

WAGING WAR: A PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION by Ian Clark. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988. Pp. 154. £17.50 (hardback only).

PEACE AND UNCERTAINTY: A THEOLOGICAL ESSAY ON DETERRENCE by Oliver O'Donovan. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989. Pp. 125. £4.95 (paperback)

Few would deny that the nuclear age presents us with a unique crisis. On the one hand, nuclear weapons are potentially 'absolute' in that their use threatens the very survival of human civilisation as we have known it. For this reason alone, many people agree that there is an over-riding moral obligation to prevent nuclear war. On the other hand, to quote Alasdair MacIntyre, 'there seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture'. To assert the existence of a moral obligation is to assert something for which there is no generally accepted reason. Even if most people acknowledged it, they would soon disagree about its meaning, its implications, and the basis on which it was being made.

In the absence of any rational, agreed basis for a morality appropriate to the nuclear age, the church surely has a special role as authoritative teacher, philosopher and friend. Yet on the nuclear question the church seems to be as puzzled and as uncertain of its own moral ground as everybody else. Does this not mean that, at the very moment of humankind's greatest need, the church is failing those it is supposed to serve? This is a question posed, implicitly if not explicitly, by both of these books.

Ian Clark begins by insisting that even if war is simply 'hell', yet being human, it is still a rule-governed activity. The question is whether the rules that govern it come out of the moral 'just war' consensus (as in the mediaeval tradition) or out of the merely political consensus which replaced it (as in Machiavelli, the Enlightenment and Clausewitz: i.e. the 'limited war' tradition). A just war will always be one which punishes the evil doer, in the name of some greater order, whereas a limited war is essentially the continuation of a limited politics and will therefore be governed by purely political rules, such as the rational proportioning of military means to political ends.

After discussing the implications of this distinction for the concept of war-crimes, Clark goes on to consider nuclear deterrence—that is, preventing instead of waging war. In particular, he discusses the doctrines of first use and of extended deterrence as examples where the two ways of thinking about war lead to somewhat different conclusions, although he does not come to any definite verdict about them.

As I have already hinted, it has long seemed to me that, in the absence of any *moral* consensus, a *theological* approach to the crisis of the nuclear age is all the more relevant. Oliver O'Donovan, in lectures originally given at Durham University, tries to provide this.

Although, as he admits, the texture of his work may seem rather lacking in explicit theological material, a theological dimension is implied throughout. In particular, he asks us to see the relevance, to the claims of the nuclear deterrents, of 'the constant yearning of human politics for the seat of divinity and the exercise of omnipotence.' 'What is distinctive in

modern deterrence is that the limitless evil which imagination can propose in relation to any determined threat has become a project for practical execution.' He invites us to re-read Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 in this connection. The technology which has made us capable, like gods, of undoing the very creation itself, is the product, not of cynicism or despair, but on the contrary of a gigantic, misplaced idealism: the notion that we now have the power to banish war, and even conflict, from the face of the earth. Such idealism, of course, is quite illusory: and so too, for the same reasons, are the claims of the nuclear deterrers to be able to prevent war by threatening absolute evil.

The claim that this way of seeing nuclear deterrence is necessary for us, if we are to grasp its true scope and meaning, comes out of a recognition that a merely moral critique, for example in terms of conditional intentions to commit genocide, will not do for an age which has lost almost all its fundamental moral bearings. On the other hand, once granted the truth of the theological perspective, the moral critique itself gains immeasurably in force. So also do those quasi-sacramental or symbolic forms of action which are especially apposite to the Christian peace movement. But also, and for a similar reason, moral arguments need to be especially rigorously deployed. Invalid moral arguments must not be allowed to go unnoticed, just because they are being used in the service of a fundamentally sound theology.

I say this because, before he begins his theological analysis, O'Donovan produces an invalid argument, in attempted refutation of Finnis, Grisez and Boyle. Nuclear deterrence threats do not necessarily entail murderous intentions, he argues, because the collateral civilian deaths consequent on nuclear attack are like the misery suffered by a criminal's family when a judge exhorts the offender: 'I want you to consider very carefully not only what this (sc. any repetition of the offence) will mean for you, but the quite undeserved misery that it will bring upon your wife and children'. O'Donovan's point here is that, while the judge is himself not inflicting the misery on the family, and does not intend it, he is nevertheless trying to deter the offender by reminding him of a possibility he greatly fears. 'So it is with threats of deterrence' O'Donovan says. Not so. For what nuclear deterrence threatens is that civilians will have to face exactly the same fate as the military. This is the whole point of the criterion of discrimination. To pursue the analogy, if the judge were to threaten, not misery, but actual imprisonment, on the offender's family, as well as on the offender himself, then the analogy would indeed hold. But then it would be the case that the judge was intentionally inflicting punishment on the innocent as well as on the guilty: exactly the thing O'Donovan was trying to exonerate him from.

These two books are both very useful additions to the literature on nuclear deterrence.

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