The Nuclear Threat

Robin Dowling and Nigel Halliday

Christians must reckon with the fact of nuclear technology. It affects our lives both through the advantages and dangers of **nuclear power** and through the possibility of **nuclear war.** We will consider both areas because the availability of nuclear energy is a result of the primary goal of developing nuclear weapons.

Nothing in the world of technique, says Jacques Ellul, is so impressive as the machinery of war; and on no aspect of our corporate existence do we spend so much money, talent and emotional energy. In particular, Clarence Glacken speaks of 'the now almost limitless obliterative capacities of man' as that which most decisively sets us apart from the past. Similarly Arthur Koestler has written that the invention of nuclear weapons has been the single most decisive event in recent history.

In this article we are looking for 'given' principles to shape our responses to nuclear technology, but application of these principles is necessarily of a pioneering nature because of the uniqueness of the situation. We will focus firstly on nuclear power then on nuclear weapons, stating in each case some Biblical considerations and following them with discussion.

Nuclear Power

Biblical considerations

Nuclear power is an aspect of the earth's resources which are a gift of God, part of the immeasurable riches of the cosmos. But these are subject to the implied purpose of the making of man in God's image, stated in Genesis 1:26:

> Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground' (cf v 27ff)

One aspect of the expression of the image of God in man is his being entrusted with dominion over the rest of the created order (note the juxtaposition of 'our image' and 'rule'). This has too often been seen by Christians as a mandate for domination. But the key idea here is that of *stewardship* and dominion expressed not as mastery but as service. It is conferred dominion over a given earth, or subordinate ownership over the earth and its resources. The earth is the Lord's (Ps 24:1) he has given it to man (Ps 115:16; cf Ps 8:6). God owns the earth but has entrusted it into the keeping not of private individuals as such but mankind (the Hebrew 'ADAM' is generic here) whom he has equipped for the task and holds accountable. Also, since the earth is given to all mankind, its resources and produce are meant to be shared by all, not just by a few.

The above creation principle is important providing we take account of the fact, too often forgotten by some who emphasise creation ethics, that we live in a world

not only of creation, but also of the fall and redemption. The OT shows how creational principles still applied in a fallen world, but in a way which took account of the fall and the fact of God's redeeming activity. Whilst in its full 'spiritual' or typological application this gives perspectives to the church, the OT (in particular the Law) paradigmatically gives principles which are relevant to human society.[1] For Israel was to be 'a light to the nations' (Isaiah 49:6).

OT Israel provides us with a pattern, model or example. Not that modern secular, industrial societies should conform rigidly to the way of life of God's old covenant people. Rather, applications of the Law's principles may be made in different ways in different societies. But there is this pattern, this way of things, this paradigm.

Consider God's gift of the earth and its resources. The creation principle was rescued from the fallenness of the world (with its greed and power struggles) by the gift of the 'land' to Israel. The earth and its resources, in the microcosmic form of the land of Canaan, was shared among the Israelites, as God's gift distributed by 'lot' (see book of Joshua). This sharing was not on a mathematical basis, but in a way that provided for, and protected, the economic viability of the household (the extended family), the basic unity in that society. However, because of the effects of sin some would be landless and could only survive by selling themselves into slavery. Israelite law, whilst applying creational principles recognised the effects of the fall and the need for redemption activity to counter it, and so made special provision for their fair treatment and welfare, eg Ex 21:2-6. Again, the fact of sin meant that not all would share the produce of the earth in the way envisaged at creation. So the law made provisions such as the fallow year, when land was left for a year and its produce for the benefit of the poor (Ex 23:11); it also provided for gleaning, so that harvesting was not too thorough (in contrast to the pattern 'I've a right to *everything* I produce'), and the poor had access to gleanings from crops, vineyards, olive trees (Lev 19:9f). Also related to our subject, the sabbatical fallow year embodied a concern for the 'health' of the soil itself (as many of the OT food laws, it has been argued, bear in mind hygiene considerations).

Therefore in the use of the earth's resources it is not sufficient simply to argue from creational principles that we have complete domination over the world. We must exercise responsible stewardship in a way which not only takes account of our privileged position as God's stewards, but also takes account of the fallenness of the world and of the fact that the God whom we serve is a redeemer. Sufficient has also been said to indicate God's concern about ecology.

Discussion

So, nuclear power is an aspect of the earth's resources which are a gift of God. But how is it to be used in a fallen world in a redemptive way?

Our first consideration should be that stewardship clearly demands that it must be for the benefit of *all*. And since this inevitably *won't* be the case, there should be protective measures to ensure that provision is made for those who do not automatically benefit. The question arises, then, whether the concern to develop nuclear energy is purely selfish, or can we distribute the benefits from first world to third world countries? To own resources does not give us absolute right of

disposal; rather, we have a mutual responsibility and we must look to the good of the whole human community.

But then secondly, given that nuclear energy is a part of God's creation, does the fall nevertheless make the use of such power untenable, such that we ought to forgo it? There are various factors to be borne in mind, and we have to decide how these should be weighed. We have to weigh up the damage caused to the environment by nuclear power (eg Chernobyl) and that caused by conventional oil or coal fired generators (eg acid rain, local soil corruption, damage to the ozone layer). And we have to assess the risks (ie other Chernobyls; transport of waste along routes through London; but also risks in oil and coal production). Do the creational benefits of nuclear power outweigh the risks? After all, energy always means risks, as seen in electric shocks, gas explosions, or the recent disaster on a North Seal oil rig. In assessing nuclear power, we wish to highlight three areas of concern: (a) the reasons why people want nuclear power anyway; (b) the dangers to civil liberties; (c) dangers to the environment and to people.

(a) **Why do people want nuclear power?** The first development of nuclear technology was for obtaining nuclear weapons, rather than electricity generation. However, with the development of nuclear reactors there seemed to be the promise of endless, cheap (almost free) electricity. This has, however, not been the case in the UK where nuclear energy is so expensive that (i) in its plans to privatise the electricity energy, the UK Government is planning to compel electricity suppliers to buy a certain proportion of their electricity from nuclear reactors (otherwise, market forces would induce them to buy cheaper electricity from conventionally powered generators); (ii) the Fast Breeder Reactor programme, which held the stronger promise of cheap electricity, has been greatly scaled down as it held no prospect of being financially viable for 30-40 years; (iii) much of the actual cost of developing existing nuclear reactors has been absorbed within the defence budget instead of being presented as a true cost of domestic energy. Judged by the costs charged to the electricity consumer, nuclear power therefore *seems cheaper* than it actually has been.

A second reason for wanting nuclear energy, however, is that our consumer and industrial society is so hungry for energy, and its consumption of energy is growing so quickly that nuclear power seems to hold the only prospect of meeting that demand. Fossil fuels and renewable resources seem unlikely to be able to fulfil such demands into the next century. This seems a very strong argument and one's response to nuclear energy is therefore tied to one's general view of modern consumer society. If we support the current trend of our society it is hard to argue against the need for nuclear power (almost irrespective of the dangers involved). On the other hand, one response to the question of nuclear power has come from what is called the *'the politics of enough'*, rejecting further industrial growth and opting for a less consumer-oriented lifestyle. This would decrease the energy demand and enable us to survive with fossil and renewable resources, although it would almost certainly involve backtracking several stages from the present level of available technological achievements, and require a major reconstruction of our society's values and aspirations. Alternatively one could argue for limited further

industrial growth, with the rejection of nuclear power as one limitation voluntarily imposed on ourselves.

Is there a Biblical basis for forgoing exploitation of earth's resources? The OT certainly legislates against unlimited growth by means of the years of Jubilee. Here the tendency for the bulk of the land, and even many of the people, to be accumulated in the hands of the few, was periodically overridden by the necessary return of land and property in the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:8ff).

(b) **Civil liberties:** the danger of terrorist attacks on nuclear installations or on nuclear materials in transit and the risk of theft of nuclear material for blackmail have always been clear. There is therefore a tendency for separate, secretive police forces to take charge of nuclear installations. Different countries obviously have different police arrangements and different expectations of what the police should be like. But in Britain, for example, according to the London Nuclear Information Unit, there already exists what is effectively a private police force, the Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary. This consists of 650 officers, responsible primarily for protecting nuclear materials either inside nuclear installations or in transit but having broad powers to go anywhere in the country, armed if necessary. They are not, however, accountable to a police committee or even to the Home Secretary, but only to the Atomic Energy Authority itself. This, in the context of British expectations of the police, is alarming. The greater the dependence of a country on nuclear energy the more widespread would have to be the special police powers necessary to prevent evil-doers from attacking or stealing nuclear material. (For Biblical considerations which militate against such a police force, see next section.)

(c) **Dangers to the environment and to people:** no guaranteed safe means of disposal has been found for nuclear waste. Some waste will remain dangerous for thousands of years, and there are, by definition in this new technology, no means of disposal which we can be certain will remain safe for those thousands of years. In addition, we have regular transport of nuclear material by road and nuclear waste material by train. To take again an example from Britain, ten tons of nuclear waste passes through London every week, some of it using the railway through Highbury where it passes the head office of the Association of Grace Baptist Churches (South-East)! These trains all leak radiation and the public are recommended to keep at least 50 metres away from them.

As far as the safety of people working in the nuclear industry is concerned, the UK nuclear industry has so far had fewer deaths than occur in energy gained through coal mining. But one major accident could entirely overturn the figures, and in any case we do not yet know if there is serious radiation leakage, as suspected round Sellafield.

The ecological concerns reflected in the OT — and relevant to us in their general (paradigmatic) application — cannot merely be dismissed, at least by Christians, as being overridden by economic factors. Accidents do occur. We have the example of Chernobyl and the effects of its radiation spread across mainland Europe and Britain. In the UK in January 1987 a lorry carrying nuclear warheads overturned on an icy road. In a railway accident in 1984 a train caught fire in the Summit

Tunnel near Rochdale, with temperatures reaching 8000 degrees Centigrade. Happily, that train was not carrying nuclear material. But the UK Government subsequently admitted that such temperatures would have 'severely tested' the flasks used for carrying nuclear waste by train.

Are we really able to handle these powers? We as Christians should be sceptical of man's belief in his supreme ability to master nature. Given that accidents do occur, should we as Christians be warning our society that the risks are too great for us and urging them to reassess their goals and direction as a society?

Nuclear Weapons

Biblical considerations

The divine origin of the authority of governmental power is clear from the OT (eg Dan 4:17, 25, 32). This is also pointed up most clearly in Romans 13:1-7. It is a God-given, real (vv 1-2), but limited (vv 3-7) authority. The passage puts it in such a way that it applies to judges, policemen and those in a position of governmental oversight (v 3 speaks of 'the one in authority'). If a case *can* be made for 'just war' (this paper does not necessarily take this view), this passage provides it. A key role of government is certainly law and order, in the sense of the punishment and restraint of evil (vv 3a/4b). This may extend to the judicial taking of life (v 4 'sword'). But by extension a case could be made for 'just war', since the evil-doers whom the state has authority to punish may be aggressors who threaten it from without as well as criminals who threaten it from within. *'Machaira'* (sword), used several times in the NT, symbolises death by execution or in war (Luke 21:24, Acts 12:12).

Even if this case for 'just war' is conceded, the Christian cannot immediately argue for the use, or threatened use, of nuclear weapons. There are two factors to bear in mind: the state's role in rewarding good as well as punishing evil and the restrictions placed on its use of force.

(a) **The state has a double function** (vv 4a, 4b): it exists not only for the punishment and restraint of evil, but to provide the social benefits of good government. It must be concerned to reward, and so promote, *good*, as well as punish evil. It 'commends' those who do good (v 3) and exists to do its citizens good (v 4a). The state has a ministry which is for the *benefit* of 'good' citizens. Paul uses the words *'diakonos'* (the deaconing word), and *'leitourgos'* (a priestly word), elsewhere applied to the apostle and to Christ. So, in peacetime, the innocent must be protected and, in wartime, non-combatants should be provided with immunity. Therefore, the use of all indiscriminate weapons, or any weapon in an indiscriminate way, appears to be prohibited. This applies to 'conventional' as well as nuclear war. Some of the worst civilian casualties in history resulted from 'conventional' bombing — eg Tokyo (100,000 killed in one night's bombing, 23 May 1945) and Dresden — not from nuclear weapons (although clearly the fear is that 520 bombers were involved in the bombing of Tokyo, whereas in nuclear war only one plane carrying one bomb can inflict just as much, and more, damage and suffering).

(b) **Limitations on use of force:** On the question of the 'innocence' of the non-

combatant population, it may be countered that the civilian population is itself involved in supporting the war, through work in munitions factories, providing food and moral support for troops etc. However, as we have said, wars are to be fought with discrimination, and this implies the use of minimum necessary force. In this respect, Rom 13 suggests that the state's use of force must be *limited.* Force is allowable only in so far as it provides for the arrest, holding, trial and punishment of the wrongdoer (v 4b). Also, it is to be strictly limited to particular people, ie the wrongdoer. The whole implication is that only limited force is permissible, ie the force required to bring *criminals* to justice. The repressive measures of a police state are excluded. Also, in war (if war is permissible), force is to be controlled. Therefore, not only must there be discrimination but controlled use of weapons. The overkill capactiy of nuclear arsenals and the policy of Mutually Assured Destruction seem to militate against this.

Discussion

As with our discussion of nuclear power, our discussion of nuclear weapons is inevitably affected by our being subjects of the British nation, which both possesses its own nuclear war machine and is a member of the NATO alliance.

'First use': we need to distinguish between (a) possession of nuclear weapons as a deterrent, ie as a defensive measure to deter others from attacking us with nuclear weapons; and (b) possession for 'first use' of nuclear weapons, where nuclear weapons would be used either as outright aggression or in response to an attack by conventional forces. The latter is the current policy of NATO, that it threatens to use nuclear weapons against any massed tank invasion of Europe. The NATO policy is mainly based on economics: it is cheaper to maintain a nuclear force than to keep 3 or 4 million men under arms. The nuclear weapons involved are of the smaller, 'battle-field' type, but their use carries the risk of escalation into an all-out nuclear war. In any case, battle-field weapons still tend to be indiscriminate to the surrounding population, and it is said with rather black humour that when we talk about the 'limited casualties' inflicted by battle-field nuclear weapons we are saying that they would only wipe out the entire population of Germany (rather than most of the western world). It seems to the current writers that it is difficult to find any Biblical warrant for 'first use' of nuclear weapons on grounds of cheapness or limitation of casualties.

Deterrent: despite what we have seen in our Biblical considerations, it can be argued that nuclear weapons still have a place as a deterrent, given the realism with which the Bible applies ethical principles. Nuclear weapons *exist* and we are unlikely to be in a position to change that, at least in the short term (cf existence of slavery in OT/NT). Nuclear weapons have so far only been used against a country that didn't possess them, and it seems unlikely that the US would have used them if Japan could have retaliated. It can therefore be argued that nuclear weapons *have* kept the peace.

Furthermore, non-possession of nuclear weapons probably means that one can never 'win' a conventional war against a country that possesses nuclear weapons. Possession of nuclear weapons can therefore be defended as a necessary part of being able to fight a conventional 'just war'. On the other hand, in assessing the

argument for deterrence one must also consider that deterrence involves the willingness to use nuclear weapons in the event of an attack, or at least the threat of willingness to use them.

Final pleas

There are no simple answers to the dilemma of nuclear weapons. But given the dilemma, *we need more mutual understanding*. We need more mutual understanding between nuclear powers to make the use of nuclear weapons less likely. But we also need more mutual understanding within the Christian constituency over possession of nuclear weapons, between those who oppose nuclear weapons and those who support their retention (Rom 14). Those on both sides of the argument want peace and justice, but they differ in their views of how these are best secured. It is not enough to claim that pro-nuclear people would 'happily' press the button: that is probably one of the biggest moral burdens on the conscience of those who feel convinced by the arguments in favour of deterrence. Equally, it is not enough to accuse the whole anti-nuclear lobby of favouring Soviet world-domination: those who oppose nuclear weapons have to have the courage of their convictions that they would live under Soviet occupation (*if* the Soviets wanted to invade, or dominate) and maybe give their lives in passive resistance or underground warfare.

Still more, *Christians need to consider the fact of the world as a global community*. The possession of nuclear weapons tends to emphasise the distinctions between countries or alliances of countries. Is it consistent with the gospel to allow national considerations to overshadow the reality of the wider community of human beings across the whole world?

We also need to consider the level of expenditure on armaments generally, both nuclear and non-nuclear. According to US senator Mark Hatfield, across the globe we spend 15 times as much on armaments as we do on co-operation for economic and social improvement. Meanwhile, 10,000 people die *every day* from malnutrition.

Finally, we may take comfort in our Biblical faith that *the world will end with Christ's return, not with nuclear war*. Non-Christians understandably see this as dangerous talk, as it might tempt a Christian-influenced world leader to think about fighting and 'winning' a nuclear war. Rather, on the basis of Scripture we must work realistically for peace in the present (Mt 5) but we must ever let the fact of Christ's return control our perspective (Rev 22).

Questions

We are aware that these considerations still leave a number of questions which evangelical Christians need to ponder if we are to come to an informed and relevant understanding of the issues. For example, is it an acceptable 'Christian' position to argue for the retention of nuclear weapons largely on economic grounds, ie because a nuclear deterrent is cheaper to maintain than a large 'conventional' defence force? Then it must be asked, what new ethical problems for the 'just war' position does the reality of nuclear weapons bring? Can one argue for the use of nuclear weapons at all in a 'just war'? Christians must also ask to what extent

they should be involved in furthering the peaceful use of nuclear power? Should they support the 'status quo' acceptance of the validity of nuclear energy in our society?

Pastor Robin Dowling and Dr Nigel Halliday are both elders of Salem Baptist Church, Kew, Dr Halliday being an art historian. This article is adapted from a paper first given at the 1988 conference of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists of Europe.

References

1. The word 'paradigm' is taken from the study of grammar. A certain verb, for example, may be used to provide examples of the pattern that verbal prefixes or endings will follow in the case of other verbs of a similar type. 'A paradigm is something used as a model or example for other cases where a basic principle remains unchanged, though details differ.' (C J H Wright, LIVING AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD, IVP, 1983, p 43).

The paradigmatic approach to OT law and the social relevance of OT Israel has been developed by Christopher Wright. It is fully consistent with the distinctiveness of the New Covenant and is not to be confused with 'Christian Reconstructionism' and what the present writers regard as its dangerous implications for modern society.

People who do not believe in the essentials of the faith cannot be guilty of schism; they are not ***in*** *the Church. We must not be afraid of saying this. Yet many Evangelicals only meet one another occasionally; their regular meetings are with people who are opposed to the essential matters of salvation. Too often our denominational loyalties are decided by the accident of birth. And for us to be thus divided from one another in the main areas of our lives and for the bulk of our time is schism.*

Let me put it positively. Don't we feel the call to come together, not occasionally, but ***always****? It's a grief to me that I spend so little of my time with some of my brethren. I want to spend the whole of my time with them. I am a believer in ecumenicity, evangelical ecumenicity. To me, the tragedy is that we are divided.*

D M Lloyd-Jones
National Assembly of Evangelicals
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