

2. The concentration of resources of research and development to make a counter-force strategy possible is a high priority. It is not the object of defense to destroy the enemy, but, rather, to inhibit certain courses of action. We aim to live with him in the future rather than to die with him now.

3. The long-term aim is to work ourselves out of the moat-and-castle age of international affairs into an age where a central government administers a rule of law. This is not simply a matter of idealism—the fate of mankind may depend on the speed with which the Western Alliance develops the maturity to work out a system for the inter-allied control of nuclear weapons. The tendency to value the independence of one's deterrent is a reversion to tribalism and must be denounced. Someone somewhere must make a start in devising the means of international control of ultimate weapons, or we are lost—and I have sufficient respect for the basic worth

of our Western traditions to believe that only within these traditions are the resources to be found to achieve success.

4. It has been the classical tradition that defense policy was a matter for experts and that it was better kept that way. If my general thesis is right, one of our major tasks is to consider defense policy not in isolation but in relation to foreign policy, to international institutions and to the convictions and interests of the civilian population. This means that we must develop organs of discussion for the purpose. I freely acknowledge that this presents at least as great a challenge to civilian groups as it does to defense specialists and one of my preoccupations has been to help produce on the civilian side a contribution to the debate worthy of the importance of the subject. But it will mean also a readiness on the part of Ministries of Defense to have their pet subjects scrambled over by vulgar outsiders.

## **Correspondence**

### **"AN OPEN LETTER TO THE AMERICAN HIERARCHY"**

New York, N.Y.

Dear Sir: In his open letter to the American hierarchy (*worldview*, September), Mr. Thomas Merton apparently intended to speak for "the common man, the poor man, the man who has no hope but in God." Yet, it seems to me, he grievously usurps the representative's role. He celebrates and condemns things when in the subjects touched upon much prudence would be in order, and does so in a tone of shrill triumphalism (is this the fashionable term?) normal for an impatient ideologue, unbecoming a monk.

Mr. Merton belongs to the so-called progressive wing of the Church intelligentsia. It is clear from his letter that he condemns what his fellow-progressives call the "Constantinian" stance, and what I would describe as the acceptance of the fact of power as an ineluctable reality of this world. He then goes on to warn the American hierarchy to make honorable amends at the Council for the fact that they belong to "a nation which is waging an undeclared war." I take this warning to mean: "You, members of the American hierarchy, should use your votes in favor of progressive decisions. You, more than the clergy of other nations, should attempt to outlaw wars and aggressions, so that in the eyes of

the world you might to some extent redeem your nation's guilt." Then, with hardly veiled threat, Merton points out that in recent history Catholics collaborated with another ugly regime, Nazi Germany; if the American hierarchy does not wish to be identified with another "monstrously criminal and unjust aggression," it must seize this unique opportunity, etc.

Grave and unjust as this quasi-blackmail based on an absurd comparison, appears to me, I do not wish to take up quarrel with Mr. Merton on this point; were I to do so, I would be sidetracked into a controversy over the war in Vietnam. The controversy would remain unresolved: I would insist that it is a war to contain a most horrendous enemy, thus a just war, while Mr. Merton would exalt Communists as freedom fighters.

What troubles me much more is that Merton claims to disengage the Church from the Constantinian embrace, that is from political preoccupations, whereas in reality he compels the Church to associate herself even more intimately with the political principle. All that Merton's effort would achieve is changing the identity of the source of political influence on the Church. Instead of linking (if this is the case) the Church to the nation-state and its

aggressions, he would tie her to world government and aggressions on the pattern of the United Nation's attack of Katanga; instead of asking the Church to coexist with capitalist greed, Merton would expect her to coexist with the labor unions' similar appetite for money and power.

This kind of political and philosophical naïveté runs through every passage of Merton's open letter. He says that the common man, etc. wants "protection against the principled machinations of militarists and power politicians." I cannot, of course, accept this simplistic, pre-Marxian presentation of today's (or any other day's) power structure; the common man suffers, now and always, from many ills, abuses, slogans, including those that Merton favors simply by omitting to speak about them. For I am amazed that he does not mention among "unprincipled machinations" the collaboration between certain groups of Catholics and the Communist regimes. Why would German Catholics, fighting in Hitler's war, be one ounce more guilty than the Pax movement in Poland which not only cooperates with the regime but accepts being a servile branch of it? Why is it worse for Pius XI to sign a concordat with Mussolini, than for John XXIII to encourage the *apertura a sinistra* in Italian politics?

Does Merton really not understand that he tries merely to rid the Church of one set of political preferences, and make her embrace another set? The set of preferences he recommends is, of course, his own, although I am sure he would say that his own preferences are non-political, that he wants a de-politicized Church, that his beliefs can be summed up in expressions of pure love and Christian charity. Yet, a man steeped in spiritual meditations, thus aware of human frailty and the power of passions, ought to treat even his own distilled beliefs with a great deal more humility, and therefore criticism.

The choice for the Church implied in Merton's letter is *not* between politics and morality, but between two political *prises de position*: whatever the choice, it can only be justified on the basis of expediency with which pure love and depolitization have precious little to do. Men like La Pira, Dossetti, Chenu hardly make a secret of this fact. They see communism as the great winner, and expect hundreds of years of its domination over minds and bodies. Christians should accept this as inevitable, writes Carlo Falconi, one of the progressives' journalistic mouthpieces (ex-priest) at the Council, and try to change the nature of communism *from inside*, as the early Christians succeeded in changing the nature of the Roman Empire. This is also the position of many French clergy, of M. Montuclard (also

an ex-priest), for example; the Church, guilty of association with the bourgeoisie, must stand aside until Marxism, by integrating the working class into society, prepares the way for a new evangelization.

It is relatively immaterial now that some churchmen and laymen are, as a rule, fifty years behind the times; those who call themselves progressives and celebrate their discovery of Marxism and of the Will of History, simply do not understand that these notions are no longer quite current, and as such are deader than last year's snow. But the point is elsewhere: calling upon the American hierarchy to denounce American policies, Mr. Merton invites them to take political positions, in this instance to repudiate Washington in favor of Hanoi. Hanoi may represent (if we believe La Pira and friends) the wave of political future; but is not defending Hanoi's position, even indirectly, a pure Constantinian option?

Mr. Merton and I have certainly widely different political positions, but this is not the issue here. It may be reasonably assumed, on the other hand, that we both would like to see a more spiritual Church, one resisting the more brutal pressures of the world. But ALL pressures! If the clericalism of conservatives is to be rejected, so should be the progressives' neo-clericalism; if old political alliances stained the Church, so do the new alliances; if the Church as an "auxiliary" of the bourgeoisie is to be deplored, why should we applaud a Church turning into an agency of social workers?

As Charles Péguy said, *le Christianisme n'est pas une religion sociale, c'est la religion du salut.*

THOMAS MOLNAR

### The Author Replies:

Trappist, Kentucky

Dear Sir: Mr. Molnar, having summarily reduced me to the lay state as a punishment for pride, proceeds to a massive distortion of my open letter on Schema XIII, and ends by calling me a Communist. Actually, what I was trying to say was nothing more—and nothing less—than Pope Paul VI said at the U.N. I have no doubt that Mr. Molnar also considers Pope Paul a Communist, since he implies that Pope John was one. I must confess that I feel some movements of pride at finding myself condemned in the company of two great Popes.

To begin with, there was nothing whatever in my open letter that could be interpreted as being in favor of communism, regarding the Viet Cong as freedom fighters and so on. This is all gratuitously assumed by Mr. Molnar, who is addicted to the usual stereotyped right-wing line of thought: "Any-

one who does not see things exactly as I do must be a Red." Therefore I take this opportunity to declare that I have no desire whatever to find myself living under the rigid and coercive rule of any totalitarian dictatorship, whether of the right or of the left. In my opinion they boil down to pretty much the same thing, and those who insist that we must choose between one or the other are in fact much closer to their mirror images on the opposite side than they are to the rest of us who look for other solutions.

If Mr. Molnar had not been so swept away by accusations of treason, he could have cogently stated a difficulty which I see as well as he does. It is this: If the Church utters a sweeping condemnation of modern weapons, this will bind the consciences of Catholic statesmen and soldiers, but Communists will ignore the condemnation. In fact they may even take advantage of it in order to use those same weapons against more scrupulous opponents. This, in Mr. Molnar's view, is tantamount to making a political decision in favor of communism. Hence he argues that the Church should not commit herself to any moral decision that would have unfortunate political consequences for the West. Rather she should make moral decisions which can be used in favor of "our side." This amounts, in effect, to a subordination of faith to *raison d'état*. That is why, though I see the objection, I do not come to the same conclusions. I believe, on the contrary, that the Church must put faith before politics. She has the obligation clearly to define revealed truth in matters of morality, even of public morality in international affairs. She has the obligation to do this

in a prudent and reasonable way (which incidentally I think the Council is doing) and Catholics are obligated to form their consciences accordingly, trusting in God to prevent any untoward consequences which they may fear in the immediate future. By this obedience and trust they will save their souls and serve the cause of God which is not always clearly manifest to us in all its details. The Old Testament and the New are full of warnings that those who trust in human weapons and alliances, rather than in God, will be destroyed in punishment for their unbelief. I do not utter this as a veiled threat against the Pentagon, but only as a plain statement of fact. As a Christian, a monk, and a priest it is my obligation to state such truths, and to do so forcefully when necessary.

It is my opinion (and here I do not speak of matters of faith) that a rigid, aggressive and opportunistic use of force will in the present circumstances be not only futile, but harmful to the cause of the West. There are certainly arguments that can be advanced in favor of taking a strong stand in Vietnam, but as far as I can see it is doing no good whatever, and will only help the cause of communism in Asia. I am certainly not one of those who believe that "communism will win." On the contrary, I do not think either communism or capitalism will win. I think that even if they do not knock each other out they will evolve, along with the rest of the world, perhaps very painfully and violently indeed, into something neither I nor Mr. Molnar have yet imagined. Whether it will be "good" or "bad" I have no idea. That is a matter for prayer.

FATHER THOMAS MERTON

## **Nuclear Weapons:**

# **CAN THEIR SPREAD BE HALTED?**

by

**BETTY GOETZ LALL**

*(former special assistant to the Deputy Director  
of the U.S. Arms Control & Disarmament Agency)*

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