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The Bomb and the Cross: A Review Article

by Paul A. Mickey

National Defense

by James Fallows (Random House, 1981, 204 pp., \$12.95; pb. also available from Vintage Press).

Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope

by Ronald J. Sider and Richard K. Taylor (IVP and Paulist, 1982, 376 pp., \$6.95).

Evangelicals can no longer afford to leave the responsibility for our security in the hands of the professional military establishment. The technology for making war surges ahead by quantum increments, yet most discussion is so patently conventional that it is idle chatter. Although evangelicals have been joining "born-again" religion with politics now for years, and although the issues of world peace and nuclear disarmament are receiving wider attention in evangelical circles, for the most part we are simply unaware of the massiveness of the destructive forces and the moral failures that surround us.

It is time for a reorientation comparable to the Protestant Reformation. That Reformation gave the Bible back to the people. Likewise, a new reformation in pastoral theology is giving the ministry back to the people. Writers like Kelsey, Nouwen and Tournier are parting from the rationalistic approaches of the mainline establishment and are leaving room for the work of the Spirit—the pastor can assume authority as a psychological guru no longer. Similarly, it is time to remove the sole responsibility for national security from the hands of the Defense Department elite and return some of it to the hands of the people. Christians should take initiative to formulate strategies for promoting peace and security which are grounded in both the biblical message and an informed understanding of the current nuclear dangers.

Two new books can spur us on in this task. James Fallows, author of *National Defense*, was the chief speech writer for President Carter and currently is the Washington editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. While not providing a Christian perspective, *National Defense* is an important contribution to our understanding of the military establishment and its threat to moral character. Ronald J. Sider and Richard K. Taylor have both been active in efforts to live out in practical social involvement the implications of the gospel. Like Sider's earlier *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope* provides a Christian perspective containing both analysis of the situation and proposals for constructive action. We need the reminder that the wages of sin is death; and a Christian peace initiative is of utmost importance.

Nuclear Fantasies

There has never been a nuclear war. The bombing of Japan in August 1945 was a low-intensity extension of conventional warfare, the ultimate leap or decision to bring the war with Japan to a swifter conclusion. But having leapt we cannot unleap: nuclear weapons are now an everyday part of our arsenals. The nuclear leap was a quan-

tum leap. We have never touched down on the reality of an actual nuclear war. Nobody knows what one is like. Fallows titles his chapter on what the military experts don't know about nuclear war, "Theologians."

"I remember when people didn't talk about sex," says Arthur Barber, a former official in the Pentagon. "Now they don't talk about God or nuclear war. They talk about nuclear fantasies, but if you ask any factual questions—how many targets are we *guaranteed* to destroy, what will happen if everything goes wrong—you won't find an answer."

The overwhelming impression that comes from talks with those who design, maintain, or test nuclear weapons—the technicians, not the theologians—is the uncertainty of it all.

No one knows. The radical uncertainty is set aside in favor of candy-coated jargon that is non-specific, imprecise, and based upon computer models where everything can be programmed to be known. The uncertainty of just how bad a nuclear war would be is given in graphic detail in the first chapter of the Sider and Taylor book, "The First Hour."

Friends, we had better believe the "first hour" scenario and not the "blind faith" of the Department of Defense theologians who lack first-hand revelations. Tests of the immense damage caused by a nuclear blast are in fact substantiated. But computer models, like computer games, are closed systems (which is why they both are such fascinating toys for generals and civilian adolescents struggling with the onset of puberty). If the plan doesn't go right, put in another quarter or a

The Pentagon thinking behind nuclear fantasies comes straight from the mind-set of an Atari, Commodore or Intellivision operator.

quarter of a billion dollars and push the "start" button. The Pentagon thinking behind nuclear fantasies comes straight from the mind-set of an Atari, Commodore, or Intellivision operator: it is all fun and games, and in the Pentagon we get paid to play.

In short, we need to grow up, trade in our nuclear fantasies and playtoys, and stop nuclear toy development. The unpredictability of any positive outcome of nuclear weapons and the *guaranteed* destructive forces of nuclear weaponry cry out for a total and complete halt to military toys based on nuclear energy.

The Howard Hughes Syndrome

The endless tinkering, the obsession with cleanliness, and the social disappearance of Howard Hughes before his announced death are oddly symbolic if not prophetic of twentieth-century American macho. Fast planes and women, high-tech industries, the military gamesman par excellence, an ever-expanding empire of toys, and the failure to be *accountable* for one's social, moral, and economic actions—these are all dear to the heart of the childhood dreams of most "grown" American males: you really can have your cake and eat it too. The fantasies of infantile omnipotence, of controlling the world and one's destiny, and of creating ever larger gadgets are the lifeblood of what made America so successful in World War II and so

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ridiculous now. Hughes died long before his time, but his spirit infects the Pentagon fantasy machine with the "Hughes Syndrome."

In a Hughesque plea for high technology, the national defense "magicians," as James Fallows calls them, have engaged in sales promotions that are unbelievable. "Threat inflation," "bigger is better," "marvelous wish book solutions," "the corruption of military purpose by procurement," and uncontrollable complexity are the tools of the military magicians. For example, the old F-4 plane used a J-79 jet engine. The new F-15 and F-16 planes use an F-100 jet engine that is eight times more complex and takes six times longer to fix. Talk about efficiency.

But we like the new and improved F-16s, not the ancient model-T version, the F-4 fighter. Howard Hughes lives on! The boys in the Pentagon like their toys, gadgets, and money. Someone else, an adult somewhere, perhaps, can worry about how to keep the country strong. Don't look to us Defense Department guys—we're having too much fun with our toys and computer games. In its brief review of

If the populace cannot control the military budget in the halls of Congress, what chance of control can possibly exist if "Defense" gets angry?

National Defense, Malcolm Forbes, editor of *Forbes* magazine, expressed his deep concern about Secretary of Defense Weinberger's Hughes syndrome that prevents him from acting in the best interests of the country. He urged Mr. Weinberger to read Fallows, and that was a year ago.

Just War: An Exercise in Constraint?

Frankly, the quantum leap of high technology and nuclear energy development has made the "just war" argument meaningless if any nuclear weaponry is allowed. Sider and Taylor remind us of the inconceivable horror of mass retaliation under nuclear conditions. Technical arguments won't do. Nor, argue Sider and Taylor, will either just war theory (chapters 4 and 5) or the pacifism of Jesus and the early church (chapters 6 & 7) allow us to use or intend the use of nuclear weapons.

All is fair in love and war. Therefore the threshold of nuclear war will be crossed easily if one is committed to possessing and using military force to resist evil. And such a counter-force strategy is the heart of the "just war" position. Yet the military elite's outcry about the sanctity of brazen Defense Department cost overruns and budget increases, coupled with the unwillingness of either the Executive or Legislative branches to control the military, says one thing very clearly. If the populace cannot control the military budget in the halls of Congress, what chance of control can possibly exist if "Defense" gets angry? Very little. And still we talk about constraint and self-imposed limits—even when Fallows' study stands as bold witness to the greedy self-agrandizement of Defense's "threat inflation" and "procurement costs." We have passed beyond anything other than textbook debate of the "just war."

By Whose Spirit?

Sider and Taylor argue that "the way of the cross" (chapter 7) is nonviolence. Jesus' means of bringing in the kingdom were quite unconventional precisely because he resisted the use of violence. The radicality of the Kingdom of God is based on four ideas that serve to deal "with the enemy through suffering love." The Spirit of Christ calls for the peace initiative that locates the sovereign power of our lives in the Lord God, not human pride.

Pride is the source of all evil. The Pride of computer games and nuclear strategies creates a closed system in which we are led to believe that no power exists outside these computer-generated fantasies. For the mildly religious individual this distortion of reality spawns two self-deceptions connected with nuclear war: I will survive; and God will protect me (see Ira Chernus, "Mythologies of Nuclear War," in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, L/2, pp. 255-273). Fallows indicates that the theologians at Defense are not incanting the words of the Psalmist but a liturgy of computer pro-

grams always reprogrammable if they don't turn out right. That is hardly a rational view of nature or history.

The "spirit" that guides our nuclear armament thinking comes from an evil spirit that denies the spiritual element in human life. The denied spirituality is personified as a social or economic or military evil "out there" that belongs to someone else who is going to get us. One's own fears are personified and objectified as someone else's strength. The intense concentration on destroying *their* evil system keeps us from recognizing the evil in us, our shadow side (to draw from Carl Jung). The more we concentrate on destroying the evil in the other the more we destroy our own moral fiber: we build our hatred and suspicion of the other upon our own denied capacity for sin and evil. We have the perfect rationalization and formula for a self-destructive response to the power of the Spirit and the "way of the Cross."

Peace and Realpolitik

The American people have been sold a Defense bill of goods predicated upon the Hughes syndrome that expensive gadgetry will save. According to Fallows and any elementary manual on military strategy, the goal of war is never simply killing people. The real goal of war is to demoralize, not annihilate the enemy. Nuclear war not only contradicts every historic strategem about waging war, but also is more reprehensible in totally disregarding the morality of devastating civilian population centers. The computer simulations make that transition into immorality so easy and so painless: we can destroy everything, and if we use the right bombs we can kill only people leaving the real estate intact as the victor's spoils.

Sider and Taylor, in the three chapters that constitute the final section of their book, advocate a *radical* approach to national defense. It is called "civilian based defense" (CBD). It is as brilliant as the conventional military strategy itself (designed to demoralize not destroy), and it is based upon Jesus' teachings of non-violence. It is a bold program for truly defending oneself and a whole people. There are five components: active resistance against evil; the participation of the whole population; noncooperation with the enemy; an unwillingness to use violence; and persistent goodwill. Chapters 13-15 detail how this program has worked historically as a strategy and how it is thoroughly grounded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is more than passive resistance; it is an active resistance, based on non-military means, that initiates peace using what Sider and Taylor call "moral ju jitsu." The plan calls for multilateral disarmament but urges the Christian to press to "get rid of *all* weapons, nuclear and conventional."

Conclusion

Many evangelicals who are committed to peace in principle are reluctant or unwilling to engage in historical peace initiatives. These may seem so self-defeating and passive that they are unacceptable to those affirming a view of a Gospel that calls disciples to self-esteem as well as faithfulness. Yet the testimony of *National Defense* and *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope* clearly suggests that what currently is posing as national defense is anything but an integrated, consistent, responsible strategy for maintaining security. For a plethora of reasons, therefore, including nuclear holocausts, it is unacceptable for the evangelical. Fallows is left perplexed and scared, as he should be.

But Sider and Taylor take the initiative to advocate a civilian-based defense that is built upon the strength of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is historically demonstrated to be a "successful" military strategy, and it gives the evangelical moral resolve, a sense of personal strength, and a means of action that is not based upon nuclear war, "the ultimate manifestation of masculinity" (Fallows) and the supreme example of Pride and hubris. This resolve flows from the "way of the Cross," the biblical and effective response to one's enemies.

The real question in this peace initiative is whether we are mature enough, strong enough, and trusting enough. Do we accept the challenge to grow in Christ or do we continue to eat of the forbidden fruit of the evil one? We can turn to the way of the cross, or we can continue with the "Hughes Syndrome," a spiritual disease putting us in a reclusive, closed social system that leaves us dead without our knowing it.

As for me and my house, I want to choose life and life eternal. God help us.