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On Nuclear Deterrence: Some Ramifications

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It is immediately clear to anyone who looks at the late Sir Michael Quinlan's letters in *On Nuclear Deterrence*[1] that his primary concern was to prevent war.[2] Those who may have thought that he was some kind of 'war monger', or a clever manipulator working for whatever government happened to be in power, are clearly in the wrong. Not only did he seek to prevent war: he thought that nuclear weapons had made major war between nuclear-armed states a logical absurdity. 'War-making capability has reached and passed the limit of meaningful rationality' (p. 68). Nuclear weapons had effectively given governments *infinite* destructive power: a power no state can possibly *use*. While he did not deny that during the cold war other factors had helped to make warfare unlikely or impracticable, for him nuclear weapons were the lynch-pin. They, and they alone, made major war virtually *impossible*. They had thus conferred huge benefits on a world which had nearly destroyed itself by warfare (including nuclear warfare) in the twentieth century.

But it followed that if military conflict between major states was to be avoided nuclear deterrence had to be maintained. Any proposal to weaken it must be fiercely resisted. Hence his profound opposition to nuclear disarmament (as distinct from arms-reductions) during the cold war, and his contempt (I hope this not too strong a word) for CND and all its works.

A spectacular corollary of his devotion to 'defence' was his unswerving adherence to the Roman Catholic Church. He had been educated by the Jesuits in Wimbledon. At Oxford in the early 1950s he was doubtless to be seen at Campion Hall or the University Catholic Chaplaincy (not alas, as I recall, at Blackfriars). After his double first in 'Greats' and national service in the Royal Air Force (1952–54) he joined the administrative class of the civil service. Rapidly scaling the promotional ladder at the Ministry of Defence,

[1] *On NuclearDeterrence: the Correspondence of Sir Michael Quinlan* edited by Tanya Ogilvie-White (IISS, London, September 2011)

[2] He was an indefatigable correspondent with all sorts of people, from top generals and civil servants to lowly citizens who were worried by the UK government's devotion to nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence. I should perhaps make clear that I was one of the latter.

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he became Deputy Undersecretary for Policy from 1977 to 1981 (in effect the strategic policy-guru for government). Later on from 1988 to 1992 he became Permanent Secretary. Throughout this time he was engaged in private correspondence with a huge number of people. Shortly before he died in 2009 he requested that a representative portion of these letters be made public for the record.[3]

An important factor in 'big Q's thinking was that totalitarian or Stalinist communism was an unmitigated evil: a poison in the global body politic. This belief was one key to his motivation. But it was not the most significant, for war itself was the ultimate enemy. And only nuclear weapons, deployed strategically as deterrents to any would-be aggressor, could ensure that major war would be avoided. True, towards the end of his life MQ began to shift his ground somewhat, largely because of the dangers of proliferation beyond the East-West cold war. But the correspondence published in this book does not fully record this change, partly because electronic communication made written documents less necessary.[4] And MQ never gave up his belief in nuclear deterrence as the basis for any sound defence policy for Britain. His legacy remains with us today, with the likelihood that Trident will be replaced after 2015.

The most interesting bits of the book are those in which MQ confronted critics whose case against nuclear deterrence was primarily moral. He regarded the Quaker pacifist Sydney Bailey as one of the most significant of these, partly because the latter understood the strategic realities of the cold war (which in his opinion many other critics did not). However, in my view his most significant critics were not the professed pacifists but those who nevertheless thought that nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence went beyond the moral pale altogether. And if they were Catholics into the bargain, these critics caught MQ's special attention. My old late-lamented friend Walter Stein, who was a member of the Catholic peace-movement PAX,[5] was one of MQ's most effective critics And in the background, though MQ seems never to have corresponded with her, was the Catholic philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe (translator of Wittgenstein)

[3] This is why Tanya Ogilvie-White, an international relations lecturer from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, who has been associated with the IISS, was asked to edit the mass of documents which MQ had immaculately filed at home in his spare time. She has chosen a representative sample of the letters for publication, with an expert commentary on the topics, the people and the policies discussed in them. *On Nuclear Deterrence* is divided into three main parts: I *The Logic and Morality of Nuclear Deterrence;* II *Strategic Decisions: LRTNF and Trident,* and III: *Arms Control and Disarmament*.

[4] Hence the editor has concentrated on the years up to 1992, when written letters were MQ's predominant form of communication with his supporters and his detractors.

[5] I myself joined PAX in the late 1950s, alongside Stan Windass, when it held annual meetings at Spode House, next door to Hawkesyard Priory where Dominican students such as Herbert McCabe, Lawrence Bright and Timother Radcliffe were studying. PAX joined with the continental Pax Christi movement in the 1970s under my chairmanship.

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who tried to stop President Truman from being given an honorary degree at Oxford because he had authorised the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[6] She also contributed a chapter called *War and Murder* to Walter Stein's book *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience*.[7]

MQ's claim that nuclear weapons made warfare between nuclear-armed states a logical absurdity, indeed a virtual impossibility, was one of his most important insights. Very few other strategists emphasised this. Many of them concentrated on how nuclear warfare should be conducted, for example by analysing nuclear targeting. MQ's believed this sort of analysis to be academic. Yet it could not be avoided. For he always insisted that you cannot have a deterrent unless you are prepared to use it. Mere possession of nuclear weapons without the willingness to use them is no deterrent in the long run.[8] Indeed MQ held that it is just *because* you are willing to use nuclear weapons that it is impossible rationally to do so. This is the paradox of nuclear deterrence. And if this is the case, you have to work out how, when and where they could legitimately be used, even though such use would be suicidal madness.

Furthermore, he never doubted that any such use would inevitably involve the killing of a great many innocent civilians. And he never doubted either that the intentional killing of the innocent was forbidden, not only by any ethic worth the name but also by the Catholic Church's explicit teaching. Somehow he had to find a way round this crux. And his 'solution' was to appeal to the principle of 'double effect'. According to this perfectly reasonable thesis, our actions have multiple effects. While one effect may be what we intend to do, others however unavoidable may be unintended. So if we have to contemplate the use of a nuclear weapon on an enemy target, as part of a plan to deter him, we can claim that while the destruction of (say) the military installations which we plan to attack will be intended, the unavoidable deaths of civilians also caused by the attack are not intended. Such deaths are only the *per accidens* 'side effects' of what we intentionally do. And as such they can be permitted even

[6] see Chapter 7 of her *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 3 (Blackwell's, Oxford, 1981). Her ground-breaking book on *Intention* (1957) grew out of this controversy over nuclear weapons.

[7] *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience* (Merlin Press, London, 1961) was a key contribution to the debate before the second Vatican Council. Elizabeth Anscombe's essay in it is reprinted in Volume 3 of her *Collected Papers,* pp. 51–61. MQ's correspondence with Walter Stein was long and complex, but the editor has managed to include some important excerpts from it in her selection.

[8] This was one of his objections to the statement put out by the American Catholic bishops in 1983, which forbade the *use* of nuclear weapons but suggested that *possession* of them for deterring others was licit. He took great pains to convince Cardinal Hume in Britain not to go along with this suggestion, even if this meant that the UK bishops' conference should sit on the fence about the issue – which they duly did and are still doing, despite the strongly anti-nuclear stance of the Vatican since the end of the cold war.

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though we do not *want* them to do happen. They are not our *purpose*. If we could avoid them we would.[9]

Even so, the question remains, *do* we intend them? For if we do so then they are forbidden. MQ's case boils down, in the end, to the claim that the unavoidable deaths of innocents which would occur in any actual use of a nuclear weapon would be only 'side effects'. (Very often, to avoid thinking clearly about this issue, other people use the pompous Latinate phrase 'collateral damage' instead, even though it only means the same thing). In *War and Murder* Elizabeth Anscombe called this argument 'double think about double effect'. In 1963 Stan Windass spelt out very clearly its implications.[10] Subsequently other writers (including myself, Roger Ruston, Anthony Kenny, Herbert McCabe, Brian Midgely etc.), often in the pages of English Dominican journals, elaborated on the 'double think about double effect' fallacy. In so doing many of us concluded that nuclear deterrence is an ethically unacceptable strategy which ought to be abandoned. But then the question arises: how? MQ did not have the time before he died fully to think through this conundrum.[11]

How to abolish nuclear weapons is obviously an extremely difficult task, given that nuclear deterrence is nowadays built into the defence policies of many major states, including the state-members of the UN Security Council. Abolishing them involves reversing these state-policies, and since those who devise and support them do not comprehend the ethical prohibition which they unavoidably entail, it seems almost impossible to do so. This fact is genuinely tragic, as I pointed out to MQ himself many years ago.[12] But what exactly is tragic about it, given that so far nuclear war has not occurred? My

[9] Sometimes people claim that against the evil action of dropping the bomb on a target including innocents we can and should balance the good action of preventing war by deterrence. For an obvious example of this argument see G. Hughes SJ in *The Cross and the Bomb* (Oxford, Mowbrays, 1983). But the argument is clearly fallacious, since *preventing war* is not an action at all but is only a *purpose* or *result* of some actions we do. This is why I cannot be *commanded* to prevent war in the sense in which I can be commanded to drop the bomb. And the goodness or badness of deterrence is about the *actions* involved (such as dropping the bomb), not about our purposes in acting. This is not always a distinction MQ observed. For example in *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons* (his farewell thoughts on the matter, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 48) he writes ' "innocents" must not be made the object of deliberate attack . . . and by "deliberate" attack is meant attack in which the harm to non-combatants is positively desired and purposed'. But the issue is not that attacking innocents is our *desire* or *purpose,* but that it is our *intention*.

[10] *Blackfriars* No. 516, June 1963.

[11] But he did begin to do so, notably in an article in the IISS's *Survival* (Vol. 49 No. 4, Winter 2007–08) called *Abolishing Nuclear Armouries: Policy or Pipe Dream?* and in Part IV of *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons*. Since then further work has been conducted by many others, not only at the IISS but elsewhere as well.

[12] In a paper on 'False Gods', part of which is included below. I also discussed some of the same themes in my contribution to *Language, Meaning and God: Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe OP* (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1987 pp. 190–208).

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answer is that it involves a belief in false gods, in the shape of the sovereignty of states. It is belief in these sovereignties which lies at the heart of our dilemma. Whether anything can be done to eradicate it is a major question for our time.

In a nutshell my case is that contemporary 'sovereign' states are among the forces hostile to the sovereignty of God which St. Paul alludes to in 1 Corinthians 15:24. That is, they are among the sovereignties, authorities and powers which are to be done away with by the 'coming' of the risen Christ. Nevertheless human life can continue only by inhabiting distinct territories, each with its resources, culture, geography and history. Does this not imply the existence of sovereign states? My answer is no. The sovereign states we now belong to are not necessary. On the contrary they emerged from the post-mediaeval wars of Europe, and were ratified by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. (The American analyst Philip Bobbitt has traced this development in his massive book *The Shield of Achilles*).[13] True, human beings, since their emergence from Africa hundreds of thousands of years ago, can flourish only in territorial communities. But the purpose of these communities is essentially friendship, i.e. *charity. A*nd it is contrary to the will of God that these communities and their territories should be in mutual competition, let alone violent conflict, with each other.[14] Yet such competition and conflict has always existed between sovereign states, and violent conflict between them is endemic precisely because of their need to put the interests of their own citizens before the citizens of other states. As I write, the resources of Africa are being appropriated by states as far away as China, while the leaders of sovereign states in Brussels are locked in competition over the future of the Eurozone, and in Durban they are haggling over the probable catastrophe of climate change. It is obvious that such competition is contrary to the common good of *all*.

Part of what is meant by 'original sin' is that *warfare* has been the normal way in which the 'sovereignties and dominations' created by human beings try to resolve their internecine differences. If the European Union collapses, as seems quite possible, the chances of renewed warfare between the European states may become irresistible – unless nuclear proliferation among them prevents it. Yet there is a different way of living in which communities can and indeed do live together in peace. For the existence of the Church, divided as it is into territories or dioceses, each with its overseer or bishop, is precisely the *alternative* to the organisation of the human race into competing sovereign communities or 'states'. For within the Church, dioceses,

[13] London, Penguin Books 2002.

[14] As the Roman eucharistic prayer III says: 'grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with the Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ'.

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for all their variety of cultures and traditions, live in harmony with each other. And a global council of dioceses, such as happened at the Vatican in the early 1960s, is a model of how states should talk to each other, in charity and peace, despite their manifold differences. Of course it is part of the sin of the sovereign state system that it tries to worm its way into the organisation of the Church itself. It encourages dioceses to think of themselves as first and foremost parts of the state-system in which they exist. Anomalies like 'national conferences' of bishops emerge to reinforce this fact. In some cases, the Church even becomes part of the state's own machinery, as with the Church of England in Britain, where the head of the state also claims to be the head of the Church. This of course is original sin made manifest in the political structure of the world.[15]

Whether the states of the European Union, with or without the United Kingdom, can come together to avoid this 'original sin' is not yet clear. What is clear is that the attempt to create a union of sovereign states in Europe for the good of all is a key issue for the twenty-first century.

II

In *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons* (p. 49) MQ claimed that there are only three choices concerning nuclear weapons:

1) always and unconditionally to renounce their possession;
2) renounce the *use* of nuclear weapons but *possess* them for deterrence;
3) be willing to *use* nuclear weapons in some extreme circumstances.

But there *is* a fourth possibility: namely that every one of these three choices is insupportable, and yet *given a world divided into separate sovereignties* there is no other choice. In other words, nuclear deterrence confronts us with a truly *tragic* predicament. What this amounts to is that nuclear deterrence presents us with an ethical conundrum comparable to that of Aeschylus's Agamemnon. In order to rescue the kidnapped Helen from the clutches of the Trojans, Agamemnon was obliged by 'divine' oracle to kill his innocent daughter. Today a parallel, and equally insoluble, conundrum confronts us. Our 'just war' ethic obliges us today to adopt nuclear

[15] For a brief summary of the Christian approach to sovereign state powers in the New Testament see Herbert McCabe OP in *Render to Caesar*, chapter 22 of his *God, Christ and Us* (edited by Brian Davies OP, London, Continuum, 2003). Of course, by refusing to collaborate with either the Roman colonial power or the nationalist aspirations of the Pharisees Jesus is bound to be killed by one side or the other in the ensuing conflict.

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deterrence as the only viable alternative to actual violence. Yet we can only do this by adopting a strategy which involves being willing *intentionally* to kill the innocent. This too is a tragic dilemma; for as Quinlan admits on page 1 of his book on *Just War*[16], deliberately killing the innocent is something which 'absolutely ought not to be done'.

How come that Agamemnon had no alternative? Well the answer is simply his unquestioned belief – shared by all the characters in the drama – in the commands of the gods. In other words, it was belief in a polytheistic superstition. But in the *Eumenides* Aeschylus adumbrated an alternative: a society with justice for all, in a framework of reconciliation, peace and the rule of law. Of course, this new world could only be vaguely conceived as a faint possibility, not described in any detail. Nevertheless, centuries later Agamemnon's polytheistic superstition was challenged and even superseded, with the emergence of monotheistic Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

We must apply this lesson of the *Oresteia* to our own conundrum. How come we too are in an insoluble dilemma, in which the only way of doing what is overwhelmingly necessary, i.e. to prevent major war, includes being willing to do something forbidden, namely commit mass-murder of the innocent? The answer is parallel to that of Aeschylus. We have to get rid of our own underlying belief in false gods.

But what does this mean? Well, as far as anyone can see, the current (and historically rather recent) division of humankind into competing 'sovereign' powers, or nation-states, seems fixed and unchallengeable[17] For practical purposes these powers are our 'gods'. This was recognised early in the rise of the sovereign-state system by Thomas Hobbes when he wrote: 'the Multitude so united in one Person, is called a Commonwealth..or rather (to speak more reverently) of that Mortall God to which we owe under the Immortall God, our peace and defence'.[18] But it is even more obvious today, when states act like personalities writ large, whose will is law and cannot be gainsaid, even though (like the gods of ancient Athens) their voices are mutually contradictory. 'Sovereign' national powers thus trump the common good of *all*.[19] For example, every time a

[16] *Just War* by Charles Guthrie and Michael Quinlan (London, Bloomsbury 2007)

[17] In his books *the Shield of Achilles* and *Terror and Consent* (London, Penguin Books, 2002 and 2008) Philip Bobbitt persuasively argues that for the twenty-first century this is no longer the case See also *The End of Sovereignty* by Joseph Camilleri and Jim Falk (Edward Elgar, Aldershot, 1992).

[18] *Leviathan*, Part 1, Chapter 17

[19] The common good of *all* is a constant theme of papal pronouncements in international affairs. Cf. the recent statement of Benedict VI to the newly-appointed US ambassador to the Holy See, February 29th 2008, and his speech to the United Nations, 18th April 2008.

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political leader of a state affirms his determination to ensure, above all else, the safety and security of his own citizens, if necessary at the expense of the citizens of other powers, or even at the price of undermining the rule of law, he reveals himself a willing victim of the false god of state 'sovereignty'.[20] The current debate about the Euro within the European Union, when leaders claim the right to retain sovereign state powers even at the expense of the flourishing of other states (and notably the poorest) is an example of the sin.

Every time a state tries, contrary to international law, to justify invading another state, say for purposes of extirpating terrorists, it is exemplifying its commitment to the same false god. The same goes for attempts by any one of the powers to claim a 'right' to torture its alleged enemies, as with American 'water boarding'. Even the United Nations, with its 'international laws', is built upon the same false gods, despite valiant efforts to tame their worst effects.[21] And in so far as nuclear weapons have produced a gigantic impasse, or *reductio ad absurdam* of the sovereign nation-state order, with its Clausewitzian assumptions about the feasibility of war to gain political objectives, their elimination would *ipso facto* be a first step in the process of abandoning the superstitions of statehood.[22]

How long it will still take to dislodge the false gods is anybody's guess, because ultimately it is a matter of divine providence rather

[20] This is what happened in the case of British buckling under a Saudi threat to break off intelligence co-operation about suspected terrorists because of an unwelcome Serious Fraud Office investigation into the alleged bribery of a key Saudi official by the arms manufacturer BAE. The enquiry was halted on the ground that the Saudi threat could undermine 'the UK's global counter-terrorist strategy' and endanger 'British lives on British streets'. The challenge to the rule of law and of the independence of the judiciary, which were implicit in halting the enquiry (a decision taken without reference to the likely global repercussions of undermining the rule of law) was issued because of perceived risks to the 'UK's national and international security'. In other words state security trumped the rule of law in this case.

[21] It is worth noting that one of the few times when there was some hint – we cannot here escape dreaming the dream of the *Eumenides* – of a post-nuclear world, when the victorious powers discussed the 'Baruch' plan of 1946 for internationalising and thence eliminating nuclear weapons, the hope was crushed by the two main characters, the USA and the USSR. They could not overcome their belief in their own false 'divinity' which had created the insoluble conundrum in the first place. Much the same has to be said about the failed attempt by Reagan and Gorbachev at Reykjavik in 1986 to do something similar. And the same is likely to happen with the initiative by Henry Kissinger, George Schultz, Sam Nunn, William Perry and others, for the nuclear powers to get rid of their nuclear weapons before things get much worse. Of course, if *per impossibile* their initiative were to be successful, this would mark the beginning of a new phase of history.

[22] On this see Ken Booth, *Trident Replacement or International Trust Building?*; and also Ken Booth and Frank Barnaby, *The Future of Britain's Nuclear Weapons* (Oxford, Oxford Research Group, March 2006); Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge University Press 2007); and Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (Houndmills, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008).

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than of self-sufficient human actions. But practical politics suggests that it will be a long and complicated business, although you can never be sure that providence won't interrupt it in an unexpected way. For the supposedly sovereign powers of states are in fact only characters in a myth, written and revised over the centuries, the current version of which we in the twenty-first century constantly re-tell to ourselves as if it were the only possible story. (The prototype version of the modern story was told by the authors of the Treaties of Augsburg in 1555 and of Westphalia in 1648). Yet the Greek myths were not merely fictions: rather they were ways of understanding the truths of their times. So too with the myth of state sovereignty today. How long the present regime will last is anybody's guess: but one thing is certain. Our state 'gods' are not immortal, for they are characters in an obsolescent modern myth, and today there are very powerful forces which are pushing in the opposite direction. Climate change is only the most powerful and most urgent.[23] The whole trend towards globalisation, not just of the world economy but of the media, the internet, even the crime of terrorism, is pushing us into admitting that the modern myth is impossible to sustain in the long run.[24] And of course MQ's recognition that nuclear weapons have made war a logical absurdity is only another nail in the coffin of state sovereignty. For as Clausewitz understood war is part of the behaviour of the sovereign state under stress, and now this way of behaving has become a logical absurdity. The existence of a supra-national institution like the EU is a key sign of the times, for of course its primary purpose, even today, as it was from the beginning, is to prevent war in Europe. And were it to collapse in the wake of the Eurozone crisis, warfare could once more haunt the European continent, even if it took the self-cancelling form of states acquiring nuclear weapons to deter each other.

Yet, just as it was difficult for Aeschylus to describe what a world of peace and rule of law, free from the slavery to false gods, would look like, it is hard today to describe a world *not* organised into sovereign states, and thus *not* in thrall to state gods. But I maintain we do have some kind of clue to the answer, or at least a hint of what is necessary. I am thinking of the role of the Church. For

[23] Its likely consequences, including mass-migration without regard for national frontiers of people from inundated lands, simply exemplify the fragility of the 'sovereign' state system

[24] The Pope made the essential point in his speech to the UN on 18th April 2008. Gordon Brown of the UK has said much the same: 'For the first time in history we have the opportunity to come together around a global covenant, to reframe the international architecture and build a truly global society'. It is worth noting here that during local elections in the UK the Labour Party was heavily defeated partly because of complaints from voters about rising global food and fuel prices: issues which the electorate has yet to understand are practically beyond the power of any sovereign state government to control.

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offering us the outline of what mankind's future should look like is a fundamental purpose of the Church. It is the sign of how we could live as a community of human beings organised, not to fulfil the aspirations of nation-states, but to practice the gospel of common good for everybody. The Church is the *sacrament* of a world not in thrall to false 'sovereign' gods.

This may sound like a preposterous claim. Yet it is but the sober truth. For what Christianity teaches is that human communities *can* (and sometimes even do) exist according to the gospel. The Church, as an organisation in the world, was created precisely to show how this is possible. For in so far as we human beings can only flourish within a diversity of landscapes, cultures, languages, habits of thinking and of feeling, yet need to share in the privilege of living in charity with everyone else, we have to comprehend the possibility of reconciling the diversity of human cultures with the common good of the whole of humankind. This is exactly what the 'catholicity' of the universal Church is all about. And the institution of episcopacy, together with the diversity of cultures and landscapes within the Church which is what the institution of distinct dioceses is for, together constitute the sacrament of global unity within diversity.

Of course while groupings of bishops into 'national conferences', with each conference belonging to one particular *state*, are a welcome and necessary counterbalance to the ever-centralising tendency of the modern papacy, they are themselves theological anomalies. They are simply a practical result of the way the world is currently run.[25]

Furthermore the products of their anomalous situation can at times be unfortunate, being divisive where what is needed is dedication to the common good of all. Thus, the teaching of the Church on nuclear weapons was badly compromised in the 1980s by the pressure exerted on bishops' conferences to say, or not to say, things determined by governments.[26] In the early 1980s numerous conferences of bishops were issuing statements on nuclear deterrence, because of the ethical difficulties associated with the introduction of medium-range nuclear weapons into Europe. All of the bishops' conferences belonging to the nuclear weapons states concluded, with varying degrees of hesitation and innuendo, that the possession of nuclear weapons for deterrence by their own state was allowable.

[25] Although it will seem ungracious to say so, at this point I must regretfully conclude that the concept of a bishop who is a servant of a state-established institution is a theological contradiction in terms. This is one reason why I had to abandon membership of the 'Church of England' many years ago.

[26] Some of this pressure was doubtless subjective, simply coming from the fact that the bishops were also loyal citizens of their state. But in other cases, as with the US bishops' pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace* it also came from spokesmen for the government who were invited to give their views to the drafting committee of bishops.

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They did so with the help of a papal statement to the United Nations which also tolerated such possession, albeit only for the conditions current at that moment (June 1982) and subject to the self-contradictory condition that deterrence was 'a step on the way toward a progressive disarmament'. And even this minimum was not enough because of 'the danger of explosion'. Yet, despite the pope's statement, many of the conferences belonging to non-nuclear states still said things that were incompatible with those of their nuclear colleagues.[27] These divergent conclusions reflected the policies of the various states rather than the thinking of the Church. This was surely a theological scandal. As a result, it was impossible for the Church as a whole to say anything coherent about this key ethical and political issue of our time. The scandal encapsulated the anomaly of the organisation of bishops into groups belonging to different sovereign state-powers.[28]

If the Church is the sacrament of the world to come it is necessary to ask how it has allowed itself over the centuries to be so heavily dependent on the state in all kinds of practical ways. For the truth is that the Church is an *alternative* to the state. Every diocese is united to the others, not by loyalty to any state, but by the fellowship of belonging to the one 'catholic' (i.e. universal) body. And every bishop, as the 'pastor' of his 'flock' (not the governor of his subjects) has as his key task the fostering of the gospel of love, justice and peace throughout his diocese. He is the servant, not the master, of those for whom he has been ordained, as the Maundy Thursday washing of feet makes clear. In other words, the Church is not just an organisation alongside (even if distinct from) that of a world divided into states. And it is certainly not just the spiritual side of statehood. It is an *alternative* to the world of states, founded on a quite different principle. As such it is the promise of a different future for humanity, a future free of false gods. Not surprisingly, people not committed to the god of their own state are those most likely to see the point of all this: I mean people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Franz Jagerstatter, Oscar Romero, Margaret Hassan and the host of others who have died for their refusal to believe in a false god. Of course, the crucifixion of Jesus is the archetype of this disbelief and its consequences.

It may be argued that what I have said is only another version of Quinlan's position 1. But this is not so. For his options all

[27] On this see my pamphlet *Nuclear Weapons: What Does The Church Teach?* (London, Catholic Truth Society, 1985) and my unpublished dissertation for Kings College, London which updated it to 1989.

[28] Of course, since the 1980s papal teaching about nuclear weapons has changed drastically, so that Benedict IV's new year statement for 2008 called nuclear policies 'baneful and fallacious'.

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rest on the unstated premiss that the current world, divided as it is into states with their false gods, has to be taken for granted. Hence the moral imperative upon any nuclear-possessing state, under position one, unilaterally to renounce its nuclear weapons. Yet, while such renunciation is necessary for the state to free itself from the guilt of being willing intentionally to kill the innocent for the sake of peace, unilateral renunciation is not the answer. Of course, if Quinlan's 'always' and 'unconditionally' were meant to be applied simultaneously to every nuclear-possessing state, as logically they should be, this would amount in practice to accepting the Nunn/Kissinger and co. proposal for eliminating nuclear weapons. Without this, unilateral renunciation by one possessing state would not in itself bring about the *reductio ad absurdam* of major inter-state war which is required if humankind is to survive. But in any case, if I am right we are already moving towards a different, globalised world.

Of course, providential acts do not happen without effective human co-operation. And this means that humankind must certainly do everything in its power to follow the anti-superstitious trends already discernible in the present world. This includes removing as far as possible the threats of global warming and climate change, 'liddism',[29] the exhaustion of natural resources, food shortages, nuclear proliferation etc. But there is one other step to be taken. This is that the voices which decree that being willing to kill the innocent is ethically insupportable, must come out of a community which is uncontaminated by the false gods of state power. This entails that the Church must be divested of its dependence upon the states which host it.[30] This does not just mean the abandonment of anything like a Church 'established' by the state, as in the United Kingdom. It also means removal of the trappings of state power which the Church in most states of the world has accumulated and currently enjoys. The idea of a 'Catholic' faith which is tied up with nation-states is as obsolete as war between nuclear powers. The truly sovereign God must never be infected, let alone controlled, by the false gods of national 'sovereignty'. Such disinfection is itself a mammoth task, comparable to that which under Constantine led to the practical accommodation of the Church to the Roman state. And it may also be compared with the abolition of slavery, which took about 2000 years to accomplish.

[29] This is a phrase coined by Professor Paul Rogers of Bradford University to name the strategy by the most powerful states of keeping the 'lid' on conflicts by the threat or use of force.

[30] In so far as the revelation of the Qur'an, committed as it is to monotheism, also rejects intentionally killing the innocent (v. Qur'an 2:190–95 and the comments of M.A.S. Abdel Haleem in the Introduction of his translation, Oxford University Press 2004, pp. xxii-xxiv), Islam too must divest itself of association with the polytheism of state powers.

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But perhaps we can at last recognise the situation for what it is. Is this not the beginning of wisdom? If we do not act decisively about the threats the false gods represent, there seems to be every chance that one way or another human folly will put paid to humanity itself – unless a large asteroid does the job first.

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