

task. We are moral teachers in a tradition which has always been prepared to relate moral principles to concrete problems. Particularly in this letter we could not be content with simply restating general moral principles or repeating well-known requirements about the ethics of war. We have had to examine, with the assistance of a broad spectrum of advisers of varying persuasions, the nature of existing and proposed weapons systems, the doctrines which govern their use and the consequences of using them. We have consulted people who engage their lives in protest against the existing nuclear strategy of the United States, and we have consulted others who have held or do hold responsibility for this strategy. It has been a sobering and perplexing experience. In light of the evidence which witnesses presented and in light of our study, reflection and consultation, we must reject nuclear war. But we feel obliged to relate our judgment to the specific elements which comprise the nuclear problem.

Though certain that the dangerous and delicate nuclear relationship the superpowers now maintain should not exist, we understand how it came to exist. In a world of sovereign states devoid of central authority and possessing the knowledge to produce nuclear weapons many choices were made, some clearly objectionable, others well-intended with mixed results, which brought the world to its present dangerous situation.

We see with increasing clarity the political folly of a system which threatens mutual suicide, the psychological damage this does to ordinary people, especially the young, the economic distortion of priorities — billions readily spent for destructive instruments while pitched battles are waged daily in our legislatures over much smaller amounts for the homeless, the hungry and the helpless here and abroad. But it is much less clear how we translate a no to nuclear war into the personal and public choices which can move us in a new direction, toward a national policy and an international system which more adequately reflect the values and vision of the kingdom of God.

These tensions in our assessment of the politics and strategy of the nuclear age reflect the conflicting elements of the nuclear dilemma and the balance of terror which it has produced. We have said earlier in this letter that the fact of war reflects the existence of sin in the world. The nuclear threat and the danger it poses to human life and civilization exemplify in a qualitatively new way the perennial struggle of the political community to contain the use of force, particularly among states.

Precisely because of the destructive nature of nuclear weapons, strategies have been developed which previous generations would have found unintelligible. Today military preparations are undertaken on a vast and sophisticated scale, but the declared purpose is not to use the weapons produced. Threats are made which would be suicidal to implement. The key to security is no longer only military secrets, for in some instances security may best be served by informing one's adversary publicly what weapons one has and what plans exist for their use. The presumption of the nation-state system that sovereignty implies an ability to protect a nation's territory and population is precisely the presumption denied by the nuclear capacities of both superpowers. In a sense each is at the mercy of the other's perception of what strategy is "rational," what kind of damage is "unacceptable," how "convincing" one side's threat is to the other.

The political paradox of deterrence has also strained our moral conception. May a nation threaten what it may never do? May it possess what it may never use? Who is involved in the threat each superpower makes: government officials? or military personnel? or the citizenry in whose defense the threat is made?

In brief, the danger of the situation is clear; but how to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, how to assess deterrence and how to delineate moral responsibility in the nuclear age are less clearly seen or stated. Reflecting the complexity of the nuclear problem, our arguments in this pastoral must be detailed and nuanced; but our no to nuclear war must in the end be definitive and decisive.

B. Religious Leadership and the Public Debate

Because prevention of nuclear war appears, from several perspectives, to be not only the surest but only way to limit its destructive potential, we see our role as moral teachers precisely in terms of helping to form public opinion with a clear determination to resist resort to nuclear war as an instrument of national policy. If "prevention is the only cure," then there are diverse tasks to be performed in preventing what should never occur. As bishops we see a specific task defined for us in Pope John Paul II's 1982 World Day of Peace Message:

"Peace cannot be built by the power of rulers alone. Peace can be firmly constructed only if it corresponds to the resolute determination of all people of good will. Rulers must be supported and enlightened by a public opinion that encourages them or, where necessary, expresses disapproval." (60)

The pope's appeal to form public opinion is not an abstract task. Especially in a democracy, public opinion can passively acquiesce in policies and strategies or it can through a series of measures indicate limits beyond which a government should

not proceed. The "new moment" which exists in the public debate about nuclear weapons provides a creative opportunity and a moral imperative to examine the relationship between public opinion and public policy. We believe it is necessary for the sake of prevention to build a barrier against the concept of nuclear war as a viable strategy for defense. There should be a clear public resistance to the rhetoric of "winnable" nuclear wars, or unrealistic expectations of "surviving" nuclear exchanges, and strategies of "protracted nuclear war." We oppose such rhetoric.

We seek to encourage a public attitude which sets stringent limits on the kind of actions our own government and other governments will take on nuclear policy. We believe religious

leaders have a task in concert with public officials, analysts, private organizations and the media to set the limits beyond which our military policy should not move in word or action. Charting a moral course in a complex public policy debate involves several steps. We will address four questions, offering our reflections on them as an invitation to a public moral dialogue:

1. The use of nuclear weapons;
2. The policy of deterrence in principle and in practice;
3. Specific steps to reduce the danger of war;
4. Long-term measures of policy and diplomacy.

C. The Use of Nuclear Weapons

Establishing moral guidelines in the nuclear debate means addressing first the question of the use of nuclear weapons. That question has several dimensions.

It is clear that those in the church who interpret the gospel teaching as forbidding all use of violence would oppose any use of nuclear weapons under any conditions. In a sense the existence of these weapons simply confirms and reinforces one of the initial insights of the non-violent position, namely, that Christians should not use lethal force since the hope of using it selectively and restrictively is so often an illusion. Nuclear weapons seem to prove this point in a way heretofore unknown.

For the tradition which acknowledges some legitimate use of force, some important elements of contemporary nuclear strategies move beyond the limits of moral justification. A justifiable use of force must be both discriminatory and proportionate. Certain aspects of both U.S. and Soviet strategies fail both tests as we shall discuss below. The technical literature and the personal testimony of public officials who have been closely associated with U.S. nuclear strategy have both convinced us of the overwhelming probability that major nuclear exchange would have no limits. (61)

On the more complicated issue of "limited" nuclear war, we

By BISHOP THOMAS J. GUMBLETON

The teaching of the pastoral letter with regard to the use of nuclear weapons may, at first glance, prove surprising to many Catholics.

Because nuclear weapons have become so commonplace in the world in which we live, a teaching that the use of nuclear weapons would almost certainly be immoral can seem to be very challenging. Yet that is exactly the teaching that the bishops are giving in this pastoral letter.

In effect they are calling us to realize that what is regarded as reasonable by the world is not always judged reasonable in light of Christ's Gospel.

The bishops begin by indicating that those who follow the non-violent approach will oppose any use of nuclear weapons. Since Catholics who follow this approach even oppose the use of conventional weapons, it is not surprising that they will oppose the use of nuclear weapons even more strongly.

With respect to those who follow the just-war approach, the bishops conclude that those who apply the just-war principles properly will also reject the use of nuclear weapons. The reason for this is that, in almost every conceivable situation, the use of nuclear weapons violates such just-war principles as proportionality and discrimination.

The pastoral letter distinguishes three situations involving nuclear weapons:

- the first use of nuclear weapons;
- the use of nuclear weapons against population centers;
- and the use of nuclear weapons against military targets.

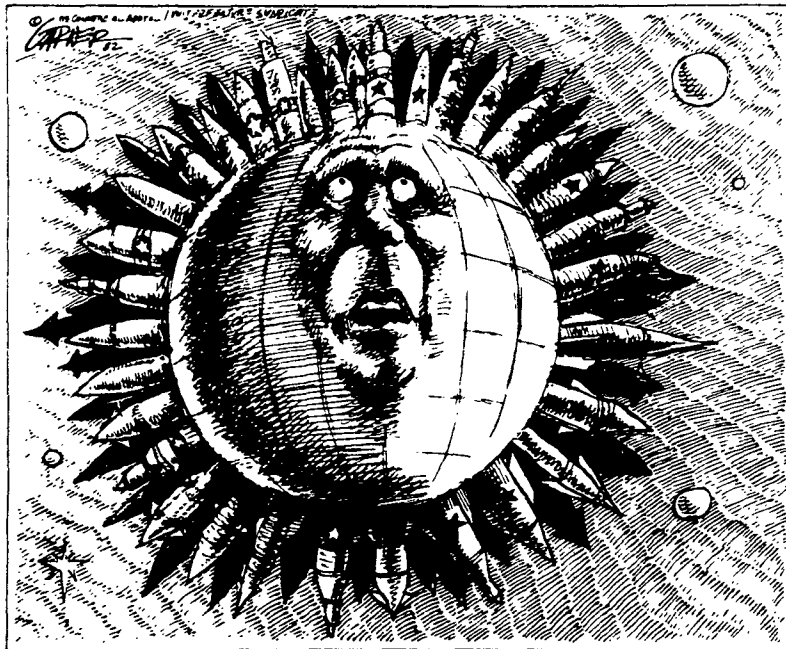
Using unusually emphatic language, the bishops state that the first use of nuclear weapons, even on a small scale, must be considered immoral.

Secondly, following Vatican II and the teaching of recent popes, the bishops indicate that it would always be wrong to fire nuclear weapons at population centers or other predominantly civilian targets. The bishops state that, even if a country's own cities had been struck by nuclear weapons, it would still be wrong to fire nuclear weapons for the purpose of destroying the enemy's cities.

What of a situation in which the enemy has first fired nuclear weapons and a government or military leader wants to respond by firing nuclear weapons against the enemy's military targets? The bishops' view is that such a response would very likely lead to a full-scale nuclear war. And for that reason they conclude that, unless someone can actually show that such a catastrophe will not occur, no moral justification for taking such a risk exists.

In effect, a field commander would have to have moral certitude that his act of firing a nuclear missile against an enemy's military target would not provoke the enemy to escalate his own use of nuclear weapons. The commander would also have to be morally certain that the effects of the nuclear weapon would not disproportionately destroy civilian life in surrounding areas. The bishops' view is that it would be extremely difficult for any military person to have such certitude in the actual situation.

In summary, even though their teaching puts them at odds with certain policies of the U.S. government and of NATO, the U.S. bishops strongly oppose any use of nuclear weapons. They call upon Catholics who follow the just-war approach as well as upon those who follow the non-violent approach to oppose any use of nuclear weapons.



William Garner "War Heads"