

worldview

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A PAX ATOMICA AND THE ALTERNATIVES

The huge nuclear explosion set off by the Soviet Union served no apparent utilitarian purpose. The Vatican radio described the blast, which was in excess of fifty megatons, as "an insane decision, morally, politically, socially, economically and humanely deprecable"—and that description will probably stand as definitive. But the explosion did show, once again, how fluid are the boundaries of the Cold War; it did show that there are new ways of waging terror; and it did, if such a thing is possible, make more urgent the solution of problems that have been with us since the advent of the atomic age.

Paradoxically enough, the entire series of tests of which that monster explosion was a part, with all the fear and anxiety and resentment it provoked, provides support for both pacifists and militarists, for those who would find solutions in extreme but opposing positions. It makes more difficult the task of those who, rejecting extreme positions, assert that we must and can find some viable alternative between them. The terms of the polar positions have become, to many people, depressingly familiar. They have been sloganized into "Better Red than dead" and its converse. Increasingly those who argue from within the honorable tradition of pacifism have been joined by doubtful allies whose thin and strident arguments derive their entire strength from the profound and legitimate fears of every person. And the theoretical position of the belligerents has been strengthened by those who, seeing in Communism the demonic face of hate, regard every attempt to crush it as the implementation of the will of God—even if this means the unleashing of total nuclear war.

These are the polar positions that have been imposed upon much of the popular debate that has taken place. It has been a work of the critical intelligence to argue that these positions are more viable, more meaningful than their critics realize, that they have more substance than the distorted forms to which they have frequently been reduced, even by their supporters. But it

has also been a work of the critical intelligence to show that the imposition of these alternatives, even in their most honorable and developed presentation, is false.

Many who reject the choice of "total war or no war" have attempted to revivify the concept of the just war which others had jettisoned, to show that the concept of a limited nuclear war is not a contradiction in terms. It is this question which Ernest Lefever approaches directly in his article in this issue and to which Herman Kahn's letter makes a tangential contribution.

But many others who make their stand on the uneasy middle ground find the application of traditional concepts to contemporary problems quite unsatisfactory, and they find unhelpful the admonition that "what must be can be." One of these persons is Helmut Thielicke, and we would direct the readers of *Worldview* to his article "The New Situation in the Atomic Age," which appears in the summer issue of *Religion in Life*. "The choice," he writes, "is not primarily between Communism and destruction; the basic issue is rather whether we must in principle recognize the right of the stronger. The question is not whether in the extreme instance we should capitulate to Communism, but whether we—again in the extreme instance, but then as a matter of principle—should allow power to become unlimited and to refuse to accept any law as barrier."

Dr. Thielicke's article is a significant contribution to the ongoing debate concerning morality and nuclear warfare. But it has an additional significance. For he reminds us that we are still somewhat strangers to a world that has been transformed by science and technology and that we have not exhausted the approaches to this transformed world and its unprecedented problems. He cautions us, by example not precept, that we cannot rest in our own formulations because we reject others with which we are familiar. The great work of the critical intelligence, for the moralist as well as the statesman, is still to be done.

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