

disappointed to hear familiar old bromides from back home: "What does it matter what I think? It'll all come out the same anyway," or "Politicians are all crooks. What does it matter which crook wins the election?" What I do find here that is very constructive is a wide variety of *accepted* political opinion. Nobody campaigns for anarchy, and nobody comes out for Nazism, but just about anything in between can be tolerated, now that the plastic has stopped flying.⁵ And I firmly believe that a person has no freedom of opinion or action unless *the people among whom he lives* accord him that right — whatever form of democratic, fascist, or communist government he lives under.

Recently two distinguished French journalists have made the statement that French politics "*s'américanise*." What they mean is that right now the French political parties are divided into two camps, for and against de Gaulle. But the fundamental difference remains: The French political parties retain their identity; even in the "federations" they function independently and insist on compromises toward their philosophies and points of view. And when de Gaulle is gone, no doubt they will again split up and promote their separate platforms. In the American political parties there are no segments who feel and operate together; there are only individuals with widely varying feeling and philosophies.

One man alone can do nothing. And a lot of people with the same opinion can do nothing, unless they have a vehicle, an organization, a realistic plan. A really free man must be able to identify himself with a functioning political party — and in that one respect, the French, and most of the rest of Western Europe, have left us far behind.

⁵ We did have a very tense summer in 1961 when de Gaulle had made clear his intention to negotiate Algerian independence. The rightist terrorists left plastic bombs in the apartments or houses of prominent Gaullists or anticolonialists, generally set to go off when no one was home, but unfortunately you can't always tell when someone might be walking by. The Communist Party headquarters was "*plastiqué*," and a small bookstore in my neighborhood was gutted. The people were neither leftist nor of any particular political bent, but the name of their bookstore was "The Progressive."

THE BLASPHEMY OF INDIFFERENCE

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This essay challenges Mormons to speak out and lead out in solving the important problems of our time. M. Neff Smart teaches journalism and is director of the University Printing Service at the University of Utah; he is a member of his Stake Board of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association.

In December of 1945, when the nuclear age was hardly launched, an L.D.S. Servicemen's Group in Europe met regularly to take comfort in the Sunday rituals of the Church and to congratulate each other on having survived a cruel war. The war's brutality had been underlined by Hiroshima and by the recent revelations from Buchenwald and Belsen, and all of us had also seen the broken and distorted bodies of the fresh dead. As a result, Sunday services

often turned from worship to a discussion of the immorality, the waste and wickedness, of war.

And during those months while we awaited repatriation we speculated on the future: What about nuclear weapons? What about the hundreds of thousands of homeless and displaced persons? Is there no limit to what people (we were thinking then of course in terms of Germans and Japanese) will do in the name of patriotism? Can the recently-created United Nations Organization become an effective institution in deterring international violence?

These were questions, among others similar, that fretted us. And we resolved them by asking ourselves some other questions: What is the role of the Church in a world crisis? What can the Church do in war prevention? Who can provide counsel and guidance on what must certainly be the main issues? Who is most sensitive to right and wrong, to good and evil, in its incipient stages? Who should sound the alarm?

Most of us were looking homeward for the answers. We expected that counsel would be forthcoming at quorum meetings and that stake and general conferences would be the platform from which advice would come to resolve the problems that absorbed us overseas. We expected that Church leaders on every level would be wrestling publicly with the new set of problems that now faced the world community.

But the quorums were not discussing the havoc of Europe and of Asia; they were not discussing the dilemma of the tortured and the homeless. Hiroshima and the new dimensions in destruction and violence were not brought up. Rather, the lessons were the familiar ones. The search for the missing tribes of Israel was still going on. The world had changed while we were overseas, but the speeches at stake and general conferences had not.

It was a shock and a disappointment from which I have never recovered. It was as if nuclear weapons, the dead and burned at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the issue of war itself, were not moral issues. And the pattern has changed little in the twenty years since. The terrain at quorum meetings and Sunday school classes comprises the same acreage. It gets plowed and re-plowed. And it is mainly the backward look. We know where we have been, but have little concern for where we are headed.

The over-riding moral issues of the sixties and the seventies are not obscure nor theoretical. They are dangerously practical. They relate to how, in the nuclear age, we can live on this shrinking planet with our neighbors — our Russian and Chinese neighbors, our hungry and desperate black, yellow, and red neighbors — during a period of world-wide economic, racial, and political revolution. Yet these issues seldom get mentioned in Church, never get serious discussion in Church literature, and would appear to be extraneous to the philosophy or program of the Church.

If the key to a peaceful world lies in projecting the brotherhood of man, in ministering to those in anguish, and in seeking a fulfillment for all mankind, then search for it elsewhere. We who are in Zion are in the war business. We dig underground silos, arm them with Utah-manufactured Minuteman missiles complete with nuclear warheads, and aim them at Russian cities that are full of women and children. We do this in the name of jobs and prosperity, without discussion, as if the destruction of cities is not a moral issue. No one speaks up in the name of religion, in the name of morality, in defense of mankind. No alternatives are suggested. We, instead, listen quietly

to those who speak in the name of nationalism and of military strategy — as if they are the ones who can save us.

So I come now somewhat fearfully, to a point in time when I must decide if the Church deserves my primary allegiance. The decision involves no bitterness, no personality clash, no basic philosophical dilemma. It arises from what I conceive to be a reasoned assessment of man's needs in this particular half-century. It is a matter of urgency.

Norman Cousins has pointed out, wisely it seems to me, that the political parties men serve, the flags they salute, the fraternities they maintain, the holy books they revere or abjure — all of these have suddenly become of intermediate significance alongside the positions men take on the question of war or peace in a nuclear age.

I am convinced that the point of view is a responsible one also for the Church-oriented, because the threat of nuclear and chemical and biological warfare has ceased to be a threat merely to nations or peoples. It has become now a threat to God himself. For it is the work of God and not of man alone that is now in jeopardy. The precariously balanced conditions that make life on this planet possible — I am referring here to radioactivity, oxygen content, strontium 90, and the other earth and biological fractions — are being tampered with. And each new tamper, every additional nuclear blast, increases the threat to an environment and a biology that can support the Creator's great experiment.

What is at stake is the basic physical condition that permits man to continue his search, his quest. Man's cities, his factories, his homes, even his temples and his works of art, are man's own and can be replaced. But his genes and his basic nature belong to a higher order. They are not man's to smash or assail.

The Church, I have had reason to hope, ought to be the first to recognize the sacredness as well as the fragility of the "breath of life," and to act quickly to safeguard it. But as relevant and as effective as the Church is to the individual growth and the well-being of members, and to the growth of the Church itself, it seems to me unlikely that it will contribute to the dialogue that can bring nuclear and chemical weapons under control. Nor is the Church likely to speed the day when its members will address themselves to the problem.

Unhappily, it seems to work the other way. Absorption in the domestic duties of the Church plus the demanding duties connected with strengthening it and perpetuating it leave little time and energy to invest in studies or institutions that relate directly to peace-keeping or arms control.

It is comforting, of course, to meet regularly with friends and neighbors for the social satisfaction, the mental stimulation, and the spiritual renewal that Church work brings. It is satisfying to re-phrase and re-emphasize the basics of the Church. We are eager to be reassured by history and by repetition. Absorption in genealogy, in proselyting, in athletic and social programs have important and significant benefits. But they are not significant roles in a world drama that may now be in its last act and whose final scenes may be climaxed by the failure of brotherhood and a resultant thermo-nuclear exchange.

Peace — and I am not referring here to a peace of mind — has certain structural requirements of its own, and these must be created and applied. We are deceiving ourselves, as individuals and as a Church, if we assume that

peace will proceed, ever, from the present international anarchy, or from force or threats of force, or from prayer, or from sporadic acts of genuine generosity, or from efforts of large numbers of people to be decent. Peace will proceed from painstaking efforts and sacrifice invested in institutions which are designed to insure all races and nations the same guarantees of freedom and security under law that our constitution and its institutions provide to us.

It is odd that we have failed to look, as a world-wide Church, in the direction of a constitutional approach to peace. For a people who are reminded daily in our Church newspaper that the Constitution was divinely inspired and is the umbrella under which the diverse groups of America can maintain both their diversity and a national unity, it is somewhat strange that we are not strong advocates on a world level of such an instrument and its accompanying institutions. Indeed, the world is suffering from the same diversity, the same economic and political problems, and the same revolutionary climate that marked the decade of the Constitutional Convention and the Federalist Papers.

Thus what is perhaps the greatest ideal of all — the ideal of a world governed by law — in which all of God's children have "certain inalienable rights," has few champions, few authentic spokesmen in the Church.

It is somewhat strange that the Church, in its theology and literature, can advocate a world brotherhood — a brotherhood of man — yet seem to recoil at the idea of world citizenship. World citizenship is the proper way to acknowledge our actual relationship with each other and to create the dialogue and the institutions needed to make a safe world. Both dialogue and institutions are needed to restrain the violent, to feed the hungry, to reassure the desperate, bring light to those who cannot read, and remove the spectre of what must be to the Creator pure blasphemy: a war of extermination.

The world is, of course, a community and was intended to be one, despite the diversity of its races and of their habits of thought. The community is a technological and historical, as well as a theological fact; there is no longer independence for any nation. All are interdependent. No single government is able to guarantee the safety or common good of its own members, but requires the cooperation of other nations and of other individuals to feed and clothe and protect its citizens. In view of this, it is shocking to be invited by the high-placed to believe that co-existence is not acceptable and that pluralism — political, economic, and racial pluralism — is doctrinally invalid.

Both logic and instinct require that we, individually and collectively, address ourselves to the creation of institutions capable of insuring peace and to the sacrifices necessary to maintain such institutions. The preservation of the planet as man's habitat and as the proper place for a man to work out at least an important portion of his salvation has become a new and high-priority duty, and any institution that is indifferent to such duty deserves only tentative devotion.

It may be true that in this quarter-century, blasphemy — the unforgivable sin — resides in ignoring the threat of annihilation and of remaining indifferent to the task of preserving the planet. Sin, in the opinion of the German philosopher Thomas Mann, is "to live against the spirit and against truth; to live as if we did not live the present hour but an hour passed long since. Sin is to cling . . . to what has been surpassed by time, to what is inadequate, clearly repudiated; sin is to turn a deaf ear to the will of God. . . ." By any

definition it is a sin to ignore the realities of today, especially when those realities threaten the survival of the race.

There is some evidence that the threat to the earthly portion of the divine plan is not going unnoticed by the churches. Pope John's encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, was not merely a letter of good will to members of the Catholic Church. It was a proposal for action, to be undertaken cooperatively by men of all churches and all nations. It was an injunction for human action to achieve world order before it is too late.

The United Presbyterian Church has proposed a "Confession of 1967," which calls members into involvement in social, political, and economic issues. It is worth quoting, in part:

In each time and place there are particular problems and crises through which God calls the church to act. The following are particularly urgent at the present time:

The church is called to bring all men to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights. Therefore, the church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination. Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize their fellow men, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they possess.

The church, in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace. This requires the pursuit of fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict even at the risk to national security, to reduce areas of strife and to broaden international understanding.

These are bold and dangerous words and positions. But they are in keeping with the dangers the world faces and the urgency with which the dangers must be met.

It was such a forthright challenge that we as servicemen of 1945 were eager to hear. We hungered for the call to bring Christianity and what we conceived to be Christianity's finest expression, Mormonism, back into primary significance. I submit that it is such a challenge that Mormonism needs, to galvanize the Church for a meaningful and perhaps dangerous role in the crucial and probably millennial drama that is now being played out without us.