



**Attitudes of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam:
Toward Nuclear Weapons**

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Abstract

In reviewing Jewish, Christian, and Islamic perspectives on nuclear weapons we find that there is a broad consensus that the use of nuclear weapons would be morally wrong because of the harm to large numbers of non-combatants and the environment. However, a small minority believes that limited nuclear war might be acceptable as a final measure for national defense, and some in the faith community believe that nuclear war would be acceptable as an eschatological event prior to the final Day of Judgment and commencement of a messianic age. Among the three faiths there has been some acceptance of deployment of nuclear weapons as a measure of deterrence for self-defense in order to dissuade other nations from nuclear or conventional attack. However, a growing number reject nuclear deterrence because of the immorality of in effect holding civilian population hostage. Within the faith community there is widespread support for negotiation of arms control agreements and for unilateral actions to reduce nuclear arsenals.

Keywords: *Judaism, Christianity, Islam, nuclear weapons, disarmament*

Introduction

Since the first atomic bomb destroyed Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 representatives of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have spoken out on the possession and use of nuclear weapons. Among them there is a broad consensus that nuclear weapons should never be used because of harm to God's creation: massive loss of human lives and disastrous destruction of the environment. Although some believe that it is acceptable for a nation to possess nuclear weapons as a deterrent against nuclear attack or an overwhelming conventional attack from another nation, many insist that it is time to go beyond deterrence and seek the global elimination of nuclear weapons.

Jewish Perspective

In 1962 when the nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union was accelerating, Rabbi Maurice Lamm (1962) of the Floral Park Jewish Center in New York made distinction between obligatory wars and optional wars. He concluded that as a matter of self-defense it was obligatory to oppose the quest of the Soviet Union to gain world domination with Communism. That was because Communism violates the basic moral principles of Judaism and Israel would cease to exist as a nation if the Soviet Union ruled the world. Therefore, the expansionist Soviet Union must be opposed with nuclear weapons even if it resulted in a nuclear war that destroyed life on earth. Thus, it would be preferable to be dead than red.

In a rejoinder Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue, who later became the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, took up the issue of self-defense. He noted in 1962 that the Torah and teaching of rabbis allow slaying an attacker to save one's own life (Exodus 22.1 [22.2 in RSVP]; Rashi on BT Sanhedrin 72a). But the defender would not be entitled to forestall the attack at the cost of both lives, such as by blowing up the house. He commented, "In view of this vital limitation of the law of self-defense, it would appear that a defensive war likely to endanger the survival of the attacking and the defending nations alike, if not the entire human race, can never be justified" (Saperstein, pp. 7-8).

Neither rabbi, of course, wanted the world to face that choice of red or dead. Rabbi Lamm favored nuclear deterrence which so far had prevented nuclear war. He wrote, "Constant negotiation between the atomic powers must continue in order to probe new possibilities of peacefully settling the differences between East and West" (Lamm, 1962, p. 177).

Twenty years later when the nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union intensified again, the Commission on Social Action of Reformed Judaism took up this issue in a report *Preventing the Nuclear Holocaust: A Jewish Response* edited by Rabbi David Saperstein (1983). The report reviews the five regulations of war, drawn from the *halacha* (Jewish law): force not an end in itself, opportunity for the opponent to choose peace, concern for lives of non-combatants, waged so as not to destroy God's creation, before ever battle reading the rules and regulations of war (Saperstein, 1983, pp. 8-13). As applied to an optional war, the report concludes:

Clearly the speed with which nuclear war could happen, the distance over which it is

fought and the virtual absence of opportunity to use human judgements to regulate the war once the missiles are launched mitigate against the ability of any nation to fight a “humane” nuclear war. From this brief view of the *halachic* stipulations on war, it is evident that nuclear war would violate almost every rule and regulation and would thereby be impermissible. (Saperstein, 1983, p.13)

The report then cites a number of rabbis to show that the weight of the Jewish tradition is clearly arrayed against the *use* of nuclear weapons (Saperstein, 1983, pp. 19-31). But what about the current nuclear build-up and stockpiling? Under what circumstances is *possession* of nuclear weapons per se, permissible or prohibited? In answering the report draws upon the *halachic* concept of *geder* (fence) that some things are prohibited not because they are evil in and of themselves but because they might lead to evil things. Rabbi Saul Berman applied this reasoning to stockpiling nuclear weapons which “will likely lead to consequences which will violate Jewish law” (Saperstein, p. 36). As Rabbi Jakobovits wrote in his 1962 article, “Once the recourse to atomic warfare, even in self defense (retaliation), is eliminated, the *threat* of resorting to it when attacked (deterrent) would naturally have to be abandoned. A threat is effective, and can be justified, only as the possibility to carry it out exists” (Saperstein, p. 36).

This being the case, *Preventing the Nuclear Holocaust* devotes considerable attention to ways of ending the nuclear arms race, such as freeze on production and deployment of nuclear weapons and other methods of nuclear arms control and reduction.

This issue was taken up again in 1991 in a book entitled *Confronting Omnicide: Jewish Reflections on Weapons of Mass Destruction*, edited by Daniel Landes (1991). Fifteen essays offer diverse points of view but have a common concern that God’s creation would be at risk in nuclear war. Pinchas Peli from Ben Gurion University, Be’er Sheva, Israel writes:

As to the universal threat of destruction of the world through the weapons of mass destruction, the view of Torah is crystal clear: The world created by God was meant for life; it was given over to Man to rule, to preserve and cultivate, and not to destroy and mutilate. (Landes, 1991, pp. 72-73)

Translating this into practice, he continues:

One is not allowed to willingly destroy any created being. This prohibition is known in the Halakhah as *bal tash’hit* – Do not destroy. The rabbis, of course, derive this prohibition from Scripture: “When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by wielding an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down.” (Deuteronomy 20:10)

In another essay Professor David Novak picks up this theme and cites rabbinic tradition over the centuries in support of the prohibition of wanton destruction. He concludes: “The evil of nuclear war, which cannot be justified by any of the usual criteria of temporary destruction for the sake of ultimate victory, is to be emphasized continually.” He adds, “It seems that bilateral, not unilateral disarmament is what is required” (Landes, 1991, p. 115).

In an essay on “Nuclear Deterrence and Nuclear War” Professor Walter S. Wurzbarger

believes that “the actual use of nuclear weapons must be ruled out, for it is inconceivable to sanction the very extinction of the human race.” But one-sided renunciation of their use “would rule out any possibility of defense or deterrence against adversaries who threaten nuclear aggression.” Therefore, “we have no choice but to continue to rely on the threat of nuclear retaliation to deter nuclear aggression.” But that choice is fraught with moral problems and must be considered a lesser evil. It would be better to gain universal acceptance of a “no first use pledge” (Landes, 1991, pp. 224-233).

Although the much of the background for discussion about nuclear weapons is the nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union with their enormous arsenals, Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons also enters into the picture. In his book *Israel and the Bomb*, Avner Cohen describes Israel’s approach as nuclear opacity – “a situation in which a state’s nuclear capability has not been acknowledged, but is recognized in a way that influences other nation’s perceptions and actions” (Cohen, 1998, p. 2). In his second book *The Worst-Kept Secret*, he uses the Hebrew term *amimut* with connotation of both opacity and ambiguity to describe this approach (Cohen 2010, xxxii). Although the Israeli government has never officially admitted that it has nuclear weapons, enough information has become available to estimate that Israel possesses approximately 80 nuclear weapons (Federation of American Scientists, 2017).

Because of *amimut* the Israeli government has never publicly articulated its rationale for acquiring nuclear weapons. In fact, there is a prohibition against public discussion of nuclear issues, a ban “rigidly enforce by Israeli military censorship (the Censora), which bans any reference to Israeli’s nuclear weapons in the Israeli media” (Cohen, 2010, p. xxix). However, one can project that the policy emphasizes deterrence as a matter of self-defense to prevent an existential threat to Israel. Some Jewish writers consider this legitimate in the present political situation. Others raise a note of caution that actual use would be disastrous.

Christian Perspective

Protestant

After the first atomic bomb destroyed Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America asked a commission of theologians to formulate a response. In February 1946 the commission issued a report entitled *Atomic Warfare and Christian Faith* that began with an act of contrition:

As American Christians, we are deeply penitent for the irresponsible use already made of the atomic bomb. We have agreed that, whatever be one’s judgment of the ethics of war in principle, the surprise bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are morally indefensible. They repeated in a ghastly form the indiscriminate slaughter of non-combatants that has become familiar during World War II. They were released without specific warning, under conditions which virtually assured the deaths of 100,000 civilians. (Lunger, 1988, p. 303)

The theologians urged that all manufacture of atomic bombs be stopped, pending the development of international controls and called upon the United States “to affirm publicly, with suitable

guarantees, that it will under no circumstances be the first to use atomic weapons in any possible future war” (Lunger, 1988, p. 305).

Four years later another commission of theologians appointed by the Federal Council of Churches in report on *The Christian Conscience and Weapons of Mass Destruction* came to the opposite conclusion. They noted: “Today, two great dangers threaten mankind, the danger that totalitarian tyranny may be extended over the world and the danger of global war” (Lunger, 1988, p. 317). The tyranny they feared was Soviet Communism which by 1950 had taken control of Eastern Europe and was moving aggressively in other parts of the world. What became known as the Cold War was underway. The report therefore insisted:

For as long as the existing situation holds, for the United States to abandon its atomic weapons or to give the impression that they would not be used, would leave the non-communist world with totally inadequate defense. For Christians to advocate such a policy would be to share responsibility for the worldwide tyranny that might result. (Lunger, 1988, p. 321)

The Commission found it difficult to draw an absolute line between types of weapons. “If, as we have felt bound to acknowledge, certain key industrial targets are inescapably involved in modern war, we find no moral distinction between destroying them with tons of T.N.T. or by fire as compared with an atomic bomb...Christian conscience guides us to restraint from destruction not essential to our total objective” (Landes, 1988, pp. 320-321).

In 1950 the Federal Council of Churches was reorganized as the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC). In years that followed the NCC put aside conditional acceptance of nuclear weapons in some circumstances and became a staunch advocate of their elimination. This history is narrated in a resolution, “Nuclear Disarmament: The Time is Now”, adopted by NCC General Assembly in 2009, that stated:

Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, declared that He had come to bring ‘abundant life’ to humanity. Nuclear weapons, which have the capacity to destroy entire cities and nations, and, indeed, all life on earth, represent the diametric opposite to this. In fact, the only thing that they are capable of producing is ‘abundant death.’ The time has arrived to eliminate all of them, before they eliminate all of us. Be it therefore resolved that the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. hereby recommits itself to the total worldwide eradication of nuclear weapons. (National Council of Churches, 2009)

Over the years the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in the U.S. has also expressed its concern about nuclear weapons. Recognizing that within the membership are those who are committed to peace through strength and those who renounce the use of force as a matter of conscience, NAE has nevertheless favored arms control agreements to scale back the nuclear arms race. In “Nuclear Weapons 2011,” NAE laid out a course that included re-examining the moral and ethical basis for the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, maintaining the taboo against nuclear use, achieving verified mutual reductions in current nuclear stockpiles, and continuing dialogue on the effects of possession and threatened use of nuclear weapons (National Association of Evangelicals, 2011).

Elsewhere in NATO countries the Conference of European Churches and its Church and Society Commission have been active on nuclear disarmament issues, favoring a world free of nuclear weapons and specifically advocating the removal of tactical nuclear weapons from Europe (Conference of European Churches. 2013).

In the United Kingdom many denominations support nuclear disarmament, expressed specifically in opposition to building a new trident submarine. Although the Church of England has tended to defer to the government on continuation of minimal nuclear deterrence, Dr. Rowan Williams, 104th Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking in Nagasaki, Japan in September 2009, said of nuclear weapons:

They are necessarily indiscriminate; that is, they will always kill the innocent. They destroy the living environment; they have long-term effects on every aspect of the material and organic world...To work for a world free from nuclear arms is to work for the sake of that moral and human dignity. □(Williams, 2009)

In 1976 the Canadian Council of Churches established Project Plowshares as its vehicle to build peace and prevent war, and promote the peaceful resolution of political conflict. Developing support for the elimination of nuclear weapons has been a major focus (Project Plowshares, 2017).

On the world stage the Ninth Assembly of World Council of Churches (WCC) in 2006 recalled its long-standing opposition to nuclear weapons.

From its birth as a fellowship of Christian churches the WCC has condemned nuclear weapons for their "widespread and indiscriminate destruction" and as "sin against God" in modern warfare (First WCC Assembly, 1948), recognized early that the only sure defense against nuclear weapons is prohibition, elimination and verification (Second Assembly) and, *inter alia*, called citizens to "press their governments to ensure national security without resorting to the use of weapons of mass destruction" (Fifth Assembly, 1975).

The Second Assembly in 1954 called for "The prohibition of all weapons of mass destruction; including atomic and hydrogen bombs, with provision for international inspection and control, such as would safeguard the security of all nations, together with the drastic reduction of other armaments" (Visser 't Hooft, 1955, p. 146). The Ninth Assembly in 2006 adopted a "Minute on Elimination of Nuclear Arms", noting that "Existing WCC policy urges all states to meet their treaty obligations to reduce and then destroy nuclear arsenals with adequate verification" and that "Churches must prevail upon governments until they recognize the incontrovertible immorality of nuclear weapons" (World Council of Churches, 2006). The Tenth Assembly in November 2013 recommended that governments "*Negotiate and establish* a ban on the production, deployment, transfer and use of nuclear weapons in accordance with international humanitarian law" (World Council of Churches, 2013).

Among Protestant denominations, the United Methodist Council of Bishops in 1986 took up the nuclear weapons in a foundation document, *In Defense of Creation: The Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace* (United Methodist Council of Bishops, 1986). They chose the title because God's creation "is under attack...[from] the darkening shadows of threatening nuclear winter... [It is] "a

crisis that threatens to assault not only the whole human family but planet earth itself” (United Methodist Council of Bishops, 1986, p. 92). Given this situation, the bishops in a pastoral letter stated:

Therefore, we say a clear and unconditional *No* to nuclear war and any use of nuclear weapons. We conclude that nuclear deterrence is a position that cannot receive the church’s blessing (United Methodist Council of Bishops, p.92).

For moving toward a nuclear-free world they recommended four measures: (1) comprehensive test ban to inaugurate a nuclear freeze; (2) consolidated of existing treaties and phased reductions; (3) bans on space weapons; and (4) no-first-use agreement (United Methodist Council of Bishop, 1986, pp. 74-78).

The 1988 United Methodist General Conference, the official governing body, endorsed *In Defense of Creation* (United Methodist Church, 1988) and in following quadrennial meetings supported concrete steps toward a world free of nuclear weapons. A 2004 resolution described the doctrine of nuclear deterrence as “morally corrupt and spiritually bankrupt” because “nuclear weapons hold innocent people hostage for political and military purposes” (United Methodist Church, 2004, p. 889).

In the last thirty years all of the “mainline” Protestant churches and the historic peace churches in the United States have taken strong stands against the use of nuclear weapons and have supported policies leading to the elimination.

Orthodox

Orthodox Churches from many nations are members of the World Council of Churches and in that sense support WCC policies on nuclear weapons. They also speak for themselves in their own countries. In the United States branches of the Orthodox Church – Russian, Greek, and others - have joined interfaith initiatives for the elimination of nuclear weapons. In Russia, Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, speaking in 2007 in Sarov, the center of Russia’s nuclear weapons industry, indicated that Russia required nuclear arms to enable it to remain a sovereign state during the Cold War. That is because of the deterrent value of nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, he said, the Church favors a world without nuclear weapons (Kirill, 2007).

Roman Catholic

In the Roman Catholic Church, popes have spoken against the use of nuclear weapons since the first atomic bomb destroyed Hiroshima. Pope Pius XII (pope from 1939 to 1958) in his 1954 Easter message demanded “the effective proscription and banishment of atomic...warfare,” calling the arms race a “costly relationship of mutual terror” (Pius XII, 1954).

Pope John XXXIII (1958-1963) in his 1963 papal encyclical *Pacem in Terris* called for the cessation of the arms race, noting:

The stock-piles of armaments which have been built up in various countries must be reduced all round and simultaneously by the parties concerned. Nuclear weapons must be banned. A general agreement must be reached on a suitable disarmament program, with an effective system of mutual control. (John XXIII, 1963)

Gaudium et Spes (“Joy and Hope”), a pastoral constitution coming out of the Second Vatican Council and promulgated by Pope Paul VI (1963-78) in 1965, stated:

Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation. (Paul VI, 1965)

However, the document noted that some “scientific weapons” are amassed for retaliation and therefore serve as a “deterrent to possible enemy attack.” But this “is not a safe way to preserve a steady peace, nor is the so-called balance resulting from this race a sure and authentic peace.” A better way is to “labor to put an end at last to the arms race, and to make a true beginning of disarmament, not unilaterally indeed, but proceeding at an equal pace according to agreement, and backed up by true and workable safeguards” (Paul VI, 1965).

When Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) spoke in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Hall in February 1981 he called on heads of state and of government and those who hold political and economic power to pledge ourselves “that war will never be tolerated or sought as a means of resolving differences; let us promise our fellow human beings that we will work untiringly for disarmament and the banishing of all nuclear weapons” (John Paul II, 1981).

Speaking to the United Nations General Assembly in June 1982, Pope John Paul II stated:

The teaching of the Catholic Church in this area has been clear and consistent. It has deplored the arms race, called nonetheless for mutual progressive and verifiable reduction of armaments as well as greater safeguards against possible misuse of these weapons. It has done so while urging that the independence, freedom and legitimate security of each and every nation be respected. In current conditions "deterrence" based on balance, certainly not as an end in itself but as step on the way toward a progressive disarmament, may still be judged morally acceptable. Nonetheless in order to ensure peace, it is indispensable not to be satisfied with this minimum which is always susceptible to the real danger of explosion. (John Paul II, 1982)

Pope Benedict XVI (2005-2013) in a message on World Day of Peace 2006 indicated:

In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims. The truth of peace requires that all - whether those governments which openly or secretly possess nuclear arms, or those planning to acquire them □ - agree to change their course by clear and firm decisions, and strive for a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament. (Benedict XVI, 2006)

At the 2010 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Msgr Celestino Migliore delivered a message from Benedict XVI encouraging “initiatives that seek progressive disarmament and the creation of zones free of nuclear weapons, with a view to their complete elimination from the planet” (Migliore, 2010).

With this decades-long support for nuclear disarmament the Holy See has become impatient with the lack of progress toward this objective. This was shown in an address by Archbishop Francis Chullikat, the permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, in Kansas City, Missouri in 2011. He said:

The Holy See has never countenanced nuclear deterrence as a permanent measure, nor does it today when it is evident that nuclear deterrence drives the development of ever newer nuclear arms, thus preventing genuine nuclear disarmament.... Nuclear deterrence prevents genuine nuclear disarmament. It maintains an unacceptable hegemony over non-nuclear development for the poorest half of the world's population. It is a fundamental obstacle to achieving a new age of global security. (Chullikat, 2011)

He noted that the Catholic Church had embraced a 1996 decision of the International Court of Justice calling for “negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.” He reiterated the Holy See’s support “for transparent, verifiable, global and irreversible nuclear disarmament and for addressing seriously the issues of nuclear strategic arms, the tactical ones and their means of delivery (Chullikat, 2011).

Pope Francis in 2015 address to the United Nations General Assembly stated:

There is urgent need to work for a world free of nuclear weapons, in full application of the non-proliferation Treaty, in letter and spirit, with the goal of a complete prohibition of these weapons. (Francis, 2015)

In the United States in the early 1980s, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops undertook an in-depth study of war and peace with special attention to nuclear weapons. Working from the moral principles of the just-war tradition, they indicated:

- Every nation has a right and duty to defend itself against unjust aggression.
 - Offensive war of any kind is morally unjustifiable.
 - The intentional killing of innocent civilians or non-combatants is always wrong.
 - Even defensive response to unjust attack can cause destruction which violates the principle of proportionality, going far beyond the limits of legitimate defense.
- (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983, p. iii)

Applying these principles to nuclear weapons, the U.S. Catholic bishops spoke against initiation of nuclear war and against any use of nuclear weapons to destroy population centers or other predominantly civilian targets even in retaliatory action. They opposed initiation of nuclear war and expressed skepticism of even a limited nuclear war. Following the leadership of Pope John Paul II, they accepted “a strictly conditional moral acceptance of deterrence” but not adequate as a long-term basis for peace (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983, pp v-vi).

Over the years the U.S. Catholic bishops have retained their strong interest in nuclear disarmament. In 2010, Cardinal Francis George, then President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote:

The horribly destructive capacity of nuclear arms makes them disproportionate and indiscriminate weapons that endanger human life and dignity like no other armaments. Their use as a weapon of war is rejected in Church teaching based on just war norms. Although we cannot anticipate every step on the path humanity must walk, we can point with moral clarity to a destination that moves beyond deterrence to a world free of the nuclear threat. (George, 2010)

For this to happen “the Church urges that nuclear deterrence be replaced with concrete measures of disarmament based on dialogue and multilateral negotiations” (George, 2010).

Islamic Perspective

“A Common Word,” a report addressed by Muslim scholars to Christian leaders, notes that Christians and Muslims together make up more than 55 percent of the world’s population. They then observe:

If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace. With the terrible weaponry of the modern world; with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before, no side can unilaterally win a conflict between more than half of the world’s inhabitants. Thus, our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is at stake. (A Common Word, 2007, pp. 72-73)

Jamal Badawi and Muzammil H. Siddiqi in an essay published by the Muslim-Christian Initiative on the Nuclear Weapons Danger offered six powerful reasons for Muslims to oppose the production, deployment, and use of nuclear weapons.

- (1) They represent a serious threat to peace, while peace is a central theme of Islam.
- (2) They are brutal and merciless, and thus violate the Qur’anic description of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as “*mercy to all the worlds.*”
- (3) They are contrary to Islam’s promotion of human fellowship.
- (4) Nuclear weapons do not fall with the scope of legitimate self-defense... Not only do they not discriminate between combatants and noncombatants, but the great majority of victims are likely to be noncombatants... Repelling aggression is permissible in Islam, but only with the minimum cost of life and property. Nuclear weapons cause destruction of the environment that lasts for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.
- (5) Nuclear weapons research and production waste a huge amount of resources.
- (6) While the argument for nuclear deterrence is not un-Islamic in principle, and while such deterrence apparently did work during the Cold War, there is no guarantee that it will work

in the future. Nor is there any guarantee that nuclear weapons will not fall into the hands of non-state actors. (Badawi and Siggiqui, 2005, pp. 26-27)

The authors continue:

Considering all of these points, we must conclude that it is *harâm* (forbidden) to deploy nuclear weapons. The *sharî'ah* of Allah could never approve such weapons. According to the principles of Islamic law, there should instead be a universal ban on their development and possession. No criteria exist that allow some states to maintain nuclear weapons while others are denied of them. (Badawi and Siggiqui, 2005, p. 27)

In applying such beliefs, Iran Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, on a number of occasions has said that possession and use of nuclear weapons are contrary to Islamic law. In 2005, Iran communicated to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that Ayatollah Khamenei had issued a *fatwa* [religious edict] that “the production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons are forbidden under Islamic law and that the Islamic Republic of Iran shall never acquire these weapons” (International Atomic Energy Agency (2005, p. 121). In a letter to the 2010 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Khamenei wrote: “We consider the use of such weapons as *haram* (religiously forbidden) and believe that it is everyone's duty to make efforts to secure humanity against this great disaster.” In an address on August 30, 2012 at the 16th Non-Aligned Summit in Tehran, he stated:

The Islamic Republic of Iran considers the use of nuclear, chemical and similar weapons as a great and unforgivable sin. We proposed the idea of ‘Middle East free of nuclear weapons’ and we are committed to it. This does not mean forgoing our right to peaceful use of nuclear power and production of nuclear fuel. On the basis of international laws, peaceful use of nuclear energy is a right of every country.... Our motto is: “Nuclear energy for all and nuclear weapons for none.” (Khamenei, 2012)

Some analysts observe that Ayatollah Khamenei sometimes speaks of production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons and sometimes only use. They speculate that this implies that Iran might want to produce nuclear weapons as a deterrent, but there have been no public statements using deterrence language. Such clarification might occur during ongoing negotiations about Iran’s nuclear capability.

Summary

In reviewing Jewish, Christian, and Islamic perspectives on nuclear weapons, we find many common features.

There is a broad consensus that use of nuclear weapons would be morally wrong because of the harm to large numbers of non-combatants and the environment. Widespread use would be disastrous for humankind and the planet Earth. A small minority believes that limited nuclear war might be acceptable as a final measure for national defense, but most maintain that nuclear weap-

ons are so powerful and indiscriminate that even limited use would be wrong. Although not part of our previous discussion, there are also some in the faith community who believe that nuclear war would be acceptable as an eschatological event prior to the final day of judgment and commencement of a messianic era.

Among the three faiths there has been some acceptance of development, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons as a measure of deterrence for self-defense in order to dissuade other nations from nuclear or conventional attack. However, a growing number reject nuclear deterrence because of the immorality of in effect holding civilian population hostage. Some deterrence adherents believe if deterrence fails and a nation is attacked, nuclear weapons should not be used in retaliation.

There is widespread support for negotiation of arms control agreements and for unilateral actions to reduce nuclear arsenals.

Although not discussed in previous sections, many voices in the faith community observe that the nuclear arms race is a waste of resources and that funds could be better spent for measures that improve human and community welfare.

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