

Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh's Speech, Law Day, May 1, 1984

Business and Professional People for the Public Interest

Chicago, Illinois

If I were going to wish the Business and Professional People for the Public Interests a toast for a happy 15th birthday, I think I should use the statement made by a wise man who said that all that is required for evil to triumph is for good people to remain silent. And that's why I hope I never have a reputation for silence.

Let me begin with a quote from Albert Einstein. Believe it or not, he said this in 1945 when we had just used up the only two bombs we had. He said, "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything except our mode of thinking, and we thus drift towards unparalleled disaster." I don't want to sound like someone yelling "wolf," but I would like to say to you, and I say it each day to myself, that it is nothing less than insane what we're doing to ourselves in this world today.

It came home to me about two-and-a-half years ago. I got a call from Cornell. They wanted me to come and give a talk at a teach-in on November 11. They were planning this through the Union of Concerned Scientists all over the country. I thought to myself, if it's important for Cornell, it's important for Notre Dame; we ought to have our own observance. While I've been in and out of the nuclear business since it began, first on the National Science Board and then on the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna where I represented the Vatican for 15 years, it seemed to me that this was something I'd better start thinking about anew. During our campus program, we had a Mass and I gave a sermon on the nuclear threat, a liturgy that made me think a little more seriously about the moral implications. That afternoon we had a meeting run by one of our former students, now on the medical faculty at Harvard University and one of the founders of the Physicians for Social

Responsibility. His name is Jim Muller -- a marvelous fellow -- and to make his talk realistic, he explained what would happen if a one-megaton bomb went off over South Bend, Indiana. It suddenly came home to me. Walking back through the autumn, smoke-filled atmosphere with leaves burning on the campus, walking back alone to the office in the twilight, I had a twilight thought. We were, indeed, heading towards unparalleled disaster, and all the things I'd been trying to do, trying not to be a silent partner in the human race when things weren't going well, that all of this would be moot. We had to do something about the nuclear threat facing us, deepening in its threatening nature each day like a mad dog getting bigger -- and more threatening.

Somehow, we have created the means of committing the greatest sin of all, which is to take God's own creation, as we know and enjoy it on this planet, and to throw it back in His face. We can reduce this planet to something like the pitted surface of the moon, or of Mars, a scarred and ugly and burned-out place. Now put that in concrete terms of no more books, and no more symphonies, no more universities, no more libraries, and no more museums (except the vast ghastly museum of the shriveled earth). Think about it -- no more little children, with their bright and smiling faces; no more grandparents; no more beautiful cities; no more clean, running water, and no more soil bursting in the springtime with new birth and new creation. No more healthy people. No more food. No more anything. Nothing. And to have done it ourselves, to have used our talent and our treasures to do it!

I don't speak about a distant threat, I speak about something that exists right now, tonight. It not only exists, but it also has been crafted with enormous sophistication and power. I don't know if you have visited Hiroshima or Nagasaki or have seen the pictures. (Most of you have seen some of the pictures--I find I have to skip the next meal every time I look at them.) Reflect on what we did to human beings

in two or three days' time. One rather simple bomb, twelve-and-a-half kilotons, and another, twenty (the "Thin Man" and the "Fat Man," as we called them jokingly) literally wiped out a city of 100,000 people. We left in Hiroshima and Nagasaki only sickening shadows of people who had once lived there, now vaporized. And survivors disfigured with burns and afflicted with cancer and genetic damage.

Not having learned from that, we have now created a million times that power. A million times that power. In just one of our little agents, the Triton submarine, we have packed three times the total power, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of both sides in World War II. And it's only one of the three tripods of our defense. It's only the naval part of it, and, at that, just a part of the naval part. There are about thirty or forty Tritons in our arsenal of massive destruction.

We're not just talking about this immense and horrible power to destroy everything that's been created by God the Creator, but also about everything we, in His image, have created with our bequeathed intelligence and our heritage of freedom. We're talking about a monstrous lethal power poised on delivery systems which are standing tonight, ready to go, in the sea and in the air and in silos on the ground. We have not only placed it and targeted it, but we have hair-triggered it to computers noteworthy, if you happened to ever pay bills they generate, for their inconsistency and their mistakes. And we have not only what we had in 1946, a time when we had only six nuclear weapons, but we have also increased that number to 50,000 in the world today, of which we have roughly half and the Russians have roughly half. (The British and the French together have about 162. Not enough to do worldwide damage, but enough to destroy Moscow and a few other Russian cities.) We began with a fuse six or seven or eight hours long that could be snuffed out at any point. These weapons of destruction had to be delivered by airplane, and it took that long to get from here to there or from there to here. We shortened that fuse with

intercontinental ballistic missiles. And we and Russia now have shortened it further by putting those missiles in submarines, missiles that can hit U.S. or U.S.S.R. population centers on a low trajectory in about three minutes. Even with a land-based Pershing, ours would take only five or six minutes from Western Europe. Five or six minutes do not give you very much time to think about what to do or where to go, except to die--for either side. And then, as if this were not enough, we're now going to put them into space and have "Star Wars" where we cut notice of Armageddon down to five or ten seconds. I defy you to think of how human judgment can protect us in these circumstances. It will be fire-on-warning, and the warning may be a flight of geese or the moon rising. But in any event, we are removing ourselves further and further from any possibility of stopping or even controlling, much less having any rational use for the monster we fashioned.

All of you should be conscious of the fact that right now we have 26,000 warheads, and the Russians have about 25,000. They are set up on about 24 different delivery systems, and they come in all kinds of sizes and shapes, from very big to fairly small. The smaller ones are the most accurate. For example, if you are firing at the Statue of Liberty with one of them, you could specify, "Hit it in the head or the bust or at the waist or at the feet," and it would hit exactly there. We not only have this enormous, targeted group of weapons, but on top of that, in the latest report we have from the Pentagon, we are now planning to create 30,000 more in the next ten years. Thirty thousand more! We already have, between ourselves and the Russians, enough to destroy the world 14 times over; enough to make the rubble jump, which is about all you can say after you've destroyed everything -- make the rubble jump. As if the insanity of today isn't sufficient, we plan to add 30,000 more warheads to this already insane arsenal on both sides. And if we add 30,000, Russia will try to add 35,000. It's been a constant accretion of insanity. We do it because

they do it; they do it because we do it. They go for ICBMs; we go for ICBMs. We go for MIRVs; they go for MIRVs. We mock each other. They put in SS-20s, we put in Pershings. We're now going for 5,000 Cruise missiles, which are beyond the customary proliferation of disarmament agreements because you can run them around in a pick-up truck. But they are hellishly accurate and just as powerful as other missiles. As a Russian told me recently, "You build 5,000 Cruise missiles, and we'll build 5,000." And then we'll both be even beyond the point of verification.

I have to say to all of you that it's hard to believe that we have actually done this willingly, knowingly -- we and the Russians. (Practically all the weapons in the world are either in the Soviet Union or aimed at it.) The feeling between the two nuclear antagonists is one of raw nerves, and that's even being exacerbated. Given the situation, it's incredible to say that our leader and their leader simply have not talked to each other since Jimmy Carter met Brezhnev in Vienna to sign SALT I many years ago.

I don't know what one makes of all of this, except to say that Einstein certainly knew what he was talking about almost forty years ago when he said, "We are drifting toward unparalleled disaster." I think all we can say is it is high time we did something about it. I don't know if all of you have read Jonathan Schell's book Fate of the Earth. He has a new one, The Abolition. I don't know if any of you have read the latest four articles in the New Yorker by Freeman Dyson, now also a book, Weapons and Hope. The more one reads, the more one becomes convinced that we have to do something about this. As long as these weapons exist, we're in grave trouble.

When I had my conversion two-and-a-half years ago, I decided that I would try to get the religious and the scientific leaders of the world together to make common cause, maybe for the first time since Galileo, against nuclear war. You may say, why these two groups? Why not lawyers, business people, teachers, university people? I

say let 's get everybody, including BPl. But I wanted to get these two groups for one reason: I am as conscious as you that this is a political problem, that this problem will be solved when a Russian Premier and an American President sit down and say "for God's sake, let 's solve it." It 's in our common interest not to live under this growing mountain of armaments. Half of the scientists and technicians in the world are working on armaments today, or things connected with military, both there and here. These brains are some of our very best. Some 40,000 children die every day for want of a five-cent pill, and we 're now spending a million dollars on armaments every minute, day and night -- over \$600 billion a year, now going toward a trillion worldwide quickly, very quickly.

The essential reason for getting these two groups, scientists and religious leaders, together is that they are people who can affect others but have difficulty doing so separately. Every time a scientist says something against nuclear war, people say: "Well, you speak with poor grace, you created the mess. If it weren't for your splitting the atom and developing these bombs, we wouldn't have the dilemma we have today," And when religious leaders speak about nuclear war they say, "Well, why don't you go back in the sacristy; this is a complicated matter. You don't know what you're talking about." Well, I figured that if I could get the scientists to give the religious leaders credibility in their scientific judgments and, conversely, the religious leaders to give some moral credibility, we would have enough clout with political leaders to get them to realize there 's no reason on Earth that will justify killing, on the first day of a nuclear holocaust, a hundred million innocent human beings, be they Russians or Americans or Europeans. As the American Catholic bishops have said, there 's no possible way of thinking that that is justifiable morally in any sense. And it isn't. If we 're destroyed, we say, "Well at least we 'll destroy them before we die." It 's an idiotic thing from start to

finish. But if you know the facts, and what I have given you are the facts, then at least you can say, "There 's no moral justification or any proportionality in this." And there certainly is no discrimination. We are told by our military leaders and the Pentagon that we have a moral, humane plan. We do not target innocent people; we only target military and industrial targets. Now, the biggest concentration of Russians in the whole U.S.S.R. is in Moscow, so we have about 60 military-industrial targets there, and I would like to know how you could possibly hit half of them without killing anyone within 50 miles of Moscow...and a few more downwind.

I'd just like to read the final paragraph of a book I read recently because it is revealing. It is written about the Wizards of Armageddon, about all these think-tanks where they talk about nuclear war plans as follows: "well, we 'll only lose 25 million on this scenario, compared to 30 million on this other." The author is Fred Kaplan. In describing the people who have been planning and plotting and game plans and war days and all the rest of it, he says,

"They performed their calculations and they spoke their strange and esoteric tongues, because to do otherwise would be to recognize all too clearly and constantly the ghastliness of their contemplations. They contrive their options, because without them the bomb would appear too starkly as the thing they had tried to prevent it from being, but that ultimately it would become if it ever were used. A device of sheer mayhem. A weapon whose cataclysmic powers no one has the faintest idea of how to control. The nuclear strategists had come to impose order, but in the end only chaos still prevailed."

And that 's where we are right now. We are facing chaos.

Back to my initiative with worldclass scientists and theologians. We got top scientists from Japan and India and France and England and America and the Soviet Union and the head of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (the Holy Father has 70 scientists, about a third of them Catholic, who advise him on matters scientific) together for a first meeting in Vienna. We talked very frankly for three days, and at a follow-up meeting at the Royal Society in London a draft statement was agreed upon.

A consultation was arranged at the Pontifical Academy in Vatican City, to which were invited members of 36 national academies of science. All but two came. We hammered out a five-page scientific statement defining the proportions of the threat we were facing. Remember, these were the best scientists in the world, representatives of national academies of science in Russia, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Japan, India; all the West European countries, from Sweden to Italy; Egypt, Argentina, Chile, Canada, the U.S., Mexico. We met for three solid days before approving this document. The day we approved it, the Pope walked into the room. We gave him the statement, and he said, "What this world's needs is hope. Give your document to all the other religious leaders in the world, and for myself, I'll use it as much as I can."

Here is an excerpt from the statement's front page:

The existing arsenals, if employed in a major war, would result in the immediate death of many hundreds of millions of people, and of untold millions more later through a variety of after-effects...

(This was before they discovered nuclear winter.)

For the first time it is possible to cause damage on such a catastrophic scale as to wipe out a large part of civilization and to endanger its very survival. The large-scale use of such weapons could trigger major and irreversible ecological and genetic changes, whose limits simply cannot be predicted.

After the Vatican City meeting of scientists, we invited a group of religious leaders to Vienna, leaders from European and American churches, including the National Council of Churches' president and the U.S. Catholic Bishops' president. They endorsed the earlier scientists' statement, continuing the effort with the world's religions. I was in Tokyo a few weeks ago, talking with the Buddhists and Shintos, as well as Japanese scientists and business people. The contacts with the



business people are important so that we not be viewed as a "nut" group. We want to come out on the 40th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with a very strong statement, one from the only nation whose people have suffered the effects of a nuclear catastrophe.

The more one reads about this nuclear dilemma, the more one becomes convinced that we absolutely have to do something. Who are "we"? I think the religious leaders can speak to three-quarters of humanity, if we can educate them to the scientific dimensions of the problem. Medical doctors, medical doctors in particular, have been very strong. Lawyers are beginning to come into the issue; we have a chapter of the lawyers' group at Notre Dame. Educators are becoming more conscious. I had a chance to speak to all the presidents of American and Canadian universities last October and suggested they all do what we at Notre Dame are doing -- establish a course on the nuclear threat and make sure that no student gets through four years of university training and education without at least becoming conscious of what the nuclear issues are.

We at Notre Dame have also inaugurated an Inter-Faith Academy of Peace at our Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem, an ample facility located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. "Inter-Faith" in this case means all of the world's religions. Under the auspices of the Peace Academy, we hope to have more meetings soon in India for Eastern religions and scientific leaders, and in Cairo or Aman or Jerusalem to get the Muslims and the Jewish community together with their scientists.

We have to get people talking. Curiously, the two superpowers malevolently regard each other across a nuclear abyss and don't discuss even what's in their common interest. We had conversations in Geneva and in Vienna, but they're like a chess game where the press keeps score, we won what today and what did you give up, what did you get.

But this is not a Russian problem; this is not an American problem. Neither was given the right to destroy humanity and civilization and culture and Beethoven and Brahms and Bach and everything else. We are faced with a unique threat to humanity, and I say we must get together and start talking with each other about how we cope with it. I'm not a unilateralist. I think we've got to do what we do together. It's quite possible to do that. We don't have to trust each other. Everybody says you can't trust the Russians. I don't think they can trust us, either. But just the same, that's not a matter of trust; you can play poker with someone as long as you keep the cards above the table. You don't have to trust them. You verify everything agreed upon. I think that we are long overdue, and I think we have somehow deluded ourselves into thinking that there's an answer through military force, becoming more powerful than our adversary. We're like two fellows in a concrete vault, if you will, and we're standing in high-octane gasoline up to our noses. We've both got a box of matches, held over our heads, and we've both got a match out ready to strike. One spark and it's all over for both of us (and the world, if that's what's contained in this cellar). And I'm saying to the other fellow, "I've only got four more matches in my box and you've got five. You're ahead of me. I've got to catch up with you." It doesn't take any more than one match, and at the moment we've both got seven. Speaking about superiority, I recently talked to Jerry Weisner of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "Jerry," I asked, "how many bombs or intercontinental ballistic missiles do we really need for credible deterrence?" (I've already mentioned to you that we have 50,000 warheads between us.) I said, "A hundred?" He said, "Ten." See, if you have ten MXs, they're Mirved, that's a hundred right there. Each one of them has ten warheads. So much for the arms race as a matter of rational defense.

Bernard Lown, a doctor at Harvard, who put together the American Physicians for

Social Responsibility gave a speech recently as the president of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, and this was his final message, "We can and we must instill a sense of moral revulsion to nuclear weaponry and to the Orwellian term 'deterrence,' which is but a sanitized word for indiscriminate and colossal mass murder. Our goal should be the widest conditioning of an anti-nuclear instinct as potent as hunger. Moral arousal, I believe, will help tilt the perilously balanced scale in world affairs toward survival. President Eisenhower predicted that there will come a day when the people will generate such a popular groundswell for peace that governments will be forced to get out of their way. Such a day is at hand, brought forward by the deepest forces rooted in a humankind threatened with extinction."

That 's where we are, ladies and gentlemen. Simply put, we are threatened with extinction. For many of us, our lives are well past the half-way mark, and we're going down the other side of the hill. But I'd like you to think, if you would, of your grandchildren and your children--those whose lives are beginning and are so full of hope and yearning. Why should we bequeath to them a future of darkness, a future of the wildest threat that one might imagine, the threat of extinction, complete and total? At best, a future where those who survive do so by some quirk, by being in a subway or something, and who will be envious of those who are dead. Why should we do that? Why should we not come to grips with this horror? Freeman Dyson, earlier mentioned, is convinced that moral conviction is the key to an effective protest against a situation both idiotic and immoral. The second phase, according to Dyson is political negotiation. If people aren't willing to do that, we've got to persuade them to do it, or do it ourselves in one way or another. Third, we have to find the technical means to move us toward a more hopeful future. I don't think this

is so difficult. I am more and more convinced, as I look at this subject, that the true realities, the black and white of this, if you will, is not full of subtleties. We are faced with a monster. There is only one ultimate answer -- get rid of the monster. Now, we can't get rid of the knowledge of rebuilding the nuclear bomb, but let's make that very difficult. We can control the manufacture of necessary materials

How to conclude? Again I give you Freeman Dyson. He says, "The basic issue before us is simple. Are we or are we not ready to face the uncertainties of a world in which nuclear weapons have been negotiated all the way down to zero?" If the answer to this question is yes, then there is hope for us, and for our grandchildren. And here I will let the scholar and author, Clara Claiborne Park, have the last word. Dyson quotes her, "Hope is not the lucky gift of circumstance or of disposition, but it is a virtue like faith and love, to be practiced whether or not we find it easy or even natural, because hope is absolutely necessary to our survival today as human beings. "

I don't think I need to say more than that. I thank you for listening. I hope you find some way to do something about it. I'm sure you will. God bless.



# BPI

## Business and Professional People for the Public Interest

109 North Dearborn Street, Suite 1300 • Chicago, Illinois 60602 • Telephone: (312) 641-5570

August 13, 1984

*edited Ms mailed to Mrs. Kuzera  
on 10/1/84  
mr*

Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, President  
University of Notre Dame  
Notre Dame, IN 46556

Dear Father Hesburgh:

Your realistic and mind-stretching speech at our Law Day 1984 dinner left a lasting impression both on that evening's audience and on WFMT radio listeners when it was broadcast during the month of June.

We have been receiving requests each week for a transcript of that speech. The enclosed is the draft that we have gleaned both from our taping and that of the radio station. Would you be so kind as to edit this according to your preferences?

When we have received your final comments we can then make this document available to our interested contributors.

Thank you again for gracing our event with your presence and your expertise.

Gratefully,

Julie Kuzera  
Director of Development

JK/dg  
Enclosure

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