



COMMENDABLES

Thinking Clearly About War

by Gary Jason

James Turner Johnson: *Can Modern War Be Just?*; Yale University Press; New Haven.

There is nothing quite so fatuous as the nuclear pacifism currently fashionable among leftist theologians and their ilk. Visions of mushroom clouds (brought on by repeated viewings of *On the Beach* and *Dr. Strangelove*) cloud many minds. The result is the fuzzy-minded view that we must either accept the current MAD standoff with the Soviets, or else we must unilaterally disarm. Nuclear pacifism thus paralyzes the West, allowing the Soviets to replace pro-Western governments with proxy regimes.

Such fuzzy-mindedness and paralysis might be avoided if we relied more upon the "just war" theory, developed by philosophers and theologians since Augustine. Sketchily put, just war theory distinguishes questions about *jus ad bellum* (i.e., questions about what justifies resort to war) from questions about *jus in bello* (i.e., questions about which forms of force in war are justifiable). The consensus view has been that a war is justified if and only if there is a just cause (reason) for it, it is ordered by the right (proper) authority, with the right intent, as a last resort, with the end goal of peace, and the evil it produces is proportionate to the good. And a form of violence or weaponry is acceptable in a war if and only if it discriminates between combatants and noncombatants, and it is proportionate (i.e., not excessive) in the destruction it causes.

James T. Johnson has applied just war theory to questions about modern war. He is certainly well-versed in that tradition, having written earlier two books on the history of just war doctrines: *Ideology, Reason and the Limitation of War*, and *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War*. These books were intended for an academic audience. In *Can Modern War Be Just?* Johnson attempts to address the lay audience.

Essentially, Johnson's book consists of a number of previously written essays more or less modified to constitute chapters. In each essay/chapter he applies just war theory to some feature of modern war—either particular wars (such as Israel's incursion into Lebanon) or specific weapons (such as the neutron bomb) or specific issues (such as conscientious objection). The results of his inquiries do not fall neatly into the current liberal/conservative dichotomy.

Some of his arguments are nicely drawn, and persuasive. He neatly punc-



tures the ban-the-bomb balloon, rightly pointing out that unilateral disarmament is the real desire of people who want to ban the bomb, and that unilateral disarmament will increase—not decrease—the chances of nuclear war. He urges a move toward counterforce rather than counterpopulation strategy (i.e., developing weapons directed at the enemy's military power, rather than at his population centers). This latter point of view has not been popular with the professional "peace" activists, causing Johnson some puzzlement. He observes that "there is no small irony in the fact that some of the opponents of counterpopulation strategy on moral grounds have been vocally opposed to efforts to transform our national defense posture away from this strategy, alleging the creation of instability." He is surely right in thinking that there is a curious inconsistency in opposing nuclear holocaust yet opposing any move toward a less deadly strategy—such as President Reagan's plans to put a defensive net in space. Johnson also argues well for the acceptability of the neutron bomb and cruise missile.

However, on a number of issues his arguments are much less persuasive. Occasionally, such as in his discussion of Israel's incursion into Lebanon, his

arguments fail to convince because they are hopelessly brief and superficial—a consequence of addressing far too many issues in a 190-page book, a book which has, moreover, a great amount of redundancy. In other cases, Johnson doesn't fully come to grips with the issues. For example, he seems to urge that we pursue a "decapitation" strategy—develop weapons with the goal of wiping out the Soviets' command and control structure. But he himself notes that this will violate the doctrine of avoiding noncombatants (the Soviet leaders, after all, reside in Moscow).

Though his effort is not satisfactory in every respect, Johnson does seriously attempt to balance principles and respect facts. For this he is to be praised. cc

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Clear-Eyed Southerner

by John Shelton Reed

Edwin M. Yoder Jr.: *The Night of the Old South Ball: And Other Essays and Fables*; Yoknapatawpha Press; Oxford, MS; \$13.95.

These essays and columns by a distinguished journalist cover a wide range of topics, among them Sherlock Holmes, *I'll Take My Stand*, the King James Bible, and Flannery O'Connor. A good many have to do with the South, one way or another, and Yoder confesses that he likes the South, with all its faults, better than the Sunbelt, with whatever its virtue may be. He suspects, deep down, that the South is gone, or going—and certainly the settled, small-town South that he (and I) grew up with is apparently doomed. In an essay on W. J. Cash, though, Yoder has some sharp things to say about the role of intellectuals (most certainly including journalists like Cash—and himself) in keeping ideas (like that of the South) alive and breathing.

For the most part, Yoder's tastes are utterly sound, and the few I don't share (Henry James, for instance) I'm com-