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WAR, PEACE, AND FREEDOM

A resolution and statement adopted by the Third General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, October 19-25, 1966.

WHEREAS, A predecessor statement was referred back to the Commission on Research and Social Action by the 1964 General Convention with suggestions for revision; and

WHEREAS, The proposals for revision have been considered and incorporated into the present draft; and

WHEREAS, Generally favorable comments have been expressed on the current draft since its circulation in the spring and early summer of 1965; therefore be it

Resolved, That The American Lutheran Church adopt the following statement as expressing its views on the sensitive issues of war and peace as a guide to its members and as a contribution to public discussion.

A. THE ISSUES IN TENSION

1. As perhaps never before in human history, men fear and dread war. They fear that through the weapons of total warfare now available, man will destroy himself, his civilization, and this present world. In contrast, the promises of peace, of a social order subject to man's control, of a world without war hold a strong appeal.

2. War is war, even though it may not be total war, nor even declared war. It may be a limited military action, waged within a relatively small geographic area, involving comparatively few combatants. Methods of warfare include guerrilla action, blockade, infiltration, subversion, and other means of undermining a people's will or capacity to resist. War thus may include not only military action but also economic and psychological weapons.

3. The price of freedom may be so high as to require war. Peace, freedom, and security come dear. It is possible that a nation and its people cannot have peace, security *and* freedom. Under some circumstances their only alternatives may be *either* the peace of surrender to tyranny and totalitarianism *or* the security and freedom bought by risking and engaging in war.

4. To people caught in the tensions between war and peace, totalitarianism and freedom, life and death, the Church of Jesus Christ needs to speak relevant counsel. Members of The American Lutheran Church ought to be vocal in helping to clarify and to shape public

policy on issues of war, peace, and the demands of responsible freedom. The Commission on Research and Social Action offers the results of its discussions as a stimulus to widespread thinking and discussion of these issues within The American Lutheran Church, to be carried by the members into the discussions within the body politic.

B. THE PARADOX OF WAR

5. War is an evil scourge, which like famine and pestilence brings destruction to mankind. War denies God's central commandment of love (Matt. 22:37-40). War is a consequence of a world estranged from God, a fruit of sinful man's passions. (See James 4:1.) Man's sinfulness shows in such traits as pride, arrogance, greed, lust for power, divisiveness, hate, bigotry, self-righteousness, and idolatry, including an unquestioning devotion to the goals and the supremacy of his own nation. These, in the complex intermingling of causes and effects and in the involved workings of man's reason and his madness, are what lead to war.

6. God's plan and purpose for man do not require war. When man's disobedience brings war, God can transform it into a chastening of sinful, rebellious men and nations that deny His Lordship and defy His demands for justice and mercy. God may turn war's waste of life, energy, and resources into a reminder of the folly of trusting in material things. God's use of pagan nations to rebuke the idolatry and wickedness of Israel and Judah testifies to His judgment through war.

7. Although war indeed may result in scientific advance and material progress, and may bring out some of the noblest qualities in the human spirit as men are moved to deny self for the well-being of others, war also gives demonic satisfaction to some of the basest elements in humanity. Cruelties and injustice are inflicted; greed and avarice run rampant; lust and license are made to appear as virtues; internal enemies can be silenced; critics are ridiculed; and power-mad men ruthlessly impose their wills upon others. Man's inhumanity to man can take its most extreme forms in war.

8. The inhumanity of war ought not be measured solely by the destructive power of the weapons used. The madness which moved men to throw stones, hurl spears, or shoot arrows is little different in quality from the cold, impersonal technology which unleashes the nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons man now has at hand. Those killed are just as dead, probably having died more quickly under the latter than under the earlier weaponry. While wars of massive destructiveness are not new in human experience man now seems to have it within his power through total war to bring this world to an end.

9. In every age men and nations have sought to renounce war as a defensible instrument of national policy. To their dismay they often found that the more loudly they spoke their love for peace and their hatred for war, the more certainly they became involved in wars of defense against an aggressor who misjudged their will to resist his dominance. It appears that war is least likely to erupt when the probable contestants are equally weak and equally incapable of waging war, equally strong and balanced and thus equally sure that they could not win the contest, or equally sure that the opponent possesses not only military power but also the will to use it.

C. THE "JUST WAR" QUESTION

10. War can be seen as an emergency use of temporal power exercised by the civil rulers, an extension of the authority they derive from God to maintain order and justice (Rom. 13:1-4). As Creator and Preserver, God has decreed laws binding upon all men, obedience to which is essential for civic righteousness. (See Ps. 19:7-11; Prov. 14:34; Matt. 22:17-21.) God has conferred a measure of His authority upon duly-constituted government in order to promote, foster, and protect justice, morality, equity, peace, order, and respect for inalienable human rights (Ps. 82, Rom. 13, Titus 3). Government must restrain, if need be by force, those who would deprive human beings of these divine blessings.

11. The very readiness to risk war and the very willingness to engage in war may be the only means the nation and its people have for assuring their independence and the preservation of their God-given opportunities and responsibilities. The forces of evil may become so fierce that men will rise in moves of desperation to curb demonic powers. A government may be so tyrannical or despotic that men seek to overthrow it. War may become a means to defend moral and spiritual values cherished more highly than goods or life.

12. This line of reasoning finds support in Article XVI of the Augsburg Confession, which declares: "Christians may without sin . . . engage in just wars, serve as soldiers. . . ." Christians of that day were ready to judge whether a particular war was a just war on the criteria of whether it (1) seemed to be fought for a just cause, (2) was motivated by a just intent, (3) was waged in accord with the spirit of justice and mercy, and (4) would result in the triumph and reign of justice and mercy for both victor and vanquished. This thinking, which prompted Augsburg XVI, needs to be understood not as justifying war *per se* but as giving criteria by which to evaluate the justice or injustice of a particular war.

13. The conditions and assumptions which underlay Augsburg's

guidance for Christians to "engage in just wars" rarely prevail today. Widely circulated propaganda and managed news cut away the foundation necessary for informed and objective decision-making. Total war wipes out any meaningful distinctions between voluntary enlistment and the draft, between bearing or not bearing arms, between combatants and noncombatants, between the fighting front and the home front, between military objectives and total victory. The decision of whether or not to go to war is a corporate decision made by the political authorities. No citizen can be excused from the massive mobilization of effort which total war demands.

14. It is the Christian's duty, therefore, as a loyal citizen to obey the demands of his government unless he feels conscience-bound to resist. Not knowing the subtleties of diplomacy and the intricacies of statecraft which brought his nation to the precipice of war, he must trust the soundness of judgment of its leaders. Should he lose confidence in their judgment, their integrity, or the rightness of their course, he must work for changes in his nation's policies, objectives, or leadership. If he is sufficiently convinced that his nation is on a course hostile to God's will, the Christian has the right and the duty to resist. As he does so he knows that he must be willing to accept the consequences, both spiritual and civic. Equally as surely must the person who supports and participates in carrying out the policies of his nation examine his own conscience and the moral consequences of his own action.

15. Such counsel of obedience to a corporate decision—save only when bound to obey God rather than man—does not deny the evil of war. It is tragic and lamentable when antagonistic nations, in the sinfulness of mankind, are unable to resolve differences they consider fundamental and so turn to war to establish their mastery. War can be understood as a seemingly necessary last resort to which sinful men and nations turn in their desperation. War cannot, however, be called good, righteous, or holy.

16. Certainly no nation today should be completely autonomous, with unchecked power by force to impose its will upon other peoples. Its claims for the justice of its objectives and the rightness of its actions must be weighed against the higher imperative of God's will for the good of the entire world (John 3:16-21). The "governing authorities" of Rom. 13:1 are not limited to the nation-state as we know it. They include any and all local, national, and international structures effectively exercising governmental powers and which remain faithful to God's purposes for good government.

17. Christians must weigh the claims of every governing authority for support of the honor, justice, integrity, and rightness of its cause

in light of their own understanding of the divine imperative. They must resist the effort of any government to bind or restrict what they believe to be their proper Christian response to God's love for them and for the world.

D. THE CHURCH'S TASK

18. The Christian rightly looks to his church for guidance in evaluating the claims and counter-claims for the justice and morality of the cause of the nations approaching the brink or in the throes of war. When men and nations are torn by strife and dissension, leaders of each position invoke high moral and ethical principles to justify their stand. Their conflicts of power and interest produce their need for self-defense, which in turn often becomes self-righteousness. Church leaders therefore need to beware lest they be used to give religious sanction or theological justification to a war which is no more than a naked power struggle for material advantage.

19. Even so, however, the church through synods, councils, and interchurch assemblies should seek to cut through the barrage of propaganda, smokescreens, and verbiage to discover as best as fallible men can discover where truth, righteousness, justice, and mercy reside. It ought to express its collective prophetic judgment on the morality of the issues of national self-interest at stake, the validity of the objectives the opponents claim, the wisdom of the policies pursued, the possible points on which the conflicting interests honorably can be reconciled, and the probable consequences of the struggle upon such values as justice, freedom, long-range peace, and respect for persons. Members of the church have the right to hear from their spiritual leaders such a reasoned evaluation, interpretation, and judgment as a guide to their own enlightened Christian response to their duties as citizens.

20. As the universal, all-embracing arm of Jesus Christ the church should rise above the partisanship of nation, race, or class in offering the Gospel of reconciliation. Though pastors and parishioners normally remain loyal to their nation, their higher loyalty is to Jesus Christ and His inclusive body of believers. Churchmen should avoid building walls of hostility toward persons who reside in the land of the enemy, which only deepen and intensify the differences to be resolved. "Love your enemy" is a divine injunction easier to follow before conflict rages than during and after a war.

21. The church also must minister to those caught in the enmity of war, strife, and dissension. Both those in the armed forces and those on the home front need to hear the comforting, sustaining, interpretive counsel of Jesus Christ to people who find themselves in dif-

icult times. Ministers of Jesus Christ stress the duties and obligations of citizens critically to obey the governing authorities, save only when commanded to sin, to support with vigor such of the nation's goals and objectives which are in harmony with God's purposes, and to pray for an honorable resolution of the conflict, culminating in the triumph of justice and mercy.

22. The church necessarily shows a deep concern for members of the armed forces and their families. It recognizes how lives are disrupted by the call to military service. Men faced with service on the fighting front, of killing and being killed, need the special spiritual care and counsel of competent chaplains. The church encourages able pastors to enter the chaplaincy ministry and maintains continuing, supportive contacts with them in their special ministry. Pastors and parishioners on the home front remember in their prayers the members of the armed forces. They seek in various specific ways to remind those of their own congregation who are away in military service of the bonds of affection and fellowship which the home congregation feels for the absent brethren.

23. To men hoping to build a world without war, the church must speak words of encouragement, yet realism. The goal of developing alternate ways of dealing with strife and conflict between nations, short of war, should command the prayers, support, and enthusiastic encouragement of the church. At the same time man cannot be sure that this goal is fully attainable in this present world. Certainly no program of political or international action can be based upon a simple reading of Jesus' words concerning "wars and rumors of wars" (Mark 13:7; also Luke 21:9) or of Isaiah's vision of an era when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:4; also Mic. 4:3).

24. Having a clear view of human sinfulness, which results in jealousy, envy, hostility, and divisiveness, Christians are sure that the seeds of conflict and war never can be totally eliminated from this present world. They dare not, however, take the position that a specific war is inevitable. Rather, they should lend their influence and efforts to work for preventing those struggles and contests in which men and nations exert military power, violence, and force against one another. They should work for justice, harmony, mutual respect and good will, and freedom from violence and civil disturbance which men call peace (Matt. 5:9, Rom. 12:18).

25. Many a dispute between nations has been settled peaceably, with honor to the adversaries, and with freedom, justice, and equity the fruits of the agreement. Christians strive for an increase in the good will, mutual trust, calm reason, devotion to humanity, and hard-

headed realism which will make it easier for nations to resolve their differences by methods short of armed aggression.

E. A CLIMATE FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING

26. Basic to any realistic hope for bringing war under control is a change in men's minds and hearts. People must come to feel that the unity, strength, development, and well-being of mankind are values dearer than racial or national advantage (Gen. 1:27; John 3:16; Acts 17:26). Toward this end it is helpful to stress:

- a. The oneness of the human race in creation, sin, and God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ;
- b. The similarities as well as the differences in the hopes, ways of living, and basic social institutions of men, regardless of tongue, flag, color, or faith;
- c. The unusual abilities and special gifts which the diversity of men and cultures brings to the richness of human life;
- d. The validity of a government being dependent not so much upon its form or structure as upon its ability to govern effectively, fairly, and impartially and upon its willingness to recognize, to respect, and to honor basic human rights.

27. Various programs seek to put such goals of international person-to-person understanding and good will into action. Current national hostilities ought not be allowed to obstruct programs which promise to relieve actual human need. Each program has hazards to which participants need ever remain alert. Each program ought preferably to be an avenue of genuine two-way contact and communication. Each offers an exciting outlet for action worthy of the energies of self-giving persons. Among such international programs are:

- a. Cultural exchange, the sharing with others of features highly esteemed in the sending country and welcomed by the receiving country;
- b. People to people visits in the homes as well as to the economic, religious, and civic centers of the host country;
- c. Counterpart or twin city ties by which municipal leaders of paired cities exchange ideas on questions of urban life;
- d. Study grants and projects, including some opportunity for the student to become a member of a family circle;
- e. Voluntary and governmental programs helping people and communities to achieve better agriculture, industry, housing, health, and sanitation;
- f. Emergency assistance of food, clothing, and medical supplies to meet human needs, even in hostile lands, when disaster strikes,

especially on a church-to-church partnership basis;

g. Sharing in the free flow of ideas and in struggles to win and responsibly to exercise basic human liberties and freedoms.

28. Along with these civic actions which they can share with any person of good will, members of The American Lutheran Church also can:

- a. Manifest in their own lives the positive qualities of peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control with which the Holy Spirit can empower them;
- b. Pray daily and fervently that all men everywhere, especially the rulers of the nations, will come to know and to do God's will in the conduct of public office, and to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior;
- c. Support with their interest, prayers, personnel, and funds the world-wide missionary program of their church, including its volunteer and short-term service opportunities, by which the Gospel of Jesus Christ is brought to every continent;
- d. Participate in Lutheran World Relief drives and learn where, how, and with what results the funds and materials are distributed;
- e. Inform themselves on the activities and projects of the Lutheran World Federation and share in them as opportunity permits;
- f. Cooperate in ecumenical programs seeking to realize the goals of peace and international good will.

29. As Christians, convinced of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we believe that to the extent that men hear about Him, accept Him as Lord and Savior, and live in total commitment to His way of love, prospects for peace and freedom thereby brighten. We believe, therefore, that freedom for religious witness and the free exercise of religion are essential for such a better world.

F. BRINGING WAR UNDER CONTROL

30. Neither "peace at any price," nor naive reliance on the words of the enemy, nor allegiance to Utopian goals can bring war under control. Voluntary, governmental, and intergovernmental measures, built upon the foundations of good will and mutual understanding between people, can help. How wise, how prudent, even how realistic or possible a proposed course of action may be, should be subjected to intense discussion and debate.

31. We urge committed Christians to take part in the arguments seeking the strengths and the pitfalls of such measures for cutting the risk of war as:

a. Cooperation in responsible efforts, both governmental and voluntary, to alleviate material and psychological deprivations suffered by human beings all over the world, which create in them a seedbed for suspicion, hate, and war;

b. Multilateral reduction of armaments to the types and levels necessary to maintain domestic tranquility and order, with effective, verified, reliable checks and controls to insure adherence to arms reduction agreements;

c. An orderly transition whereby excess manpower and materials devoted to armaments can be turned to goods and services yielding a higher quality of personal and community life;

d. International cooperation and control to insure the peaceful uses of outer space;

e. Technical assistance to younger nations in developing their own resources and traditions so that they can take a strong, cooperative, responsible, viable place in the community of nations;

f. Development of a sense of regional and world community through voluntary associations of free nations united by history, values, and goals, and evidenced by mutual cooperation and adherence to covenants which protect the freedoms and liberties of responsible men;

g. Establishment, strengthening, and support of agencies of international conciliation, arbitration, and justice, which seek under law to resolve in honor, equity, and impartiality any major disputes which arise between nations and which possess legitimate power and delegated authority to enforce their decisions;

h. Increased intergovernmental cooperation in cultural, educational, economic, and social spheres to achieve goals of human welfare beyond the capacity of any one nation.

G. REACHING A CHRISTIAN POSITION

32. The traditional Lutheran doctrine of the "Two Kingdoms" requires that in discussing issues of war and peace we not confuse the roles of church and state. "The Gospel cannot legislate for the civil estate." Rather, God seeks to rule through both the civil and the ecclesiastical realms in order to accomplish His gracious purposes and to thwart the evil powers. The church's task is to proclaim the whole counsel of God, tell of His mighty acts, denounce sin and evil, offer His reconciliation, and assist in counteracting the causes of war both in persons and among nations.

33. As Redeemer and Sanctifier God works through the Means of Grace, administered by the Church, offering to men the saving Truth revealed in Jesus Christ. The faith of the Christian should manifest

itself in words and deeds of love, alike in personal piety and in meeting the obligations of his life in community. Through the Means of Grace the Holy Spirit seeks to guide the believer to the decisions he must make on issues of war, peace, and freedom, as in other civic affairs. God thus would rule in the hearts and lives of His people, who dwell as Christians in both Kingdoms.

34. Pastors in their preaching and teaching bring to their people the counsel of God's Word. Members of the priesthood of all believers deserve such help, from pulpit, lectern, and classroom, and from synods, councils, and interchurch assemblies, in thinking through the issues of war and peace and in taking an informed position on them. Above all, people need to act with knowledge, understanding, judgment, and assurance. In their office as citizens they have an obligation to work toward bringing about a world where justice, righteousness, freedom, peace, truth, and love may increase and prevail.

35. Making the right decision on specific issues is an agonizing task. The Christian gropes for the greater good. He knows that whatever course he chooses he is not entirely free from sin. In the process of reaching his decision he wisely seeks the counsel of his pastor and of trusted fellow Christians. Yet, having decided, he acts boldly and with confidence, knowing that in Jesus Christ his every sinful decision and action is forgiven.

H. CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

36. Historically the teaching of the Lutheran Church, based on its understanding of the Bible, has been that a Christian as a citizen willingly should assume the duties of citizenship, including the bearing of arms and engaging in "just war."

37. However, the church recognizes that on the basis of their understanding of the total message of Scripture and the traditions of the early church some of its members arrive at the conviction that they cannot with good conscience bear arms. The American Lutheran Church therefore sustains the individual who reaches this conviction in the necessity of following the dictates of his conscience.

38. The American Lutheran Church appreciates that government recognizes the demands of conscience and provides alternate channels by which he whose conscience forbids him to bear arms may serve the needs of his country. The American Lutheran Church respectfully asks that the pertinent provisions for alternate service be applied to those of its members whose conscience impels them to refuse the bearing of arms and commends to its members who are conscientious objectors those alternatives for fulfilling the responsibility

of citizenship. It recognizes its duty to minister spiritually to the conscientious objector as well as to him who for conscience sake bears arms for his country.

I. IN CONCLUSION

39. Christians with contrite and repentant hearts must accept their share of guilt for many of the wars of the Christian era. Often they have felt a numbing complacency that failed to work for peace, that accepted war as inevitable, that harbored the illusion that peace would come without effort once the war was won.

40. Now we know that humanity can be degraded by war. Inhumanity in any form violates the basic tenets of our faith. Man's welfare can be crippled by warfare. The time has come for all men to seek alternatives to war. Even so, as a means for deterring aggression, maintaining human liberties, and assuring justice war sometimes may become man's last desperate resort to prevent the total victory of evil powers in a sinful, fallen world.

41. As envoys of Jesus Christ, living in the power of His Cross and His forgiveness, we dedicate ourselves anew to His benedictory charge, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, 20). We covet His accolade of "peacemakers," whom He called "sons of God" (Matt. 5:9).

42. Nonetheless, we are not so desirous of saving our own lives that we surrender to "peace at any price." We recognize with the Apostle Paul (Rom. 12:18) that the possibility of living peaceably with all does not rest entirely with us. Rather, with him we insist "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).

"O God, the Father in heaven: Grant thy mighty aid to the efforts of men to establish peace among the nations of the world. Give strength of purpose to those who lead; enlighten those who sit in council; and so transform the hearts of men everywhere by thy gracious Gospel, that they may exalt peace above war, service above gain, and righteousness above glory; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen."*

* *Service Book and Hymnal*, Collects and Prayers, "58. For Peace," p. 226

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