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A matter of life and death....

The latest Draper Laboratory annual report is revealing both for what it says and for what it does not say. For example, it views itself as "the government's agent" and sees itself as a peacemaker:

"We undertake, at the behest of the government, the research and development of systems, in our field of expertise, needed to maintain the nation in an advantageous position vis-a-vis any nation in the world. Technical superiority is a powerful deterrent to world strife, and by doing our share in establishment of national technical superiority we help discourage the aspirations of potential aggressors and thus make it easier to keep the peace, uneasy though it may be from time to time."

In other words, Draper helps the "Defense" Department wage peace by preparing for war, including most especially instrumentation which will make it possible for the United States to launch the first strike in a nuclear war and knock our enemy missiles in their silos before they can be launched. The Soviets will, of course, develop some system to counter this. We depend on mutually assured destruction (M.A.D.) to assure the peace, hoping all the while that some flock of geese won't be mistaken for hostile missiles. Does anyone doubt that the continued buildup of nuclear arms and their spiraling proliferation throughout the world will lead inevitably to a war that will destroy life on earth as we know it? Nobody can "win" a nuclear war.

In all the pages of the Draper Laboratory annual report with its descriptions of sophisticated weaponry designed to kill people, we searched in vain for mention of "death", until the last page:

"According to ancient legend, some 3000 years ago the great inventor Daedalus fashioned wings for himself and his son Icarus out of feathers and wax, as a means of escaping incarceration on Crete. In spite of Daedalus' warning, Icarus flew too close to the sun, the wax melted, the feathers came off and he fell to his death in the sea. This was the first entry in a category of accidents called Pilot Error, the great catch-all and historic shrug-off of air operations ever since."

The ancients well understood that Icarus flew too close to the sun and died because he was filled with overweening pride and arrogance. Let those who do the work of Draper with confidence, as well as all of us, reflect deeply upon our direction. Pilot Error will be irreversible and fatal.

Perhaps the imminent destruction of the world will force us to think more clearly before it is too late and to consider anew the ancient teachings:

"Whoever can reconcile this, 'Resist not evil', with 'Resist violence by force'; again, 'Give also thy other cheek', with 'Strike again; also, 'Love thine enemies', with 'Spoil them, make a prey of them, pursue them with fire and the sword.'...whoever can find a means to reconcile these things may be supposed also to have found a way to reconcile God with the Devil, Light with Darkness, and good with evil. But if this be impossible, as indeed it is impossible, so will the other be impossible, and (people) do but deceive both themselves and others, while they boldly adventure to establish such absurd and impossible things."

Robert Barclay, 1678

There is still time for us to heed the words of one who gave his life for peace: "Love one another." There is no way we can love one another by killing, or by preparing to kill, others. Peace begins within each of us, extends to loving relations with each other, and calls us to resist the life-defeating powers and principalities of the nation and the world.

We invite you to respond.

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