Dear Sir,

A few months ago I read *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience* as part of an attempt to study the moral and theological problems implicit in British defence policy. I found the book profoundly disturbing. Its arguments are convincing, it gives all points of view fairly, it goes to no extremes and it arouses no (or very little) irritation by the manner of its approach. Most publications dedicated to the same object are full of rather cheap jibes at the 'military mind'.

But if the book's arguments were to be accepted, and its conclusions followed, then all Catholic officers (and presumably men) in the Air Force and the Navy – the two services which now or in the future will man the weapons used to pose the British element of the Western strategic nuclear deterrent – should forthwith resign from their service.

To someone who has believed for some years that strategic nuclear weapons, or rather the threat of their use, has saved the world from either Communist domination or a third world war (or both) ; to someone, therefore, who holds the views which are attacked so strongly in this book, the fact that such a course of action should be suggested to members of the armed forces by Catholic lay people is disturbing, especially as the arguments used are so difficult to dispute. It repeats none of the reasoning of the professional pacifist and, to one untrained in philosophy, the task even of commenting on the book is difficult. But my instincts tell me that there must be a flaw somewhere and in this letter I try to find it.

But let me first deal with the minor irritation mentioned above and after that, set out the background from which I write.

Miss Anscombe starts off her chapter with the statement that the probability is that warfare is injustice, that a life of military service is a bad life, '*malitia* rather than *militia*', and compares this probability with the probability that membership of a police force will involve malice.

Surely this statement is unnecessary to the purpose of the book, which is the voluntary renunciation of nuclear weapons. It wounds deeply many sincere and devoted public servants and their families. It can only weaken the chances of attaining the object of the book by the irritation it causes, and lastly, it is a statement which is extremely difficult to justify. I believe that, in this country especially, it is wholly false and that it would be wise to omit it from later editions.

As to my own background, I had much to do, as a serving naval officer with the preparation of Christmas Island for the Megaton Bomb tests of 1957, and was a frequent visitor to Aldermaston. At that time, I sought advice on the moral problems involved and was given the same general proposition which was later produced by Cardinal Godfrey in 1958 – an answer which satisfied my conscience that I could

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continue to take part in the operation.

However, the book quotes Cardinal Godfrey's sermon and compares it rather unfavourably with the statements of the French hierarchy in 1950. Cardinal Godfrey could allow a conceivable circumstance in which there might be a legitimate target for a nuclear weapon, though he went on to say that the use of nuclear weapons against civilian populations was unlawful. The French bishops on the other hand condemned the use of them (nuclear weapons) 'with all our strength'.

Since taking part in the Christmas Island tests, I have had much opportunity to study the problems of nuclear war and of nuclear deterrence, both in the academic atmosphere of the Imperial Defence College, in the committees of the Ministry of Defence and in discussion groups of the Institute of Strategic Studies. I am only too well aware of the fundamental evils of nuclear explosions – except against strictly military targets.

To turn to the arguments in the book, my first criticism is that I believe Mr Stein is too pessimistic in his fears about the instability of the nuclear stalemate and also of the dangers of a miscalculation which would endanger peace. He is too ready to forecast that the deterrent will fail, and gives three reasons: a local conflict, say in Africa or in a satellite, setting off a chain re-action to total war; a failure of nerve by one side or other in the tense atmosphere of prolonged nuclear stalemate; and, lastly, as a result of the proliferation of nuclear weapons to politically unstable countries.

But surely the Test Ban Treaty, signed since the book was published, has reduced the dangers of proliferation. And as to other two causes, the 'chain re-action' seems less and less likely as the leaders of both sides appreciate the certain consequences to their own countries of escalation. Surely Cuba and the Berlin crises have provided evidence of promising precedents? As to the failure of nerve or the accident, arising perhaps from a falsely interpreted radar signal, far-reaching precautions have been taken – the 'hot line' is only one of them – to ensure that in the very unlikely event of accident, time is available for consultations, for a careful appreciation of what has really happened and for a chance to find a sensible solution without unleashing the nuclear exchange. The recent books and films which depict the failure of nerve or the accident are dramatic and striking but they must not be confused with reality.

But these are criticisms which do not probe the heart of the matter. Mr Stein believes that not only is nuclear war absolutely intolerable, but that deterrence implies a conditional willingness to unleash such a war and is therefore not only wicked in what it risks but in terms of implicit intention.

Here we have the core of the argument, and I am untrained in philosophy. But my answer would be that the intention is to deter the horrors of nuclear war, and that that is a good and just intention.

I think that it is necessary to look at the facts. The facts are that between 1946 and

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the early 1950s, a massive Russian superiority in conventional forces did not result in a victory for Communism in Europe. Since the advent of Russian nuclear weapons and her achievement of parity with the United States, the world has been free from major wars. My conviction is that this result, a result happy in comparison with what might have occurred, is due first to the American monopoly in nuclear weapons and later to the *capability* of the West to deliver a certain retaliatory nuclear strike even though it had been itself first attacked by a Communist pre-emptive blow. I believe that a good and just intention has produced a good and just result. The authors believe that the means are illicit – I do not think that they have proved their point.

My second criticism refers to the statement that the unilateral renunciation of nuclear weapons is not only the best policy morally, but also that it is the best practical method of retaining the elements of a Christian civilization in face of the Communist threat. Mr Stein does not accept the proposals of Sir Stephen King-Hall for non-violent resistance, but I have failed to see that he has put forward any convincing alternative. To me, the outcome would be inevitable – an eventual surrender to Communist domination – and I do not share the authors' confidence in Christianity's ability to resist the modern techniques of Communist persuasion. We would be quickly back in the catacombs. Certainly, it would be unfair to ask our leaders to take such a dangerous risk – a risk far worse than that inherent in our present policy.

I am afraid that I have no safe, certain alternative. I believe that the balance of terror is a stable balance and that when the Soviets have developed a greater 'second strike' capability, and so gained a stronger sense of security, it will be more stable still.

I believe that progress in arms control, started by the Test Ban Treaty, will continue slowly but steadily, and with it the dangers of nuclear war will recede. I believe that slow, desperately slow, steps will be taken towards an effective international police force which will be controlled by some form of world authority. And I believe that until this comes about, we must 'ride out' a situation which is not nearly so dangerous as that depicted by Mr Stein and his able collaborators.

Yours faithfully,
Peter Gretton

Walter Stein, Editor of *Nuclear Weapons and Christian Conscience,* writes:

Sir Peter Gretton's letter is profoundly encouraging. It so evidently springs from a real confrontation, by a highly responsible Catholic strategist, of the case against nuclear deterrence that its efforts to reaffirm the legitimacy of nuclear strategy seem to me less

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directly important than its underlying attitudes – the depth of its moral concern, its intellectual openness, its realism and freedom from slot-machine casuistic rationalizations.

It is, alas, only too rare to find authentic strategic knowledge and authentically moral-theological concerns associated with each other. It is no less rare to encounter conditions for real dialogue in a field where, usually, there are only battles to the last prejudice. I very much hope that the Vice-Admiral's letter may open the way towards fuller exchanges and co-operation, both in analysing the basic moral dilemma and in exploring its practical implications.

Sir Peter is understandably sensitive to the suggestion in *Nuclear Weapons* that 'the probability is that warfare is injustice'. I much regret that this should have seemed wounding; but we had hoped that, in its context, Miss Anscombe's statement would come through essentially as a qualification of the book's – and especially her own – emphatic defence, in principle, of military service, though this is constantly, gravely exposed to outstanding moral hazards, and at the present time bound up with the morality of nuclear deterrence. I imagine there is no profession without its own occupational moral risks. And it is surely as evident that such professional 'occasions of sin' are especially precipitous where the professions of arms and government are concerned, and that history – including the history of obliteration bombing in the last war – indicates how easy it is to succumb to these dangers, as that those who successfully surmount these, in the service of justice, are to be held in corresponding honour.

As regards the arguments Vice-Admiral Gretton puts forward in defence of the deterrent, a brief note like this can do little more than name the defects that are (it seems to me) inseparable from them.

1. Estimates of the degree of 'stability' in the deterrence balance differ widely. Sir Peter does seem to me unduly emphatic about the stability achieved; and it would not be difficult to cite equally authoritative estimates to the contrary. Nor is anyone in a position to predict anything sufficiently sure about phenomena like Senator Goldwater, who is committed to the 'liberation' of Eastern Europe and has actually advocated the use of nucelar weapons in Asia.

2. Whatever one's estimate of the probabilities, however, nobody claims to have *certainty* in these matters. And, as Vice-Admiral Gretton recognizes, the core of the argument against nuclear deterrence is that it involves conditional intentions to genocide, if the worst comes to the worst. Here, I am afraid, his answer confuses intentions with motives (though these motives could be said to form *part* of the intentions involved). The best of motives may, according to Catholic theology, underlie the worst of actions or intentions. The question is whether the nuclear deterrent makes

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any sense without ultimate genocidal threats, and without a readiness, in certain circumstances, on the part of governments, officers and men (and therefore also their peoples), to put their threats into action. Sir Peter's answer to this question would be most valuable.

3. The question of non-violent resistance is immensely complex. It is a question to which, again, one would especially like to see examined by minds like Sir Peter's. I do not reject Sir Stephen King-Hall's proposals; I am merely anxious that that they should be analysed with maximum toughness of mind and spirit. After all, even the catacombs had their point.

Reviews

THEOLOGY AND THE UNIVERSITY, An Ecumenical Investigation, edited by John Coulson. *Darton, Longman and Todd 15s.*

The importance of this book has already been widely recognized, but time will be needed to take its full measure; which is some comfort for a belated reviewer. But why does 'important' seem in this case so clearly the right adjective? For three reasons, I think. First, this book is at long last a really searching examination of conscience on the part of Roman Catholic theologians and intellectuals into their situation with regard to higher education in Great Britain today – their relative isolation, precisely as bearers of a *theological* message, from the university world, and the opportunities available to them to remedy this. Secondly, it concretely exemplifies the 'ecumenism' that we are all talking about, and does so, on the whole, at a high intellectual level.

Thirdly, it deals seriously and yet never at all pretentiously with a very urgent and actual problem, that of the insertion of the Christian mind, as bearing its own specific witness to truth, into modern culture, and into it just at those points of growth and activity – the universities – where above all culture means, or ought to mean, the specifically human appetite for truth (a university, as Canon Richardson finely says here, being 'an open society of teachers and students who come together in uncoerced association for the common pursuit of knowledge and with the single purpose of learning from one another'.) The first of these three features of this symposium has a special interest, obviously, for Catholics. And so in a sense has the second. But the third should draw, at least the interested attention of everyone concerned, directly or indirectly and either as

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