

CREATION OR CREMATION?

Scripture Reading: Matthew 24:6, Micah 4:3-4, James 4:1.

There has already been a nuclear war. It killed several hundred thousand people in a matter of minutes. It was initiated by the United States of America in an effort to prevent what military experts forecast as the slaughter of millions of men and women should the Japanese have to be invaded by the forces of this country. The two bombs which were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—cities which had not been attacked before by American aircraft—left all of us paralyzed with the power that had been unleashed in nature.

Ever since those two devastating moments in 1945, we have asked ourselves whether it will ever happen again. If it does, could it be controlled as we seemed to be able to control it in 1945? We were playing a bluff; we had three bombs and used two of them. To some extent, historians can now prove that the bombs were used not only to break the back of Japanese resistance, but also to send a message to the Russians that when the war was over they had better mind their manners.

Will one ever be exploded again over a populated area? Your guess is as good as mine or the President of the United States. There are no experts in this area for the simple “and merciful reason that mankind has had practically no experience from which to make judgments and predictions with any certitude.” (*Time*, March 29, 1982, p. 20.)

The guesses range from “nuclear war is inevitable” (Admiral Hyman Rickover) to “it could only happen through a series of tragic miscalculations” (James Schlesinger). On one of its covers *Time* magazine dubbed the possibility of nuclear war as “thinking the unthinkable.” “Thinking” is a poor choice of words. It should be called “imagining the unimaginable” for if one should ever occur no one would believe that anybody had been “thinking.”

We have become psychically numb over nuclear war. It is so horrible to picture, so shocking to our senses, that we force ourselves not to face it. Studies indicate that a majority of Americans live in constant fear of such a war and that a sizable percentage believe that sooner or later it will happen. “If it comes let me be at ground zero,” is a typical attitude.

In a total nuclear war as many as 500 million people might be killed. Those who survived would get little medical attention, if any, and the civilization that supported them would be rubble. No electricity, little water, no medicines to treat the injuries, unpredictable consequences to the ozone layer, unforeseeable amounts of radiation—there is no telling all of the possible results.

Apparently somebody has calculated the effect of a one-megaton bomb on the city of Detroit, and it has been used as a graphic example of the catastrophe we are talking about. A bomb this size equals 1 million tons of TNT—many times larger than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. We have 20-megaton and 50-megaton bombs in the arsenals of this country and Russia. The majority, however, are one-megaton bombs. (It would take a train 200 miles long to carry 1 million tons of dynamite.)

If a Soviet SS-13 missile were exploded at 6,000 feet over Detroit, the 35,000 baseball fans in Tiger Stadium would be blinded by the flash of light and then be lit up as human torches one second later. Then would come a wave of super-hardened air created by the force of the nuclear explosion. The air

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pressure would increase rapidly and the combination of the air pressure and the rapidly moving air would crush any buildings that were left standing for miles around the point of impact. Those not killed instantly would die within a few hours. In the city of Detroit, 500,000 people would die; 600,000 would be wounded. There would be no way to be of significant help to the survivors. No country (with the exception of Japan) has experienced anything like this.

This is an example of what would happen in one city, but every major city in the United States and Russia is targeted by many warheads. But it is what we don't know that is even more terrifying. Many scientists believe that a total nuclear war would destroy the whole planet. Some speak about literally blowing the top of the world off, destroying the ozone layer that filters out the destructive rays of the sun or upsetting weather patterns so completely that disaster would follow.

All are agreed on one thing: nuclear war would be the most horrible event in the history of the world; it might even end the world. "But would it be so horrible that the mere contemplation of fighting such a war is irresponsible, immoral, even lunatic?" (*Time*, p. 22.) Treating a nuclear war as a viable option increases the probability that there will be one. Some people disagree. They feel that the United States must maintain a posture of making it clear that we should not hesitate to use nuclear weapons if we think any power on earth is trying to threaten our national interests. Those are political questions which I'm not going to discuss.

I know that the Soviet Union and United States have enough destructive power to blow each human being up. All the wars in history could not kill the number of people that 30 minutes of nuclear war would kill if it happened now. It is the moral issue of our time. The question of civil rights, women's rights, or anybody else's rights, pales into insignificance. Not that they are unimportant, but when you are talking on a relative scale between human rights and the survival of human beings, we are talking about the moral issue of our time.

What is the Christian's, particularly Seventh-day Adventist's, responsibility? Do Seventh-day Adventists have something to contribute from their own unique theology, their own unique emphases? Speaking as a pastor who must voice his convictions, there may have been just wars fought in the past. Many believe World War II was such a war. Regardless of that possibility, I would have to say that nuclear weapons are so indiscriminate, so destructive and so ultimate in their possible consequences, that a nuclear war is inherently unjust and immoral. Christians need to say it as loudly and clearly as possible. I don't care who uses nuclear warfare for whatever purposes. The Soviet Union needs to hear this and every other nation that possesses nuclear weapons. It would be a sin against God as Creator such as the world has never committed in its history.

Seventh-day Adventists have uniquely emphasized the doctrine of the Creation. It's in the Three Angels Message we look to as a guidepost for our beliefs and our actions. "Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the seas, the fountains of waters." (Rev. 14.) What greater idolatry could be committed, what greater rejection of the Creator than a nuclear war? None is even conceivable.

What is frightening is that if it started on a small scale, people would want blood revenge. What would happen to the public opinion in this country if even one nuclear warhead were launched on one city? What would we want in return? As Christians we would have to ask ourselves if we really wanted that

kind of revenge. What would have happened to Matthew 5 where we are told to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us? We can see the terrible moral dilemma we are in as Christians. The only possible solution to nuclear war is prevention and that is where the Christian church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church must put their efforts.

The Russians are my brothers and my sisters. They have the same Father in heaven that I do.

There is another section in Revelation 14 that cannot be overlooked. It really comes first: "The hour of God's judgment is come" (verse 7). Seventh-day Adventists have tried to convince the world that they should not think about the judgment as simply a future event toward which we are moving. But to act morally and responsibly in the world now, we must conceive of the judgment as something that is happening now. We have told people that we are now accountable to God, that we are **now** responsible for what we do. What does that judgment hour message have to say to a world on the brink of nuclear war?

It has to say several things. First, it has to say that should any statesman of any country be insane enough to begin a nuclear war, that statesman will be held accountable in the judgment. That statesman may not believe in God. That statesman may not believe in a judgment, but when people are insistent, certain and vocal about the fact that there is a God and a judgment, it makes people who deny it a little nervous, because they can't be sure they're right.

Secondly, the doctrine of the judgment tells us that now, today, God is intervening in the world in a special way and that the only hope for the world is the fact the judgment hour message means that God in a certain point in history takes over, intervenes, and does not allow human beings to ruin the world that he has created.

I want to, and I do, believe that God will never permit an all-out nuclear war to happen. I can't be certain of that, I can't prove it from Scripture, but I would like to believe it. That is the conviction on which I operate personally. On the other hand, I've had Seventh-day Adventist professors who do not rule out the possibility of a limited nuclear war. Whatever the case, the judgment hour message says that God will intervene. If he does not intervene before a nuclear war, then he would certainly have to intervene during or after such a war because there won't be much to intervene for.

I am not a Christian Scientist who thinks that the world is a bad dream. It's real and what I'm talking about is a real possibility.

A third reason why Seventh-day Adventists need to be involved in this question is our commitment to health. Physical health is obvious. If you kill 500 million people and leave the rest of the world in shambles, you've certainly broken the principles of health. But there's the question of psychological and mental health. We have a nation of people who live under constant stress and anxiety. We have a world living like this because of what's happened. All you have to do is take a look at a world map and see where the various countries have positioned their nuclear weapons. The world is literally ringed—the most distant islands in the Pacific, the most northern point in Siberia and Alaska. The sheer anxiety is doing certain things to us. It's produced a fatalistic attitude. We all want to hole up and blow away.

What can the churches do? Obviously, ultimately only God can solve the problem in any secure sense

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of the word. But the churches have something to do. As Ron Graybill put it so well earlier in our weekend, we don't think we'll ever get everybody to quit using alcohol but we do what we can to rescue people from it. One of the things that we can do as Seventh-day Adventists is to give people some hope. This is a hopeless kind of situation and prospect.

I realize there are many political solutions suggested on the way to some kind of lasting peace. I don't have confidence in too many of the political solutions, because human beings are not in all cases totally committed to Jesus Christ. I think at least the churches could support a reduction in arms. There are several great institutions in human culture—the government and politics, the family and the religions of the world. There is no reason why the Christian church, and Seventh-day Adventists in particular, cannot be vocal and in the forefront in trying to put pressure on all of the governments of the world to pull back from the madness toward which we are propelling ourselves. It can happen. Many believe that that is the only chance that the world has to hold back what they regard as inevitable.

One thing that concerns me is that if a nuclear war did break out, I don't know what would happen to the preaching of the gospel, especially if the churches did not do all that they could to prevent it before it took place. What kind of credibility would we have? What would happen to the preaching of the gospel if all the communication systems in the world were destroyed? What would happen to the feeling that people would have about God? After World War II the Jews practically gave up their faith in the Creator. What would happen if 500 million people were killed in a total nuclear holocaust? How would we convince the remaining people that there was a compassionate, benevolent God? It would be a monumental task.

I have several prayers that I'm going to utter for the next few months at least with a renewed intensity. I'm going to pray that Jesus Christ comes soon. We need to be sobered up. We've taken for granted the good life we've had in this country.

Secondly, I'm going to pray that the Christian church and the Adventist church will take seriously the uniqueness of the current crisis and marshal their strengths to head off a nuclear disaster.

Thirdly, I'm going to pray that the Prince of Peace will rule over everything that takes place. I do not put my trust in the marshals of the Soviet Union or the generals of the Pentagon. I do not put my trust in treaties or even disarmament agreements. My ultimate trust can only be placed in Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace.

And then I'm going to pray that someday soon (which is another way of talking about the Second Coming) instead of beating our swords into plowshares, we'll beat our nuclear bombs into tractors. Instead of beating our spears into pruning hooks, we'll beat our missiles into clothing. And nation shall not rise up against nation; neither shall there be war any more.

The choice is clear: creation or cremation. That is a judgment hour message. May God help us to speak it with conviction and clarity.