

worldview

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THE TWO AMERICAS

In the few weeks since the inauguration of the new President it has become clear that there are today really two Americas. There is the America which refuses to be troubled and views the present world situation without grave alarm; there is also the America which sees the present as a time of mortal danger and thinks great action must be taken, if free institutions are to survive. The first America finds many spokesmen for it in the United States Congress; the second America finds its voice in the administration of John F. Kennedy.

Professor J. Robert Oppenheimer certainly spoke for the second America in his address before the tenth anniversary conference of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, excerpts from which are published elsewhere in these pages. "What some of us know, and some of our governments have recognized," Professor Oppenheimer declared, "all people should know and every great government understand: if this next great war occurs, none of us can count on having enough living to bury our dead." And Professor Oppenheimer would have peoples and governments everywhere recognize, too, that "this situation, quite new in human history, has from time to time brought with it a certain grim and ironic community of interest, not only among friends, but between friends and enemies. This community has nothing to do with the injunction that we love our enemies, but is a political and human change not wholly without hopeful portent."

In "A Christian Approach to Nuclear War," published as the lead-article in this issue of *Worldview*, a group of distinguished Protestant theologians takes an even more urgent view of the world's situation than does Professor Oppenheimer. They state bluntly that "there is no parallel between the wars of the past and the impending cataclysm brought on by nuclear war . . . In Christian terms this means that atomic war so offends against the doctrine of creation that a Christian rationale for war is no longer tenable. There is no meaningful way in which one can speak of a 'just war' fought with atomic arms."

Whether or not one agrees with the unyieldingly pacifist conclusions the Protestant theologians draw, it seems impossible not to share their profound disquiet over the arms race, and their conviction that a radical new course must be found if the final catastrophe is to be averted. A commitment to pacifism involves the individual conscience and, clearly, cannot be advanced as a matter of national policy; but national policy can be informed, and new directions taken, in light of the unprecedented dangers which the present direction of the world offers. Perhaps, when all considerations of justice and prudence are weighed by wise statesmen, the risks of atomic war may have to be taken. But those who may decide to take these risks surely must ponder the warning of Professor Oppenheimer: "If the switches of great war are thrown, in anger or in error, and if indeed there are human survivors, there may some day again be high art, perhaps, and some ennobling sense of the place of man and his destiny, and perhaps great science. There will be no sense of history. There will be no sense of 'progress in freedom'."

There seems little doubt that President Kennedy and many of his advisors realize these grim truths. This realization lies behind and supports their determination to seek new ways to break the deadlock on disarmament. It lay behind and supported the President's eloquent inaugural address, with its plea for the nations to concentrate on those things which unite them (including, certainly, their mutual interest in survival) and to cease contention for awhile on those deep issues which divide. It lies behind and supports Mr. Kennedy's evident determination to avoid the provocative word, the harsh reply, the inflexible public stance.

One of the great tasks facing the administration is to communicate this realization, and its corresponding sense of urgency in seeking new solutions, to that other America which does not seem to recognize the dangers. This is an area in which a consensus among our people must be achieved.