

Nuclear Draft

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70-page document that became public in June.

In their second version of the letter, the five bishops on the committee state their opposition to current nuclear policy more bluntly.

They more clearly address the letter to the public at large. They spell out the bishops' goal: to influence the U.S. government by forming "a public attitude which sets stringent limits" on U.S. nuclear defense policy.

Even within the just-war moral tradition that acknowledges "some legitimate use of force," says the new document, "contemporary nuclear strategies push the moral limits beyond the permissible."

"Certain aspects of both U.S. and Soviet nuclear strategies fail" to meet the limits imposed by the moral principles of discrimination and proportionality in the justifiable use of force, it says.

Addressing specific issues concerning the use of nuclear weapons, the committee said:

"Under no circumstances may nuclear weapons or other instruments of mass slaughter be used for the purpose of destroying population centers or other predominantly civilian targets." Although moralists are divided on questions of indirect attacks on civilians, "we nonetheless feel obliged, as a matter of practical moral guidance, to register our opposition to a policy of

attacking targets... (whose destruction) would devastate the nearby population centers. The relevant moral principle in this case is the disproportionate damage which would be done to human life."

"We do not perceive any situation in which the deliberate initiation of nuclear war, on however restricted a scale, can be morally justified. Non-nuclear attacks by another state must be resisted by other than nuclear means... We find the moral responsibility of beginning nuclear war not justified by rational policies."

"As regards so-called 'limited' nuclear war, 'The issue at stake is the real as opposed to the theoretical possibility' of keeping such a war limited and within the stringent bounds of the requirements for a just war. The range of gravely important questions surrounding those issues 'makes us skeptical about the real meaning of limited.'"

The committee quoted from the official U.S. Military Posture Statement for FY 1983, an annual fiscal year policy statement and situation analysis by the office of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff: "Deterrence depends upon the assured capability and manifest will to inflict damage on the Soviet Union disproportionate to any goals that rational Soviet leaders might hope to achieve."

"The concept of 'disproportionate' or 'unacceptable' damage," the committee commented, "implies (more

strongly in some variants of deterrence than in others) the willingness to strike targets of 'value' in the adversary's country. 'Targets of value' either explicitly include the civilian population or include industrial targets which inevitably would involve killing large numbers of civilians."

The committee's draft document identified five basic moral issues involved in a policy of nuclear deterrence:

- "1. The possession of weapons of mass destruction;
- "2. The accompanying threat and/or intention to use them;
- "3. The declared, or at least not repudiated, willingness to use such weapons on civilians;
- "4. The moral significance of the prevention of use of nuclear weapons through a strategy which could not be morally implemented; and
- "5. The continued escalation of the nuclear arms race with its diversion of resources from other needs."

The moral aspect of such questions "is often mentioned" but "has hardly ever been a decisive dimension of the strategic debate," the document said.

Following a nuanced argument that admitted the complexity of the deterrence issues and their interrelatedness, the committee passed a fundamentally negative moral judgment, citing five interrelated "negative dimensions" of any deterrence policy:

"1. The intention to use strategic nuclear weapons which would violate the principles of discrimination and proportionality;

"2. The human consequences if deterrence fails;

"3. The political relationship which sustains deterrence, a relationship of radical distrust which John XXIII described in 'Peach on Earth' as the root of our international problems;

"4. The threats made or implied by deterrence give no assurance of any limits which would be maintained if deterrence fails; and

"5. The diversion of vitally needed resources which are consumed by the arms race."

"All of these conditions," the document said, "are the reason we have called the arms race, with deterrence as its key element, a 'sinful situation,' one which must be changed, however long and difficult the task."

The bishops urged support for an immediate, verifiable bilateral nuclear freeze, negotiated bilateral "deep cuts" in current U.S. and Soviet arsenals, a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and the removal of all nuclear weapons from border areas by all parties, coupled with increased controls against inadvertent or unauthorized use of tactical nuclear weapons.


"These judgments are meant to exemplify how a lack of unequivocal condemnation of deterrence is meant only to be an attempt to acknowledge the role attributed to deterrence, but not to support its extension beyond the prevention of use of nuclear weapons," the

committee said.

The second draft, like the first, addresses "issues" of military service, conscientious objection to military service, and the Christian tradition of non-violence. It praises the

pacifist position as a legitimate moral view of Christians, while also defending the just-war tradition as a second legitimate moral view which, it says, is also based on the Gospel message of love.

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