

IS THERE A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF  
NUCLEAR WEAPONRY?

By

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We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness--That to secure these rights Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,--That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter it or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Although these words constitute a fitting foundation for our government, and have given us a tremendous heritage as Americans, their loftiness and relativity have also allowed serious debates to erupt concerning how best to put them into practice. In the past, these debates have brought brother against brother in combat, and have sought to destroy the unity that these words were meant to promote. Today, we are involved in another such debate over the prudence and value of nuclear weaponry to defend that Life, Liberty, Safety, and Happiness. And like those debates of the past, this argument also pits brother against brother, husband against wife, and American against American.

This debate would remain a valuable exercise in Democracy, and in the internal strengths of our country, if it weren't for those who are trying to bring this discussion out of the realm of Politics, into the moral and even religious arena. These zealous proponents or opponents of nuclear weaponry are burdening the consciences of many Americans by telling them that Christians must be of this opinion in regard to nuclear weapons, while still others tell them Christians must be of the other opinion. It is our purpose in this paper, to examine the issue of nuclear weapons to determine whether it should remain a political debate; or whether there is a Christian view of nuclear weapons.

In the minds of many religious leaders, there is no question whether this is a religious or a political issue. 29 Roman Catholic Bishops gathered a statement in October 1981 to state:

As members of the Catholic community in the United States of America we are impelled by our faith vision and our mounting concern over the increased probability of nuclear war to speak our conscience  
...3... The concept of limited 'nuclear war' is  
folly. The possession of nuclear weapons is  
immoral."<sup>2</sup>

The World Council of Churches at its New Delhi Assembly in 1961 said:

Christians must also maintain that the use of nuclear weapons, or other forms of major violence, against centers of population is in no circumstances reconcilable with the demands of the Christian Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

And many other Churches have responded to this idea. The United Church of Christ, in its "Network" wrote that, "The development and use of nuclear and biochemical weapons, be recognized as completely contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ." The Reformed Church in America also had this to say about the issue:

God is the ultimate subject of theological reflection. The nuclear arms race may well be regarded as the penultimate subject of our time. There is no greater affront to the Lord and Giver of life, no more convincing evidence of human enslavement to the dark powers of this age, and no more urgent cause for the church's prophetic witness and action...The nuclear arms race is first and foremost a false religion. It is, to be sure, also bad politics, bad economics, bad science, and bad war. It can and should be opposed on all these fronts." 5

Even on the other side of the issue, there are those who argue that the nuclear arms race is a religious issue since the survival of our Christian nation depends on them. They propose that we must protect ourselves and the Gospel from atheistic communism with whatever means are necessary. In this case, we must meet nuclear weapons with an equal or greater nuclear deterrent. For, according to this kind of theology, when the Christ returns, our Christian country will be the launching point of his rule here on earth. Thus nuclear armament is our Christian duty to deter the Godless horde, and to preserve freedom to preach the Gospel of Christ.

In the Christian Community, however, there is an alternate view of nuclear weaponry, and the two views listed above. This view states that nuclear weapons, its value or insanity, is the concern of the body politic, and therefore is outside the realm of religious debate. The proponents of this view remind us that the purpose and mission of the Church is to preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:19,20), and not to be rulers over the governments of the world. Jung, in her review of a debate between Kaufman and Hauerwas, entitled "Nuclear Eschatology", writes, "The task of religion is to enrich and guide politics rather than to lead." 6 In a more direct approach, and with possibly more force, members of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod have outlined their position in the following manner:

God's Word does not offer the final word on the nuclear arms issue. That issue is one for governments to decide, not the church. Thank God that in our country we are free to hold differing views of the question, and that we can try to influence our legislators and our president to see things as we do. But as Christians we are not free to bind the consciences of other people on matters on which God has not spoken decisively.

Erasmus Seminary Professor

Joel C. Gerlach, Mission Counselor

The church should mind its own business of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. Christ's kingdom is "not of this world." His messages to the churches were conspicuously free of any directives to become involved with the military, civil, or economic affairs of the state, or even with its regulation of public morality...Nor should we forget that politics is a game two can play. The church that involves itself in the affairs of the state is likely to find that the state will return the favor and involve itself in the affairs of the church. The Christian church should mind its own business.

Professor Carleton Toppe,  
President, Northwestern College

A similar view is also held by many politicians, who regard the subjugation of the government to the whims and wishes of the church as a violation of the separation of Church and State. Former president, Gerald Ford responded this way in an interview in Brainerd, Minnesota on this topic:

I'm against organized religion getting involved with organized government and I'm against organized government getting involved in organized religion. The two should remain separate.

The question of nuclear weaponry, and whether it is a matter of Christian discussion, is perhaps best understood under three concepts, and how the church individually and collectively responds to them. They are: The Mission of the Church, The Separation of Church and State, and The Just War Theory. In the remainder of this paper we will take a cursory look at these principles and how they apply to the question of whether there is a Christian view of nuclear weaponry.

### THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

In Matthew 28:19,20, Christ gives us the primary purpose and mission of the church, and that is to preach the Gospel, making disciples of the whole world, teaching them to observe everything that He has commanded us. An important factor to remember in the discussion of Nuclear armaments, for or against, is that nowhere in the Holy Scriptures are they mentioned or even alluded to. Our discussion of them must summarily be an application of divine principles to the world around us, and not inventions or opinions of our own. The importance of this principle is illustrated by Pieper, in his Christian Dogmatics:

Holy Scripture makes the absolute demand that the doctrine taught in the Church be DOCTRINA DIVINA. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are full of warnings against those teachers who will not confine themselves to teaching God's Word, but feel free to proclaim their own thoughts. Read the solemn words of Jeremiah 23:16 (Parallel Jer. 14:14; 27:14-16; Lam. 2:14;

Testament proscribes the teaching of human thoughts and opinions and enjoins all teachers to speak out of the mouth of the Lord. Whoever opens his mouth to teach in the Church, which is the "house of God" (I Tim. 3:15), should speak God's Word, LOGIA THEOU (I Pet. 4:11)<sup>10</sup>

Pieper then weaves two parallel statements from Martin Luther to further demonstrate the point that only what God says directly can we teach as the ultimate Word of God:

Otheologians, how are you going to escape here? Do you consider it a trifling matter when the Supreme Majesty forbids whatever does not proceed out of the mouth of the Lord and is something else than God's Word? (St.L. XIX:821)

In "the government of the world and the home" human opinions and the word of man are in place, for this territory is ruled by the "natural light," that is, by human reason. But teaching in the Church is a different matter: "If any man would preach, let him suppress his own words. ... Here in the Church he must utter nothing by the words of the rich head of the family; otherwise it is not the true Church. therefore it must be thus: God is speaking." (St.L. XII: 1413.)<sup>11</sup>

The reason that I am stressing so much the principle that we, as ministers of the Church must preach everything that God teaches, and only that is not only because that is what God tells us to do; but because that stands in direct contrast to some of the pastoral theology philosophies that are abundant today. Many churches and theologians, in trying to bring God's Word and intent to His people, have overstepped their bounds and made dogmatical statements where God doesn't. Take for example this quotation from Bishop Roger Mahoney's statement from December 30, 1981:

It is even more important to recall that the moral reasoning involved in classic just-war theory led the Bishops at the Second Vatican Council to declare that a form of nuclear pacifism is a weighty and unexceptional obligation of Christians. This means that ANY USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS, AND BY IMPLICATION, ANY INTENTION TO USE THEM, IS ALWAYS MORALLY--AND GRAVELY--A SERIOUS EVIL. (sic) No Catholic can ever support or cooperate with the planning or executing of policies to use, or which by implication intend to use nuclear weapons, even in a defensive posture, let alone in a "first strike" against another nation.<sup>12</sup>

Bishop Mahoney has taken an application of a tenuous Just-War Theory and not only applied that to the nuclear arms race, but then concluded that because they, "Involve indiscriminate and massive violence committed against civilian populations, their employment or contemplated use can never be morally permitted."<sup>3</sup> He thus seals the decision for countless Catholics, not to mention other Christians by denying the possibility of Nuclear weaponry or its use. The question is raised, where is his basis for making such an EX CATHEDRA, ANATHEM SIT (If anyone doesn't agree) statement?

In almost every case of the opponents of nuclear armament, their justification for the NO NUKE stance is taken from application of Christ's principles of:

PEACE MAKING: Ps 37:37, 85:8, 120:7, Pr 12:20, Is 2:4, Joel 4:10, Mt 5:3-12, Rm 12:17-21, et al.

LOVE OF ENEMIES: Mt 5:43-48, Lk 6:20-36, et al.

CROSS BEARING: Mt 10:38, 16:24-27, Gal 6:12 (in principle)

There are other justifications, but these represent the most tenable "Christian" principles. The confusion here is the intermingling of the mission of the church, with the attitude of the individual Christian for the promotion of the Gospel. In other words, the mission of the Church is to spread the Gospel. The individual Christian in his attempt to be a part of that work of the Gospel, lives his life in such a way that he does not detract from that message, i.e., as a peace-maker, in loving his enemies, and bearing the crosses of being a Christian. There is nothing that hinders the individual Christian from living a life of peace, being terrified over the prospect of war, even nuclear war, nor suffering death rather than doing his neighbor harm; but that is not his message as part of the Church. His message is the saving Grace in his redeemer Jesus Christ; and his mission is to bring that message to the world.

#### THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

The confusion over the mission of the church, is nothing to be compared with the encroachment of the clergy on the responsibilities and concerns of the government. In his word, Christ tells us that we are responsible to the civil authorities, as they are ordained of God, bearing the sword, to "bring punishment on the wrongdoer." Christ, through St. Paul, summarizes this point, "Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience." Notice that He does not say that the authorities are subject to us, Christians; but we are subject to them. This has been the historical interpretation of passages such as these; yet from time to time, there have been those theologians who have tried to reverse this order. In summarizing the importance for the nuclear freeze movement of the involvement of the clergy, "Newsweek" quotes Erik Johnson, of Peace Lutheran Church in Dearborn, Michigan. He said, "Our technology now has developed to the point of massive destruction of the world as we know it, and that is certainly a matter of faith...If anything, I'm not political enough." Pastor Johnson is an example of the growing number of clergy who feel responsibilities over not only the "mysteries of God" but also as watchmen of the mysteries of society. Bishop Roger Mahoney, again states his case:

As an American Bishop, I deeply respect our nation tradition of the separation of Church and State. I would deplore, however, any attempt to turn this legitimate separation into a separation of Church from society or into a privatization of religion that would divorce our faith and hope from public concerns and crucial moral questions that face us all as citizens...We must all decide what constitutes the true relationship between religious faith and social justice, and

I would deplore any attempt by politicians and government officials to claim for themselves some special competence to define this relationship.<sup>14</sup>

What Bishop Mahoney is really saying is that he reserves the right to determine how far his ecclesiastical weight goes in respect to social concerns. That is approximately the same view held by many of the clergy today. Yet, this is not a new concept in Christianity, but has been maintained by Papists and followers of Zwingli's philosophy of theocracy. However, this has never been a doctrine of the Lutheran Church, as Pieper relates, "The Lutheran Church, so far as it remains true to its principles, teaches no social activity aiming at the establishment of a theocracy by demanding, for instance, that the State embody the Christian religion in its Constitution and attend to its enforcement. On the contrary,<sup>15</sup> the Lutheran Church warns against the mingling of Church and state." The Lutheran Confessions also support this view:

Let it (the Church) not break into the office of another, let it not transfer the kingdoms of this world; let it not abrogate the laws of civil rulers; let it not abolish lawful obedience; let it not interfere with judgments concerning civil ordinances or contracts; let it not prescribe laws to civil rulers concerning the form of the Commonwealth...For civil government deals with other things than does the Gospel. The civil rulers defend not minds, but bodies and bodily things against manifest injuries, and restrain men with the sword and bodily punishments in order to preserve civil justice and peace. 16

President Toppe, gives us some common sense reasons for the separation of Church and State, when he says, "When church bodies make world peace more important than eternal peace, they will become more and more remiss in carrying out their God given commission to proclaim the gospel. Pursuit of the kingdom of God on earth draws away support and manpower and funds from the Church's gospel mission."<sup>17</sup>

This infatuation of the clergy with civil and social issues has brought the nuclear arms question into the religious world. It would be easy to suppose that all those clergy who are thus concerned, are so because they are overly concerned with the social gospel, and have forgotten the preaching of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. But such is not necessarily the case. Many of them are sincerely concerned with not only the spiritual status of mankind, but also of its physical well-being. As their philosophy echoes that they must deal with the whole man; they seek to apply that principle to the ideal of wiping out nuclear weaponry and the holocaust that they are sure it will bring. Thus, these "men of God" apply that which has been a development of Christianity to defend the innocent and non-belligerent from undue destruction, the Just War Theory.



## THE JUST WAR THEORY

According to Thomas Shannon, in his book What are They Saying About Peace and War?, the Just War Theory developed in Christianity from St. Ambrose, with his idea of "living unharmed in a time of peace" through St. Augustine, to St. Thomas Aquinas. From these men, we received the three principles that determined whether a war could be considered just, and thereby entered in by a Christian without pangs of conscience:

1. The one who wages the war must have the authority to do so.
2. The war must be waged for defensive purposes, e.g. to right some wrong.
3. The desired end must be for a good purpose. 18

By the end of the thirteenth century, it seems that all the bases for the establishment of a sound Just War Theory had not only been laid, but solidified. The purpose for a Just War Theory was twofold. First, it was enacted as a way to justify Christian participation in a civil action (It would seek to preserve the peace in which the church could do its work); and secondly, it was thought of as a way of bringing some kind of morality into a normally immoral situation. By the time of Luther, this idea was so entrenched, that the Lutheran Fathers had no serious question about it, as evidenced from this selection:

It is taught among us that all government in the world and all established rule and laws were instituted and ordained by God for the sake of good order, and that Christians may without sin occupy civil offices or serve as princes and judges, render decisions and pass sentence according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evildoers with the sword, engage in just wars, serve as soldiers, buy and sell, take required oaths, possess property, be married etc. 219

The Just War Theory has developed during the subsequent years to the point where there are now seven questions which Christians are supposed to ask themselves about the "righteousness" of any given war. "1. Is a particular war being waged under legitimate authority? 2. Is the war being waged for a moral purpose? 3. Is force being employed without excessive violence? 4. Will conditions after the war be better than if no war had been waged? 5. Have all other means of solving the issue been exhausted? 6. Will selective immunity be employed to avoid wholesale slaughter? 7. Will the war lead to a restoration of moral order?" 20 Along with that development of the Just War Theory, evolved two possible reasons for its demise. First, there was the growing concern that the destruction levied by even a "limited" nuclear war would lead to a violation of at least points 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. Secondly, there was the question whether anyone might legislate how a war might be run. As John Wayne put it in the movie, "The Horse Soldiers", War isn't exactly a civil business."

Proponents of casting the Just-War Theory aside include Archbishop Hunthausen from Seattle, who advises, "A lot of this goes back to the just war theory. We have to abandon that...The church has got to indicate that the principles that govern the just war are shattered, and that there is no way we can accommodate ourselves to that, given the weapons of destruction now available to us." 21 Also included in

that group of theologians who wish to update our thinking on just wars, is LCA Bishop James Crumley, Jr., who says, "Martin Luther is frequently quoted for his beliefs that on some occasions wars can be just. We can no longer talk about just wars." Their thinking is that the total devastation levelled by a nuclear detonation could never be justified by any Christian or moral reasons. Those ends could never be justified by the means. Along with the discussion of the possible scenario of a nuclear war, comes the increasing tone of humanistic eschatology; or in other words, that mankind controls his own destiny, and with nuclear weapons, we very well just might end the world. Gordon Kaufman, in his address to the American Academy of Religion, tells us this:

The novelty of the (nuclear) situation resides in the fact that the end of history can no longer be viewed as "GOD'S climactic act"; rather it is "the possibility that we humans, by ourselves, will utterly destroy not only ourselves, but our specie, all future generations, thus bringing the entire human project...to an abrupt and final halt." 23

His reviewer, L. Shannon Jung, adds this thought:

The traditional Christian alternatives are either that the ultimate catastrophe is God's will and God's doing, or that God would never allow the catastrophe to occur. Neither of these, though they retain the sovereignty of God, takes cognizance of what is central to the new situation: that human beings will be fully responsible if the catastrophe occurs." 24

What we are seeing, in the move away from the Just War Theory, is the loss of hope and comfort in the sovereignty of God; and increasingly a reliance on humanism. God no longer will destroy this earth, as he did at Noah's time, (Mt 24:29-39) but man, at least according to many of the new theologians, will destroy himself with nuclear weapons. Thus to put this destruction off, so that perhaps God will regain his sovereignty, they preach NO NUKES. It is a dangerous mix of humanism, hopelessness, and gloom. We should be very careful about who we align ourselves with.

#### SUMMARY

In these few pages I have attempted to summarize what is an on-going debate in the religious and scientific world. The question of whether there is a Christian view of nuclear weapons is an important one even if it is only so that those disguising themselves to be God's shepherds do not take our freedom away from us, and turn us from our true mission on earth, and that is preaching the Gospel of Christ. Yes, there is a Christian view of nuclear weapons, but it is only there because the Christian wears two hats, one as a Christian, and the other as a citizen of this world. I like the way that Stanley Hauerwas puts it when he says, "Christians, have their hope in the heavenly city. Nevertheless, the relative status of humanity is an issue that cannot be avoided." 25. Because we live in this world until the time that Christ takes us home again, social and political issues will always confront us as Christians, and also as American citizens.

Let us hope and pray that in our mission of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to this world, He might lead our consciences to determine what avenues are best for us as citizens to follow.

END NOTES

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2. Heyer, R. Nuclear Disarmament, p.182
3. IBID, Pp. 194,5
4. IBID, Pp.268,9
5. IBID, p.266.
6. Jung, L. "Theology Today", vol.40, N.2, July '83, p.189.
7. Gerlach, J. "NWL", vol.69, N.11, June 1, '82, p.169.
8. Toppe, C. "NWL", Vol.71, N.8, April 15, '84, p.116.
9. WTCN, Channel 11 News, May 10, '84, 6:00pm.
10. Pieper, A. Christian Dogmatics, Vol I, Pp.54,5
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12. Heyer, R. p. 193.
13. IBID.
14. IBID, p. 209.
15. Pieper, A. III, p.179
16. Concordia Triglotta, 85, XXVIII, 13,14.
16. Toppe, C. p.116
18. Shannon, T. What are they saying about peace and war, Pp. 12-
19. Trig. 51, XVI, 2.
20. Gerlach, p.169
21. IBID, p. 168.
22. IBID.
23. Jung, L. p. 184.
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