

On Threats of Nuclear War

The 223rd General Assembly in June, 2018, urged the churches to renew the push for nuclear disarmament. It called for an updating of the 1988 policy of Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age in terms of the 2017 Treaty on the prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which, though approved by 122 nations, has not been approved by the nuclear powers. The Advisory Council on Social Witness appreciated the urgency in the General Assembly's resolution, but also noted the need for mutual negotiations towards reduction and the complexity of disarming the weapons of deterrence.

The Pittsburgh Presbytery's Peacemaking Team in light of its commitments to the theology of peacemaking developed since 1980 in The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the action of the 223rd General assembly urges churches to provide forums, seminars, publications, sermons or other forms of leadership on the subject of the threats of nuclear war. The negotiations between the U.S.A. and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have been surprising without resolution of major or any important issues. The Peacemaking Ministry Team recommends church study of *Five Risks Presbyterians Must Take for Peace* by Christian Iosso on the General Assembly's 2016 action on peacemaking. The Team can provide resource personnel for such study. The website of the Advisory Council on social Witness Policy, *Unbound Justice*, includes a dialogue between the Coordinator of Pittsburgh Presbytery's Peacemaking Team and the coordinator of Social Witness Policy on the General Assembly's action

While deploring the threats from North Korea, the Peacemaking Team does not regard counter-threats of nuclear war as appropriate. The Presbyterian Church found the possession of nuclear weapons to be immoral, and it has urged for decades the diplomatic disarmament of weapons of terror. U.S.A. policy has been to possess these weapons only for defense and threat. Presidents and churches have urged disarmament through diplomacy and recognized the temporary reliance on deterrence against other nuclear powers as only a short-term necessity.

There is no justification for threatening to destroy civilian populations because national leaders have chosen to develop weapons against their treaty obligations. Economic sanctions, pressure and diplomacy to prevent the development of nuclear weapons or nuclear war are appropriate, but nuclear war to prevent proliferation cannot be morally justified.

The Presbytery Team strongly recommends the appointment of an Ambassador to South Korea who can pursue peacemaking through the means of diplomacy and discussion. The Washington D.C. Administration should revisit the possibilities of a negotiated solution to the threats in a revised policy representing previous negotiations with North Korea or other viable solutions.

While international focus seems to be on nuclear weapons involving Iran and Korea, the appearance of a Second Cold War with Russia suggests the need for pursuing agreements with the Russians as they are possible. Of course, nothing may be possible. The Advisory Council on Social Witness regards the Russians as in violation of some existing nuclear agreements and calls for investigations and negotiations over this malpractice.

Daniel Ellsberg's new book, *the Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*, details 25 occasions where the U.S. arsenal of nuclear weapons has been used politically to attempt to coerce enemies to behave differently. He admits that he cannot prove all of his cases, but there is an extremely high probability that more than a majority of his historical cases are accurate. All Presidents of the U.S.A. have refused to take the option of nuclear warfare "off the table." U.S.A. policy has been to refuse to forswear the "First use option". It is not absolutely clear if the earlier dread reality of "Nuclear Winter" would follow a current war between Russia and the U.S.A. since the earlier predictions of nuclear winter were before Start II. Admittedly Daniel Ellsberg has not been in the central planning process for nuclear war since the Kennedy Administration. However, this former Rand scientist has tracked developments since that time through the available literature. His judgments of ½ billion casualties resulting from a U.S.A.-Russia war are documented as held by contemporary thinkers about the war.

He does not presume to go deeply into the moral issue of planning for nuclear war, though it drove him into resistance against the war planning and the Vietnam War. He refers to the Robert Kennedy book, *Thirteen Days*, and to Kennedy's hope to think through the questions of the right to possess such weapons after the near miss of nuclear war over Cuba. Several churches thought through the question of "right" in the 1980s and some granted a period of reducing the deterrent as one of possible morality, and several refused to "recognize the right" of possessing nuclear weapons. Our church called for extraordinary use of ordinary means to reduce the nuclear threat. Russian and American developments threaten each other, and we possess the benefits of influence through our weapons. Ellsberg is correct I think that for political leaders to reach the conclusion of moral realists that "First strike" policy should be discontinued and the dismantling of the Doomsday Machine begun is the moral stance recognizing the humanity of our children, the hunger for protecting the environment, and the priority of peacemaking for the Presbyterian Church.

This period of deepening tension, threat and counter threat may be a time of Kairos as recognized in *Peacemaking the Believer's Calling* of 1980. Such times are promising and also filled with danger. Poetically speaking the demonic and the divine are wrestling as Jacob wrestled the divine before negotiating with Esau (Genesis 33:11). Jesus in his most explicit advice which political leaders could use called on armed kings to negotiate (Luke 14:31).

The Presbytery's Peacemaking Ministry Team prayed on June 6, 2018, for the peaceful fulfilment of present nuclear negotiations and urged churches to discuss the issues of peacemaking and nuclear weapons. This letter was then authorized, and we committed to continue praying for sufficient and peaceful negotiations. Ronald Stone, retiring coordinator of the Peacemaking Ministry Team.