

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

favor some changes in tax policies and in governmental expenditures. But responsibility means that I abide by the law that has been duly enacted.

However, any free society must be extremely reluctant to demand that people violate their consciences or turn their consciences over to the state. To require any man to do what in his profoundest faith is morally abhorrent is an offense against the freedom of us all. Freedom, if it means anything, means respect for dissent. It does not mean agreeing that the dissenter is right, that his moral judgment is superior to that of the nation or government. He may or may not be right. The point is that he disagrees with the powers that be on the issue of what is right. We respect his right to disagree — not to withdraw from social responsibility but to accept a form of responsibility that he can justify to his conscience.

The issue is especially troublesome at the point of war. Here we call on men to undertake what to any morally sensitive person is a portentous act: to kill other people. It is not surprising that throughout its long history Christianity has always found among its membership those who refuse to wage war. Their rights of conscience are guarded by our law. But for the past fifteen centuries the majority of Christians have said that there are “just” or “justifiable” wars — that sometimes war is a painful necessity, or the best available alternative in the face of unbearable injustice. However, it has never said that all wars are right. It has put upon its people the moral burden of distinguishing between the justifiable and the unjustifiable war.



In the very logic of the case, nobody — whether a churchman or not — can possibly believe that all parties in all wars are morally justified. Of course, human nature being what it is, most people will believe that the wars their own countries fight are righteous. But are *all* persons to be locked into the judgment of the majority or of the government in power? Those who believe in an all-powerful state can let the issue stop there. The rest of us must say that men of conscience have a right and responsibility to make moral decisions that may differ from those of the government.

If we examine our recent and contemporary history, we find many examples of moral judgments insisting that men have no right to turn over their consciences

to the state. In the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals, our own government as well as the international tribunal insisted that men had a responsibility for the exercise of conscience, if necessary in disobedience of their governments. The Vatican Council in Schema XIII, “The Church and the Modern World,” declared that “blind obedience” to authorities was no excuse for committing military atrocities, and it praised those who “openly and fearlessly resist” such commands (#79).

Neither of these cases refers specifically to the issue of conscientious objection to participation in war. But both make the point emphatically that a man has no moral right to turn his conscience over to the state; rather he has a responsibility to reject the judgment of the state if he believes that judgment to be morally wrong. The fact that he is not a complete pacifist does not commit him to accepting all judgments of the state. If we recognize that principle, are we not required to say that in some times and places men have a duty to object to the wars that their nations are fighting? And if we say that, must we not also allow for the possibility that some of our own citizens may have a duty to their own consciences to object to wars that our own nation fights? The issue is not, I repeat, whether we agree with their judgment. It is whether we recognize their conscientious right to perform some alternative form of service instead of the military service that they believe is morally wrong.

The Council for Christian Social Action believes that the time has come for America to extend its traditional respect for the conscience of the dissenter. We think it is not enough to accord this respect to those who are, in the words of the present law, “conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form.” We believe that the Congress should “amend the Selective Service Act to provide suitable alternatives of military or civilian service for those who on grounds of conscience object to participation in a particular war.” Those words come from a proposed resolution, already approved by the Council for Christian Social Action, to be submitted to the General Synod of the United Church of Christ at its biennial meeting in June of 1967.

We realize that our proposal would be difficult to implement. We do not pretend that it would be easy. But freedom often makes difficulties. And our society at its best has not avoided responsibilities because they are hard. If we genuinely believe in the dignity of the person and if we respect conscience, we must be ready to go to some trouble so that we will not compel our citizens to act against their own deepest convictions.

Our proposal, although difficult, is not impossible. It requires local draft boards and appeal boards to examine some claims of conscience that they now must reject out of hand. The people who now operate our Selective Service machinery will need to examine the cases of some conscientious objectors, who do not meet the requirements of the present law, with great care. But these public servants already have experience in this kind of inquiry. And our proposal gives them a new freedom. Like the prospective inductee, they are freed from the rigid categories that divide men into across-the-board pacifists or soldiers. Some of them will not welcome the extra work, but will welcome release from the painful task of coercing consciences.

It has been argued that we are obscuring the plain clarity of the present law, which assumes that a consistent pacifist is probably acting out of conscience whereas the man who would fight in some but not all wars is merely expressing his political opinions about wars. We think this judgment is erroneous. We grant that there is some element of reason, perhaps even political judgment, in all workings of conscience. But surely the man who distinguishes among wars *can* be acting out of conscience. It may even be that his conscience is too sensitive to accept the glib all-or-none decision that the present law requires.

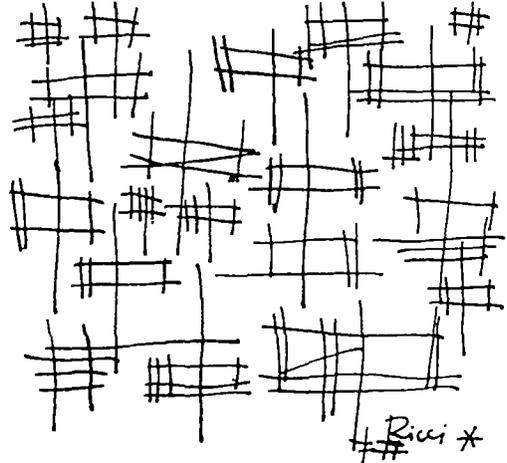
Again, it has been argued that our proposal will encourage evasion of the draft. That is not our aim, and we doubt that it would be the result of our plan. We hear of men getting married or continuing in school to avoid the draft; we hear of few choosing the difficult way of conscientious objector to dodge the draft. And if a few should do so, surely they would have an easier time pretending to oppose all wars than explaining to skilled interrogators why on grounds of conscience they accept some wars but oppose others.

Finally, it has been argued that our proposal presents an impossible administrative burden. To that we say, the burden is certainly not impossible. We know, as a matter of fact, that the British system has for years carried a similar, though not quite identical, burden. Even when under enemy bombardment, the British government "kept its cool." Lord Brockway, a longtime leader in British politics, has written in a letter to the *New York Times* (April 7, 1966) as follows:

In Britain the tribunals set up in the last war to judge the sincerity of objectors . . . exempted men from military service who might be prepared to fight in certain wars, but who were not prepared to fight in that particular war. They judged on the basis of the depth of moral convictions.

We do not presume to recommend an exact pro-

cedure for carrying out our proposal. We suppose that the starting point would be the elimination from the present law of three words: "in any war." Then the Congress or the Selective Service administration might adopt one of two procedures: either the recognition of two classifications of conscientious objectors, or the recognition of a single classification with more flexibility than the present definition permits. Any procedure, we assume, would require some form of alternative service for the objector.



We do not know how many citizens would be affected by modification in the definition of the conscientious objector. Perhaps the change would touch only a few. In time of war dissent is not easy, and most men support the claim of the nation. If at any time the number of conscientious objectors should become large enough to interfere with the war effort, that fact itself would be a real reason to re-examine national policy. If a nation cannot convince the vast majority of its own citizens that its cause is just, then searching questions are in order, whether or not the laws accord a status of dignity to the dissenter.

If, as we can assume would normally be the case, only a few would be affected, the issue is none the less important. Surely a society can find a better use for its citizens of sensitive conscience than to send them to jail.

Furthermore, the proposal we offer would make a real difference to our society, even to our national honor. We would be saying to ourselves and to the world . . . "This is the kind of people we are—a people who believe in freedom of conscience even when it is inconvenient."

Societies are stronger, although not always more comfortable, if they keep alive the right of conscientious dissent. The difficulties they agree to accept in the process are the evidence of their devotion to freedom.