questions, but decisions on these matters have momentous moral consequences. For example, playing statistically with

expendable percentages of mankind betrays an amoral evasion of the human factor. Furthermore, during the next score of years we shall witness technological advances as great as those we have observed in the past 20 years. New and unimaginable possibilities of horror are no doubt even now in the making. New deterrents can be followed by new inventions of terror. Not in that direction lies hope. We second the recent plea of our colleagues in the natural and social sciences for the encouragement of "the new science of human survival."

The grave demand is upon us that we exhibit patience and steadfastness, that we support the will to negotiate, that we display imagination looking toward audacity of innovation. These alone can save us from the drive toward mastery and from resort to misdirected strength that can be our undoing and the undoing of the nations. It is not only the advances of technology that are unpredictable. Unpredictable also are the resources and the solutions that can make for peace. The very extremity of the human need is God's opportunity. Time is on the side of those who open themselves to the forces that give rise to new and creative possibilities. This fact is attested by the venturesome and experimental pioneering of our American forefathers as they through the years coped with the hardships of the unexplored wilderness and as they sought, for the good of all, to deal with the stubbornness of our common human nature. In the same way we must wrestle resourcefully with the perils of our day.

We may be confident that our task so understood will touch the conscience, the moral nerve of mankind; it unites us with people of many faiths, and thus sustains the sturdy hope that has ever been the mainstay of our common humanity.

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We must encourage the government to seek new solutions, new reciprocities, with respect to "the problems that unite the peoples" of East and West—for example, in areas of trade and travel, and of the peaceful uses of the sciences and of nuclear energy. The governments need not wait for broadly integrated enterprises to be established; regional trade and tariff agreements can be effected with the countries of NATO, with Russia and the Asian nations, with the countries of South America. We should, without ulterior motive, go far beyond our present minimal "cultural exchange" at many levels and in many forms. But these procedures can be only ineffectual halfway measures if we do not in our own country at the same time radically reduce racial discriminations in industry, in education, in government. Why have thousands of Americans been excluded from the jurisdiction of our minimum-wage law? Why do we falter? Because we lack the sense of urgency, in short because we do not recognize the bond between the drive for justice and the race against international strife.

This mission of resourcefulness and courage should not be confined to governmental channels. The individual Christian, in association with others, must find ways of taking the initiative in promoting or defending civil rights, in extending the opportunities available to minority groups, in supporting the cause of freedom and justice for all citizens, in exhibiting a heroic and costing compassion for the underprivileged of the earth. Without delay the individual can immediately express his commitment to the disciplines of peace by making direct financial contribution to the United Nations or UNESCO.

The churches as corporate groups have much to do in these and in other areas. When American citizens in their several vocations occupy exposed positions—for example, in furthering East-West contacts or in speaking unpalatable truths—they merit the support of the churches, especially when their patriotism is called in question. Church people should take a concerted stand in their communities against the press, or other media of communication, when they become instruments of panic and suspicion. The churches can strengthen the hands of public officials who further the American tradition of keeping the military under civilian control. We can openly encourage political leaders who persist, even against what seem to be impossible odds, in keeping open negotiation and other channels of communication.

The church is one body that should be a source of creative and resourceful alternatives to war. In its life of prayer it is open to the vision of new possibilities of cooperation and trust. The church is also worldwide; it reaches into every land; it contains in its own life the basis of the most open communication between peoples and of the growth of confidence between the nations. The church has sacrificed for the relief of human need; it is now time to find new directions of heroic action in the face of universal disaster. The church is the body where the ministry and the laity are obliged to lift the vision of the people beyond the limits of race and nation. The purposes of God and the resources of faith have not been exhausted. The outcome will depend upon how we use the time that is granted to us.

The above statement, reprinted from the January 31 issue of *The Christian Century*, was issued by faculty members of Boston University School of Theology, Duke University Divinity School, Episcopal Theological Seminary, University of Chicago Divinity School, and Vanderbilt University Divinity School. Signatories—whose names are available upon request—either approved the statement in its entirety or supported its purpose and general tenor. The faculty of Boston University School of Theology endorsed the statement but expressed regrets because of its "very broad and vague theological basis" and, in their opinion, its lack of boldness.