

A STUDY DOCUMENT ON PEACE

At the Eighth General Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada it was moved, seconded, and carried, that the Division of Social Service prepare a theological statement on peace for discussion early in 1983, and that all congregations and conferences of the ELCC be encouraged to study and reflect on the document in pursuit of world peace.

STATEMENT OF PEACE

(The following statement has been produced through the resources of the ELCC Committee for Justice and Peace of the Division of Social Service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada.)

OUR CONCERNS TODAY

OUR WORLD SITUATION

While war has always been a threat and a manifestation of the reality of sin and the possibility of nuclear, biological or chemical warfare has been with us for many years, recent developments have raised the need to clarify again the Christian call for world peace.

Today, war has the possibility of destroying human civilization on an unprecedented scale. Weapons systems are being developed to provide a "first strike" capability, changing the traditional desire for "defense" into plans to initiate a nuclear war. Money spent on weapons is increasing at an alarming rate at a time when poverty and other social problems are increasing. The destructiveness of a war today would not only involve the immediate combatants, but would engulf the entire earth, now and for generations to come.

We live at a time when the fear of war, especially nuclear war, is haunting the lives of many. The existence of this fear is a major pastoral concern. Some are being led into an ethical relativism, or a loss of faith in God's future, because of such fears, feeling that life has no meaning because the future is in doubt.

The ethical and political issues before us have become so great that the church cannot remain silent or apathetic regarding the future of God's creation and human civilization.

OUR THEOLOGICAL SITUATION

There have been different viewpoints within our church regarding strategies for achieving world peace.

We recognize those who adhere to some form of the ancient Christian tradition of pacifism, attempting to renounce any use of violence to settle human conflicts. This position has been found in Christianity since the earliest centuries and represents a sincere attempt to actualize the teachings of Jesus within a broken world. But some forms of pacifism have difficulty in articulating the need for a legitimate defense, if not of one's self (for we are never called to defend our own self interests), then the need to defend one's neighbor. In light of the possibility of one nation practicing "nuclear blackmail" against another, a unilateral disarmament does not seem realistic in the near future. Yet the non-violent resolution of conflicts remains a goal for all of us.

Most of us have adhered to the "just war theory" (mentioned in the Augsburg Confession, Article 16). The classical just war theory affirms that war is always evil and sinful, but it concedes that on occasion it will be necessary for Christians to participate in war, provided that a number of provisions are met: that the means of conducting the war are appropriate to the end being sought; that greater justice will result fighting the war as opposed to the unjust condition if the war is not fought; that only military targets are attacked and not the civilian population; that the war has been declared by a legitimate authority; that the

intention in declaring the war is good; that there is a reasonable chance of success; that all possible moderation be used; and that war is seen as only a last resort when all other attempts at resolution have failed. Martin Luther essentially saw defense, in particular defense of the neighbor, as the only valid grounds for participating in war.

The just war theory provides some important guidelines for today's world. Many feel that the policy of nuclear "deterrence" has delayed a major confrontation between the superpowers for the past generation. The "just war theory" remains valid for some forms of more conventional warfare.

But we are also aware of problems facing the traditional just war theory in light of today's technology and military strategies. Many now feel that nuclear warfare should violate the "just war" principles. Current military strategies call for attacking the civilian population, in violation of the just war theory. The attempt to develop weapons that can initiate an attack ("first strike") on an enemy, such as the Cruise and Pershing II missiles, rather than developing a purely defensive military strategy, is also a violation of traditional Christian just war theory. Nuclear war calls for using levels of force and destruction that far exceed being legitimate means for the end in view. Many of today's weapons not only inflict immediate destruction, but also will make large portions of the earth uninhabitable for many generations. Thus no war employing nuclear, biological or chemical weapons can meet the criteria for a just war.

The policy of "deterrence" must affirm the intention to use nuclear weapons in order for there to be a deterrence; without the intention there is no deterrence. But even the threat to use nuclear weapons and bring about this kind of destruction, as a policy of deterrence, is morally unacceptable because intentions are not morally neutral.

Thus our traditional approaches to war and peace are in need of reappraisal in light of today's world. We need to recover again the bible's teachings on peace and justice in order to deal with many of the problems and concerns now before us. We need to witness to faith and love even within the difficult choices before us. Regardless of the specific means or tactics employed, we affirm that our common calling is to be peacemakers and agents of reconciliation in this world. We need to explore the bible to express our common calling even while we have differences in accepting specific strategies for approaching peace through justice and reconciliation.

THE CALL TO PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

In approaching issues of peace and war, the New Testament clearly calls for Christian discipleship to be the pursuit of reconciliation and peace. We are called to reconcile neighbors with each other, just as Christ has reconciled us to God (John 15:12). We are called to be God's instruments in achieving peace and justice for others. "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" (Matt. 5:9).

Our calling and vocation as peacemakers begins with the peace of God which is ours when Christ reconciles us with God. "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:). In the Bible, the word "peace" refers to many dimensions of our spiritual life, our life with God and our life with others. "Peace" means wholeness, health, prosperity, security, well-being (political and spiritual), liberation and freedom, reconciliation with God, reconciliation with our own conscience, submission to the will of God, peace with all people, mutual concord and agreement, deliverance and safety.

This peace transforms our attitude towards life and we seek to witness to the peace and justice we have with God. "We love, because God first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We seek to be instruments of justice because God has established us in a relationship of righteousness; we seek to be instruments for peace and for our own lives. Thus, while the "peace of God" is different from "world peace," it is the peace of God that inspires and strengthens us to work for world peace. "The peace that Christ gives is to guide you in

the decisions you make" (Col. 3:15 TEV). Peacemaking is a part of the gospel message of peace and justice and an intrinsic aspect of Christian discipleship.

The Christian experience of peace transcends the immediate limits of the present reality and can be experienced even in the midst of strife; yet it is also present in human history: "seek peace, and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14b). Peace means the reconciliation of people through understanding, truth, justice and mercy.

Christian peacemaking should not be motivated by fear, especially the fear of war; rather, Christian discipleship is motivated by love, God's love for all people. We seek peace, not simply because we are afraid of war, but because of our love for all of God's children. Fear is a present reality that we must acknowledge but which we must also overcome. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me" (Ps. 23:4). While fear causes nations to manufacture weapons of destruction and while fear of nuclear holocaust has caused many to oppose the military buildup, as Christians we must preach to all that love casts out fear.

We are called to be good stewards of God's creation (Gen. 1:28), we are part of God's plan to redeem the creation from the brokenness of sin (Eph. 1:1-12). But war destroys the creation and therefore is always opposed to God's will. We oppose the use of military power to resolve political or economic problems when other forms of resolution are possible. We affirm that a nation cannot justly test, develop, produce or use nuclear, chemical, biological or other weapons which are designed primarily to inflict civilian casualties and to maximize the destruction of God's creation. Likewise, we oppose military strategies designed to inflict casualties upon the civilian population.

The gospel message of peace is crucial in healing the creation. Those who recognize God will know the path of peace (Rom. 3:15-17) and peace and reconciliation is intended for all (Isa. 57:18-21). With the threat of nuclear war we must work even more diligently to sustain God's creation, bringing God's Word more fervently to all peoples and nations and acting concretely as agents of reconciliation. We hope and pray that Christ will bring about these works through our lives.

CHRISTIANS IN A MILITARIZED SOCIETY

The fear of war has been promoted, to some extent; by ways of thinking that encourage the increased militarization of society. In order to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the world, we are told that it is first necessary to increase their number. We are told that the way to achieve peace is by preparing for war. We are told that "national security" can be achieved by inciting fear and threatening violence. We are told that we must be prepared to destroy the world in order to save the world. Despite the pervasiveness of such positions, we do not necessarily feel more secure today than in past generations. Governments speak a language that calls for world peace, yet we do not have peace.

For many in our church and society, profits and jobs depend on research and manufacturing related to military weapons. Various social values and systems have brought this about, and we find that our general concern for peace is often compromised by our immediate need for financial security. The great importance of military production to the world's economy has often been justified by extolling power, might, and violence as values to attain. We are too often conditioned to support the political and economic desires of our own nation, to the detriment of understanding the welfare of other nations. The money spent on war preparations is money not spend on our neighbors who are in need (Matt. 25:3-46). We live in a society that too often encourages preparation for war. We must confront the evil contained in many of the structures of our society, and which has placed all of us in an ethically compromised situation. We are disturbed because we feel that legitimate needs for defense have been exceeded.

Our society tells us to place our trust and security in material things, including military weapons and other things that we possess. Instead, we affirm that the basis of true security is trust in God. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:11); "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help

and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Only One in Israel or consult the Lord!" (Isa. 31:1).

Security is not a matter of what we possess, but a matter of our relationships with others. If true international peace is to be achieved, it will happen only when all nations are "masters" over others ["even as the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve." (Matt. 20:28).]

We know how to prepare for war, but we have neglected to learn how to bring about peace. In preparing for war, we find a false sense of security in military structures and weapons systems which seem for the moment to be more comforting than the uncertainties of preparing for peace. The immediate security attached to weapons of war may seem more comforting than the long-term quest for peace which requires our self-sacrifice, and which requires our nation to trust its perceived "enemies." Preparing for war can seem to offer security because military experts tell us how to do it, while we think we have a shortage of experts on the things that make for peace (Luke 19:41-42).

We affirm that only God is ultimate, and we reject the claims for ultimate allegiance made by nations. We dare not give to any nation the allegiance which properly belongs to God. All governments are called to be servants of God and humanity, and are accountable to God's moral law (Rom. 13:3b-4a); therefore, we encourage all governments to pursue peace more actively, and to reduce the number of military weapons.

We affirm the right of all citizens to dissent from the laws of their government when they find that, in order to obey God, they cannot obey human rulers (Acts 5:29). We support those who, for reasons of conscience, decide that they must avoid military conscription (Matt. 25:52). We promote and encourage all efforts aimed at establishing good will, trust, and justice among the people of the world.

God's peace brings reconciliation but war always represents sin and human failure, regardless of the outcome (Rom. 3:23). Thus we should never bestow religious approval on the perpetrators or victors of war. The power of God is not measured by human standards of victory (Isa. 55:8-9), for God's power is expressed through identification with the victims of oppression (1 Cor. 1:26-31), and through the renunciation of power (Phil. 2:5-8). This is the starting point of God's peace as reconciliation, which is contrary to the nature of war and military victory.

From the perspective of love, we must oppose the secular nationalistic attempt to define certain people as "our enemy." This label is used to de-humanize other persons, making them objects and therefore dispensable. As Christians, our "enemy" is the fundamental reality of sin, which is present in all people, nations, and social systems. In any war, sinfulness can be found on both sides of the conflict.

PEACEMAKING AND THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD

We affirm that Christians always have, and always should, live in expectation of Christ's imminent return. The end time could possibly come through nuclear holocaust or some other means. In witnessing to this reality today, we are called to work more fervently to make this world more pleasing to God, to bring all nations under God's rule. "We must work the works (of the Father) while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:4-5). This is a necessary aspect of our witness of faith to the Creator, and part of our calling to discipleship.

But we are opposed to the "secularized apocalypticism" wherein religious language is used to justify preparations for nuclear war, seeing this as a way of fulfilling the "Battle of Armageddon." As a variation of the "holy war" or "crusade" theory, a future war is seen as an actual coming military battle to be fought between the present day nations of the world, and as a final confrontation between the "free world" and communism. Some have been led to the false conclusion that, since Armageddon is inevitable, therefore there is nothing wrong in the production or even the use of nuclear weapons. In this way, today's secular political order has been given an unwarranted theological blessing.

Instead of such interpretation, we affirm that the end of time must come from God's authority, not from human authorities. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Matt. 24:36). Even though humanity now has the power to end human life as we know it on earth, humanity does not have the authority to do this. Therefore, to use religious language to support the increase in nuclear weapons is a serious form of blasphemy and idolatry. It confuses the authority of God with human authority.

Such a viewpoint is further based on a misinterpretation of God's fundamental battle against the forces of evil (Rev. 16:19-21). It identifies God's battle against the root sources of sin and evil with the cause of specific political and economic systems of today's world. As Christians, we recognize that good and evil will be found on both sides in any conflict. We deplore any attempt to use religion to portray the actions of any particular nation or social system as receiving divine sanction (Rev. 13:7). God's own war against the powers of evil does not respect the political boundaries of our nation states.

God's hope strengthens us to keep witnessing for world peace (Rom. 5:3-5). Christian hope is not naive optimism, rather it is hope within and in spite of despair, hope that is sensitive to the realities of history while also recognizing that history alone does not limit life's meaning, value, and possibilities.

The church must re-emphasize that the meaning of one's life is not based on the works and accomplishments which one may perform in the future (Eph. 2:1-10). Human fears must be confronted with God's love and hope, for love casts our fear (1John 4:18). We must continue to persevere in witnessing to the Creator, for although there are wars and rumors of wars, the end has not yet come (Mark 13:7). Thus today we find that there is a need to emphasize the hope we have in God, rather than to emphasize a message of inevitable doom. "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Although we know there will be an end to this earth, we will never know the specific future events of human history: the Easter story demonstrates that we can never predict the future that God will create for us, because the resurrection of Christ was a surprising and unexpected event. In the future, peace is just as possible as war.

Whether or not all war can ever be removed from history, our calling as Christians is not to condone but rather to be a light to all nations regarding the paths of peace and justice. We must be daily strengthened in Christian hope to work for an eventual total disarmament of all the weapons of war from every nation on earth. Baptism "signifies that the old Adam in us...should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new person should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous" (Luthers *Small Catechism*); "seek peace and pursue it" (1 Peter 3:11b). We cannot accept the secular pessimism that decrees that war is inevitable and therefore we can do nothing to promote peace.

THE CHURCH: A FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION

The church is called to be a fellowship of reconciliation (2Cor. 5:17-21), a community of peace, made up of people scattered among the many nations of the world. The church is not defined by the boundaries of nation states or economic ideologies, but by the person of Jesus Christ, who is the vine joining together many different branches (John 15:1-6; 1 Cor. 12:12-13). The church must demonstrate that the important divisions of the world are not national or ethnic boundaries. Rather, good and evil, justice and injustice, are found both within and transcending every human boundary. In the church, peace is not simply a goal for the future, but can be a present reality.

By recognizing that Christians are branches on a vine that transcends human boundaries, we are aware of the solidarity we have with all of the oppressed, the victims of injustice, and even our "enemies." "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them...live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly...Repay no one evil for evil" (Rom. 12:14, 16, 17, and also Matt. 6:12).

Wars are not simply fought between "nations;" they are also fought between God's children, and too often Christians find themselves in nations that are at war with each other. A war against another nation can be a war against members of the body of Christ. We think especially of the 10 million Lutherans living in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the millions of other Christians living in countries that might be portrayed as our "enemies". In Christ we share a bond with those people that national, economic, and ideological hostilities must not diminish.

There are many opportunities before us to counter the messages of fear and despair being propagated by those promoting war. We continue to work and witness for peace as an act of faith in God the Creator. Every day we are renewed and reconciled in a relationship of peace with God, through Christ, and this gives us the power and strength to continue the renewal of all relationships in the world. The ultimate victory belongs to God alone. "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:27): "thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:57): "Mend your ways, heed my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you (2 Cor. 13:11).