

Leaders: World must remove atomic weapons

By Deacon Dr. Amy Blumenshine (Dec 2019)

In the time of Advent, our church prepares for the coming of the Prince of Peace. Our scripture readings raise dire concerns. May we too be emboldened to be about the work of peace.

In recent days, both Pope Francis and Mikhail Gorbachev (former leader of the Soviet Union) have called for eliminating nuclear weapons. And an international treaty to ban nuclear weapons needs only 14 more nations to sign before it goes into effect. We are at a time of great risk and opportunity.

Pope Francis explicitly declared “the possession of atomic weapons is immoral”, and “we will be judged on this...Future generations will rise to condemn our failure if we spoke of peace but did not act to bring it about among the peoples of the earth.” Peace must be “founded on truth, built up in justice, animated and perfected by charity, and attained in freedom,” he added.

Both the Pope and Gorbachev separately called out the high current risk of catastrophe due to international tensions. Gorbachev also noted:

"As long as weapons of mass destruction exist, primarily nuclear weapons, the danger is colossal. All nations should declare - ALL nations - that nuclear weapons must be destroyed. This is to save ourselves and our planet."

As we investigate moral injury among military veterans, we must inquire to what extent our nation has been morally injured by our massive investment in nuclear weapons. How has our moral decision-making been impaired? {Alex, perhaps this could be the “teaser” in the Sentinel leading to the longer article?}

Gorbachev famously signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with then President Reagan on behalf of their respective countries, reducing the nuclear weapons of the two powers and the risk of accidental annihilation. President Trump unilaterally withdrew from the INF recently, acting without congressional authorization.

Meanwhile, the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons**, passed the UN in 2017, and is being signed by countries around the world—despite official US pressures against it. It prohibits nations from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, or allowing nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory. It also prohibits them from assisting, encouraging or inducing anyone to engage in any of these activities. Theoretically, if ratified without US approval, the US would have to keep our nuclear weapons in our own country, instead of in bases around the world.

Given the practice of nuclear war (and the military does practice nuclear war constantly), nuclear weapons are the first targets of an enemy. People in the targeted metro area will be the first to be obliterated in a nuclear bombardment. Current weapons are exponentially more destructive than those dropped on Japan. Secondly, however, governmental, social, and ecological systems would fail – from the massive destruction and trauma and due to weather events triggered that will make life unsustainable. Any objective analyst would conclude that it

is insane to promote the likelihood of this catastrophe. Indeed, the explanation for building these weapons is called MAD – Mutually Assured Destruction. This is supposed to keep empires who seek to dominate from using atomic bombs--assuming rational and well-informed leadership.

Opponents of nuclear weapons point out, however, that every US president since 1945 has indeed used these weapons by threatening other countries, sometimes explicitly. Daniel Ellsberg's research showed that North Vietnam was given nuclear ultimatums 13 times during the American War in Vietnam. Ellsberg concludes that large peace rallies were what kept Nixon from implementing his plans.

Our Lutheran Church historically has also opposed weapons of mass destruction. The guiding document of the ELCA, For Peace in God's World social statement (FPGW), declares: The Church is a disturbing presence when it refuses to be silent and instead speaks the truth in times when people shout out, "'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14). The Church is this presence when it names and resists idols that lead to false security, injustice, and war, and calls for repentance. We therefore denounce beliefs and actions that:

- ◆ elevate our nation or any nation or people to the role of God;
- ◆ find ultimate security in weapons and warfare;
- ◆ ordain the inherent right of one people, race, or civilization to ^[]rule over others;
- ◆ promise a perfect, peaceful society through the efforts of a ^[]self-sufficient humanity; and
- ◆ despair of any possibility for peace.

The FPGW also affirms

- ◆ agreements among the leading nuclear powers to reduce their nuclear stockpiles and to decrease the possibility of nuclear confrontation or accident;
- ◆ the successful negotiation of a renewed Nuclear Non- proliferation Treaty, the strengthening of mechanisms to monitor and enforce nuclear treaties, and efforts that move toward the elimination of nuclear weapons.

One can conclude from this guiding statement that the ELCA would condemn the current US commitment to spend \$10 billion **an hour** for 30 years to "improve" the nuclear arsenal (instead of on the many other human needs of our citizens.)

Pope Francis invited us all to "open our hearts to hope, and become instruments of reconciliation and peace...This will always be possible if we are able to protect one another and realize that we are joined by a common destiny", he said. "Our world, interconnected not only by globalization but by the very earth we have always shared, demands, today more than ever, that interests exclusive to certain groups or sectors be left to one side, in order to achieve the greatness of those who struggle co-responsibly to ensure a common future. ...Peace and international stability are incompatible with attempts to build upon the fear of mutual destruction or the threat of total annihilation."

The Pope seemed to echo the ELCA social statement in his declarations. He too emphasized that the arms race uses resources that are taken away from the peoples' needs and appropriate care of the environment. "In a world where millions of children and families live in inhumane conditions, the money that is squandered and the fortunes made through the manufacture, upgrading, maintenance, and sale of ever more destructive weapons are an affront crying out to heaven... Convinced as I am that a world without nuclear weapons is possible and necessary, I ask political leaders not to forget that these weapons cannot protect us from current threats to national and international security. We need to ponder the catastrophic impact of their deployment, especially from a humanitarian and environmental standpoint, and reject heightening a climate of fear, mistrust, and hostility fomented by nuclear doctrines.. One of the deepest longings of the human heart is for security, peace and stability, the possession of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction is not the answer to this desire... Our world is marked by a perverse dichotomy that tries to defend and ensure stability and peace through a false sense of security sustained by a mentality of fear and mistrust, one that ends up poisoning relationships between peoples and obstructing any form of dialogue."

Peace and international stability, said the Pope, "can be achieved only on the basis of a global ethic of solidarity and cooperation in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family of today and tomorrow."

In Congress, Eleanor Holmes Norton has introduced H.R. 2419, the Nuclear Weapons Abolition and Economic Conversion Act, but the bill has not yet had a hearing.

In his recent statements, Pope Francis also named atomic energy as immoral when it is used for war. "The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is today, more than ever, a crime not only against the dignity of human beings but against any possible future for our common home. The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possession of atomic weapons is immoral." Atomic energy production has never been economic or rational from solely an energy production standpoint. The plants were initially promoted and nationally subsidized in order to produce weapons-grade plutonium for bombs. As climate change warms and otherwise impacts bodies of water, each nuclear power plant is in peril. Radioactive waste can kill for 10,000 years.

Illnesses from radiation exposure include leukemia, multiple myeloma, cataracts, birth defects, infertility, chromosomal aberrations, hemorrhaging, infections, and stomach, colon, lung, breast, and thyroid cancers. Learn more about the current health impacts from nuclear weapon production at <https://psr.org/issues/nuclear-weapons-abolition/disarmament-public-health>

Pope Francis invited everyone to join in praying "for the triumph of a culture of life, reconciliation, and fraternity." Making a world without nuclear weapons a reality requires "the

involvement of all,” said Pope Francis. May we have the moral courage to pray and to act for the abolition of nuclear weapons.