

worldview

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A WIDER CHOICE

In his address to the nation on the Berlin crisis President Kennedy stated a doctrine that has political and moral implications which extend far beyond the question of our immediate response to Soviet pressure. "We are not confronted," he said, "with choosing between the extremes of resistance and retreat, between atomic holocaust and surrender. Our peace-time military posture is traditionally defensive; but our diplomatic posture need not be. . . . We intend to have a wider choice than humiliation or all-out nuclear action." And in seeking this "wider choice," Mr. Kennedy cautioned the nation against impatience, against the temptation to demand a quick resolution of the world's problems: "I know that sometimes we get impatient; we wish for immediate action that would end our perils. But I must tell you that there is no quick and easy solution."

What the President has held out to the American people, then, is not the promise of glory, of any clear victory in a crusade against its enemies. Rather, he has placed before them the prospect of a long struggle, reaching over years, decades, and, perhaps, generations, a struggle which will be decided not by the total approach of thermo-nuclear bombs but by the more viable (and more frustrating) strategies of conventional armaments, economic sacrifices and negotiations. Mr. Kennedy, in brief, has promised us not a day of reckoning but a long future of, if not blood, then sweat and tears.

The President's call for a "wider choice" than surrender or annihilation is, of course, a conscious rejection by his administration of that fearful dilemma which has haunted the West for over a decade now. This dilemma—annihilation or surrender—was implicit in the late John Foster Dulles' strategy of massive retaliation and in the doctrine (so vulgarly stated by Mr. Charles Wilson) of "a bigger bang for a buck." And this strategy was a strategy of despair; it resulted, inevitably, in the growth of nuclear pacifism in many parts of

Europe and gave rise to the slogan, now so popular in Great Britain, "better Red than dead." Because, if our defense relies entirely on the nuclear deterrent, then we are finally defenseless: few sane men can believe that any given provocation—in Korea, Hungary, Laos, or Berlin—is really worth possible destruction of the human race, or a large part of it. Certainly Premier Khrushchev has assumed that the United States, in any given situation, would turn away from such an "answer" to his challenge. And Soviet policy, operating on this assumption, has prepared to take terrible risks.

The doctrine of total reliance on the nuclear deterrent—of all or nothing at all—was thus not strategically serious. Neither was it morally defensible. No responsible theologian—Protestant or Catholic—would admit the justice of any war in which nuclear weapons of mass destruction are employed against civilian populations. As Mr. William J. Cook, Field director of the The Church Peace Union, recently observed at a Georgetown University Conference on morality and nuclear warfare: "The moralist will say that if we are to be faced with the mutual destruction of the social substance of the United States and the Soviet Union, or submission to Communist domination, we must submit. But if a situation in which these are the only alternatives develops, it will be the result of a prior moral failure to develop morally acceptable and politically relevant instruments and resources of policy."

President Kennedy's address to the nation represents the attempt to develop such instruments and policies. As such, it marks a clear moral and political advance for the world.

Editors note: Because of a pending change in editorship, Worldview is publishing a combined June-July-August "Summer Issue." In September an expanded issue will be published, and details of the change in editors will be announced.

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