

worldview

A JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

THE GREAT DEBATE

At certain times in history a great event forces men to great reassessments. The development of nuclear weapons of mass destruction has been such an event in our time. Faced with the awful prospect of nuclear destruction, the traditional concept of a "just war" has become, for many, the curious relic of an easier age. Increasingly, we hear, the real alternatives are now the fearful ones of surrender or death for civilization itself.

In December 1958 *Worldview* published an article by the distinguished Catholic theologian John Courtney Murray which reassessed the contemporary reassessment. The "traditional doctrine," Father Murray claimed, is as relevant today as it was before Hiroshima, and its initial relevance "lies in its value as the solvent of false dilemmas."

The first of these false dilemmas, Father Murray said, is that of the two extreme positions of "a softly sentimental pacifism and a cynically hard realism." The second false dilemma "is between the desperate alternatives, either universal atomic death or complete surrender to Communism."

Father Murray noted that the traditional position asserts that the *unlimited* use of nuclear force is immoral; but, he said, "the facts assert that the use of nuclear force may be necessary, lest a free field be granted to brutal violence and lack of conscience." In this situation, he argued, "since nuclear war may be a necessity," the conditions for limiting such a war "must be made a possibility . . . Its possibility must be created. And the creation of its possibility requires a work of intelligence, and the development of manifold action on a whole series of levels — political (foreign and domestic), diplomatic, military, technological, scientific, fiscal, etc., with the important inclusion of the levels of public opinion and popular education. To say that the possibility cannot be created by intelligence and energy, under the direction of a moral imperative, is to succumb to some sort of determinism in human affairs."

In the months following its publication of this essay, *Worldview* has presented the opinions of a

wide range of other thinkers on this, the great moral issue of our age. Political scientists, theologians, military analysts and journalists—"realists" and "pacifists"—have joined in the discussion. The essay by Kenneth W. Thompson which appears in this issue is a further — and, for this phase of the debate, a final — contribution. Together, we think, these essays make an important argument, and they will soon be published as a symposium, in pamphlet form.

There has been a strange silence on the subject of morality and modern war in the United States, and there has been a dangerous divorce between the moralists and the makers of policy. The debate over morality and nuclear weapons has raged in many European countries — notably in Great Britain—but here there exists a widespread apathy which seems to result more from ignorance than from cynicism. The great majority of citizens, it seems, has no notion that any future war carries dangers that were undreamed of in any past war, and the government has not been concerned to inform them of this fact. Indeed, the discussion so far has often seemed rather academic, far removed from "the world where things really happen."

Unfortunately, the discussion is not so removed, nor can it be finally terminated until some meeting between the twin demands of morality and survival is effected.

Note: *Worldview* will soon complete its third year of publication. During these three years the journal has presented the views of some of the most distinguished writers in American life in the general area of "religion and international affairs," and it has reached an increasingly wide range of readers. But for the magazine to be truly effective, a much wider readership must be developed, and for this we must depend, in large part, upon those who now subscribe. The holiday season is an ideal time for them to help, by presenting gift subscriptions to friends who they think will be interested. For this purpose a holiday gift subscription blank appears on page eleven of this issue.