

“Mission in the context of war and weapons of mass destruction”

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1. Introduction

We are living in a world where there is no peace and security and also “we need not remind anybody that we are in a global war.”¹ Every country has its own insecure situations which lead them to acquire dreadful arms. Some of the cold wars happened due to oil resources. “Oil was at the heart of the first post-Cold War crisis of the 1990s –Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.”² The past history says that “among Hitler’s most important strategic objectives in the invasion of the Soviet Union was the capture of the oil fields in the Caucasus.”³ In fact today’s world is in the crisis of oil and many more wars may happen in the future.

What is the affect of Wars on Christian church? What is the contribution of church in this context of wars in the past and what is the role of the church in this context? These are some of the major questions the church should deal with. This paper tries to answer these questions and also this paper is an attempt to understand the mission of the church in the context of war and weapons of mass destruction. Since it’s a huge topic to address, here I limit my paper to the church’s struggle and response to the arms race and war in the context of the church in India, Japan, Germany, Former Soviet, Korea, Vietnam and Middle East.

2. Biblical basis

The nuclear arms race is an ever ending competition among the nations. Bible clearly predicts Wars in the end time. Jesus said, “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed.” (Matt 24:5-6). In this context “it is being initiated by Christian people who believe that an atmosphere of capitulation in nuclear nations challenges Christian faith and political hope to come together.”⁴ Christian faith is contrary to the development of these dreadful arms because scripture says, “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world” (2 Cor 10:3-4).

Even though we find lot of passages that describe God of the Old Testament as a God of Warrior, we should understand that God is a God of peace who does not want to see the destruction of his people and creation. In fact a careful investigation of the scriptures would help us to understand that there is an “apparent discontinuity between the Testaments” concerning war.⁵ Prophet Isaiah visualized a peaceful creation in which nations live without any arms and wars. “They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore” (Isa 2:4). “The transformation of weapons of war and destruction into implements for agriculture production, and tools for satisfying the basic needs of the poor and the impoverished, is the message of this passage.”⁶ Also “Isaiah envisions a society marked by the absence of learning warfare and training for military exercises.”⁷ The church should visualize this kind of Kingdom of God and it should extend its mission to fulfill this Isaiah’s vision.

Christ inaugurated his mission in the time of tension and conflicts. Jewish people were oppressed by the Romans. “Jesus would have instigated the crowds to overcome the Roman soldiers and authorities and establish his own rule three times: after the feeding of the multitudes, after his triumphal entry in Jerusalem, and at the trial in Gethsemane.”⁸ Jesus resisted taking violent methods. Violence and force may not bring peace but rather they will

create much more violence and also “the use of force could even contribute to some new, if unintended, forms of injustice.”⁹ Thus the church has a great responsibility to be an agent of peace in this context of war and weapons of mass destruction. The church should play the role of peace making agent because Christ said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matt 5:9). The church is an agent as helper, healer, comforter and servant to the insecure world.

3. Mission in the context of weapons of mass destruction

Countries are in a global arms race. Every country is spending most of its income on defense activities, especially in the area of arms research and development. In this context the church should raise its voice through writing, speaking and educating the public about the danger and the calamity that will fall due to this arms race.

3.1 Arms race

India has proved of its non-violent approach to get freedom from the British but in these days it is also one of the strong nuclear nations. India is spending much of its budget on defense while most of its people are suffering with unmet needs. “Buddha smiled”¹⁰ two times in India once in 1974 when the first Nuclear tests were conducted under the leadership of Indira Gandhi and the second time on 11th May, 1998 under the leadership of A. B. Vajpayee.¹¹

In our Indian context Zachariah agonizes that “we who are so proud of our achievement have not still addressed issued such as: One-fifth of our people go hungry every day: two-thirds of our children suffer from malnutrition; the commonest causes of death in our country are diarrhea, malnutrition, respiratory infections, TB and malaria.” He also speaks the truth that “while becoming the sixth nuclear power, we are still 155th in rank on the human development index.”¹² Indian budget on defense is questionable. India is pending so much on defense by neglecting the development of the poor. The church in India has a great responsibility to raise its voice on this issue.

The most powerful weapons are with the European countries. The fact is that “6,000 nuclear warheads deployed in western Europe alone.”¹³ The arms race between U.S and U.S.S.R created tension in the past. “Since the beginning of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) in 1969, both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. have increased the numbers of their strategic nuclear warheads fourfold.”¹⁴ The tension continues to increase. “Despite 6,000 meetings at the United Nations to discuss disarmament, not a single nuclear weapon, missile, or aircraft has been dismantled.”¹⁵ James E. Will brings out the truth that

These armaments are the result of a 1952 NATO decision to depend on them for deterrence rather than deploying the 92 divisions then thought necessary for conventional defense. Then NATO decided, in 1979, to deploy 572 Cruise and Pershing II missiles by 1983 — to counter the 250 new Soviet SS-20 missiles already deployed and the 300 older SS-4 and SS-5 missiles still in place.¹⁶

United nations continue to talk about disarmament but in reality arms race is continuing instead of decreasing.

Ultimately the affect of arms race is on the poor and the marginalized. “While many millions suffer from malnutrition and 1.5 billion people go without effective medical care, the global arms race costs \$300 billion a year — equal to the annual production of the poorer half of the world's population.”¹⁷ Nations are neglecting the poor while spending their income on dreadful arms. “In El Salvador in the early 1990s, 41 percent of the government's budget went for servicing the foreign debt and an additional 26 percent was spent on the military” by

neglecting the development of the country.¹⁸ Willy Brandt rightly evaluates that “the military spending of half a day would finance the entire World Health Organization programme to eliminate malaria.” Another fact is that “a modern tank costs about 1 million dollars. This money could improve storage facilities for 100,000 tons of rice and reduce spoilage by 4,000 tones a year.”¹⁹ Nations are not realizing on their expenditure on arms. The church needs to write and protest on too much expenditure on defense.

3.2 Fear of arms

The world is under threat and fear of dreadful arms. The nations are living under the fearful condition due to nuclear arms because “there is real reason to fear. The actual use of the weapons stored on European soil for its ‘defense’ would be an unmitigated tragedy; they would not only kill tens of millions of people, but would utterly destroy European civilization for any surviving generations.”²⁰ These nuclear weapons not only bring disaster on the enemy but they bring destruction to the entire globe including those who use it to destroy the enemy.

We should learn from the history. Germany had to face horrible suffering, loss, pain and agony in spite of having superpower technology, and military power. Soviet shattered suddenly even though it was one of the superpower with all of its nuclear technology. After the World War II there were so many major and minor wars but no country has the courage to use nuclear weapons because “there is no victor in nuclear war.” In fact “Nuclear radiation has no geographical barrier. These lessons of recent history clearly show that nuclear weapons cannot act as deterrent. It cannot prevent war.”²¹ John Mohan Raju strongly argues that “Nuclear weapons are not legitimate weapons of war. They are weapons of mass destruction and should not exist in the civilized world” because “their existence and acquisition does not give any security to any State” but rather they create insecurity and fear.²² In fact “in a nuclear war, there are no winners” but only losers.²³

The UN tried to control the increase of nuclear arms in the nations. “In the NPT Review Conferences of both 1975 and 1980, the nonnuclear states sought to achieve a complete test ban in order to stop vertical proliferation.”²⁴ It is not possible to stop because the western rich nations have already possessed these nuclear weapons and they are in the fore front in arms race. The recent nuclear tests in Iran created fear in the minds of western powers.

3.3 The danger of Nuclear weapons

The world is under threat due to Nuclear weapons. The use of Nuclear weapons brings incredible suffering on the victims. “The penetrating radiation would cause immediate radiation sickness and foster the later growth of tumors and genetic disturbances among the survivors, as evidenced by living Hiroshima and Nagasaki victims.” Also “unlucky survivors would face epidemics and psychological disturbances on a massive scale.”²⁵ The nations should realize the threat and they should work toward the disarmament.

If at all there is any world war in the future “with a nuclear stockpile of 30,000 strategic and tactical nuclear weapons equal to eight billion tons of TNT, the United States has the capacity to kill every person on earth 12 times over.”²⁶ Nuclear weapons are the dreadful enemy to the living beings in this globe. Most of the dreadful nuclear weapons are stored in America and Soviet and these two countries possessed “at least 15,000 ‘strategic’ (intercontinental) and 27,000 ‘tactical’ (short-range or battlefield) nuclear weapons.”²⁷ These weapons are increasing year after year in the name of security. The present reality is that “an atomic bomb devastated the city of Hiroshima with the explosive force of 15,000 tons of TNT. We now have nuclear bombs which are equal to 25 million tons of TNT.”²⁸ We can not imagine the devastation that will be happening to the world. No life on earth can survive if at all there is a nuclear war in the near future.

3.4 Church's mission in the context of arms race

The global arms race raised ethical questions in the church. In fact "the atomic bomb also heralded a new age of ethical thinking among Christians, an age in which 'the bomb' and the threatened extermination of the human race loomed as the most important problems facing ethicists."²⁹ Because "the arms race deprives individuals and nations of the resources they need to develop their own common good and jeopardizes the well-being of people by increasing the likelihood of war and by harming the environment in which people live."³⁰ The expenditure on arms neglects the development of the nations. The developmental programs will be neglected.

The NCCI has expressed concern over tests in one of its reports in the year 1998. Dr. Ninan Koshy commented that "India has lost its moral authority having professed and practiced 'ahimsa.'" Dr. Konrad Raiser, the General Secretary of WCC in the year 1998, mentioned in his letter to the prime minister of India saying that "India has tarnished its image as a wise and considered voice of reason in international affairs. It has turned a deaf ear to its best counsel, relying on weapons of mass and indiscriminate destruction to assert power, rather than on the sophisticated art of statecraft of manifest wisdom."³¹ Ipe Joseph writes on behalf of the church in India that "we request the Government not to carry out any more nuclear experiment. Nuclear test, wherever it is done, is anti-people. The fall-out and radiation destroy the lives of people and plants and make the womb of the mother earth cancerous."³² In the context of Indian nuclear tests NCCI's contribution is noteworthy.

The church has been raising voice against this arms race. "Pope John claimed that the arms race violates justice because it channels intellectual and economic resources into the development of weapons of destruction and consequently inhibits economic and social progress."³³ He also "argued that the ever-increasing number of weapons has the likelihood of setting off a war, either accidentally or intentionally. He also suggested that the testing of nuclear weapons, an inherent part of the arms race, has the potential to jeopardize various kinds of life on the earth."³⁴ The church has been raising its voice against the arms race especially on nuclear weapons. WCC has been speaking on this issue in various platforms. "Between 1954 and 1961 the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs spoke and worked intensively on the need for an international instrument to control nuclear testing. At the New Delhi Assembly in 1961 the churches called for both no-first use and nuclear arms-free zones."³⁵ Kosuke Koyama, the one who developed Waterbuffalo Theology, identifies nuclear arms race as idolatry and he says that the nuclear weapons would "fall under the judgment of the cross."³⁶ Thus the church needs to extend its mission to protest arms race.

Dennis Jacobsen suggests a strategy to witness in the midst of arms race. He says that the Christians should seriously resist paying tax.³⁷ The tax that is paid by Christians should be used for the development of the country but most of the countries are neglecting the poor, the marginalized and they are utilizing much of its tax collection on defense purpose. By knowing this Dennis argues, "However, I will not pay the 50% of my federal income tax which the State uses to engage in the arms race. I send that money instead to Lutheran World Relief to be used to enhance the lives of a few of the world's countless poor."³⁸ This is an example for the Christians to react in the midst of war and weapons of mass destruction. Christians should resist in paying taxes for the defense purpose but rather they should insist Governments to increase their budget on liberating the poor and oppressed.

4. 'Mission of the church' in the context of war

The church in the past was not silent in response to the war. "The clergy at home provided prayers for victory or at least for peace, and comfort for mourners, but in the end the

wars did not strengthen the Christian faith for most Europeans, because the brutal realities seemed to be beyond control by God whom the churches were thought to have preached.”³⁹ The church at large raised its voice against wars in the past.

There were consultations and resolutions which addressed the issue of church’s response to war. There were four basic principles that were developed by the consultation between German leaders and Dr. Mott and Dr. Warnshuis had produced four basic policies to be followed in the event of war. The first one is communication. There should be proper network and communication among the missionaries. The second one is “care for the younger churches.” The National Christian Councils were expected to care for the younger churches in their financial and ministerial matters. Finally there were proposals to protect mission property.⁴⁰ “Another significant committee headed by Dr. Robert Calhoun of Yale worked on the relation of the church to war in the light of the Christian faith.”

The church responded and tried its best to bring peace during the time of war on Iraq. “Besides speaking eloquently about the imperative of finding a peaceful solution, Vatican officials conducted a remarkable diplomatic campaign to prevent war in the early months of 2003.”⁴¹ Several American denominations suggested President Bush to resolve the issue through peaceful negotiations and they tried their best to stop the war. In fact his own “United Methodist Church” also suggested him to resolve the issue through peaceful means. Presbyterian Church, the Evangelical Lutheran church in America, the American Baptist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Disciples of Christ, and the United Church of Christ opposed the war and suggested peaceful negotiations.⁴²

4.1 Reconstruction and development

Reconstruction and development of the war affected nations is one of the major concerns in the context of war. “The aftermath of violent conflict was often deemed less interesting and worthy of less attention.”⁴³ The church’s mission should extend to the reconstruction of the war affected nations because “post-War recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction have been the increasing focus of international organizations, governments and NGO’s as well as becoming an area of academic study.”⁴⁴ The actual disaster started after the war. In this context Roger Mac Ginty comments that “the fact that many post-war zones seemed prone to natural disasters (for example, El Salvador and Azerbaijan) or suffered from extreme under-development (for example, Angola and Eritrea) meant that an exclusive post-war recovery or disaster management lens was often inappropriate.”⁴⁵ “The Life and Work” movement’s contribution is note worthy in this context because “the Study Department of Life and Work was greatly active from 1930 onwards holding many conferences and initiating a spectacular number of specific studies on problems such as: ethical reality and function of the church, prevention of war, ecclesia militants, international order, post-war reconstruction, etc.”⁴⁶ It also extended its service to the refugees, prisoners of the war.

4.2 Education and service to the children victims in war

The church has a great responsibility to help the war victims because “war always results in tremendous loss for children. Their war-related losses from a total experience, not just a series of isolated experiences, and involve all aspects of their lives: emotional, spiritual, physical, and developmental.”⁴⁷ Children go through lot of suffering and pain of loss. They need basic psychological needs such as love, security, trust, self-respect, hope, moral development. The church should extend its mission to these suffering children. Children go through lot of psychological trauma because they loose their parents in the war. War brings curse on innocent children. “From a child’s point of view, however, the experiences of any war can be divided into three categories: *violence, losses or separations and exploitation* (taking unfair advantage of the

children in their situation).⁴⁸ Thus the church needs to focus its attention to war affected children.

In the context of war, church's mission can be extended to the field of education. "After the end of the Pacific War the focus of missionary activity was in the field of education."⁴⁹ In the past missionaries focused on education in the context of war. Children become orphans due to war and there will be no one who takes care of them. The church can extend its mission to help these children by giving education.

4.3 Social work

War creates lot of insecurity and devastation in the lives of civilians. People struggle for their existence because of the shortage of food, shelter, water, medicine etc. The church should actively engage in helping the afflicted during the time of war. The church in the past engaged in social work. "In the early years after the end of the Pacific War, the churches also made great and important contributions in the field of social work like taking care of the poor and sick people."⁵⁰ The churches during the two world wars actively engaged in reconstruction work. The churches worked together at home and overseas in relief and rehabilitation and in fact "this was one of the most significant chapters in the modern church's history." Also "while the World Council of Churches was in the process of formation, the denominations worked together magnificently through a Geneva office in the work of reconstruction and reconciliation."⁵¹ The church has a role to play in reconstruction of the affected countries. During the world wars the church actively participated in relief work. The life and work movement concentrated in relief work and they focused on helping the afflicted during the war time.

The Mennonite church made plan of action to serve the people who are affected by the war. These churches are called as peace churches for its initiation of peace during the war. The statement of Mennonite church on *Peace, war, and military service* says, "We are willing at all times to aid in the relief of those who are in need, distress, or suffering, regardless of the danger in which we may be placed in bringing such relief, or of the cost which may be involved in the same. We are ready to render such service in time of war as well as in time of peace."⁵² The church engaged in relief work to the war affected nations. During the Second World War the Mennonite church involved in relief work, financial aid to the war sufferers, food and milk distribution programmes.⁵³

4.4 Evangelism

Christian faith only gives hope to the survivors of the war. Along with the social work and liberation activities the church should never neglect in sharing the gospel. In the context of Tokyo the church multiplied in its number. The World War II brought calamity to the church in Tokyo but Christianity grew steadily. "There were twenty-one churches in the archdiocese of Tokyo in 1941, and fourteen of these were destroyed in the war." They were rebuilt after the war and "by 1963 the total number of churches had risen to sixty-six."⁵⁴ Evangelism should be the central focus in the context of war and weapons of mass destruction because people come to the personal relationship with Christ which helps them to experience a new hope.

4.5 Working for peace

In the context of war and weapons of mass destruction the church has a great responsibility to promote peace teaching. For instance, "by 1940 the Mennonite church had made a fair beginning in the field of peace literature and peace teaching. It was only a beginning, however, and operated too much merely at the top level."⁵⁵ Developing literature on peace contributes a lot to the context of war and weapons of mass destruction. Today's world lacks teaching on peace. "The Mennonite Publishing House, the church colleges, and the Mission Board labored together faithfully for the promotion of the cause."⁵⁶ Thus Mennonite

church is an example to practice mission as promoting peace through the teaching. Our churches lack this teaching.

WCC has been actively participating in peace making in the context of war. "The ecumenical commitment to peace in Latin America concentrated during the 1990s on Guatemala where war had dragged on for over thirty years, and Peru where the extremist Marxist guerrilla group Shining Path wreaked havoc among the civilian population." WCC attempted to bring peace "in El Salvador where churches actively defended human rights, helping to bring about the signing of peace treaties in 1992."⁵⁷ The churches all over the world have been praying for the peace in the globe.

4.6 Unity among the churches

The first and second World Wars brought a paradigm shift in Christian mission practice. The traditional mission emphasis on "evangelizing the heathens" was given less priority and service to afflicted human society gained popularity. The ecumenical movement turned from soul winning to the social gospel. "The outbreak of World War I dealt a blow to Edinburgh's optimism and, from later perspective, brought an end to the nineteenth-century missionary movement."⁵⁸ In this context Laurenti Magesa argues that "ecumenism was of course the main item on the agenda of most of the protestant, Orthodox and Coptic churches after World War II. It led the establishment of the WCC, which had its first assembly in Amsterdam in 1948."⁵⁹ The ecumenical conferences focused more on unity in the context of war to witness the world effectively.

The church at large realized the need for unity and the spirit of ecumenism grew by the devastation of first and second World Wars. Unity among churches was understood as the mission and "unlike the tragedies of war, Christians had been driven to realize as never before their oneness in Christ."⁶⁰ The church needs to come together to serve the humanity in the midst of wars.

7. Conclusion

In the context of war and weapons of mass destruction the church has a significant role to play because Jesus commanded the church to be an agent of peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matt 5:9). Through out the globe the church went through lot of persecution and oppressive situations due to war. The most powerful weapons of mass destruction are falling into most of the developing and under developing countries which is a greatest threat to the globe. This threat is not only to human beings but to the entire creation. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Rom 8:22-23). Nuclear weapons are the most destructive weapons and their existence is a great threat to the entire creation. Nations should spend less on acquiring weapons and they should spend much on developing the countries and liberating the oppressed, harassed, and helpless.

In this context the church needs to conduct awareness programs and it should raise its voice against the destructive arms race. The churches should bring pressure on governments to decrease the nuclear weapons and they should encourage the governments to spend much of its budget on developmental programs than spending on defense purpose. Christians should not loose heart because of wars but rather they should stand firm in their faith (Mathew 24:4-8).

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⁵⁹ Laurenti Magesa, "Mission in the post cold war era considerations for the 21st century," *Exchange Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research* 30/3 (Jul 2001): 204.

⁶⁰ T. V. Philip, *Edinburgh to Salvador* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1999), 43.