Nuclear Weapons and the American Churches

Ethical Positions on Modern Warfare

Donald L. Davidson
CHAPLAIN (MAJOR), UNITED STATES ARMY

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Nuclear Weapons and the American Churches

"Not to promote war, but to preserve peace"

PREPARED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE

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U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE

CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA

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Acknowledgments

The preparation of this study has extended over three brief tours of duty at Harvard University, the Army Chaplain School, and the Army War College. Formal research for the project commenced in December 1981 when Kermit D. Johnson, then Chief of Chaplains, U.S. Army, requested that I prepare an indepth research paper objectively describing the just-war tradition and the current positions of American religious denominations on nuclear weapons and policies. When Patrick J. Hessian succeeded Chaplain Johnson as the Chief of Chaplains in 1982, he urged me to complete the study. Neither Chaplain Johnson nor Chaplain Hessian has sought to influence my opinion or the specific conclusions I have reached. They have, however, provided the encouragement and support essential for the completion of the document.

Originally I intended to describe the positions on nuclear weapons held by each major religious body in the United States. To assist in the research and to allow the denominations to speak for themselves, I sent a letter requesting information from sixty-six different groups (attached as Appendix A). This letter was addressed to all denominations with membership of at least 100,000, plus a few smaller groups like the historic peace churches. Included on the mailing list were Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, Morman, Christian Scientist, and other bodies less traditional in American culture. I am grateful to each of the forty-one denominations who responded to my request. The aggregate membership of the denominations discussed in the text is well over one-hundred million.

I have not, however, addressed the positions of all groups. None of the larger Eastern Orthodox churches or black denominations replied to my request for information. My investigation suggests that these groups have not commented extensively (if at all) on the moral issues of nuclear weapons. Jewish positions are covered only briefly because these bodies have published few official statements. Space and time limitations have also prevented discussion of some of the smaller groups who did send information. Though I attempted to be fair, I have occasionally criticized points in the positions I have discussed. This fact should not obscure my appreciation for the assistance given to this research and to the nation as we collectively reflect on the moral issues of war in the nuclear age.

Several persons have critically examined my work. The text has been improved because of the observations of Arthur J. Dyck, James T. Johnson, Ralph B. Potter, Paul Ramsey, Michael Walzer, and Brother David Austin. Others who have contributed through advise and argument include colleagues Reynold B. Connett, Richard Tupy, Donald E. Lunday, Otto P. Chaney, John F. Scott, Albert P. Holmberg, Robert G. Chaudrue, and Henry G. Gole. As I have not always accepted their criticism, however, I alone am responsible for the deficiencies of the text. I am especially thankful to Connie Warner who prevailed over many changes in preparing this manuscript.

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Donald L. Davidson
17 May 1983

Introduction

Since the late 1970s a new debate on nuclear weapons has emerged in the democracies on both sides of the Atlantic. Signs of a significant level of concern about these weapons also exist in the Eastern bloc and Third World nations. The controversy challenges international alignments, military strategy, economic policies, and traditional moral views on war. Leaders in the anti-nuclear movement include politicians, scientists, physicians, academicians, and religious officials. In the United States an elaborate network consisting of new organizations and revived Vietnam War protest groups has developed. Perhaps the most visible element of the new movement is the national freeze campaign.

There is little question, however, that concern ranges far beyond the formal protest organizations; the new controversy has become "politicized," or "democratized." Earlier disputes over nuclear policies were confined largely to policymakers, "think tank" strategists, and academic ethicists. Currently, by contrast, policy questions are being raised by broad segments of the population. The present debate has prompted a large percentage of Americans, including soldiers, to rethink their views on the development, deployment, and use of nuclear weapons. Fundamental questions are being asked about the morality and feasibility of war in the nuclear age. The central issue is how to protect and preserve values worth defending while preventing nuclear war.

Of the various organizational proponents in the contemporary nuclear debate, religious denominations have by far the largest number of constituents. Well over a hundred million Americans are members of the Roman Catholic Church and the major Protestant churches. Therefore, positions advocated by ethicists, denominational leaders, and policymaking bodies of the prominent religious groups are significant. Potentially, at least, the collective positions of the churches represent the most powerful influence on moral opinion in the United States. And, clearly, the churches view war and nuclear weapons as moral issues.

Religious denominations in America and the West have held diverse views on the morality of war. The position supported by the majority, however, has been that of the just-war tradition. Around 400 A.D. the African bishop

Augustine asked: Is it ever right for a Christian to participate in war? The three types of response to this question have been identified by Roland Bainton as pacifism, the holy war or crusader attitude, and the just-war position.[1] During the first three centuries after Jesus, the majority of Christians were pacifists, that is, they refused to participate in war. Pacifists have traditionally claimed that Jesus approved of only "passive" or nonviolent resistance to aggression. They frequently cite Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount where he affirmed: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. . . ." "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right check, turn to him the other also."[2] Also remembered is Jesus' command at his arrest for Peter to put away his sword rather than forcefully resist (John 18:11).

The majority of pacifists do not deny that aggression and violence should be resisted. The means they approve, however, are nonviolent. The pacifist tradition is continued today in the historic peace churches--Quakers, Mennonites, Brethren and others. Since World War II an increasing number of Catholics and Protestants have also adopted the pacifist position.

The crusader or holy war position emerged following the medieval alliance between the church and state. The most striking examples of this ideological warfare are the Crusades (11th-13th centuries) and the Reformation Era religious wars (16th-17th centuries).[3] Holy wars have been extremely violent because the military engagement is seen as a fight to the death between forces of good and evil. The crusader is providing a religious service in protecting God's kingdom and stamping out the corruption of infidelity. Humanitarian considerations normally practiced in combat tend to be abrogated because the adversary is seen to be a wicked foe of righteousness. The enemy is outside the pale of God and must be defeated, no matter what the costs. Contemporary expressions of this position hold that moral and political limits and self-imposed restraints on force are unrealistic when confronted by the evils of aggression.

Augustine's answer to the question he posed in the fifth century has become known as the just-war position. He concluded that Christians should share in the responsibility of resisting aggression and maintaining social order, but with the recognition that all human life is sacred. In its historical development the just-war tradition rejected absolute pacifism as ineffectual against ruthless aggression. It justified some use of force for the protection of the innocent, but renounced unlimited force and the crusader goals of

punishing infidels and extending the hegemony of religious doctrine by violent means.[4]

Through the contributions of philosophers, theologians, lawyers, statesmen, and soldiers, a set of criteria has emerged for evaluating whether or not violent force is justified and to what extent it should be applied. The jus ad bellum (justice *of* war) criteria are used for judging when it is right to resort to war. These permit legitimate national authorities to declare war as a last resort if the nation's causes and intentions are just and there is a reasonable possibility of victory, without causing more harm than good. Because of the devastation of war, war must always be justified. Even then the just-war tradition only approves of war as a lesser evil than aggression. The jus in bello (justice *in* war) criteria are employed to moderate the destructiveness of war by limiting its means and protecting noncombatants.

Since the fifth century the just-war position has been the dominant Western moral view on war.[5] It has been the position advocated by the Roman Catholic Church and, following the Reformation, most Protestant denominations. Interest in this position waned in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The development of modern weapons and the employment of large conscript armies, however, have led in the twentieth century to greater efforts to limit the legitimate causes and means of war. This movement has been manifested in the international law conventions and, among Christians, a renewed emphasis on just-war principles.[6]

In the last few years, however, the nuclear weapons debate has had the opposite effect. The continuing buildup of nuclear arsenals and the recent talk of fighting a limited nuclear war have prompted many to question the capacity of the just-war tradition to prevent nuclear war. James R. Crumley, Jr., for example, affirms: "Lutherans are not pacifists, . . . But isn't it true that the nuclear age has altered the way we are to apply our theological and ethical presuppositions?"[7] Some are more definite in their opinions: "A nuclear war is so unimaginably destructive . . . as to make a rationale of 'just war' a devilish joke."[8] As this comment illustrates, in rejecting the use of nuclear weapons some also eschew just-war theory on the assumption that it justifies the use of these weapons.

Those who renounce nuclear weapons as unjust means have created a fourth type of Christian response to war--"nuclear pacifism."[9] Some in this group have concluded that all war in the modern age is illicit because of the possibility (at least among nuclear powers) even in a conventional war of escalation to nuclear weapons. This version is a new form of pacifism. Others may be described as "just-war nuclear pacifists."

On the basis of just-war criteria, especially discrimination (noncombatant immunity), due proportion, and reasonable hope of success, these have rejected any war using nuclear weapons. Wars without nuclear weapons may still be justified if they meet the criteria of just war. This is not a new position in principle. In the past others have proscribed warfare that employs means considered unjust, such as chemical and biological weapons and indiscriminate bombardment.

Within the religious arena current discussions on the morality of war in the nuclear age manifest all four of the positions described above: pacifism, nuclear pacifism, just war, and the crusader attitude. Among the major denominations, however, the crusader position has all but disappeared. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that a crusade mentality now exists in opposition to war. In documenting denominational positions, research confronts a major problem: To what extent are denominational pronouncements supported by members? I know of no study that has resolved this question.

Perhaps the opinion poll conducted by The Christian Science Monitor in the summer of 1982 is indicative of the view from the pew concerning nuclear weapons. In analyzing the results of this poll, the Monitor affirms that to a majority of respondents: "Nuclear weapons are morally repugnant--but the lesser of evils at this point, so long as they are used only in non-use, to deter rather than to fight."[10] The survey shows that 51 percent approve of possessing nuclear weapons and threatening their use, while 43 percent find such actions morally unacceptable. Only 25 percent find the actual use of nuclear weapons in a war morally acceptable; 68 percent rejected this option. By a margin of 67 to 28 percent the respondents rejected a threat of nuclear retaliation in response to a non-nuclear attack on Western Europe. Concerning "a unilateral American renunciation of nuclear weapons," 58 percent said "no," while 36 percent said "yes." Of those surveyed, 74 percent consider the arms race immoral and 88 percent think it dangerous. A majority sees the United States and the Soviet Union as roughly equal in nuclear weapons and advocate a goal of maintaining parity (60 percent). Concerning "overall arms-control policy for the U.S.," 22 percent favored the Kennedy-Hatfield nuclear freeze proposal; 7 percent favored the Jackson-Warner freeze-after-building proposal; and 46 percent supported George F. Kennan's recommendation for "an across-the-board reduction of both American and Soviet nuclear arsenals by 50 percent."

This study focuses on many of the questions addressed in the Monitor poll. The moral positions described, however, are those of ethicists and denominational leaders. Also, extensive attention has been given to the positions reflected in official

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pronouncements of the major religious bodies. Because the issues of war and nuclear weapons are largely debated within the intellectual framework of the just-war tradition, the first two chapters describe the development and moral principles of this tradition. Chapter 3 considers the positions on nuclear issues held by contemporary just-war ethicists. The remaining chapters document the positions reflected in the pronouncements of religious leaders and the official statements of the larger denominations. Much attention has been given to the recent pastoral letter of the fifty million member Roman Catholic Church in America. It should also be recognized that churches representing an equal number of Protestants have issued pronouncements on these issues.

My approach to the issues of war and nuclear weapons is from the just-war perspective. Undoubtedly this has influenced my selection and interpretation of data. My objective in the following chapters, however, is to present an accurate description of the various positions. My brief evaluations are largely confined to the conclusion sections and the final chapter.

NOTES

1. Roland H. Bainton, Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 148.

2. These New Testament quotations are from "Matthew," Chapter 5 (New International Version).

3. The Thirty Years War, which ended in 1648, devastated much of Europe. The contemporary Iranian Revolution and Iran's war with Iraq are "holy wars" in Iran's perspective.

4. See William V. O'Brien, The Conduct of Just and Limited War (New York: Praeger, 1981), p. 22.

5. "Two Issues in Contemporary Defense: A Just War Critique," Military Chaplains' Review, DA Pamphlet 165-135, Fall, 1982; published by the U.S. Army Chaplain Board, Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, 07703. For more indepth discussion see Johnson's Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981); and "What Guidance can Just War Tradition Provide for Contemporary Moral Thought About War?" New Catholic World 226 (March-April 1982): 81-84.

6. These concerns led to the Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928), which proscribed wars of aggression, and the League of Nations, which was intended to serve as an arbiter in international conflicts. These steps proved insufficient, however, and in the depression torn Thirties, militarism again rampaged in the world. During World War II many jurists recognized that international law had not developed an adequate basis for punishing even the most heinous aggression. In just-war terminology, there was inadequate "jus ad bellum" provisions in international law. Again, following this war strong attempts were made to "outlaw" aggressive war in the United Nations Charter and the Charter of the Nuremberg Tribunal, both signed in 1945. For discussion on the laws of war, see Telford Taylor, Nuremberg and Vietnam: An American Tragedy (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970). The epic work on international law, is L. Oppenheim, International Law: A Treatise (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 8th ed., 1955). James Johnson discusses the development of just-war doctrine in this period in "Just War Theory: What's the Use?", Worldview 19 (July-August 1976). Arthur J. Dyck, "Ethical Bases of the Military Profession," Parameters 10 (March 1980):44, alludes to the connection between the laws of war and just-war principles.

7. Pastoral Letter addressed to members of the Lutheran Church in America, 9 November 1981.

8. "What Monitor Readers Think About Nuclear Weapons," The Christian Science Monitor, 15 December 1982, p. 12.

9. Thomas A. Shannon, War or Peace? The Search for New Answers, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1980), p. x.

10. Elizabeth Pond, "Speaking Out on Nuclear Issues," The Christian Science Monitor, 15 December 1982, p. 1. This interpretative analysis accompanies the results of the readers poll which was also published in this edition of the Monitor.

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[1]
The Development of the Just-War Tradition

INTRODUCTION

The just-war tradition is an amalgamation of Western thought on war. Theologians, philosophers, statesmen, and soldiers have contributed to this tradition, which continues today in the teaching of many churches and in the codes of international law. In this chapter I highlight the development of this tradition by surveying the concepts of some of its more significant architects, including Cicero, Augustine, Aquinas, Bonet, Victoria, Suarez, Grotius, and Locke. When theologians look for the roots of Christian moral views on war, they most frequently turn to the works of Augustine. In many ways he could be considered the "father" of the Christian theory of just war. When Augustine sought to provide a rationale for Christian participation in war, however, he referred to an older tradition. So let us begin where he did, with the Roman tradition, as represented by the Stoic philosopher Cicero.[1]

THE TRADITION BUILDERS

Cicero (106-43 B.C.)

In the two centuries before Christ, Rome sought its "manifest destiny" by aggressively extending its control throughout the ancient world. Once the empire was essentially established, the role of the Army was to protect the Pax Romana, by defending the borders and maintaining internal security. Toward the end of this expansion period Cicero and others developed a legal concept of just war that was applied in conflict among peoples of the empire, but seldom in war with "pirates" or "barbarians."[2] A just war for Cicero was one waged "to recover lost goods, whether property or rights." His was a legal view that required prior guilt of an enemy. A primary concern of Cicero was to identify just causes for war, which he believed included punishment of an

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