

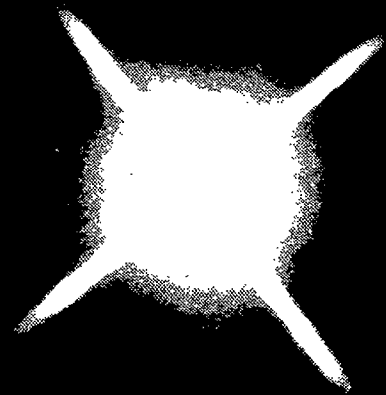
# COURIER-JOURNAL

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## Faith Today

The sun  
will come out  
tomorrow...



Only if we  
choose

By Katharine Bird  
NC News Service

In a nuclear age, what responsibility do we have for the future?

People today "have the same responsibility to the future of the planet as they have for the care of their own child," Father Ernan McMullin thinks. He teaches philosophy of science at the University of Notre Dame.

This presents Christians with a paradox, he said, since the Bible says not to worry about tomorrow — to be concerned about the present. But, Father McMullin continued, the Bible was speaking of a different world, a world whose continued existence "didn't depend on human choice."

Today "we have power over the future in ways not possible ever before, even 100 years ago," Father McMullin said. Recently he attended a conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in New York. He came away convinced anew that choices being made now have the possibility of "drastically altering the environment in ways that are difficult, dangerous and uncomfortable for

future generations."

For example: "Today we are using up natural resources in spendthrift, sometimes frivolous ways," he said.

Always, Father McMullin continued, "at the back of our minds is the threat of nuclear destruction. We have the capacity to destroy the earth."

He suggested imagining how survivors of a nuclear war might feel as they look back on the events leading up to the final blast. Any survivors, he thinks, won't limit their blame to generals and presidents. Survivors also will hold accountable "all those who allowed destructive types of weapons to be built; who didn't insist more strongly on negotiation."

However, Father McMullin admitted, persuading people they can do something about the serious problems of the times is very difficult. "The temptation is to give up," he said.

His view, especially where nuclear weapons are concerned, was echoed by Father James Bacik, campus minister at the University of Toledo, Ohio. "I get a strong sense that facing the war and peace issue today tears many students up," Father Bacik

said in an interview.

Recently he studied the U.S. bishops' peace pastoral and other articles on the issue with honors students. Six of 15 students admitted that they had "never grappled with the issue because it's too painful," he remarked.

The campus minister said those students may be succumbing to "psychic numbness," a phrase used by Yale psychologist Robert Lifton. It is what happens when people become reluctant to confront topics they consider hopeless. It isn't healthy, Father Bacik said.

Father Bacik then explained how he proceeds to convince students that "ultimately it makes sense to work for peace." He is convinced that people "will get involved if they think they can make a difference."

The campus minister uses a two-part approach. First, as a framework for the discussion, he helps students discover that ultimately hope can be found in God; that, despite the seeming hopelessness of a situation, God's kingdom will come with their aid.

Father Bacik also alerts students to "the signals, of hope in real life." Often, he explained, these involve small efforts: 50 students attending a prayer vigil for peace or sponsoring seminars on the bishops' peace pastoral.

Father Bacik also points to people involved in peace activities. He looks for examples of people who can "articulate a vision and motivate others" to see how life can be different — people willing "to go out on a limb" for deeply held beliefs.

Both priests stressed that in a democracy elected officials can be influenced to be more responsive to the future by informed voters.

"The American tradition is one of political initiative," Father McMullin commented. "We create the government and have control."

Father McMullin also thinks Christians have a "special responsibility to adopt a concerned and loving attitude" toward others. This includes children not yet born and people often considered enemies — those living in communist nations.

He thinks such an attitude can help Christians learn to think of others in making choices about how to live and what activities to pursue.

It can lead individuals and families to think about ways to conserve and preserve the earth for future generations.

(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)

For the first time in history, writes Katharine Bird, the existence of the planet depends on human choice. And despite the enormity of the challenge, working for peace should be a Christian, and human, priority.

