

"SHELTER MORALITY" AND THE JUST WAR

Lynn, Mass.

Sir: I have just read Paul Ramsey's piece, "U.S. Military Policy and 'Shelter Morality'" [*worldview*, January, 1962].

I am sick of being polite about this subject and tired of being academic about it. The survival of America and of the human race depends upon it. What is more, and perhaps more important, every last vestige of religious decency, of spiritual sensitivity, of intellectual honesty, and of moral uprightness is being torn to shreds.

Therefore, a few straightforward and unambiguous words:

Ramsey's attitude and writings in this field are highly dangerous and ethically bankrupt.

We pacifists—not "crypto-pacifists" nor "sentimental pacifists" nor any other kind of hyphenated or adjectival pacifists, although assuredly also the "nuclear pacifists" and lots of non-pacifists who are sick at heart and mind about the current course of American policy and religion—and I would refer you in this connection to the increasingly stirring essays of Thomas Merton—we pacifists have been saying for years that all this talk about building up a nuclear arsenal not so that it may be used but so that it will serve as a virtually guaranteed deterrent is a lot of nonsense, and that practically all its spokesmen actually know this perfectly well, that, in effect, they are liars. Part of our argument has been to try to depict what the actual devastating effects of war would be like.

Now, at this late stage, Ramsey and his cohorts come along and tell us that we have been asleep all along, that we must realize that "military forces are intended for use," that we must be grateful to Kahn and Khrushchev for awakening us to this truth, that we had better face up to the realities. Hell, this is what we have been saying all along. We haven't been asleep; he has been. Or, rather, I can't really believe that he has either; he just tried to make us and possibly himself believe that he has.

This is really very interesting. The "realists" started out by telling us that what they like to call "simple-minded morality," what is actually plain minimum humanity, had to be reduced, "adjusted," practicalized, integrated into political and military plans *before* the war. Then they went on to tell us that such morality had no place *during* the war. Now Ramsey also explains that ethics, love, humanity, just simple visceral decency have no place on earth *after* the war, that it will then not be the kingdom of God. Whom is he telling? If this is what he believes he has every right to it. But (speaking as a Jew) I wish he would stop protesting that what he says is Christianity. Let Christians answer him. For myself I want to scream out that it certainly isn't Judaism; it is not the word of the God of the Bible.

Ramsey quotes Luther. What Luther says is perfectly true: to oneself one must apply the strictest standards of righteousness; to others, one's fellowmen, one ought to apply the dictates of loving charity. Didn't anyone notice that Ramsey then goes on, without so much as a "by your leave," to advocate the exact opposite: that to one's own one ought to go

out of one's ethical way to act protectively but that toward others one must be "realistic," uncharitable, and if necessary, brutal. If he meant to ask a real question, let it be answered in the ringing affirmative: Yes, indeed, there is a government "of divine charity under the most horrendous conditions."

What kind of argument is this—that because all of us admittedly live at the expense of one another and that the mere act of living involves us all in unfathomable guilt toward the bacilli in the air and toward human beings near and far, that therefore we also ought to shoulder the guilt of the annihilation of mankind, human culture, and the world? This is really carrying the argument that if you can't have the whole loaf you ought to starve more than a bit too far! The moral and religious answer is, of course, that we ought to try insofar as we possibly can to reduce the amount of suffering that we wittingly and unwittingly impose on God's creatures, not to be prepared rather cavalierly to increase it, and that in the meantime and for the rest we must live with our painfully bad consciences and beseech forgiveness before God.

Ramsey, finally, is back at his old poisoned-apple stand: he isn't really so interested in shelters for their own sake any more than he was interested in building up our arms arsenal for the sake of the deterrent. He wants to prepare us for bigger and more vicious things (and this is precisely one of the main reasons that we are opposed to "shelter-morality"): thinking about shelters, he says, will accustom us to thinking about other things, i.e., how and when to murder the human race, our fellow-Americans, and come out, if you please, with a good conscience.

Heaven help us! Heaven help us especially if this is taken to be the word of Almighty God—and of this Republic!

While I am at it, and since I am still angry enough not to care how the chips fall, a few words about Ramsey's book, *War and the Christian Conscience*. This is a book in which a Protestant, for typically Protestant reasons, out of patriotism, joins a Catholic, John Courtney Murray, who, for typically Catholic reasons, out of considerations which he regards as "natural law," advocates bellicism.

(I must, in passing, ask whether it is really cricket, or charitable, to say that Linus Pauling "belatedly discovered Jesus Christ" and that C. Wright Mills has "forgotten more about religion than Jesus Christ ever knew" (p. 138). In view of such polemical tenor my somewhat outraged outspokenness will, perhaps, not be held against me.)

Here Ramsey argues against every Catholic pacifist, against the main stream of Protestant meliorism, on behalf of "limited war." He'd so love to sound like a "scientific technician," rather than like a theologian. He declares that "war must be made morally possible, not only because it is not improbable at some distant time" and suggests limited nuclear warfare as an "alternative to peace" (p. 153). I happened to read this on the day on which Khrushchev announced—later to prove—that he had a bomb equal to 50,000,000 tons of TNT!

Let the realists understand this: we are just as realistic and gradualistic as they; contrary to what they always accuse us of, we do not expect, by the work of our own hands, suddenly to bring about the Kingdom of God. We are also in favor of "limited" things, but not "limited wars" and "smaller bombs" and similar forms of limited mass-homicide, because (a) we know, and now they admit, that they won't remain limited, and (b) even if they remained limited they would cause an absolutely incalculable catastrophe. Rather do we favor limited things such as limited disarmament; increasing;

ly less limited, limited pacifism; increasingly less limited, limited morality; and if we can't get the whole bloomin' thing, a limitedly effective UN, despite sly editorial and religio-academic expostulations which give their head to the Tshombemen and the heroes of Guatemala, Pigs Bay, and Suez who scream "bloody murder" in Goa. I like to think that my gradualism is the kind of gradualism of which the Bible speaks: "I shall not drive the enemy out from before you in one year, lest the earth become a desolation and the beast of the field outnumber you. Slowly, slowly shall I drive him out from before you so that you will be fruitful and inherit the earth" (Ex. 23:29f). A gradualism toward life, not death.

STEVEN S. SCHWARZSCHILD

Dr. Ramsey replies:

Princeton, N.J.

Sir: "Goshallhemlock!" would be my one-word reply to Steven S. Schwarzschild's letter. But to be more articulate, more has to be said.

Mr. Schwarzschild attempts no argument, drawn from either Scripture or sound ethico-political reasoning, against one main thesis of my article, namely, that "there is no duty that all should die when not all can be saved." This omission alone is fatal to his rejoinder. No wonder he does not try to prove that, instead of adopting some program that may save some by morally permissible means, all should die together. That proposition can only be sustained by a state of soul in despair over God's governance of mankind in this nuclear age, and only be a refusal of charity to save life.

No wonder, also, that he does not try to prove that it is morally impermissible ever to resist an aggressor upon the household in a "state of nature" following nuclear attack or upon a society in a "state of war," but instead appeals for gradual steps to remove the necessity for any such thing. One may wish and work for the latter goal while still holding armed resistance sometimes justifiable. If so, it is necessary to analyze the manner and circumstances in which a nation or a man may resort to arms. This is the moral problem of the conduct of war, and this requires that we come clear as to the criteria limiting the performance of such "official" duty and the justice of such conduct.

Mr. Schwarzschild seems rather irritated that I have joined him in believing that "all this talk about building up a nuclear arsenal not so that it may be used but so that it will serve as virtually guaranteed deterrent is a lot of nonsense." Surely, any reader of my article knows that the chief point of it was to point out the glaring contradiction between the requirements of a proper defense and massive deterrence policy. I said that the "skilled non-use" of massively retaliatory weapons is technically impossible to maintain; and that our weapons-system, so far as it is directed against whole populations for the sake of deterring their rulers, seems to me to be inherently immoral even if this might work. Tying babies to the bumpers of our automobiles is no way to regulate traffic even if it regulated it perfectly! Finally, I said that all this talk about "shelter morality" ought to show everyone that there are "moral and political dilemmas long inherent in our massive deterrence policy."

Mr. Schwarzschild is, of course, entirely mistaken when he writes that my article called for this nation to think about shelters in order "to accustom us to thinking about other things, i.e., how and when to murder the human race." It borders on slander for him to imply that I believe we "ought

to shoulder the guilt of the annihilation of mankind, human culture, and the world." I wrote quite the contrary.

From the fact that my book has been attacked both from the side of the pacifists and from the side of the (euphemistically so-called) "responsibilists" or "realists," one might conclude that I am one of the few genuine *nuclear pacifists* in existence. Most of the people who use this term concerning themselves, or to whom it is applied, are actually nuclear *pacifists* (if I may use italics to indicate where in substance their viewpoint takes its origin). At every point where I reach an ethical conclusion as to the limits of justifiable war and call for decision to renounce the unjust, unlimited conduct of war, I at the very same time and for the same reasons reach a conclusion as to the possible justice of war, and the need for mounting force, and possibly using it. This nation needs a doctrine regulative of its use of force. In contrast, nuclear *pacifists* simply find in the nuclear dilemma new occasion for the revival of their position or, at long last, conclusive demonstration of its "realism."

Mr. Schwarzschild objects to certain unprincipled realists who adjust and compromise morality "before the war," and then go on to tell us merely that "simple-minded morality" has no place "during the war." I refuse to be located at the end of this moral decline, as one who is supposed to have declared that "ethics, love, humanity, just simple visceral decency have no place on earth after the war." Mine is a search for the clarification of moral categories that apply *before, during and after* any war.

I say that in a "state of nature" after all-out nuclear attack it would be wholly immoral for me to get my neighbor's children somehow into my power and use them directly as a means of getting at their father's basement lay-out, even to the good end of saving my family. I say that in a "state of war" it is wholly immoral to aim (subjectively or with objectively direct action) at killing our enemy's children as a means of getting at his government and forces. I say that in a state of society "before the war" it is wholly immoral to aim massive weapons at babies as a means of deterring war, and that the attempt to perfect such a system of preserving peace cannot work.

But at the same time I say (and, puzzlingly, this seems to offend the best of people) that under all three conditions, *before, during and after* the war, there is moral justification of an "official function" in defense of justice and of human life; and that the justification of this is not to be found only in an ethic of natural self-defensiveness but rather among the requirements of "social charity." If this is going to be dismissed, it has first to be refuted. I do not see how it can be refuted without adopting the view that there are conditions under which charity requires one thing only: that all are morally obliged to die together when only some can be saved.

Now, do I want "to sound like a 'scientific technician,' rather than like a theologian"? I rather hoped I sounded like a moral theologian or a Christian ethicist. In making this attempt, it is, of course, easy to talk about morality without facing factual cases, to talk politics without knowing anything about it, or to talk about military policy without having entered into concrete discussion with men who are expert in this. I must regard it as a compliment if I have any expert knowledge about these subjects, or even sound as if I do. And certainly any "technical" errors would be a demerit in any writings upon the subject of warfare. The charge that might stick would be if it could be shown that the principles of