

## Catholics against the Bomb

Five Catholic university teachers have published a symposium on the morality of nuclear warfare entitled *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience* (Merlin Press; 12s. 6d.). These writers state the moral case against the policy of nuclear deterrence with a clarity and cogency not hitherto achieved by Catholic writing on this topic in England. They conclude that in order to avoid becoming a party to plans to murder the innocent, each of us is bound to use all lawful means to secure unilateral nuclear disarmament and withdrawal from N.A.T.O. by this country.

The essence of the argument for this conclusion is stated in the introductory chapter by the editor of the symposium, Mr Walter Stein. The plea is very simple indeed; (i) that some things are intolerable, irrespective of circumstances; that total war is thus absolutely intolerable; and that 'nuclear defence' means total war; (ii) that the mere willingness to risk a war that could annihilate civilization, poison the whole of this planet, and for ever violate the life of the future, if life survives, is a wickedness without parallel, a blasphemy against Creation; and (iii) that the policy of 'deterrence' involves a conditional willingness to unleash such a war and is therefore not only wicked in what it risks, but in terms of implicit intention. In succeeding chapters the other contributors develop particular stages of the argument. Miss G. E. M. Anscombe, writing against pacifists on the one hand, and advocates of total war on the other, expounds vigorously the Christian teaching according to which war may sometimes be justified but the deliberate killing of harmless non-combatants never. Taking this doctrine as his premiss, Dr Robert Markus observes that nuclear warfare necessarily involves the indiscriminate killing of non-combatants and is therefore murderous. He goes on to argue that the retention of the H-bomb as a deterrent, involves an intention to use it, in certain circumstances, in a murderous manner. Since this intention is criminal, the N.A.T.O. policy of deterrence is morally repugnant. It follows that a Christian in this country must refuse military service, and must use what political means are open to him to bring about unilateral disarmament, withdrawal from N.A.T.O., and an option for non-violent resistance.

The symposiasts' argument is complete at this point, but further essays illustrate other aspects of their case. Mr Geach, in a chapter entitled *Conscience in Commission* counters the suggestion that a layman should not seek to make up his mind on such matters, but should rely solely on guidance from those in spiritual or temporal authority over him. Mr Roger Smith gives an anthology of quotations from theologians, bishops and popes on warfare in general and nuclear weapons in particular. In a final chapter Mr Stein makes clear that the symposiasts, 'unilateral disarmers' though they are, advocate the renunciation of nuclear weapons not as a policy but as a moral imperative. On prudential

considerations, he suggests, the arguments for and against nuclear disarmament more or less cancel out: each side to the dispute can show the absurdity of the other's policy but not the reasonableness of its own. Here, he suggests, we can see the bankruptcy of any utilitarian system of morals which tries to assess the rightness or wrongness of an action by a calculation of its probable consequences. Once for all, we are brought back to the insistence of Christianity that there are some actions, such as murder, which must be abhorred, no matter what the consequences.

The moral case against the H-bomb has been frequently stated. The value of this book lies chiefly in the cool and patient answers which it provides to arguments which are canvassed among Catholics in support of the policy of nuclear deterrence. Here are samples of such arguments, with a summary of the answers provided in the symposium.

(1) *In modern warfare it is impossible to draw the line between combatants and non-combatants.* It is impossible to draw a line between day and night; the two are distinct for all that. Full-time mothers, children, the sick and the aged are not borderline cases: they make up a large part of the population of any city. (Stein, pp 24-25; Anscombe pp. 59-60).

(2) *It is possible to imagine a legitimate use for an H-bomb (e.g. against a fleet at sea); therefore it is lawful to manufacture and possess one.* As well justify the manufacture and marketing of contraceptives on the ground that it is possible that people will buy them to melt them down into balls for their children to play with. (Stein, 33-36; Markus, 67-71).

(3) *The Governments of the West have no intention of using H-bombs; their threats to do so in certain circumstances are so much bluff.* We cannot dissociate ourselves in this way from threats made in our name. How can we know that our governments are lying? The criminal attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the work of Western politicians, and have not yet been repudiated. (Stein, 33-4; Markus, 77-78)

(4) *Until the Pope or our Bishops have explicitly condemned Western defence policy, Catholics are entitled to follow those theologians who support it.* The argument from silence of the Holy See has itself been condemned by the Holy See (Denzinger, 1127). A policy of approving everything not explicitly condemned by his own diocesan would have led a man into unjust war under Henry V and into schism under Henry VIII. (Anscombe, 60; Geach, 93-94).

(5) *One should choose the lesser of two evils: to disarm is tantamount to accepting Communist domination, but Communism is worse than death, so it is wrong to disarm.* This rests on a confusion between a moral and a non-moral sense of 'evil'. A moral evil may never be chosen—i.e., one may never choose to do wrong—no matter how dreadful the alternative. To embrace Communism would indeed be morally evil; but it is not the voluntary embracing of Communism, but the loss of political freedom, which is the alternative envisaged to a nuclear defence policy. (Stein, 37-40; Geach, 98-101).

So faithfully have the symposiasts dealt with the current objections to their

thesis that hostile reviewers were able to dissent from their conclusions only by repeating arguments which had already been refuted in the book. Thus Mr Norman St John-Stevas, in the *Observer*, defended the use of nuclear weapons on the ground that the distinction between combatants and non-combatants had been blurred by modern conditions. This defence, we have seen, is already countered in the book itself: it was particularly astonishing to see it repeated in a week in which the newspapers had carried reviews of the official history of the air offensive against Germany in 1939-1945. For that history made clear that during a large part of the war Bomber Command was divided at the highest level on the exact issue whether the attacks of the R.A.F. should be aimed at precise military targets or at centres of civilian population. There are, of course, those who justify attacks on civilians on the grounds that wives and children comfort soldiers and cheer munition workers. But one who takes this view cannot pay lip-service to the traditional Christian teaching about just war, or appeal to modern conditions or technological advance. By a similar argument a medieval king might have justified the sacking of foreign convents, on the grounds that the nuns were praying for his enemies.

Again, Mr St John-Stevas argued that the symposiasts had made 'an unreal contrast between a moral evil (dropping a nuclear bomb) and a material evil (submitting to Communism)'. In fact, he said, material and moral evils were to be found on both hands. 'Is there no contrast then', asked Dr Wangermann pertinently in a letter a week later, 'between the evil that we *do* and the evil that we *suffer*'?

The Bishop of Salford, in a kind and careful review of the book in *The Tablet*, suggested that none of the symposiasts had faced the problem created by the duty of governments to defend the material and spiritual goods entrusted to them by their citizens. Much however of Mr Stein's concluding chapter was devoted to a consideration of the consequences of this duty, which he enunciated as follows: 'It would not only be inexpedient but wrong if a government failed to afford the greatest possible protection to its subjects' (p. 136). If the use of nuclear weapons as a deterrent is sinful, as the symposiasts maintain, then it is of no avail for a government to plead its duty to protect its citizens. Its duty, and its right, extends only to the protection of its citizens by all *lawful* means. His Lordship did not counter the symposiasts' arguments against the lawfulness of nuclear deterrence, but insisted simply that the *magisterium* of the Church 'has not yet laid down that the possession of nuclear weapons is sinful'.

It is such a relief to see the arguments against Western defence policy at last publicly and soberly stated at length by English Catholics that one is tempted, out of gratitude to the symposiasts, to refrain from criticism of what they have written. But the cause in which they write is so important, and so bitterly opposed, that it is vital that the arguments used in its favour should be as rigorous and as persuasive as possible. Not all the arguments in the book meet this requirement.

The essays by Miss Anscombe and Mr Geach, for example, lack persuasive-

ness in places. Sometimes they make the tactical error of using premises which are more disputable than their conclusions. In the course of her argument to show that the deliberate killing of the innocent in war is murder, Miss Anscombe makes the following points *en passant*: the concept of 'aggression' is to be rejected; it is probable that a man who belongs to a police force is leading a bad life; universal conscription is a horrid evil; the New Testament is not more 'spiritual' than the Old; English law is corrupt in a fundamental matter. On all these points Miss Anscombe may be right; but none of them is essential to her argument, and each of them will shock and alienate many of her readers far more than the conclusion which it is her business to establish. Similarly, Mr Geach, in order to establish the inoffensive conclusion that one cannot act on the presumption that whatever the State does is right, throws out the suggestion that since the Reformation the governments of Western Europe have perhaps lost and never regained the right to the allegiance of their subjects.

The failures in rigour are more important. In *The Tablet* the Bishop of Salford took exception to Dr Markus' deducing from the immorality of the deterrent policy the necessity of refusing military service. The point is well taken. The armed forces have many tasks other than the nefarious ones of maintaining the deterrent, and it is not obvious that a man who joined the services with a firm and genuine intention of restricting himself to legitimate warfare would commit sin. Certainly the principle which Dr Markus enunciates in this context is too broadly stated: 'in the circumstances of modern warfare responsibility must be accepted for all that is not antecedently, clearly and publicly ruled out, by anyone who in any way participates in its waging'. On this principle, a man who spent the last war mine-sweeping would be a party to the bombing of German civilians. There may indeed be other arguments to show that in present circumstances a Christian may not be or become a member of the armed forces; but no such convincing argument is put forward by Dr Markus.

Again, the symposiasts seem to me to do less than justice to the theory of 'deterrence by bluff'. It is not enough to point out that politicians who endorsed Hiroshima, or who publicly proclaim adherence to utilitarian principles, are unlikely to be restrained from murderous use of the H-bomb by moral scruple. For it may well be argued that fear of inevitable retaliation must operate to prevent the murderous threats of Eisenhower and Sandys from being genuine expressions of intention. Nor is it sufficient to point to the risk involved: for when a course of action is condemned not for its own sake, but because of the risk connected with it, then the prohibition against it ceases to be absolute, and there is room for calculation of probabilities and alternative dangers. (For example, a speed and manner of driving which would be criminal in a pleasure-motorist may be laudable in the driver of an ambulance or fire-engine.) A fuller argument than any provided by the symposiasts seems necessary to refute the 'bluff' justification of nuclear deterrence. One such is put forward by a correspondent in *The Tablet* of October 14. We may summarize it as follows:—

Even if there is no genuine intention on the part of any Western government to use nuclear weapons in any circumstances, the maintenance of the credibility of the deterrent demands that the governments concerned should demand from their servants (e.g., the officers on a missile range) a readiness to operate these weapons on receipt of orders to do so. But an intention to operate a murderous weapon in certain circumstances is immoral. No government therefore may exact such an intention, and no citizen may support a policy which involves such exaction.

ANTHONY KENNY

## Heard and Seen

### THE STYLE AND THE MAN

It was as a critic that Jean-Luc Godard began his work in the cinema, but all the time that he was criticizing the work of other men he thought of himself primarily, he once said in an interview, as a director who would one day make his own pictures. Eventually he started to make shorts, and after completing five of these he launched himself with something of the insolent ease of a trapeze artist into his first full-length feature, the dazzling *A Bout de Souffle*, which was first shown in France early in 1960 and came to London this summer where it had a long and successful run at the Academy. After this he made *Le Petit Soldat*, which was promptly banned on political grounds, and still remains in cold storage for, although it never specifically mentions North Africa and the terrorists in this film could belong anywhere and to any side, the controversial and—to judge by the excerpts from the script and the stills published in *Les Cahiers du Cinema*—horrifying torture sequences could only too easily be fitted into an Algerian context. Undaunted by this blow and the expense of time and money to no purpose, and showing a remarkable absence of bitterness, he turned briskly to make another quite different kind of film, with which he won first prize at the Berlin Festival this year. This was *Une Femme est une Femme*, a comedy starring the two most interesting and provocative young actors on the French screen today, Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean-Claude Brialy, who play the masculine sides of a triangle which is completed by the exquisite Danish girl, Anna Karina, now Godard's wife.

Though he got his chance later than Chabrol and Resnais, Godard is perhaps the director who most neatly epitomizes the new school of French cinema. His sense of style is so acute, his confidence in his professional capacity so solid that he really does make films in the same way as one might embark upon a novel,