

Correspondence

The MAD and the Myth

To the Editors: I am moved to comment on two articles in your November, 1972, issue, those by Paul Ramsey ("The MAD Nuclear Policy") and David S. McLellan and Walter Busse ("The Myth of Air Power"), in my continuing (and unsuccessful) attempt to get all of us out of the rut we have fallen into as regards war/peace issues. The conventional wisdom, whether of ethics or politics, no longer helps.

I have previously disagreed with Ramsey's long-term attempts to carefully distinguish between moral uses of force (against official combatants) and immoral uses (against noncombatants). Now, in adopting Brennan's thesis that we should indeed consider the widespread building of antimissile missiles, he unwittingly argues that we should transform thermonuclear war into something which *seems* both possible and "winable." This returns us to the Herman Kahn of 1960 (evacuate the cities and bomb the Russians) and the Robert McNamara of 1962 (missiles can attack missiles with no damage to "civilians"). There can be no hope at all in any effort to make nuclear war *attractive*, and this, no matter how inadvertently, remains at the heart of Ramsey's thinking. Let me use two illustrations to make my point:

1. During the early 1960's some individuals in McNamara's office raised an interesting question. Why, they asked, could not our missile silos be manned by *civilians*? After all, the silos were located within a reasonable distance of population centers (not because of strategy or misguided morality but only because of cost), those tending the missiles worked more or less normal "shifts," and there was nothing obviously inevitable about the proposition that those sitting at computer consoles must wear military uniforms. In

truth, there was no completely satisfactory answer to the question, even though the transformation from military to civilian was never carried through. It remains exceedingly difficult to distinguish between the military officer who sits at the console, the civilian mechanic who keeps the missile "ready" and the truck driver who might be delivering milk to the missile complex at the time the enemy missiles arrive.

2. By common consent, World War I remains the classic case of a war of attrition, in which evenly matched enemies slug it out for years across a stalemated front line and decimate entire societies in the process. It does not get us very far to insist that the Paris worker, suddenly pulled from his neighborhood and transformed into a *poilu* to fill an empty space in the trenches, becomes a more legitimate target in the latter role than he was in the former. No matter how outrageous it may seem, an atomic bomb might have produced a better outcome to World War I. The point remains that whatever Ramsey might wish, we cannot return to those glorious Middle Ages when the small armies of mercenaries fought each other thousands of miles

away from their parent societies and were, in effect, totally disconnected from them. That ancient theory of war, we might remember, was based upon a total unconcern about the "natives" who might be in the "neighborhood" where the war was being fought. It is, simply stated, a colonialist theory of war.

The McLellan/Busse piece typifies the sophomoric thinking which has so long cluttered up discussions of air power. They are so committed to the notion that air power *must* be totally discredited as to lose all sense of proportion. It may interest them to learn that in the mid-1960's serious proposals were advanced within the Air Force that it would be better to abandon bombing altogether than to use air power in ways which could not be expected to succeed and which, therefore, would publicly discredit air power itself. Few air power advocates have ever argued that *any* sort of bombing in *any* sort of war would, *by itself*, dictate the outcome, yet this is the caricature which underlies the McLellan/Busse argument. Having armed themselves with blinders, it is no wonder they cannot see.

Even the *New York Times*, certainly no supporter of Nixon's strategic moves, has reported that bombing had much to do with blunting this year's North Vietnamese offensive and that, in *combination* with the mining of harbors, it encouraged the North Vietnamese to seriously

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AN ANNOUNCEMENT

Attentive readers of mastheads will note a number of changes in *Worldview* this month:

Beginning with this issue, WILSON CAREY MCWILLIAMS, Chairman of the Department of Political Science, Livingston College, Rutgers University, and HILLEL LEVINE of Harvard University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences become Associate Editors.

DENNIS HALE of the City University of New York assumes the responsibilities of Book Editor.

GUNNAR MYRDAL of the Institute for International Economic Studies in Stockholm becomes a Contributing Editor.

EUGENE BOROWITZ joins the Editorial Board.

After more than twenty-five years with the Council on Religion and International Affairs, JOHN R. INMAN has retired from the organization which publishes *Worldview* and, therefore, from the Editorial Board.

ture. The point of reading such things now is to join the game of matching scenarios; a game recommended for fun and possible profit.

Civil Disobedience and Political Obligation

by James F. Childress
(Yale University Press; 250 pp.;
\$7.95)

We're some months late on this one, but perhaps just as well, since it is now possible to relate it to the subsequently published and much-discussed *A Theory of Justice* by John Rawls. The relationship is as clear as it is complex. Professor Childress of the University of Virginia basically follows, as does Rawls, a contract theory approach to political obligations and advocates, as does Rawls, the idea of justice as "fairness." Unlike Rawls, Childress wants to be explicit about the metaethical (theological, anthropological) context within which political obligation can be conceived in a distinctively, if not exclusively, Christian way. Whether he in fact, and not just in intention, moves beyond Rawls is for the reader to judge. What he does do is to offer a closely reasoned analysis of past and present Christian thinking about political obligation. At one point in *A Theory of Justice* Rawls confesses that many of his assumptions are contingent upon a metaphysical framework but that it would take him too far afield to deal with that framework in detail. Childress declares his readiness to venture afield, and the result is a demanding and highly suggestive book that has an importance far beyond the late sixties' fashions of civil disobedience which may have been its immediate occasion.

In March
"Containment &
Change: 1966 & 1972"
Richard Shaull

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seek an end to the fighting. As I implied in the August *Worldview*, it became clear to them that neither the Soviets nor the Chinese were disposed to challenge the blockade because of larger issues at stake in their relations with the U.S. Sensible discussion is unlikely to be helped by those who insist upon pretending that none of this ever happened. *Of course* bombing was seemingly ineffective so long as the North Vietnamese had access to virtually unlimited supplies from the Chinese and the Soviets, and this opened the door to those who imply that wars are "moral" when they involve infantrymen and "immoral" when they include airplanes. This most recent application of air power, however, is the *first* application during this ghastly war which conforms even in part to what an air power "expert" might recommend. Taken together with what seem to have been tacit agreements between Nixon, the Chinese and the Soviets, it paved the way to our disengagement from South Vietnam (and theirs also).

In the early 1950's I had the good fortune of having as a professor a distinguished Japanese scholar who had spent World War II as the editor of a Tokyo newspaper, and I never will forget his analyses of the effect of bombing. Correctly or incorrectly, *he* credited the incessant firebombing of Tokyo (not the atomic bombs, which he thought to have been superfluous) with having discredited the Japanese military in the eyes of the public and, more important, made it possible for the emperor, *for the very first time*, to step forward himself, in effect recapture Japanese society from its military, take charge of the surrender, and prevent the land war from reaching Japan itself. I make no assertions here about moral and immoral bombing, whatever those categories may

be, but I do insist that it is absurd to argue that air power *never* can have an effect at all on the outcome of war. Depending upon the entire set of circumstances, *strategic* air power (as in Japan) and *tactical* air power (as in Vietnam now) do indeed have an effect. The McLellan/Busse focus on Iwo Jima and Okinawa is absurd unless they mean to suggest we should not have bombed or shelled at all; this would change "absurd" to "idiotic."

Without being overoptimistic, I would guess we are turning a corner, and much in the way Nixon has described it. Given the global necessity to cope with the growth crisis, war will soon be seen as anachronistic and irrelevant. At the same time, we may have to credit fearsome weapons with having brought that about. If both we and the Soviets, for example, actually were able to fend off a thermonuclear attack without great damage, Nixon might not have gone to Moscow. We should have learned during the '60's, but Ramsey has not, that "graduated," "moral" or carefully designed "countercombatant" deterrents, let alone "flexible response," are concepts which lure the naive into believing that *some* wars can be made small enough, safe enough or cheap enough to be defined as "moral." That's how we got into Vietnam, and it is time to decently bury such thinking.

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To the Editors: In "The Myth of Air Power" Professors David S. McLellan and Walter Busse state, in support of the claim that air power is too costly in terms of destruction of our own and allied forces: "The U.S. has lost almost 1,000 aircraft reputedly worth ten times the damage inflicted on North Vietnam by the 1965-68 bombings." (It is assumed that the figure given above represents a projection from the 928 given in a Congressional Research Service report prepared in 1971 for