

# worldview

A JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

## AS OTHERS SEE US

*worldview* is especially pleased to present, in this issue, a discussion of Christianity and nuclear war by Rear-Admiral Sir Anthony Buzzard. This journal has insistently returned to the problems posed by nuclear weapons, for they have been accurately described as the great moral and political problems of our time; around the fact of nuclear weapons cluster the great debates on hot war, cold war, limited war and peace; on authority and the individual conscience; on alliances and coalitions; on trade and aid; and on the host of unsettled questions that plague the political life of our country and the Western world.

Almost all of those who have previously contributed their views to *worldview* have, quite naturally, been Americans. From whatever religious tradition they wrote, whatever political position they held, and however informed they were about other nations, they had in common their citizenship in and their allegiance to the strongest country in the Western world. This fact inevitably helped to inform, to shape, to color their views. This is not only inevitable but proper; the universal citizen does not yet exist. Yet these natural tendencies are not without danger and an awareness of them will keep us from being narrowly chauvinistic.

Alastair Buchan, director of the Institute for Strategic Studies in London, recently pointed out some of the ways in which Americans sometimes narrow their perspective—unconsciously and unnecessarily. In an otherwise favorable review of a book on nuclear war he wrote:

“It is no disparagement of the book to say that it reveals a wholly American process of thought. It assumes . . . a bipolar world in which American and Soviet allies play merely the role of Shakesperian stage armies, an assumption that may be true but requires better demonstration. Its terminology is grounded on a rather bizarre definition of ‘local war’ as conflict involving the United States and the Soviet Union but in which their homelands are exempt, a definition whose narrowness excludes the majority of the thirty or

so actual local wars that have occurred since VE Day. And throughout, the American national interest is unconsciously equated with the Western interest: as the real debates within NATO have shown, this may be true but it may not be thought to be true.”

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Those who read Admiral Buzzard’s lucid analysis of the causes of disunity and disagreement concerning nuclear war will find some of their traditional—or, more properly, conventional—attitudes challenged. He raises questions that some readers will probably regard as an impertinence. But if these readers are tempted to respond that Admiral Buzzard should acquaint himself more fully with the American political scene (should assess more correctly the strength of the right wing, for example), they should pause to consider that they are, in thus responding, agreeing with the procedure he recommends. For we should, he suggests, become *conscious* of the reasons for our disunity, and some of those reasons stem from our different national views.

Mere acknowledgment of these differences is not, of course, sufficient to dissipate them. But without this recognition many of our disputes with our allies will be without value. As John Courtney Murray, S.J., remarked in another context, disagreement is a precise thing. There cannot be real disagreement—although there can be formidable confusion and opposition—unless there is mutual understanding of the terms of discussion.

The lesson which is pointed here does not apply only to questions of nuclear arms. The explanation of our policies of trade with Russia, China and Cuba that Secretary of State Rusk recently offered shows that this simple lesson needs constantly to be relearned, retaught and re-examined in many areas of our foreign policy. For American readers the value of Admiral Buzzard’s essay, it is clear, extends even beyond the area to which he addressed himself.