

Catholic Theology and Disarmament

Why do so many Catholic theologians plea for a nuclear freeze, oppose nuclear deterrence and the testing of the cruise missile in Canada? I believe that the key to the answer lies in their view of natural law and original sin.

Natural Law

According to the principle of natural law, moral norms correspond to man's nature by which he orders his conduct toward God, neighbour, society and himself. The law, which is rooted in human nature, is of divine origin, and can be known by every moral person, who possesses reason. The ten commandments are a declaration and amplification of natural law. The basic concepts of natural law – to do good and to avoid evil – are universally recognized, despite variances resulting from different philosophies of good and evil. Natural law provides principles which all people can accept. Some of them are:

What you do not want to have done to you, don't do it to others. Give everyone his due. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that what one recognizes as good, one must do. Natural law is not a law formulated in writing. Pope Pius XII wrote that "the law is ultimately founded on the stable and immutable nature of things. Wherever there are men and nations gathered in communities with laws, are they not precisely human beings with a nature which is essentially the same? The needs which derive from that nature are the guide-rules of law."

Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* states the natural law as a basis for moral behaviour. "Hence, the norm of human activity is this: that in accord with the divine plan and will, it should harmonize with the genuine good of the human race, and allow men as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfill it." The heart of the Catholic doctrine of natural law is the teaching that there exists a source of ethical wisdom and knowledge which the Christian shares with all mankind. On the basis of this natural law, appeals are made for peace. Therefore, Pope Pius XII could say in his 1957 Christmas message: "The divine law of harmony in the world strictly imposes on all rulers of nations the obligation to prevent war by means of suitable international organizations, to reduce armaments under a system of effective inspection, and to deter whoever should aim at disturbing the nations which sincerely desire it." Vatican II's objectives concerning war and peace are based on the same principles. On mass exterminations it states: "The Council wishes to recall first of all the permanent binding force of universal law and its all embracing principles. Man's conscience itself gives ever more emphatic voice to these principles. Therefore, actions which deliberately conflict with these same principles, as well as orders commanding such actions, are criminal."

How should we evaluate the Catholic principle of natural law? It falls neatly within the Catholic grace and nature scheme. In Catholic thought, a man cannot, do any good, in the spiritual realm, but in the natural realm he is able to do good. Furthermore, natural

law is in conflict with the teaching of Scripture. The Bible says that we must do all things to God's glory (I Cor. 10:31) We must love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind (Matth. 22:37) We may not divide what God has created as one. The good in the eyes of the holy God is only good when it is done out of faith, according to God's law and for God's glory.

2. Original Sin

What will promote peace and good will among mankind? Public opinion! If only public opinion can be well informed and alert, we will have lasting peace and security. If all citizens will just recognize their sense of responsibility in the making and the maintaining of peace, the world has it made. How shall we meet the challenge of peace? The U.S. bishops declared in November, 1944, when some of the most intense and brutal battles for freedom were fought, that citizens "must inform themselves of the issues and form their judgments in the light of sound reason and our Christian democratic traditions. They must free themselves from hatred, from distrust, from the spirit of mere expediency, from natural greed, and from indifference to right in the use of might; they must form their judgments on the basis of stern objective realities." What was the cause of World War I according to the bishops? "This war came largely from bad education." What do we need for a just and a lasting peace? Good education! Public opinion must be shaped for peace. A well informed people does not want war. The Vatican II's Pastoral *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* declares: "It does them (government officials) no-good to work at building peace so long as feelings of hostility, contempt, and distrust, as well as racial hatred and unbending ideologies, continue to divide men and place them in opposing camps...Hence arises a surpassing need for renewed education of attitudes and for new inspiration in the area of public opinion. Those who are dedicated to the work of education... should regard as their most weighty task the effort to instruct all in fresh sentiments of peace."

Why this spirit of optimism? Because in Catholic theology the descendants of Adam possess the freedom to make moral choices. As long as we know the good, we must act accordingly; otherwise the light will be lost because of our neglect. Traditionally, original sin in Catholicism, is viewed as the lack of righteousness and holiness. Sin is something primarily negative. It is the loss of saving grace and with it the supernatural virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The inclination to do good has not been destroyed, it has only been weakened. God's world remains good, even after the fall. In Catholic theology there is no concept of total depravity as we have it in the doctrines of the Reformation. Man, though fallen, is still basically good. In contemporary Catholic theology, the doctrine of original sin doesn't play a very large part. Because of a shift in theology towards the left, under the impact of scientific, theological and philosophical development, there is a different understanding of man's nature. The emphasis is now placed on self-awareness as persons, freedom and responsibility. "This new direction in thought", admits Richard P. McBrien, "is reflected to some discernible extent in the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the *Church in the Modern World*." With this vision on human nature after the fall comes a spirit of optimism, which comes close to characterizing the Catholic world and life view. Man is still able to love and to

do good. Because of this inner quality of goodness; everyone has an inner desire for peace. In his radio address "to all the Peoples of the Earth and their Rulers". November 10, 1956, on the Plight of Hungary, Pope Pius XII said: "Accordingly we address ourselves above all to you, beloved peoples, men and women, intellectuals, workers, artisans, and farmers, of every race and country. Let your rulers know your inmost sentiments and your genuine aspirations. Recent events have confirmed the belief that nations, families, and individuals prefer the tranquility of labor and family life to any other form of wealth that men covet."

Reformed Christians recognize the radical nature, totality and gravity of sin. Original sin has a devastating effect on the whole of man's nature, and the participation even of children, in this hereditary disease. With the catechism we confess that we are prone by nature to hate God and neighbour. (LD. 2; Q:A.5)

The same view is expounded in the Canons of Dort: "Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage, there to; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation." (Third. heading, Art. 3).

The U.S. bishop's draft draws its theological framework on war and peace from principles which are in conflict with Biblical teaching. We can nether appeal for peace on the basis of natural law nor draw on the inner desire for peace within mankind. Man's "heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure". Who can understand it? (Jer. 17:9)

Therefore the free world must keep its deterrence. There are no simple answers to complex questions. But we better do some careful Bible study in our approach to the vital issues of war and peace.

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