

FEATURES

Christians, morality, and the nuclear issue

New Zealand's anti-nuclear stand has been both praised and condemned by Christians. The televised Oxford Union debate highlighted this contradiction. The Prime Minister, Mr Lange, a Methodist, attacked nuclear weapons as immoral because of their enormous destructive power.

The American Baptist preacher, the Rev. Jerry Falwell, argued that a moral stand is being taken by

the West, its nuclear arsenal being a deterrent against Soviet attack and domination. Two leading Christians, Dr Alistair Campbell, a Church of Scotland minister and moral theologian of world repute from the University of Edinburgh, and Mrs Jocelyn Armstrong, general secretary of New Zealand's National Council of Churches, both see nuclear weapons as immoral and support New Zealand's stand.

Dr Campbell says it has an educative value in giving hope around the world that a small country can take a stand on a moral issue.

Mrs Armstrong, whose council represents 12 mainstream churches in this country, says New Zealand is helping to give people a vision of a world, not overshadowed by the threat of nuclear holocaust. Both talked to KEN COATES about the questions the nuclear issue raises for all Christians.

N.Z. stance 'given people a vision'

Thousands of people in the Christian churches around the world support New Zealand's anti-nuclear stand, according to Mrs Jocelyn Armstrong. "We do not need to feel isolated at all," she says.

The National Council of Churches in the United States, a large body representing the nation's major churches, has been "heartened and strengthened" by New Zealand's opposition to nuclear arms, no matter who is the bearer.

Reprisals against New Zealand have brought dismay "to those who respect democracy and the sovereignty of a nation."

The American council wants to "turn" New Zealand parishes which have declared themselves nuclear free with similar parishes in the United States. "It is seen as a way of raising the awareness of church people in the United

States," says Mrs Armstrong.

Other messages of support from around the world received at the N.C.C. headquarters in Christchurch include those from the World Council of Churches, the British Council of Churches, and the Catholic Institute for International Relations in London.

The chairman of the Pacific Conference of Churches, Bishop Jabez Bryce, of Suva, has stated that New Zealand's stand matches that of the conference.

Another large overseas Christian body, the National Christian Council of Japan, says the New Zealand decision to refuse access to nuclear weapons, or nuclear-propelled vessels, is encouraging for Japanese who are concerned about the same problem in Japan.

"We have not yet succeeded in preventing access to United States nuclear-armed ships here, but will

continue to fight with real hope," says the Japanese council. Support has also come from the Australian Council of Churches.

Mrs Armstrong believes the important thing about New Zealand's stand is that it gives hope to other people.

"We have been calling for a nuclear-free and independent Pacific for about 10 years, and now that the Government has taken a stand we support it wholeheartedly," says the N.C.C.'s secretary.

Not only is nuclear war morally wrong and evil, but it is a consensus of churches around the world that even to possess nuclear weapons and prepare them for use is wrong, she adds.

The Vancouver assembly of the World Council of Churches called churches to declare the production, employment, and use of nuclear weapons as a crime against

humanity.

Mrs Armstrong points to the need for joining a positive search for a policy of global security which would make nuclear weapons superfluous.

New Zealand, she says, should be part of a call for a stronger effort to make the Pacific nuclear free and independent. Moves towards this have come from an indigenous people's movement — people who have been exploited, dominated, and simply pushed aside.

The Pacific peoples can teach the white peace movement much about nurturing this planet, and that we are all caught up in a system, built on a nuclear base, which unjustly keeps one-third of the world rich and two-thirds poor.

Mrs Armstrong says that while it is not possible to put all the blame on one superpower or the other, Western nations — France and the

United States — have through their nuclear policies put pressure on and prevented the independence of the Pacific peoples.

"That, to me, as a member of the Pacific community, is hurtful. As a Christian, I would want the independence of nations to be expressed."

The Russian threat is not feared by Mrs Armstrong — at least not in the way some people fear it. As a tiny nation, not on the defensive, and not caught up in the nuclear system in the same way as a Caribbean or Pacific nation, she says New Zealand can afford to challenge the United States to take up a more humane and more Christian stance.

She sees no cogency in the argument that essentially says that wars are prevented by one country being stronger than another. "Even so, I would not ask for unilateral

disarmament — that is perhaps foolish. I would therefore go along with a multi-lateral approach."

The peace movement is just as strong in Eastern Europe as in the West, according to Mrs Armstrong. "Christians on both sides must hold hands and call for this new vision, otherwise there won't be a world."

There can be no just nuclear war, and the total destruction posed by nuclear weapons calls for Christian values to be applied. The N.C.C. secretary maintains Christians throughout New Zealand should be giving total support to the Government's stand, "because it will make a difference to the thinking of the whole world."

"Maybe as some say, it has not decreased the number of nuclear weapons, but it will help to give people a vision. The whole world has been living for too long under a pall of fear and gloom."



Mrs Jocelyn Armstrong: "Stand will make a difference to the thinking of the whole world."

No just war with nuclear weaponry

New Zealand's anti-nuclear stance shows how a small country that can be easily economically threatened by larger countries can yet take a stand on a moral issue, says Dr Alistair Campbell. It presents a hope that matters of principle can survive in a world largely dominated by power and money.

It is not just a matter of keeping nuclear warships out of New Zealand ports, he adds, but a question of whether there is genuine freedom in the so-called free world for countries to take their own view on such issues.

Nuclear weapons are not morally justified, according to the theologian. "Deterrence does not mean anything unless you intend to use the weaponry, and its use could never be justified."

He describes the effects of nuclear weapons as so totally destructive — not only of people but eventually of the earth and civilisation — as we know it — that from

a Christian viewpoint no-one has the right even to use them as a threat.

The argument that nuclear weapons are a deterrent is impossible to prove, according to Dr Campbell.

"The logic of deterrence leads to an escalation of arms in order to match the other side. That in itself increases the danger that the situation will get out of control."

Dr Campbell is not a clergyman actively involved in the peace movement in Britain and says he is not totally pacifist in his approach to war. "Yet there can be no just war that involves nuclear weaponry," he asserts.

"Christians are therefore committed to accepting the possible dangers of not having nuclear weaponry — even if this means some kind of political domination by someone else.

"This is the lesser of two evils from a Christian point of view." I asked Dr Campbell for his view

of the Christians who argue that nuclear weapons are morally justified because a strong West is needed to defend what they see as freedom and Christian values from the domination of Soviet atheistic communism.

He does not accept an equation of Western civilisation with Christianity, but does not suggest that communism has Christian values either. Both threaten some Christian values each in their own way.

"Some of the most self-sacrificial sort of Christianity is found within people who do not question a communist regime, but try to humanise it," he says.

The church in East Germany, for example, has had an important relationship to the Government, although limits are defined by Russia. "It has tried hard to ensure that the values the church stands for can be promoted among young people," he adds.

"In many ways, the church has been supported by the East Ger-

man Government in this because it has been afraid of a materialistic culture overtaking young people.

"Christianity is not the same as materialism, and the danger is that if it becomes equated with the Western way of life, it becomes totally confused, not only with the liberty, but also with profitability and materialistic values."

Dr Campbell sees it as "a kind of idolatry" to try to equate a particular nation, or a particular form of Government, with Christianity. "There are considerable dangers in equating the defence of the West with the defence of Christianity."

New Zealand, he says, presents an example of how a small country can actually take a stand on a moral issue. Many people in Britain feel strongly on the freedom of countries in the free world to make up their own minds on issues of this kind.

"Many felt quite offended at the attack by their Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, who openly critic-

ised New Zealand's stance on American television when she visited the United States. Many of us felt this was quite unwarranted, and the wrong thing to do."

"We consider we owe more of a loyalty to New Zealand to allow it to have its own viewpoint, even if we do not agree with it, and not so wholeheartedly equate Britain as an ally of the American point of view."

Dr Campbell says the New Zealand position is having a great impact in Britain. "It is being very widely discussed, and a number of people not identified with any extreme point of view in the nuclear debate have been encouraged to think again about the whole question."

"The main value of the stance is its symbolism rather than its effectiveness, but it made people think again as to whether there could be a disassociation from a wholehearted support of nuclear policy."

Dr Campbell takes a gloomy

view of the possibility of nuclear war. "I am afraid I feel it is extremely likely. I can't see how we can continue to live with the number of minor accidents and the possibility of proliferation of nuclear weapons among governments of extremist groups who would be quite irresponsible in their use of them."

"Because nuclear arms are such a totally indiscriminating and destructive force, I cannot believe you could find a moral argument for their use."

To those who argue that the West must be in a position of superiority and strength in nuclear terms in going to the negotiating table with the Soviets, he says: "I don't know why the situation should have changed from that existing over the last 20 or 30 years. There has never been an effective limitation of nuclear weaponry and I don't see why it should start now."



Dr Alistair Campbell: British "owe a loyalty to New Zealand."