

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 13
Number 1 *Parameters* 1983

Article 7

7-4-1983

RELIGIOUS STRATEGISTS: THE CHURCHES AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Donald L. Davidson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>

Recommended Citation

Donald L. Davidson, "RELIGIOUS STRATEGISTS: THE CHURCHES AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS," *Parameters* 13, no. 1 (1983), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.1314.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters by an authorized editor of USAWC Press.

RELIGIOUS STRATEGISTS: THE CHURCHES AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

by

DONALD L. DAVIDSON

© 1983 Donald L. Davidson

In 1945 Winston Churchill turned his thoughts toward Hiroshima and described the atomic bomb as a "miracle of deliverance."¹ Three decades later Pope John Paul II returned to Hiroshima to speak of the "horror of nuclear war," and to call on all humanity to work untiringly for the "banishment of all nuclear weapons."² With more than 500,000 nuclear warheads in the world today, few would speak of them as miraculous instruments. Only those blinded to the devastation of nuclear war could visualize these weapons as a satisfactory military solution today. This truth is certain; but is it sufficient? To prevent nuclear war we must be prepared to prevent aggression that might lead to the use of these weapons by ourselves or by others who possess them. That is, we prepare for nuclear war to prevent nuclear war—a form of defense we call deterrence. Perhaps no one has articulated the ethical dilemma posed by nuclear weapons more graphically than Reinhold Niebuhr. When the H-bomb was developed he wrote, "Thus we have come into the tragic position of developing a form of destruction which, if used by our enemies against us, would mean our physical annihilation; and if used by us against our enemies, would mean our moral annihilation. What shall we do?"³

After more than 30 years, with even greater urgency, we still debate Niebuhr's question: What shall we do to deter aggression in the nuclear age? A search

through virtually any bookstore will uncover numerous paperbacks addressing the nuclear dilemma. Almost daily, newspapers report demonstrations against nuclear weapons in the United States and around the world. In recent years Christian and Jewish bodies have joined this protest with unprecedented enthusiasm. Indeed, the major religious groups have launched a "crusade" against nuclear weapons. Since 1980, churches and synagogues representing more than 100 million Americans have issued official statements that criticize nuclear weapons and US deterrence policy.

Many religious leaders are convinced that they must do something to stop the arms race and remove the specter of nuclear annihilation holding the world hostage. In the following pages I examine the positions advocated by religious groups in the current nuclear debate. The Roman Catholic Pastoral Letter on War and Peace, adopted in May 1983, has attracted much attention. It should not be overlooked, however, that Protestant and Jewish bodies representing an equal number of Americans have also issued statements, many of which are more critical of security policy than the Catholic letter. After reviewing the Catholic letter, I will compare it with recent Protestant and Jewish statements. Then I will address the import of these statements for current security policy. Before looking at these positions, however, a preliminary question needs to be answered:

Why should national security leaders care what the churches say?

CHURCH POSITIONS AND MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS

First, what the churches say is important because of their influence in shaping individual conscience. For many individuals, religious faith and morally right decisions are important values. As religious groups debate the morality of nuclear policies, many of their members have begun reevaluating their own moral positions. Members do not always follow the dictates of the church, as is evident in the Catholic reaction to the pronouncement on birth control. However, members do not often completely ignore church teaching on moral issues. Perhaps not many, but some will reach conclusions similar to those of Francis X. Winters. His understanding of pronouncements by American Catholic leaders led him to affirm in 1981,

If the bishops are correct in their assessment of the damage to be expected from any strategic nuclear exchange, Catholics in the line of command for the use of, or threat to use, these weapons are now forbidden by conscience from meeting these constitutional responsibilities under pain of serious sin. Resignation of office is their only morally viable option.⁴

Following the publication of the Catholic pastoral letter in May 1983, I briefed the Department of the Army Staff Council on the letter's contents. What concerned the council most at this briefing was the possible effect of the church's pronouncement on the willingness of Catholic soldiers to follow orders relating to nuclear weapons. Army leaders recognized the influence of the church on the formation of moral consciousness among individual Catholics. This influence, however, is not confined to Catholics. The dialogue among Presbyterians contributed to the decision of former Chief of Chaplains Kermit Johnson to retire a year early, rather than cooperate with President Reagan's nuclear policies.

We should care what the churches say because as individuals we should be concerned to find moral truth for ourselves. We should also care because of the moral influence of religious teachings on personnel who implement national policy.

A second reason for caring what religious bodies say is their influence in the formation of public consciousness. One of the principal lessons we relearned in Vietnam is that military policy requires public support. Whether focused on counterinsurgency, conventional warfare, or nuclear deterrence, if military policy conflicts with the public will, it is in grave danger of failure.

Colonel Harry G. Summers, in discussing how the United States could win virtually all the battles but lose the war in Vietnam, suggests that it is an "obvious fallacy to commit the Army without first committing the American people." He concludes, "The failure to invoke the national will was one of the major strategic failures of the Vietnam War."⁵ Similarly, Chaplain (Colonel) Charles F. Kriete, now retired, observed that war "requires for its successful pursuit the mobilization of a moral consensus of the legitimacy of both the objectives of violence and the means by which these objectives are pursued [T]he maintenance of that moral consensus is one of the key objectives of national security, in both a political and a military sense, for when it fails, the war is lost."⁶ Public consensus, or the national will, is as critical for military preparedness as it is for the conduct of war.

Chaplain (Major) Donald L. Davidson is on the faculty of the US Army War College, where he teaches ethics, European and Soviet studies, and military history. Chaplain Davidson holds a B.A. from Texas A&M in history; a Th.M. from Harvard University in ethics, with emphasis on war and morality; and a Ph.D. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in church history. Chaplain Davidson has served as a church pastor, a professor of Bible and Christian history, an artillery officer, and an Army chaplain. He is the author of *Nuclear Weapons and the American Churches: Ethical Positions on Modern Warfare* (Westview Press, 1983).



And what about the effect of the churches on the public consensus? Well over 50 percent of the American society maintains some affiliation with a religious denomination. In the past year, religious statements, especially the Catholic pastoral letter, have been front-page news. A large number of the organizations promoting the nuclear freeze campaign are religious groups. Religious leaders frequently participate in public forums dealing with nuclear issues. Most of the major denominations have initiated study and action programs focused on peacekeeping in the nuclear age. These factors suggest that religious groups have the capacity to exert significant influence on public opinion in the present debate over nuclear weapons.

Though somewhat belatedly, President Reagan has recognized this influence. Members of his Administration testified before and corresponded with the Ad Hoc Committee which drafted the Catholic letter. After each of the three drafts of the letter, the Administration issued reaction statements to the press. Furthermore, the Administration adopted the language of the pastoral letter in describing US deterrence policy in a recently revised military posture statement.⁷

Democrats also recognize the importance of church statements. On 20 September 1983, Charles T. Manatt, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, delivered a speech on the "party position" in which he expressed "general support for the Catholic letter." He specifically endorsed the church's call for a halt in the development of new nuclear weapons, an end to the arms race, and a major reduction in nuclear arsenals. In response to questions following the address, Manatt said that he was not concerned about Republicans labeling the Democratic position as "soft," because he believed that "it was in accord with public opinion."⁸

We may agree or disagree with the positions advocated by the various religious denominations. Nevertheless, because of their influence on individual and public moral consciousness, church positions must be considered in formulating national security policy.

THE CATHOLIC PASTORAL LETTER

Let us now direct our attention to the substance of religious statements on nuclear weapons. The Catholic Church has raised serious questions about weapons of mass destruction since the 1950s. The destructiveness of nuclear weapons led Pope John XXIII to conclude in *Pacem in Terris* (1963) that stopping ongoing military aggression was the only justifiable cause for the use of military force. In 1965 the Second Vatican Council condemned absolutely "any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or extensive areas along with their population" as a "crime against God and man himself."⁹ The council also described the arms race as "an utterly treacherous trap for humanity" and called for "an evaluation of war with an entirely new attitude." The council urged multilateral arms control with appropriate "safeguards." In 1976 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States issued a pastoral letter in which they declared, "Not only is it wrong to attack civilian populations but it is also wrong to threaten to attack them as a part of a strategy of deterrence."¹⁰ Also in 1976, US bishops affirmed, "No members of the armed forces, above all no Christians who bear arms 'as agents of security and freedom,' can rightfully carry out orders or policies requiring direct force against non-combatants or the violation of some other moral norm." The bishops concluded in their pastoral letter on moral values that with respect to nuclear weapons, "the first imperative is to prevent their use."¹¹

All of the statements cited above were repeated in the Pastoral Letter on War and Peace published by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in May 1983. This brief survey shows that the fundamental positions in the pastoral letter are not new. When these statements were first issued, however, they attracted attention only among the clergy and specialists. Several factors account for the subdued reaction to these statements. They were usually accompanied by a recognition of the Soviet threat to the free world and an affirmation that national security was a

legitimate national right. The statements further concluded that, although undesirable, nuclear deterrence policy was necessary to prevent nuclear war. Also, these statements were first written at a time when nuclear warfare was "unthinkable," at least among the general public. When the Catholic statements were reissued in the 1983 pastoral letter, they received national attention from a society greatly sensitized to the possibility of nuclear war. Not only was holocaust thinkable, it was graphically described by Jonathan Schell in *The Fate of the Earth*, and in frequent presentations by the Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Because of the growing concern over nuclear war and the arms race, when the bishops began working on the new pastoral letter in 1981 their work received immediate attention. Interest further increased when the first two drafts of the letter were released for comment, and it was not at all clear that the bishops were as critical of the Soviets as they were of US policy, or that they would even reaffirm their traditional recognition of the right of national defense. Indeed, it appeared that pacifist elements in the church had exerted the strongest influence in the second draft. After reading the second draft, Bishop Hunthausen, a leading spokesman in the anti-nuclear peace movement, exclaimed, "I've read the document again and again and I am convinced that the Spirit of Christ is at work among us."¹² His only real disappointment was that the letter did not advocate immediate, unilateral nuclear disarmament.

In contrast to the pacifist reaction, the response of traditionalists (advocates of the just-war tradition) in the United States and in Europe was one of alarm. Catholic bishops of the Federal Republic of Germany publicly differed with US bishops in their assessment of the policies of deterrence and the first use of nuclear weapons. The Pope called US and European bishops to Rome in January 1983 for the purpose of revising the letter to make it consistent with papal statements on the moral issues associated with war and nuclear weapons.

The final draft of the pastoral letter was modified in tone and substance. Despite the

overwhelming vote by which it was adopted (238 to 9), the document is not fully satisfactory to either pacifists or traditionalists; it is what one would expect, however, in a document produced by these two contending factions. In general terms, the pastoral letter is a strong affirmation of the right of legitimate national defense and a recognition of the threat to the free world posed by the Soviet Union. It is an equally firm rejection of the arms race and indiscriminate (counterpopulation or counter-value) warfare. The bishops express their "extreme skepticism" about any actual use of nuclear weapons. They are not convinced that these weapons can be used without disproportionate civilian casualties, or without destroying more values than they would preserve. The bishops do recognize, however, that in the present world context it is necessary to prevent the use of these weapons by the Soviet Union or some other nation. Therefore, they conclude, a policy of nuclear deterrence that is strictly limited and linked to a policy of progressive disarmament is "morally acceptable."

To terminate the "curse" and "folly" of the arms race and to prevent nuclear war, the bishops offer the following specific recommendations to national policymakers:

- No initiation of nuclear war.
- Immediate, bilateral, verifiable agreements to halt the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons.
- Negotiated "deep cuts" in the arsenals of both superpowers.
- A comprehensive test ban treaty.
- Removal of nuclear weapons from areas where they could be overrun in early stages of war.
- Removal of short-range nuclear weapons.
- Strengthening of command and control over nuclear weapons.

PROTESTANT AND JEWISH STATEMENTS

The Catholic pastoral letter of 1983 is the most deliberated and comprehensive church document in the current discussion of

nuclear warfare. It is by far the longest church statement. It is not, however, the most "radical." In comparison with Protestant and Jewish statements, the Catholic letter represents a moderate position.

The position of many Protestant groups is difficult to summarize because of their ecclesiastical structures. Some bodies have a very loose denominational connection. Others have no denominational structure at all. In both types of churches, local congregations are autonomous institutions. Therefore, statements issued by individual leaders or coordinating agencies are not intended to represent denominational positions. Traditionally, these church bodies have paid little attention to social and political issues and have published few statements on these subjects. This generalization is true concerning the issues of nuclear weapons. There are notable exceptions, however, such as that provided by the Moral Majority, led by Jerry Falwell, pastor of the Liberty Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. This movement has been very supportive of the government's nuclear policies. Conversely, among Southern Baptists, who are generally firm supporters of national defense and government policy, several leaders have endorsed the nuclear freeze proposal and have encouraged stronger arms control measures. It is not possible to document adequately the positions of the loosely connected and independent Protestant churches. It is accurate to say, however, that the majority of these churches are less critical of nuclear weapon policies than the Catholic Church, and some ardently endorse Administration policies.

The positions taken by the Lutheran Synods are less specific but similar in substance to the Catholic position. At least one of the Lutheran denominations endorsed the Catholic letter shortly after its publication. In general, Lutherans affirm the just-war tradition and the duty of nations to provide national security. In 1982 the annual synod of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) also expressed its support for "a multilateral, verifiable freeze of the testing, production, stockpiling, and deployment of nuclear

weapons and delivery systems as a step toward the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons."¹³ The synod further urged Soviet and US leaders to "consider taking responsible and appropriate risks" in initiating arms reductions. The LCA raised serious questions about counterforce weapons and first-strike deterrence policies, but did not reject all use of nuclear weapons.

Also in 1982, the general convention of the American Lutheran Church (which merged with the LCA in 1983) adopted a statement entitled "Mandate for Peacemaking." This statement recognizes that nations have legitimate security interests, but it affirms that nuclear weapons have made nations less secure. The statement strongly condemns the arms race and calls for a mass movement, the building of a popular majority which will insist that "national security be defined in less militaristic terms." The Lutheran statement judged that any use of nuclear weapons is immoral (a position the Catholics did not take) because these weapons violate the just-war principles of discrimination, due proportion, and reasonable prospect for victory. The church also concluded that the threat to use nuclear weapons implicit in deterrence strategy is immoral. The Lutherans reasoned, however, that deterrence strategy was necessary at this time to prevent the use of nuclear weapons. Like the Catholic Church and the LCA, American Lutherans advocated a mutual freeze on new nuclear weapons and reductions in existing arsenals. In addition to urging unilateral initiatives in arms control, the church encouraged leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union not to deploy weapons in a manner that makes the number of warheads unverifiable.

The other large Lutheran Church, the Missouri Synod, has said very little about nuclear weapons.

Of the major Protestant denominations, the churches most critical of national security policy and nuclear weapons are those affiliated with the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC). The NCC has for many years urged the United States to adopt stronger arms control

measures. The position statements of the NCC are generally critical of US foreign policy and its supporting military policy and blatantly hostile toward the Reagan Administration. In 1968, more than a decade before Randall Forsberg initiated the nuclear freeze movement, the NCC called for a mutual halt to testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons. In addition to a freeze on nuclear weapons, the NCC urged the United States to seek a non-proliferation treaty, to cease producing fissionable material for military purposes, to support a comprehensive test ban treaty, to reduce military spending, and to curtail the supply of arms to other countries. This 1968 document, entitled "Defense and Disarmament: New Requirements for Security," is a seminal statement, often cited by the NCC in later years. The council urged the United States in 1977 to cease funding the development of the neutron bomb, cruise missile, Trident submarine, MX missile, and Mark 12A warhead. It further called for negotiated arms reductions and encouraged unilateral initiatives by the United States. The following year, in a message entitled "Swords into Plowshares," the NCC suggested that the United States adopt policies of no first strike and no threat or use of nuclear weapons against nonnuclear states. Again, the council called for a moratorium on new strategic weapons.

The NCC has continued to issue similar statements in the 1980s. It is evident from the proposals cited above that the NCC has for many years advocated arms control steps similar to those recommended by the Catholic Church in 1983. Furthermore, the council has criticized specific weapons. In its political criticisms, the NCC has been much more harsh than the Catholics. Only individuals and small groups of Catholics have made comments similar to those coming from the front office of the NCC. The following excerpt from a 1981 statement entitled "The Re-Making of America?" is a good example. Concerning Reagan policies, the NCC avers:

Although the United States and the Soviet Union both have more than enough strategic nuclear warheads to kill the earth's people

several times over, yet further weapons escalation is proposed.

Reversing an increasing willingness to see the world in its real diversity and pluralism, the new administration is determined to turn away from the uneasy detente of the past decade and revive the distorted vision of the bipolar Cold War world, in which all adverse occurrences, at home or abroad, are attributed to the machinations of a single force—Communism. Turning from the growing satisfaction of being one of a worldwide community of nations, this administration proposes to make America "Number One" in the world. Not number one in literacy, life expectancy, or assistance to less developed nations. Not number one in freedom from infant mortality, drug addiction, crime or suicide. But rather, number one in military dominance, in the ability to impose our will on others or to kill multitudes in the attempt.

The mainline Protestant churches affiliated with the NCC have also strongly advocated nuclear disarmament. In April 1982, United Methodist bishops issued a pastoral letter which was to be read in all churches. This letter exhorted:

Governments must stop manufacturing nuclear weapons. Deployed weapons must be removed. Stockpiles must be reduced and dismantled. Verification procedures must be agreed upon. Eventual nuclear disarmament is necessary if the human race, as we know it, is to survive.

American Baptist Churches (ABC) have condemned the arms race and urged support for the SALT II agreement, a comprehensive test ban treaty, nonproliferation agreements, and an immediate, negotiated freeze on nuclear weapons. Late in 1981 the executive ministers of the ABC published a document entitled "A Call for Elimination of Nuclear Weapons." In it the 36 chief executives declared:

Believing there is no justification for the use of nuclear weapons on any people under any

circumstances, we call on the nations of the world to stop the production of nuclear weapons, to dismantle those that exist, and to join in a program of mutual inspection. We call upon the President, Congress, and the leaders of other nations to take bold initiatives to reach these goals.

In addition to the measures recommended by the ABC, the Christian Church (Disciples) encouraged its members to consider adopting the position of conscientious objection to war and endorsed the establishment of a national peace academy to train persons in peaceful methods of conflict resolution. The United Presbyterian Church (UPC) in 1963, and again in 1971, expressed its support for a goal of "general and complete disarmament." This church has also advocated a comprehensive test ban treaty, a nonproliferation treaty, and a freeze on nuclear weapons. A study prepared in 1981 and sent to all member churches suggests that in the arms race the Soviet Union has been playing "catch-up" with the United States. The study concludes, therefore, that it is US weapons and policies that perpetuate the arms race and impede nuclear arms control. In a separate action in 1981, the UPC urged the President and Congress to make "a solemn public commitment never again to be the first to employ nuclear weapons as an instrument of warfare."¹⁴

Other churches affiliated with the NCC have issued statements on arms control and disarmament that are similar to those outlined above.

Jewish groups have been slow to criticize military policy and to address the moral and political issues associated with nuclear warfare. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, a Reformed body, has adopted over the years several resolutions supporting arms control. In 1982 the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America called for "a bilateral reduction in the size and deployment of nuclear weapons." Early in 1983 the Synagogue Council of America (which represents the six major Jewish religious bodies in the United States) urged Reagan and Andropov to

implement a "bilateral mutual and verifiable total cessation of the production and deployment of nuclear weapons" and to strive for significant cutbacks in existing arsenals. The Synagogue Council resolution is an urgent plea for nuclear arms control. In general, however, the brevity and limited number of Jewish statements indicate that Jewish congregations have been far more reluctant than mainline Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church to comment on nuclear weapon issues.

As the foregoing discussion suggests, the Roman Catholic Church is not the first or the most adamant of religious bodies addressing nuclear issues. Because of its centralized teaching authority and its 50-million-plus membership, however, it is the most influential of the religious groups.

ARE THE CHURCHES RIGHT?

In the previous two sections I have attempted to summarize the positions reflected in recent Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish statements on the issues of nuclear warfare. Differences do exist in these perspectives. The Jews have said the least, and their position is generally to the right of the Catholic Church. The major Protestant churches (especially those affiliated with the NCC) have, over the years, said the most, and they stand to the left of the Catholic Church. With this acknowledgement, however, it should also be recognized that the difference between Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish positions is one of degree, not direction. All three groups have increasingly criticized nuclear weapon policies in recent years. The shouting is just more shrill among some than others. But are the churches right? Are their proposals good strategy, or, indeed, even good ethics? Is it right for religious leaders to address military issues of national security?

Certainly the religious groups are correct in questioning defense policies. Like all citizens, religious leaders have a responsibility to be concerned about issues relevant to individual and public well-being. Religion is a private, individual affair, but it is not exclusively personal in focus. Like Amos and

Jeremiah in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament, religious leaders have a prophetic responsibility to the general society. In a real sense the churches represent the public conscience. German churches are quite aware that had they been more faithful to their prophetic responsibility, perhaps the national and international atrocities of Hitler could have been avoided. American churches still remember their tardiness in addressing the issues of slavery and human rights. Only a narrow view of religion would deny the right and responsibility of churches to speak out on issues of public interest.

The prophetic responsibility of churches includes, however, the obligation to rise above partisan politics. Their duty is to witness for moral truth, not campaign for party platforms. Also, religious leaders should remember their area of expertise. Their authority pertains to the meaning and requirement of moral principles. On the issues of war and nuclear weapons, the churches ought to describe the moral demands inherent in the principles of discrimination and proportionality. The churches, especially the Catholic Church, have correctly reminded us of the fundamental moral considerations in the legitimate use of military force: nations should resort to war only for the purpose of defense against aggression; noncombatants (including enemy population centers) are never legitimate targets of intentional, direct attacks; and justifiable war should preserve more values than it destroys. It is doubtful, however, that the churches' expertise qualifies them to address technical issues of national security, such as the placement of theater forces and the uses of specific weapon systems. It is to the Catholic bishops' credit that they identified their recommendations on these issues as "prudential judgements," rather than "universally binding moral principles."¹⁵

Are the churches right in their assessment of nuclear war and the arms race? Certainly—at least partially. Surely the Catholic bishops are right when they assert that the first imperative concerning nuclear war is prevention. Large-scale nuclear war

would be horrendous. The awful devastation it would bring is unimaginable, beyond comprehension. Nuclear weapons are not simply conventional weapons with a bigger bang. Their effects are not limited to the time and place of battle. The battlefield would be contaminated well beyond the duration of conflict, and long-term genealogical and ecological destruction could circle the globe, poisoning populations and the environment for generations. The effects of tactical weapons can be limited, but there is no assurance that the weapons used in war could be limited to tactical nuclear weapons. Everyone should agree with the churches that all-out nuclear war is immoral and irrational in the pursuit of legitimate political objectives. All should be equally skeptical of the use of tactical or intermediate-range nuclear weapons because of the possibility of escalation to all-out warfare. It could be argued (and was) that before the age of nuclear parity, nuclear weapons were useful military instruments. Today, however, with parity, the use of these weapons would greatly increase the devastation of both sides, rather than provide either with military advantage. Moreover, all should agree with religious leaders that the seemingly endless and extraordinarily expensive arms race is "madness." Therefore, in my judgment, the churches are right in their fundamental conclusions on nuclear warfare and the arms race.

There are indications that the Reagan Administration shares some agreement with the churches on these fundamental issues. Despite earlier, careless comments about nuclear war, the President now denies that nuclear war is "fightable." Also indicative are the Administration's more flexible posture in the Geneva arms reduction talks, the recent "build-down" proposal (eliminate two old weapons for each new one deployed), and the NATO decision to reduce the number of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.

Military planners have also taken seriously the churches' teaching on moral principles. Ethics instruction and consideration of the moral issues of nuclear warfare have received increasing attention in

officer education in recent years.¹⁶ Non-combatant immunity (discrimination) is a basic consideration in strategic nuclear targeting. Military forces are the primary targets in strategic and theater plans. The bishops are probably right, however, in questioning the proportionality of targeting plans. Because of the size and number of nuclear weapons aimed at military targets in Soviet and Warsaw Pact territory, their use would almost certainly exceed desired military effects.¹⁷

Thus, the churches are correct in their fundamental judgments on nuclear war and the arms race. But how well do they do as strategists and ethicists in the areas identified by the Catholic bishops as prudential judgments (e.g., no use or no first use of nuclear weapons, and the policy of nuclear deterrence)? If we conclude, as I believe both the churches and the government have, that nuclear war is disproportionate and ought to be prevented, while also maintaining defenses adequate to deter or defeat nuclear or conventional aggression, the paramount question becomes, How? It is on this question that the churches and the government most often disagree. How to attain desired objectives is a strategy question, and one that always contains ethical considerations. In the larger sense, strategy, like ethics, should identify general principles and broad directions for achieving selected goals. Strategy, again like ethics, has a second function of choosing right courses of action for obtaining specific objectives.

In the larger function of strategy the churches have done well in reminding us of the horrors and the need to prevent nuclear war, the foolishness of the arms race, and the dangers of nuclear deterrence. In the second function of strategy, the churches have not done well. Because the churches have not adequately dealt with the present international politico-military context, their critique at this level amounts to a loud cry of "Ain't it awful?" This is not helpful. Certainly nuclear war is awful, but the question is how we prevent it while also deterring aggression. It is insufficient to say that the present context is bad. Ethicists and

strategists should specify right choices within existing realities, not simply wish for other realities. To the extent that they fail to do this, the churches are not good ethicists or strategists. (Of course, to the extent that the government fails to use arms negotiations constructively, or hearkens back to military practices that are no longer adequate in the nuclear age, it is guilty of the same.)

At the policy level, those designing national security must take into consideration more than the effects of nuclear weapons. These weapons are not abstractions, nor an isolated military factor in the world. Nor can they be "disinvented," which makes total nuclear disarmament an unrealistic goal. The political aims and force structures of both superpowers must be considered by policymakers. The present balance of forces and complexity of arms control negotiations are critical factors. Does it matter if Soviet conventional and nuclear forces are superior to those of the United States? Should the United States trust the Soviet Union and negotiate agreements that cannot be verified? Do "vulnerable" forces increase or decrease the likelihood of preemptive attack? In failing to deal with these and other issues, the religious leaders provide us with less than adequate ethical or strategic commentary. If they are unwilling or unable to consider these issues, then perhaps their prudential judgments should be less comprehensive.

Church positions on the strategy of nuclear deterrence deserve closer analysis. Religious leaders have rightly warned us of the risks of deterrence failure and of the costs of the arms race. We should recognize that something akin to parity is a more stabilizing goal than the attainment of superiority. Yet, the churches' statements on deterrence tend to be hollow utterances. The mainline Protestant churches consistently call for cuts in military spending for both nuclear and conventional forces. If we are serious about avoiding nuclear war, is it not right to reduce our reliance on nuclear weapons by providing conventional forces adequate for deterring aggression? If there are essential differences between the destructive capacity of nuclear and conventional weapons, should we not

prepare to fight future wars with only conventional weapons if possible? Yet, among the churches, only the Catholic bishops acknowledge that increasing conventional forces might be a "proportionate price to pay" if this would reduce the possibility of nuclear war. The reluctance of Protestants, and to a lesser degree of Catholics, to increase conventional forces is understandable. Conventional forces are also very destructive and even more expensive than nuclear forces. But it was the desire to cut costs in the 1950s and 1960s that got us into this nuclear mess in the first place.

In the present balance of forces, we must also question the advocacy of some churches for "no use" or "no first use" nuclear weapon policies. The churches do not call for unilateral nuclear disarmament, and they acknowledge the necessity, at least for now, of possessing nuclear weapons to discourage the use of these weapons by others. Several churches do, however, condemn any actual use of these weapons, and many call for an announced policy of no first use. Further, the churches reason that if it is wrong to use nuclear weapons then it is also wrong to threaten to use these weapons. Logically, of course, the churches are correct; it is wrong to threaten to do something that is wrong. However, the significant question in this argument is, What is the right thing to do in the present context? Sometimes our choices are not between good and evil, but between better goods or lesser evils. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the churches are correct in judging that we should not use nuclear weapons as fighting instruments. Let us also acknowledge that an adversary is deterred only if he knows that we have the capability to devastate (i.e., that we possess nuclear weapons) and believes that we have the intention and will to use that capability if attacked. To announce in advance that we will not use nuclear weapons first, or at all, undermines the credibility of nuclear deterrence. If it is right to possess nuclear weapons to deter their use by others, as the churches say (and I believe), then it is also right *not* to announce in advance that we have no intention of using these weapons. That is, the

right thing to do in the present context is to "threaten" the use of nuclear weapons (even as a lesser evil) because this helps in preventing the actual use of these weapons. In wrestling with this difficult issue, Michael Walzer observes, "Against an enemy actually willing to use the bomb, self-defense is impossible, and it makes sense to say that the only compensating step is the (immoral) threat to respond in kind." Walzer concludes, "We threaten evil in order not to do it, and the doing of it would be so terrible that the threat seems in comparison to be morally defensible."¹⁸

In conclusion, let us recognize that the nuclear weapon debate is an important event in American history. It focuses on crucial questions of national security which deserve thorough consideration. The debate is essential for achieving a national consensus on nuclear weapons in which military policy is congruent with the public moral consciousness. In this debate the churches have made a vital contribution in reminding national security leaders of the horrors of nuclear weapons and of the essential nature of ethical principles. The contribution of those responsible for national defense is the reminder that weakness invites aggression, as Americans have had to learn repeatedly through our history. The challenge remains twofold: to prevent aggression and to deter nuclear war.

NOTES

1. See Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 267.

2. Pope John Paul II, "War is Death," an address presented at Memorial Park, Hiroshima, Japan, 25 February 1981, and reproduced in Robert Heyer, ed., *Nuclear Disarmament: Key Statements of Popes, Bishops, Councils and Churches* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), pp. 52 and 54.

3. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Hydrogen Bomb," in *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. D. B. Robertson (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1976), p. 235. Niebuhr offered this comment in 1950 following the development of the hydrogen bomb.

4. Francis X. Winters, "The Bow or the Cloud?: American Bishops Challenge the Arms Race," *America*, 18-25 July 1981, p. 29.

5. Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1982), pp. 13 and 19.

6. Charles F. Kriete, "The Moral Dimension of Strategy," *Parameters*, 7 (No. 2, 1977), 67.

7. For a more complete discussion of the exchanges between the Reagan Administration and the Catholic bishops, see my book *Nuclear Weapons and the American Churches: Ethical Positions on Modern Warfare* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983), ch. 4 and especially pp. 183-89.

8. Phil Gailey, "Democrats Urge Steps To Prevent Nuclear Warfare," *The New York Times*, 21 September 1983, p. A1. Ironically, on the day of Manatt's speech, the Republican-controlled Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 10 to 7 to reject a resolution urging a mutual and verifiable freeze of nuclear weapons.

9. "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S. J. (New York: Orbis Books, 1980), p. 294.

10. This statement, entitled "To Live in Christ" is published in Heyer, pp. 90-91.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

12. Hunthausen's statement was included in his response to the second draft, presented to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 15 November 1982.

13. "War and Peace in a Nuclear Age," a resolution adopted by the Lutheran Church in America, 3-10 September 1982.

14. *Church and Society*, 72 (September-October 1981), 13.

15. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response, A Pastoral Letter on War and Peace*, 3 May 1983, pp. vii and 4-5.

16. One indication of this fact is use of my book, *Nuclear Weapons and the American Churches*, in the curriculum at the Army War College and the Army Command and General Staff College.

17. Unclassified literature indicates that over 50 nuclear targets are located in Moscow and some 40,000 in all of the Soviet Union, with casualty estimates ranging between 200 and 400 million if all targets were struck. See Solly Zuckerman, *Nuclear Illusion and Reality* (New York: Viking Press, 1982); Thomas Powers, "Choosing a Strategy for World War III," *Atlantic Monthly*, 250 (November 1982), pp. 82-110; and Paul R. Schratz, "War, Morality, and the Military Profession," *Proceedings*, 109 (September 1983), p. 49.

18. Walzer, p. 274.

