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LUTHER'S DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION AND THE PROBLEM OF WAR

Egil Grislis

With a major attention to sin, which is ever present in the individual believer and in every form of society, Luther's doctrine of sanctification looks squarely at the real world. While more tranquil generations might have accused Luther of an incorrigible pessimism, we, living with the real possibility of a nuclear annihilation, can only appreciate Luther's realism. At the same time Luther does not consign the Christian believer to despair and inactivity. Praying for the divine gifts of humility and courage, and believing in the generosity of God, Luther can offer authentic trust in God's gracious providence. Luther can do this despite the fact that he harboured no illusions about the condition of the world!

We may sum up what Luther believed in four statements. (1) The world has always been in a crisis. Put in the vernacular: the world has always been in a mess. (2) Christianity does not offer a successful method by which one can always calm violence and

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invariably do away with danger. Only snake oil merchants offer instant cures. (3) The only security which Christianity offers is the assurance that through the bearing of our cross we will come to taste life eternal, both now and hereafter. (4) The authentic and otherworldly thrust of the Christian faith includes a loving concern for the quality of life in this world. True love is not only an inward attitude, but also an outward and specific act, carried out with humility and courage.

I

Much of what Luther had to offer he derived from the Holy Scriptures and Christian tradition. Both of these relate to the world and the power struggles within it in a complex way. While the New Testament is surely a record of the incarnate love of God (John 3:16), it seems to underscore this very complexity. We are told, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9-10). We are strictly commanded, "Do not resist one who is evil" (Matt. 5:38-41). We see Jesus radicalize the Old Testament injunction, "You shall not kill," into a prohibition against all anger (Matt. 5:18-26). We note that Jesus Himself set an example by refusing to rule the kingdoms of the world (Matt. 4:8-10), knowing that He had come "to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45). On the other hand, Jesus' teachings abound in very radical metaphors! Jesus refers to the sword (Matt. 10:34; Luke 12:52), to violence (Matt. 11:12), to war (Luke 14:31-33), and to the destruction of murderers (Matt. 22:1-10). It was Jesus who said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:13-17), accepted the authority of the centurion (Matt. 8:5-13), violently drove out the money changers from the temple (Mark 11:15-19; Luke 7:10), advised his disciples to sell a mantle in order to buy a sword (Luke 22:35-38), even allowed Peter to carry a sword and stopped its use only after blood had already been shed (Matt. 26:51ff.). Apostle Paul quickly and normatively summed up early Christian attitude toward government: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment" (Romans 13:1-2). The warning of Revelation 13 that governmental structures can turn not only sour but even demonic, was a serious qualification to what Paul had said; still, it was an afterthought and not as powerful as the Apostle's message.

Nevertheless, it is beyond dispute that generally speaking Jesus came in love and brought peace. His true followers did not organize guerilla outposts, but regarded martyrdom as the appropriate consequence in cases of conflict with the government. Tertullian was quite correct when he put into words the true accomplishments of the early church: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed [of the church]".¹ Undeniably, the early church was a peace church, and continued to be such while Christians were a persecuted minority, far removed from the seats of power. Yet while the general practice of pacifism is evident, Paul's appreciation of government in Romans 13 would serve in another day as encouragement for participation in a non-persecuting government.

That day dawned with the decision of Constantine to make the Roman empire

1. *Apology*, 30.

Christian. The rapid transition from an obscure and persecuted sect to the state church soon necessitated the official blessing of the empire's defenses. The process of this blessing was completed, when Cicero's just war theory was adopted by St. Augustine and became the normative Christian approach to the problem of war throughout the middle ages.² No doubt much can be said in criticism of the just war theory. But it also can be defended, since it at least attempted to bring a measure of morality into an otherwise completely violent situation.³ Justice and compassion, even when incomplete, are never to be scorned!

In retrospect we have to admit that the negative side of the just war theory was immense — it justified the evil practice of war. It nurtured a climate of thought which did not challenge churchmen to speak out against the horrors of war as often as they should have. Nevertheless, many did and their eloquence was not utterly fruitless, e.g., Desiderius Erasmus' pacifist impact on the rising Anabaptists of the sixteenth century was thorough. In his famed *Adages* commenting on "War is sweet to those who do not know it", Erasmus had warned, "If there is anything in mortal affairs which should be approached with hesitancy, or rather which ought to be avoided in every possible way, guarded against and shunned, that thing is war; there is nothing more wicked, more disastrous, more widely destructive, more deeply tenacious, more bothersome, in a word more unworthy of man, not to say of a Christian. . . . What is war, indeed, but murder shared by many, and brigandage, all the more immoral from being wider spread?"⁴ In another tract, *The Complaint of Peace*, Erasmus observes: "God made man unarmed. But anger and revenge have mended the work of God, and furnished his hands with weapons invented in hell. Christians attack Christians with engines of destruction, fabricated by the devil. A cannon! a mortar! no human being could have devised them originally; they must have been suggested by the evil one."⁵

Martin Luther inherited such a complex view of war and violence, and appropriated insights both from the just war and peace positions. Accounts of Luther's thought, often onesidedly select passages in which Luther praises the powers that be.⁶ Indeed, Luther is outspoken, even in this matter. ". . . I have written in such glorification of temporal government as no teacher has done since the days of the apostles, except, perhaps, St. Augustine."⁷ During the Peasant war, Luther penned the infamous words, "Therefore let everyone who can, smite, slay, and stab, secretly or openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel. It is just as when one must kill a mad dog; if you do not strike him, he

2. Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation* (New York: Abingdon, 1960); Adolf von Harnack, *Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

3. Paul Ramsey, *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility* (New York: Scribner, 1968); F.H. Russell, *The Just War in Middle Ages* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975).

4. (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 107 and 116.

5. (La Salle: Open Court, 1974), p. 21.

6. For a notably nasty study of Luther's and Lutheran patriotism, cf. Hartmann Grisar, S.J., *Der Deutsche Luther im Weltkrieg und in der Gegenwart* (Augsburg: Haas & Grabherr, 1924). A wise and reliable study has been written by Hermann Kunst, *Martin Luther und der Krieg* (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1968).

7. *L W* 46:163-164.

will strike you, and a whole land with you.”⁸ Such a statement made very good sense within the larger context of Luther’s doctrine of two kingdoms.⁹ That is, while “a Christian should not resist any evil” as a Christian and in the name of Christ, the same person in office “should oppose every evil”¹⁰ with the means appropriate to his particular office. Therefore Luther could argue, “Of course, a prince can be a Christian, but he must not rule as a Christian and insofar as he does rule, his name is not ‘Christian’ but ‘prince.’ The person is indeed a Christian, but his office or his principedom does not involve his Christianity.”¹¹ Though otherwise relying on *sola Scriptura* and scorning tradition, here Luther in accord with medieval tradition informs us that even holy martyrs went to war when called to fight by their rulers, who happen to be not Christians but infidels!¹² Luther explained, “If I kill in war, it is a work of God. And when a judge sitting in court passes sentence, why is it not a good work to kill with the hand by the authority of the prince?”¹³ In this way Luther was thoroughly reliant on the “just war” theory, which he defined as “the punishment of evildoers and the maintenance of peace.”¹⁴

As in his doctrine of sanctification in general, so also in its application to the discussion of war, Luther emphasizes the significant role of courage. “For whoever fights with a good and well-instructed conscience can also fight well. This is especially true since a good conscience fills a man’s heart with courage and boldness. And if the heart is bold and courageous, the fist is more powerful, a man and even his horse are more energetic, everything turns out better, and every happening and deed contributes to the victory which God then gives. On the other hand, a timid and insecure conscience makes the heart fearful.”¹⁵ Was humility then completely inapplicable in this setting? Luther had second thoughts and he expanded his insights. “Before God,” Luther said, “he should be discouraged, fearful, and humble, and commit his cause to him that he may dispose things, not according to our understanding of what is right and just, but according to his kindness and grace. In this way he wins God to his side with a humble, fearful heart.” Yet the earlier emphasis on the need for courage is thereby not discarded. “Toward men he should be bold, free, and confident because they are in the wrong, and smite them with a confident and untroubled spirit. Why should we not do for our God what the Romans, the greatest fighters on earth, did for their false god, Fortune, whom they feared?”¹⁶ We should not be greatly surprised, therefore, that Luther’s doctrine of two kingdoms also included the advice, “Let the preacher keep his hands off the secular government, lest he create disorder and confusion!”¹⁷

Now with such texts before us, there is hardly any need to be surprised that from

8. L W 46:50.

9. Paul Althaus, *Luthers Haltung im Bauernkrieg* (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1952); cf. Hubert Kirchner, *Luther and the Peasants' War* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972).

10. L W 21:113.

11. L W 21:170.

12. L W 21:110.

13. L W 29:73.

14. L W 46:98.

15. L W 46:93.

16. L W 46:124-125.

17. L W 22:225.

England, undated, but during the days of World War II, there could come *Win the Peace Pamphlet No. 3*, authored by Peter F. Wiener and entitled *Martin Luther-Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor*. Not to be much outdone, in the United States William Montgomery McGovern published a book, entitled *From Luther to Hitler: The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy*.¹⁸

However, there is another side to Luther as well. The theologically conservative Luther can at times also be a liberal and even a rebellious one. After all, a mere supporter of the status quo could not have brought about a reformation!

We may begin the account of this side of Luther by noting that while Luther defended the theory of "just war", he did not hesitate to make critical comments about its actual practice. "Therefore anyone who claims to be a Christian and a child of God, not only does not start war or unrest; but he also gives help and counsel on the side of peace wherever he can, even though there may have been a just and adequate cause for going to war."¹⁹ On another occasion Luther puts it even more bluntly: ". . . whoever starts a war is in the wrong."²⁰ Instead of being merely subservient to the authorities of his day, Luther very often spoke with prophetic freedom. "Our kings, princes, and bishops often stir up deadly wars on account of the most insignificant offenses and shed innocent blood. Nor do they fight about some advantage or about pleasure or honors, but they engage in war out of pure malice and horrible madness."²¹ The soldiers, that serve under such a leader, are even worse: "Look at soldiers! Are there any beasts more wild, unbridled, ungovernable, shameless, and indiscreet in both deeds and words? If it is morals and uprightness you are thinking about — anything they want goes."²² Luther also records the kind of considerations which would seem to rule out his support for a modern war. "If the guilty cannot be punished unless the innocent is harmed at the same time, then the evil one is to be endured rather than that the good one be harmed."²³

Moreover, Luther never forgot by what actual means he had brought about the Reformation! It certainly had not been through violence. In a lighthearted moment Luther said, "And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friend Philip [Melanchthon] and [Nicholaus von] Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything."²⁴ In a more serious tone, Luther confessed, "I have never drawn a sword or desired revenge. I began neither conspiracy nor rebellion, but so far as I was able, I have helped the worldly rulers — even those who persecuted the gospel and me — to preserve their power and honor. I stopped with committing the matter to God and relying confidently at all times upon his hand. This is why God has not only preserved my life in spite of the pope and all the tyrants — and this many consider a really great miracle, as I myself must also confess — but he has made my gospel grow and spread."²⁵ In another statement Luther writes, "In our times we

18. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1941.

19. *L W* 21:40.

20. *L W* 46:118.

21. *L W* 8:169.

22. *L W* 9:232.

23. *L W* 9:243.

24. *L W* 51:77.

25. *L W* 46:31.

have gained a wonderful victory against the pope by means of prayer and faith. Although arms and swords are not lacking, the church conquers the pope by means of prayer alone, slays him, and strips him of his arms and that thunderbolt of excommunication even among his subjects and confederates. And we shall do still greater things if we persevere in faith and prayer."²⁶

Of course, Luther was not a pacifist, but he loved peace and believed in the power of the Gospel. At the same time, even his statements which celebrate the need to enforce justice within society and between governments are never mere statements of subservience. We should never forget that after 1531 Luther was prepared to support armed resistance against the emperor,²⁷ if the latter should undertake to suppress reformation by force.

But ordinarily Luther preferred the ways of prayer and peace. In his *Table Talk* we can read what Luther thought about cannons. "Afterward he spoke of firearms and cannons, those most inhuman devices which smash walls and rocks and slay men in battle. 'I think these things were invented by Satan himself, for they can't be defended against with [ordinary] weapons and fists. All human strength vanishes when confronted with firearms. A man is dead before he sees what's coming. If Adam had seen such devices as his descendants have constructed to fight one another, he would have died of grief.'"²⁸ The absence of peace to Luther was a major calamity. "Thus lack of peace may be counted half of hell, or hell's prelude and beginning."²⁹ And precisely because Luther had a very high view of the pastoral ministry, he expected the preached word to be the means by which peace is established. "Therefore, to tell the truth, peace, the greatest of earthly goods, in which all other temporal goods are comprised, is really a fruit of true preaching. For where the preaching is right, there war and discord and bloodshed do not come; but where the preaching is not right, it is no wonder that there is war, or at least constant unrest and the desire to fight and to shed blood."³⁰ After all, as Luther understood it, the preacher was not delivering his own pet opinions, but proclaiming the holy Word of God. Therein was to be seen the preacher's significance and real power. Luther wrote, "For a preacher is neither a courtier nor a hired hand. He is God's servant and slave, and his commission is over lords and slaves."³¹ On another occasion Luther underscored, "I am a preacher. I have to have teeth in my mouth. I have to bite and salt and tell them the truth."³²

In other words, with religious realism Luther accepted the religious and political structures of his own day that could not be changed, put all his efforts into changing those that could be changed and ultimately relied on God for the achievement of the

26. L W 8:277.

27. L W 45:84-85; 47:8-36. Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), 2 vols. outlines Luther's views on resistance. For greater detail, c.f. Eike Wolgast, *Die Wittenberger Theologie und die Politik der evangelischen Staende: Studien zu Luthers Gutachten in politischen Fragen* (Guetersloh: Guetersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1977).

28. L W 54:232.

29. L W 13:55.

30. L W 46:226.

31. L W 13:51.

32. L W 21:124.

possible. If in reading Luther we pay attention only to the static elements of his thought and overlook his rapidly developing insights, we may have misread Luther and consequently will fail to grasp how it was that this one man radically changed the society of his day! In other words, Luther's true visage may be recognized best when we do not pay equal attention to just everything he said, but underscore his truly creative insights. Then we observe that Luther really celebrated the infinite power of the Word of God, looked for and developed a prophetic but responsible ministry, and relied on the secular government no further than it was necessary in order to accomplish his religious goals. Instead of being used by the princes and instead of being desirous to serve them blindly, Luther, with a remarkable skill and honesty, set the mood of the worldly powers to his own advantage.³³ In this way, while Luther did not build a pacifist church, he established a peace-loving church, leaving for it the glorious heritage of the infinitely powerful Word of God which was to guide and to develop the church throughout the centuries to come.

II

In the retrospect of centuries we shall do well to admire what Luther accomplished, but also to observe what he left incompleting. The practical and the visionary Luther did in a remarkable way combine conservative and liberal ideas, just war theories and peace, obedience and criticism, the old and the very new. But the combination was more ad hoc than a cogent and enduring theory. In the years to come, Luther's two kingdom doctrine³⁴ usurped the role of an integrating model. As a result, the two kingdom doctrine was abused by the regimes that tended to be autocratic, or neglected by all others. At any rate, the two kingdom doctrine reflects only one aspect, however significant, of Luther's thought.

In order to establish the relevance of Luther's doctrine of sanctification for today (especially in regard to politics in general and the threat of a nuclear holocaust in particular) it will be always possible to turn to Luther piece-meal and to obtain vigorous and often very insightful quotations for the side of the issue on which we stand. But Luther can offer more than that, if not immediately and directly then at least through the prism of one of his great interpreters. I am referring to the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr which is currently experiencing a come-back and which in a very timely fashion warns us against the heresy "that there is some fairly easy way out of the human situation of 'self-alienation'." Man is not "essentially good at some level of his being."³⁵ Any "theology which fails to come to grips with this tragic factor of sin is heretical . . ."³⁶ Niebuhr continues, "The New Testament does not . . . envisage a simple triumph of good over evil in history. It sees human history involved in the con-

33. Karl Truediger, *Luthers Briefe und Gutachten an weltliche Obrigkeiten zur Durchfuehrung der Reformation* (Muenster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1975) observes that, unlike Calvin, Luther did not pursue a program of direct political support for the Reformation and ordinarily reacted more than acted. I believe that such a judgment overlooks Luther's subtle skills to accomplish many of his goals.

34. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966).

35. *Christianity and Power Politics* (New York: Scriber, 1952), p. 7.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

traditions of sin to the end. That is why it sees no simple resolution of the problem of history. It believes that the Kingdom of God will finally resolve the contradictions of history; but for it the Kingdom of God is no simple historical possibility. The grace of God for man and the Kingdom of God for history are both divine realities and not human possibilities."³⁷ Now if Reinhold Niebuhr would have said no more than this, his wisdom would have remained otherworldly and early Barthian. With great insight, Niebuhr applied his general insights to the specific political method of the balance of power. Perhaps one of his most weighty insights is this: "Justice is basically dependent upon a balance of power. Whenever an individual or a group or a nation possesses undue power, and whenever this power is not checked by the possibility of criticizing and resisting it, it grows inordinate."³⁸ While the balance of power needs to include love, the role of love is clearly subordinate. "Without love the frictions and tensions of a balance of power would become intolerable."³⁹ At the same time, the major ingredient in this balance of power is power. Hence Niebuhr's commitment to democracy is thorough, viewing it as "a perennial necessity because justice will always require that the power of government be checked as democracy checks it . . .".⁴⁰ After all, claims Niebuhr, "no one is good or wise enough to be completely entrusted with the destiny of his fellowmen."⁴¹

If in our own day the phrase "balance of power", as by a conditioned reflex, recalls only the arguments for a nuclear buildup, then it is a one-sided reflex. Niebuhr's use of that term "balance of power" also includes the clear reminder of the significance of the democratic process which relates to those who on "our" side are responsible for the balance of power on a world scale. Within a democratic society it is not treason but an authentic responsibility to speak out freely and even to voice sharp protest! As the New Testament balances Romans 13 with Revelation 13, as Luther's obedience to the powers that be of his day did not preclude his successful attempts to transform these power relationships, so we in our own day are called upon to participate in the making of the balance of power — to be not only faithful conservers, but also faithful critics and innovators! If the preaching ministry of this day cannot add a prophetically sound voice, it serves merely as an old and broken record, and will be disregarded and discarded as such. The great Lutheran Confessions of the *Book of Concord*, unless supported by our own contemporary witness, will not suffice for the proclaiming of the Gospel today.

But what is the Gospel message in the face of the threat of a nuclear holocaust? To begin with, it is a threat far beyond our ordinary imagination. There is a sense in which all of us know a great deal about what a nuclear holocaust might look like; newspapers, magazines, films and lectures have been pursuing this theme for some time now. But unless we make the effort and read the detailed accounts of what really happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and unless we consult some relatively recent and detailed rehearsals of possible nuclear holocaust scenarios, our preaching about this fearful possibility will be vague and narrow. The amount of books on the

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

41. *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York: Scribner, 1953), p. 11.

nuclear problem is now a deluge. Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary Bookstore in St. Paul, Minnesota has already filled two shelves with the latest publications on this subject matter. However, to my taste, Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*⁴² and Robert Jay Lifton and Richard Falk, *Indivisible Weapons*,⁴³ are two very good books that cover many of the important issues. These and other studies have persuaded me that when the nuclear holocaust breaks out, human life on this planet will cease to exist. Those who will be incinerated immediately, or die very shortly afterwards, will be the fortunate ones. The epidemics, the lack of food and medical care will turn the limited days of the relatively few survivors into a total nightmare of as yet unexperienced proportions. Then there is a second observation which reinforces what has been already said. Such a sober statement as *Peace and War: Some Theological and Political Perspectives*, issued in 1982 by the Division of Missions in North America of the Lutheran Church in America, is prepared to prognosticate, "The option of unilateral disarmament is not one which the U.S. will probably ever have the luxury of exploring."⁴⁴ Richard Falk puts the case even more pointedly, "The vector of nuclear intention is, of course, the Soviet Union. More and more Americans grasp the tragic flaws bound up with nuclearism and yet they support the nuclearist path as the lesser of two evils. Pushed, the majority of Americans would rather take their chances with nuclear war than expose the country, or even its world position, to Soviet aggression."⁴⁵ The corollary to this is not surprising, though undoubtedly shocking. In regard to the question whether "a nuclear war will actually occur," Robert Jay Lifton replies with frightening clarity, "The odds are probably against us."⁴⁶ Richard Falk concurs, "A great majority of citizens currently believe that a total nuclear war is quite likely to occur in the next several years."⁴⁷

Surprisingly, an intensive concern with the nuclear holocaust is of a relatively recent date. Even then it cannot be assumed that it is shared by everyone in our congregations. After all, as Jonathan Schell has put it, "It is always difficult to become aware of one's ignorance."⁴⁸ Moreover, in the United States "being strongly opposed to nuclear weapons has until recently been merged in public consciousness with being anti-American."⁴⁹ Canada is, perhaps, an exception in this regard. But even in the U.S. a new trend is observable. "For the first time, prominent church leaders from many denominational backgrounds are beginning to associate opposition to nuclearism with religious duty. Furthermore, professionals, especially doctors, but

42. (New York: Avon, 1982).

43. (New York: Basic Books, 1982). Cf. also Michael Riordan, ed., *The Day After Midnight: The Effects of Nuclear War* (Palo Alto: Cheshire Books, 1982). An anti-war propaganda statement, but with a useful bibliography is Murphy Polner, ed., *The Disarmament Catalogue* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982).

44. p. 16.

45. Falk, p. 208.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

48. Schell, p. 75.

49. Falk, p. 156.

also lawyers, scientists, engineers, and artists are using their specialized skills to promote antinuclear causes."⁵⁰

Will such protests bring about nuclear disarmament? Certainly not in a unilateral way; but the weight of popular opinion should not be gainsaid. It has a way of influencing democracies, whose leaders can then approach negotiations with greater zeal, and perhaps even success. But such processes take time and it is not at all certain that this planet earth has left much time to spare. After all, more likely than a planned nuclear war is an unplanned accident that can occur at any time. Jonathan Schell lists this as the first probable cause of "a wholly accidental attack, triggered by human error or mechanical failure. On three occasions in the last couple of years, American nuclear forces were placed on the early stages of alert twice because of the malfunctioning of a computer chip in the North American Air Defense Command's warning system, and once when a test tape depicting a missile attack was inadvertently inserted into the system. The greatest danger is computer-generated misinformation and other mechanical errors. It may be that one error might start a chain reaction of escalating responses between command centres, leading, eventually, to an attack."⁵¹ There is an uncanny cogency to this argument, particularly because it is supported by the often infallible Murphy Law, "If anything can go wrong, it will."

Should the terrible accident occur, there will be no chance for second thoughts, for regrets, for doing anything at all about it. Humankind will have been murdered. In the Bushnell park in Hartford, Connecticut, every Fall when the pond was just frozen over, the park administration displayed a large sign which warns, "Drowning is for keeps." So is death in a nuclear holocaust. The Jesuit Father Richard McSorley was correct when he wrote in 1976, "It's a Sin to Build a Nuclear Weapon."⁵² Might this not be our generation's unforgivable sin?

As all weighty issues, so also the nuclear problem is not without its financial considerations. It cannot be assumed that all nuclear buildup is inspired by patriotism and sound theology. The experts claim that missile building is highly lucrative. At a time when too many people are out of work, it may not be popular everywhere to oppose the nuclear industry, particularly where it is serving military purposes. While Roman Catholic bishop L. T. Matthiesen, Diocese of Amarillo, Texas, knew that, he still released a public statement about the immorality of assembling the neutron bomb at Pantex. Some of his parishioners appreciated the moral guidance, others did not; from outsiders there came praise as well as condemnation. At least one thing is clear: he who criticizes the business side of the nuclear defense system, will not escape controversy. Yet cross-fleeing, though an occasional Christian practice, dare not become our goal.

So, in the end, what moral and truly Lutheran guidance can be offered? At least five observations may be in order.

First of all, although indeed it is possible to quote Martin Luther on both sides of the issue, this fact should not discourage us from seeking wisdom from Luther. Luther's concern for the well being and the defence of society was authentic; his disapproval

50. *Ibid.*, p. 269.

51. Schell, pp. 26-27.

52. Ronald J. Sider & Darrel J. Brubaker, eds. *Preaching on Peace* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 83.

of aggression was also very real. Justice and love are never easily correlatable, and precisely for this reason they demand our continuous and dedicated concern.

Second, Reinhold Niebuhr's refreshing way of reading the meaning of the term "balance of power" so as to invite a full scale democratic participation in the act of balancing, is a constructive observation. It allows us to see the need for political activity as an authentic expression of a Christian sense of responsibility. Of course, not all Lutherans will express their responsibility in the same manner. There will be those who do and those who do not march and protest. But either position ought to be an active one and hence an expression of our faith.

Third, the rising fear about the possible results of a nuclear build-up may have some very positive effects as well. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, then even a very human fear may have some sobering effect. While the preceding generations took the notion of a divine judgment and hell fire quite literally and seriously, most of our contemporaries do not. As is visible in the abortion debate, a large number of people prefer to leave the ultimate decisions about life and death in their own hands, based more on convenience than on any deep moral principles. The nuclear threat is so powerfully real and so all inclusive, that it forces even thoroughly secular people to think about the well being of the whole earth and the meaning of morality. The need for morality is now being affirmed in circles that previously spoke of it with infinite scorn. If the religious leaders neglect this opportunity to speak to a genuinely felt need, they are overlooking a great opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Fourth, the Liberation theologians of our generation have taught us that it is very difficult to preach to the hungry and to the oppressed unless the preaching deals with their life situation as well. If our concerns with nuclear peace are merely selfish demands about retaining our accustomed way of life without regard to what happens elsewhere in the world, I sincerely doubt that our efforts can be successful. The prophet Isaiah said, "There is no peace for the wicked" (48:22). The popular demand for nuclear peace, authentic and sincere, therefore needs to be broadened into such a proclamation of the Gospel that cares for human dignity and freedom both at home and in far away places.

Fifth, Karl Holl, the best Luther scholar that Germany has produced, wrote in 1917 during the days of World War I that the greatest need, if Luther's heritage was to be restored, was "to awaken a conscious commitment to the church (literally: the church-feeling) in our nation."⁵³ I truly believe that Holl was right. Only a renewed sense of intensive Christian fellowship can sustain us in humility and courage to live in the days which look evil.

53. Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1928), III:167.