

The Urgency of Now
A Pastoral Letter on Nuclear Weapons Production in our Community
From Leaders of Faith Communities in East Tennessee

On the eve of the 70th anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we call for renewed reflection and serious dialogue about the morality of nuclear weapons and the proposed modernization of nuclear weapons production facilities in our own backyard.

From many traditions, we speak with one voice out of a profound sense of gratitude for life and deep compassion for all creatures. These dual imperatives, to live with gratitude and with compassion, compel us to speak to our community about nuclear weapons.

Gratitude and compassion are, in virtually every major religion, inseparable foundational concepts. Muslims find Allah, in Chapter 55 of the Qu'ran, asking the same question thirty-one times: "Which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?" The essence of daily Islamic prayers is to show everlasting praise to Allah; Ramadan's month-long fasting and prayer cultivates a spirit of gratitude that finds expression in acts of charity.

Likewise, for Jews, whose prayerbook, the Psalms, is first and foremost a missal of gratitude: "O Lord, my God, I will give thanks to you forever (Psalm 30:12). Jews recite a prayer of gratitude and praise, the *Modeh Ani*, immediately upon rising each morning; even the word Jew—*Yehudi*—has at its root the expression of gratitude. As one scholar wrote: "This attribute shapes the essential character of a Jewish believer."

Cicero wrote: "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others." Aesop described gratitude as "the sign of noble souls."

Buddhists recognize gratitude as the glue that binds people together, monastics to householders through the "economy of gift." Carol Zaleski writes that in East Asian societies, where Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist teachings meet and mingle, "gratitude is the grammar of daily life." She notes the daily devotion of Hindus toward the divine presence, along with small acts of hospitality, are expressions of gratitude.

The Christian theologian Karl Barth called gratitude the "genuine being of the human person." In his systematic theology, Barth wrote: "Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Grace evokes gratitude like the voice of an echo. Gratitude follows grace like thunder lightning....We are speaking of the grace of God who is God for man [sic], and of the gratitude of man as his response to this grace....The two belong together, so that only gratitude can correspond to grace, and this correspondence cannot fail."

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.1

Seventy years ago the city of Hiroshima, Japan was destroyed by the world's first atomic weapon, followed three days later by Nagasaki. Today, in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, we continue to produce thermonuclear cores for US bombs and warheads, and the government has announced plans to spend as much as \$6.5 billion to construct a new nuclear bomb manufacturing facility to continue this work for decades to come. This continued pursuit of new and more powerful nuclear weapons now poses an urgent existential threat to creation itself: The more than 17,000 thermonuclear weapons deployed around the globe could, in one afternoon, kill billions of people and render the Earth uninhabitable.

The Y-12 Nuclear Weapons Plant in Oak Ridge was constructed as part of the original Manhattan Project. Employing massive calutrons, Y-12 separated the highly fissile isotope Uranium-235 from the more abundant and common Uranium-238 in a

process called enrichment. The resulting highly enriched U235 became the fuel for the Little Boy atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima, Japan on August 6, 1945.

After the conclusion of the war, the K-25 Plant in Oak Ridge took over the mission of uranium enrichment, and Y-12 found a new job—manufacturing the thermonuclear “secondaries” for nuclear warheads and bombs. A modern nuclear weapon has two main components in the “physics package.” The plutonium pit, also called the primary, is a small fission bomb (like the atomic bomb that destroyed Nagasaki, Japan). The primary acts as a trigger for the secondary—the part made at Y-12 of enriched uranium, lithium deuteride, depleted uranium and other materials. The secondary is a fusion bomb that creates the massive thermonuclear explosion.

Currently, the United States and Russia maintain the world’s largest stockpiles of nuclear weapons; each nation has more than 5,000 warheads. Many of these are designated “reserves,” but each country has 1,500 actively deployed nuclear weapons; US missiles are kept on hair-trigger alert and are deployed on land and sea.

Other nuclear weapons states include (in order of stockpile size) France, China, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Israel, and North Korea. France is believed to have a stockpile of around 300 nuclear weapons.

As a practical matter, in case of a perceived nuclear attack, the time for decision-making is truncated. US and Russian policies are similar—the nation under attack must launch a massive counter-strike within 14 minutes in order to avoid having its weapons wiped out by the attack. Such an exchange would likely wipe out all major population centers in the United States and Russia, but the holocaust would not end there. Fallout from the hundreds of nuclear explosions would circle the globe, being deposited with rainfall, exposing survivors of the attacks, even in non-combatant countries, to large, probably lethal doses of radiation. Finally the incineration of major cities would create a cloud of particulate matter (smoke) that would trigger a “nuclear winter,” blocking the sun’s light and disrupting the capacity for plant growth globally. It is the combination of global fallout and nuclear winter that would render the earth uninhabitable for humans and most other forms of life.

As people of faith, dedicated to lives of gratitude, service and love, we ask ourselves: Is it right for us to support the production of weapons of mass destruction designed to be used against other human beings with our money, our votes, or our silence?

As citizens of a country that proclaims a commitment to the rights of all people to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, we ask ourselves: Is it right to dedicate such massive resources to the production of these weapons—in the words of Pope Francis, “squandering the wealth of nations”— when we know there are so many other pressing needs in our nation – from the alleviation of poverty, disease, and the national debt, to improvements in education, healthcare, and economic development.

One of the first major public figures to decry the diversion of our common treasury to the production of military weapons was President Dwight D. Eisenhower, former Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe. Eisenhower, a Republican, warned the American Society of Newspaper Editors in a 1953 speech: “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the clouds of war, it is humanity hanging on a cross of iron.”

Eisenhower’s warning was repeated during his presidency—he warned against the nuclear-industrial complex and its insatiable appetite for public money in pursuit of an illusory sense of security.

Later, speaking at the Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. issued a similar warning about the consequences of misplaced

spending priorities: “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom.”

According to the National Priorities Project, the United States in 2015 is spending \$2.2 million dollars every hour on nuclear weapons. If Eisenhower and the Pope are right, each dollar spent on weapons is a trade-off. Current cost estimates for the Uranium Processing Facility bomb plant slated for Y-12 are \$6.5 billion. That is enough money to build 118,000 Habitat for Humanity homes or to hire 140 teachers for ten years in every county in Tennessee.

As global citizens who are increasingly aware of our dependence upon the well-being of creation itself, we ask ourselves: Is it right to take the power of life and death into our own hands, to threaten the very fabric of creation itself with these weapons?

As citizens in East Tennessee, where plans call for spending many billions of dollars to modernize the Y-12 Nuclear Weapons Complex, fueling a resumption of the global nuclear arms race while other urgent needs go unmet, we ask ourselves: Is this the best we can do?

A Tipping Point

We believe it is imperative that we speak and act now, while there is time. We are not alone. Military and diplomatic leaders who once embraced nuclear weapons as part of a policy of deterrence are now calling for their abolition. We recognize there are hurdles to achieving nuclear disarmament, but they are not insurmountable.

The threat of nuclear weapons appears to be contained, but this is a dangerous illusion. The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty has failed to constrain the spread of nuclear weapons. Since it was signed in 1968, the number of nuclear-armed states has doubled. Military, diplomatic and political leaders from across the political spectrum and around the globe have recognized the growing threat of nuclear terrorism, and called for nuclear weapons states to disarm. George Shultz, former Secretary of State in a Republican Administration, recently wrote, “We are at a tipping point. We can not continue in the same direction.”

The United States was the first country to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1968; the Treaty was ratified by the US Senate in 1969 and entered into force in 1970. The point of the Treaty was to constrain the spread of nuclear weapons to non-weapons states. In exchange for eschewing nuclear weapons, the non-weapons states were promised two things: access to nuclear technology for power generation (under international controls) and the eventual nuclear disarmament of weapons states (“at an early date” is the language in Article 6 of the NPT). Since that time, the number of countries with nuclear weapon capability has grown to eleven, then shrunk to nine, where it has stabilized for the time being. Libya and South Africa both developed mature weapons technologies, South Africa manufactured a small stockpile, but both nations eventually disarmed and dismantled their production infrastructure. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, some satellite states, including Belarus and the Ukraine, possessed Soviet nuclear weapons; they returned the weapons to Russia and, with assistance from the United States, disposed of their stockpiles of fissile materials.

In January 2009, George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn and William Perry co-authored an opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal calling for the United States to pursue nuclear disarmament. These four leaders, whose careers were dedicated to maintaining a strong and vigorous defense posture, declared that the continued reliance on nuclear weapons undermined US security goals, arguing the weapons states could only eliminate the threat of nuclear terrorism by abolishing their nuclear stockpiles and destroying stockpiles of nuclear materials. One year later, they wrote again, underscoring their message by noting the broad support they had received from military, diplomatic and political leaders across the globe for their initial call, and raising

the bar—they called for the United States to develop and take concrete steps toward disarmament.

The Shultz quote cited here comes from an article he penned for Reflections, a Journal of the Yale School of Divinity, in 2011.

Current events provide no comfort; if anything, they heighten the urgency of the Kissinger/Nunm/Perry/Shultz agenda. Consider:

- The spectre of a nuclear armed Iran (or a nuclear attack on Iran to prevent further development of its nuclear capabilities),
- The destabilization of eastern Europe through provocative actions on the part of the United States and NATO and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia which has led to nuclear saber-rattling at the rhetorical level,
- The plans for a trillion dollar investment in “modernization” of US nuclear weapons and the infrastructure that produces them which has compelled similar commitments to modernize in Russia and China, reviving the global nuclear arms race,
- The potential for the use of nuclear weapons to address regional disputes in southeast Asia (India and Pakistan; North Korea and ----) and the MidEast,
- The growing possibility of breakout states who have expressed dismay at the pace of nuclear weapons states meeting their obligation to disarm “at an early date,” an obligation underscored by unanimous opinion of the World Court in 1996,
- The possibility that nuclear weapons or weapons materials could be used by non-state actors who are able to procure materials or weapons.

Other military leaders, notably among them General George Lee Butler, former Commander in Chief of US Strategic Command, and General James Cartwright, former Vice-Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have publicly called for the United States to take steps to reach its goal of nuclear disarmament.

International institutions have proven themselves effective, when given funding and support, in constraining the spread of nuclear weapons and even turning back the clock in some cases. It is not preordained that the United States will forever rely on nuclear weapons for our security—in fact, achieving nuclear disarmament is our national policy and our legal obligation.

The rationale President George W. Bush, Vice-President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice gave for invading Iraq in 2003 was the need to disarm Iraq’s stockpile of weapons of mass destruction. Ms. Rice famously invoked the spectre of a mushroom cloud. After the invasion and a thorough search, however, no weapons of mass destruction were found.

This is not because there never were any. It is because the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), an arm of the United Nations, conducted inspections of Iraqi facilities during the 1990’s. Nuclear materials and facilities were destroyed by the IAEA and by US military actions under President Bill Clinton. The absence of weapons of mass destruction was documented by the IAEA before the invasion of Iraq—former US Marine Scott Ritter, a member of an IAEA inspection team for years during the 1990’s spoke in Knoxville, TN, prior to the invasion of Iraq to debunk the Administration’s claims of weapons of mass destruction.

The point of this reverie is simply this: the IAEA has demonstrated it can effectively document and, with international support, eliminate nuclear weapons capabilities; it did so in a not-fully-cooperative Iraq.

Our Unique Responsibility

As people who live in the shadow of the Y-12 Nuclear Weapons Complex, our primary concern is not the past, but the present and the future. We believe it is time to think in new ways about the production of nuclear weapons in our midst.

There is no legitimate moral stance that permits us to absolve ourselves of the responsibility for the role our community plays in the nuclear arms race. Discussions of military and diplomatic policy take place elsewhere, but they rely, ultimately, on individuals who do the hands-on work of producing thermonuclear weapons of mass destruction.

We acknowledge an uncomfortable truth: the purpose of the weapons being built in our backyard is to threaten the mass extermination of whole populations of innocent men, women, and children. Each of us bears the weight of responsibility for our individual actions; each of us decides whether or not to participate in the production of nuclear weapons; each of us decides whether to speak or to remain silent.

The responsibility of individuals involved in carrying out government policies that violate international law was established in law at Nuremberg following the end of the second world war. The tribunal at Nuremberg, under the guidance of the United States, established a set of principles known as the Nuremberg Principles. The fundamental principle is personal responsibility: citizens are not relieved of responsibility or moral consequences for their actions by arguing they were “just following orders” or carrying out the will of the state. Instead, individuals are required to exercise moral judgment and behave accordingly. The principles apply to heads of states and to common citizens. Extermination is one of the crimes specifically enumerated in the Principles, and, in the final principle, complicity is itself declared a crime under international law.

In 2013, testifying in a motions hearing in federal court in Knoxville, Tennessee, former Attorney General of the United States, Ramsey Clark, told the court the actions at Y-12 are “unlawful.” He was specifically referencing the US failure to meet the obligation it undertook in the NPT, signed when Clark was the Attorney General, to disarm “at an early date.” Clark also described the continued production of nuclear weapons a criminal activity.

A Time to Speak

In December of last year, Pope Francis, in a statement titled *Nuclear Disarmament: Time for Abolition*, noted that “rather than providing security, reliance on a strategy of nuclear deterrence has created a less secure world.” The Pope’s leadership provides an opening for a conversation that engages all of us.

During the early 1980s mainline religious organizations in the United States recognized the urgency of the moment as President Ronald Reagan initiated a major build-up of nuclear weapons. The nuclear freeze movement was largely, though not entirely, faith based. One by one, mainline Christian denominations adopted and released papers and statements addressing nuclear weapons. The Roman Catholic Church led with a Pastoral Letter that offered a “provisional acceptance” of the policy of deterrence. Other communions followed, concluding in 1986 with the United Methodist Church’s publication of *In Defense of Creation* which condemned nuclear weapons outright as immoral and incompatible with Christian belief.

A pamphlet collecting some statements of faith communities is available along with this annotated statement.

In the same spirit, we call on our community to think of nuclear weapons from the perspective of our core values of gratitude and compassion. If we are truly grateful for the gifts of creation, for the life-sustaining power of Earth, and for the relationships we have with other living things and one another, how can we countenance the threatened destruction of the life-giving capacity of the earth by weapons of mass destruction? If we are truly committed to treating others as we

would be treated ourselves, how can we maintain a posture that threatens them with complete and utter extermination by our nuclear weapons?

We do not speak today for our congregations or our community. Instead, we invite them to join us in an honest public conversation—in places of worship and in the public square, in the media and in professional associations, in book clubs, in kitchens and living rooms—about our responsibility to one another, to future generations, and to the planet. A world free of the threat of nuclear weapons is possible, but only if we create it. We should begin by addressing the moral and spiritual implications of the role we play in this existential drama.

A Place to Begin

We are fortunate to live in a place that is rich in resources, human and natural, physical, mental and spiritual. These qualities made East Tennessee an attractive place to pursue the daunting challenges of producing the Bomb in the dark days when the nation felt threatened by the power of a great evil.

The resources and beauty of the Tennessee Valley and her people are, if anything, even more attractive today. We are uniquely positioned to pursue development that enriches the lives of all who live here and the world beyond. Determining the future is our right and our responsibility. It begins with a conversation about who we are and what we do. To that conversation, we call our community.

Followed by a list of events, activities and suggestions for conversation?