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Nels Ferré and Reinhold Niebuhr Discuss War

WALLACE GRAY

REINHOLD Niebuhr in his *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*¹ wrote: "It does seem that the unique resource of religion ought to give at least a touch of daring to the religious community and the religious leader." *A touch of daring!* That is really what this particular dialogue is about: Can a Christian display at least a touch (that is, a small but perceptible amount) of daring in confronting the vexing problem of war? If so how?

SCENE ONE

The setting is Ferré's rather scrambled-looking study. The time is future—I don't know exactly when. Enter Ferré humming and singing enthusiastically; his voice is deep and unpredictable but admirably uninhibited and vibrant. He seems to be expecting someone; suddenly he interrupts his singing to exclaim, "I do hope Reinie won't use that word 'intolerable' this afternoon. It has such a note of finality about it, as though he meant to say, 'You'd better not try that line of argument further; you'll just look sillier and sillier if you do.'"

There is a knocking at the door, and Ferré cheerfully calls out, "Come in!"

Niebuhr enters and says, "I received your note just before I left home. Said you wanted to discuss something."

FERRÉ: Yes, I knew you were to be in the city today and hoped you would find time for a visit. Thanks for phoning me when you got in. I've been getting ready for you.

NIEBUHR (in mock alarm): That sounds ominous.

F: Not at all. I've been rethinking my pacifism.

Niebuhr eloquently withholds comment, though Ferré pauses.

F: And I've decided that I'm right after all.

N: Wonderful conclusion!

F: The strange part of it is that I find that in large measure you're right, too!

N: You'd better explain that.

F: I was reading in one of your books before you came. In it you said, "This is as good a time as any to make up my mind that I am done with

1. New York: Meridian Books, 1957, p. 131. Cited hereafter simply as *Leaves*.

the war business. . . . The time of man's ignorance God may wink at, but now He calls us all to repent. I am done with this business. I hope I can make that resolution stick."

N (quietly but with noticeable impatience): You remember the *quotation* very well. I suppose you also remember the date and title of the book in which you read the quotation?

F (enjoying himself and seemingly unaware of Niebuhr's question): Another statement in the same passage particularly appealed to me, "I am going to try to be a disciple of Christ, rather than a mere Christian, in all human relations and experiment with the potency of trust and love much more than I have in the past."

N (his poise regained): You're getting me in a very belligerent mood for the discussion of pacifism. The colossal impudence of you younger theologians! What nerve to quote the pacifist Niebuhr to the non-pacifist Niebuhr!² Don't you realize that my works are like the Bible in that you can prove anything by quoting them? I've evolved a long way from the pacifism of 1929. In fact as early as 1932, I had made public my break with pacifism.

F: Oh, I find that I can even agree with you in your pre-pacifistic period. Then you criticized Christian ministers for donning the chaplain's uniform.³ Much more recently I myself have written, "Under military auspices the chaplaincy is not a function of the true church. . . . If the Church with a clear stand on the whole issue of war were allowed to have men who are not part of the military machine go in to minister to the men in such areas as might be possible, ministers of Christ should be anxious to do what they could."⁴

N: You must not assume that just because my statement comes from my pre-pacifistic period I would approve it now. As a matter of fact both my statement and yours remind me of the danger of moralism and the puristic neglect of the doctrines of divine forgiveness and justification by faith. When a group of British air-force fliers in the Second World War refused to take communion because of their moral revulsion against what they had to do in the line of duty, they showed commendable sensitiveness of conscience, but they also showed what great suffering can be caused by the failure to understand justification.⁵

F: You once criticized Brunner for making justification by faith a way of escape from the sensitive conscience, and I think it only fair now for you to re-consider your own words. [Ferré takes a large volume from his shelves, searches its pages briefly, and then reads:] "Fortunately there have always been judges who have never heard of this doctrine of justification by faith and who have therefore been prompted by a sensitive

2. The passage in question is found in *Leaves*, p. 68 f.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

4. "The Christian Faith, the Church, and War," *Fellowship*, Vol. XI, No. 2 (February, 1945), p. 21.

5. Cf. *Christianity and Society*, Summer, 1943, p. 4, Editorial.

conscience to apply the law as justly as possible.”⁶ I would like to paraphrase this for our discussion. Fortunately there have always been Christians who have never felt excused by this doctrine and who have therefore been prompted by a sensitive conscience (and/or the Holy Spirit) to practice peacemaking as fully as possible.

N: That’s good, though we still disagree on how “peacemaking” should be carried on politically and internationally. However, I must add a comment which to some extent admits the force of your criticism.

There is no area in which I feel a greater need for the doctrine of justification than with regard to my many changes on ethical and theological questions. I have been *so sure* on questions concerning which I have subsequently had to do an about-face. That is why I wrote in the 1956 preface to the paperback edition of *Leaves From the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* (p. 8) some words which you may have overlooked:

We are all, whatever our pretensions, the children of our day and hour. What we think of man and God, of sin and salvation, is partly prompted by the comparative comforts or discomforts in which we live. It is a very sobering reflection on the lack of transcendence of the human spirit over the flux of historical change.

Such reflection saves us from any pretensions that our ideas ultimately save either ourselves or others. We are saved by grace through faith. But I would like to confess at this point that I pressed this thought too far in my formula, “redeemed in principle but not in fact.” That is inadequate because it does not describe the real sanctification which takes place when the soul turns from itself to God.⁷

F: Agreed! But going back to your earlier point, let us assume that you are a non-pacifist because of your immediate environment in time and space and that Pastor Niemöller is a pacifist because of his, isn’t it at least meaningful to ask this question, “Which environment reflects most accurately man’s *total* situation as of this moment—your comparatively comfortable one or his comparatively uncomfortable one?”

N: That is a meaningful question, though I doubt that either you, he, or I can answer it for sure. And I also doubt whether the contrast between comfortable and uncomfortable is as important in this connection as the contrast between living in America which has become a world power, and living in West Germany which no longer has to make so many of the ultimate political decisions; or at least where the individual citizen feels the pressure of being a pawn of other people’s decisions more than the weight of his own responsibility. In 1918 I noted one effect of war on the supporters and participators: it reduced life to simple terms. Now I have decided that the horror of another possible war has again reduced life to

6. R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Scribner’s, 1951), II, 196, n. 18.

7. Quoted, with minor changes, from Niebuhr’s reply to critics in *Reinhold Niebuhr, His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, edited by Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 437. Cited hereafter as *Reinhold Niebuhr*.

too simple terms but this time for the pacifists as well as for the non-pacifists. Since you've been quoting that book so much, please give me a chance to defend myself from its own pages. [Ferré hands him the book and Niebuhr reads, inserting a couple of parenthetical comments as he goes along.]

The modern man lives in such a complex world that one wonders how his sanity is maintained as well as it is. Every moral venture, every social situation and every practical problem involves a whole series of conflicting loyalties, and a man may never be quite sure that he is right in giving himself to the one as against the other. Shall he be just and sacrifice love? Shall he strive for beauty and do it by gaining the social privileges which destroy his sense of fellowship with the under-privileged? Shall he serve his family and neglect the state? Or be patriotic to the detriment of the great family of mankind? Shall he be diligent at the expense of the great cause in which he is interested? Shall he strive for the amenities of life and make life less robust in the process? Or shall he make courage the ultimate virtue and brush aside the virtues which a stable and therefore soft society has cultivated?

Out of this mesh of conflicting claims, interests, loyalties, ideals, values and communities he is rescued by the psychology of war which gives the state [or, for the pacifist, humanity at large] at least a momentary priority over all other communities and which makes courage [or pacifism] the supreme virtue.

Unfortunately, all these momentary simplifications of the complexities of life cannot be finally satisfying, because they do violence to life.⁸

F: Don't misunderstand me. When I earlier said that I had decided that both of us are right, I did not primarily have in mind your early writing. My allusion to it was partly facetious. Actually, much of your present criticism of pacifists and pacifism I find challenging and true. I do not have to go to your early writings to find that to which I can say Amen!

N: You sound almost unnaturally pacific for a pacifist. You remind me of what I said about the difficulty of being both kind and truthful. Let's assume that we shall love each other regardless of what is discussed or where we come out; surely that is a right starting point. Then let us in utter frankness tear down each other's idols.

F: I would suggest that instead of attacking each other's idols directly—one's idols are so hard to differentiate from one's self—that we examine the ideas or idols of another man.

N: Whom do you have in mind?

Ferré (picking up a copy of *The Christian Century*): Roland Bainton. He has recently written an article, "Christian Pacifism Reassessed,"⁹ which touches most of the main issues.

N: Yes, I read that article a while back and am happy to debate it with you. Please lead the way.

F: To me it is significant that a responsible church historian such as Bainton

8. *Leaves*, p. 35 f.

9. *The Christian Century*, Vol. LXXV, No. 30 (July 23, 1958), pp. 847-49. Cited hereafter simply as Bainton.

would say that before the time of Constantine "No Christian writer whose work is extant condoned Christian participation in warfare."

N: It seems to me that Umphrey Lee in his book *The Historical Church and Modern Pacifism*¹⁰ gives a sounder interpretation of the data.

F: I don't think so.

N: Well, if what you have just quoted is a fact, what is the reason for it?

F: Christians became more numerous than committed.

N: That doubtless is one reason. Another may be the way in which men who were responsible became at least nominally Christian and the way in which Christians were catapulted to positions of power and responsibility. For someone to shoulder responsibility is always necessary but also particularly tragic for the parvenu. Life is so much simpler when someone else has to be Emperor or President. One is always tempted to regard politicians and statesmen as stupid or immoral just because of the tragic dilemmas in which their power involves them. I find the scornful references to statesmen of our era distasteful (I almost said intolerable). Contemporary statesmen, with the exception of Mr. Churchill, are not very bright or great. But it is just possible that they cannot follow their critics' utopian advice because they are responsible, and not because they are stupid or lacking in scruples.¹¹ All this leads me to ask, Would you ever consent to serve as President?

F: Yes, apart from my Swedish birth! Bryan, as you know, resigned as Secretary of State in 1917 because he was a pacifist. I could serve as a policeman but not fight other policemen. I do not think the church has ever been "near perfect" but, for over two hundred years, she refused to accept war. But the Church always accepted civil power.¹² In other words, I'm not a "pacifist" except in the case of war. I believe in the need for constructive force.¹³

N: Nevertheless, your position means that you would be debarred either from attaining or holding office. So you can be more "Christian" than any president can ever be simply because you can't or won't bear a president's responsibility?

F: I didn't say that.

N: Nevertheless, it appears to me that your very limited concept of Christian citizenship is one of the weaknesses of your pacifist position. When the state has to exercise its admitted central function as guarantor of order, then the state is abandoned by pacifists on the ground that the Christian has a higher loyalty and code of conduct. The tension with the world is thus narrowed and over-simplified to this single issue.¹⁴

10. Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1943. This book was reviewed favourably by Niebuhr in *Christianity and Society*, Spring, 1943, p. 39.

11. Adapted, beginning with "I find . . ." from Niebuhr's "A Century of Cold War," *The New Leader*, August 2, 1954, p. 13. Minor revisions were made for the purposes of the dialogue.

12. From a letter to the author, dated September 2, 1959.

13. From another letter, dated December 22, 1959.

14. Quoted in part, with necessary changes, from "God Wills both Justice and Peace," by Bishop Angus Dun and Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XV (May 16, 1955), p. 76. Cited hereafter as Dun and Niebuhr.

Non-pacifist Christians, unlike pacifists, have no simple guide. However, they are unwilling to surrender the decision as to the justness of a particular war to the state.

F: Your reference to a just war reminds me of Bainton's comment that that concept was borrowed not from Christ or Paul but from the Greeks via Cicero.¹⁵

N: Perhaps the Greeks had a greater contribution to make with regard to man's horizontal or political relationships than the early Christians. Perhaps the Christian contribution has been so heavily in the direction of man's vertical relationship that the Greeks, or someone like them, must be leaned on to supplement the vertical approach. As I recall, Bainton bases part of his argument for pacifism on the Greek approach to war and peace. He must think they have something to offer.

F: He does and so do I. But he and I would dispute the appropriateness of trying to apply the "just war" concept to any wars which may become nuclear or biological—and nearly all imaginable future wars may do that.

N: I'd like to recall some words which Bishop Dun and I addressed to that argument. We pointed out that the Amsterdam statement, "War is contrary to the will of God," was approved by a predominantly non-pacifist group. We explained that those words do not mean that the aggressor and the victim are alike condemned. Degrees of guilt, we said, are not "wiped out by the increasingly catastrophic character of modern war." But our "clincher" was this: "The notion that the excessive violence of atomic warfare has ended the possibility of a just war does not stand up. . . . The consequences of a successful defense are fearful to contemplate but the consequences of a successful aggression, with tyrannical monopoly of the weapons of mass destruction, are calculated to be worse."¹⁶

F: Do you recall what your colleague, John C. Bennett, has said to that particular argument.

N: No.

F: To me it seems the knock-out punch: "The survivors of a nuclear war are not likely to thank us for preserving their freedom."¹⁷

N: Of course he's right, though it may still be our obligation to run at least a small risk of nuclear war on behalf of people who are and will be ungrateful. Our obligation is surely not determined by other people's gratitude or lack of it.

F: No, but doesn't this line of reasoning become rather paternalistic? One wonders if Uncle Sam should be renamed "Father Sam." The fact that God may not exactly will that the U.S. replace him as the judge of all the earth seems to elude some of you non-pacifists.

N: And the fact that God may have delegated even more terrible responsi-

15. Bainton, p. 849.

16. Dun and Niebuhr, p. 78.

17. *The Christian Century*, August 22, 1956, p. 572.

bility to statemen than we non-pacifists have accurately or fully described seems to have eluded some of you pacifists.

F: You have given the so-called "realistic" appraisal of the situation. Bainton, in the section of his article entitled "The Balance of Terror" (pp. 847-848), complains that the realistic appraisal is not realistic enough:

What all this means for ourselves the realists must realize. Over two-thirds [three-fourths is nearer the figure] of our national income must go for the expenses of war—past, present and future, hot and cold. Our young men must be diverted for two years from farm, factory and office to the barracks and the armorer's forge.

I would add that "realism" too often discounts love and reason as forces which actually operate in history along with (and sometimes more effectively than) force.¹⁸ Man is not totally evil, even in his power politics. A house built of basically bad material would collapse. History stands because its heart is not conflict but community. The claims that our rulers represent us rightly only when they are totally selfish on our behalf is a caricature of government.¹⁹

And, as Bainton explains, the danger of the situation encouraged by "realism" is not static. During the Second World War only 5% of the bombers got through to England, but "5% with hydrogen bombs could pulverize the islands." The best brains, therefore, if the realists are right, must be diverted to developing even more terrifying weapons and ever more expensive (and futile) plans of "defense." Look at these lines of Bainton's article.

Niebuhr silently reads:

If atomic warfare should thus [by defense] be eliminated, it might be replaced by bacteriological warfare, and we might then emerge from our burrows and equip ourselves with hypodermics. We shall need also to inoculate our livestock and treat our fields. And if this were to succeed, then poison gas might be revived and we should revert to the goggle stage of civilization.

N: The point is that we can avoid the *use* of such weapons only if we have them and their counter-measures (if they can be found) and only if we are wise enough not to stumble into war and strong enough not to tempt the Russians to embark upon it.²⁰

F: That is certainly not Bainton's point, though it may be yours. Bainton believes as I do, that nothing is gained by an ever-intensifying "balance of terror." The dilemma it creates is that even if war is temporarily averted by it, internal collapse is brought that much nearer by the attrition of the

18. N. Ferré, "Contemporary Civilization and Christianity," *Christendom*, XII (Autumn, 1947), p. 438 f.

19. N. Ferré, "The Distinctive Dimension of Christian Social Action," *Studies in Christian Social Commitment: A Christian Pacifist Symposium*, edited by John Ferguson (London: Independent Press, 1954), p. 97.

20. Cf. "A Century of Cold War," p. 14.

nation's morale and economy and by the usurpation of the very freedoms which the "defense effort" is supposedly defending. Internal problems become so hopeless that anything, even war, is for many people preferable.

N: You pacifists have regularly painted the consequences of defense too blackly. You have assumed that either war or internal collapse is bound to come with any armaments race. Thus you have oversimplified history. No event in history is the logically necessary consequence of other events in a scientifically predictable fashion. Actually, the most destructive weapons of all history—the atomic and hydrogen bombs—seem to have had as much deterrent as destructive effect.

F: The invention of gun powder did not deter wars noticeably, nor did airplanes, nor did poison gas. And has any brief period of time in world history been more filled with war or the threat of war than the last quarter-century? Weren't our weapons *big* enough yet?

N: Much of this is due more to rising nationalism and to the ambitious hopes of have-not people than to any weapons-race. I believe that today there are two facts which we overlook to our peril. One is that neither side really wants the ultimate conflict. The other is that neither side will sacrifice great strategic advantages for "the easing of tension."²¹ Therefore, military power is indispensable as an *ultima ratio*, but it never can compensate for the lack of basic moral and political strength, which must be the chief weapon in any cause.²²

F: Why do you say that? Please illustrate the effect of greater moral strength in our nation.

N: Well, for example, we are almost universally suspected of being more intent on assuring victory in a possible conflict than in avoiding it.²³ Moral and political keenness would perhaps help us allay that fearful suspicion.

F: I don't see how your "realism" is compatible with what you are saying now, but go ahead.

N: While I was speaking with a group of French friends in the early fifties, they put the reason for their and Europe's misgivings about America in succinct terms. They said, "You are building up vast armaments. Modern armaments are subject to rapid obsolescence. Your day of temptation will come in two or three years. [On the length of time they were wrong.] You will be fully armed and faced with the prospect of new taxation burdens in untold future years to replace the outmoded arms. The question is whether you have the moral resources and political maturity to resist the temptation to a preventive war in that situation."²⁴

F: I believe that you have become so preoccupied with the political aspect

21. Quoted (beginning with "One") from Niebuhr's article, "Geneva: Preface and Problems," *Christianity and Crisis*, XIX (June 8, 1959), p. 79.

22. R. Niebuhr, "American Leadership," *ibid.*, XIV (October 18, 1954), p. 129.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

24. R. Niebuhr, *The Moral Implications of Loyalty to the United Nations* (Hazen Pamphlet No. 29), p. 12 (with minor changes).

of the war problem that you have neglected to push your understanding of this moral aspect deep enough. For example, the "realistic" counsel which you have given as a theologian has helped lull many to sleep in militaristic complacency and has even had repercussions in international politics as your own story bears out. You suggest that we need to build larger and larger armaments at the same time that you hope we will allay the fears of all who suspect that we intend sometime to use them! How this is to be done is a mystery, but a deeper problem concerns the morality from a Christian standpoint of involvement in such casuistry.²⁵

- N: I don't see the casuistry (or if I do I should prefer to call it the tragically necessary casuistry) of responsibility in contrast to the more reprehensible casuistry of irresponsibility and isolationism. One point I think Bainton makes quite well and soundly: "Let the realists therefore recognize that the course on which we are embarked bids fair if not to extinguish the species then at any rate to wreck the amenities of life" (p. 848). I recognize this as a real possibility. It is the risk we must take as a mature and powerful nation, if we are to discharge the responsibility which goes along with our new power. And I take it that no Christian would turn away from a course of action or urge others to turn away just because it "bids fair . . . to wreck the amenities of life."
- F: Right! But, as Bainton says, much more disturbing than the inconvenience of protracted cold war, from the Christian point of view, is "what we are prepared to do to our enemies." "After a hundred million Americans had been killed, we would destroy a hundred million Russians in an act of massive retaliation" (p. 848).
- N: We are obliged to make that threat in order that it may not have to be fulfilled.
- F: Then why make the threat? Assuming the threat is not idle, Bainton correctly asks, "Can this be described as Christian behavior? 'Vengeance is mine. I will repay,' saith the Lord."
- N: I had forgotten that Bainton took such a legalistic line.
- F: He points out that if this is legalism, then Paul led the way in it by *quoting* these very words from the Old Testament.
- N: It is Bainton's political use of an individualistic verse which fails to convince me.
- F: Of course Jeremiah was urging political action when he told the Jews to surrender to the Babylonians without fighting. Are you sure he was wrong?
- N: Are you sure he was right? Besides, Judah at that time was more comparable to modern Hungary than to the U.S., so perhaps he *was* right; if so, this would have precisely nothing to do with the issue at stake, namely, what U.S. policy should be.

25. Cf. Ferré's article, "Contemporary Civilization and Christianity," p. 438 f.: "The illusion that physical force—economic, political, or military—is to be equated with historic power subtly paralyzes our respect for truth and our use of it, while effectively aiding the powers of evil."

F: Except that what the Bible says about individuals cannot be completely compartmentalized away from man's social and political responsibility. Bainton reminds us that Machiavelli urged your same argument against any attempt to apply Christian ethics directly to politics.

N: That may simply mean that Machiavelli saw some things more clearly than Christians such as Bainton. Doesn't he believe in loyalty to the state as God's best instrument for the preservation of order? Is he an absolute pacifist and therefore an anarchist? And where do you stand? I thought you said we agreed on something!

F: Bainton does believe in the state and is not an absolute pacifist. Neither am I. I agree with him when he writes:

Even the exercise of the police power requires that the gentler virtues be regarded as attitudes rather than as acts. But in the situation with which we are confronted of massive retaliation, can the gentler virtues survive even as attitudes? One may love a criminal at the same time that one restrains him from a crime. But to annihilate a hundred million people in retaliation for the annihilation of another hundred million people already dead and beyond restoration, is hard to square with love, long-suffering, gentleness and meekness, indeed even with temperance. Such sublime casuistry was not attempted by Machiavelli (p. 848).

N: I am glad you two do not take the absolute pacifist position. That is indefensible. But surely you do not follow Bainton in all of the rest of his statements in this quotation?

F: No, I think the Christian policeman who restrains a criminal is displaying Christian love in act as well as in attitude. Love operates with strictness, even harshness, as well as permissively and gently. Your approach has certainly helped me to accept and stress that point.

N: But aren't you disturbed about the tendency of Bainton's pacifism to limit the use of force to internal affairs? Don't criminal nations need restraint as well as criminal individuals? Isn't it casuistry of another kind to ask men to restrain gangsters but to leave it to God to restrain tyrannical nations?

F: I did not say that men have no responsibility to restrain such nations. Bainton, so far as I know, would not say this either without qualification. We simply raise the question as to whether one nation, namely ours, should presume to take the place of a representative world government. Of course, such a government would need to have force at its disposal and would need to use it from time to time.

N: Until we can have world government, then, you are willing to leave questions of international order to the Russians and to God? When Koreans occur or recur you would simply say: "Too bad! But such tragedies will be ironed out in heaven! We had better not interfere." And I suppose you would condemn both the U.S. for "unilateral" action in the Korean affair and the U.N. for permitting itself to be the "front" for a U.S. war. Of course, you would also have to condemn all fellow Christians who con-

curred in the acceptance of the U.N. Commission's report which branded the Communists as the aggressors. Or at least you would criticize the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches for urging support for the collective measures undertaken by the U.N. In other words, unless a police action could clearly and unambiguously conform to your utopian picture of "world government," you would have nothing to do with it. If you had been living on the frontier I suppose you would have condemned the vigilante committees as severely as the outlaws because neither had official and representative governmental sanction!

F (who has become more and more restless under this lecture): Now, now, Reinie, don't get carried away with what you *think* I might say or with what you *think* the absurd consequences of my position are! I want to clear up just one point in what you have said, the point about condemning and criticizing. If a Christian, or any other person, is convinced that more can be conserved or created by war than without it, naturally he must follow his conscience in this regard, and no one is to judge his decision, as far as his spirit goes, though we can disagree as far as the objective analysis goes.²⁶

N: It's the objective analysis which, I believe, is on my side.

F: All right, let's hear some of it.

N: I notice in the article which you have there [Niebuhr takes it] that Bainton raises the realistic question well; but I do not believe he satisfactorily answers it. He explains that if we eliminate our willingness to kill a hundred million in retaliation, "there is no use threatening to do so. And if we do not threaten to do so, there is no point in being ready" (p. 848).

I think that last statement might be challenged, but the rest of the analysis stands valid without it. He continues, "And then not only our nuclear tests but our whole nuclear program must be abandoned. Whether without it there would be any point in the rest of our armaments is doubtful." He points out that though we might seek to keep a war limited by having and using only limited means, there is no guarantee that an opponent with the means to wage unlimited war would feel any compunction about doing so. Now my question to you: What then would happen if we disarmed, at least nuclearly?

F: The two possibilities are clear enough: war or peace.

N: But don't you believe that the possibility or probability of war would be heightened by our *weakness*?

F: I wouldn't want to predict. Nor am I too much concerned with what the Russians might do or any such questions. The main thing is to know that war is no solution to our problems, that there must come a new age of religious reorientation and remotivation, that we must work for world law and world rule, which is more than international law and world police. In the meantime we have to negotiate and find whatever ways we

26. This last sentence is quoted almost verbatim from Ferré's *Christianity and Society* (New York: Harper, 1950), p. 203.

can to arrive at this goal. The Church as a church should throw itself thoroughly into it, and Christians should above all believe God, who acts in history and responds to faith far beyond our understanding.²⁷ However, to answer the question as you put it: Perhaps Bainton is right when he suggests that "one possibility is that the Russians would follow suit" if we disarmed.

N: Such naive optimism!

F: Wait a minute! Aren't you the one who was castigating the pacifists for simplifying history? How do you non-pacifists conveniently know what is most probable when that is to your advantage in argument and yet you criticize the pacifists for warning about the dangerous consequences of the armaments race? [Ferré rushes on heatedly without waiting for an answer.] You masterfully describe the complexity of human motivation and response and yet you blandly assume or seem to assume that you know what our military weakness would lead to. I might add that you would need godlike wisdom which you have always claimed to lack, if you were to weigh all the facts so as to accurately determine whether or not we should enter a just war—whatever that might be.

N: Don't you ever run out of breath? [Both laugh, but Ferré proceeds, though more calmly.]

F: Bainton rightly asserts that no one could be sure the Russians would not disarm if we did. He writes—well, you read it for yourself beginning with "Such an . . ." in the paragraph you quoted from a minute ago.

Niebuhr (reading aloud): "Such an experiment has never been made in history. It might have astounding effects. Admittedly there is no power in weakness, but there is moral power in the voluntary renunciation of strength. If we, being able to continue our armaments program, should of our own accord render ourselves defenseless, the Russians might with relief abandon their defenses."

F: Well, what do you think?

N: I think the whole idea, first of our "rendering ourselves defenseless" and, second, of the Russians following suit is so unlikely as to hardly be worth discussing. But remember that when I say a thing is unlikely I do not mean it won't or couldn't happen. However, in this instance, Bainton's thinking is afflicted, I suspect, with the disease of "Gandhi-itis" which so many of our idealistic political and religious theorists have caught.

It seems to me that you are neglecting one small item—history. The theme of Churchill's *The Gathering Storm*, as I recall, is "How the English speaking peoples through their unwisdom, carelessness, and good nature allowed the wicked to rearm." In the preface of that book Churchill tells how Roosevelt asked what the Second World War should be called and how he (Churchill) said at once: "The Unnecessary War."

27. Quoted, with minor changes, from a letter to the author, dated December 22, 1959.

He explained that "there never was a war more easy to stop than that which has just wrecked what was left of the world from the previous struggle."

Pacifists assume that secular-minded people will always jump at the drop of a hat to intervene forcefully on behalf of the oppressed. Even if that were always true, which Churchill's statements show was not the case in one important crisis, still John Dewey's quip would provide the necessary criticism: "While the saints engage in pious introspection, burly sinners run the world."

F: I recognize that, even for me, who stand at the opposite pole from Dewey and Churchill, it would be much harder to be a conscientious objector in Finland (or in Sweden if Sweden were trying to defend Finland) than to do so in Nazi Germany—even though the consequences of conscientious objection were far more dangerous physically in Germany.

There is an existential gap here; no mere thinking can cover it. My decision is, therefore, not altogether satisfactory either to reason or to feeling. In leaving the defense of the more just state to God and to those still on the level of creation, I presuppose an order within which I can operate and for which I have not, in one respect, fought. But I must make a concrete decision and, representing the Church of God, the ground and goal of history, a community without which genuine peace can never be found, I must be true to God's revelation and redemption in the fullness of time. But history itself is now helping to fill up the gap of my position.

N: I am certain that an ethic of love which dispenses with the structures and commitments of justice is ultimately irrelevant to the collective life of man. I do not think that Gandhi has taught us anything new on this perplexing problem. He made the pretension of sainthood into an instrument of political power. That may have seemed plausible in the environment of India, but it must be ultimately intolerable anywhere.²⁸

F: I wish you hadn't used that word.

N: What word?

F: "Intolerable." It makes me see red, particularly in this connection.

N: Why?

F: Your dismissal of Gandhi seems to me to be a rather bad rationalization.

To say that one whose fruits of saintliness were so apparent "made the pretension of sainthood" and that his methods, though they might work in India, are "ultimately intolerable anywhere" seems to me an attempt to evade the significance of the successful application of Jesus' so-called "individual" ethic to social problems.

N: The very obviousness of Gandhi's "sainthood" is what caused me to use the word "pretension." It was *too* obvious; it almost reminds me of the Pharisees.

F: Certainly that's not your ultimate judgment to make.

N: And I didn't make it ultimately.

28. Cf. Niebuhr's "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," *Reinhold Niebuhr*, p. 450.

F: You said "*ultimately* intolerable anywhere."

N: Yes and I think I then used the word in a sense different from what you are trying to pin on me now.

F: Be that as it may, aren't you presuming to judge the inner sincerity of Gandhi? And isn't that a difficult matter to appraise by sheer objective analysis?

Niebuhr (laughing, after showing the stress of being pushed): You not only lead up to a point and make it, but you keep stabbing one with it until the blood comes. Very unpacifistic!

Ferré (also softening up a little): Why not use a good point to the maximum? I am even tempted to argue this Gandhi business a little further with you.

N: That's all right with me.

F: If you alone had influenced Martin Luther King, the Montgomery bus boycott might never have been carried off successfully and non-violently. Fortunately you did not have the sole influence on King (though you had and continue to have a lot); Gandhi furnished King with a method which worked, though he was realistic enough to realize that it might not work. This proves that non-violence can be introduced effectively into the West, into social conflict, and . . .

N (interrupting): But not into international conflict, particularly where Communists are involved. Also, "effectively" does not necessarily mean the same as "morally."

F: That's right. But I think that King's combination of morality with effectiveness does show that your polemic against the naively optimistic use of Gandhi led you to overstate the case when you said his method "must be ultimately intolerable anywhere." Perhaps you need to read King's book *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper, 1958).

N: You've gotten me way off the track.

F: Maybe you need to be on the track I've put you on! However, go ahead with what you were going to say.

N: Bainton says that if we dropped our defenses, the Russians might do likewise. Then he says, "On the other hand, they might not. They might simply sneer at our decadence and take over the world," which would tragically involve more free nations than just our own. It is this possibility which I think we must consider most seriously.

F: Bainton considers it seriously when he concludes the section you have been quoting with the words: "For a Christian to live under the Russians is not easy, but it is not impossible; and rather than train ourselves for war, we should do better to discipline ourselves for resistance to tyranny from within."

N: As Truman used to say, "That's hogwash!" There is a duty higher than the duty not to kill.

F: A duty not to be killed, I suppose.

N: No, a duty to defend the weak and innocent. That applies to nations as well as individuals and it can't be done without a willingness to kill. Do you know who would suffer first and most from a policy of massive non-resistance on our part?

F: Western Europe and England?

N: Yes, just as they did when we took so long to unite sufficiently to enter the Second World War. Furthermore, for a state to lay down its defenses is a contradiction in terms. A state by definition is an organization which at least is supposed to protect its citizenry. So morally we are bound to use our power for the defense of other weaker states just as, by nature, we are bound to use it for ourselves.

F: The answer to both needs, defense of others and self-defense, is not the perpetuation of the balance of terror between powers but an effective world government. History is pushing us rapidly beyond the time when national sovereignty is a luxury we can afford. Perhaps our only alternative to global destruction is global government.

N: For you to say that is nearly intolerable.²⁹

Ferré is ready to protest but nods for Niebuhr to continue.

N: I have four questions for anyone proposing "world government" as the quick and easy solution to all our problems:

1. Has he any evidence that the nations, many of which are still celebrating their recently acquired independence, would welcome a supra-national sovereignty?
2. How does he know that the fear of American power, the envy of American wealth and the resistance of American leadership would be mitigated by a tighter constitutional arrangement? Minorities would be more threatened by the majority in one efficient organization.
3. Would not "world government" for the non-communist world destroy the present bridge between the two worlds which we have in the United Nations? Would such an eventuality really protect us against the dreaded atomic conflict?
4. How can we speak of effective world government when there is neither sufficient community nor enough organs of communication available to make election contests across national boundaries possible?³⁰

Because of the negative answers required by these questions, I believe that the possibility of world government is practically nil, so you see what is left according to your posing of the problem. Your prediction is so pessimistic that I find it, I repeat, *intolerable*.

Ferré starts to respond but instead turns toward the radio which has quietly been droning away as the two men talk. A music program has just been interrupted. The men strain to catch what the announcer is saying. Ferré

29. Cf. Niebuhr's reaction to Lewis Mumford's similar statement, "A Century of Cold War," pp. 12-14.

30. These questions in a slightly different form are found in *ibid.*, p. 12 f.

reaches over and nervously twists a dial; he turns it too far so that the voice booms:

. . . DROPPED ON TWELVE EASTERN AND OTHER CITIES, INCLUDING NEW YORK CITY, WASHINGTON, D.C., AND CHICAGO. ANOTHER SUCH BOMB IS EXPECTED MOMENTARILY IN THIS AREA, BUT WE SHALL CONTINUE BROADCASTING AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. . . .

SCENE TWO

The setting for Scene Two is Heaven. Ferré and Niebuhr are still seated in an office which is remarkably similar in appearance to the other one. They seem to be waiting for something. Niebuhr listlessly runs his finger up and down the large pages of the magazine they were just discussing. Suddenly his finger comes to a stop and he speaks, but without enthusiasm.

N: Bainton was right on one thing: "To hope to make enough pacifists to stop a third conflict is fatuous."

F: I'm sorry to have to agree, but that seems true, at least as things turned out.

N: I wonder about the family.

F: So do I. Perhaps someone will let us know shortly.

A young lady who had been Ferré's secretary years earlier at Vanderbilt enters; the men rise.

Ferré exclaims: Lorine! Where in heaven's name did you come from?

Lorine: New York. I was visiting there. [Continues after a somewhat awkward silence] I have a Heavenly Word for you two. You are to prepare for glorification.

N: Oh *no*! When do we learn about our families?

L: After glorification. You can bear it better then.

F: How long does it take?

L: I don't know. I haven't been glorified myself. I got here just shortly before you did and they pressed me into service. So many have to be processed because of It.

N: Where do we go?

L: Nowhere—yet. First you are to finish your discussion.

Both men in chorus: I don't want to!

L (smiling): I'm sorry; the Heavenly Word says nothing about your wants.

It just says, "Have them finish the discussion."

Exit.

N: I must say this puts things in a different light.

F: Not entirely. It will be interesting to find out what if anything happened to Russia.

N: I think I know.

F: So do I. Do you think it right?

N (jumping up and pounding on the desk): I DON'T KNOW. I DON'T

KNOW. [Subsiding somewhat as he sits down again]: Sometimes I wonder if God knows.

F: Coming back to Bainton, he says your proposal to defend the weaker states is impractical. Of course, as things turned out we were attacked directly and first (or at least not after Europe was attacked). But for sake of the argument. . . .

N (sarcastically): Yes, the argument. By all means let's get on with the argument! [Somewhat more mildly]: This is awfully trivial, don't you think?

F: It would seem from the Heavenly Word that our discussion has some importance still.

N: Yes, excuse me. You were saying . . . ?

F: For the sake of our argument, let's suppose we have heavily armed our weaker allies.

N: No need to suppose. We did just that.

F: Now the question is: Does this in any sense defend them?

N: Of course, but what does Bainton say?

F: He says, "No." "If we plant bases or troops on their soil we turn them immediately into targets" (p. 849).

N: So?

F: He continues, "The only possibility of defending them and at the same time leaving them intact would be to do nothing of a military nature on their own soil, but to resort to massive annihilation of the Russians on their own territory. And thus we are brought back again to the expedient from which we recoiled." Excuse me, I should amend—"the expedient from which Bainton and I recoiled."

N: Good grief! Are you still going to assume your pious superiority because of your pacifism? Besides, we didn't strike Russia first or because of her attack on our allies but because of her unprovoked attack on us.

F: Massive retaliation is massive retaliation.

N (pulling the hair on the back of his head): Where did they say we were? It seems almost like hell. I believe I prefer Bainton's statement about the fatuousness of making enough pacifists to avert a third conflict, to all the other things we have discussed this afternoon—or is it evening? Or what in the world is it anyway?

F: Let's call it a timeless discussion.

N: "Eternal" would be more accurate.

F (laughing with Niebuhr): I'm glad there's laughter in heaven. I didn't expect it to be of this kind though.

N: Remember, we're not glorified yet.

F: I doubt if we'll ever be at this rate. You accuse Bainton and me of unrealism, but the rest of the paragraph from which you quoted is, I think, the epitome of realism. Listen [Ferré reads]:

One comes to the conclusion that the Christian ethic is at variance with the major part of our national policy, and we can be confident that our

national policy is not going to be revised in accord with the Christian ethic. Pacifism is not a political strategy. No nation has ever adopted it as a policy, and one may doubt that any nation ever will. The majority of the churches do not recommend it, and probably they will not. Pacifism in the time of its greatest strength in the United States and Britain—that is, in the period between the two world wars—was not sufficiently potent to avert the Second World War. If it was not strong enough then, it certainly is not strong enough now. To hope to make enough pacifists to stop a third conflict is fatuous (p. 849).

N: Amen to the whole thing!

F: Do you realize that "Amen" is the most religious word you've said since we've come up here?

N (who is so excited about the discussion once more, that he ignores the facetiousness, proceeds): I like the statement, "Pacifism is not a political strategy," even more than the last sentence.

F: Whatever led you to believe that we pacifists were promoting a political strategy?

N: Merely this whole discussion!

F: I'll admit that Bainton's emphasis on national and international affairs sounds as though he is greatly interested in the political scene. And he is, but not because he believes that pacifism at present is directly applicable to international politics.

N: Why then?

F: Because only thus can he discuss the question of what is ultimately *right*. There is some value, certainly for Christians, in determining what is right, quite apart from questions of "Will it be done?" or even "Can it be widely practised?" But also he believes as I do that "Pacifism is a witness, a worthy and much needed witness, but it is not a strategy. If a third world war is stopped it will be not because of pacifists but because of peace-minded nonpacifists. There are many of them and their hands should be strengthened." All Christians are non-participants, if not in war then at least in hate.

N (sadly): Now we are communicating—a pacifist and a nonpacifist—but it's too late.

F: Of course I would wish to fill out Bainton's discussion with the doctrine of the reconciliatory nature of the Church and the love-function of the Holy Spirit. Your theology was deficient here, I feel. God works on two levels—the level of creation as exemplified in the state and the level of redemption and reconciliation as exemplified in the true Church.³¹

I think that if you had understood the Church and the Holy Spirit better, you would have handled the question of compromise more satisfactorily. Obviously no one, pacifist or not, can divorce himself from all the evil consequences of his acts, even his good acts. Jesus' uncompromis-

31. Ferré shows the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Christian and of the Christian to creation and redemption and to such historical instruments for peace as the U.N. in his contribution to *Studies in Christian Social Commitment*, e.g., p. 105.

ing facing of the cross had as a side-effect the suicide of Judas, but we certainly shouldn't say that Jesus was guilty of murder. Pacifism as a national policy, it is true, *might* have led to the destruction of our nation even sooner than the other course did. Since that is a real possibility the pacifist should not even object to being treated as a traitor. From one viewpoint—the level of creation—he is.

N: It sounds a little martyrish to talk thus.

F: Perhaps you have forgotten how pacifists were sometimes treated. Please look at those two paragraphs from Hershberger's book:

They were frequently roughly handled by petty officers who had little sympathy for their scruples. . . . In all the camps they were subject to ridicule and were considered fair game for any army officer or Y.M.C.A. secretary who cared to take a hand in converting them. Even some of the higher officials in some of the camps, being entirely out of sympathy with the liberal policy of the war department, permitted unnecessary abuse of the conscientious objectors, as those were called who refused to work in the camps even at noncombatant work, and usually refused to don the uniform. In Camp Funston the worst abuses prevailed, and two officers, a major and a captain, were removed for negligence in permitting rough treatment of the conscientious objectors. Some of these men were brutally handled in the guardhouse; they were bayoneted, beaten and tortured by forms of the water cure; eighteen men one night were aroused from their sleep and held under cold showers until one became hysterical. At another time a man had the hose played upon his head until he became unconscious. The war department finally was forced to interfere a short time before the armistice....

In other camps similar abuse prevailed, carried on usually by under officers for the purpose of breaking down the morale of the conscientious objector, or perhaps to retaliate for his refusal to obey peremptory military orders. Men were forced to stand at attention, sometimes with outstretched arms for hours and days at a time on the sunny or cold side of their barracks, exposed to the inclemencies of the weather as well as to the jeers and taunts of their fellows until they could stand no longer; chased across the fields at top speed until they fell down exhausted, followed by their guards on motorcycles; occasionally tortured by mock trials, in which the victim was left under the impression to the very last that unless he subjected to the regulations the penalty would be death. Every conceivable device—ridicule, torture, offer of promotion, and other tempting inducements were resorted to in order to get them to give up their convictions; but with only few exceptions the religious objectors refused to compromise with their consciences.³²

N: Yes, I had forgotten about that. But perhaps you have forgotten the suffering of enslaved peoples, or the sacrifices some men have made as soldiers in order to break the chains and still the whips of tyrants. Agape, I think, was not cancelled by the fact that such soldiers employed violence. Christian conscience could lead a soldier to give himself to the task of making human relations a little more tolerable and slightly more just.³³

32. Guy Franklin Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1946), p. 119 f.

33. See John C. Bennett's excellent article, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Social Ethics," in *Reinhold Niebuhr*. Pp. 58 and 64–71 are particularly helpful on the question of war.

F: No, I did not forget the courage or self-sacrifice of some soldiers, and I know that what hurts the pacifist the most is for him to realize that innocent people in his own country and in other countries may suffer more, at least temporarily, because of his pacifism than he does. Nevertheless, the pacifist must make an existential commitment and trust God's love to cover unintended evil side-effects or, what is more important, to take them over into his larger plan and transform them so that, while still evil as ends, they may be good as means.

N: You're getting breathless again, even in Heaven! I note with interest that you, too, fall back on the doctrine of justification. Also, you are still speaking of pacifism as though it were even in heaven a live option.

F: I should hope that in heaven peace is an especially live option!

N (ignoring the retort): While I cannot go along with your analysis and critique of me all the way, I can say that as a way of *witness* I see (now that I am in heaven) more and more advantages to the pacifist position. Perhaps if more people had borne this witness, the Church would at least have been stronger and clearer as a Christian fellowship, even if war were not averted—as I believe it would not have been.

But was the Church ever really or actually the kind of fellowship which you, Nels, have pictured?

F: Since we don't know about the heavenly Church yet, I can do no better than continue to talk as though peacemaking is still a "live option" on the earth we both know. [He opens a book.] Though it now seems too late to do much about it, I still believe what I wrote on the Church in *Christianity and Society*, p. 208:

The Church as a total sociological institution, to be sure, is now slow and conservative. We must not pin too much hope on that body without, nevertheless, underestimating what can happen, even through it, if prophets are raised up and followed, first even by the faithful few, and then by the many. The Church is now, however, too feeble, as a whole, even to become one Church in the sense of overcoming its senseless denominational sovereignties. We must not be overoptimistic about the Church as a social and political example to a divided and dying civilization. We must, rather, find the power of fellowship, through concern for the world, borne high on faith in God.

Lorine enters and says: This way please.

SCENE THREE

Since Ferré and Niebuhr and the reader may not like such concrete imaginings of history and heaven as are found in the preceding pages of this dialogue, I herewith present a third scene which is not intended to supplant the second but to supplement it. What would our conversationalists say if they suddenly awoke from Scene Two as from a very realistic dream? At least what might they say about the "heavenly discourse" which I have attributed to them? Let us see.

N: I'm not sure now that I shall make any concession, in heaven or on earth, about the Church bearing a clearer witness through pacifism. Being a pacifist is perhaps beset with even more illusions than being a repentant non-pacifist.

F (fingering and opening a small book): Frank Laubach has correctly pointed out that there are two kinds of repentance. "Judas," he says, "repented and committed suicide. It would be easier for us to say our prayers and repent and continue the way we have been going until our folly results in the death of hope than to repent in *deed* and not in word only."³⁴

N: But it's the choice of appropriate deeds which is the problem. I agree with Churchill who says that patience and persistent good will could have averted many wars. You and I can mutually endorse deeds of patience. But I sympathize with Churchill, which I wonder if you do, when he says with regard to the Quakers and the Sermon on the Mount, "It is not on these terms that Ministers assume their responsibility of guiding states and protecting the lives and freedom of subjects."³⁵

Since we still don't know what course history is to take, the pursuit of proximate, realistic goals, such as Churchill emphasized, seems to me potentially productive of more good than your course. I might be a pacifist and call others to hear this witness if I knew that the perfect tragedy were upon us. But I do not and so I will not.

F: Perhaps you should assume the end is here (not an altogether improbable or unchristian assumption) in order that you might take a more radical course to help defer it!

To quote Bainton once more:

But now let us return to Christianity and remind ourselves that to survive is not the chief end of man. Christianity has been called by its critics the cult of death. Certainly it is not the cult of life on [just] any terms. The realists tell us that if we are not powerful we shall be at a disadvantage. Of course we shall. When were the scrupulous not at a disadvantage in dealing with the unscrupulous? (p. 849)

Perhaps you, of all people, are too optimistic about proximate goals and limited strivings. *You* an optimist!

N: I am willing to be called an optimist if I may set the context for it in my own words.

F: I am eager to hear you describe yourself optimistically.

N: Perhaps "meliorist" describes me more accurately. William James once defined the requirements for any great moral endeavour as: (a) Resoluteness in the original commitment to the cause or discipline, whether it be peacemaking or something else, and (b) a whole series of specific acts of loyalty to give historical body to the commitment.

34. Frank C. Laubach, *Wake Up or Blow Up* (Los Angeles: Fleming H. Revell, 1951), p. 41.

35. Winston S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), p. 320.

It seems to me that there are two types of pacifists and two types of non-pacifists. Some pacifists claim to have found a program which will usher in the Kingdom of God almost by force—what an anomalous idea! Others do not believe that history is perfectible. Menno Simons is an example. He thought of suffering love rather as a sign and symbol of the Kingdom of God, which God would have to usher in his good time. If I were a pacifist, I would be this type. It is a good thing to seek for the Kingdom of God on earth; but it is very dubious to claim to have found it. The Quakers represent pacifism too much as an evolutionary program of transforming society; the Mennonites represent it as a witness to a great commitment.³⁶

F: Your analysis doesn't sound like meliorism or optimism either one.

N: But I am a non-pacifist. In non-pacifism there are these same two emphases, so, in line with James' suggestion, I try to keep my original commitment exactly in balance with my specific and quite imperfect acts of loyalty. Thus in one sense of the word I am pacifist in intention or commitment and non-pacifist in my stress on means.

F: I still don't quite see the optimism or meliorism.

N: You will, Nels, you will. We have the double duty to avoid war and to prevent the spread of communist tyranny. I believe we may be able to do both. That's optimism! To preserve a minimal bridge between ourselves and Russia requires the preservation of the United Nations organization. And to prevent the spread of tyranny we must use the U.N. and other means to relate our power to a weakened world and our prosperity to an impoverished world.

However natural the suspicions and the misinterpretations of both our friends and enemies, we cannot afford to be guilty of any act or attitude which might give them credence. Here is where we need all the moral and spiritual resources available. An atomic war is so terrible in its known and unknown consequences that no stone must be left unturned for its avoidance. The idea of a preventive war, even with known injustices as its excuse, is absurd.

I would agree with you to this extent: The occasions to which the concept of a just war can be rightly applied have become highly restricted. Consequently, the restraints imposed by the new dimensions of war underline the importance of a vigorous development of methods of peaceful change.³⁷

F: Wonderful! I agree wholeheartedly.

N: I would reiterate: Nothing in history is inevitable, including the probable. So long as war has not broken out, we still have the possibility of avoiding it. Those who think that there is little difference between a cold and a hot war are either knaves or fools; for there is an obvious difference

36. This speech includes direct quotations from Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, II, 177, n. 16; 177.

37. The last two sentences are quoted almost verbatim from Dun and Niebuhr, p. 78.

between a state of tension and a state of destruction and mutual annihilation.

F: Nevertheless, I believe that your emphasis upon "a whole series of specific" and prudential acts of loyalty bears witness mostly on the level of creation and not enough on the level of the Church. To me it seems to bear the stamp of secular idealism (or realism) more than the stamp of eternity.

N: You may be right. That is each man's decision to make, as you yourself have pointed out.³⁸ For myself I must do what I can while I can and urge others to do the same rather than wish we were doing that which might seem more heroic or perfect but which actually might be ignoring the real situation and the immediate responsibilities. I see you have my little pamphlet on the U.N. Please look at the two closing paragraphs. Ferré reads the following silently:

Our nation is basically committed to the principles of a cooperative world community. The real problem is whether we can give this basic commitment the body of, the flesh and blood of, our daily acts of loyalty and forbearance in the nascent community of mankind. Undoubtedly the constitutional instruments of world order must be perfected in time. But the more perfect instruments must grow out of the more perfect mutualities of daily living together.

If our nation is to achieve success in this arduous and sometimes disheartening task we must not give way to the "cry-baby" theory of modern history, which regrets the trials and tumults of our era and wishes that the lot of our generation had been cast in a more pleasant century. The trials are undoubtedly great, and the insecurities and frustrations are disheartening; but the stakes are also very big and the possibilities of achievement are inspiring. They might well prompt our generation to Rupert Brooke's prayer of thanksgiving: "God be thanked who matched us with this hour."³⁹

N (speaking after Ferré looks up): You see, our task is a big one. We must acquire the humility to be sufferable to our friends and the patience to outlast an unscrupulous foe.⁴⁰ So the final paradox of faith is that the Christian faith and hope will be most creative if we are not too preoccupied with its current relevance and pragmatic efficiency.⁴¹ Perhaps there lies the truth in your criticism of my "secularism."

F: I would try to express "the truth of my criticism" somewhat more theologically. God's new order will dawn in God's time and by his power. The ethical question for Christians is: Will we now witness for or against it? Will we witness for what was, for what is, or for what will be? Which

38. Cf. N. Ferré, "The Distinctive Dimension of Christian Social Action," p. 99, where Ferré says of his pacifism: "It fails also to preserve some of the relative values which characterize the distinctive truths of the other approaches."

39. Niebuhr's last five speeches, including this quotation, have incorporated direct and indirect citations of *The Moral Implications of Loyalty to the United Nations*, pp. 7, 8 f., 13.

40. Cf. R. Niebuhr, "American Leadership," p. 130.

41. Cf. R. Niebuhr, "The Theme of Evanston," *Christianity and Crisis*, XIV (August 9, 1954), p. 111.

reality claims our allegiance? Are we called to be political realists or to be Kingdom-realists?

The early Church recognized that the fullness of time had come on the level of redemption; now we must recognize that the fullness of time has come also on the level of creation. The special challenge of our age is to renounce war while creating the positive conditions for peace.⁴² Process is pushing all of us very hard, and God's purpose is pulling some of us even harder. We pacifists are somewhat like the conscientious abstainer whom the waiter asked, "Will you take your drinks at the bar or at the table?" When current events pose evil alternatives to us, we feel constrained to answer, instead of "At the bar" or "At the table" (or whatever the particular choices on a major issue), simply and humbly, "Neither."⁴³

War is not primarily caused by unjust treaties or by the faulty distribution of goods. Radical causes and immediate irritations are secondary to the total evil drives that have caused wars at all times and in all systems. The only way to cure the deeper constant conflict that no peace treaty can remedy, is to change the world by the thorough diagnosis and drastic surgery of God's love. When this will be accomplished we do not know; but we do know that continuous compromise and acceptance of the ways of the world will certainly increase its malady. In the end, we are certain, there is no stronger historic force than resolute faith in a cause that is rooted in the very web of the universe. As surely as Christianity is true, so surely will history be most deeply and significantly affected by those who keep living, war or no war, as far as possible the only kind of life that can

42. Quoted (beginning with "The early Church") from N. Ferré, *Christianity and Society*, p. 208.

43. A full explication of some of these ideas in the context of process philosophy and with reference to Ferré's reinterpretation of natural law is found in his article in *Studies in Christian Social Commitment*; see especially p. 98 f. Cf. his *Christianity and Society*, Chap. VII, "The Christian Perspective on War." Ferré's use of process philosophy is not to be confused with the "inevitable progress" theories of the nineteenth century. According to Ferré the resources for mutual helpfulness or hurtfulness have dramatically accumulated through history, especially recently. But there is no inevitability about the way in which man at this time will use these resources. Thus it is too early to evaluate the amount of "progress" in history absolutely. This means that Ferré agrees with Sorokin's criticisms of progress theories which have a superficial likeness to his own process philosophy. See Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, Vol. III: *Fluctuation of Social Relationships, War, and Revolution* (New York: American Book Co., 1937), p. 360 f.: "Some have not been satisfied even with this rather long stretch of time, and have tried to prove that war has certainly been disappearing (and most assuredly does not dare to stay!) as we move from the amoeba or protozoan to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century civilization of *homo sapiens*." Cf. p. 361: "A sudden disappearance of war, with the magnitude of war unprecedented, not in its smallness, but in its greatness! One must have strange logic to see disappearance in these and other data given! . . . The present work has possibly shown that the crisis in our whole present culture is infinitely deeper and more serious and tragic than most people think. The possibility of a gigantic catastrophe, including war, is also much greater than many think. This should be understood by all who want to avoid it and to give their mind, and will, and effort to the noblest and most urgent task of its prevention or minimization." And finally, the agreement of Ferré and Sorokin is represented by Sorokin's melioristic statement: "As in the data presented there is nothing to support the claim of disappearance of war in the past, so there is nothing to support the claim, in spite of the exceptionally high figures for the twentieth century, that there has been (or will be) any steady trend toward increase in war."

ever save the world. In deep humility, and without judging our brethren in Christ who differ from us, I believe that in God's time our refusal to compromise our witness will aid in leading the whole world to that community in Christ that is our sure goal.⁴⁴

N: While there is much in this sort of statement to which I have consistently objected, you may be surprised to learn that I believe your position has something to say to us non-pacifists.

We who allow ourselves to become engaged in war need this testimony, lest we accept the warfare of the world as normative, lest we become callous to the horror of war, and lest we forget the ambiguity of our own actions and motives and the risk we run of achieving no permanent good from this momentary anarchy in which we allow ourselves, from time to time, to become involved.⁴⁵

F: Well, I see one thing more clearly than ever: Christianity at its best makes a difference in one's perspective, whether one is a pacifist or a non-pacifist. It challenges the "puristic" pacifist even more deeply to understand the nature of responsibility and the need for the use of force in a world like this. It challenges the "realist" at the other extreme, as you have also pointed out, to see that the danger of conflict is just as real as the danger of tyranny.

N: Or, to put it another way, "pure" idealism is equally dangerous for the militarist and for the pacifist. The "pure" idealists are always tempted to go to war against communism in the name of justice or to come to terms with it in the name of peace. The ideals of these contrasting idealists may be purer than mine. I cannot claim greater moral purity; but perhaps I may claim to possess a wisdom which is more relevant to our two-pronged predicament.⁴⁶ I realize that I am talking again about current relevance after warning just a few moments ago against preoccupation with it.⁴⁷

F: Nevertheless, Christianity can and often does restrain both the romanticism of the pacifist and the impulsive aggressiveness of any "realist" who would set things right by the immediate use of force to use your own expressions. Even if this is all that Christianity says on the war question, which it is not, you might almost say that even this requires "a touch of daring" in one's social outlook and witness.

N: I certainly might!

44. N. Ferré, "Christianity and Compromise," *Fellowship*, VIII (April, 1942), p. 55.

45. This paragraph is quoted, with minor changes, from R. Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, p. 31 (cited in *Reinhold Niebuhr*, p. 67).

46. Adapted, with minor changes, from R. Niebuhr, "Christianity and the Moral Law," *The Christian Century*, Vol. LXX, Pt. 2 (December 2, 1953), p. 1388.

47. Some theologians stress Niebuhr's concern for relevance as his greatest contribution, others as his greatest limitation. Ferré himself seems to recognize it as both, so that he can criticize this facet of Niebuhr's thought and yet probably appreciate it as fully as Emil Brunner, who wrote that "theology, with Niebuhr, broke into the world; theology was no longer quarantined, and men of letters, philosophers, sociologists, historians, even statesmen, began to listen" (*Reinhold Niebuhr*, p. 29).