

THE MORALITY OF NUCLEAR WAR¹

*A Medieval Disputation
between*

*Fr Ian Hislop, O.P., Defendant, and Fr Laurence Bright, O.P.,
Objector, with Fr Illtud Evans, O.P., as Moderator*

MODERATOR: I think it may be useful to begin our proceedings by saying a word or two about the form they are going to take. Tonight's discussion is described as a 'Medieval Disputation', which may seem to suggest that its interest is only historical: the *subject*, I think you will agree, could hardly be more up-to-date. It is true that the Disputation was the normal method of formal argument in medieval universities—for that matter it still takes place every week as an ordinary academic exercise in every theological college of the Order of Preachers, to which Order tonight's disputants belong. The procedure is that a thesis is proposed, its terms of reference explained and an argument in defence of it is indicated. This is the work of the defender. The objector attacks the thesis in strict logical form, and so the argument proceeds—the defender conceding what he must and denying what he can. And all this is done with a strict regard for the rules of logical argument. At a later stage informal objections are put forward, and once more the defender's business is to inspect them in terms of his thesis.

It is important to remember that a Disputation is not a debate. This is not a matter of two people arguing in defence of personal opinions: you must not suppose, for instance, that Fr Ian Hislop thinks that atomic war is justifiable and is prepared to go to any lengths in saying so. Nor is a Disputation a dispute: the courtesies that traditionally govern it are genuine and are a reminder that the passions are not meant to be engaged in objective reasoning. And that is really the point. There are other ways of arguing, but this is one which demands precision, a careful definition of terms and a proper respect for the demands of truth.

That is why you may think it particularly valuable in view of

1. The text of a Disputation, given at the invitation of the National Peace Council at Caxton Hall, Westminster, on January 30th, 1956, and broadcast on the Third Programme of the B.B.C.

tonight's subject—the morality of nuclear war. There is no need for me to emphasize the gravity of this question: all I want to say is that while its difficulties can't be removed by a simple appeal to reason, yet at least the difficulties can by reason be more exactly determined. And judgment demands first of all a knowledge of the facts. And it is perhaps useful at the very beginning of our Disputation to bear in mind the real dimensions of the nuclear warfare we are to discuss: what it really involves. I need only remind you of the recently published Home Office manual for civil defence, which gives an official estimate of the effect of dropping a single megaton bomb on Central London. The fireball of the bomb would measure four miles across and within that area everything would be totally destroyed. The greater part of the County of London would be damaged beyond repair and the heat of the explosion would start fires that might well extend for ten miles. People sixteen miles away would be blistered by heat and the buildings round them would be severely damaged by blast. Moreover, the radio-active dust would float for two hundred miles or more downwind, far beyond sight or sound of the explosion, falling all the time and poisoning everything it touched. . . . Such, in official terms, is the effect of dropping a hydrogen bomb—and that not a particularly big one by modern standards. It is important to keep this picture in mind, for our Disputation, while it may seem abstract and academic, is in fact concerned with weapons that have this sort of capacity for destruction.

And to remind us of the sense of responsibility we should have I might end these preliminary remarks with some recent words of the present Pope, who has spoken of the need for 'sincerity in a matter basic to the fate of the whole human race'. It is as a contribution to that essential sincerity that this Disputation is offered.

The Defender of the thesis is Father Ian Hislop, who lectures at the Vaughan College, Leicester; the Objector is Father Laurence Bright, who was a research student in atomic physics at Oxford and is now a lecturer in Philosophy in the Dominican House of Studies at Hawkesyard.

DEFENDANT: Public anxiety about the morality of war waged under modern conditions has been immensely sharpened by the perfecting of nuclear weapons. These are not only destructive on an unprecedented scale but seem, to the ordinary man, to carry

a threat to all human life and civilization. Nuclear weapons, we feel, not only make us vaguely frightened of some distant but ill-defined catastrophe, but menace us in the very moment of our present existence. The purpose of tonight's disputation is to attempt to indicate to what extent this anxiety has, or has not, a rational basis, for we are not concerned with it in so far as it is conditioned by a simple recoil from the unknown and frightening.

In order to put the subject we are discussing in its proper context, it is necessary to say something about warfare in general in its relation to traditional western morality. According to this tradition war may only be waged in a just cause. That is to say it is only permissible to wage war in order to remove some pressing injustice which is being inflicted on the community. Hence wars for mere gain or for conquest are excluded and must be termed evil.

It is not sufficient simply to have a just cause; everything else must have been tried—every other form of negotiation and arbitration invoked—before the last defence of right is used. This is so because war is negative, it consists in a use of restrictive and destructive force and tends to accentuate the irrational side of man's character. The heroism and sacrifice often brought out by warfare are incidental to its nature as a technique for regulating the relations of organized groups of human beings.

Given these two conditions, it is not difficult to envisage an historic situation in which a moral duty arises to resist by force an evil system that is expanding. For example a system of government whose very structure involves an inhuman treatment of those subjected to it and which seeks to extend its boundaries by force or the threat of force must be resisted. Failure to resist implies accepting a situation in which one just cannot acquiesce without losing all claim to be human—there are situations about which it is morally evil even to be an onlooker.

Hence in order to protect oneself and others against injustice it may be permissible to use force provided a third condition obtains, for the first two conditions do not justify just any use of force; its use must be controlled and measured by the evil it seeks to remove. Even in periods in which the distinction between combatant and non-combatant was clearly recognized a ferocious use of primitive weapons could destroy the claim of the party originally in the right to stand for a more human way of life.

It may be felt that these abstract considerations are far removed from the muddled half-lights of human activity, but they do provide a standard of criticism without which that activity very soon ceases to be human and becomes demonic.

Within the modern period two factors have accentuated the traditional problem.

First, the notion of a nation in arms. It can be argued that in modern circumstances the ordinary citizen becomes part of the war machine in a sense that was not normally the case two hundred years ago. He ceases, in the old sense, to be a civilian, for by his share in Civil Defence, armament production or other activities he becomes in effect a member of the forces of the realm and as such can be assumed to consent as a responsible agent to the state of war. It can, too, be argued that the State has the right to demand such service of its citizens in a just cause. It is different when we consider the case of children, who cannot, without an abuse of language, be called responsible or combatant. They have no responsibility, in any sense, for the state of war, and against groups of which they are an integral part it would always be wrong to make use of processes which of their nature involve the direct destruction of children as if they were on a par with the combatants.

It is however the second factor, the perfecting of the means of destruction, that we are directly concerned with in this disputation. The means that can now be used are of such a kind that the effects produced seem to escape our control.

Since this is your subject, Laurence, perhaps you would describe the meaning of the term 'nuclear warfare' for us.

FR LAURENCE BRIGHT: I think we had better take this term 'nuclear warfare' quite generally at first so as to cover every possible use of the new weapons, from the small atomic fission bombs that might be used against limited objectives, such as a ship at sea, to the gigantic hydrogen or fusion-fission bomb capable of devastating large areas of continent. I hope we shall eventually be able to discriminate between their different uses and decide which, if any, can be morally justified and which not. This means we shall have to consider the three effects which all these weapons produce, and which I want briefly to mention at this point. There is first of all the direct destruction of life and property by blast from the

explosion and fire due to the intense heat. This differs in degree only, not in kind, from the destruction caused by the so-called conventional weapons. But nuclear weapons have two effects peculiar to themselves and due to the intense radiation they spread over a far wider area. A heavy dose of radiation may lead to death within a few weeks. And those who survive may also have suffered genetic changes which can affect their offspring, perhaps only after many generations. I think that our method of disputation will allow us to consider the moral consequences of these three effects separately and in their correct order.

DEFENDANT: Thank you. I must now put forward a preliminary statement of my thesis, which will serve as a basis for discussing the points you have raised. And since the normal assumption would seem to be that nuclear weapons can be justified, more or less as other destructive weapons in the past have been, I shall, for the purposes of argument, put the thesis in a negative form, and maintain:

That nuclear warfare is not immoral.

OBJECTOR: Nuclear warfare is immoral. Therefore your thesis is false.

DEFENDANT: Nuclear warfare is immoral. Will you please prove that statement?

OBJECTOR: Yes;

That which of its nature is destructive is immoral.

But nuclear warfare is of its nature destructive.

Therefore nuclear warfare is immoral.

DEFENDANT: That which of its nature is destructive is immoral.

But nuclear warfare is of its nature destructive.

Therefore nuclear warfare is immoral.

First I shall distinguish the major premiss.

That which is of its nature uncontrollably destructive is immoral:
I affirm.

That which is of its nature controllably destructive is immoral:
I deny.

Next I shall distinguish the minor premiss in the same sense.

Nuclear warfare is of its nature controllably destructive: I affirm.

Is of its nature uncontrollably destructive: I deny.

I therefore deny that the argument follows and will explain my distinction.

The distinction I have made concerns the very nature of these weapons, for on this depends the possibility of distinguishing between moral and immoral ways of using them. A weapon must be of its nature controllable if its use is to be kept within justifiable limits. To use a weapon whose destructive force escapes one's control is morally evil since it will not only destroy those who are engaged in unjust aggression but also the innocent. This seems to me like shooting down a crowd of persons with machine-gun fire because several guilty men are hiding in the crowd. If nuclear weapons can be used in such a way as to select purely military targets, for example a fort or a tank group, it would appear that their use could be justified; but if not, then they must be rejected. Perhaps you can help me again on this matter of fact?

OBJECTOR: I will try and do so. In this first objection we are restricting our attention to the effects of blast wave and heat flash. Now it is possible to make an atomic weapon whose destructive power, so far as these effects are concerned, is not vastly greater than the destructive power of conventional weapons. It could be used as a tactical weapon against limited military objectives. On the other hand, atomic bombs of very much greater destructive power are now being made, and the destructive power of hydrogen bombs is, so far as I know, necessarily greater still. You cannot make—or at least no one would want to make—a small hydrogen bomb; it is intended to destroy a target the area of a large city. So on the basis of direct effects only, it seems that you have ruled out all use of the hydrogen and large atomic bomb, since these are only intended for indiscriminate use against cities, but you will allow the tactical use of small atomic weapons. I should now like to see whether further restrictions have to be made if we go on to consider the radiation effects. From this standpoint I shall affirm the minor premiss in the form you have just rejected, and shall say that nuclear warfare is of its nature uncontrollably destructive.

DEFENDANT: Nuclear warfare is of its nature uncontrollably destructive.

Will you please prove your new statement?

OBJECTOR: Yes. Something whose effects spread far beyond the target area is of its nature uncontrollably destructive.

But nuclear warfare has effects which spread far beyond the target area.

Therefore nuclear warfare is of its nature uncontrollably destructive.

DEFENDANT: Something whose effects spread far beyond the target area is of its nature uncontrollably destructive.

But nuclear warfare has effects which spread far beyond the target area.

Therefore nuclear warfare is of its nature uncontrollably destructive.

I shall first distinguish the major premiss.

Something whose effects spread far beyond the target area, without assignable limits, is of its nature uncontrollably destructive: I agree.

Something whose effects spread far beyond the target area within assignable limits is of its nature uncontrollably destructive: I deny.

I shall next distinguish the minor premiss in the same sense.

Nuclear warfare has effects which spread far beyond the target area, within assignable limits: I agree.

Which spread far beyond the target area without assignable limits: I deny.

I therefore deny that the argument follows and will explain my distinction.

You maintain that the effects of nuclear weapons spread far beyond the target area and therefore their use is immoral. The distinction I have used in reply is again spatial in character. If spatial limits can be assigned to the effects of the bomb it is not impossible that its use might be justified, due warning having been given, in order to neutralize an area of military importance. The whole distinction hinges round the question whether such limits can be assigned. What do you think?

OBJECTOR: We have agreed that spatial limits can be assigned to

the direct effects of small atomic weapons. But when a nuclear explosion occurs at ground level radio-active fragments of earth, etc., are carried up into the atmosphere and slowly descend over a wide area causing what is known as radiation sickness in men and animals. Anyone who receives more than a certain dose of radiation, whether directly or through eating contaminated food, is likely to die within a few weeks. A hydrogen bomb may contaminate many thousands of square miles in this way. But even with the tactical use of smaller bombs, which is our present concern, a somewhat unpredictable area will be contaminated. You maintain that this area must be limited so as to exclude non-combatants. No doubt this is possible, but it would certainly not be easy under war conditions to ensure that the explosion occurs in the air rather than on the ground. Moreover, such limitation depends on weather conditions over which we have little control. When testing the bomb long delays were often necessary in order to have the right wind conditions. During actual combat rather greater impatience might be felt. But even if these radiation effects do not rule out such restricted use of atomic weapons as you are prepared to admit, I believe that the genetic effects are decisive in doing so, and this is the basis of my third objection. I shall therefore affirm the minor premiss of the last objection in the form you have just rejected, and shall say that nuclear warfare produces effects which are without assignable limits.

DEFENDANT: Nuclear warfare produces effects which are without assignable limits.

Will you please prove that statement?

OBJECTOR: Yes. That which produces genetic damage has effects which are without assignable limits.

But nuclear warfare produces genetic damage.

Therefore nuclear warfare produces effects which are without assignable limits.

DEFENDANT: That which produces genetic damage has effects which are without assignable limits.

But nuclear warfare produces genetic damage.

Therefore nuclear warfare produces effects which are without assignable limits.

I first distinguish the major premiss.

That which produces unpredictable genetic damage has effects which are without assignable limits: I agree.

That which produces predictable genetic damage has effects without assignable limits: I deny.

I shall next distinguish the minor premiss in the same sense.

Nuclear warfare produces predictable genetic damage: I agree.

Produces unpredictable genetic damage: I allow to pass.

This final objection I find most powerful. I have managed to find a distinction that enables me to escape, for the moment, from the fast-closing jaws of your logic. You have argued that nuclear warfare has effects that are without assignable limits because it produces genetic damage. I have replied that if you can predict the damage you are enabled to exercise some control; on the other hand, if the damage is unpredictable, then only a person who was quite irresponsible would make use of these nuclear weapons. I suspect that I have really conceded the argument because, as applied to the minor premiss, the only prediction that can be made is that it will produce unpredictable genetic damage. Is this the case?

OBJECTOR: I think so. The third effect of a nuclear explosion lies in the genetic changes, in the majority of cases harmful, which result from the comparatively small amounts of radiation, even very far away from the original target, falling on the human reproductive organs. These changes do not, as is sometimes thought, produce dramatically obvious effects, such as the birth of monsters. Many generations may elapse before anything observable occurs. But inevitably, sooner or later, some descendant will either die prematurely or be made sterile. Now there is one sense in which these effects can be predicted. It will eventually be possible to calculate the number of casualties due to a given dose of radiation: even now it can be shown that the number of these delayed casualties which will occur down the years will be of the same order of magnitude as the number due to the direct effects of the bombing. But in another sense this effect is quite unpredictable because at the time it operates its victims will not yet be born. Clearly they at least cannot be said to share in the guilt for which they suffer. And I feel bound to add that every atomic test which is made produces its as yet unknown victims as a result of this effect. No doubt it will be said that tests are responsible for fewer

deaths than the natural radiation continually present on earth, about which nobody worries, or than the radiation used legitimately in medicine and industry; that these deaths are an occupational hazard that we must put up with for the sake of a greater good. Personally I do not see how such known evil consequences, even if in a sense unintentional, can fail to change the morality of the situation; we cannot ignore them, much as we may be tempted to.

MODERATOR: This ends the *formal* part of our Disputation. We now proceed to objections put in a more informal way—that is to say, not according to a strict logical pattern. This will help us to see some of the applications of the principles we have been considering. In order to underline the fact that the two disputants are not necessarily *personally* committed to the positions they have up to now been holding, they will collaborate in dealing with the objections that are now going to be raised.

So first of all the objector himself will put a further question to the defender. Afterwards, I will call on members of the audience who wish to contribute to the discussion.

OBJECTOR: I should like you to say a little more about a point which lay behind a good deal of our discussion: the indiscriminate nature of these new weapons. I believe it is legitimate to kill soldiers who have taken up arms in an unjust cause if there is no other way of bringing about a just peace. But there must be many blameless people even among the members of an aggressor nation. How can we impute blame to small children 'who know not how to distinguish between their right hand and their left'? Yet they will certainly be among the victims if a city is hit by a nuclear bomb or if a cloud of radio-active dust drifts in their direction; and what of those yet unborn, who will suffer from genetic damage caused many years before, perhaps to people who lived far away from the scene of conflict and took no part in it?

DEFENDANT: Your objection reduces to the statement that nuclear warfare is immoral because it is indiscriminate. Here the principle to guide us is that punishment may only be exacted from those who are in some way responsible for, or who help to maintain, the wrong. It may be difficult in practice to be exact about who does

or does not fall under this description, but it is quite clear that the use of a weapon that is indiscriminately destructive on a large scale makes it impossible to exclude from its range those who cannot on any view be said to be responsible either for the wrong or for maintaining it. Further, if the effects of the nuclear bombs are as far-reaching as you have indicated, it is wrong to use them because they imply the destruction of those civilized ways of life that are the highest product of man's creative reason. Their use then implies, at a critical level, the use of reason to negate reason. One is not maintaining that atomic research is irrational, only stating that its use for war is irrational and therefore immoral.

OBJECTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

I. PROFESSOR J. E. ROBERTS: Although reluctantly agreeing that in the present state of world morality nuclear weapons may be an evil necessity, I find it difficult to concede an ethical distinction between different types of such weapons. Scientifically there is no qualitative difference between the little understood genetic hazard of so-called atom bombs and hydrogen bombs. The difference is entirely a matter of size and degree. Is it possible, therefore, to draw a clear-cut ethical distinction between the two types of weapons when the physical difference between their effects is quantitative and not qualitative?

FR IAN HISLOP: As I understand you, you maintain first that there is no clear-cut ethical distinction between two types of weapon, when the physical difference between their effects is quantitative and not qualitative; and secondly, that scientifically there is 'no qualitative difference between the little-understood genetic hazard of so-called atomic bombs and hydrogen bombs'; and that, therefore, the distinctions we have made in the disputation are too clear-cut.

To take the general point first. I agree that a merely quantitative distinction in the destructive effect of two weapons—for instance, when it is a question of the number of innocent persons killed—does not provide us with a clear-cut criterion for making ethical judgments about them. From another point of view, however, quantitative considerations do enter into our ethical judgments on

these matters. For instance, the quantity of destruction must be proportionate to the goal one is pursuing; it would be wrong to injure or kill a single person unnecessarily.

The second point falls in your sphere, Laurence. Perhaps you would deal with it.

FR LAURENCE BRIGHT: I should first point out that the distinction we have drawn between two types of bomb was based not on genetic effects but on direct effects, about which the facts are clear. We ruled out the hydrogen and large atomic bomb on the grounds that the destruction they produce is disproportionate to the end in view, in accordance with the principle Ian has just laid down. It is true that this distinction between the two types of bomb was blurred when we came to consider genetic effects, but because the nature of these effects is so little known, this conclusion is less certain than the earlier one that to use large nuclear weapons to destroy cities is plainly immoral, and that because they have no other use they should be banned. By contrast, the results of genetic changes due to radiation have not yet been directly observed in man; nor is it impossible that when more is known, means will also be found to shield us from these changes, or to neutralize their adverse effects. Our method of disputation has just this merit of allowing us to analyse a moral situation in a progressive way, and divide off conclusions which by their certainty demand immediate action, from those which are more debatable.

2. HUGH DELARGY, M.P.: The possession of the hydrogen bomb exposes this island, vulnerable and densely populated as it is, to dangers which no responsible government should allow its people to have to risk. It is therefore morally wrong to manufacture the bomb, because to do so exposes the nation to the certain annihilation that would follow its use by an enemy. Far from being a deterrent, it is in fact an *invitation* to an enemy possessing nuclear weapons to destroy this country. And that is morally indefensible for a government that is bound to protect its people.

FR IAN HISLOP: I am glad this question has been raised as it seems to me to be one that every citizen must face. If the manufacture of the hydrogen bomb exposes the nation—or for that matter the civilized peoples of the earth—to annihilation if it is used, is it moral to

make it as a deterrent? A deterrent is only of *use*, if its *use* is contemplated even if only as a last resort; and for this one has to be *willing* to make use of it. If the effects of using the hydrogen bomb are as far-reaching as we have suggested, it is the kind of weapon which it is wrong to use and, therefore, wrong to be willing to use. Hence its use as a deterrent is wrong. One can go further than that, I think, and say that if it is wrong to use the hydrogen bomb, it is wrong to manufacture it. The primary responsibility, here, falls on those who direct, either governmentally, scientifically or administratively, the processes of manufacture, but those who engage in the manufacture also share in the responsibility, as does, too, the citizen of a democratically governed people.

If it is argued that the bomb is only used as a deterrent against systems that appear as inhuman, it must be very carefully considered whether their inhumanity is greater than the possibility of the removal of all civilized human experience, to put it at its lowest, involved in the use of the bomb.

Once one considers the possible results of the use of this weapon the conclusion forces itself that war, as a method of resolving disputes, cannot be regarded as having a place in a scientifically ordered world, unless that world is prepared to destroy itself. The conclusion is clear. Social consciousness—at parochial, urban, trade union, national and international levels—of the implications of the presence of the bomb in our society must be both deepened and enlarged in order that the tardy evolution of international institutions for dealing with disputes may be hastened. Such a development seems to me to be the one way out of the impasse we have created for ourselves.

3. MR DAVID BALLARD-THOMAS: If the mere testing of nuclear weapons produces, as seems likely, harmful effects beyond our certain knowledge or control, *a fortiori* the use of such weapons in warfare must be immoral.

FR LAURENCE BRIGHT: The moral issue which this question raises is complex and difficult, and I am glad to have this chance of adding to what I said during the disputation. That we should always avoid all harmful effects of our actions is certainly not a general moral principle; we may sometimes have to pursue a course of action even if it does have consequences that in themselves would

have to be considered evil. In such cases we must first ask whether we are acting for a good purpose, and then whether those further consequences that are not intended can be brought into the total moral order which the action establishes. Moral problems like this cannot be solved automatically by some rule of thumb; only the conscience can decide in each particular case. Our present problem concerns experiments which involve radiation, with their genetic consequences. I think most people would agree that where the purpose of such experiments is clearly good, such as finding a cure for some disease, they are justifiable provided that the harmful effects are not out of all proportion to the good expected. On the other hand, where the purpose is clearly evil, as in the testing of hydrogen bombs which cannot have any proper use, then the tests too are immoral. Tests on small atomic weapons are less easy to decide about. If, apart from genetic considerations, their use in a just war is allowable, then it is allowable to test them, provided that the harmful genetic consequences of the tests are not disproportionate to the expected good. The trouble is, we have so little knowledge of these consequences. Hence I am not going to attempt a dogmatic decision in a matter so complex and difficult. As I said in the course of the disputation, my own personal decision would be against the tests; other people's consciences may decide differently.

I do not entirely agree with you that if genetic considerations rule out the tests, they necessarily rule out the use of small nuclear weapons in warfare, for in the case of a just war the good intended would be greater than in the case, outside war, of experiments for greater efficiency; but I do agree that the moral problem is similar, and no easier to solve.

4. DAME KATHLEEN LONSDALE, F.R.S.: Nuclear war is immoral because it attempts compulsion by efficient, scientific torture. But can physical force afford to be inefficient, of its kind? The moral alternative is surely complete physical disarmament and entire reliance on spiritual force, on persuasion and redemption by unselfish goodwill and Christ-like love?

FR IAN HISLOP: Thank you. I agree with you, that where large groups are concerned, and serious disputes involved, physical force cannot afford to be inefficient. It is a fairly safe conclusion,

from experience, that, in the heat of warfare, moral sensitivity diminishes and that the opposing forces slip into the state of mind that victory justifies anything. As the pernicious tag has it: 'My country right or wrong'.

I agree, too, that reliance on spiritual force is of immense importance. As much reliance as possible should be put on it, but it would be 'starry eyed' to expect mere reliance to solve everything. I do not think, however much these qualities may be admired, that most people including myself are unselfish or full of Christ-like love—in the sense that they are able to give social expression to these virtues. We have not yet found, in our society, institutional forms to express and support our rather vague humanitarian desires—for instance in our relation to foreigners. We may be willing enough some of the time, but most of us are capable of behaving like maladjusted children, some are quite insensitive to spiritual considerations, and practically everybody is at the mercy of undeveloped international traditions. As long as this situation obtains, it is necessary, provided the motive is good, and the means proportionate, to restrain (for example by police action) certain people from injuring their fellow-citizens. This use of force should not, of course, be divorced from a real attempt to engage the attention of the person restrained on a deeper level; and it may be that this attempt will progressively solve problems which up till now have seemed to be amenable to force only.

On the other hand, as has been stressed, I think, in the disputation, the use of force must not be excessive. When an evil is inescapable, and we are unable to overcome it, because resistance to it would involve an excessive or immoral use of force, one has no choice but to refuse to acquiesce, even to the point of losing one's own life in what is from one point of view a hopeless struggle.

5. SIR THOMAS RAPP: The taking of life is always immoral, but to take life in self-defence is a condition of human survival. Therefore at some point morality must give way to expediency. Consequently, the pros and cons of atomic warfare can only be judged on the basis of expediency and not of moral principle.

FR IAN HISLOP: First, I do not agree that the taking of life is always

immoral, for it may be necessary to protect an innocent person against unjust aggression.

But the real point, I take it, of your objection is that human survival demands that we consider the expedient, rather than the artificialities of moral principle.

There is a very real sense in a case like this, in which one must consider the expedient: or what is rational and practicable. But what is expedient in a small-scale situation (where weapons are controllable) may not apply to a large-scale situation where control cannot be exercised.

In the case we are considering it is not a question of my survival, or of a group's survival, but of the survival of civilized man.

In order to preserve this it may be necessary to endure certain evils, i.e. where a mode of resistance involves immorality another mode must be sought. In a situation of such gravity what is expedient will be dictated by one's view of man. If one, as I do, regards him as basically a moral being then one is confident that if he clings to what he knows to be right, his moral judgment will creatively adapt itself to novel situations. But the point is, clinging, perhaps with heroism, to the original judgment.

MODERATOR: I should like to put an objection on behalf of a correspondent who cannot be here. The peaceful uses of nuclear energy have already proved to be of immense good to mankind, e.g. the development of radio-active isotopes and the building of nuclear power stations. The use of something of such potential good for the purpose of indiscriminate destruction is immoral, but the possible good of nuclear energy remains.

FR LAURENCE BRIGHT: I entirely agree with you. It is most important to emphasize that discovery of truth is in itself always a good thing, even though there is a possibility of putting it to evil purposes. People have sometimes suggested trying to ban the kinds of scientific research that are especially liable to be misused. I think that to do this would be to abandon reason in favour of irrational fear. Moreover, as you point out, research in nuclear physics has valuable applications to medicine and industry, which we should make every effort to develop. In this field there should be no great difficulty in protecting workers from harmful genetic mutations, now that the danger is known. The morality of using nuclear

weapons in warfare, with which our disputation was concerned, is an entirely different question, but one often confused in people's minds with the matter you have just raised, so I am glad to have had this chance of distinguishing them.

MODERATOR: I think you will agree that this Disputation has enabled us to see a little more clearly what are the moral issues involved in nuclear warfare. I need hardly remind you that the procedure of the Disputation is a deliberately restricted one, and many of you may feel that all sorts of qualifications should be made; that indeed whole areas of possible discussion have been left out. The defender, for the purpose of the Disputation, maintained that nuclear warfare was not immoral. To that a series of objections, proceeding in a strict line of logical argument, led us to the factors that create special moral difficulties in making a judgment about the use of nuclear weapons—namely the uncontrollably destructive nature of this type of warfare, its inevitable effects spreading far beyond the target area—effects which are without assignable limits. And that led us to the difficult question of genetic mutation as a possible effect of nuclear weapons. The further objections raised were in effect only applications of the principles stated by the two disputants in the formal part of the Disputation.

It is no part of my function to seem to adjudicate. But, by way of conclusion, I should like to suggest that a sincere and objective judgment about nuclear warfare can't be evaded simply because the subject is so terrible in its implications. The truth can be uncomfortable, but it can't for that reason be got rid of. We are likely to be hearing much more of the issues we have discussed tonight. If we want to avoid the extremes of despair or of presumption we should want to cultivate a measure of hope. And hope doesn't mean the abdication of reason: it's not a vague feeling that somehow or other things are going to be all right. It means rather that we should respect and should want to live by moral principles that are secure—principles that are essential to the business of being human. We can't make moral judgments about nuclear warfare—or about anything else whatsoever—unless we possess the sort of hope that is sure about what man is really

meant to be, what he is really meant to do. So the argument is only to be resolved in our own consciences, and we may hope that tonight's disputation, unfamiliar as it may have been as a method of argument, has perhaps helped us to think a little and to hope a little too.

NOTICE

The April issue of *BLACKFRIARS* will contain articles by the Bishop of Salford on 'The Life of Faith', by Fr Kenelm Foster, O.P., on 'The Medieval Church' and by Joseph Rykwert on 'Contemporary Architecture'.