



Social Statements

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

WORLD COMMUNITY

ETHICAL IMPERATIVES IN AN AGE OF INTERDEPENDENCE

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THE REALITY OF A WORLD NEIGHBORHOOD

To realize the oneness of the human family is an imperative. The technologies of communication, transportation, and weaponry are drawing humanity into an increasingly intimate neighborhood where the action of any nation or interest can lead to instantaneous and irreversible consequences for all. People are beginning to sense that if they do not soon devise some means of living together they will surely perish together.

The possibility of a massive extinction of life—through either nuclear holocaust or a general pollution of the environment—is matched by the possibility of a dramatic enlargement of the horizons of human fulfillment by means of humankind's burgeoning knowledge and skill.

Concern for human survival, fulfillment, and community flows from the very heart of the Christian faith. The church has long proclaimed both humankind's natural oneness "in Adam" and eschatological oneness "in Christ." The biblical writings attest to humanity's kinship with and stewardship over the earth which humans are not simply to "subdue" but "to dress and to keep" as well.

As a beginning of its response to the challenges of the present age of world interdependence, the Lutheran Church in America addresses the following judgments both to its own constituency and to all who must participate in the fashioning of a world community.

TOWARD A GLOBAL CIVIL ORDER

The classical Christian tradition views civil authority as a sign of God's loving activity of advancing human justice and well-being and of preserving humanity from its tendency to violence and self-destruction. Just government performs the double function of promoting the welfare of humanity and restraining wickedness.

As each age of history gave birth to institutions of civil authority appropriate to its needs, so this present age of global interdependence calls for transnational structures of law and authority within which human enterprise can be regulated to the benefit of all and disputes can be settled peacefully. It is of vital importance that there be established such world and regional institutions as will encourage social, political, and economic pluralism productive of genuine human enrichment rather than perpetual conflict.

It is a hopeful sign that many nations are accepting legal obligations in connection with their participation in transnational organizations. These organizations should be regarded as emerging forms of world civil authority which, insofar as they promote peace and justice, are worthy of support by churches. Christians should be encouraged to exercise their vocation through international civil service.

The United Nations is the chief among these transnational institutions. Since the United Nations Charter emphasizes human dignity and freedom, membership in this world body should be universal. The world community will benefit if all nations have the opportunity to engage in continuous dialogue and co-operation which may prevent disputes among nations from escalating into wars. Exclusion of any nation willing to accept the United Nations Charter is not in the interest of world peace and community.

The work of the specialized agencies of economic and social development deserves increased support, particularly from the wealthy nations. The joint planning and action carried out through these agencies is useful in both the accomplishment of specific ends and in the provision of occasions in which nations may learn to perceive common interests and to co-operate toward common goals.

There continues to be a genuine fear, particularly within the developing nations, that the evolving international legal system will be simply an instrument whereby the more powerful nations can enforce their will on their weaker neighbors while themselves remaining free to obey or disobey the rule of law. This fear will doubtless continue until the greater powers show themselves willing to give more support to institutions of a genuinely multinational character and to abide by their rulings.

For the sake of strengthened confidence in the evolving structures of international law and institutions, nations holding self-judging reservations to the Statute of the International Court of Justice by which they reserve the right to reject the Court's jurisdiction should repeal these reservations.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, together with the Conventions related to it, is another sign of movement toward global civil order. Growing

out of the general revulsion to the massive violation of human dignity during World War II, the Declaration bears witness to the fact that the rights of persons—civil, political, economic, and social—are no longer the exclusive concern of particular nation-states. Even though national governments retain legal sway over individual persons, they have become, to varying degrees, sensitive to the judgments of world public opinion regarding their treatment of their citizens.

However, the high ideals embodied in the Universal Declaration stand in tragic contrast to continuing violations of human dignity. These violations are not confined to one sector of the globe or to one ideological camp. They indicate a woefully insufficient sense of human worth on the part of nations.

The churches of every nation must be opposed to these abuses, and they and their members must find ways to work politically for a fuller realization of human rights. At the same time, they must examine themselves to discover to what degree they have contributed to dehumanization, and take such actions as repentance and justice may demand.

THE INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC DOMAIN

Rapidly growing technology is making demands on the world's resources which, if permitted to continue without regulation, may result in extensive depletion and pollution. It is no longer possible for one nation to consider its use, or abuse, of resources within its own borders—for instance, air and water—as its exclusive concern. The time has come for all nations to cooperate in the coordination of conservation efforts within their respective territories, as well as to establish the rule of law governing resources of oceans, polar regions, and outer space—"the international public domain." The latter task, a beginning of which has already been made, includes the establishment of agreements which protect international resources from uncontrolled private or national exploitation, the guarantee that such resources shall not be used for warlike purposes, and the development of genuinely international agencies empowered to enforce the agreements.

As possible reservoirs of new resources, the oceans, polar regions, and outer space could generate economic support for international organizations aiding developing countries. Creative use of the international public domain should also include the devising of means of more effective communication among peoples. Imaginative use of communications satellites could contribute to increased international understanding at both the popular and governmental levels. A world communications organization might be established for the purpose of supervising such a global communications system.

SECURITY AND WAR PREVENTION

It is clearly time for a rethinking of the meaning of national security. In view of the overkill capacity now possessed by the super-powers, national security can no longer be defined in terms of either nuclear superiority or even nuclear stalemate. The common threat which such weapons hold for all humanity teaches that their continued development can only undermine security. It is now necessary both to create an international legal framework within which arms control can be brought about and to help nations perceive that their safety must be conceived in more than military terms.

A beginning has been made in the construction of the necessary legal framework. This effort should be intensified, should become increasingly multinational in character, and should include all weapons of mass destruction. In the meantime, the United States should be encouraged to undertake such unilateral initiatives as may contribute to a climate more hospitable to the limitation of arms.

It is of vital importance that all nations give sustained attention to the inappropriateness of massive arms as a means of maintaining national security, a critical appraisal of their arsenals in the light of such considerations, and a restudy of national needs and goals with a view toward the reallocation of resources for peaceful purposes.

The classical Christian tradition takes full account of the human tendency to destructive aggressiveness and the component of force required by political authority for the purpose of maintaining peace within and among nations. At the same time, it recognizes that any true and lasting peace cannot be purely the maintenance of existing power relationships. Indeed various aspects of the existing power relationships may help to sustain and contribute to the maintenance of dehumanizing and unjust structures that stagnate and resist the growth and development of human rights and justice. True peace must include justice for all; and violence can often be a symptom of unrealized justice. In such cases violence must not be merely viewed as a break from orthodox dissent but also as a manifestation of frustration and despair experienced by oppressed people. Peace will be established not through the suppression of human aspirations but rather through the provision of structures within which they can flourish. In addition, this suppression is contrary to the freedom given to everyone and can only result in sowing the seed of greater disunity and ultimate violence and destruction. The history of free people reflects a tradition of liberation. This grants people the strength, freedom and right to challenge oppressive systems in their struggle for justice and social progress.

The present Christian attitude toward armed violence must of necessity be a two-sided one. On the one hand, it must recognize the suicidal character of

nuclear war among the Great Powers; on the other, it must accept the fact that while injustice persists there will continue to be violent conflicts within and among nations.

The churches must work, therefore, for a lessening of the nuclear peril and the realization of greater degrees of justice for the poor of the world.

The peacekeeping function of the United Nations should be revived and strengthened and should receive support from the Great Powers which, on their part, should pledge their noninterference with the international police function.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLES

There can be no full or abiding peace without justice for all the world's people. The prophets of old warned that until the poor were treated as full members of the community rather than the objects of exploitation, there could be no security from the wrath of God or humankind. The nation which lived by injustice sowed the seeds of its own overthrow.

It is the Christian community within the affluent countries that is, by virtue of its prophetic heritage, called to set forth the obligations of the wealthy and the rights of the poor. It is scandalous that the industrialized West uses so little of its great wealth for the economic and social development of the newer nations. It is now time to mobilize support for increased aid policies which will insure a larger degree of justice to the developing nations. Having supported the overseas ministries of evangelism, education, and mercy, the people of the church must now, without abandoning these tasks, undertake the *political* task of securing that massive aid necessary for meaningful development.

The use of development aid by the Great Powers to achieve short-run political ends is to the disadvantage of both donor and recipient. Short-term aid commitments do not contribute to a climate of trust in which sound planning can be done. Aid given on the basis of purely political motives can, in fact, compound the problem of world poverty.

It is important that development aid be channeled in increasing amounts through multilateral agencies and committed for periods of sufficient duration to insure trust and responsible planning.

Poor nations should not be kept outside the world economic mainstream, excluded by policies advantageous to the more affluent nations. Unfavorable terms of trade should be removed in order to encourage participation by these nations in the world economic community and free them from any status as economic, if not political, colonies.

In their own work in the new nations, the churches must strive constantly to develop such relevant programs as may complement those under public auspices. In the new nations the indigenous churches must challenge their governments and people toward a higher level of well-being for all. If such churches request help to develop skills for the political task, the churches in the affluent countries should be ready to share experiences and resource persons.

THE CHURCHES AND WORLD COMMUNITY

Underlying all this is the fundamental premise that, as a corporate entity within a given nation, a church body has the God-given responsibility of generating support for national policies which contribute to the building of a world community. It is imperative that the Lutheran Church in America in both the United States and Canada begin the generation of such support by means of (1) more intensive study of international issues; (2) representation to the respective governments in support of multilateral development assistance, greater support of the world organization, and further efforts at arms-limitation; and (3) joining with other organizations and persons of good will in pursuit of these ends.

Although the church ideally transcends race and nation, frequently it has in fact generated or condoned policies in sharp contrast to that ideal. It is the duty of the organized churches working together to create occasions for the meeting and sharing of perceptions between people whose respective nations may be locked in deep conflict and to provide channels of communication when others are cut by political and ideological division.

Sensing the urgency of the times, the Lutheran Church in America recognizes these roles as central to its God-given mandate and pledges itself to redoubled effort in the building of world community.