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Editorial

"RED OR DEAD?"

SOME TIME AGO the Honourable Lester Pearson made a remark to the effect that outward domination by Communist power might conceivably be a lesser evil than total destruction in thermonuclear warfare. Unhappily, this observation was used in a subsequent election campaign as evidence for the politically damaging charge that Mr. Pearson was "soft on Communism." The predictable result—predictable, that is, in view of the acute sensitivity of most of our political leaders to the supposed sentiments of the electorate—has been an almost universal exclusion from public debate of the very serious issue which Mr. Pearson's remark raised. This outcome is doubly unfortunate, because the question of recourse to nuclear war is both the gravest problem of contemporary statecraft—far too grave to be lost sight of in the competition for political power—and one of the sharpest moral issues of our age. "Red or Dead?"—as the question has somewhat misleadingly been phrased—is an urgent issue of political judgment and a crucial case of conscience, which we ignore at our moral as well as our physical peril.

No doubt "Red or Dead?" is an incomplete statement of the conceivable alternatives. Indeed, we must suppose that Western policy is aimed at a third possibility, which may be summed up in the phrase "Neither Red nor Dead." The narrower formula does, however, help to pin-point the moral question which must be answered whether we are considering means of attaining our desired goal or facing the possibility that it may be unattainable. That question is this: Can we imagine a political evil so great that nuclear warfare could rightly be preferred to it? We can hardly claim that a great decision is not at stake here. If we answer the question affirmatively, we can continue on our present path with a clear conscience. On the other hand, if we find that it must be answered negatively, we shall be hard put to it to justify our accepted strategic concepts.

Let us be sure that we understand the dilemma, as concretely presented in our formula. The question is not whether it is better to confess the Marxist faith or to die rejecting it—clearly, when the Christian has to choose between apostasy and martyrdom, the time for deliberation is past—but whether it is better to accept the risk of having to live under a Communist tyranny or deliberately to court the destruction of our civilization and our society, not to mention ourselves and a good part of the human race. Nor does it matter morally whether we can be sure of making our answer effective. The point is simply that as morally responsible men we cannot evade the question. However we decide, we may well lose our

lives, but if through inertia or cowardice we connive at a morally intolerable strategy we shall deserve to lose our souls.

The deliberate acceptance of the nuclear risk obviously has much to be said for it. "Better Dead than Red" has all the heroic appeal of "Give me liberty or give me death." Even to ask questions about it may suggest a subordination of ethical and spiritual to purely physical values. Surely (it may be argued) it is better to die in defence of just claims or a just social order than to preserve our lives at the expense of justice. Surely it is nobler to die for freedom than to live in slavery. Surely it is a betrayal of the faith to save one's own skin by exposing Church and community to the cruel pressures of a militant atheism.

Yet certain doubts nag. No one wants to mistake mock heroics for authentic heroism. Truly moral action is directed towards a reasonable goal; may it not be, then, that the man who rushes to his death in the flames of a ruined world is less truly courageous than the man who sets himself to work and witness to the end, through poverty and oppression? Just how much reason is there in making a stand for social justice at the cost of destroying society itself? Can we really demonstrate our own nobility by bringing untold horrors on millions of friends and enemies and bystanders, to say nothing of generations yet unborn? Above all, can the Church rightly seek to escape the Cross by calling on the armaments of fleshly warfare, especially at such a cost? If these questions seem to have any force, Christians should not try to suppress them.

This *Journal* has no "official" position on the problem, and this editorial certainly does not pretend to offer a solution. We are convinced, however, that the problem itself is too big and too urgent to be swept under the rug. The pages of the *Journal* will be freely opened to serious discussions of the whole issue. As things stand, we can hardly think of a better use of our space in the year that has just begun.

E.R.F.