

AFTERWORD: A QUESTION

*Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.**

An intelligent child listening to a protracted discussion like this on President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)—“Star Wars”—might ask: What about other world problems? What about the forty thousand children, mainly in the Third World, who die daily because they suffer malnutrition and the diseases that follow on lack of suitable food and water? That's a Hiroshima for children every other day. The adults would have to admit that we civilized nations could solve this problem with a lot less than the four billion dollars the United States is spending this year on Star Wars. There are, of course, many other human worldwide problems today, such as ozone depletion, the greenhouse effect, the pollution of oceans and ground water, deforestation, unproductive agriculture and ensuing starvation, illiteracy, homelessness, and on and on. All of these problems could be solved if we directed toward them the brains—let alone the one to two trillion dollars—destined to be spent on Star Wars, which has been allocated despite the fact that most experts say SDI will not work and, even if it did, it would destabilize an already fragile system based on fifty thousand threatening and accident-prone nuclear warheads in the United States and the Soviet Union.

The child might also ask: How did you adults get into this muddle? The President and his men said that SDI would render nuclear weapons “impotent and obsolete.” We would have quite a problem explaining to this simple child that, even though this dubious claim was made, and fifteen billion dollars has already been uselessly spent on this pipe-dream, the fact remains that SDI was never meant to extend an impenetrable shield over the U.S. civilian population, but was really designed to protect U.S. nuclear missile launchers. Furthermore, SDI does nothing to keep us from being radiated, fried and vaporized by every other system—airplanes, cruise missiles and so on—of delivering nuclear warheads.

At this point, the child might ask: If you really want to remove the threat of *all* nuclear warheads, why not just get rid of them all?

President Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev almost stumbled onto this simple solution, including the means for verification, at Reykjavik. But then the generals and admirals and war games experts almost had a corporate heart attack.

But I still ask with the child: Why not? If we make them, we can unmake them, and watch each other doing it. Indeed, we can let the whole world watch on television.

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Then we adults could get on with the other problems that threaten to destroy us and our still beautiful world. Think about having even a fraction of the \$1,000,000,000,000 we spend each year on arms to help implement a solution which, unlike Star Wars, we know will work and give people happier and more productive lives.

Why not indeed?