

Why the Catholic Church Opposes Trident Replacement

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“Nuclear Weapons – The Time to Disarm Is Now”

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A time traveler from the Cold War would find it astonishing that nuclear weapons are still very much part of the global landscape. The opportunity that arose at the end of the Cold War in 1989 to get rid of nuclear weapons was squandered. Today, there are still 27,000 nuclear weapons held by eight states which together comprise almost half of humanity. It used to be that nuclear weapons were maintained for deterrence purposes; now their war-fighting role is emphasized. Terrorists are trying to acquire them, and no major city in the world is safe from the threat of nuclear attack. The Second Nuclear Age has begun, and it is decidedly unsafe for humanity.

Can the world ever be freed from this nuclear albatross? Are we fated for a nuclear Armageddon on the simple proposition that the longer nuclear weapons stay in existence the more likely they will be used? Are the exponents of politics, law and morality not capable of raising up civilization to realize that universal human rights and weapons of mass destruction are completely incompatible?

These are the great questions of our time. And to answer them, I start from a positive position.

The hope I express for the elimination of nuclear weapons, which are the ultimate evil, is founded not on wishful thinking but an awakening of concern about how we humans treat one another on the planet. We are still mired in conflict, but we yearn to break free from the old bonds that have encased us. Out of the suffering and seemingly perpetual conflict in the world is emerging a new standard by which we judge right and wrong. Humanity is learning to understand all our human relationships, our relationship with the Earth, and how to govern for the common good. The utility of war is now questioned as never before. This is the stirring of a global conscience.

This stirring is seen in the nuclear weapons issue where the overwhelming number of people around the world agree that all governments should sign a treaty banning all nuclear weapons. It is true that, for the most part, this opinion is still passive, i.e., people are not yet demanding that their governments move in this direction. And governments, driven by the exigencies of the military-industrial complex and a perpetuation of Cold War thinking, continue to manipulate publics into thinking that nuclear weapons are still of some value for security purposes. But a new spurt of activism by enlightened civil society groups, fed by instant worldwide electronic communication, is challenging the

governmental status quo. Those who truly understand the terrible dimensions of the nuclear weapons threat must dive into their interior wellspring to restore the vision, energy and drive to find new and creative ways to challenge the political elitism that has caused so much discord and suffering.

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Nuclear weapons point up the central security issue of our time: Are we going to base our security on a culture of peace or on a culture of violence? Morality is at the core of the nuclear issue. Nuclear weapons are fundamentally immoral. Their action is indiscriminate, affecting civilians as well as military, innocents and aggressors alike, killing people alive now and generations as yet unborn. The voice of religion is starting to be heard in expressing condemnation of nuclear weapons, and the Catholic Church, hesitant at first, is moving to the forefront.

Definitive Catholic teaching on nuclear deterrence is found in the Second Vatican Council and subsequent statements by Pope John Paul II. Vatican Council II taught:

Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation. (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, No. 80).

Though they elaborated their concern that a universal public authority be put in place to outlaw war, the fathers of Vatican II rather grudgingly accepted the strategy of nuclear deterrence. The accumulation of arms, they said, serves “as a deterrent to possible enemy attack.” Thus “peace of a sort” is maintained, though the balance resulting from the arms race threatens to lead to war, not eliminate it. Pope John Paul II restated the Catholic position on nuclear deterrence in a message to the U.N. Second Special Session on Disarmament in 1982:

In current conditions, “deterrence” based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself but as a step on the way towards a progressive disarmament, may still be judged morally acceptable. Nonetheless, in order to ensure peace, it is indispensable not to be satisfied with the minimum, which is always susceptible to the real danger of explosion.

In this statement, it is readily seen that deterrence, in order to be acceptable, must lead to disarmament measures. Limited acceptance of nuclear deterrence was a prudential judgment in the grave conditions of the Cold War. It was only a transition step toward complete nuclear disarmament. Vatican Council II anticipated this move by emphasizing that “the arms race is an utterly treacherous trap for humanity.”

As the 1990s progressed, it became clear that the policies of the Nuclear Weapons States were not moving to nuclear disarmament. Even before the arrival of the Bush Administration in 2001, the United States

rejected a no-first-use policy and adopted flexible targeting strategies to use nuclear weapons either preemptively or in response to chemical and biological weapon attacks. The Bush administration's Nuclear Posture Review explicated the maintenance of nuclear weapons for war-fighting strategies. France has threatened to use nuclear weapons against a state responsible for a terrorist attack on that country. Russia is developing new warheads.

In 1998, seeing the institutionalization of nuclear deterrence taking place, 75 U.S. Catholic Bishops signed a Pax Christi statement criticizing the U.S. for moving beyond original nuclear deterrence policies "to which we grudgingly gave our moral approval in 1983." The bishops said they were painfully aware that many policymakers sincerely believe that possessing nuclear weapons is vital for national security. "We are convinced, though, that it is not. Instead, they make the world a more dangerous place."

We cannot delay any longer. Nuclear deterrence as a national policy must be condemned as morally abhorrent because it is the excuse and justification for the continued possession and further development of these horrendous weapons.

At the 2005 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, the Holy See made it clear that nuclear deterrence, in the modern context,

cannot claim any moral legitimacy. Archbishop Celestino Migliore,

Permanent Representative of the Holy See at the U.N., stated:

When the Holy See expressed its limited acceptance of nuclear deterrence during the Cold War, it was with the clearly stated condition that deterrence was only a step on the way towards progressive nuclear disarmament. The Holy See has never countenanced nuclear deterrence as a permanent measure, nor does it today when it is evident that nuclear deterrence drives the development of ever newer nuclear arms, thus preventing genuine nuclear disarmament.

In his January 1, 2006 World Day of Peace Message, Pope Benedict XVI criticized the idea of nuclear arms for security as “completely fallacious.” He said: “Peace requires that all ... strive for a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament.”

The policy of the Catholic Church can be stated authoritatively as follows: Policies of nuclear deterrence, typical of the Cold War period, must be replaced with concrete measures of disarmament based on dialogue and multilateral negotiations.

The Catholic voice in opposing the continued existence of nuclear weapons is joined to many other religious voices. The new General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Dr. Samuel Kobia, has also spoken out, excoriating the spread of nuclear weapons technology as “an outrage to all humanity.” He focused on the core of the problem: “The recent reports of countries acquiring nuclear weapons technology is

frightening. But it is equally a scandal that countries which possess vast arsenals of nuclear weapons are unwilling to renounce their use.”

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I now wish to address the application of the Catholic Church’s position on nuclear weapons to the current debate over the replacement of the Trident nuclear weapons system.

First, at the 2000 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the U.K. government pledged to make “systematic and progressive efforts” to implement the Non-Proliferation Treaty through:

An unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament to which all States Parties are committed under Article VI.

Further, the U.K. government said it would take a series of steps “leading to nuclear disarmament in a way that promotes international stability, and based on the principle of undiminished security for all.” These steps included: “A diminishing role of nuclear weapons in security policies to minimize the risk that these weapons ever be used and to facilitate the process of their total elimination.” In the light of this commitment, a move to develop a new generation of nuclear weapons is unjustifiable.

If the U.K. government proceeds with the development of a new Trident generation, carrying Britain’s nuclear weapons well into the second

half of the 21st century, it will clearly signal Britain's rejection of its commitment to nuclear disarmament. No amount of political sophistry will suffice to convince other countries that it is following its own commitments to the NPT. A renewed Trident will firmly put the British stamp on a two-class nuclear world. As numerous commissions and authorities have pointed out in recent years, a two-class world is unsustainable. Mohammed ElBaradei, winner of the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize, stated: "As long as some nations continue to insist that nuclear weapons are essential to their security, other nations will want them." For all its otherwise good work in improving verification capabilities under the aegis of the NPT, the government will be deliberately undermining the non-proliferation regime. Its word will be worthless.

It is this modernization of nuclear weapons the Holy See is now speaking against. Since the nuclear weapons States are making their nuclear doctrines permanent, a clear violation of the condition the Holy See first laid down when it accepted nuclear deterrence in the Cold War, the Holy See must protest. That protest extends to the particular and outstanding case of the Trident.

Cardinal Keith O'Brien of Edinburgh and his fellow Scottish bishops, in speaking firmly against the Trident replacement, are applying the teaching

of the Catholic Church. A renewed Trident would signal Britain's determination to maintain its nuclear weapons as far into the future as can be imagined. Such a flouting of international law would signal moral bankruptcy. Cardinal O'Brien has asked men and women of good will, men and women of peace, to raise our voices in protest. I have come here tonight to raise mine.

The Cardinal asks that the Trident be replaced not with more weapons but "with projects that bring life to the poor." This wise approach would underscore the relationship between disarmament and development and lead to true human security. The amount of money governments around the world spend on arms, now more than \$1 trillion annually, dwarfs the amount they spend on sustainable development. The gross disproportion is a scandal that mocks the poor and vulnerable of the world. Since nuclear weapons were invented, governments have so far spent \$12 trillion on these instruments of mass murder, which is a theft from the poorest people of the world. This madness must stop.

Who among the Nuclear Weapons States will have the courage to turn away from the nuclear weapons path to mass destruction? Who among these major states will send out a signal to the world that the rule of law represented by the Non-Proliferation Treaty will be upheld? Who among

these leaders who vie for the acclaim of their publics will stand up and say:

No more nuclear weapons?

The Nobel Peace Prize is awaiting the first leader who will take such a stand on behalf of humanity. Much more than a prize is at stake; rather it is the future of civilization. The abolition of nuclear weapons is no longer just a lofty goal, a noble aspiration, an idealistic thought. It has become the irreducible essential for survival. This is the paramount moral issue of our time.