LACIVILTÀ CATTOLICA

The Church Says 'No' to Nuclear Weapons

Pastoral and moral implications

Drew Christiansen, SJ





BEATUS POPULUS, CUIUS DOMINUS DEUS EIUS

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Title: La Civiltà Cattolica, English Edition









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The teaching of the Church has evolved from a conditioned acceptance of nuclear deterrence in the 1980s, to rejection of deterrence as an unacceptable moral rationalization for nuclear armament in the 2000s, to strong support for nuclear disarmament in recent years, leading to approval for the Ban Treaty in September 2017. Catholics have the right to ask, "Which position should I take?"

I would be less than candid if I did not report a degree of consternation among those serious about their Catholic faith that they have not yet received clearer guidance on how to address their civic and professional obligations with respect to nuclear weapons in light of the Church's current teaching condemning "the possession and threat to use nuclear weapons."

For their part, at this point, when many bishops hesitate to give a blanket answer to that question; they are prudently exercising their pastoral office until they have greater clarity about the issues involved. This hesitation is not unprecedented, for in past generations popes, bishops and councils often consulted theologians and canonists and waited for them to sort out issues before pronouncing on issues or intervening in a controversy.

To offer clearer moral advice, the pastors of the Church need to build consensus in the Church, wait for it to gather into a settled judgment on the part of moral theologians and bishops, and into a firm conviction in faith among the people of God. The response to the U.S. bishops' multi-year, open process in drafting *The Challenge of Peace* during the first Reagan administration (1981–85) demonstrates that not just ephemeral public opinion but the more mature *public judgment* can move

in the direction of Church teaching where there is wide and full engagement on the part of the faithful.

Growing toward consensus: the Oakland paradigm

If we were to consider these issues merely in the abstract, there might be reason to think we stand at an impasse between the moral ideal and the pressing realities of a nuclear-armed world. But we have historical precedent to which we can turn to see how scientists' options can change with the development of the Church's teaching, in this case the options of physical scientists.

After *The Challenge of Peace* appeared, Bishop John S. Cummins of Oakland, California, sponsored a series of conferences to address the implications of the letter for scientists, both Catholics and others, working at the University of California's Lawrence-Livermore Laboratories with theologians and ethicists from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley. Together they probed the issues posed by the letter.

Those deliberations resulted in new choices both for the scientists and for their institutions. Some scientists, at least, moved from designing bombs to working on verification techniques. Aided by energy policies set in place earlier by the Carter administration, others, along with their laboratories, shifted the direction of their research from nuclear weaponry to alternative energy development. In the present U.S. political climate, the paths to career and policy change may not be as easy. But the Oakland dialogues took place during the equally discouraging days of the Reagan administration, and they offer a pastoral model for bishops and bishops' conferences to function as conveners of moral conversations and leaders of moral discernment for scientists and other learned professionals in the nuclear weapons business.

Adult moral formation. The Oakland dialogues also present a model for adult moral formation. Adults learn better in interactive settings where their own experience is engaged as they were in the Oakland Diocese dialogues. In addition, extensive public deliberation over the drafts of *The Challenge of Peace* led to wider knowledge and acceptance of the bishops' teaching than

it would have had the letter been issued *de caelo* on the authority of the bishops alone, without public engagement.

The pastoral's long-lasting moral authority in the U.S., including among the U.S. military, came in part because of the open, inviting and trusting way in which the bishops of that day shaped the document they finally approved. There were hearings in various places, and the successive drafts of the pastoral were widely distributed in the media and debated by people inside and outside the Church. As a result, various constituencies, even those who were initially opposed to or critical of the project of the letter, eventually accepted the teaching and employed it in their teaching and the professional training of their colleagues.

Communities of moral discourse and discernment. The Oakland model also provides a way to think about collective moral discernment in the Church. The Second Vatican Council affirmed that the "Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in light of the gospel." Later Pope Paul VI, and now Pope Francis, have spoken about the responsibility of the whole Church, and communities within her, to discern the signs of the time.² Furthermore, given the diversity and complexity of today's world, both popes confessed the inability of the pope alone to read the signs of the times and accordingly the need for diverse communities to undertake this discernment in communion with their bishops.³

The Oakland meetings were not themselves explicitly exercises in communal discernment, though many scientists

^{1.} Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes, No. 4.

^{2.}Cf. Paul VI, Octogesima Adveniens, No. 48; Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, No. 51.

^{3.}On the inappropriateness of the pope providing a universal response to reading the signs of the times, cf. Paul VI, Octogesima Adveniens, No. 48; Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, no. 16. In the case of the threat of nuclear weapons, however, a strong case can be made for the importance of the pope's reading of the signs of the times, because it is a global problem related to the universal common good where the pope's judgment as universal pastor would be especially relevant. The papal responsibility does not relieve others, however, from the duty to discern the same issue in their own social context. The responsibility of moral discernment belongs to the whole Church.

made such discernments on the basis of those convenings; rather, they were a model, at least, for the Church as "a community of moral discourse," a first step on the way of discernment.

Maturation of judgment. Lastly, the discernment model taught by Pope Paul VI and Pope Francis allows for both the maturation of collective judgment on the part of the faithful and for its gradual permeation throughout the Church. In this fashion, moral teaching may arise in Cardinal Newman's words, as "a conspiracy of bishops and faithful." Accordingly, the teaching will be more readily received as an authentic expression of the Church's faith. As envisaged by the Council and advanced by Popes Paul and Francis, however, communal discernment assumes not passive but engaged and active communities of faith.

Recent Church teaching

The first efforts of the Church's magisterium to articulate the responsibilities of scientists toward nuclear deterrence were of a general sort. They provide us with direction but without specific guidelines or a method for prescribing the responsibilities of knowledge workers.

The Cuban Missile Crisis prompted Pope John XXIII to write *Pacem in Terris*, but in those early years of Catholic emancipation from "the long 19th century," Pope John primarily focused on the need for lay people to be scientifically competent and to participate in public affairs. He argued against allowing a two-culture mentality to split the life of faith from scientific and technical expertise, and urged instead "that human beings, in the unity of their own consciences, should so live and act ... as to create a synthesis between scientific, technical and professional elements on the one hand, and spiritual values on the other."

^{4.}For application of the expression "the long 19th century" to Catholic Church history, cf. John W. O'Malley, SJ, *What Happened at Vatican II*, Harvard (MA), Harvard University Press, 2010, 53–92.

^{5.}Cf. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, Nos. 77-78 on technical competence and No. 76 on participation in public life.

^{6.} Ibid., No. 150.

In its reflections on the destructive power of modern weapons, the Second Vatican Council simply urged government officials and military leaders to "give unremitting thought to the awesome responsibilities which are theirs before God and the human race."

The U.S. bishops, noting the role of science in precipitating the problems of the nuclear age, in their 1983 pastoral letter, urged scientists' involvement in the solution to those problems. "Surely," the bishops wrote, "equivalent dedication of scientific minds to reverse current trends, and to pursue concepts as bold and adventuresome in favor of peace as those which in the past have magnified the risks of war, could result in dramatic benefits to all humanity."

Ten years later in *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace* the bishops urged that American Catholics renew their collective "No to the very idea of nuclear war." But the U.S. bishops offered no explicit moral guidance for those in the field of nuclear weapons research and strategic analysis.

Even a notable study by moral theologians John Finnis, Germain Grisez and Joseph Boyle, which attempted a detailed casuistry of the responsibilities of various actors in the nuclear arena, offered no advice to scientists, whether physical scientists or the nuclear theorists. They did address the responsibilities of legislators, submarine commanders and key-turners, but not those of bomb designers, builders or strategists. For citizens in general they argued a positive obligation "to take such opportunities as their prior responsibilities permit to bear witness to their alienation from their nation's deterrence policy."¹⁰

So, allow me then, to venture to address, in preliminary fashion, the responsibilities of one broad class of scholars,

7.Cf. Gaudium et Spes, No. 80.

8. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, Washington, USCC, 1983, No. 320.

9. "The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace: A Reflection on the Tenth Anniversary of *The Challenge of Peace*" in G. Powers et al. (eds.), *Peacemaking: Moral and Policy Challenges for a New World, ibid.*, 1994, 333.

10.J. Finnis – G. Grisez – J. Boyle, *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality and Realism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 253.

namely, just-war analysts (and especially the moral theologians among them) with respect to the Church's teaching on nuclear weapons policy and deterrence strategy.

Responsibilities of just-war analysts

Specification of the responsibilities of just-war analysts should be done with respect to their roles and relations and, where there are professional codes of conduct or legal regulations, the prescriptions of the rules governing their profession as well. Relations is the fundamental category and, for our limited purposes here, the most germane relations are those of the analysts to Church and civil society: the Church because it remains a primary agent, as Pope Francis has written, for "continuing efforts to limit the use of force by the application of moral norms"; and civil society because it constitutes the public square where we debate our fundamental values and explore how they should shape the institutions of our common life.

Now, following Pope Francis' condemnation of the threat to use and possession of nuclear weapons let me propose a set of eight responsibilities for just-war analysts with respect to nuclear deterrence.

1) Positive peace. With respect to nuclear abolition, the overall task, as John Howard Yoder argued, is to make just-war analysis "credible" by setting it in the broader Catholic peace tradition. In this new moment, the first responsibility for just-war analysts, I would argue, is to assess nuclear weapons policy, and especially deterrence, within the larger context of an ethic of peace. For Catholic just-war thinkers this would embrace not only the Church's developing teaching on nonviolence and just peace, but also the fuller teaching on positive peace, including human rights, integral development and care for creation.¹²

Only when analysts integrate the full implications of human rights, integral development and care of creation into their thinking on issues of war and peace will they be able honestly

^{11.}Francis, 2017 World Day of Peace Message, "Nonviolence: A New Style of Politics for Peace," No. 6.

^{12.}On the notion of positive peace, cf. The Challenge of Peace, Nos. 68-69.

and, yes, competently, address the risks and the costs of armed conflict and nonviolent direct action.

There are two reasons for integrating the Catholic ethic of peace with our moral analyses of conflict: First, the practice of just-war thinking tends to be carried out in a crisis mode where the pressures of public debate induce a focus on blood and fire. Just-war thinkers need, rather, to take into account the growing body of knowledge and practice of peacemaking by both secular and religious actors.

Furthermore, Augustine's identification of *peace as the substance of right intention* in warfare should not be allowed to vaporize into a mere formality. It needs to be fully updated in light of contemporary social science, international humanitarian law, moral philosophy, theology and church teaching.

2) Engaging the different schools of thought. The very broad community of just-war thinkers is fissured in two ways. First, there is the fault-line between those I call permissive just-war thinkers, who tend to approve of any military practice or policy, and others who, intent on preventing and limiting armed conflict, apply the tradition more stringently. The second fissure lies between just-war thinkers, even the stringent ones, and those in the nonviolent and just-peace traditions.

The credibility of contemporary just-war thinking would be greatly enhanced if, at a minimum, the practitioners would alert their audiences to where they stand in these debates. But, as a practical rule, the second responsibility of analysts of peace and war would be to seriously engage thinkers on all sides of the theoretical divides: permissive/stringent and just war/nonviolence approaches.

Engaging the permissive school is necessary to avoid and, if possible, to correct abuse of the Just War Tradition in rationalizing the extremes of armed conflict, an extraordinarily grave need in the case of nuclear weapons. Engaging the cutting edge of the nonviolence/just-peace school is required to inform the analysis of war and peace issues with not only the best of current knowledge on the alternatives to armed force but also to establish what would count for success in a given conflict. There has been growing clarification of the latter in recent discussion of the *ius post bellum*, i.e., norms of post-war justice.

3) Maintaining the firewall. Furthermore, nuclear strategists speak of the firewall between nuclear and conventional war. A recurrent problem with nuclear ethics is that when it is carried out repeatedly over time, it seems like just another exercise in the casuistry of war. Just as weapons designers attempt to make nuclear weapons more usable, so some nuclear ethicists try to identify peculiar circumstances in which it might just be permissible for the weapons to be used. That slide to normality must be resisted. In ethics, as in military strategy, the firewall must be maintained.

Just as Pope John Paul II and the U.S. bishops asked Christians and people of goodwill "to say 'No' to nuclear war," 13 so today we must say no to the possession and development of nuclear weapons as the U.N. Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons did last year. The third responsibility of just-war thinkers is to maintain the firewall between the casuistry of conventional armed war and that of nuclear weapons policy. They must treat nuclear war and nuclear weapons as a wholly different class of problems demanding an exceptional degree of caution in their analyses. We should cease to imagine nuclear weapons as tools for us to manage, but rather as a curse we must banish. We need to think about them as Vatican II said of modern war, "with an entirely new attitude." 14

4) Acknowledging the shift in world opinion. The fourth responsibility follows from the third: Today's just-war analysts, especially but not exclusively Catholics, have a responsibility to integrate into their scholarship the rejection of nuclear weapons by the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons passed at the U.N. last year.¹⁵ The treaty prohibits the development, testing, production, manufacture, acquisition, possession or stockpiling of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.¹⁶

^{13.}On the "No" to nuclear war, cf. The Challenge of Peace, Nos. 132, 139-141.

^{14.} Gaudium et Spes, No. 80.

^{15.}On the Church's rejection of deterrence, cf. *Nuclear Deterrence...* op cit. The UN identification number of the approved treaty text is A/CONF.229/2017/L.3/Rev.1.

^{16.} Ibid.

Analysts must take into account this shift in the law of nations, the *ius gentium*, as represented by the majority of the U.N. member states who authorized the conference negotiating the ban treaty, by the nations belonging to Nuclear Free Zones and the civil society organizations supporting nuclear abolition, and reject the further legitimation of defense strategies based on nuclear weapons as supposed legacy rights of the P5 (China, France, U.K., Russia, U.S.A.) under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

5) Making the teaching "church-wide and parish deep." Gerald Schlabach has written that the challenge to Catholicism with respect to nonviolence is to make the Church's teaching "church-wide and parish-deep." I would adapt his maxim into a fifth responsibility for moral theologians wrestling with issues of peace and war: Catholic moral theologians who are also just-war analysts have the responsibility with respect to global moral problems, above all nuclear abolition, to make the Church's teaching "church-wide and parish deep."

The Church needs their expertise to fill an enormous pastoral gap in the knowledge and practice of contemporary Catholic social teaching on this matter. Professors have the right to keep their autonomy, but the alienation that sometimes afflicts the relations between bishops and the academy needs to be overcome for the sake of the global common good. In this new moment, for the good of the Church and the future of the planet, the academic and episcopal *magisteria* must work together.

6) A forensic process. Further, I would argue that just-war analysis, or more exactly the moral analysis of issues of peace and war, is not a disengaged, neutral academic activity. It is rather a forensic exercise, a contribution to ecclesial and public debate, articulating pastoral and public policy as part of our common life. It operates within a social system that defines, applies and enforces rules and policies related to the building of peace and the prevention and limitation of war.

17.Cf. G. W. Schlabach (ed.), Just Policing, Not War: An Alternative Response to World Violence, Liturgical Press, 2007, 101.

Its participants include not only philosophers, theologians and legal scholars, bishops, pastors, confessors and pastoral counselors, but also military lawyers, courts martial, military training systems and conscientious objectors as well. Thus, the sixth responsibility of analysts of issues of peace and war is to purposefully participate in and contribute to a public dialogue that establishes, adapts, applies and enforces societal norms related to the building up of peace and the conduct of war.

Today the forensic character of just-war thinking requires their involvement in critiquing nuclear deterrence and pioneering paths toward a non-nuclear peace. As such, analysts share responsibility in a larger network of scholars and professionals who together build up the conditions of peace and defend it against the destructive effects of violent conflict and the temptations of a warrior mentality. It is out of that set of interactions that sharper, more direct and satisfying answers to nuclear scientists' doubts and honest questioning will emerge.

In our day, moreover, public forums are the primary loci where public opinion can be built to resist policies of deterrence. As the U.S. bishops wrote in *The Challenge of Peace*, "Especially in a democracy, public opinion can passively acquiesce to policies and strategies, or it can, through a series of measures, indicate the limits beyond which a government should not proceed." ¹⁸

Just as the U.S. bishops in the 1980s encouraged "resistance" to nuclear-war fighting, so today Catholics and people of goodwill need to assert their opposition to nuclear deterrence as a policy of defense. Fellow citizens, as the U.S. bishops and others recognized, make up a primary audience for just-war analysis. While social media today will certainly have a role in building opposition to deterrence, the more considered methods of the past will still have a significant role in establishing public judgment with respect to deterrence by providing solid intellectual, political and religious foundations for that public judgment. In processes of public education and deliberation just-war thinkers will undoubtedly play a role.

For centuries moral theologians, confessors and spiritual directors played a role in conscience formation for policy makers, military leaders and ministers involved in state policy. Bishops can convene the faithful for moral conversation and discernment; they ought to expound Catholic social teaching and preach it, and they can discreetly exercise their disciplinary authority toward egregious public sinners.¹⁹ The Council also urged that they address the great public issues of the day and proposed the formation of bishops' conferences so they can collaborate for the common good.

Just-war thinkers, moral theologians and philosophers can and should assist bishops in their work. They serve a tradition of moral wisdom, but they also work on the frontiers and peripheries of the Church's life where that tradition meets new challenges and unexplored terrain. Pope Francis has called for theologians to participate in a dialogue with science and recommended the university as a site of this encounter.²⁰

7) Casuistry for those working on deterrence. Following Pope Francis' condemnation of deterrence, there is a need for moral theologians and philosophers, and scholars of military and international humanitarian law to discuss with military professionals, strategic theorists, policymakers and other professionals and employees in the nuclear-weapons field the moral issues they face in their work and to provide guidance for those currently charged with maintenance and operation of nuclear deterrence forces. The seventh responsibility of scholars of peace and war is to develop casuistry for those in the nuclear weapons field to help them think through the moral and ethical conflicts and choices they face in the exercise of their role responsibilities within the nuclear establishment.

Pope John Paul II provided us one approach to discerning these responsibilities in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*.²¹ Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, has provided still further guidance

^{19.}Cf. Second Vatican Council, Christus Dominus, No. 19.

^{20.}Cf. Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, Nos. 133-134.

^{21.}Cf. John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae, Nos. 68-77.

on how to exercise this pastoral role, especially in chapter eight, "Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness."²²

Scholars will need to take account of the gravity of the duties with respect to nuclear disarmament borne by those in various roles, including those who may continue to believe conscientiously that deterrence is morally justified. They will have to address conflicts of duties and marginal situations in need of further elucidation.

8) Pastoral guidance for those working with deterrence. Even as they delineate degrees of complicity with wrongful behavior in their scholarly writings, moral theologians, other pastoral workers and just-war analysts, when applying those ideas should take into account John Paul II's pastoral principle of "gradualness," that is, "a gradualness in the prudential exercise of free acts on the part of subjects who are not in a position to understand, appreciate, or fully carry out the objective demands of the law." Such caution is particularly necessary for those with an impatient sense of prophecy or an exaggerated, apocalyptic mentality about the nuclear threat.

Also, following Pope Francis' teaching, two additional principles need to be heeded: accompaniment and discernment. The Church has an obligation to accompany those faced with career changes and challenges to their professional identities from the changed moral status of nuclear deterrence in Catholic social teaching. For scholars this may involve direct engagement with nuclear specialists in conversations over how to fulfill the demands of the Church's teaching when they conflict with other responsibilities as professionals, military personnel or patriotic citizens. In addition, even for those who dissent from the Church's teaching on deterrence, opportunities for continued participation in the life of the Church need to be affirmed in accordance with the Synod on the Family.²⁴

^{22.} Francis, Amoris Laetitia, Nos. 291-312.

^{23.}Cf. Pope John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, No. 34; Francis, Amoris Laetitia, No. 295.

^{24.}Cf. Francis *Amoris Laetitia*, No. 299. Also, cf. the section "The Church as Field Hospital" in Francis, *A Big Heart Open to God*, Harper Collins, 2013.

Above all, discernment requires that moral decision-making take place in terms of the whole of a person's spiritual life.²⁵ As Pope Francis wrote, "there is a need 'to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations' and 'to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition."²⁶ Such discernment also requires attentive guidance in terms of the overall spiritual trajectory of the person's life, assessing the individual's engagement with the Gospel life, his or her development in (or loss of) Christian virtues and the promptings of the Spirit.

As Pope Francis wrote in *Amoris Laetitia* with respect to divorced couples, "the Church has the responsibility of helping [in this case, persons that work in the nuclear field] understand the divine pedagogy of grace in their lives and offering them assistance so they can reach the fullness of God's plan for them,' something which is always possible by the power of the Holy Spirit." So, the eighth recommendation is that pastoral workers applying the casuistry of the condemnation of nuclear deterrence for workers in the field ought to do so with pastoral sensitivity to the spiritual dynamics in the lives of the persons with whom they are working.

Similarly, while scholars will need to work with conceptual precision and logical consistency in elaborating the casuistry involved in the abolition of nuclear weapons, those same scholars will need to be mindful that today their casuistry will be applied in a pastoral mode, more akin to advanced spiritual direction than to an older juridical model of confession guided by black-letter law.

Conclusion

This article has endeavored here to provide a preliminary sketch of the responsibilities of knowledge workers in the nuclear field, taking as a starting-point some guidelines for just-war analysts, especially the moral theologians among them, understanding that the pastoral and academic requirements

^{25.}On discernment, cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Nos. 296-300. 26.*Ibid.*, No. 296.

^{27.}Ibid., No. 297.

of other fields, like strategic analysts or bomb designers, will demand suitable, perhaps even distinctive, adjustment and additions to the model presented here.

My special hope is that scholars will work together with experts, bishops and other pastoral workers in the development of this kind of aid to implementation of the Church's teaching on the immorality of deterrence, voiced by Pope Francis on November 10, 2017. The Church works at its best when bishops and the faithful in all sectors can, to use Newman's term, "conspire together" to articulate and put into action its teaching on grave issues of morality.

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