

A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO NUCLEAR WAR

In 1958 the World Council of Churches published its widely-noted "Provisional Study Document" entitled *Christians and the Prevention of War in an Atomic Age*. In response to the World Council's request for comments on this document, a large committee of theological professors was assembled to collaborate on proposals for its revision. These proposals form the basis of the present statement, which has been prepared and published by The Church Peace Mission in order to "make generally available for study a document embodying essentially the same ideas as the [original] paper." Among those who have endorsed *A Christian Approach to Nuclear War* are George A. Buttrick of Harvard University; Herbert Gezork and Norman K. Gottwald of Andover-Newton Theological Seminary; Walter G. Muelder, Paul Deats, Jr., and I. Harold De Wolf of Boston University School of Theology; Arthur C. Cochrane of the Theological Seminary of Dubuque University; John K. Hick, Otto A. Piper and D. Campbell Wyckoff of Princeton Theological Seminary. Inquiries should be directed to the offices of The Church Peace Mission, Room 249, Interchurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive, New York 27, New York.

There is no parallel between the wars of the past and the impending cataclysm brought on by nuclear war. This is evidenced in the contamination of the earth and its atmosphere, the entirely practical destruction of civilization, the genetic distortion of the race, and the possible extinction of human life and of earth's life-sustaining resources. It is clear that no beneficial results could follow from the employment of such brute force. In Christian terms this means that atomic war so offends against the doctrine of creation that a Christian rationale for war is no longer tenable.

There is no meaningful way in which one can speak of a "just war" fought with atomic arms.

Since no theoretical limits can be placed upon the invoking of destructive atomic power, those who employ or plan to employ such power come dangerously close to usurping the sole prerogative of the Creator, even to the point of upsetting the balances of nature which make human life possible.

In our day this usurpation of divine power is undertaken by competing and contradictory national wills, each claiming that it sees the real or ultimate good of the world and has the right to use whatever force is necessary to secure its ends. They take it upon themselves to make this decision not only on behalf of their own nationals but on behalf of non-combatant peoples, multitudes of whom will certainly perish in a nuclear war, if indeed there are any survivors at all. Even if one or both combatants invoke God and deliberately risk their life in the expectation that a better life will result for those who

may survive, this does not alter the fact that each in its own way lays claim to ultimate if not divine right over all mankind. Thus the Creator of the world is replaced by tribal gods which are personifications of the national interest.

Moreover, the enormous investments of material and human resources necessary for modern armaments constitute a violation of man's obligation to be a good steward of the created world over which he has been given control. He betrays his role as creature in dissipating his best gifts in preparation for the destruction of the very conditions that make his creaturely life possible and in diverting his God-given powers from developing the creative uses of new discoveries which the Creator has now opened before mankind.

Love is the distinctly Christian way of dealing with evil-doers and overcoming injustice and violence. This love must embrace enemy as well as friend, the attacker as well as his victim. We are bidden to be "not overcome of evil but to overcome evil with good." In so far, therefore, as resort to force can be justified on Christian grounds, it must aim to restrain evil and redeem the evil-doer rather than destroy him. In relations between nations the great majority of Christians throughout history have held that under certain conditions war might be justified, if not on distinctively Christian grounds, as a tragic necessity in a sinful world. But such tolerance cannot possibly extend to the indiscriminate and unlimited use of force which nuclear war among modern powers entails. Nor can traditional Christian doctrine re-

garding the providential role of government or the state be used to justify the pretension to absolute sovereignty of the nuclear armed powers of our time. This tradition points rather to the need of surrender of some measure of sovereignty by modern nations and the establishment of international law by consent backed by discriminate use of police force under the direction of the United Nations or some form of world government.

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Christians who take the stand, as an increasing number do, that the use of nuclear weapons in an all-out or general war is forbidden as irreconcilable with Christian faith and the precepts of the Gospel, cannot consistently support the manufacturing and stockpiling of nuclear weapons for purposes of "deterrence." Weapons which may be intended to deter also create suspicion and fear, and therefore inevitably provoke. Moreover, the continuance of the arms race daily heightens the risk that through accident or otherwise the precarious "balance of terror" will collapse into war. Those who advance the formula that we should have weapons which we may under no circumstances use cannot entertain a reasonable hope that the determination to use is in their control, or even in the control of the central civil and military agencies of their government, since the decision may actually be made by a bomber pilot, a submarine commander or other subaltern or may actually be the result of a defect in a calculating machine. This approach amounts, therefore, to advocating a misleading gesture. It also leaves the way open for the acquisition of nuclear capability by more nations.

The position that the use of a nation's stockpile is forbidden to Christians and that they must seek to persuade the nation not to commit this heinous crime is certainly sterile and misleading unless Christians and citizens generally are taught this truth in advance and are somehow trained to make the right moral decision at the very moment of ultimate crises when "deterrence" has failed. But if the adversary is virtually assured, as would be the case if this course were followed, that nuclear weapons would never be used against him, such weapons lose their deterrent efficacy. The political decision to use nuclear weapons is therefore implicit in the fact of having them. If the threat of use, i. e., of massive retaliation, is actually removed, there is no point in the possession of nuclear arms.

Beyond all this is the specifically moral dilemma or Christians who oppose use but not possession of atomic weapons. For if foreign policy is not based

on pure bluff, the nation which stockpiles weapons, i. e., uses massive retaliation as a threat, and Christians who condone or justify this policy are now morally committed to massive retaliation. The fact that by some chance they may not be drawn into actual nuclear war, does not affect the moral position. They are involved in the hopeless contradiction of saying that they will under certain circumstances use the diabolical weapons which they must not use because God forbids it! It is an impossible position from which Christians and the Christian churches must extricate themselves.

Save perhaps in a peripheral situation in no way involving any of the great powers, limited war in the nuclear age cannot be equated with wars of the past. Resort to the concept of limited war and emphasis on conventional or "tactical" atomic weapons does not, therefore, provide an escape from the problems which nuclear war poses for the Christian conscience. The limited war proposals advanced by the military and the theoreticians of the power politics school assume that nuclear weapons are retained for deterrent purposes, not abolished. Consequently the basic moral problem presented by the use or threat to use these diabolical weapons remains. The hope that in practice better equipment for conventional war would stave off the need to resort to atomic weapons is extremely precarious. As Hanson Baldwin points out, "the first requirement for keeping a limited war limited is, ironically, the capability of extending it." The threat of nuclear retaliation is at least implicit under the concept of limited war as before. In the absence of the advance decision, discipline and training already referred to, nuclear weapons would be used if impending loss of a limited war seemed to jeopardize a nation's global power position. The latter is the real stake in the East-West conflict. The idea that big powers today would completely abandon their nuclear arsenals but plan to be prepared only for the kind of limited wars known in the past is thoroughly utopian. Societies do not deliberately wage wars on a lower technological level than that on which they operate in other fields. As is generally recognized, therefore, by national leaders and competent analysts of world problems, consideration of conventional and nuclear weapons cannot be separated if a serious effort to achieve disarmament is in question. To remove the threat of nuclear war nations must find a way to get rid of war.

Christian leaders have been deeply concerned as the nations have fought two World Wars in a generation, only to be plunged into the era of nuclear war—war, geared not so much to the influencing of

history as to its mad and meaningless conclusion, in a blasphemy against the Creator Himself. For the most part, however, they have sought to pull mankind back from the brink by infusing the politics of the nations with some measure of Christian humility, restraint, concern for others, and confidence in such constructive measures of good will as could be coupled with large-scale nuclear arms programs. It is now evident that such measures are totally inadequate to the climactic need of the present hour.

We must go back to the basic certainties of the Christian faith and the stern and revolutionary demands of the Gospel and see whether they can furnish us a new insight into the human predicament, new ways of dealing with the problems of our age, and power greater than our own to help us translate into reality the ancient prophetic dream of peoples who learn to walk in the way of the Lord.

The Christian has a mandate to regard his discipleship as relevant to his role as a political being. The Christian ethic is certainly incumbent on men in political relationships and institutions fully as much as in their personal relationships. Admittedly, the way of discipleship is not possible for nations in the way open for individuals. Apart from Jesus Christ no person or group has ever fully lived out the task of the Servant; but the commission of the Servant is addressed to nations as well as individuals, and more emphatically and urgently now than ever before.

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Reconciliation in every age entails the Cross and means surrender of pride and readiness to accept sacrifice, for nations as well as individuals.

From the Christian perspective forces inimical to righteousness and freedom have to be met with counter forces, that is to say, with justice, steadfast love and sacrifice. Sacrifice means willingness to persevere in doing right and seeking to establish it by means of love and against the disapproval or opposition of others, if necessary to the point of death. The preservation of physical life and the survival of particular political forms is not the supreme end of human life, and men organized in political institutions have no reason to believe that they are exempt from the obligation of sacrifice.

Accordingly, it is a specious notion that willingness to fight an atomic war in the defense of freedom is a form of Christian sacrifice. Atomic warfare is meaningless and futile. It cannot be justified by the resolve, "Give me liberty or give me death," since it holds no promise that many may live in

freedom because some have voluntarily sacrificed their lives; but means the end of freedom in mass annihilation and suicide. Such conceptions cannot be equated with the sacrifice of Christ which was a disciplined self-giving that refused to injure any other human being and had in mind the building up rather than the annihilation and distortion of life.

The Atonement teaches us both the heinousness, the subtlety and the power of sin, and on the other hand, the possibility of overcoming sin in union with Christ. We must therefore shun every tendency to blame our sorry performance as Christians on a presumed incapacity to do otherwise, lest we mock the Incarnation, deny the Atonement, and flout the ethical mandates of the New Testament. We are not so free of sin as we are likely to think in our self-congratulatory moments; but we could become much freer of it than we usually admit in our moments of self-defense. This is true of nations as well as individuals.

At various points, the Bible suggests that God may not will that the human race continue indefinitely within the structure of history as we know it. But there is certainly no Scriptural mandate for man to precipitate the end of history.

Continuance of the present policy of major nations in ringing large sections of the world with atomic armed planes and missiles is itself an implicit usurpation of God's right to end creation. It assumes that man, acting in the limited interests of one nation or coalition of nations, has the wisdom to apply unlimited power in the pursuit of his ends, whether defined as justice or self-defense.

Christians see no resemblance between the end promised in the Scriptures as the fruition of God's purpose and the end that might be precipitated by the rash acts of man in defiance of the norm of love revealed in Christ. Men and nations may usurp God's exercise of power but Christians cannot join them in such rebellion against God.

Christians cannot be positive that abandonment of primary reliance upon atomic arms will avoid a holocaust or bring righteousness and peace among nations. The true basis of Christian trust in reconciliation is its consistency with the nature of Christian hope. Christian hope is sturdy when linked with acts of faith that grow out of unreserved commitment to the standards and demands of Biblical teaching. In the final resort Christian ethics requires that all moral calculation be made instrumental to obedient faith, never opposed to it or substituted for it.

We are undeterred by the suggestion that this hope and the acts of faith derived from it are "ideal-

istic" and "utopian." They may be such in the sense that men at large have not responded to them, but we reject any contention that such hope and faith are inept substitutes for nuclear armed might. Reliance upon such might is certainly not advancing either security or reconciliation among nations but tends even more dangerously toward war through accident or fear. Our hope is born of faith in God and the knowledge that Christ is the Lord of History. In this hope and faith, men facing their political responsibilities will discover new courage to refrain from futile and pathetic trust in violence or the threat of violence to maintain or extend the national or universal interest.

It is immediately objected that nations which cease relying on unlimited use of force will incur the risk of enslavement and individual physical and mental suffering which might be imposed by a conqueror. An ordeal of this sort could not be as acute and meaningless a form of suffering as that bound to occur in an eruption of atomic warfare. This is not simply because some life is better than no life. It is not bare survival that ultimately matters for the Christian who does not fear death. What matters is that the survival of life under tyranny could be creative, being deliberately chosen in consonance with Christian faith and hope. The risk of enslavement at the hands of another nation is not so fearful a thing as the risk of effacing the image of God in man through wholesale adoption of satanic means to defend national existence or even truth. What would be the substance of "freedom," "truth," "love," after we had used atomic weapons in a general war?

On the other hand, we dare not underestimate the positive effect that a policy of reconciliation might have upon hostile nations. We do not predicate our reliance upon love on the assumption that it will automatically elicit love from other nations, but Christians in our day tend to place too low an estimate upon the power of redemptive love practiced by nations, not because they have conclusively studied human nature and political institutions and potentialities, but because they have been saturated with political and military doctrines which engender cynicism and rob them of the courage to invoke those deeper realities that cry aloud for opportunity to work in men and nations today.

Were a nation in response to a prophetic Christian summons to abandon its reliance on nuclear weapons and massive retaliation and base its policy toward other peoples on resolute good will and massive reconciliation, the results might not be as great and swift as we imagine in our most sanguine moments, but there would doubtless be more signs that

policies consonant with Christian faith are "practical" than our cynicism and disbelief presently encourage us to expect.

• There is no effort here to present a complete outline of a national policy consonant with the convictions expressed above. Formulation of such a program must in fact depend chiefly upon the labors of large numbers of individual Christians and of church bodies who come to share these convictions. Here, however, are several concrete proposals which we are prepared to endorse:

1. Christians should advocate that our government commit itself immediately to the most serious and unremitting effort to achieve controlled multilateral disarmament among nations. The actual dismantling of military establishments and demobilization of armed forces necessarily require considerable time but it is unlikely that there will even be any significant reduction of armed forces unless there is a clear decision that total and general disarmament down to police level is the basis of policy and that security is henceforth to be sought in international agencies and not military establishments.

2. As Christians we affirm that we cannot under any circumstances sanction the use of nuclear and other mass-destruction weapons, nor can we sanction using the threat of massive retaliation by these weapons for so-called deterrence. We accept the responsibility of bearing witness clearly and persistently to these convictions among our fellow-Christians, especially among Christian youth, and also among our fellow-citizens generally.

3. We plead with the leaders of our government not to persist in piling up nuclear arms even if other nations are not prepared to agree to the same course, but to formulate and call on our people to support a program of unilateral withdrawal from the nuclear arms race. In the absence of agreement to disarm, and faced with increasing danger that a nuclear holocaust may be accidentally precipitated as more nations take steps to equip themselves with nuclear weapons rendering agreement still more precarious, such decisive unilateral action may be the only way to break the terrible circle of armament and counterarmament in which the world is trapped. As an initial step we advocate that the U. S. cease the testing and further production of atomic weapons, and of chemical, biological and radiological weapons.

4. We advocate serious negotiations for disengagement of troops and military installations from various areas, such as Middle and Eastern Europe, the

Middle East and Far East, followed by neutralization of these areas as was done in the case of Austria, the problem of guarantees against aggression being placed in the hands of the UN.

5. We urge that the U. S. extricate itself from military alliances with imperialist and reactionary regimes which are of dubious value even in a military sense, and instead adopt political, economic and cultural policies which will make her the symbol to the peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and even of Communist lands, of their hopes for freedom, equality, and deliverance from the ancient curse of abject poverty.

6. We urge upon our fellow-Christians and upon governmental agencies and educational leaders serious study of the possibilities of nonviolent resistance to possible aggression and injustice.

7. We call upon the Christian Church to disabuse the American people of the notion widely held that Christian values can be defended and our Lord and his teaching somehow vindicated by the extermina-

tion of Communists. We plead with our fellow-Christians to help in carrying out our primary Christian task of winning adherents of Communism to Christ by the preaching of His Gospel and the daily practice of the ministry of reconciliation which He has entrusted to us.

God has not called us to be dragged like slaves in the wake of history plunging to its doom but to be the messengers and servants of Christ who is the Lord of history and the victor over the demonic forces in it.

It is with a deep sense of our own unworthiness, our little faith, our halting obedience that we send this message to the churches and to our fellow-Christians everywhere. But we believe that in response to faith, God will now, as in other times of man's sinning and despair, impart new light and power to His church and His people. The Church will then be a channel of grace and renewal for the world, and Christian citizenship will acquire a new meaning.

other voices

"A TIME OF SORROW AND RENEWAL"

The February issue of Encounter publishes the text of an address delivered by J. Robert Oppenheimer at the recent tenth anniversary conference of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Berlin. Excerpts follow.

Among all the changes of this [past] decade there are two to which I would address myself. One is brutal. Ten years ago my country had barely lost, and still effectively had, a monopoly of the great new weapons, the atomic weapons; and for their use in combat our armed forces, and all others, had means of delivery not essentially different from those of the Second World War. Yet it was then generally held, and I believe correctly, that these armaments constituted for all of us a hideous argument against the outbreak of general war. Today there can be no talk of monopoly: we are deeply into the atomic age, in which many nations will be so armed.

Let me say only this: What some of us know, and some of our governments have recognized, all people should know and every great government understand: if this next great war occurs, none of us can count on having enough living to bury our dead.

This situation, quite new in human history, has

from time to time brought with it a certain grim and ironic community of interest, not only among friends, but between friends and enemies. This community has nothing to do with the injunction that we love our enemies, but is a political and human change not wholly without hopeful portent.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, that beautiful poem, the great Hindu scripture, is a sustained argument on the nature of human life and its meaning, introduced by Prince Arjuna's reluctance to engage in fratricidal combat, and by Vishnu's clarity that this combat was a simple and necessary duty, whose performance would preserve the way of Arjuna's salvation, and whose evils were of no deep meaning, either for him or for those whom he might kill. Can we be thus comforted?

Traditionally, the national governments have accepted as their first and highest duty the defense and security of their peoples. In today's world they are not very good at it. We all know that the steps which we have taken, alone or in concert, have at very best an uncertain, contingent, changing, and above all transitory effectiveness. This is one reason, important but perhaps not central, for a second change in this past decade. We have come to doubt the adequacy of our institutions to the world we