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The Bishops and the Bomb: The Morality of Nuclear Deterrence

Philip F. Lawler



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Nuclear Deterrence**

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THE BISHOPS AND THE BOMB: THE MORALITY OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

PHILIP F. LAWLER

Not too many months ago, in another lecture sponsored by The Heritage Foundation, my colleague John O'Sullivan quoted a newspaper item that had caught his eye during a trip back to his native England: "Bolton Council last week closed down its nuclear bomb-proof shelter after it had been destroyed by vandals."

That item is a rare thing indeed: a genuinely funny story involving the question of nuclear weaponry. When this grim topic is at issue, humor is almost always out of place.

However, I mention that story for another reason as well. Like the unfortunate civil-defense planners of the Bolton Council, we should be ready to acknowledge that life does not always operate according to our plans. The best-laid plans of all men, including nuclear strategists, often become nonsense in the light of unexpected developments. We cannot afford to be rigid in our thinking, or inflexible in our approach, on such a serious question.

At the same time, it is equally important to maintain some sense of perspective about human foibles and frustrations. Humor may be out of place, but there is another countervailing danger: the danger of becoming so grim, and so emotional, as to neglect the rational arguments that take place on either side of the issue. If there is one thing that I want to make absolutely clear—one thing that this lecture should demonstrate—it is the fact that emotionalism has no place in the debate about nuclear strategy. There is a great deal of serious thought, and serious work, to be done. Demagoguery, hand-wringing, and scare tactics simply distract us from our tasks.

There is no moral argument about nuclear war, if the question is, "Is Nuclear War Desirable?" It is silly to posit a pro and con for that question. We all equally abhor the prospect; everyone opposes war. I say this, admitting the fact that war throughout the ages has shown some ability to bring out splendid human virtues—virtues like courage, honor, national pride, and self-sacrifice. I admit that without war we would not have the blessings of great works of art such as the *Iliad*. Still I say—and fear no contradiction on this point—that nobody likes war, and nobody ever has.

True, there may be one or two Dr. Strangeloves somewhere in the world: desperately sick emotional cripples who revel in thoughts of war. I seriously doubt that such lunatics could be found near the Pentagon, where cold reason breaks down schizophrenic attitudes. In fact, if you were looking for a Dr. Strangelove, you might want to seek him elsewhere. For those of you familiar with Catholic theological speculation, I will say that one person who always sounded to me frighteningly happy about war is Teilhard de Chardin. I don't think you will find many people in the Pentagon reading his works.

Nuclear war, in particular, is a question on which there is no moral debate, because the horrors are beyond comprehension. Jonathan Schell's book, *The Fate of the Earth*, is a perfect example of a talented writer wasting his time by arguing the obvious point: that an all-out nuclear war would be a devastating tragedy for the world. We all accept that argument, long before we begin page one of Schell's book. The question is what we gain from the next 200 pages.

No one wins nuclear war, in the sense that no one can take over a country after a nuclear exchange and enjoy the usual benefits of military victory. If the Soviet Union wipes us out in a nuclear war, there may be some benefits to them, depending on the exact scenario of destruction involved. But certainly there will not be the same benefits that they might achieve by political subversion, or intimidation, or any other system of conquest.

To repeat, then, there is no moral argument on this question. There is, however, an argument on the question of how to *prevent* war. That is the only important moral argument involved.

Nuclear weapons are here to stay. They are a fact. There again, there is no argument. It is virtually inconceivable that we could do away with the knowledge through which nuclear weapons can be made, and the technical expertise necessary to their manufacture. They will remain with us. No moral man can oppose the idea of disarmament, but no realistic man can expect that disarmament will occur quickly.

Recall, too, that not only the United States and the Soviet Union are involved in this question. If we were to disarm both countries somehow, there would remain several other countries with nuclear weapons, several more with nuclear capacity, and any number of nations with the ability to develop nuclear weapons in the future. Given the unstable political regimes that pepper our world, we could never be really secure as long as other countries had nuclear weapons.

There are serious thinkers on both sides of the question of how to prevent nuclear war, and they have serious differences. Many of these differences are, in fact, moral differences.

Nuclear Weapons: The Moral Question

A few things need to be clarified, I think, before we begin exploring the moral arguments put forth on the question of nuclear war. As a Christian, I am told to be ready to turn the other cheek in response to aggression; I am not told to turn the other cheek of my neighbor when he is struck by someone else. If I myself choose to make a sacrifice, that may well be honorable. If I choose to sacrifice my wife and my child, who depend on me for their security, that certainly is not honorable. The same is true for governments. Governments are committed to support their citizens; to sacrifice those citizens is surely not honorable.

As we ask the moral question about nuclear warfare, the serious question (as opposed to the spurious question of whether or not war is desirable) divides into two parts. Given that nuclear weapons are likely to exist for the foreseeable future, how can we make war—nuclear war—less horrible? More important, how can we make it less likely?

As I address this topic, I want to address it as a layman—and I mean a layman in two senses of that term. I have studied both theology and nuclear strategy, but I am not professionally qualified in either field. I do not intend to use the special jargon peculiar to nuclear strategists, nor do I want to use the terminology of Catholic theological studies.

But before I delve into these questions, let me explain why I want to speak about the *morality* of nuclear weapons, and why I want to speak more particularly about the morality of nuclear weapons in the light of the teachings of my own church, the Roman Catholic Church.

The Church does have something to teach on this issue: on this I shall insist. The Church has something to teach us especially because the Church has always sponsored rational study—as opposed to emotional posturing—on moral problems. Pope John Paul II, in his message on the World Day of Peace, pointed out, “Scientific studies on war, its nature, causes, means, objectives, and risks have much to teach us on the conditions of peace.” In order to know how to pursue peace, we have to know first how to understand, and avoid, war.

This is a question, again, of basic morality: a question that flows from common moral sense. We are not concerned here with the technical questions of nuclear weaponry and disarmament negotiations; those questions are important, but they are important to another discussion. To quote again from the Pope, in his statement to the U.N. Special Session on Disarmament—the statement delivered in New York by Cardinal Casaroli: “I neither wish nor am I able to enter into the technical and political aspects of the problem of disarmament as they stand before you today.” The purpose of the Church in advancing

moral stands is not to examine the mind-boggling intricacies of negotiations; the purpose of the Church—and of all moral actors—is to advance moral arguments.

Now why should *I* talk about this subject? Well, this may sound like an absurd claim to youthful social consciousness, yet it is true that I began to think seriously about nuclear war in 1964, when I was 13 years old. For most of my life, I have worried about the question of nuclear policy. But I am happy to tell you that this is not quite as self-important a commitment as it might seem. I became interested in this question when I was a high school debater, and the topic for debate was nuclear disarmament. I became fascinated with the subject, and I have studied it ever since that time.

At that time, in 1964, there were a few interesting approaches taken by different organizations toward the question of disarmament. The United States officially endorsed the concept of a nuclear freeze. The Soviet Union rejected a freeze. The Catholic Church called for disarmament.

Today, the Catholic Church is—as you cannot fail to have perceived—in turmoil, particularly in the United States, on the question of nuclear defense. There is no serious argument about the fact that the Church supports disarmament. (As I said earlier, there is no serious argument that *all* moral men favor the idea of disarmament.) But now the Church, or some representatives thereof, seem to have gone much further. I am speaking particularly of bishops like Bishop Hunthausen in Seattle, Matthieson in Texas, Sullivan in Richmond, Gumbleton in Detroit, and Quinn in San Francisco, all of whom have made fairly strong statements in favor of the nuclear freeze proposal, or in favor of some form of unilateral disarmament, or in favor of income tax resistance. I am told that a plurality of the American Catholic bishops endorse a nuclear freeze. And I am bothered by that fact. At this point, the stance of the Vatican is still in favor of disarmament—not a freeze. The stance of the U.S. government is for disarmament—not a freeze. The stance of Moscow is for a freeze. It bothers me to see American bishops taking their stance not with the Vatican, much less with Washington, but with Moscow.

The Bishops' Authority

As you all probably know, the bishops of the United States are now working in preparation of a document that will be released as a Pastoral Letter on the question of nuclear weapons, scheduled for release in November. Many of you may have seen reports of what is contained in the draft copy of that Pastoral Letter, which is now circulating among the bishops. That draft is marked "Confidential." I have been asked to give my comments on the draft, and so I have seen it. Unlike some of the others who have seen copies, I shall honor my own pledge of confidentiality, and so I cannot tell you what the draft Letter says. (I will tell you that many of the reports based on that draft have been grossly inaccurate.) Nonetheless, there is obviously a very serious debate going on within the American Church right now.

Is it clear to me that the bishops can do a great deal of harm, as well as a great deal of good, as they advance the cause of nuclear sanity. George Weigel, in his extraordinary book *The Peace Bishops and the Arms Race* (which I commend to your attention), makes my point for me, and so I shall quote him at length:

The Catholic Church in America could help form a country capable of leadership toward an end to war, but the Church won't make the crucial contribution unless it soberly faces four serious errors in the Peace Bishops' position.

One, they tend to muddle the right relationship between moral witness and political judgment in ways that do damage to both of these important concepts.

Two, they address the wrong question, as though the decision to build weapons or not is the key determinant of whether we get war or peace...

Three, they do not address the right question: how to alter the course of Soviet power by means other than the threat of violence...

Four, they are fracturing the Catholic community and damaging again America's sense of its right role in world affairs, rather than building agreement among diverse people on how our country can both defend its interests and lead the world away from Armageddon.

The Catholic Church can play a role on this question. Anyone who believes, as I do, that the Catholic Church embodies the Holy Spirit working in this world can put no limitations on what questions the Church should address. If the Spirit is working with you, why should you lack confidence in any area? This is not a question of bishops meddling in politics. I see no inherent problem with bishops in politics, because faith *is* political. If you doubt that, look to Poland.

But bishops have a particular responsibility. Bishops are obliged to define the morality of a question—not the political intricacies, not the strategic details. And, in dealing with these political and strategic questions, the bishops must look to the laity. For that reason, I fully endorse the call put out by Washington's own Archbishop Hickey, asking for more discussion of the moral questions involved in disarmament. I hope that call is taken seriously on both sides, so that laymen give their opinions (as I am giving mine today) and bishops, and clergy generally, listen seriously.

Nevertheless, the bishops do have limitations on their authority. They are not experts in all fields. They should be careful about politics: careful to get their facts straight. Whatever facts they use should be beyond dispute. Where facts are in dispute, they should not adhere to any given set of theories, but should throw the question back on the hands of the relevant decision-making body: the laity. If they do observe those guidelines, then I think that I, as a faithful Catholic, have an obligation to obey them.

The bishops, in turn, have an obligation to acknowledge the wisdom of the *sensuum fidei*—the sense of Catholic people at large; to hear the voice of the people in the pews, who are so often ignored by the clerics who foment talk on disarmament. Most notably, the bishops have an obligation to the Pope, and to statements of magisterial authority.

Finally, as bishops formulate their thoughts and statements, they have an obligation to be faithful to the traditions of the Church, particularly to that tradition which emphasizes reason rather than emotion—which emphasizes hard-headed looks at moral issues, and especially at tough moral questions. Again, George Weigel made the point: "The relevant standard is not whether the intentions behind the prescriptions are morally pure, but whether the consequences of following the prescription actually make peace more likely."

It can be very liberating, some clergymen have said, to renounce nuclear weapons outright, rejecting the entire argument for deterrence and defense. Quite so. And it can be very liberating to renounce one's

fealty to authority and obligation, one's commitment to reasoned discussion, or one's responsibility to make difficult moral decisions. It is always liberating, in a superficial sense, to become irresponsible.

The Official Catholic Position

One question is rather confused in the public consciousness today, and I would like to set that confusion to rest. The Catholic position on disarmament has not changed since I first encountered it in 1964; indeed, it has not changed since the advent of nuclear weaponry. The Church does *not* condemn the possession of nuclear weapons. Again I refer to the statement by the Pope to the U.N. Special Session on Disarmament.

The teaching of the Catholic Church in this area has been clear and consistent. It has deplored the arms race; called for mutual progressive and verifiable reduction of armaments, as well as greater safeguards against the possible misuse of these weapons. It has done so while urging that the independence, freedom, and legitimate security of each and every nation be respected.

Further on in the same statement, the Pope made the point still more clear: "In current conditions deterrence based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself, but as a step on the way toward progressive disarmament, may still be judged morally acceptable."

Just as some observers wonder whether the Vatican stance has changed, there is a similar question as to whether the American Catholic bishops, in their collegial authority, have made a statement different in essence from that of the Pope—whether they have condemned nuclear weapons. They have not.

The closest the Catholic bishops of this country have come to a collegial statement on this question (pending the release of the Pastoral Letter in November) is a statement by Cardinal Krol in testimony before Congress in 1979, when he said, "Catholic moral teaching is willing, while negotiations proceed, to tolerate the possession of nuclear weapons for deterrence as the lesser of two evils."

The Just-War Theory

In the Catholic tradition, there is a very distinct, well-developed body of thought, the Just War Theory, which comes to us from at least as far back as Saint Augustine. This body of thought cannot be dismissed readily by any group of clerics forming an opinion on war. The Just War Theory itself comes in two different categories: the *ius ad bellum*, which defines under what circumstances it is permissible to wage war, and the *ius in bello*, which defines the permissible standards for the conduct of war once it has been declared.

Ius ad bellum: when is it permissible to wage war? The Just War Theory teaches: First, war must prevent a real and certain injury; there must be an adequate reason. Second, the state must have the right intention—that is, self-defense or the defense of others, rather than self-aggrandizement or the conquest of territory. Third, war must be a last resort, after all other hopes for peaceful solution have been exhausted. Fourth, there must be some reasonable prospect of success. Fifth, the war must be declared and waged by a competent authority—that is, not by a private citizen but by a sovereign state.

The second category, *ius in bello*: the permissible standards for the conduct of war. Essentially, there are two such standards. First, the standard of proportionality. The damage inflicted must be in proportion to the good that is to be achieved. Second, the standard of discrimination. The conduct of war must discriminate between combatants and civilians, in order to avoid harm to civilians wherever that is in any way possible.

These are not simply statements of Catholic moral teachings, but statements of moral common sense that might apply with equal force to anyone seeking a justifiable approach to warfare. (And it should be noticed in passing that the Just War Theory was not originally constructed as a means to justify war-making. On the contrary, it was originally set forth to put strict *limitations* on the countries who would otherwise have embarked on various military missions.) But since I'm investigating the moral arguments put forward by representatives of the Catholic Church, I will adhere to these questions, look at nuclear strategy in the light of the Just War Theory, and harken back to the two questions I asked earlier: How can we make war less horrible? How can we make war less likely?

Now as a final, but essential, preliminary note before I embark on my main arguments, let me put the whole question in perspective—in a Catholic, Christian perspective. Nuclear war is not the worst thing that could happen in this world. The worst thing that could happen in this world already happened, 2000 years ago, followed three days later by the best thing that could happen. We live in the shadow of these eternal, historical truths. The value of human life is infinite, because of the Incarnation, Redemption, and Resurrection. Human life has tremendous value, but other values are still higher. Souls are more important than bodies. By the same token, any faithful Christian approaching the question of nuclear war must recognize the priority of prayer over debate. Strategies err. We make mistakes; we are misguided; we are misinformed. Our errors can render our actions immoral. Prayer puts the problem in more capable hands. In anything else I say here, I hope you will keep these primary guidelines in mind.

As we recognize these primary guidelines, nonetheless, we must devise a practical strategy. We must look clearly at the question on nuclear weaponry and face it with courage fired by faith. If we do so—if we devise a workable and moral nuclear strategy—then we can rest assured in our own security. Then, and only then, we shall enjoy the special feeling that Mark Twain described as “the serene confidence of a Christian holding four aces.”

Nuclear Weapons Themselves

Nuclear weapons have no souls. That sounds obvious, doesn't it? But it is worth contemplating. Nuclear weapons are hunks of rare metals and esoteric equipment. They will not go to heaven or hell, although they can usher us toward one place or the other fairly quickly. I say this because I think it's important to avoid thinking about what my friend Father James Schall of Georgetown calls the “thing-ness” of nuclear weapons. Weapons are instruments of strategy. Strategy can be right or wrong; weapons in themselves have no moral force.

We often hear citations of the number of nuclear weapons present in the world today. We have, we are incessantly told, enough bombs to blow up the whole world several times over. So what? Why are such statistics relevant? I can kill you with my bare hands, if you don't resist. That doesn't make my hands immoral, or even necessarily threatening;

it may teach you about the need to be ready to resist me. By analogy, is it inherently wrong to have weapons? I do not see the point.

Once again the argument is beautifully made by George Weigel: "An arms race in Europe helped bring on World War I; not entering an arms race in the 1930's helped make Hitler and World War II possible." An arms race in itself can be either good or bad, safe or dangerous. The "thing-ness" of a weapon is not important.

Conventional weapons, too, can kill. They can kill women and children. They can wipe out cities indiscriminately, as they did in World War II, notably in Dresden. (And by the way, just as there are enough nuclear bombs to kill us all several times over, there are also enough bullets to kill us.) Some of the nuclear weapons available in the U.S. arsenal today—and here I am thinking particularly of the neutron warhead—make discriminating judgments that our conventional weapons cannot manage. They are, in that sense, *less* inherently murderous than conventional weapons. So it is silly and illogical to lump all nuclear weapons together into the same category, a category totally distinct from those used to judge conventional weapons. This is why Cardinal Krol, in his 1979 Congressional testimony, said, "Some of these weapons may be sufficiently limited in their effects as to not merit unequivocal condemnation."

An antiballistic missile system could use nuclear warheads to intercept incoming warheads in space. That is a nuclear weapon, but it is clearly not a weapon that should be condemned in the same way as a nuclear warhead which lands in the middle of a crowded city. The ABM explodes in space; it *prevents* a nuclear bomb from exploding on earth. It saves lives, rather than taking them. Again, the "thing-ness" of a weapon can be misleading. A nuclear weapon can be more morally desirable than a conventional weapon.

By the same token, a discriminating judgment often missed by the popular media today is that a nuclear war need not be an absolute war. In that book to which I referred earlier, *The Fate of the Earth*, Jonathan Schell assumes (rather facilely, I think) that no nuclear exchange could be limited. It is true, of course, that political leaders in both the United States and the Soviet Union have said that it would be difficult or impossible to limit a nuclear war. I, for one, do not believe them. Those statements are made for two reasons. First, they are part of the strategy of deterrence. If the other side believes that a nuclear war might become a global conflagration, they will much less likely to take risks.

Second, those statements are made for internal political reasons. Imagine the outcry in this country if President Reagan said that a limited nuclear exchange was possible. To some people, that would be a signal that nuclear war was being viewed in the White House as a real policy option. Personally, I am convinced that a limited nuclear war is possible, and I am further convinced that President Reagan and his advisers agree with me on this point. But I understand the politics of the situation, and I can see why the President would be very much averse to making a statement on this volatile issue.

Still, the question does seem to be worth exploring. If you were a political leader, why would you embark upon an all-out nuclear war? Under what circumstances would you loose your entire arsenal of deadly weapons on the other side? If you hoped to reap any benefits from your victory, you would want to preserve something of the other country: the farms, the industrial plants, and the population that could serve you. If you could win the war after one or two limited exchanges, why would you not do so? If you were losing, why would you not surrender? It seems to me more likely that a nuclear exchange would be just that—an exchange, followed by negotiations.

More likely still, there would be *no* exchange. I say this is more likely, because it is exactly what has happened for over a generation. There have been no nuclear exchanges, ever, in history. There have been threats, and counter-threats, and then resolutions. One side, in the extreme crisis, always has backed down. And it is instructive to notice which side has backed down in which crisis. During the crisis of the Berlin airlift, the Soviet Union blinked. It is not irrelevant, I suggest, that at the time the United States had a clear nuclear superiority. In 1962, in Cuba, the Soviets blinked again. It is not irrelevant that, again, we had a clear superiority in weapons concentrated in the area at that time. In 1973, in the Mid-East crisis, there was an angry exchange between Nixon and Brezhnev, and both sides backed away from direct confrontation. It is not irrelevant that at that time, in that place, the two superpowers were evenly matched.

Deterrence and MAD

This, in a few words, is the strategy of deterrence. There are few times when it has been summed up better than by Winston Churchill, who explained that "Security will be the sturdy child of terror, and safety the twin brother of annihilation."

The strategy of deterrence assumes that the other side will not take advantage of any strategic opportunity if it realizes that by taking advantage, it risks an all-out war. You are familiar, of course, with the aptly named doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction, or MAD, in which both sides acknowledge that they are wide open to decimation.

The doctrine of MAD is based on a mutual ability of the United States and the Soviet Union to destroy each other—to destroy cities wholesale, killing women and children, combatants and noncombatants alike. It is based on the assumption that both sides will, at all times, have enough weaponry to ensure the destruction of their enemy even after a pre-emptive first strike. Therefore, the question becomes, are we willing to put such a deterrent scheme into effect. In other words, are we willing to destroy the Soviet Union and all of its people?

The question could arise, in a practical sphere, in one of two ways. The first would be the case of a classical first strike. In such a classical first strike, the Soviet Union would strike at our missile installations, in an effort to wipe out whatever retaliatory force we have. We would then be faced with the question of whether or not we should strike back with our remaining missiles, rather than surrendering. Should we submit, or should we kill Russians wholesale? Win or lose, our sense of proportion could at least remain somewhat engaged; we could make at least some discriminating judgments about the values involved.

But consider now the second case in which we might be faced with the ultimate moral question of deterrence—the harder case. Suppose a madman took power in the Kremlin, and launched an all-out strike against the population centers of America's cities. The President would be informed, and the relevant officials in the Pentagon would be informed: we are all about to die; the missiles are already in the air; we cannot stop them; 150 million Americans will perish. What could we do?

Should we, in that case, save the world from the tyranny that would be the consequence of a Soviet victory? Should we kill 150 million Russians in return? If the world is tyrannized, remember that public Christianity would be at an end. The Connecticut Conference of Bishops, at least, noticed that point and observed, "In view of its proven record, Communism now actively threatens the existence of all religions and of all places of worship in the world."

The Ultimate Decision

Consider, on the other hand, the undeniable effects of a nuclear strike, even in these circumstances. If a madman in the Kremlin had ordered a nuclear strike, he would presumably have taken some measures to protect himself; he, and the other members of the Politburo, would be relatively safe in their shelters. So if we were to launch a counter-attack, the burden would fall disproportionately on the innocent civilians of the Soviet Union. And if we held back our power—if our attack failed to devastate that country—then the kingpins of the Communist Party would re-emerge from their shelters and take over hegemony—not over Russia alone, but over the entire world.

So, then, should we kill 150 million innocent humans? And *are* they innocent? One of the rather unfortunate questions raised by this gruesome doctrine of MAD is the question of whether *anyone* can be considered a civilian. One argument posits that anyone living in a nuclear-equipped society is by definition a combatant. I reject that view; I think it is a fundamentally totalitarian argument. We have responsibilities to our country and our society, but those responsibilities are limited; that is the nature of republican government. I am not now a soldier; I may be drafted into the army, or I may volunteer, but I am not *now* a soldier. More to the point, neither my wife nor my baby son is a soldier. There are noncombatants in a nuclear war, just as in every other war, and the plotters of strategy should do their utmost to protect the lives of those noncombatants.

Really, the question boils down to whether or not a nation—our nation—should be prepared to bomb and destroy enemy cities. The stand of the Catholic Church on this question has been as clear as the Church's stand on the general question of disarmament. As to whether the bombing of cities is justifiable, the answer has been a clear No.

At the Second Vatican Council, in a document entitled "The Church in the Modern World," the assembled bishops took this clear line: "Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or extensive areas, along with their population, is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal condemnation." There has been no change in that doctrine from the Vatican. Nor have there been any differences between the teachings of the Vatican and the teachings of the American bishops on this point.

But what is the alternative? The alternative, too, is gruesome. It means the Soviet takeover of the world. It means that the madman in the Kremlin could be rewarded for his grossly immoral behavior. It means that all religious practice would be imperiled.

Is deterrence, then, still morally viable? In a statement to the military chaplains of the American Church, the Catholic military vicar went into this question in some detail. Again, I shall quote at some length, from Cardinal Cooke:

Although the Church urges nations to design better ways—ideally, non-violent ways—of maintaining peace, it recognizes that as long as we have good reason to believe that another nation would be tempted to attack us if we could not retaliate, we have the right to deter attack by making it clear that we could retaliate. In very simple terms, this is the strategy of deterrence we hear so much about. It is not a desirable strategy. It can be terribly dangerous. Government leaders and peoples of all nations have a grave moral obligation to come up with alternatives. But, as long as our nation is sincerely trying to work with other nations to find a better way, the Church considers the strategy of nuclear deterrence morally tolerable; not satisfactory, but tolerable. As a matter of fact, millions of people may be alive in the world today precisely because government leaders in various nations know that if they attacked other nations, at least on a large scale, they themselves could suffer tremendous losses of human life or even be destroyed.

Deterrence Against Rationality

If, in the extreme case, the United States is not ready to retaliate, then the entire doctrine of nuclear deterrence unravels. If our opponent knows that he can always defeat us, simply by escalating to a point where we will not match his forces, we have already lost the final war. If he knows that by upping the ante he can pressure us to fold our hand, he has won. This not only assures our defeat, but also makes warfare more likely. Safe in the knowledge that we would never make the ultimate commitment, our adversary could undertake military adventures at will, preying on our weaknesses.

So again we are faced with the question: Should we allow these horrors, or should we allow the loss of those 150 million lives? In either case, we are acting irrationally. But inaction, too, would be irrational. We must do something. In an essay written in 1963—an essay whose analysis holds up to this day—Sylvester Theisen pointed out, “One must continue to apply moral rules; one must continue to discriminate between permitted and prohibited behavior. But the barbarous circumstances allow the use—in fact, demand the use—of coercive means which would not be permitted in a law-abiding world society. Inflexible allegiance to abstract principles may result in irresponsible inaction.” Faced with this horrible question, we cannot just sit on our hands. We must have a response.

Should we retaliate? I will not answer that question. I have answered it in my own mind, but I will not reveal that answer. I don’t think anyone in charge of American strategy should answer the question publicly. I say all this because to avoid a direct answer is to nurture uncertainty, and uncertainty is the key to our deterrent. If the Soviet Union is uncertain whether or not we would retaliate, then they will not attack, and deterrence will work.

Here let me pause, and illustrate my point with an admittedly less serious example. Suppose, right now, our chairman were to announce that I should stop talking. Suppose he threatened to kill me if I continued. I would smile, and continue. Why? Because I know he would not kill me. He is not an irrational man.

But suppose the chairman began flourishing a revolver. He might even contrive to foam at the mouth a bit. And suppose he again repeated that I must stop talking. Well, at this point, I would sit down quietly. I would still doubt that he intended to carry out his threat; I would suspect that it was all an act. But uncertainty would have led me to the prudent choice, and I would acquiesce.

See the result? Our chairman would have succeeded. Deterrence would have worked; he would have deterred me from continuing my talk. But, his action would have been immoral. He should not have threatened my life. This speech is not that bad.

Now on a serious note: do we want to put the President of the United States into that box? Do we want to force him to act irrationally—to act in a manner that none of us could justify logically? The world is at risk; his soul is at risk; the souls of our defense analysts are at risk. I cannot imagine how anyone would be content with this hideous situation.

In the document "The Church in the Modern World," the bishops at the Vatican Council stated, "The unique hazard of modern warfare consists in this: it provides those who possess modern scientific weapons with a kind of occasion for perpetrating such abominations. Moreover, through a certain inexorable chain of events, it can catapult man into the most atrocious decisions." MAD provides us with nothing but atrocious decisions. For that reason, we must find other ways to defend our nation.

Steps Toward Sanity

Let me suggest some first steps. We must be willing to have an all-around deterrent. I have heard calls from the pulpit for what is known as a minimal deterrent—a deterrent sufficient just to destroy Moscow, for example, in the worst case. The idea of such a minimal deterrent is that it would halt the burgeoning arms race, and leave us with a very small supply of weapons to be used only in the most extreme circumstances. Ambassador Edward Rowny, our chief American negotiator in the present disarmament negotiations, has pointed out the flaw in that logic: if we had only a few nuclear weapons, "there would be only one feasible target for that response—Soviet cities and their civilian population. The moral condemnation of such targeting of cities is crystal clear in the documents of Vatican II and in post-conciliar papal statements." A minimal deterrent might be inexpensive, but it would be immoral.

We should, as a first step, do everything that we can do to discourage strategists here or abroad from making cities and civilians their targets. On this score I disagree violently with Archbishop Quinn of San Francisco, who has spoken in favor of a policy that clearly encourages our opponents to put our cities in their bombsights. Archbishop Quinn, in October 1981, addressed this comment to the people working in San Francisco's Catholic hospitals: "I urge the administrators and staff of Catholic health facilities to join all those who are vigorously opposing the intentions of the Department of Defense to establish a civilian-military contingency hospital system, if this system is based on the illusion that there can be an effective medical response in the case of nuclear war."

Of course there can be no effective medical response in the case of nuclear war. But mobilization could save *some* lives. When did it become Catholic doctrine—or any moral doctrine—to encourage a

posture that would maximize the loss of human life? When did it become a moral posture effectively to encourage our enemies to target our cities in their strategic planning?

Another first step that we can take toward replacing the MAD doctrine is endorsing any new weapons systems, or any new strategies, that discriminate between combatants and noncombatants. Better yet, we should endorse any new defensive possibilities that enhance the likelihood of effective defense against nuclear attack. We should support anything that enhances our ability to fight against enemy soldiers, rather than terrorizing their civilians.

Keep in mind that for strategic purposes, even in a nuclear age, it is irrelevant whether or not we can kill the people of the Soviet Union. Our adversaries would be not the people, but their political leaders. It certainly is relevant whether we can oust the Communist Party from power in Russia. And it seems at least conceivable that we might devise some new weapons systems, capable of ousting that leadership without wreaking havoc of Russian society. I do not have any brilliant ideas as to how such weapons might be designed. I simply mention that we should ardently hope for, and support, efforts to design them.

At the same time, we can devise more and better defensive systems, reducing the advantages of offensive, destructive weapons. Anti-ballistic missiles are only one of the options in this area, but they constitute one promising strategic possibility. An effective ABM would answer both of our basic questions satisfactorily. It would make nuclear war less horrible, since fewer warheads would rain down on cities. And it would make nuclear war less likely, since a potential aggressor would be less likely to profit by launching his attack. As a generalization, I think it is safe to say that where scientific weapons are concerned, defense is always preferable to offense.

(Let me add a note in passing about the balance between offense and defense. I am not a military historian, but I do think that military history runs in certain cycles. Offense often outpaces defense, but eventually defense closes the gap. A weapon is designed, and for some time it carries the day in combat, but eventually counter-measures are devised. Today, in world military posture, offense has outstripped defense badly. Even on the conventional level, inexpensive Argentine missiles eliminated some very expensive British ships. In Lebanon, sophisticated Israeli weapons disarmed the Syrian air defense. At the level of nuclear conflicts the imbalance is even more marked. To date, no ABM system has been devised that could eliminate the advantage of a nuclear first strike. In fact, as we have seen, the only effective response to a nuclear

attack available to us today is to attack in turn ourselves. This imbalance is a dangerous situation. But I feel confident that this stage in military history, too, will pass. Eventually, defensive measures will reduce the offensive edge.)

In some cases, we can take the steps necessary to shore up our defensive systems immediately. In other cases, a satisfactory solution will probably come only after arduous years of research, testing, development, and—of course—expense. But we have a moral obligation to find and develop those systems, whatever the problems involved. And we should have faith: a satisfactory solution is certainly possible.

I call your attention to the project originally sponsored by The Heritage Foundation, called "High Frontier." This project suggests a system of defense in space. I am utterly incapable of answering the technical questions involved, except to say that the "High Frontier" envisions a system of satellites in orbit around the world, capable of intercepting ICBM's as they come up out of the Soviet Union: it intercepts them and destroys them in space. No one is hurt. To me, this seems absolutely, clearly preferable, both morally and strategically.

Non-Nuclear Defense

We can also devise integrated weapons systems and integrated defense systems. By integrated, I mean capable of dealing with any variety of situations of aggression: a defense strategy that doesn't resort simply to nuclear weapons, but is willing to match any aggression with a suitable and proportional defense. We can deny our adversaries the opportunity to profit by escalation, because we can make them know that whenever they escalate, we can match their escalation. Then, it is never to their advantage to escalate, and so a nuclear war (or any other wider conflict) caused by escalation becomes less likely.

We can avoid mirroring the strategies of our adversaries. We can avoid the fallacy that if our adversary develops chemical weapons, therefore we must develop chemical weapons in order to deter him. There is no reason why that is true. We can deter with our own more moral strategies.

We could respond to guerilla wars in a more convincing fashion, making it less advantageous for our potential adversaries to mobilize guerillas in other countries. One could easily fill a lecture hall with the literature produced by various moralists on nuclear war. But I have seen

very little on the comparatively difficult moral question of guerilla war. I don't know how many of the 145-odd wars since World War II have been guerilla wars, but many have. How can a nation avoid killing civilians when the combatants hide behind the civilians? How can we deal with an adversary who engages in strict terrorism? In that propaganda movie, "The Battle of Algiers", the conclusion is that one can deal with terrorism by torture. Well, that is not a morally attractive option.

We could shore up the political defenses of our allies, making them stronger politically: less likely to clash with internal elements, less likely to have weaknesses exploitable by outside forces, more likely to stand up and participate in their own defense. In a word, we could encourage political stability around the world.

We could do our best to stop the mad development of weaponry in the Third World, where so much conflict is going on right now.

What I am suggesting is an all-around strategy for U.S. defense policy. It will be expensive. It will be tremendously expensive. By comparison, MAD is cheap.

But, let me put this in some context. Are we, as moral actors, willing to make a sacrifice on behalf of peace? Let me put it into hard, simple terms. Would it be unreasonable to expect each working American to devote one hour a day to the cause of peace? If we each work one hour a day at the minimum wage, in a year we would have \$100 billion for defense systems. Even in Pentagon terms, that is a very large sum. I do not suggest that we fund our weapons systems that way. I am simply pointing out that the moral tradeoff is clear. We should make the sacrifice in defense of peace.

Sacrifice for Peace

The cause of peace requires us to acknowledge that there are wars *now*, throughout the world. Since World War II, there have been over a hundred instances of conflict—armed, open conflict. Millions of people have died; our nuclear weapons have not been enough to stop that.

The cause of peace requires us to acknowledge the cause of war, which is not weapons, but ideologies. And, in our very dangerous world today, the overwhelming cause of war is one ideology in particular. In his message on New Year's Day this year, Pope John Paul pointed out: "Particular groups abuse their power in order to impose their yoke on

whole societies. An excessive desire for expansion impels some nations to build their prosperity with a disregard for, indeed, at the expense of, other's happiness. Unbridled nationalism thus fosters plans for domination. Deeper analysis shows that the cause of this situation is the application of certain concepts and ideologies that claim to offer the only foundation of the truth about man, society, and history." I leave it to your imagination to guess which ideology he has in mind.

Weapons don't cause war; ideology causes war. Irresponsible international behavior causes war. Anyone concerned about war and, therefore, concerned about irresponsible international behavior, must address himself to the gross violation of treaties by the Soviet Union; to the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union; to the use of chemical warfare by the Soviet Union; to the fomenting of guerilla warfare by the Soviet Union. Anyone who devotes himself to this question must recognize the problem stemming from Moscow. He must, I think, agree with the statement of the bishops in Connecticut, "All people who believe in God have a moral obligation to not only not tolerate Communist incursion, but to actively fight this menace which threatens to take from us that which we hold most precious, our human dignity and our God."

The first front is moral warfare, and on this front, we cannot be defensive. Here, we have to undertake a first strike. The question is, how do we prepared ourselves for a moral first-strike? How do we advance a moral argument—a pragmatic argument, but an argument true to our ideals?

It is impossible to address this question without addressing the general question of the moral posture of the United States. Georgetown's Father Richard McSorley said in a 1976 article entitled, "It's a Sin to Build a Nuclear Weapon": "The taproot of violence in our society today is our intention to use nuclear weapons. Once we have agreed to that, all other evil is minor in comparison."

I could not disagree more strongly with Father McSorley. When we speak about the moral evil of nuclear warfare, we speak in hypothetical terms. We speak about evils that we envision that *might* occur—deaths that *could* be caused—while, as I speak, our government is condoning the legal destruction of a million and a half lives a year. In the time in which I have spoken, about 200 lives will have been snuffed out, legally, in the United States. The question of nuclear war is *not* the primary moral question that faces us today. The primary moral question is the question of abortion.

A few years ago, in my own native Boston, Cardinal Medeiros earned a great deal of notoriety in advance of the Congressional elections, by pointing out to his Catholic flock they had an obligation not to support candidates for political office who would vote in favor of abortion. He earned a great deal of notoriety, as I see it, not because he said anything wrong, but because the Catholic bishops and the Catholics of this country haven't been saying that often, and loudly, enough.

Any country hoping to have a moral posture on defense, or any other issue, must address this question first. This is the central moral question of our day, and the central moral evil that we must address. How can our government defend human rights when it doesn't know what a human is? If we don't know when life begins, why should we care when it ends?

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The Heritage Lectures

The Roman Catholic bishops of the United States are now discussing a Pastoral Letter on the morality of nuclear defense. But the issues discussed in *The Bishops and the Bomb* are not only interesting to Catholic readers. By any standards, nuclear weapons present us with excruciating moral decisions.

Since a nuclear war would be an unprecedented horror, nations have a moral obligation to make such a war less likely. That, in turn, implies a moral obligation to think clearly and cogently on the best strategies for nuclear defense.

In this provocative address, Philip F. Lawler argues that the United States has a moral obligation to safeguard peace with a revised, strengthened nuclear deterrent.

