



The New Nuclear Threat: Engaging Youth to End the Danger Nuclear Weapons – Moral/Ethical Considerations

We have just heard a pretty horrifying picture of massive, irresponsible expenditures on an equally irresponsible weapons system. All of us -- the people and the governments of the world -- face an urgent and enormous challenge to deal with the threat from these weapons that grew from our own intelligence and that now hold us all hostage.

That nuclear weapons continue to threaten the human community and the earth herself with catastrophic possibilities is a breathtaking indictment of my/our generation's legacy to the future. Since the dawn of the nuclear age, Pax Christi International, the World Council of Churches, the International Peace Bureau and other communities of faith have repeatedly and consistently called for nuclear disarmament on moral and ethical grounds – thus far we have failed.

A little over a year ago, four distinguished leaders from across the political spectrum in the United States - George Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn – published a Wall Street Journal ad that caught global attention. The world, they said, is on the “precipice of a new and dangerous nuclear era with a dramatically increased potential for the actual use of these devastating weapons.” We all know this is real and the urgent ethical demands it places on all of us as members of the global community – cannot be overestimated.

Pax Christi UK expressed the convictions of our whole movement well when they called the possession and threatened use of such weapons “an affront to life and a gross misuse of power and status in a fragile world. Nuclear weapons have not and will not bring us security, rather the opposite: they are likely to cause animosity and resentment.” “Nuclear weapons and human security,” according to Senator Douglas Roche, “cannot co-exist.”

I was asked to say a few words tonight about the morality of nuclear weapons. That is not a difficult assignment. It is simply immoral for states and for non-state actors to use, to threaten with or even to possess nuclear weapons.

Churches and communities of faith have regularly and consistently implied this as they pleaded for complete nuclear disarmament. Pope Benedict XVI stated clearly “In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims.”

This deep conviction about the evil entailed in maintaining a nuclear arsenal is rooted in our belief

1. in the dignity of every human life
2. in the profound value of creation and
3. in the intrinsic interconnectedness of the two.

Ethical obligations and limits flow from these roots, including

- the obligation for governments to provide for genuine, inclusive human security – at a very minimum to ensure the survival of the human community and of the earth; thus follows, for example,
- a prohibition on the use of - or threats to use - weapons so powerful that they put at risk the very survival of the human species and the rest of creation -- the willingness to inflict massive destruction on civilian populations and on future generations undermines our deepest human and ethical values; and
- a prohibition on the expenditure for weapons that threaten the very existence of life, of financial resources necessary to meet basic human needs or to restore the integrity of creation – from an ethical perspective this massive expenditure would be seen as a theft from the poor and a violation of our obligation to protect the environment for the sake of all life.

Far from being the purview of pacifists, the ethical prohibition of nuclear weapons as a legitimate tool in any national or regional security toolbox flows easily from even a cursory application to nuclear weapons of the *jus in bellum* criteria of just war theory. For example,

- wars must be fought with right intention – ie to restore peace or to defend violated rights and must be fought with a view to negotiated peace, not unconditional surrender;
- there must be a strong probability of success;
- conduct in war must be just and civilians cannot be deliberately targeted;
- proportionality – the good accomplished must outweigh the evil.

None of these criteria can be met by a nuclear war. “The whole point of nuclear weapons,” again, according to Doug Roche, “is to kill massively.” In fact, the very application to nuclear war of these criteria – that assume war would be fought to protect human life and restore the peace – is absurd. Only a “holy war” mentality that demonizes the so-called “enemy” civilization and is thus willing to obliterate the “other” and put the whole world at risk could imagine justifying the use of nuclear weapons.

The moral obligation, then, incumbent upon all of us, is to move swiftly away from the potential for nuclear war, for which there is no moral justification. Governments challenge us to make that moral obligation politically pragmatic, but the way from here to there has been well articulated almost unanimously by the family of nations, including in the NPT. Perhaps what is most lacking is truth in the public arena about the potential consequences of our failure to comply with provisions of the treaty – and therefore, the political will to do so.

My own country, the United States and the other nuclear weapon states have not fulfilled their “good faith” obligations (in the words of the International Court of Justice in 1996) “to bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects....”

In fact, the United States has reserved the right to use nuclear arms against countries and terrorist organizations that intend to use weapons of mass destruction, as well as the right to destroy the facilities used to produce or store such weapons. Invoking the dangers of international terrorism to legitimize nuclear weapons and the threat of their use ignores the futility of deterrence against elusive, ideologically driven and

suicidal non state actors. Preparing tactical nuclear weapons for use in the so-called "war on terror" could not only spark the collapse of the non-proliferation treaty, but also lower in a dangerous way the nuclear threshold, with all that entails.

In underscoring this concern, Bishop President van Luyn of Pax Christi Netherlands called the use of nuclear weapons with the express purpose of killing civilians itself an excessive form of terrorism.

The possession of nuclear weapons, their development, modernization and testing have been – and certainly are now - immoral and ethically untenable.

Twenty five years ago, at the height of the Cold War, the U.S. Catholic bishops issued their historic pastoral letter on war and peace in a nuclear age, which reaffirmed the condemnation of nuclear weapons by the Second Vatican Council, calling the nuclear arms race "one of the greatest curses on the human race; an act of aggression against the poor and a folly which does not provide the security it promises." (Pastoral Constitution No 81)

While in 1983 the US Catholic bishops made clear that nuclear weapons can never be used, they stopped short of condemning nuclear deterrence, giving deterrence a "strictly conditioned moral acceptance." Specifically, they said this must be an interim, not a long term policy; that it was only to prevent the use of nuclear weapons by others; and that it must be a "step on the way toward a progressive disarmament."

Clearly, deterrence has not led to the elimination of nuclear weapons. Rather, as Archbishop Migliore, the Vatican representative to the 2005 NPT Review Conference said, "nuclear deterrence drives the development of ever newer nuclear arms, thus preventing genuine nuclear disarmament."

There is an urgent need to revitalise multilateral cooperation in the area of disarmament and for governments to recognize their collective responsibility to place nonproliferation and disarmament high on the political agenda.

At stake is the survival of humanity and most likely of the earth. Peace, sustainable human development and the integrity of creation must be given priority over an arms industry that monopolizes capital and perpetuates profound insecurity. The sacredness of human life and the rest of creation make the development, maintenance, threats to use and use of nuclear weapons a deep affront to morality. The human community is obliged to redirect of our pursuit of security. No one will be secure until we all are secure.

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