

# THE ISSUE OF PEACE; THE VOICE OF RELIGION

## What Are the Bases for Collective Action?

*John C. Bennett*

A statement on religion and peace should begin with some affirmations about the bases that our churches and synagogues have for speaking and acting in the sphere of international relations.

Underlying all else that we may say or do here is the Biblical faith that God is Lord of our nation and of all nations. As the prophet said, "all the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness" (Is. 40:17). As Amos said earlier: "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?" (9:7). The faith that all nations are under the judgment and providence and mercy of God is central to Biblical religion. Since it is the nation that so easily becomes the ultimate object of loyalty for its citizens, this faith in God transcending the nation is always a warning against national idolatry. And in our time it is political idolatry, the worship of any social group or system, that is the greatest obstacle to the tolerance and humaneness which are essential conditions for decent relations among nations, essential conditions for peace. The form that idolatry takes with people of some sophistication is not so much the explicit worship of the nation as it is the assumption that God is always on the side of one's own nation, an easy assumption when our adversaries are atheists!

A second basis for all that we say or do may be ultimately derived from Biblical faith, but even without being aware of its religious background many people are, fortunately, able to see the truth of it and to be claimed by it for their own lives. I refer to the moral imperatives that, when translated into a social ethic that is relevant to public life, call us to care for the welfare and dignity of all neighbors including enemies, to seek for them justice and freedom. When I speak of justice, I mean a transforming justice that continually raises the level of life of those who have been at a disadvantage. Most of our neighbors in the world are victims of poverty and hunger. Only a revolutionary

justice can help them. I am not suggesting that there are some religious shortcuts to the proper balance in our world of justice and freedom, both of which depend upon some kind of political order. But our religious imperatives do press upon us to seek these values. Our churches and synagogues should continually disturb us and press us to do what is in our power to deliver God's people everywhere from poverty and hunger, from humiliation and oppression, from anarchy and war.

Our problems begin when at a given time we find the quest of one value such as freedom interfering with another such as order or justice. There will be some differences of opinion about this, but I believe that a conference on peace should begin by recognizing that peace is not the only good, that at times it may have to be sacrificed for the sake of other goods. And yet we may still say that total war would probably destroy all the goods for which we strive and that the burden of proof upon those who defend even limited wars must be a heavy one, for limited wars may escalate into total war and nations, including our own, have a habit of assuming too uncritically the moral and political efficacy of military solutions.

I shall add to these bases for what we may do here one more: a realistic understanding of the temptations to which nations are especially vulnerable. Reinhold Niebuhr has a chapter in his *Moral Man and Immoral Society* on the "morality of nations." This is a classic statement of the situation. Let me mention two of his chief emphases: The first is that "patriotism transmutes individual selfishness into national egoism." This enables good men to become the instruments of the pride and ambition and greed of nations. He also emphasized the tendency of nations, including the United States, to clothe the national will with idealistic pretensions. He says that "perhaps the most significant moral characteristic of a nation is hypocrisy." This is a hard saying, but I recommend this chapter as devotional reading to all the speech writers in Washington.

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Professor Herbert Butterfield emphasizes the way in which democracies especially become victims of their own frenzied national self-righteousness. He makes much of the idea that the most furious and cruel conflicts are between what he calls "giant organized systems of self-righteousness" with each system only too delighted to find that the other is wicked, each only too glad that the sins give it the pretext for still deeper hatred and animosity (*Christianity, Diplomacy and War*). This is a fairly accurate description of the relations between the United States and China.

George Kennan reminds us of our own national frenzy in the first world war when our enemy was the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm II, a moderate compared with subsequent adversaries. Kennan says: "There is, let me assure you, nothing more egocentric than the embattled democracy. It soon becomes the victim of its own propaganda. It then tends to add to its own cause an absolute value which distorts its own vision of everything else. Its enemy becomes the embodiment of all evil, its own side, on the other hand, is the center of all virtue" (*Russia and the West*).

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National self-examination and national repentance are difficult though not impossible. But citizens, each with his own background of faith and commitment, can and do repent on behalf of their nations. A national repentance usually depends upon events, often catastrophic events, which convince men of ordinary prudence that the nation has been following a wrong road. One of the responsibilities of churches and synagogues is to interpret such events.

Let me at once put in a corrective for what I have said: from such a statement about the temptations of nations it would be a great error to deduce that we should therefore say "a plague on all houses" and hold ourselves aloof in personal self-righteousness from all of the strivings of our government. We may be tempted to become personally self-righteous because of our criticism of national self-righteousness. Nations at the present time are the only units of power that can do many things that need to be done. Nations have responsibilities that are commensurate with their power. National ideals are not necessarily mere rationalizations of crude national interests. Also, what is in the real national interest of the citizens of a nation has its proper claim so long as it is not dressed up with idealism and ideology and made into an absolute.

Whatever the errors and self-deceptions of the United States, our country was not wrong about the

threat of Hitlerism to humanity and it was not wrong about the need to develop power in the defense of Western Europe against Stalinism. The United States is right today in trying to keep as much of the world as possible open so that nations may choose their own social systems; but it does exaggerate the role of military force in this effort, it is guided by a persistent notion of American omnipotence, and it does clothe its policies with far too simple ideas of freedom and with too absolutistic an anti-communism.

I come now to a question that is asked on all sides whenever churches and synagogues or their leaders speak about these problems of foreign policy and international relations. Always we hear it said that these high matters belong to the experts or to policy makers on the spot who live with the changing details of the problems and who may have access to classified information. We are often believed to be outsiders who are said to have no competence to speak.

It is very difficult to disentangle the moral factors from the technical and in the broadest sense strategic factors in any complicated situation. I shall speak of six areas in which persons who combine religious perspectives and moral sensitivity with a careful attempt to understand the relevant facts, though not specialists or insiders in the government, have a duty and right to speak.

*First* they have a duty and a right to call attention to the immediate human consequences of any policy. This in itself may not be decisive because there is always the question of the probably human consequences of changing the policy. Yet, this question should not silence the critic. The human consequences of an alternative policy in many cases may be quite speculative and, however one judges that, what our nation may now be doing to people needs to be kept to the fore.

*Second*, the determination of the goals of policy is a matter of moral choice. Dean Acheson, in his provocative speech at Amherst College in 1964 about morality and foreign policy was right in dismissing many moral slogans as inadequate guides to policy, but when he came to his own statement of the goal of American policy he said that our goal was "to preserve and foster an environment in which free societies may exist and flourish." Is not his own phrase "free societies" another one-sided moral slogan? How is this freedom to be related to a transforming justice and to order and viability in a nation in a period of tumultuous and revolutionary change?

Without taking time for analysis, I shall dogmatically state four goals that should guide our

policy. They are all moral goals but they are all consistent with a wise estimate of the conditions for our own national welfare and security in the long run. They are as follows: (i) the prevention of war and especially the prevention of the escalation of any conflict into general nuclear war; (ii) the preservation of as wide an area as possible of openness in the world in which nations have freedom to choose their own social systems, in which there is diversity and mutual respect among those who choose diverse paths; (iii) the helping of nations that are struggling against hunger and poverty to achieve justice and access to plenty and to do so in their way and not necessarily in our way, (iv) support for the United Nations and development of its functions to enable nations to find security and multilateral substitutes for the present arms race, to extend the rule of law among nations and encourage the growth of mutual confidence and human relations between them. At any given moment there may be a fierce debate among moralists concerning the priority that is to be assigned to each of these goals. This is where morality necessarily becomes contextual. But let no context in which we may be called to act obscure any one of them. The assignment of priorities is not a matter for the expert alone. It does not depend on classified information. It should not be the monopoly of the policy maker. It should be a subject of continuous national discussion to which churches and synagogues can make an essential contribution.

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The *third* area of moral concern has to do with the means used to achieve any or all of these ends. Here there will be much debate among us between those who represent a religious pacifism and those who believe that we must allow for the use of military force to check force or to overcome oppression. I belong to the latter group but the issues are so difficult that I often wish that I did not. For one thing, I am much impressed today by the probability that even uses of force that have some justification easily escalate and even when this process remains limited, do more harm than good. Can we not agree on two forms of limitation of force? One is that we should not use bombs, nuclear or conventional, against centers of population as was done in the second world war and as our own government now threatens as a last resort. I know that we are at a stage in which it is plausible to allow some license to what may be called "deterrent talk" even though it is murderous. I am not clear about this myself except that I believe that this cannot go on

for long without being very much a source of moral corruption to a nation that engages in it. The other form of limitation of force is to resolve never to use nuclear weapons first. There are difficult technical problems here mixed with moral problems; for example, problems involving the differences between types of nuclear weapons and their relation to conventional weapons.

While we discuss these matters in general terms, we should give strong support to those in our government who resolutely refuse to bomb Hanoi or to extend our bombing to China. If it is true that the President feels stronger pressure from those who would expand the war than he does from those who would restrict it or end it now, whatever else we may think about our policy in Vietnam, we should be able to agree on our responsibility to counteract that pressure.

A *fourth* area in which religious groups can make a contribution is in helping the American people to see the world as it appears to other countries and especially as it appears to people in Asia and Africa and Latin America—for they get less of a hearing among us than the European nations. Our churches have close relations with the churches in these other continents. What we hear from our fellow churchmen there reflects much more than an inside church point of view; it reflects widely held views in their nations.

Let me give one illustration of this kind of contribution: The General Board of the National Council of Churches in a message to the American churches last December put great emphasis on the self-defeating character of our action in Vietnam because of its effects on the sensibilities of Asians. Here is one very forthright statement:

We believe that if the United States follows a unilateral policy in Vietnam, no conceivable victory there can compensate for the distrust and hatred of the United States that is being generated each day throughout the world because we are seen as a predominantly white nation using our overwhelming military strength to kill more and more Asians.

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches made a similar statement in February:

The primary objective must be to stop the fighting as the most effective step to starting discussions and negotiations. This is not an easy task and we are not unaware of the deep-rooted obstacles which have thus far prevented progress from the battlefield to the conference table. This is all the more urgent because by continuing the conflict both sides face acute problems. On the one hand the United States of America and its allies face increase of bitter racial and other

resentments against the West, and on the other hand the Vietnamese face the vast destruction of their people and resources. The prospect of victory at the end of the conflict does not justify this inevitable cost.

I do not suggest that churches have a monopoly of wisdom concerning the more intangible effects of our policies on other peoples, but they do have an inside track to this kind of understanding and it is easy for the policy makers and experts in any one country to be so absorbed with a problem from the dominant point of view in their country that they fail to see how self-defeating their policies may be. Also they often gain a vested interest in policies and so rather than admit an error, they extend the range of their commitment in the hope of proving that they were right. This need not be a conscious process.

The *fifth* area in which those who are not specialists and those who are not policy makers on the spot may make a contribution has to do with the presuppositions of policy, expressed or unexpressed. Is it not probable that on important matters of foreign policy that go beyond limited tactical decisions, our makers and defenders of policy are governed less by facts of which they may have a monopoly, than they are by various assumptions about our period of history? Assumptions on many matters are determinative, e.g., about the dynamics of communism in its various stages, about the role of military power in the containment of communism in a revolutionary situation, about the meaning of social revolution on other continents, about the place of freedom in relation to other values, about the relevance of our experience in dealing with Hitler and Stalin in Europe to the way in which we deal with problems in Asia, about the degree of the risks of nuclear war involved in our policy and about our moral right to take such risks. Military expertise is no guarantee of wisdom about any one of them. And on some of them decisions may be made on the highest level on the basis of an unexamined line of thought that has become dominant.

Churches and synagogues have no monopoly of wisdom about these matters either, but they do have their contribution to make. These issues belong to the sphere of public debate. They need the widest possible ventilation from all sides with many voices heard from other countries. I believe that at the present time, especially in relation to Asia and Latin America, our policy makers are in a rut about many of these issues.

A *final* contribution the churches and synagogues can make to the national discussion of these issues,

is to criticize the false uses of religion and morality that are so common. This means criticism of the psychology of the "holy war" that is one factor in the American attitude toward the cold war. This means alertness concerning all forms of national self-righteousness. It also calls for a continuous examination of the use of such words as "honor," "obligation," and "commitment," when our policy in Vietnam is defended by spokesmen in government. Honor is an especially ambiguous word and it is difficult to distinguish between its use to refer to national face-saving and its use to refer to a genuine moral obligation.

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I shall limit myself to a discussion of one of these issues that seems to be most pervasive, and that is the view that we hold of communism. At the present time in many situations one major source of error in the determination of policy is an absolutistic anti-communism. I do not believe that this is always so, for in relation to European communism this outlook has been in large measure abandoned. The breaking of the Communist monolith by the Sino-Soviet split, the gradual humanization of society in the Soviet Union and most of the Eastern Communist countries, the diverse paths taken by these Eastern European nations—these developments fortunately have influenced American policy. We now know intellectually, even if this knowledge is not fully absorbed, that for a nation to become Communist does not mean that it is lost for all time to Stalinist slavery. The American rhetoric of a decade ago that kept contrasting the free world with the slave world has fortunately disappeared in the highest circles of government, though to a considerable extent it continues to influence the public.

No influence has been more helpful in counteracting the American anti-Communist obsession than that of Pope John XXIII and the Vatican Council. Pope John did much to expel the holy war psychology in relation to communism from his Church and from other churches. It is most significant that the Vatican Council refused to take action condemning communism and that it initiated steps leading to dialogue with atheists, including Marxist atheists.

Yet the American obsession with anti-communism keeps appearing, especially when we seem ready to declare that we must oppose all wars of liberation in Asia and Latin America if they are inspired by one of the branches of international communism.

I believe that we should help nations that can be helped to find alternatives to communism because,

however much a Communist society may improve after some decades, it does bring terror and tyranny in the early stages to any country that embraces it. I do think that we should put over against this fact the recognition that Communists have no monopoly on terror. The recent slaughter of Communists in Indonesia by the hundreds of thousands should remind us of this. Political cruelty on all sides in tumultuous situations is so common that it should perhaps gain our attention more than it does.

The axiom that communism is the worst fate that can ever come to any country is false. It may not be worse than years and years of civil war; it may not be worse than some rightist tyrannies; it may not be worse than some decades or even generations of neglected social and economic problems. Communism is cruel in its early stages and it has not been successful in dealing with all problems, the problem of agriculture for example. But after the revolutionary period it does become in many ways constructive; it does overcome anarchy, it does deal radically with famine and poverty and disease and illiteracy. If it can be gradually humanized, as it is in European Communist countries, our nation should not take all measures to prevent a nation in Asia from becoming Communist. It may be that people will vote themselves into communism, but how far self-determination in this sense can be a reality in situations of civil war and revolution is debatable. One fine day there might be a free election, but what is to prevent its results from being overturned six months later? The pressure and counter-pressure of political movements in such situations seem to determine the fate of nations whether there are elections or not. We in America do not like to have it so, but there are some things that are beyond our control and when we try to control them we may do far more harm than good, despite fine motives.

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I cannot speak of communism without dealing with China. As we face the reality of China as a vast human power—whether it is moved primarily by communism or by nationalism—churches and synagogues have no expert knowledge of what is happening in that country; nor can they read the minds of the Chinese leaders, those who will pass from the scene or those soon to assume power. The doctrines and slogans of the Chinese which seem to scare our Defense Department are paranoiac, even though Chinese behavior has so far been prudent and cautious. Who is to decide how significant the doctrines and the slogans are? James Reston raises the question as to whether this is for the Defense

Department to decide. Without attempting to decide we can ask ourselves some questions.

Communism has been the instrument by which China has been unified, by which it has become able to assert itself among the nations, by which it has been able to purge itself of the effects of generations of humiliation at the hands of the white West. Why must we take all that China does now against us with such seriousness and forget for how long she has been the victim of the Western powers of which this nation is now the chief representative? Why must we have a double standard to do near the borders of China what we would never allow China to do near our borders? Why are we still involved in the Chinese civil war as the major ally of Nationalist China? Is there no possibility of our changing our attitudes toward China even though we know that a tragic history and the fanaticism of early communism make it unlikely that China will soon change her attitude toward us? How long are we to be engaged in diplomatic efforts to keep Communist China isolated? Should our policy not be designed with all the imagination we can muster to undercut the paranoia of China, not exacerbate it?

In our religious communities there should be continued efforts to counteract national attitudes in regard to China. The General Board of the National Council of Churches called recently for a reversal of American policies that are designed to isolate China and for preparation for the widest variety of relations between the United States and China.

China today is relatively weak. If we take advantage of her weakness to keep her down, to deny her even her natural role as the greatest power in Asia, a role that we assume for ourselves in this hemisphere, if we isolate her and continue to express our own hostility against her, punctuated by moral lectures, we may find ourselves face to face fifteen years from now with a powerful China that has every reason to seek revenge upon us. I do not say that this prospect should be the main motive for a change of attitude and a change of policy but it does indicate the kind of judgment that will come upon us if we do not do so.

Churches and synagogues should provide an environment in our country within which these questions are continually raised and in which new attitudes can begin to form. I hope and pray that new relationships will become possible between our religious communities and the people of mainland China. We often hear that our government would like to change its policy in many respects but that it is afraid of the people. If so, let us do what we can to support its desire for change among the peo-

ple and let us ask the representatives of government to give some leadership if they do seek such change.

One final word. I have said very little about the United Nations and the institutions of world order, but I believe that churches and synagogues should not only give strong support to the United Nations and to efforts to improve its working but should now put great stress on the need for multilateral judgments upon American actions. The United States gets some support for its Asian policies from European allies and from nations on the eastern fringe of Asia, and doubtless it is always easy to find people around the world who are somewhat ambivalent because they see in the power of the United States the only countervailing power east of Suez. But let us not expect very much of this support and let us

not allow it to lead to self-justification. Whatever anyone here may think of American policy to date in Vietnam, there is a terribly dangerous momentum in our power. We may easily become its prisoner. Also, the mounting of national self-justification may gradually cause the self-criticism that now exists to erode. There is danger that more complete moral isolation is not far away. Unless we find ways to submit our policies—policies that affect all mankind—to a far broader judgment than is now the case we may become a nation possessed by a destructive determination to have our own way in Asia. Our religious communities are called to be an inner check on this development. This first interfaith conference dealing with these issues should begin to prepare to meet this call.

## correspondence

### "THE CIA AND PENKOVSKY"

South Ozone Park, N.Y.

Dear Sir: I am puzzled by what seem to be contradictions in Paul W. Blackstock's article "CIA and the Penkovsky Affair" (*worldview*, February 1966).

1) The "Bessedovsky school" is described as intent on telling "the dirtiest possible stories" about "Stalin and Molotov" while observing "one invariable rule: Never attack the Soviet Union and always present the masters of the Kremlin in a sympathetic and favorable light."

2) Soviet General Vlossov who was captured by the Germans and fought on their side during World War II is said to have "liberated Prague" (!).

VINCENT A. BROWN

#### *The Author Replies*

Columbia, S.C.

Dear Sir: When questioned with respect to contradictions in his logic Stalin once replied, "Yes, this is a contradiction, but it is a good Soviet contradiction." The same observation applies to the technique used by the Bessedovsky school of filling fraudulent memoirs with "the dirtiest possible stories," thus pandering to the public taste for the sensational, and then using the same vehicle for expounding the Soviet propaganda line. The French Communist paper *Humanité* uses the same technique when it gives front page, headline coverage to *crimes passionnels*. In the case of Bessedovsky's *The Soviet Marshals Speak*, the entire political-military elite was portrayed as being firmly in control of the situation (under Stalin's wise and prescient leadership) at the

time of the Nazi invasion. Nothing could have been farther from the truth!

With respect to the liberation of Prague by Vlassovite forces under the dissident General Buniachenko who had defected to the German side, there are few comparable tragic ironies in the history of World War II.

By the end of April 1945 two divisions of the "Vlassov Army" of Soviet defectors fighting on the German side had rebelled against the suicidal missions assigned to them and had withdrawn to positions east of Dresden and about thirty miles southwest of Prague. The city which was occupied by S.S. forces revolted about May 5th, and the revolutionary Czech National Council called on the dissident troops of the First Vlassov division to aid in the uprising. After two days of savagely bitter fighting the scales were tipped in favor of the Czech uprising by the Vlassov forces under command of General Buniachenko. Regular Soviet forces did not enter the city until after the German surrender on May 9 but have since been credited exclusively by Soviet propaganda with the "liberation of Prague." The Vlassov units, after learning to their dismay that by Allied agreements U.S. forces were prevented from occupying Prague, withdrew on the 8th to Czech territory occupied by U.S. troops. From thence they were later forcibly deported and turned over to the tender mercies of the Soviet occupying forces. Many of the Vlassov troops committed suicide by cutting their wrists as they were herded into box cars, thus ending one of the most tragic episodes of the last days of Hitler's "thousand-year Reich."

PAUL W. BLACKSTOCK