THE CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE AND MODERN WAR

Can we bridge the gap of disunity which now divides both Church and country?

Rear-Admiral Sir Anthony Buzzard

In the light of that Commandment which states, "Thou shalt not kill," and Our Lord's subsequent teaching in the New Testament, what should be our attitude to killing and war, in the precise situation in which we Christians now find ourselves in the nuclear age?

Unfortunately there is at the moment a most distressing and dangerous disunity on this in the Church, in Parliament, in the country, and in the Western Alliance. Three quite different attitudes are being adopted—three different positions which are causing this tragic disunity amongst us.

Let me start by describing these three positions.

At one end of the scale there is the policy of massive retaliation, which runs like this.

"It is aggression which is evil. So long as we show that we will use our tactical atomic weapons first and early, even against conventional attack, and that this would rapidly spread to total war, there will be no serious war. Of course we have to have some conventional forces to deal with very small conflicts, and to make our nuclear deterrent credible, but, if we provide strong conventional forces, the aggressor will think we have lost our will to use our tactical atomic weapons first and early; that will tempt him to have a go with his conventional forces, which are inherently stronger than ours; and once fighting starts, it is bound to spread to the total war which nobody wants.

"At any rate," say the massive retaliators, "it is better 'to be dead than red'; this is the cheapest policy, and we need all possible money for the cold war.

"Of course," they say, "we believe in disarmament, but that is a long way off. Meanwhile we must guard our national interests, and to ensure this, even when our friends may not be with us, we must be able to have our own finger upon our own independent nuclear trigger, if necessary."

That all or nothing policy of massive retaliation has now been abandoned by the U.S., but it is still strongly held in France, and still lingers on in some circles in this country and in Germany, particularly in Whitehall and in Bonn. With geography and shortage of manpower weighing so heavily against us in conventional strength, it is a natural attitude for the hard-boiled official, politician or Service man to take. We should note that this view emphasizes aggression, deterrence, national interests; and it is a deliberate policy of threatening to use nuclear weapons first.

At the other extreme there is the policy of unilateralism, which runs as follows.

"It is war that is the real evil, and Our Lord told us to love our enemies and to turn the other cheek. Even though He seemed to accept Roman military power to maintain law and order, he would surely never condone the use of any nuclear weapons, even the smallest and cleanest of them, or even against military targets only, particularly since such limited use would be so liable to spread to total indiscriminate killing.

"Moreover," the argument goes, "even to possess nuclear weapons implies an intent to use them, which, morally, is as bad as using them. The Christian conscience demands, therefore, that we have nothing to do with such weapons. Britain should therefore opt out of all her alliances that rely on any use of nuclear weapons, even the mere possession of them for possible second use to deter the enemy from using his.

"Resistance with conventional forces might be acceptable, but if this should not prove enough against, for example, a nuclear power, then it is better 'to be red than dead'."

That argument is adopted by many pacifists and by others whom one might call nuclear pacifists, on grounds of conscience—regardless of consequences. But many unilateralists usually add that, even if one does calculate consequences, the best way out of our present impasse is for Britain to join up with the uncommitted countries, from which position she would be better able to help disarmament and the development of the UN Police Force.

Admiral Buzzard recently arranged and participated in a London conference on the moral and religious implications of security and disarmament.
We should note that this view emphasizes the evil of war, rather than aggression; the awful event of nuclear weapons being actually used, rather than their deterrent effect; and the importance of UN sovereignty, rather than national sovereignty. Far from threatening the use of nuclear weapons first, it advocates renouncing everything to do with them, even possessing them for possible second use.

We should note, too, that both these extreme attitudes of massive retaliation and unilateralism share the view that the choice before us now is total war or total peace.

- Between these two extremes of massive retaliation and unilateralism lies an attitude which I will call the policy of moderation. This tries to pay attention to both aggression and war, both deterrence and the possible use of nuclear weapons, both national and UN sovereignty.

It seeks to reach a position in which the West as a whole, while continuing to possess nuclear weapons so long as its adversaries do, only threatens to use them second, and only then with strict limitations. It believes that the bulk of the human race can be 'neither red nor dead.' This doctrine runs as follows.

"We are prepared to fight, if necessary, even in the nuclear age, but only as a last resort, only so long as it is a lesser evil than not fighting, and only on behalf of, and on the same principles as, the UN Police Force, while we develop that organization. We will pursue disarmament both unilaterally and multilaterally, so as to provide a stable balance of arms between East and West, without any independent nuclear deterrents at least on our side, and at a level of arms which will gradually decrease as the UN Police Force grows to take the place of national arms.

"Though not the cheapest policy in the short term, we believe it will be in the long term, and meanwhile will make the necessary sacrifices for it in money, service and national sovereignty—the money coming out of personal pockets, and not from that needed to help the under-developed countries."

That policy of moderation has now been largely accepted by the U.S., and partly accepted in British and German official circles, but is still being opposed by the bulk of the French and by some British and German elements, who feel that it would reduce the deterrent.

It is also opposed by the unilateralists, who complain that it aims at having nice gentlemanly little wars, which is much too dangerous.

Its supporters, however, insist that it would be the best way to prevent all wars, as well as to limit and stop them if they should break out. They feel that the extreme all-or-nothing attitudes of total peace and total war would in fact sooner or later land us in total war, and would moreover provide the worst prospect for disarmament and the building up of the UN Police Force.

Now each of these three groups genuinely believes that their solution is the most likely to maintain peace and prevent war. What Christians, and all men of goodwill, have to do, surely, is to try to understand the reasons for these different opinions, and then try to decide what God's will is in this matter.

What are the sources of, the reasons for, these differences?

- First there is a difference in the way these three groups approach the problem—different ideas of the degree to which we should base our judgments on grounds of expediency, coolly calculating the consequences of this or that action, or on grounds of moral principle, in obedience—perhaps blind obedience—to our consciences, leaving consequences to the Providence of God.

Strategists and officials are inclined to be particularly cool calculators of expediency, with their feet very much on the ground, while moralists are inclined to be particularly wedded to their consciences, with their heads perhaps more in the clouds, especially when it comes to the issues of nuclear war.

Many massive retaliators, and many officials, whether they are massive retaliators or not, feel that Christian ethics should be reserved for their personal lives, and that Government policy should pursue that which is expedient for the national interest, because that is what the public wants.

Unilateralists, on the other hand, tend to base their judgments on moral principles, with more sensitivity to their consciences and what seems to be morally right.

The 'moderators', however, feel that expediency and moral principle are really not so far apart, and may actually meet in the long run, provided our principles are truly relevant to the actual human situation at stake, and provided our expediency is based on really impartial aims and criteria.

To help find that meeting point, the 'moderators' pursue both approaches. Both are needed in any case, because only expediency will enable first steps to be taken in practice; and only moral principle, acting as guide lines, can ensure that those first steps are taken in the right direction.
May not the bringing together of expediency and moral principle be one of the main lessons taught us by Our Lord in the New Testament? Without it we are liable to become split personalities, as well as split communities.

* The second great source of disunity lies in the different assessments we make of the principal factors in the defense and disarmament situation. Of the three factors I will discuss, the first which we assess so differently is the relative threat to peace posed by Russia and China on the one hand, and by America on the other.

The massive retaliators are inclined to picture a threat of Russian hordes sweeping across Europe; or striking into the Middle East; or millions of Chinese infiltrating through the jungles of South-East Asia towards Australia. Nuclear deterrence against deliberate major Communist aggressions becomes for them the only guarantee of peace.

At the other extreme the unilateralists look upon the Russians and Chinese as peace-loving peoples, who sometimes talk and act aggressively only because of the American threats confronting them. Many unilateralists consider that there is little to choose between America and the Communists. Some even consider America the greater threat to peace.

Between these two extremes lie, again, the 'moderators.' They accept that much of the present tension arises from the interplay of threats and counter-threats; that the Russian and Chinese peoples are as peaceable as the Americans; that there is an aggressive right wing group in America; and that America may well be unduly over-threatening Russia and China with her superior nuclear capability. Nevertheless they still see evidence that the Chinese Government certainly, and perhaps the Russian Government too, would try to extend their boundaries and spread their revolutionary dictatorships by pressure of military force, if there were no opposition.

In any case our allies living next to the Iron Curtain do not yet trust the Communists, and it is not very helpful—perhaps not very Christian—for us, living five hundred miles behind, to tell these frontline countries that they ought not to bother about possible Communist invasion, and that a balance of military power is no longer needed for settlements on Berlin and in South-East Asia and Korea.

Nor can it be Christian if, in our efforts to foster reconciliation, we overlook such threats, if they really exist. As for the Americans, despite their right-wing minority and their unnecessarily superior nuclear deterrents, we cannot, surely, accuse them of intending to spread their boundaries or way of life by force.

The second factor which we assess so differently is the threat or possible use of nuclear weapons.

Here the massive retaliators and the unilateralists are rather close together. Both assume that any use of any nuclear weapon, whatever the power, the fallout, the target, the range, must inevitably result in total war. For the massive retaliator this assumption leads him to rely exclusively on nuclear deterrence. For the unilateralist it leads him to have nothing to do with nuclear weapons at all.

* But the 'moderator' sees the problem differently. True, the explosion of any nuclear weapon must put some radio-activity into the atmosphere, must involve some risk of genetic effects to any casualties who are not killed outright. But these weapons do vary enormously in power; they can be burst in the air without any direct fallout; they can be fired at short range; and they can be fired at aircraft in the air, or airfields in open country, or fleets in the open sea. True, once used, there would be a grave danger of escalation. But fear of this would be a strong incentive to both sides to prevent it, and it is always possible for us to stop, even to stop on the enemy's terms. Much depends on what our policy has been beforehand, and on how we have presented it in the years of peace before a crisis arises.

"At least," says the 'moderator,' "things—even nuclear weapons—cannot be intrinsically evil in themselves. It is how we use, or intend to use, things that is morally evil or morally good. And although there are certain possibilities for ghastly evil in the use of nuclear weapons, might not there also be some good in possessing them temporarily? For the fear which they have struck into all men's hearts is making us much more reluctant to pursue war to achieve our ambitions. Nuclear weapons have reduced the prospects of a prolonged, world-wide, conventional conflict like World War II, which, do not let us forget, killed tens of millions, though spread over six years.

"Let us reflect, too, that not to possess nuclear weapons in the West when our adversaries do might be morally irresponsible, for if a conventional war broke out that military vacuum might tempt an adversary to use them, as we did at Hiroshima and Nagasaki when we had a monopoly of those weapons. "Moreover, if there is an element of bluff in possessing nuclear weapons without saying in advance exactly how we might or might not use them, no basic moral principle is defied, and, disagreeable
though the practice be, might it not be the least of the evils facing us at the moment?"

The third factor that we assess differently is that of the balance between national sovereignty and its surrender to collective security and to the UN.

The massive retaliator feels that our Government's responsibility for the national interest and for those we have promised to protect requires that, although we should seek collective security in alliances, we must reserve an ultimate right to use nuclear weapons independently.

Two reasons—both valid in themselves—are given for this. First, we might feel obliged to take some action overseas, against the wishes of our main ally, America, which developed into a crisis with, say, Russia, who might then blackmail us into giving way by threats of nuclear bombardment, to which there would be no answer.

Secondly, it is held that only an independent nuclear deterrent can give us a voice at the conference tables in proportion to our responsibilities in the world.

And the massive retaliator looks upon the present pitifully weak UN Peace Force as something which must at present virtually be ignored. Similarly they consider the prospects of disarmament negligible as yet.

The unilateralist goes to the other extreme, and feels that if only Great Britain would renounce everything to do with nuclear weapons, and join up with the uncommitted countries, real progress in disarmament and the development of the UN Police Force would then result.

The 'moderators,' again, take the intermediate view. Their assessment is that at the moment the removal of Britain from NATO, CENTO and SEATO—particularly the removal of her conventional forces, her conventional bases, and her influence within these alliances—would so upset the present delicate East/West balance of power as to make war, including nuclear war, more likely, and disarmament more difficult.

And the 'moderators' feel that the valid arguments for an independent British deterrent are overridden by the need to centralize the control of nuclear weapons, in order to prevent their proliferation to more and more countries (who could claim similar arguments to ours for independence); and they wish to save all possible money for better defensive conventional forces, so helping to escape from our present reliance upon the first use of tactical atomic weapons.

And while accepting the present weakness of the UN Peace Force, the 'moderators' recognize, nevertheless, the urgency of developing it, which means exercising it wherever practicable, sheltering it from the challenges which it cannot yet face, and modifying Western defense policy, so that it acts on the same basic principles as we insist on for the UN Police Force. For there must not be a double standard, one for the West and one for the UN Police Force.

The 'moderators' demand, too, that British and Western defense policy must be tailored to assist, and not obstruct, disarmament, which they feel Britain can at present best help from within, not from outside, the Western alliances.

The final, and perhaps greatest, cause of disunity amongst us arises from the differing aims and criteria we adopt for making our judgments.

All three attitudes, as I have said, genuinely strive to pursue peace and to prevent war. But the massive retaliator is inclined to jump straight to such aims as the defense of his country, or the defense of NATO. As a result, defense becomes an end in itself, and deterrence almost the sole means to that end.

And the unilateralists are inclined to jump straight to disarmament, or nuclear disarmament, on the assumption that that is an end in itself.

The 'moderators,' however, usually try to search for more fundamental aims and criteria, on the following lines.

"All war is evil. We must therefore do all we can to abolish it, prevent it, or at least limit it. But there is another evil which has to be abolished, prevented, or at least limited, and that is the evil of aggression, with the tyranny and injustice which follow it. We are in fact faced with a choice of evils—war or aggression."

Our overall aim and criterion for choosing between these two evils can only be the good of humanity as a whole—concern for all our neighbors in the world. And this means striving to uphold justice, for, in a community, justice is the collective equivalent of the love which is the ethical aim of our relations with our neighbors as individuals. 'Love-inspired justice' is the phrase used by some to express this collective Christian duty.

"We have to balance, in the scales of justice, on the one hand the evil of aggression and tyranny, and on the other the evil of fighting and war which results from resisting the aggressor or tyrant."

Hence the doctrine of the 'just war,' and the ef-
forts of international law to place certain restraints on fighting.

Now although much of these were wrongly conceived, have often been abused, and are in some respects now out of date, it seems impossible to deny that they contain certain basic principles.

- The first is the principle of restraining both aims and means in war, so that it does remain the lesser evil—the principle of proportion. Aims and means must be limited to ensure that the killing and suffering of our neighbors as a whole is never disproportionate to the issues at stake, or to the alternative of ceasing to fight and adopting non-violent resistance.

Secondly there is the principle of discrimination—between belligerents and neutrals, and between military forces and civilians. Direct and intentional attack on civilians and neutrals has been ruled as absolutely wrong—except by way of reprisals. It is difficult not to class such action as murder. I fear we were guilty of this in our attacks on German and Japanese cities in the last war.

This, however, has to be distinguished from the indirect and unintentional killing of civilians or neutrals who happen to suffer as a secondary effect of our defense against an aggressor’s military forces. But even this cannot be justified if it is calculated to cause suffering which is disproportionate to any just military action being pursued.

Thirdly there is the principle of control. One cannot justify methods likely to result in destruction becoming out of control of the human conscience, and this includes, of course, the uncontrolled spread or escalation of war, and the uncontrolled spread of suffering after a war, due to genetic effects.

Finally there is the principle of reprisal, or protective retribution. Although initiating indiscriminate or uncontrolled means of warfare cannot be justified, nevertheless resorting to such methods by way of reprisal for similar enemy action is permitted by international law, but only as a means of stopping an enemy from indulging in such action. Reprisals taken beyond this point, or continued to the extent that, overall, more harm than good is done to humanity as a whole, cannot be justified.

In their simplest terms, these principles of proportion, discrimination, control and protective retribution mean that, if fighting can be justified at all, it must be conducted on the same principles as a policeman operates, or as is envisaged for the UN Police Force which we cannot yet organize. Clearly it is wrong for a nation to be motivated in war by hate, vengeance, national glory, or to aim at punishment, unconditional surrender, or even at victory as such.

What, therefore, is urgently required is a certain change of heart, a new spirit in the approach to the whole business of war, particularly in the government machinery where strategy and policy are made.

Perhaps it has taken the bomb to teach us this. Perhaps fear of the bomb may now hold us to it.

- If those are the moral principles which point the direction in which Christians should move, what then should we demand of our Governments as expedient and practical first steps in that direction?

In necessarily brief and simplified terms I suggest this.

In terms of defense:—
(1) No first use of force by the West, unless ordered by the UN.
(2) If use of force is, however, initiated against us or anybody else, then our war aim must be confined to halting or repelling the aggressor and returning to negotiations as soon as possible.
(3) The West must never use the H-bomb first, and never be the first to attack cities directly.
(4) We must escape as far, and as fast, as possible, from our reliance upon the first use of tactical atomic weapons, and make the necessary sacrifices for that.
(5) We must never continue any fighting to a disproportionate degree, and certainly not all-out indiscriminate war against cities, regardless of what the enemy may be doing to us. We should not, however, ask our governments to announce in advance just how far they would go.

In terms of disarmament:—
(1) We should continue our efforts for test cessation and open negotiations for the demilitarization of space before it is too late.
(2) Britain should offer to give up all independence for her nuclear weapons, and share the cost and control of them with her allies, on condition that France does the same and that no more Western countries start making nuclear weapons.
(3) The West should reduce unilaterally some of our superior nuclear capability, on condition that Russia reduces unilaterally some of her superior conventional capability.

With the arms situation thus better balanced, and more stable, the West should then pursue every further measure calculated to reduce tension and
the level of arms, while at the same time doing everything possible to build up the UN Police Force so that it might gradually replace the reduced national arms.

These steps closely resemble the five points proclaimed last year by twelve Bishops and leading Churchmen (some of them pacifists) as minimum first steps on which they could all agree, without prejudice to their ultimate positions.

Could such first steps form a rallying point—at least as a basis for discussion—for the less extreme unilateralists and massive retaliators? Could they begin to bridge the gap of disunity which at present splits the country, the Church and the Western world in two?

In making up our minds on this matter we must ensure that we do not put too much emphasis on feeling, rather than doing, good—that we do not concentrate more on salving our consciences than solving the problem.

We must ensure, too, that we really do consider the moral, as well as the strategic and political, aspects of the problem, and do not pursue defense and disarmament as two separate exercises.

At all events we must all urgently study, discuss and pray over these matters, keeping our minds open to each other’s views, and to God’s will. Time is not on our side. And it only requires good men and women to do nothing, for the powers of evil to prevail.

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**other voices**

**FOREIGN AID: PRINCIPLE AND POLICY**

Report, a new journal which strives to present “the news of the month in perspective,” devoted one large section of its November issue to problems of foreign aid. One of the problems it grappled with was that of relating decisions of policy to principles of morality. What follows is an excerpt from that presentation.

Why do men disagree on such matters as foreign aid? Is their disagreement legitimate? What are the bases of disagreement of this kind?

The present debates on foreign aid and international relations have readily brought to the surface questions of morality and policy, often with a great deal of confusion...

The advocates of each policy find moral grounds for their distinct positions; but this does not mean that each can claim absolute and exclusive morality for himself. The morality in one position does not automatically make the opposite position immoral. They are debating practical policy within a moral framework; they are not debating the relative validity of different moral principles. Men of principle have freedom in determining their practical policies, not because they are free to pick and choose their moral standards, but because they must act responsibly according to these standards.

When a policy is formulated within the moral framework it remains moral regardless of alternatives, so long as it stays by those standards and does not go against some distinct moral principle. The American policy of giving aid to Yugoslavia, for instance, was originated to exploit the differences that arose between that country and the Soviet Union. It was done with the full knowledge that Tito is a Communist, but it was nevertheless felt that the division in the Communist camp could have a hobbling effect on Russian aggression. The aim was not the quixotic one of trying to turn a Communist into a friend, but rather to seize upon a weakness in the heretofore united Communist bloc. In the recent visit of Khrushchev to Yugoslavia we have had a reminder that the effort to woo Tito away from the Soviet Union has in fact failed. But success or failure in a policy is not the way to judge its morality. Furthermore, it appears that the renewed ties between Belgrade and Moscow go hand in hand with the policy battle between Soviet Russia and Red China, and that the original small division between Tito’s communism and that of the