

*A
Shuddering
Dawn*

Religious Studies and
the Nuclear Age

Edited by

Ira Chernus and Edward Tabor
Linenthal

With a Foreword by

Ninian Smart

State University of New York Press

Chapter 3

*Nuclear Images in the Popular Press:
From Apocalypse to Static Balance*

Nuclear imagery had lain dormant for some fifteen years when it emerged again in the late 1970s. By 1982, it had reached a crescendo of concern rivaling that of 1962. Although much had changed over two decades, much remained the same. *Reader's Digest* was still by far the most widely read magazine in the country. Time-Life, Inc., was still the leader in the news category, although *Time* had replaced *Life* in the number one slot. And the arms race spiraled on, unabated. While the nation seemed to rest from nuclear anxiety and "the nightmare of actual war receded somewhat into the subconscious of civilization ... in the '60s and '70s, both sides increased their nuclear firepower by several orders of magnitude."¹ There was one momentous new reality, however: by the beginning of the 1980s, the United States could no longer claim nuclear superiority. Indeed, *Reader's Digest* warned that "the United States is already running second in important aspects of military preparedness,"² and *Time* concluded that "the two nations are in rough parity meaning essentially that each could destroy the other."³

Whether our position was perceived as parity or inferiority, a major shift in nuclear imagery was inescapable. With military victory no longer a meaningful concept, images of omnipotence and readiness for apocalyptic war could not be sustained. Some new context was needed to give meaning to the Bomb and the arms race. The media apparently realized this before the Reagan administration. Although the Reaganites spoke freely and easily about fighting a nuclear war, *Time* assured its readers that

even those in the Administration who sincerely believe that the U.S., if it had to, could fight and win a nuclear war agree that the primary goal of U.S. weapons and policy should be preventing one.... The best way to prevent a holocaust is to prevent any kind of nuclear war in the first place. On that everyone agrees.⁴

As for the USSR, "the preponderance of the evidence is that the Soviets just do not want to fight a war."⁵ The premise of nuclear imagery in the 1980s was that no one intends to use these weapons to fight a global war: "Nuclear war remains a special kind of nightmare, threatening an apocalypse for the whole human race."⁶ "The only thing harder to imagine than a permanent reconciliation between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. is a rationalization on the part of either nation for taking the risk of all-out war."⁷

Visions of apocalyptic battle had to recede into the background, but the Bomb remained front and center in the nation's consciousness in the only meaningful role left to it-guarantor of safety and peace. How could the Bomb keep the peace? The new image turned out to be a very old one, refurbished for the nuclear age: "While balance of power may be an old fashioned idea, it can be argued to be all the more valid now that power is nuclear. Precisely because these arsenals must not be used, they must keep each other in check."⁸ The image of stable balance-rationally achieved and rationally maintained-became the unifying thread tying together all the nuclear imagery of the 1980s. The central message was that nuclear weapons can still be our savior, because they play a crucial role in moving the world toward perfect and immutable balance.

Despite this new vision, the Cold War still rages on in all its cosmic importance and intensity. "The Russians say plainly, over and over again, that they are in an ideological war with us.... Most Americans believe that the war of ideologies will determine the future of the world order."⁹ The NATO military commander contrasted himself with his Russian counterpart: "I'm defending liberty and all the values we hold so dear in the West. He's fighting for secret police, censorship, labor camps and the suppression of individual freedom."¹⁰ In sum, "the values of the U.S. and Soviet society are too starkly contrasting to permit for the foreseeable future anything friendlier than a more cautious competition."¹¹ The competition must be more cautious because the stakes are so much higher; balance must be maintained at all costs.

And this is now seen as the overriding threat and crime of the Soviet Union-its irresponsible and unpredictable destabilizing behavior. "Nothing did more to destroy detente than the Kremlin's insistence throughout the

race "would raise the danger of a political crisis turning into a military one, inadvertently but catastrophically."¹³ "They might be tempted to try to get the drop on the U.S. in a *High-Noon-type* showdown over some crisis in the Third World or Europe."¹⁴ The confrontation "would probably be related to political instability in some region or the competition for scarce resources, or both."¹⁵ If "the nuclear arms race has reached a point that no one could really have wanted,"and the United States must prepare for a war it does not want to fight, "the fault for these deepening dilemmas lies largely with the Soviet Union. If the Soviets were truly interested in restoring stable mutual deterrence, they could scale down their military machine and desist from international behavior that provokes crises.

They could also negotiate arms reductions in good faith. Although Soviet leaders loudly proclaim their desire for peace, they are simply "trying to enhance their bogus claim of championing disarmament."¹⁷ When both sides

do sit down at the bargaining table, "The United States tends to enter negotiations in a spirit of good will and fair play. This is hardly the Soviet approach.... We failed in the SALT negotiations because we continued to believe that the Russians would or could think like us." "Indeed, the contrast in thinking could hardly be more complete. Whereas they talk of peace without meaning it, we talk of war without meaning it. As is often the case in the realm of the sacred, there is a deeper truth hidden beneath superficial appearances. If the president lets slip some "loose talk" about limited nuclear war, this is just a "tiny tempest" that should "stay in the teapot."¹⁹ "Reagan, according to his closest aides, believes fervently in reducing nuclear arms." "If he enthusiastically builds up our nuclear arsenal, he is merely evincing his commitment to balance and peace. He has no other choice, in the face of the destabilizing Soviet buildup: "The 'lengthening shadow' of Soviet power.... The Soviet threat. It is the driving force behind the administration's major rearmament program."²¹ "Any U.S. President elected in 1980 would have had to continue and enlarge the counterbuildup that Carter had already begun."²²

Plans for limited nuclear war in Europe have nothing to do with warmongering either. They are just a necessary component in "NATO's deterrent strategy of flexible response, which creates real uncertainty as to what our reaction to any attack by them will be.... This uncertainty is presently the biggest deterrent to war."²³ Plans for fighting a "protracted nuclear war" reflect the same benign motive. As the Secretary of Defense explains, "We see nuclear weapons only as a way of discouraging the Soviets from thinking that they could ever resort to them. That is exactly why we must have a capability for a protracted response."²⁴ Nothing that the United States does indicates any desire to conquer the enemy force. Everything grows out of "the theory of deterrence, the main canon of U.S. nuclear doctrine for nearly

40 years... Ronald Reagan has relied on the same doctrine of deterrence as his predecessors.^{1,25}

This perception (or misperception) of history is now a cornerstone of our nuclear imagery. Every new weapon is justified as another step toward peace through deterrence. An article entitled "Trident: Deadly New Deterrent"

opens with the claim that "our new Trident sub will help restore the balance of power" and closes with a solemn affirmation of "that basic rule of the nuclear age: deterrence must not fail."^{2c} The strongest argument in support of deterrence strategy is that so far it has not failed: "It is acknowledged by most authorities in the field that peace over the past 40 years has been maintained by the controlled use of horror... If nuclear weapons did not exist, the U.S. and the Soviet Union might have gone to war at least once since 1945."²³ Once we penetrate to the truth of the matter, we know that the irrational power of the Bomb, ruled by the hand of reason, is still our savior.

This commitment to deterrence is part and parcel of the new emphasis on rational balance. It conjures up the image of a world safely frozen in a permanent stalemate. As long as both superpowers keep using their weapons

to build inviolable magic walls around themselves, neither can harm the other and everything remains status quo. If deterrence has always been the "main canon" of U.S. policy, this benign stability-not superiority-has

avoiding nuclear war depends on keeping a balance between the imperatives of American policy and various factors of international relations, particularly the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. While those international tensions cannot be eliminated, they can be, and have been in the past, kept in a state of overall equilibrium.... But it is an equilibrium with an underlying paradox.²⁸

One side of the paradox undermines the old image of apocalyptic warfare, as we have noted: "By their very nature, nuclear weapons are military instruments too powerful and destructive to 'solve,' in any meaningful sense, political problems that confront the U.S. and the Soviet Union."²⁹ But the arms race must continue anyway because of the other side of the paradox: nuclear weapons "are also too powerful and destructive for one superpower to relinquish as long as its rival has them."³⁰ Indeed, the quest for balance demands that each side keep building new weapons until it believes it has achieved the elusive goal of parity. Even if we long ago had more than enough weapons to deter the Russians from attacking us, we need more weapons to deter them from continuing a destabilizing arms race. Ultimately, our purpose is to deter destabilization itself.³¹ Perfect equilibrium is now the accepted definition of peace-and salvation.

Of course, the media insist, we do not really want to build more weapons. We want to reduce our nuclear arsenals. But this must be done in a balanced way-through mutual and rational negotiation. "Progress in arms control has

always depended on a degree of civility and a broader context of cooperation, or at least jointly regulated rivalry, between the superpowers."³² Such a context cannot be created simply by good intentions, however. In the first place, the issues to be negotiated are overwhelmingly complicated: "There is no simple nostrum, no simple solution."³³ No disarmament proposal is helpful unless it "does justice to the complexity of the problem, and steers clear of simple-minded pseudo solutions."³⁴ This is the principal objection to the nuclear freeze campaign: "The very simplicity of the freeze idea-stop building bombs now-makes it inadequate to the technical and diplomatic rigors of arms control."³⁵ Only the experts, with their highly specialized and highly logical minds, can meet these rigors. Clearly, they should be left to negotiate their way through the wilderness of complexities without undue interference from the public.

Yet even the best of America's experts may be stymied by the biggest stumbling-block of all-the intransigence of the Soviets. So, as they go to the bargaining table, they must be backed up by an awesome and growing arsenal, "for unfortunately it is strength alone that the Soviets understand and grudgingly respect."³⁶ As the only force able to compel the Soviets to bargain in good faith and accept true parity, the Bomb is once again the path to peace. It is now deployed in Europe in hopes that "the new U.S. missile presence will pressure the Soviets to bargain more seriously in Geneva."³⁷ Although the Soviets seem to have dashed this hope by breaking off the Geneva talks, Time echoes the president in remaining "optimistic that the NATO missile deployment will, if anything, snake a negotiated arms agreement more likely."³⁸ At the same time, of course, the "Euromissiles" are also seen as effective deterrents to the Kremlin's designs on the West: "The U.S. must ultimately rely on the big stick to deter Soviet aggression."³⁹ A new weapons system like the MX is also promoted for both functions: "At stake is our ability to deter Soviet aggression-and war.... It should also convince the Soviets of the futility of continuing arms competition."⁴⁰ Along both lanes of the "dual track" of deterrence and arms control, more bombs are the path to equilibrium.

The "dual track" approach deserves its name not only because it deftly balances deterrent strength and negotiating flexibility but also because it weaves together old and new imagery with similar dexterity. The new imagery of rational balance has served as a screen behind which much of the old imagery could survive and still appear meaningful. Of course, additions and alterations were necessary. We have already seen that the Cold War continues

as a contest of cosmic proportions, with the awesome power of the Bomb providing the key to victory; yet we have also seen how the understanding of victory has changed. Defeating the Russians now means primarily defeating the instability and threat of war that the Russians are held to represent; the two enemies become one. Given the pervasive fear and rejection of nuclear war," there is much less focus on the destructiveness of the Bomb itself (although pictures of weapons continue to be customary). So the contest, like the whole nuclear issue, comes to have an air of familiarity and, thus, of safety. As long as we are on the way to the protective shelter of perfect balance, we can accept and perhaps even enjoy the thrill of a competition with infinitely high stakes. *Time* uses appropriate terms from the sports world quite often in reporting the nuclear issue: *players, playing the game, strategy, scoring, next move, stalemate*. Gambling terms such as *betting, ante, odds* are equally common. A spectator sport is also a spectacle, and so diplomatic events are described with words like *acting, oratory, stances, cues, delivering lines, interludes in the drama*. The Cold War is perceived as a play—both in the sense of a game and of a theatrical event.

The principal actors are the experts, driving the nuclear train along the "dual track" to security and salvation. Their favorite and most important show, it seems, is the "show of resolve."⁴² Challenge and willingness to meet the challenge are still key elements in the nuclear drama: "They must see ... that we *are* the leaders of the free world and that we have the purpose and strength to carry out that role."⁴³ "The first half of the '80s may well be the most critical period that the West will have to face for many decades to come. It will be a time of testing and perhaps of crisis."⁴⁴ The public, of course, is encouraged to be a deeply involved audience, identifying with its leaders as they do whatever is necessary to demonstrate our resolve to meet the test.

The show of resolve is equally important in both lanes of the dual track. We must show a willingness to use the terrible weapons that we claim no intention of using: "If the use of nuclear weapons is renounced, they lose their utility not only as weapons of war but as instruments of peace. If deterrence is to work, an aggressor should not be able to dismiss entirely the possibility of nuclear retaliation."⁴⁵ "For the American threat to be credible, there must be widespread acceptance of the proposition that the U.S. forces would be survivable and enduring."⁴⁶ Resolve is just as crucial in diplomatic negotiation, where words can be almost as potent as bombs in demonstrating strength. An "East-West War of Words"⁴⁷ reached new heights during the "Euromissile" crisis: "It loomed as a fundamental test of wills between the Soviet Union and the 16 members of the NATO alliance."⁴⁸ The Soviets'"chill blasts" and "barrage of threats" "appeared to signal an increased willingness by Moscow to push its war of nerves with Washington to the breaking point."⁴⁹

With the USSR finally breaking off negotiations, "the overall climate of U.S.-Soviet relations has reached poisonous intensity ... but there was an important positive consequence: the oft-fragmented Atlantic Alliance had, contrary to many predictions, responded to its most stringent test in more than 25 years by affirming rather than weakening its resolve."⁵⁰ In the global theater, a proper show of resolve is apparently more important than improved relations with the foe; a resolute will is the path to peace, because only firmness can deter instability. The Cold War remains a war and a test of the nation's spirit.

All of these intertwined themes are evident in the media response to Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars" proposal. There is nothing radically new here, *Reader's Digest* points out: "A U.S.-Soviet 'space war,' undeclared and veiled in secrecy, has been going on for over 20 years ... to see who will perfect a new generation of weapons of blinding speed and destructiveness.... And while the Soviets lost the race to the moon, they seem determined not to lose the grim cosmic race of orbiting weaponry."⁵¹ The challenge of combat is combined here with the challenge of technological progress and conquering the heavens. Yet, now victory is urged in the name of peace through deterrence; *Time* headlines its major article on the subject "Reagan for the Defense."⁵² As always, *Time's* concern is stability: "A missile defense system could undermine the very foundation of strategic stability, namely, the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)."⁵³ But its final word is an affirmation of faith in unlimited progress through competition and will: "We must in our own interests pursue it, if only to find out what our adversaries may be doing.... Once challenged, and once convinced, this nation has been able to do just about anything it wanted to do.... A determined, skilled President who captures a nation's imagination, energy and know-how can work miracles."⁵⁴ Perhaps we can still aspire to omnipotence by imposing the immutable order of a pax Americana, in heaven and on earth, without firing a single shot. And we might just do it by reenacting a "Star Wars scenario" that was once only a motion-picture show.

The recurrent theme of play and show serves a vital role in tying together old and new imagery. It allows us to accept the persistence of old images by suggesting that the whole nuclear issue is nothing more than high drama and, therefore, fundamentally unreal. We can live with apocalyptic images that might otherwise be terribly frightening by distancing ourselves from them and seeing them as part of the show. On that level, they become quite appealing. The show is intensely exciting, holding cosmic significance yet touching each of us individually, and it is even tinged with comic relief in its black humor. Both as actors and as audience we get to participate vicariously; we get to step into a larger, richer world, imbued with infinite power and ultimate meaning.

Yet we feel safe, for no one seems to seek anything other than peaceful stability through this show. Indeed, the nuclear drama offers much the same appeal as religious ritual: a play staged by experts, offering safe contact with numinous power, and aiming at the restoration of balance on a cosmic scale. But when political realities become so thoroughly imbued with ritual play, the line between theatrical play and everyday reality threatens to disappear, and an air of unreality hangs over all we think and do.

The air of unreality helps to sustain the most terrifying of all the old images, the actual waging of a nuclear war. Here again, though, the new modifies the old. Despite the explicit affirmations that no one can win a nuclear war, there are implicit claims that nuclear war will be fought much like traditional war—the familiar contest of challenge and response, offense and defense, with a winner and a loser. "Many features of the American defense plan greatly increase confidence that the U.S. could mount a potent nuclear counterattack even if the Soviets were to strike first." ⁶¹ Pentagon war-fighting plans "describe what has for some time been U.S. strategy: ensuring a second and third-strike capability that would allow the country to continue fighting the Soviets after an initial nuclear exchange."⁶² The commander of a Trident submarine "will have at his fingertips the power to bring a total of 192 targets under nuclear attack."⁶³ "If the vital interests of the Atlantic Alliance are involved," the NATO commander stoutly asserts, "we'll fight."⁶⁴ For the average reader, the obvious implication is that we are ready to fight—and win—now as we have always been.

In hot war as in Cold War, however, winning no longer means quite what it used to mean. Of course, in the media's view, only the Soviets could be destabilizing enough to launch a war. If they do attack us, then deterrence has failed, and our goal is to reestablish deterrence: "War fighting makes sense (and rather shaky sense at that) only as an extension of deterrence-deterrence by other means, as Clausewitz might have put it."⁶⁵ So our goal is not primarily victory over the attacker but victory over the true enemy—instability: "Whatever the Soviets do or threaten to do, the U.S. must be in a position to do something worse, and to do it with such speed, precision and force that the Kremlin will not escalate the conflict."⁶⁶ Fortunately, we have both the rational plan (the Single Integrated Operating Plan) and the technological capacities to keep control of any situation, even a nuclear war. The SIOP "would theoretically allow for a limited nuclear war, in which a Soviet attack could be answered with surgical retaliations that would conceivably be halted

before a full-scale missile exchange occurred." ⁶¹ The president is at the helm: "The SIOP is intended to give the President an elaborate array of carefully calibrated choices for retaliation." ⁶² The assumption is that the president would remain cool, logical, and precise. Yet even if tempted to respond emotionally, "there is no way a President could succumb to reflexive nuclear revenge.... The President must deal with an impersonal and coldly rational chain of command."⁶³ In war as in peace, only balanced rationality and the Bomb can be our salvation.

Could this combination in fact save us? The answer remains unclear. "Even some distinguished American strategists ... concede in private that a so-called selective flexible response would be likely to unleash a chain reaction out of either side's control."⁶⁴ Others, apparently, disagree. If full-scale war came, *Time* sees only the gloomiest prospects. It labels civil defense proposals "Planning for the Unplannable." ⁶⁵ *Reader's Digest* joins *Time* in using a litany of familiar terms to describe nuclear war: *horror, holocaust, devastation, terror, annihilation, extinction, apocalypse, catastrophe, the end of the world.* *Time* spices up its reporting with vivid images of a postwar world: *universal fire, the abyss, freezing cold, mass death,* and the like. Yet *Reader's Digest* also reports the sanguine views of Edward Teller: "Our survival can be considered certain.... Civil-defense planning in the United States could save 100 million more lives.... Were the Soviets aware that the American people are able to survive an attack, they would be much less likely to take the risk of initiating a conflict."⁶⁶ As always, planning for war can be seen as the path to peace.

These conflicting views on all-out war echo the complexities that run through all nuclear imagery. The resulting bewilderment adds to the air of unreality. "Understanding and making nuclear policy are like stepping into a wilderness of mirrors." ⁶⁷ This does not mean, however, that the issue must end in confusion. "There is one given in the debate: nuclear weapons cannot be disinvented, so ways must be found to ensure that they are never used."⁶⁸ "Living with nuclear weapons is our only hope. It requires that we persevere in reducing the likelihood of war even though we cannot remove the possibility altogether." ⁶⁹ It is obvious by now that the media see only one way to do this—unflinching pursuit of rational balance. To that end, the prime virtue of the nuclear age is to remain calm and reasonable amidst the terror. *Time's* chief criticism of the disarmament movement is its tendency to get emotional: "In an open society, legitimate movements based on valid ideals, like the arms-control crusade, have the potential to be manipulated in such a way that passions and emotions override rational judgments."⁷⁰ This is also *Time's* criticism of the nationally televised film, *The Day After*.

Real events, unlike TV scripts, keep demanding not just emotion, not just fear, but answers.... If the film's lasting impression is one of fright, then no

purpose has been served save to boost ABC's ratings. But if by looking at the unlookable, millions of Americans start thinking about the unthinkable and appreciating the complexities of coping with atomic arsenals, then the show could prove to be a public service.⁷¹

Appreciating those complexities, we are likely to realize that only the experts have the sufficient skill and understanding to stay in control of this "wilderness of mirrors." So, the safest course is to follow the advice and example of our leaders:

The horror of nuclear war has greatly troubled every President, and yet all of them since 1945 have conditioned themselves to plan nuclear strategy coolly and prudently. The experts tend to agree that too much fear in the Oval Office would warp judgements and make crises more likely.... Presidents have all become tempered, cautious, and properly fearful stewards of our destructive might. But none has had nightmares over his nuclear responsibility.⁷²

The dual track of deterrence and arms control, of old and new images, is also a dual track of trustworthy experts and a calm rational public. Riding this dual track toward the heaven of unending stability, we have reason to be hopeful: "Like all the complex interactions within the atom, the volatile human forces at work on the planet earth may be able to maintain their dynamic equilibrium indefinitely. That will unquestionably require ever increasing wisdom and skillful management," Time optimistically opines. Yet it cannot avoid adding: "as well as luck."⁷³ But isn't a little bit of unpredictability and risk the ingredient that makes every game exciting?

By the middle of the 1980s, the imagery of rational balance had become nearly universally triumphant. Its appeals are many and varied. It demands no choice between an arms race and arms control, for it sees the two as partners aiming toward a single goal. Just as important, it sees the two as partners in a ritual reenactment of fundamental American values: faith in technological rationality and in the technical experts who implement that rationality to give us an everimproving way of life. The Bomb has become our prime symbol of abiding faith in human ability to master and control all realities, no matter how complex or forbidding. The numinous power of the Bomb has been joined to the numinous power of the experts who claim to have it safely in hand. As the average person participates vicariously in the journey down the "dual track," there is a growing conviction that "we, the people" are indeed omnipotent. For if we can in fact harness the atom and its dangers in an immutable stability, then we can do anything.

This wondrous achievement is evidence of our strength-and of our right and obligation to remain strong. For if we can forge a perfect world

equilibrium, it is a victory for and tribute to our national strength; but it is also a victory for the world. What more could anyone, anywhere in the world, desire? We are exercising our firm resolve just as much for the benefit of the Russian people as for our own, though they do not realize it. So we can justify the imposition of those values we celebrate through our nuclear arsenal. Reason tells us that truth is one and the same for all people. The technological reason we enshrine in the Bomb is equally valid in every nation. Just as it has given us unparalleled abundance and ease, so we would offer this to all other peoples. The image of a single salvation and a single savior for all is still very much alive. But, if we are to use our weapons for universal salvation, we must be strong and unyielding in the Cold War struggle. We must form an immovable center around which the world can gather and ultimately revolve. Our Bomb and our resolve can make us the sacred center of human life-if we remain strong enough. So there is no need to choose between nationalism and universalism; like the arms race and arms control, the two go hand in hand.

Immovability is a basic theme in all this imagery. In a world encircled by nuclear weapons, we can be safe only if the weapons are immobilized. Safety comes to be equated with stasis, yet stasis has a deeper meaning. The transcendence or cessation of time is an age-old dream embodied in the myths and rituals of virtually every culture. In a time when the rate of change seems so dizzying, we are ever more strongly drawn to this dream. But we must express it in modern terms; immutable balance achieved through technological reason is the perfect solution to the problem. If the most potent power known to us can be fixed in this static state, so can everything else. As we move toward nuclear equilibrium, using the Bomb itself as our vehicle, we may believe that we are moving toward a time when change and the passage of time itself will cease. As long as we have the Bomb, then, every day brings us a bit closer to this eternal end-time. The Bomb itself redeems the passage of time by giving it a transtemporal meaning. Yet, this whole process must occur, the images tell us, carefully and gradually; the complexities must be worked out one by one. There will be no sudden cataclysmic transformation, no great rupture with the known and the familiar-and so we are safe.

This is the one crucial point at which the imagery of the 1980s departs from its predecessor of the early Cold War era. Both agree that our values must be ritually reenacted by nuclear means. Both agree that we have become, and must remain, awesome and omnipotent. Both agree that our victory will be a victory for all humanity, and that time must work toward its own elimination by means of the saving Bomb. But, once the hope for a sudden apocalyptic redemption is gone, conflict no longer has the same overwhelming appeal. Gradual amelioration takes its place, and along with it a professed willingness to work with and for the enemy, if the enemy is tractably willing.

When images of balance replace images of conflict in the forefront of our minds, stasis comes to be prized more than change. The world we work toward is in fact the world pictured by technological and scientific reason: a world that is wholly predictable and wholly manipulable because it is inert.⁷⁴ This immovable world is the terminus at the end of the "dual track." It is our salvation.

So we are called to act out this value, too, in the nuclear issue, by remaining emotionally stable, rational, and passive. We can aid our redeemers, the experts and their weapons, by allowing them to pursue their course unimpeded. We can adopt this supine posture confidently, for we are assured over and over again that the experts have only our best interests at heart. Their only goal is to build a rational order, using the Bomb, that will protect us forever from the chaos of the Bomb. So, although the new imagery does differ in significant ways from the old, its deepest appeal is the same. It offers an infinite power that symbolizes both life and death, order and chaos, good and evil, and the harmonious synthesis of all in a single universal equilibrium. Because this equilibrium works on many levels—military, political, technological, ideological, emotional, and more—it assures us that beneath the apparent fragmentation and disorder of our world there is a fundamental unity.

This all-encompassing unity has room for every contradiction. Everything can be affirmed; nothing need be denied. Indeed, the more contradictions it must face, the stronger is its appeal, for each is further evidence that balance and static synthesis can in fact be perfectly achieved. So the new image welcomes the old apocalyptic images, giving them an enduring place while buffering their frightening impact with its aura of impregnable safety. We believe ourselves to have mastered the apocalypse; we have taken the place of our ancestors' God.

Do we really believe that such salvation through balance and the Bomb is possible? Perhaps it is only a smokescreen, a way to go on holding the old apocalyptic images that are so central to Western civilization without going mad from terror. But, if these images are sincerely held and affirmed, we must reckon with a new kind of religious experience. The aspiration to rational balance is not new; it grows out of the Enlightenment dream that human reason and order could eliminate chaos forever. What is new, though, is the embodiment of this vision in an unlimited technological power that serves as the vision's symbol and vehicle. Because this unlimited power threatens to unleash unlimited chaos, chaos now returns to a central, although paradoxical and hidden, place in our image of perfect order. And this may be the key to the widespread appeal of static rational balance. Although we crave order, we have an equal craving for the power that can destroy every order. Our ultimate

desire is for the paradoxical unity of the two that are their images of God. Today, images of static rationality can have that unity. They tell us that we need make no choice: have the Bomb, we can have it all.