

# THE CHRISTIAN HERO, MODEL 1967

Can He Live with Ease in the Nation-State?

Quentin L. Quade

"Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic, or social order. The purpose which He set before her is a religious one." This is a formulation which the Bishops of the Catholic Church asserted in the Conciliar document *The Church in the Modern World* in the chapter devoted to "The Fostering of Peace and the Promotion of a Community of Nations." From this statement one should not conclude to the political irrelevance of religion. Rather, he should seek further for the precise mode of that relevance; he will find it, I believe, in the religiously enlightened person acting politically. As the document continued: "Acknowledging the demands of faith and endowed with its force, they [these enlightened persons] will unhesitatingly devise new enterprises, where they are appropriate, and put them into action." We must do what must be done. To expect "the Church" to do it is a kind of escapism.

Thus, one is frustrated by the generalized character of the prescriptions of the Vatican Council only if he mistook the Council's character and competence. The Council's prescriptions become politically pertinent in persons who are politically pertinent. Those prescriptions become relevant insofar as such persons accept them as principles, in which case those principles become, in effect, step one in the prudential process leading to concrete acts by the individual and political groups.

But if Vatican II rightly confined itself to generalities, the citizen must not so confine himself. Those generalities are, in a sense, the foundation on which to build a specific, more or less concrete analysis. As a vehicle for doing this, I will construct a model. The model will be my perception of the Christian Hero, 1967, in terms of his world political ethic. My hero has accepted Par. II, Chapter 5 of *The Church in the Modern World* and, having accepted it, has now turned to figuring out what to do with it.

In one respect this hero is the same hero I would have in any other age. That is, he is the man in whom perception, judgment, and act practically fuse. Unlike one kind of hero today, my hero does not take

undifferentiated act alone to be sufficient, or even fully human. For my hero, it must be *an* act, *this* one, not any act, and accordingly it must be rationally perceived, defensible, and consciously chosen from among many possible acts.

But in another respect, this Christian model will be new, because his situation is new, his options are new, his responsibilities for knowing, judging, and acting are new. If my hero's vision is unclouded, what will he perceive now as being the dominant realities of world politics? In light of these realities, what options will he recognize as possible techniques for fulfilling his religious commitment in the political order? How should he judge among these options, and what specific actions might he take?

The basic religious commitment of my hero which is pertinent here is his belief in the brotherhood of all men. All men are his brothers, and he is beholden to each. He will strive to integrate this religious perception with his political understanding, and from this integration will emerge his world political ethic. It will be a viable ethic, but a difficult one, encompassing two distinct and equally necessary dimensions. In a sense, the test of this man will be his ability to proceed judgmentally on *both* levels, neither neglecting nor overemphasizing either. Failure for him would be to adopt, out of frustration or intellectual limitation, an either/or posture. He must learn to recognize, live with, and control these two ethical facts: first, the nation-state and the nation-state system are in a sense good — at least a good of a sort; second, the nation-state and the nation-state system must be transcended and finally discarded.

The *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* is permeated with an implicit awareness of the two-fold and tension-filled reality of today's world which, in my judgment, necessitates a two-fold and tension-filled ethic. It did not reconcile the duality, but it certainly provided witness to it. Consider, for example, these passages:

Every day human interdependence grows more tightly drawn and spreads by degrees over the whole world. As a result the common good, that

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is, the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment, today takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties to the whole human race. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, *and even of the general welfare of the entire human family.* (#26, emphasis added.)

God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people. (#69.)

Citizens should develop a generous and loyal devotion to their country, but without any narrowing of mind. [There is the tension, and the problem.] In other words, they must always look simultaneously [how difficult, but how true — not an either/or proposition] to the welfare of the whole human family, which is tied together by the manifold bonds linking races, peoples, and nations. (#75.)

The political reality reflected in these paragraphs informs and specifies my hero's religious commitment, and from this interaction emerges the two-dimensional ethic suggested above. What torturous analytical route must my hero follow to arrive at this ethic?

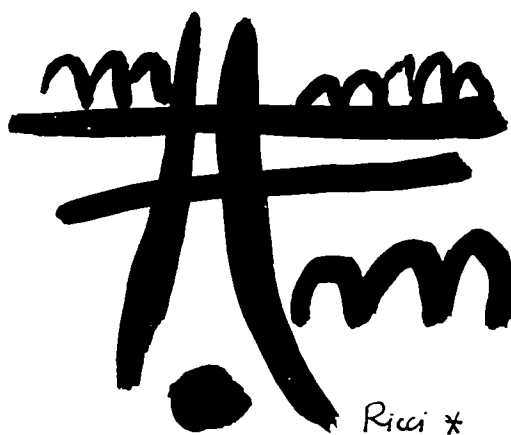
The first step is to recognize that man is, indeed, a political animal requiring a political order for his existence. Both the freedom he cherishes and the fulfillment he seeks presuppose an authoritative social structure which frees him by maintaining a predictable order for his activities.

Next, he must see that the present mode of this good political authority, the nation-state, is an historically justified condition. He will see, for example, that its development in the West was an advance over previous political structures, that the communities thus created have in the past been capable of greatness, as well as great folly. This may most clearly be seen in the vast desire we have to see genuine national integrity achieved in such atomistic societies as Nigeria or Vietnam. He will understand that it has been rational for men to give their allegiance to their states, though that allegiance should never have been blind. He will, in short, not belittle the nationalistic sense of community which has motivated and still motivates so many men.

But, though the present arrangement of political authority seems historically justified, my noble Christian will perceive another fact: the nation-state system invariably gives rise to human conflict as the many states seek, legitimately or otherwise, their particular interests, their non-common common goods. At

its worst, this conflict leads to war. Thus, though the nation-state system is a good, it can only be seen as a good-of-a-sort from the Christian perspective of human brotherhood.

Now recognizing this—that the nation-state has been good but is not good enough to bring peace with some order and justice to all men — my hero will extend his perception one step further: peace or the prevention of war has only been brought about by the politicization of a given territory. Peace will not come from a perfect harmonization of the inevitably conflicting interests of many nation-states, but only by the development of a universal polity. Thus, this paragon concludes that *the good* in terms of preventing the ultimate calamity of war would be the development of a world state.



He knows, of course, that the abstract ideal of a world state is not original with him. Any Christian might have followed his reasoning at any time in history and have thus concluded. Indeed, we know that many have done so. But there is a difference between my hero's situation and that of his counterparts of one, or two, or five centuries ago. The Christian hero of 1467 might have concluded identically from abstract reasoning, but when he applied his abstraction to the real world around him he would have found it fundamentally hostile to his conclusion. He would have seen that the real world of 1467 was enormously large, and that the political vistas of most men were woe-fully small. He would have found that even if many felt as he did, they did not have the technical capacity to rule the entire world or, indeed, any preponderant portion of it. In brief, he would have decided that his abstract conclusion, though<sup>1</sup> logically true to his religious commitment, was simply not feasible. And being a prudent man, he would realize that the historical conditions made it impossible to act on his abstract conclusion. For him, since the world state

could not be, the proper imperative was to try to influence his nation-state to act with justice toward others.

But my hero, 1967-style, sees the good of a world polity as more than simply a desirable abstraction, for he is able to consider it both feasible and urgent. These three qualities taken together – desirability, feasibility, and urgency – transform the good of world polity from a pleasant contemplative object to a moral imperative actually to be sought.

What has changed between 1467 and 1967 is not the religious commitment to the universality of human brotherhood, but the circumstances within which that commitment exists, and my hero knows that this has changed his responsibilities. When he applies his abstract conclusion to the concrete world, he learns that the world is sharply smaller than it was in 1967—the much-noted shrinking of the world is actually true. And while he still does not find many people prepared to transcend the nation-state, he does find a growing number scattered the world over, for whom the nation-state no longer makes good sense. He finds some who, by virtue of working on international projects, have begun to develop something like a world sense. He finds others who evidence this beginning transcendence negatively, by openly questioning the legitimacy of nation-state decisions. And while he does not conclude from these fragments that the world state is upon us, he judges that such things represent the beginning of the passing of the nation-state.

And, of course, this hero grasps that the technical barriers which confronted his 1467 predecessor are gone. It is technically possible to rule this globe under one just political order. Indeed, it could be easier than was the governance of this single country a century and a half ago.

The desirability of a world polity for this Christian is clear, as it always was; the feasibility of a world polity has *begun* to emerge; but equally important, the urgency is indisputable. To put it very simply, the system of nation-states has taken on a potential for ugliness which it did not have in prior times. Nuclear war is only the most dramatic of the possibilities.

From this deliberative process, my Christian hero concludes what I forecast: that today an acceptable world political ethic must have two dimensions which must live together. He recognizes the validity of the present situation of many nation-states, and the fact that these states are legitimate actors on the international scene. He does not, therefore, deliberately endanger his nation-state, but at the same time he does not mistake it for *the good*. And, while using the nation-state as a just vehicle, he begins to promote the transcendence of the nation-state system.

With his one ethic of two parts thus elaborated, how does this Christian respond to prevailing circumstances? What specific policies does he advocate, and what specific actions does he himself take?

In the present situation, which may not be sacrificed in the name of the sought-after future, this man seeks the good for all even while all are splintered and even opposed. He seeks, among other things, to prevent war, the unhappiest manifestation of division and conflict. But he seeks also a difficult-to-define but nonetheless real justice, which is another way of saying that, given the presence of many competing states, the prevention of war, though a good, is not the *only* good he seeks. He subscribes to the Council's judgment that "Peace is not merely the absence of war. Nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies. Nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead it is rightly and appropriately called 'an enterprise of justice.'" (#78.)

The prevention of injustice is for this man a value at least as great as the prevention of war. But to perceive as he does the presence of *several* goods to be sought, goods which can and do conflict, is to recognize that a just action demands not simply a reflection on normative principles but a prudential assessment of alternatives. Confronted with a threatened significant injustice, the hero's nation – with the hero's blessing – may assess the use of force as a suitable means to prevent or redress the injustice. Indeed, it may be just to contemplate *this* war as a means to prevent a larger, more horrendous one. Or, better put, the prevention of a larger, more horrendous war may be *one* of the factors which would justify *this* war.

Precisely such considerations incline my Christian hero to endorse the substance of American policy in Vietnam presently. The threat to world order and justice implicit in a Communist victory does, in his view, justify U.S. intervention. The encouragement such a victory would give to comparable activities elsewhere causes him to believe that U.S. withdrawal would enhance the possibility of larger war in circumstances even more conducive to uncontrolled escalation. This Christian forms this judgment with no great confidence, but in the knowledge that a judgment must be made, and the evidence as he sees it points in the direction of justified war.

But there is the problem, all over again. My hero began this journey to prevent war among men. Yet here he is advocating and defending a very brutish war. It suggests to me that the odds of preventing war while the earth is politically divided are poor odds indeed. In one sense it is ludicrous even to pursue the

question of the prospects for preventing war given the state of the world. Vietnam is a war, as was the Indian-Pakistani clash of a short time ago. But even if Vietnam vanished and Kashmir had never been an issue, the odds for preventing war are not favorable *in general*. If a gambler uses loaded dice or a marked deck, he controls his fate. But if he does not employ such devices, he will still know his fate reasonably well by studying and obeying the odds in craps or poker. When I say peace as such seems unlikely, I am not acting as a deterministic controller but rather as the gambler who has studied the odds. They are not encouraging.

Summarily, my hero determines that as long as the political motif of the world is multi-statism, his nation is responsible for the utilization of its power, and he knows that will involve in some situations the application of force. This reaffirms his earlier conviction that while justly using the nation-state, he is obliged simultaneously to recognize its ultimate futility. Accordingly, he turns to a second kind of policy recommendation and personal action to pursue the ultimate good of a world polity.

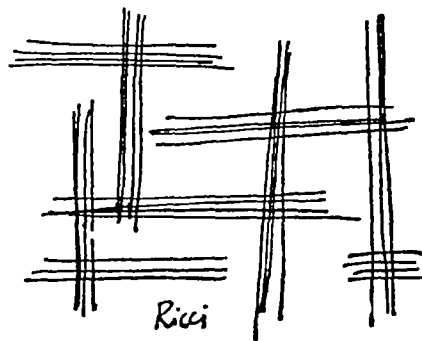
While recognizing the present weaknesses in the United Nations, NATO, and other supranational agencies, this man will advocate their use whenever possible and will also advocate additions to their functions when feasible. More concretely, he will seek to internationalize the wealth of the world more completely than is presently the case. As one step in this direction, for example, he will argue for the dispersal of foreign aid funds through international agencies and through private charitable agencies, and encourage other aid-giving nations to employ the same devices. Furthermore, he would urge the recipient nations to develop supranational systems of utilizing aid funds.

And using such devices, he will seek to multiply the flat amount of such aid tremendously. The first year's funds in the Marshall Plan — over \$4 billion — represented more than two per cent of our Gross National Product of approximately \$200 billion. We have fallen to less than one-half of one per cent now, while glutting ourselves unprecedentedly. My hero, being a student of politics rather than an economist, cannot say precisely what the limits on aid are, but he is certain that two per cent or five or ten times the present rate would not bankrupt us.

And if he is told that the impoverished nations could not usefully absorb twenty-five billion dollars of aid, he wonders if that is absolutely true, or only relatively true — relative, that is, to the fact that imaginativeness and ingenuity have not abounded in our foreign aid programs since the Marshall Plan. He

wonders, for example, if charitable mission organizations could not find secular ways to spend ten or fifty times the amounts of money they presently receive. He wonders, in short, if there are not several quite concrete ways in which we might promote a practical internationalization of wealth, all of which he perceives to be intrinsically universal.

But such things as this are obvious and, in a sense, of secondary importance. For my Christian model understands that the largest tasks are in the internal political structures of the major nations. One such task may be called the general task of public education. He will undertake a public education program aimed not at the abandonment or weakening of the nation-state, but aimed at establishing the fact that the nation-state should be used ultimately to transcend itself. To all those who share his ethical commitment regarding the brotherhood of many, my hero will argue precisely that the nation-state is only a good-of-a-sort, a second best.



To those who do not share this ethical perspective, he will suggest that transcending the nation-state can be seen to be in one's self-interest. Presumably, for example, we all share a desire to avoid nuclear destruction, and transcendence of the nation-state would better guarantee that. In open societies such as our own, my hero and his counterparts will have to take the message to the public and present it as a genuine and desirable alternative.

But anyone who knows the operational characteristics of political systems knows that public opinion and will are only partial determinants of what political systems actually do. Another determinant is the desire on the part of those in power to maintain their power — the phenomenon of vested interest and self-perpetuation. My hero, accordingly, will have to begin serious study of the tendency of institutional systems to perpetuate themselves for he is, after all, going to ask these same systems to subordinate themselves sometime in the future, to incorporate themselves in a higher political order, a world state. An investigation, for example, of American state legisla-

tures' often self-generated struggles to fend off political nationalization suggests how monumental will be the task of transforming national systems from their present semi-autonomy to subordinate roles.

And, finally, this Christian will add to his general prescription for transcendence of the nation-state this most-important modifier: there must be a certain simultaneousness among the nation-states of the world. He knows the transcendence of the nation-state is imprudent, indeed extremely dangerous and a defaulting responsibility, *if* one is talking about just one state, or even several. Even if, for instance, the U.S. and Great Britain contained significant sentiment in favor of a world state, my hero would advocate shelving such sentiment until it was shared by new nations, e.g., Indonesia, and closed societies, e.g., the USSR. For my Christian hero would know that such sentiment not shared by other powers would invite disaster by tempting the covetous one. This illustrates what I suggested earlier: the ethic must have two parts, and neither must submerge the other.

The Council said: "Insofar as men are sinful, the threat of war hangs over them, and hang over them it will until the return of Christ. But to the extent

that men vanquish sin by a union of love, they will vanquish violence as well, and make these words come true: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.'" (#78.)

That may be the peace of the Christian ideal. The peace of which I have spoken is not this peace, though we may seek to build it out of Christian idealism. The peace of which I have spoken presumes rather that men *are* sinful or unenlightened, and that as long as there are many nations and many sovereigns, the swords will stay swords, the spears will stay spears, and indeed that they will be used and in some situations *should* be used.

But believing that, I must believe further that this cannot be the supreme good for me or for others. The present political condition is historically justified, currently necessary, and therefore good in a sense — but crucially inadequate. And so I must see that while I cannot ignore the prevailing circumstances, neither can I forego the attempt to transcend those circumstances, to transcend the condition of multiple sovereigns.

## **other voices**

### **RESPECT FOR DISSENT**

*Although the Congress is sure to extend the present Selective Service Act for another four years, virtually intact, the preceding debate brought to the surface a number of questions about the draft which will continue to incite debate and dissent. One of these is, of course, the problem of the selective conscientious objector.*

*A perspective on this question was offered by Roger Shinn in a statement to the Senate Armed Services Committee on April 14, as a representative of the Council for Christian Social Action of the United Church of Christ. His statement, as adopted for publication in the May Council Journal, monthly journal of The Council for Higher Education of the United Church of Christ, is reprinted below.*

The Council for Christian Social Action of the United Church of Christ maintains that a person might be an authentic conscientious objector to some wars or to most wars without being "conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form." We ask that our public law recognize such freedom of conscience.

We have no illusions that total freedom is possible. We believe that freedom carries responsibility, that responsibility sometimes requires acceptance of the judgments of others. All of us obey laws that are inconvenient and costly. Probably we obey laws that we would write differently, if we had the choice, or laws that we actually oppose. Every time that I make out an income tax return, I realize once again that I