

**Address for a service of prayer and reflection
On the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945
St Paul's Cathedral, 6 August 2009**

We are here to reflect and pray about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 64 years ago. We have some familiarity with the utter horror of those events. The bomb dropped on Hiroshima totally destroyed everything within a radius of one mile from where the bomb exploded. There are various estimates of the number of people killed instantly, in the later hours of the 6 August, and in the following months and years from the effects of the bombings. However, there are memorials in both cities containing lists of 'explosion-affected people' – *hibakusha* – who have died since the bombings and by August 2008 these lists contained over 400,000 names, 258,300 in Hiroshima and 146,000 in Nagasaki. Ninety per cent of doctors and 93 per cent of nurses in Hiroshima were killed or wounded by the explosion. About 20,000 of those killed as a result of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima had Korean ancestry.

The decisions to build those bombs and to use them raise many controversial moral issues but those which it is our responsibility to consider today are about what can and should be done now.

The first step is to express our utter grief that such destruction has ever occurred and to pray for those who have suffered so terribly. In a few minutes we will join in such a prayer, part of which is also a prayer of confession for being complicit in the destruction of what God has created.

Second, we can express unlimited gratitude that nuclear weapons have so far not been used again. The World Council of Churches expressed this at its most recent Assembly:

In the nuclear age, God who is slow to anger and abounding in mercy has granted humanity many days of grace. Through the troubled years of the Cold War and into the present time, it has become clear that, in this as in other ways, God has saved us from ourselves. ... If vengeance in daily life is for God (Rom 12:19), surely the vengeance of nuclear holocaust is not for human hands.

The merciful God has given humankind more time in which to end the threat of global nuclear annihilation which is embodied in the 25,000 or so nuclear weapons in existence now, about 2,500 of them on high alert, so that they could be launched within 30 minutes. As the Indian writer Arundhati Roy has eloquently written: 'The nuclear bomb is the most antidemocratic, antinational, antihuman outright evil thing that man has ever made. If you are religious, then remember that this bomb is Man's challenge to God. It's worded quite simply: We have the power to destroy everything that You have created.'

So, third, surely our responsibility as Christians is to continue the struggle of many churches since 1945 to end the existence of nuclear weapons. As a member church of the World Council of Churches we should aim to speak

out of love for the world and in obedience to the God of all life, [and] raise our voice again with convictions the church has held since nuclear weapons were used six decades ago. One shared principle of world religions is greater than all weapons of mass destruction and stronger than any 'balance of *terror*': we must do to others what we would have them do to us. Because we do not want nuclear weapons used against us, our nation cannot use nuclear weapons against others. Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki there is uranium within the golden rule.

Yet nuclear weapons do embody a force for evil. Judith Wright articulates well one of the corrupting features of nuclear weapons.

The will to power destroys the power to will.
The weapon made, we cannot help but use it;
it drags us with its own momentum still.

The power to kill compounds the need to kill.
Grown out of hand, the heart cannot refuse it;
the will to power undoes the power to will.

Though as we strike we cry 'I did not choose it',
it drags us with its own momentum still.
In one stroke we win the world and lose it.
The will to power destroys the power to will.ⁱ

We must therefore question the rationalisations which allow nuclear armed states to justify to themselves holding and strengthening their nuclear arsenals: As the WCC writes: 'On the question of morality, all people of faith are needed in our day to expose the fallacies of nuclear doctrine. These hold, for example, that weapons of mass destruction are agents of stability; that governments have nuclear arms so they will never use them; and that there is a role in the human affairs of this small planet for a bomb more powerful than all the weapons ever used. With our aging sisters and brothers who survived atomic bombs in Japan we are bound to confront these follies before it is too late.

In contrast to those rationalisations, the Beatitudes which we have just heard, testify to God's grace, and are also implicit commands, demanding obedient action. The one which speaks particularly to us today is 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' The commentary which I use, by Douglas Hare, says that peacemakers are 'those who devote themselves to the hard work of reconciling hostile individuals, families, groups, and nations'. He continues further on that 'The creators of *shalom* will deserve to be called the sons and daughters of God, because they have chosen to imitate his magnanimity. ... Where others build walls, they painstakingly construct bridges.' This quite extraordinary offer and command is a challenge to us all.

The challenge involves all areas of our lives, but the issue for today is what can we, people living in Melbourne in 2009, do about nuclear weapons? We are on the other side of the world from the places where the most powerful decisions about nuclear weapons are made – in Washington and Moscow, and nor are we geographically close to the other countries with nuclear weapons – Britain, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, North Korea or to those which are reported to be actively seeking to acquire them such as Iran and possibly Burma.

Yet our country has leverage too. A substantial proportion of the world's uranium is mined in Australia. Our Government has a close alliance with the US, the country with the greatest influence and in July hosted training manoeuvres with about 12,000 US troops in Queensland. The current Australian Government is re-engaging with the UN and could be influential in multilateral discussion at UN forums. Since we live in a democracy and have a government committed to making democracy work, all of us have some capacity to influence national policy.

Churches must prevail upon governments until they recognize the incontrovertible immorality of nuclear weapons. All people of faith are called to advocate and support complete nuclear disarmament. This could be achieved by negotiation of a nuclear disarmament treaty.

Fortunately there are signs of hope that the goal of complete nuclear disarmament might be possible. In January 2007 George Schultz, Henry Kissinger and others, all former US foreign policy leaders, published an article advocating a world free of nuclear weapons. They wrote that mutual deterrence is decreasingly effective when more countries and possibly even terrorists acquire nuclear weapons or the capacity to make them. They proposed a joint enterprise with other nuclear countries, to achieve the goal of complete nuclear disarmament through a series of 'agreed and urgent steps' starting with increasing the warning time of deployed nuclear weapons.

Kevin Rudd used the political space created by this change of attitude to propose cooperating with the Japanese Government in establishing the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament and appointing Gareth Evans as Co-Chair. The Commission's mandate is about reinvigoration of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and eventual nuclear disarmament for without a nuclear free world the risk of use of nuclear weapons by accident or design will continue to grow.

In April President Obama made the most important speech on this issue in recent decades when he spoke 'clearly and with conviction [of] America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. This goal', he said, 'will not be reached quickly - perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence'. The concrete steps he mentioned included reducing the role of nuclear weapons in national security strategy; starting the process by negotiations with the Russians about cuts to NW stockpiles; and in Congress with hearings on ratification of Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to ban testing of nuclear weapons; and by seeking a new treaty which would end the production of fissile material.

There are other modest steps which Australians opposed to nuclear weapons could take. The Public Affairs Commission of the national Anglican Church made a submission to the public inquiry by the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Treaties on nuclear treaties. The recommendations included:

- Rigorous scrutiny of the uses of uranium exports.
- Continuing to sustain the obligations of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty.

- Changing Australia's votes to support such steps as: urging nuclear states to promise not to use nuclear weapons first; actively supporting peaceful conflict resolution and participating in peacekeeping missions; taking all NW off high-alert status; urging all nuclear states to make no-first-use pledges; starting detailed work on verification of nuclear disarmament agreements; and revision of nuclear doctrines, the plans and principles about how nuclear forces are configured and employed.
- And suggesting that the Australian Government become one of the advocates for holding a fourth special session of the General Assembly on disarmament.
- In addition we should join with other churches in working to overcome the ignorance and complacency in society concerning the nuclear threat, especially by raising awareness in generations with no memory of what these weapons do.

Since that submission the Government has published its Defence White Paper. This statement of policy is inconsistent with both a commitment to ending the threat of nuclear weapons and to Australia's obligations as a member of the United Nations. The paper argues that Australian military spending should be steadily increased in response to an assumption of growing Chinese military power. It does not discuss the possibility of taking steps towards nuclear disarmament and in fact simply asserts that 'The number of states with weapons of mass destruction over the next 20 to 30 years is likely to increase,' and further on that 'It is the Government's judgement that stable nuclear deterrence will continue to be a feature of the international system for the foreseeable future'. [p39] Malcolm Fraser commented on what he called this 'backward looking assumption' by writing that

substantial progress towards a world free of nuclear weapons, and potentially achieving it, is possible within this time frame. Thus the white paper is at odds with and undermines Australia's stated support for complete nuclear disarmament. Achieving a world free of nuclear weapons would enhance security more than anything else, and we should be doing everything possible to prepare for it. [The Age, 29 June 2009, p 13]

It is vital that we clarify the vision of a world without nuclear weapons and act as if it is not only necessary but possible. It is more utopian to think that nuclear weapons can continue to exist without their use than it is to seek their abolition.

Today is the Feast of the Transfiguration. This is not the occasion for a discussion of the meaning of that event, which was transformative for the way Peter, James and John perceived Jesus. But it does not seem to be stretching the events of that mystical experience too far to suggest that one of many insights we could learn from it is that we need to have a transforming vision of the world which God created and of our stewardship of it. The capacity of humankind to destroy the world which God has made, and for which He has demonstrated his love by sending His Son, must be at least one of the ultimate expressions of human evil. To acknowledge the possibility of a world without nuclear weapons and to work with realistic hope for that end requires a transformation of our world view. Let us pray for that transformation for ourselves, for the communities and nation in

which we live and for the world. And let us also remember the inspirational question and answer from Micah:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Amen

ⁱ Judith Wright, *Collected Poems 1942 – 1985*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1994, p 281