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*Postcard*

WORLD CONFERENCE ON CHURCH AND SOCIETY  
Geneva, 12 - 26 July, 1966

For Press and Conference  
use only

Conference Address  
No. 26

PEACE IN A NUCLEAR AGE

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When I consider the programme presented to us by Dr. Kohnstamm, which Christians are supposed to support, although I agree with everything he says there is one point which I consider indispensable, although I do not know whether Dr. Kohnstamm will agree with me. It is a factor which concerns the special task of the Church. I will illustrate it by an anecdote. In 1956 the German physicist, Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, asked Martin Buber, why all the protests against nuclear weapons had had no effect. Martin Buber replied: they are only addressed to other people, and do not involve any personal commitment. After this Weizsäcker included in the so-called "Göttingen Declaration" signed by 18 German physicists in the spring of 1957 a statement whereby these physicists refused to participate in the development of German nuclear weapons. So today I ask myself in what way the Church is prepared to commit itself in regard to the problems before us this evening. The most essential tasks of the Church are preaching and teaching. In its preaching and teaching the Church has made statements everywhere about the question of war and the question of Christian participation in military affairs. How is the Church to go on doing this? Are nuclear weapons merely an "extension of artillery" (Conrad Adenauer). If so, as Dr. Kohnstamm has said, they compel us admittedly to reorganise international life, but they do not compel the Church to adopt a new attitude. What I mean is that nuclear weapons (to be more exact A-B-C weapons and everything else which technology may invent in future) compel us to re-examine the attitude of the Christian to the use of lethal force. One cannot be a Christian, one cannot look at the cross of Christ, one cannot live by reconciliation, one cannot be liberated by it to action based on love nor obey Jesus' commandments to live a life of love (Sermon on the Mount) without realizing what a challenge this presents to us.

In the history of the Christian Church two answers have been given to these questions:

1. The first answer is that of Christian pacifism, represented especially by the historic Peace Churches. If I understand this answer rightly, it does not deny the usefulness and the necessity for force in this world, which is under the power of sin. Nor does it deny that it might be necessary to have recourse to the use of lethal force. But it recognizes that in this world we cannot simultaneously do two things which are contrary to each other. One cannot be a doctor and a soldier at the same time. Neither can one be an active disciple of Jesus Christ and at the same time make use of lethal force. Although military

force is necessary for the national states in this wicked world, owing to their special call to bear witness of the gospel in word and action, Christians cannot participate in military affairs, any more than ambulance-workers can bear arms (according to the Red Cross Convention).

2. The second answer is that given by the great Churches. Just as Christian love compels us to assume secular responsibilities, it also compels us to assume the most difficult responsibility of all: responsibility for the use of force. By this we mean responsibility for the use of lethal power in this world, and participation in military affairs both as those who govern and those who are governed, for the purpose of maintaining justice and human society through the use of force.

Both these answers can quote the gospel, each of them is an attempt to obey the Christian message, each of them stresses an important aspect of it. But the two answers are incompatible; each presents a challenge to the other, neither of them is at all satisfactory. For the answer given by Christian pacifism leaves to non-Christians that very secular task which requires the greatest love and unselfishness, namely the use of force; and the answer given by the great Churches involves Christians so deeply in the conflicts of the world and in the settlement of these conflicts by the use of lethal force, that it is almost impossible for Christians to bear witness to the joyful message of Christ to their adversaries. During the history of the Christian Church neither of these answers has succeeded in convincing the other. There must be a reason for this. In my opinion both answers are necessary, they complement one another, just as two elements complement each other in modern physics.

Nuclear weapons create a new situation only for those who support the second answer. Should they continue to give this answer? This answer has never consisted in simply approving the use of lethal force, it always took the form of very restricted approval dependent upon certain conditions. This was expressed by drawing a distinction between *bellum justum et injustum*. This distinction provided some spiritual guidance for Christians, who were able to ask themselves in every case whether they could assume personal responsibility for taking part in this particular war.

We must not despise this teaching which was given by Augustine. It has helped to tame war and to remove some of its horrors at any rate within Europe. (In their colonial wars the European countries paid no attention to this teaching.) If European history is nevertheless the history of innumerable wars

that is not the fault of this teaching; it is the fault of the official Church which applied that teaching of justify the wars of its own country instead of banning warfare altogether. If this teaching had been applied rightly, in the majority of European wars the Church would have had to advise Christians not to participate in them and would have had to condemn those wars.

Is it possible for us to apply this teaching today? Here we are confronted by two factors:

1. This teaching was based on the following casuistic arguments: ask yourself whether this war has a *justa causa*, whether it is being waged by the *legitima potestas* in a *legitimus modus* (= observing the rules of warfare), with due consideration of the relation between the methods applied and the ultimate purpose, and with a definite end (*finis*) - not annihilation but co-existence with the enemy through a just peace. (N.B. the American intervention in Viet-Nam is contrary to most of these points!). Owing to its emphasis on the *legitima potestas*, this teaching did much to strengthen the conservative attitude of the Churches: the sword in the hand of the established authorities, the sword used from above is justified, but the sword used from below is rejected. No attention is paid to the possible class-nature of the state authority. When we think of the addresses given by Bola Ige and Richard Shaull, we are bound to say: this teaching bears the stamp of a feudal age. It draws no distinction between the rebellion of a medieval aristocrat against his feudal lord and the modern revolution of a suppressed people; it is therefore not applicable to the situation today. The Church has not paid sufficient attention to Lenin's rejection of the doctrine of the just war. (In Lenin's view the struggle of the people against oppression is justified).
2. The *legitimus modus* formerly included the proper procedure in declaring war and the observance of ethical rules which were worked out in each case. In ancient Greece these rules already meant that it was forbidden to poison the wells. Today it means respecting the Red Cross Convention, protection for prisoners of war and civilians, not attacking open cities, etc. In the twentieth century, immediately after these rules were laid down in the Hague Convention, these efforts to make warfare more humane have become less and less effective. During the twentieth century each war has been more horrible than the previous one. During the first stage we had the war in the air and the full participation of civilians in the war effort. The latest stage so far is the invention of the atom-bomb. The *legitimus modus* is no longer effective; on this point there is general agreement. Nuclear warfare can never under any circumstances be a *bellum justum*. Of course the criterion for this is not the technical method employed (atomic chain-reaction

instead of powder); the criterion is the lack of discrimination in mass-destruction, the impossibility of distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants.

What does it mean, however, this realisation that a nuclear war cannot be a just war? What does it mean for the Church's message? The Church is present in the armies of the world through the military chaplains. It thus recognises the calling of the soldier as a possible calling for a Christian. Hitherto the Church has not remained silent concerning the question of war but has worked out certain careful distinctions to guide people's consciences. Today the Church has only one choice: either it must act as if nothing essential had changed and as if the new war technique were merely an extension of the old one. Either the Church must regard all wars as similar in kind, and all forms of "weapons" as similar, in which case it would be morally possible to use these new "weapons". Or the Church must clearly say: these weapons of destruction must not be used under any circumstances; whoever has recourse to atomic warfare (also unilaterally, in cases where there is no fear of nuclear retaliation, e.g. America today against China), will have God against him. No government and no individual must make use of this menace, no one must participate in its use. At any rate we Christians (this is the obligation which we must impose upon ourselves) refuse to participate in such warfare. For we can only do what can be done in the name of Jesus Christ. (Col. 3:17 "Whatever you are doing, whether you speak or act, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.") And we cannot participate in such warfare while giving thanks to God through Christ.

As far as I know, only one of our churches, the Dutch Reformed Church (Hervormd Kerk), has made a clear statement about this. At the second Vatican Council those who advocated a clear statement on the matter were unable to obtain a hearing. In my view, however, the Word of God does not permit us to say anything else. Nor do I know when we shall at last set a limit to the development of increasingly terrible weapons of destruction unless we do so now, in the case of nuclear weapons. Technology will provide us with chemical weapons for poisoning the whole water-system of a country, bacteriological weapons to infect a whole population, and weapons which influence the weather conditions (as Teller prophesied) for twenty years. When will the Christian Church discover the point where it can unanimously and unconditionally say No, unless it does so now?

I know what tremendous problems this raises for political action at a time when politics are determined by the existence of these new weapons and their future development. I refer you to my article in the second preparatory volume for this Conference. In my view this definite No is the first task of the Church in obedience to God's Word in relation to the question of war today. The Church must shout "No!" in the ears of the politicians and military leaders. It must base its own action also on this refusal. Not until then can the Church turn to the second task, mentioned by Dr. Kohnstamm: to cooperate with politicians in finding a way out of the present Balance of Terror to a new system of international law and security. It is only when the Church undertakes the first of these tasks that the second task becomes urgent. And it is only if the Church undertakes the second of these tasks that its rejection of the use of weapons of mass destruction will be something more than an easy phrase, a comfortable ethical attitude which involves no concrete responsibility, but a real basis for our political ethics and aims.

Does this lead us to any further practical conclusions? I will present them in the form of questions:

1. Should not the Churches in countries which already possess atomic weapons sharply oppose all projects to use such weapons unilaterally, in order to destroy potential enemies - preventive warfare (e.g. America against China)?

2. Must not the Churches urge their governments to regard possession of these weapons as a mandate entrusted to them by the international community of nations, and not to use them merely for the pursuit of national aims?

3. Should not the Churches in countries which do not yet possess nuclear weapons, urge their governments not to endeavour to acquire these new weapons, but to enter into an international convention, whereby they commit themselves not to manufacture nuclear weapons?

4. Should not the Churches give stronger moral support to the scientists, technologists and citizens who refuse to cooperate in the manufacture of the new weapons and to undertake military service which involves their use?

5. Should not the Churches do more to urge the nations to give up many of their special national desires, even if they regard them as very important, in favour of a system of international security?

I have formulated these ideas as questions, instead of theses, because I realise how many objections could be raised. But in my view we should discuss such questions at this Conference.

In conclusion I should like to illustrate what I have said by speaking of the German problem; for the German problem is so important for the peace of Europe, and unless Europe is at peace, no international system (like that envisaged by Dr. Kohnstamm) can be set up. I come from West Berlin and am therefore a West German citizen. The government of Western Germany has three aims in foreign politics, which are an obstacle today to the peace of Europe. It has the support of most West German people in these aims. That is understandable when one thinks that at least two of these aims are very near to the heart of a German who loves his country, in spite of the terrible crimes committed by Germans in the name of the German people at the time of Hitler. These three aims are as follows:

1. The reunion of Germany by means of an "Anschluss" between the DDR and the Federal Republic;

2. Revision of the present eastern frontiers of Germany;

3. Possession of nuclear weapons within the framework of NATO.

In order to get soldiers from Western Germany, the Western NATO-States have encouraged the West Germans in these aims. But outside Western Germany everyone today knows that these aims are unrealistic, and that insistence upon them is an obstacle to the peace of Europe. But no one tells the truth to the people in Western Germany, neither the Federal Government, which clings rigidly to these

aims and has created an atmosphere in Western Germany which makes public discussion very difficult, not the governments of the Western countries; so far President de Gaulle is the only person who has clearly stated that Germany's eastern frontiers are permanent. In the autumn of 1965 the Evangelical Church in Germany published a statement in which it very cautiously advised the Government of Western Germany to give up the idea of recovering the East German territories which it had lost. This led to very heated disagreement, also in the Church, and strong forces in the Church are determined not to allow the Church to interfere in future in such political questions. In my view, however, it is one of the legitimate tasks of the Christian churches in Germany to tell the people that they must recognise the consequences of the Second World War,

- that the German people must not think of recovering a single square mile of the territories which they lost;
- that the latent civil war between the two German Republics must be ended;
- that the government of Western Germany must therefore abandon its claim to represent the whole of Germany;
- that no progress can be made towards rapprochement between the two separated parts of the German people, except on the basis of a recognition of the present status quo, and that German participation in a NATO-nuclear force is not useful but harmful for Europe and for the German people.

In my view recognition of these facts is indispensable as a German contribution to the integration of which Dr. Kohnstamm speaks. But there is no agreement about them in the German Church. I will formulate the question which occurs to me here in the following general terms:

How can the churches within the ecumenical fellowship and how can our ecumenical fellowship of churches help the Church in a certain country to recognise its political task and to fulfil it? For it is not only the individual Christian, but also the public voice of the Church which must be heard, and which must help us to go forward towards the indispensable goal of an international system of law and security. We must make use of the time which still remains. Perhaps we have not much more time.