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Creative justice in a nuclear world

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CREATIVE JUSTICE

IN A NUCLEAR WORLD

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There is no doubt that the issue of peace has become a topic of central concern for persons both within and outside the church. All one has to do is open a newspaper, listen to the news on television, or browse through the local bookstore to appreciate the pervasive way in which the desire for peace in our nuclear time infiltrates our

lives. Truly the introduction of advanced nuclear weapons with their apocalyptic consequences into the international arena has raised the consciousness of people to the importance of avoiding nuclear war. Of course the way persons believe this aim should be accomplished varies a great deal. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that such an aim should be pursued. The avoidance of nuclear war and the pursuit of those activities which will help facilitate this end have become an ethical imperative of particular importance in our time.

However, beyond this general agreement that nuclear peace should be that for which we all struggle, there lies the more difficult question of how we can best achieve this aim. How we get from "here to there" is the question which must be satisfactorily answered if peace is to be successfully pursued. To this question there appears to be no generally agreed upon solution. As one who was directly involved in the preparation of the recently adopted Lutheran Church in America social statement, "Peace and Politics", I encountered over that two year process a wide variety of proposals. Some of these were complementary while others were in significant ways mutually exclusive and contradictory. Dialogue among persons supporting different approaches was often heated and polarized. Votes have been taken and positions officially adopted by a number of denominations. Nevertheless, it is my feeling that in the minds of many Christians there remains a fundamental unease with what has been said. There is an often unspoken hope that a better alternative might emerge to the solutions which have current attention.

In the face of this perceived unease a new way of addressing the matter needs to be discovered. We need to find a creative alternative which transcends the apparent impasse among and inadequacies of the basic solutions currently being considered. Therefore it is to this task of identifying such an alternative strategic approach that I want to address myself.

In pursuing this task I will first briefly review each of the three basic types of strategies that I have found in my work on this issue. In examining these different approaches I will show both how each of them embodies a legitimate Christian ethical concern and insight, and how each falls short from a theologically ethical point of view. It is my contention that an adequate alternative approach will have to take into account the legitimate concerns and insights of each of the basic types of strategies reviewed while avoiding their inadequacies. Such an alternative approach I suggest can be developed around the motif of "peace building". In concluding this paper I will suggest some initial ways in which a "peace building" approach might be implemented in Canada and in the world.

CURRENT STRATEGIC APPROACHES

In my study and work I have encountered a variety of proposals for bringing about nuclear peace. At the risk of over-simplifying such proposals fall into three basic types. The first type appeals to the power of an apocalyptic vision as its basis for prescribing action. The second type focuses on one or more universal principles in terms of which ethical judgment and activity is determined. The third type employs a

method of pragmatic calculation which its advocates believe will bring about proximate justice in an imperfect world.

Apocalyptic Vision

This approach to nuclear peace has received strong support from the recent television dramas "The Day After" and "Special Bulletin", from the CBC film "If You Love This Planet", and from the book *The Fate of the Earth* by Johnathan Schell. In all these materials (and many others like them) the devastating consequences of a nuclear war are graphically drawn out. Such consequences for Canada have been projected by the McGill Study Group for Peace and Disarmament. Their findings indicate that a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union would result in a global catastrophe which would include Canadians. Roger Hutchinson succinctly summarizes their conclusions in the following words:

> Taking into account the possibility that Canadian centres, larger than 100,000 in population and places with military or industrial significance such as North Bay, Saint John, Edmonton and Windsor, would be attacked, the group study estimated the effect of a direct nuclear impact of 20 to 40 megatons on Canada . . . In terms of casualties . . . half the Canadian population would be affected immediately. Six to eight million would be killed or seriously injured, and most of the latter would die within a few days. Cumulative effects of radioactive poisoning, famine, epidemics, violence from social disorder and obliteration of medical facilities, would add to the deathtoll, leaving less than one-third of Canada's present population alive at the end of a year.[1]

Looking beyond the Canadian context, Johnathan Schell, in his book, very carefully analyzes the far-reaching effects of nuclear war on the Earth's environment in general. He summarizes his findings in the following way:

> Bearing in mind that the possible consequences of the detonations of thousands of megatons of nuclear explosives include the blinding of insects, birds, and beasts all over the world; the extinction of many ocean species, among them some at the base of the food chain; the temporary or permanent alteration of the climate of the globe, with the outside chance of 'dramatic' and 'major' alteration in the structure of the atmosphere; the pollution of the whole ecosphere with oxides of nitrogen; the incapacitation in ten minutes of unprotected people who go out into the sunlight; the blinding of people who go out into the sunlight; a significant decrease in photosynthesis in plants around the world; the scalding and killing of many crops; the increase in rates of cancer and mutation in the world, but especially in targeted zones, and the attendant risk of global epidemics; the possible poisoning of all vertebrates by sharply increased levels of Vitamin D in their skin as a result of increased ultraviolet light; and the outright slaughter on all targeted continents of most human beings and other living things by the initial nuclear radiation, the fireballs, the thermal pulses, the blast waves, the mass fires, and the fallout from the explosions; and, considering that these consequences will all interact with one another in unguessable ways and, furthermore, are in all likelihood an incomplete list, which will be added to as our knowledge of the earth increases, one must con-

1. Roger Hutchinson, "Disarmament: Clarifying the Debate," *Angelos* (Autumn, 1984):6.

clude that a full-scale nuclear holocaust could lead to the extinction of mankind.[2]

The consequences described above are obviously based on the exchange of a large number of nuclear weapons. In the face of this some might suggest that a limited nuclear exchange would avoid most of his predictions. However, Schell contends that once a nuclear exchange has begun there will be little or no chance that an escalation to full-scale nuclear war could be halted.

Given the apocalyptic possibilities inherent in the very nature of nuclear weapons and given the large number of such weapons currently in existence, it is the stance of those who adopt this type of approach that it is immoral to possess such weapons. It is immoral because on the one hand, one can not ethically support actions which negate the very possibility of human ethical activity, and on the other hand, even a cursory examination of the Biblical material would indicate that it is God's intention that our stewardship of creation support the well-being of humankind, not destroy it. In light of this it is argued that nuclear disarmament (unilaterally, if necessary) is required and should be pursued by Christians and non-Christians alike.

There is a good deal of power in the arguments of this approach. Certainly responsible Christian stewardship would call on us to take any and all steps possible to eliminate the apocalyptic risks which nuclear weapons by their very nature have thrust upon us. However, despite the powerful insights of this type of approach, I find it fails to address sufficiently another important Christian concern. This concern involves the approach's apparent over-riding preoccupation with the value of survival as the primary end of human life. In contrast to this St. Paul declares in Romans 8:38-39:

> For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Clearly it is Paul's declaration here that the grace of God supercedes all other concerns in our lives. Therefore we are able to risk ourselves on behalf of our neighbor in the face of any number of obstacles, even death. This means that for Christians survival is not the over-riding consideration of life. (In one sense, Christians have always known the world would end and knowing the possible method of its ending should not render present life any more or less meaningless). Rather, the concern for survival must be tempered by a concern for justice. A plea for nuclear survival rings hollow if it does not also include some strong concern for the ethical quality of that survival. We are called to be stewards of "creation", but we are also called to be "just" stewards of creation. As Christians it is not simply peace as the absence of conflict that we seek, but the peace of truth and justice for all; a vision of peace informed by the "peace of God" which passes all understanding. Therefore, as Christians we are called to reach beyond this type of approach while not losing sight of the important insights and warnings that it offers.

Universal Principles

The second type of approach which I have encountered focuses on one or more universal principles in terms of which ethical judgment and action is determined. On

2. Johnathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1982), p. 93.

the one side are those who in the name of the principle of non-violence view the matter of taking human life under any circumstances as ethically abhorrent. For them the doing of violence against one's neighbor is a betrayal of the grace and support which God has already given to each of us. The fact that nuclear weapons enable the taking of human life on a scale previously unimagined simply intensifies their condemnation of the violence of war. It should be noted in this regard that those who support this approach do so not out of a fear of losing their own lives but out of a concern for the unjust killing of human life. This means that reciprocity is not a prerequisite for ethical action. One should not support preparations for nor engage in the pursuit of war even if such action calls into question one's own survival. Such a stance has obvious implications for the current development and deployment of nuclear weapons in the world. Such weapons development should cease and all current stocks of these weapons should be destroyed.

In reflecting on this position there can be no doubt that this appeal to the principle of non-violence as a proper response to the gift of God's grace is a powerful one. Clearly there is here an appropriate deep concern for the neighbor. However, it is just at this point that this position leaves inadequately addressed a concomitant significant Christian concern. More specifically, we as Christians are called on not only to avoid doing violence to our neighbor, but also to assure protection for those in our midst who are weak and defenseless. This would include the protection of children, the disabled, the widow, the poor, etc. from exploitation by those who are more powerful. Further, such protection is to take the form of not only immediate assistance but also help toward their gaining an opportunity for greater justice in the future. Obviously such protection can often be pursued in non-violent ways. We should seek out such non-violent ways whenever this is possible and thank God when we find them. However, given the sinful world in which we live, circumstances do not always allow for the avoidance of coercion and violence in the exercise of one's responsibility to help protect the weak and defenseless. Consequently, our pursuit of non-violence must also be tempered by our responsibility to seek justice for those who can not effectively act on their own behalf.

The other side of this approach based on universal principles is indebted to the theological reflection of St. Augustine and acknowledges the fact that Christians may on occasion be called on to engage in coercion and violence. To assist Christians in such situations a set of principles are provided against which they are to gauge their actions. In this way it is believed that the destructive consequences of the use of violence can be limited and Christians can be helped to act as justly as is possible in the circumstances. This means that if one uses these principles for the a-priori determination of what might or might not be a "just war", one has misunderstood their purpose. One properly employs these principles after, not before, the unavoidable need for some form of violent response has been ascertained. The principles employed in determining the just use of violence (war) are the following:

1) The use of violence must be declared by a legitimate authority.
2) The use of violence must be in the service of a just cause.
3) The use of violence must be in the service of a cause for which there is a

reasonable hope of success.

4) The use of violence must involve actions which promise proportionately more good than evil will ensue from their use.

5) The use of violence must be pursued so as to serve always the good intention that was initially projected.

6) The use of violence must always give immunity to those who are non-combatants.

7) The use of violence must seek to incapacitate rather than kill the adversary.

8) The use of violence must always seek to avoid unnecessary suffering.[3]

Applying the above principles to the matter of nuclear weapons, it would appear that one of the implications would be that if nuclear weapons were to be employed they would need to be refined so as to enable their use on a very limited and discriminatory basis. Moreover, political mechanisms would appear to be called for that would work to prevent the escalation of limited nuclear exchanges.

Here again the desire to serve the needs of the weak and defenseless neighbor is most laudable. Moreover, the establishment of guidelines to help reduce the evil consequences ensuing from the use of violence should also be applauded. Further, this position quite rightly does not view the survival of either the individual or the group (nation) as the *sine qua non* of ethical judgment. However, it is at the point of implementation that concerns arise regarding this approach. The first of these concerns involves the question of how one is to operationalize the principles described above. In principle they appear reasonably clear, but in practice they become much more ambiguous. For example, in an age such as ours which perceives war as an effort of the whole community it becomes very difficult to distinguish combatants from non-combatants. Similarly, how does one arbitrate between two competing "just" causes, or how does one establish a legitimate mandate for action when the evil to be opposed is the legitimating government itself. Unfortunately, such ambiguity can itself become the basis of injustice. The second of these concerns arises at the point of this position's flexibility. More specifically, the desire to implement policies which enable a more just execution of violence may also dehumanize those involved by exposing them to greater likelihood of limited nuclear war. In this way, the temporizing of our ethical judgments can work to desensitize us to what it means to be fully human in God's eyes. In the name of ethical necessity we may lose our sense of ethical vision. A more adequate approach would hold both these elements in full creative tension.

Pragmatic Calculation

This approach to the question of achieving peace begins from a deep appreciation of two fundamental realities. The first of these is the fact that we all participate in the human condition of sin. We all possess the propensity to take advantage of one another both as individuals and as groups. Moreover, in our sin we often are unable or unwilling to recognize the ways we are doing this. Consequently, it is sometimes necessary, in the name of justice, to employ the language of deterrence against unjust actions when the language of moral persuasion can not be heard. Because we live in a world of nation-states that interact with one another, this also means accord-

3. Stanley Hauerwas, "On Surviving Justly: An Ethical Analysis of Nuclear Disarmament," *Religious Conscience and Nuclear Warfare* (University of Missouri-Columbia, 1982), p. 4.

ing to this approach that military deterrence is sometimes what is ethically called for.

The second fundamental reality from which this approach works is the fact that different communities and nations properly develop, cherish and have a right to protect their own unique constructive marks of communal life. Swedes, Germans, Poles, Canadians, etc., each have a right to be proud of their culture and have a right to preserve it in the face of those who would seek to rob them of it. Ethnicity helps to give us our identity and as such is a value which each nation can properly celebrate. Moreover, it is through the mutual appreciation of one another's ethnicity that the fabric of the world community is enriched.

In affirming these two realities this approach believes that in the absence of any supreme, acknowledged arbitrator among nations, the most just world possible emerges when there exists a balancing of power in the world. In this way the propensity to sin of one nation is checked by the similar propensity in other nations. Moreover, such an arrangement also works to protect each nation's unique constructive cultural marks, thereby preserving the richness of the world community.

The presence of nuclear weapons is seen as a factor which complicates this balancing activity but does not fundamentally change its ethical significance. Greater care would have to be taken in assessing the requirements of balance. More sensitivity would have to be given in framing responses to perceived imbalances. But in both cases it is felt that such adjustments can be made. In this approach the real ethical challenge is seen to be the scaling down of the possession of nuclear weapons to the lowest possible level at which a real balance of power can exist.

In reflecting on the strengths of this approach mention must be made of the important way in which it attempts to deal realistically with the limitations of the political world. An adequate alternative approach must seek, as does this approach, to take seriously the important impact sin has on our perception of ourselves and of others. Further, an adequate alternative also must begin, as does this approach, by acknowledging that for the foreseeable future the question of nuclear peace will have to be worked out within the context of the nation-state system; a system that is marked by cherished cultural diversity and no effective means of international governance.

However, the acuity of this approach is not universal for it fails to recognize significant limitations in its own method of pursuing proximate justice. These limitations arise in two areas. First, while the call for a balance of power is relatively clear in principle, history has shown that the implementation of that concept is inherently destabilizing. The reason for this is twofold. On the one side it is not easy to get nations to agree either on what would constitute a balance or on whether such a balance had in fact been reached. On the other side the normal progress of research and development would soon render obsolete any balance which had been achieved, thereby reintroducing the instabilities of the rebalancing process. What one therefore ends up with is the arms race, and its accompanying destructive spin-off of Third-World countries feeling compelled to spend money on arms which could much better be spent on improving the welfare of their people.

The second area in which this approach's method is limited involves the use of nuclear weapons as a deterrent. For a deterrent to work one must be prepared to do what one threatens to do. If one's threat involves the killing of millions of persons with nuclear weapons then one must adopt an attitude commensurate with that action. However, if one does this, one simultaneously becomes desensitized to what it

means to be fully human in God's eyes. Persons who are viewed as subjects by God become objects to be shunted around in calculations of nuclear survival. Such a consequence is ethically undesirable. An adequate alternative approach must take this dehumanizing dynamic into account and work beyond it.

REACHING BEYOND THE IMPASSE

Each of the three basic types of approach described above has definite ethical strengths but also clear ethical weaknesses. No one approach stands out as the clearly superior path to take. It would almost appear that we are condemned to continue to live in a dilemma. We exist in a world that possesses nuclear weapons without any very satisfactory way either of living with them or of getting rid of them. In the face of this some might be tempted to resign themselves to the dilemma and make do as best they can in their personal lives. However, I don't believe this option is open to us. Simply to remain in our present condition of nuclear uncertainty is to resign ourselves to a process of becoming more and more dehumanized, morally, psychologically, and politically.

If this is the case, then, the question immediately arises, "How does one reach beyond the dilemma?" The foundations of an answer to that question can be found in the Noah story as it is recorded in Genesis, chapters 6 through 9.[4]

As one reads through the story of Noah the parallels with our own time are striking. It will be remembered that it is this story which specifically addresses humankind at a time of cosmic crisis, a time when all the life on earth could be destroyed. Such a time is not unlike our own time, filled with the threat of nuclear holocaust. The story is also concerned with the question of preserving life on earth in the face of the threat of life-extinction. Here too one finds a parallel to our own search for a way to reach beyond the dilemma into which our inadequate approaches to the nuclear problem have thrust us.

What then can be learned from the Noah story? While there are no doubt a host of insights that could be drawn from the text I would draw your attention to two insights in particular. The first of these is that God, through Noah and his family, assigns to the human race the stewardship responsibility of caring for and preserving all of creation. God calls on humankind to accept the responsibility of addressing the needs of creation even in the face of impending doom. There is no room for bystanders or abstainers. What is true in the Noah story is true for us also. In our time Noah's ark has become the earth itself, and we bear the non-transferable responsibility of attending to the preservation of it and all the species on it.

The second insight to which I would draw your attention concerns the question of how we are to exercise our God-given responsibility to preserve life. It will be remembered that when the Flood was sent all the normal cycles of life were suspended. When the time came for ascertaining if the period of the flood was over Noah sent out first a raven and then a dove. In this way he sought to restart the cycles of life again. With the raven there was the act of clearing away the remains of the last life-cycle prior to the Flood. With the dove there was the act of receiving the gift of new life in the olive branch. What then does this mean for us? Following Rabbi Arthur

4. In preparing this section of the paper I found Arthur Waskow, "Noah and the Nuclear Rainbow," *Worldview* (October, 1983):17-19, very helpful.

Waskow,[5] I believe it suggests that we will be able to reach beyond the impasse in which we currently find ourselves as we reaffirm the cycles of life God promised us in the Rainbow covenant. Put into less poetic language, the story of the Flood and the Rainbow expose a basic misorientation in the approaches reviewed earlier. More specifically, each of those approaches focused on methods of "peace keeping" rather than "peace building".

"Peace keeping" involves those activities which are designed to limit the harmful consequences of or inhibit the execution of destructive actions. Peace keeping is aimed at preventing the emergence of destructive forces which will undermine the possibility of peace. In contrast, "Peace building" involves those activities which are designed to displace the felt need for destructive confrontation with an increased sense of supportive, mutual interdependence. Peace building is aimed at developing a sense of mutual hope and trust upon which peace can grow.

When one compares the dynamics of these two stances the importance of Peace building as an alternative approach to the question of nuclear peace becomes clear. When one pursues a policy of peace building one subverts the need for peace keeping. As one establishes bridges of economic and technological interdependence between nations which fear or mistrust one another, one creates a climate in which weapons (nuclear or otherwise) become increasingly less important. The displacement of mistrust with trust and fear with mutual hope makes destructive confrontation obsolete. As such, a setting emerges where the call for nuclear disarmament will appear increasingly reasonable and desirable, and the need for an arms race with all its dehumanizing spin-offs will become increasingly unimportant. In contrast to this, peace keeping approaches which invoke fear to frighten nations into a more cooperative and less destructive orientation are in fact engaging in a self-defeating activity. For it is fear and mistrust themselves which will work to deter the lessening of a nation's reliance on its own power.

Beyond these military concerns, peace building as an approach is also recommended by the fact that it enables the focusing of energy on those activities which are aimed at meeting the needs of persons in other countries. In this way questions of justice are more easily acknowledged and addressed.

In making this case for peace building I do not want to leave the impression that the achievement of nuclear peace will be an automatic or an immediate reality. The process will be slow and as long as nuclear weapons remain in existence there will be risks. Peace keeping activities will no doubt be with us for awhile. A freeze on the building and further development of nuclear weapons is certainly in order by all the nuclear powers. However, I believe we should be noticeably shifting our attention in new directions toward peace building activities. We should be as concerned with the ways in which the Canadian government is helping the Soviet Union deal with what is said to be its sixth straight year of crop failure as we are with the matter of testing of the cruise missile or upgrading the Canadian radar early warning system.

In conclusion let me suggest that the pursuit of nuclear peace is much like the pursuit of happiness. One finds true happiness not by pursuing it directly (for then happiness becomes oppressive work), but by pursuing it indirectly through the service to one's neighbor and the sharing of the ensuing joy. Similarly, one will ultimately find real peace in our nuclear world not by pursuing it directly, through a primary reliance

5. *Ibid.*

on "peace keeping", but by pursuing it indirectly, through the creative development of "peace building" activities.

THE BEGINNINGS OF A CANADIAN AGENDA

As a part of the peace building process the following steps might be taken.

1. Greater attention should be given to joint manufacturing ventures, technological exchanges, and sharing of agricultural expertise between the Soviet Union and Canada.
2. Greater encouragement should be given to the United States to capitalize on the trade potential which exists with the Soviet Union.[6]
3. A closer working relationship should be fostered between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches in the East, and the churches in Canada and the United States.[7]
4. A more open exchange of ideas among the scientific communities of nations should be encouraged.

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6. Erwin A. Salk, "U.S.-U.S.S.R. Trade," *The Churchman* (October, 1984):8-9.
7. Daniel Martensen, "The Ecclesiastical Dimension in the Search for World Community," *Lutheran Theological Seminary Bulletin* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Summer, 1984):7-23.