

## PANEL: NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND THE QUEST FOR DISARMAMENT

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE ARMS RACE

To defend oneself and one's fellow human beings against natural, human, or spiritual threats to human dignity and existence is a noble and necessary task of humankind. To seek peace, security, and to deter evil are not just physical but spiritual values which no person can justly abandon. Further, to demand that human beings regard each human person as sacred with inviolable rights which include survival, the right to conscience, economic and political justice, and the right to enjoy the fruits of creation is a humane imperative. In theory, at least—and sometimes in practice—no person, government, military officer, theologian, or bishop would disagree with the above assertions.

The great debate which characterizes our age, then, is essentially not over the above stated assertions. The debate lies not over our goals or ends but rather over the means to achieve these goals. The debate is characterized by practical as well as moral questions: Just how efficient is war in securing human justice? Is nonviolence a realistic strategy to defend the powerless against the armed strength of adversaries? Just what do nuclear weapons deter? Do they actually deter war and social evil or do they merely postpone the very war they seek to prevent? Is disarmament, whether unilateral or multilateral, an effective way to enhance security and to defend people against war? Or will disarmament so weaken people so as to make war inevitable? Finally, is the possession of nuclear weapons in itself moral or is the abandonment of those weapons the greater moral policy?

While it is the task of the social and physical sciences to answer the practical questions about the efficiency of nuclear weapons and nonviolence, it is the task of ethics and theology to answer the moral questions about the best way to achieve peace. While we can only adequately answer these great questions through a multidisciplinary analysis, it is important to realize the central role that ethics and theology must play in this debate. Life and death issues cannot be decided on the basis of pragmatic concerns alone, they must also be judged as moral or immoral or from the viewpoint of eternity. It is the purpose of this brief paper to restrict itself to theological concerns about war and peace and to attempt to insert the theological enterprise into the age old question about the best way to insure human survival.

What is the contribution of theology to this debate? I believe that a theology which results from a biblical understanding of the Reign of God can make substantive contributions to the ethical and even strategic debate on matters of war and peace. I shall now proceed briefly to discuss nine theological assertions which are derived from a biblical understanding of the Reign of God and then seek to interpret these assertions as they relate to the specific issue of nuclear weapons as a form of deterrence and defense. While this presentation will necessarily be brief and will avoid any "proof-text" use of Scripture or theology, it is, nevertheless, based on years of personal reflection and study of

theology and the arms race and on consultation done with numerous theological and ecclesial statements on the subject. These brief remarks are offered with the hope that they may contribute to the growing debate on the subject of Christian theology and war and peace. It is my conviction that a theology of the Reign of God has not yet substantively challenged the present debate and it is hoped that the following assertions will, at least, point us in that direction.

1. *God is the creator, sustainer, and judge of the universe and human history.* God is the author of all existence and life and it is God's will that all of creation conform to his design for the universe. It is God's will that people live in justice, harmony, and reconciliation. To place one's faith in humankind's designs for creation without measuring them against God's own wishes is a form of idolatry which is consistently condemned in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

2. *God has created humankind to act as stewards and co-creators of the divinely instituted universe.* It is not the role of humankind itself to chart a course for creation which is contrary to the divine will. Rather, the message of service and stewardship are central biblical themes and it is only through adopting these values that people can live in peace and harmony.

3. *The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures reveal a God who seeks to liberate humankind from personal and structural sin so that the Reign of God can be fully established throughout the universe.* Two of the great sins in the Scriptures are idolatry and injustice, and they are often mutually causative and inter-related. When people abandon obedience to God and start to worship themselves, their institutions, and nations they invariably act unjustly and the fruit of injustice is often war.

4. *The central hallmark of God's revelation and the test of faith in the Scriptures is the establishment of the reign of justice over the universe.* Justice in a biblical context is best understood as right relations between persons, communities, and God. Where these relationships are fractured, idolatry often results with its attendant violence and war. To labor for the harmony that must exist between persons, communities, nations, and God is, then, the essence of divine liberation and the singular hallmark of the Reign of God.

5. *According to the Divine plan, the fruit of justice is peace.* Peace invariably does not result from war or military preparations but rather from the works of justice. Where war does occur in the Hebrew Scriptures peace results not from the Hebrew people placing their faith in their weapons and armies but rather from their faith in God, their defender and protector.

6. *The way to establish justice with its attendant reward of peace is through placing one's faith exclusively in God's power and might.* Peace is a special gift of God alone which results from people engaging in the works of justice. Only through a combination of faith and works can peace reign in the universe. To isolate faith from works or to rely exclusively on only one cannot produce the peace to which humankind aspires and thus cannot result in the Reign of God.

7. *The special revelation of Jesus was that enemies could only be overcome through the process of conversion based on love.* Jesus reversed the "eye for an eye" ethic and demonstrated through his own suffering and death that salvation could not be achieved without taking the sins of others upon oneself in order to save them from their own sin. Nonviolence—the ethic of self-suf-

fering—is at the heart of the ministry of Jesus. Evil can only be overcome by acting justly and doing good to one's enemies—any other form of defense is doomed to failure.

8. *Since it is the insight of Jesus and Paul that we are not merely struggling against flesh and blood but rather against spiritual and demonic forms of wickedness, it follows logically that they call upon us to use spiritual—rather than physical—weapons to overcome enemies.* We are called to put on the whole armor of God in struggling with the demonic in human history. Only the spiritual weapons of truth, justice, peace, faith, salvation, and the Spirit can effectively defend people against their adversary (Ephesians 6). These weapons do not rely on military might to conquer foes but rather seek the conversion of enemies in order to produce the just reconciliation which must characterize the Reign of God.

9. *The proper way to defend oneself and others, then, is through the work of justice and reconciliation of enemies.* Christians are called not to kill or to plan to kill their enemies but rather to convert their enemies through self-suffering and the works of justice which alone can result in reconciliation. Biblical revelation and salvation tell us that both living faith in God and active works of justice are the basis of defense and deterrence to evil. In short, Christians are called upon to be "fools" especially in our century when so many regard it as "wise" or "realistic" to defend themselves through massive armies and sophisticated weapons systems which are designed to produce "peace" either through the threat to use, or the actual use of armaments which will result in the extermination of hundreds of millions of people.

I shall now conclude by relating the above assertions to the present debate on war and peace.

1. Christians are called to make peace through demonstrating faith in God as their defender and through the works of justice. Authentic Christian peacemaking and the establishment of the Reign of God over the universe can only be achieved through this program. Those Christians who serve in the military or support it in any way would engage in far better defense and deterrence by pursuing universal human rights and the reconciliation of adversaries.

2. To place one's faith in any physical weapon is to engage in a form of idolatry which can only result in furthering the cycle of violence. We reap as we sow, and to assume that physical weapons and their massive buildup will prevent war and secure peace is contrary both to the spirit of the Scriptures as well as to a host of empirical research.

3. The use of any physical weapon either to defend oneself, family, or nation cannot be reconciled with the theological assertions we have stated above. The only way physical weapons can ever be tolerated is as the lesser of two evils—but an evil nonetheless. There was a period in church history when knights were called upon to do penance for killing in battle for, even though they had fought in a just cause, the means itself was not considered to be just. Even Augustine stated that war must be fought with a "mournful" attitude. The military profession is thus an objective form of evil and the cause of civilization and the Reign of God will only be furthered if, even as some tolerate soldiers and weapons systems, we acknowledge that their existence is contrary to God's plan for the universe and Jesus' view that we can only properly overcome our enemies through good works.

4. Christians cannot in good conscience, therefore, support physical methods of defense or deterrence. If they do so, they must acknowledge that they are participating in evil even if the cause is just and it is the lesser evil. The policy of Mutually Assured Destruction has no basis in biblical theology and is clearly contrary to the spirit of the Gospel. Christians are called to pursue a policy of Mutually Assured Survival (MAS) and this can only properly be pursued by laboring for justice and reconciliation.

5. Nuclear weapons, in particular, are an intolerable evil and pose the most severe threat to the Reign of God in our millions of years of existence. Not only is it clearly contrary to God's plan to have his creatures annihilate one another, it is also contrary to God's plan to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on armies and weapons which deprive the poor in every nation of the necessities of life. God gave us this universe so that we might use its resources to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and give sight to the blind. To squander God's resources on anything but the works of justice and human rights is a profound form of idolatry and injustice which directly contradicts the Reign of God.

As is obvious from the above assertions, I do not believe that either the Just War principles or the Crusades are securely based on a biblical understanding of the Reign of God. When the Church departed from the pacific tradition in the fourth and fifth centuries it did so at considerable cost to the theology of peace which was emerging in early Christianity. What Augustine viewed as mournful, Urban II viewed as necessary and some contemporary Christians even accept genocidal weapons of mass destruction as essential to the survival of given-nation states. A return to a biblical understanding of the Reign of God is a necessary corrective to the ever escalating cycle of violence which Christianity gradually adapted itself to through the ages.

Christians must defend themselves and others against those who would kill not only their bodies but their souls as well; Christians must deter the demonic forces of evil which threaten humane existence; but Christians must do so in a manner which will eventually lead to reconciliation between adversarial parties. Only the spiritual weapons of justice and truth which we find in the prophetic Hebrew and Christian Scriptures will eventually produce reconciliation. The test of our age is whether we shall place our faith in these spiritual weapons or whether we shall continue to prepare physical weapons which will almost certainly lead first to the destruction of our souls and then to our bodies as well.

God's peace is not the world's peace but it is nevertheless a true peace—the only authentic peace.

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## THE THEOLOGIAN'S ROLE IN DISARMAMENT

### *The Problem*

One key question in contemporary moral discernment of the arms race is this: How concretely can the theologian of the Church dare to speak? What is