



# Life Matters Journal

V. 6, ISSUE 8 — DECEMBER 2018

## And Let It Begin With Me:

### Peace Beyond Politics

Julia Smucker reflects on how she builds a culture of peace on a personal level.

### Regaining a Sense of the Sacredness of Human Life

Thirty-five years ago, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops published *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, which is their most influential statement on nuclear weapons, deterrence, and disarmament.

### Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress

Christina Yao explains the ways that perpetrators of violence — from soldiers to abortion providers — experience increased rates of traumatic stress.

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear friends,

At the end of October, tragedy struck close to home for me. A mass shooter entered a Pittsburgh Synagogue, Tree of Life, and claimed the lives of eleven individuals. Anti-Semitism and violence have no place in a culture of life, but it happens still today. In fact, acts of violence happen every day. As I have been watching my classmates and community members mourn this act of violence, I continued to meditate on what peace means. How can it be achieved? What will come after?



What Does Peace Really Mean? This is a topic our writers and myself have dove into attempting to unpack and grasp the intricate complexities of the issue. It stems from institutional violence such as nuclear arms, war, and abortion to everyday action or inaction. MyLan Metzger and Christina Yao dove into the parallels between war and abortion both psychologically and through the examination of how the issues exist in tandem—if we eliminate one, we must eliminate the rest. Any act of violence will continue to be deemed acceptable until all are extinguished. This may seem impossible, but Julia Smucker highlights the topic on a grassroots level from advocacy on large and small scales. The topic of peace should not be limited to the winter holidays or specific moments of the day; peace should be something we all strive for every single moment, both internally and externally. It needs to be integrated completely into each of our personal lives, as well as in society. Perhaps everyday acts of peace to our neighbors should be our first step—as Julia reiterates from the famous song, “Let It Begin With Me.”

With peace and love for every human life,

*Maria Pane*

This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether legal or illegal.

We have been told by our society and our culture wars that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to take a lukewarm, halfway attitude toward the victims of violence. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others.

We reject that conventional attitude, whether it's called Left or Right, and instead embrace a consistent ethic of life toward all victims of violence. We are *Life Matters Journal*, and we are here because politics kills.

Disclaimer: The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. We exist to present a forum for discussion within the consistent life ethic, to promote discourse and present an opportunity for peer-review and dialogue.

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# Life Matters Journal

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*This poem is dedicated in remembrance of the lives lost at Tree of Life in Pittsburgh, PA on 10/27/18. May loved ones, friends, and neighbors continue to heal from the tragedy.*

## After the Violence—

By Maria Pane

At dusk, we gather—the pale pink of the sky grows darker, as it is clouded over with a gray haze and the incoming blackness of night. Drops of water leak from the sky—it mourns with us. Men, women, and children surround me holding candles and purple umbrellas. A thick hum of speech grows louder—prayer is uttered. We hold up our hands and see the reflection of light from the stars—as the candles waver in the monochromatic shadows.

Then, we stand together in the street shivering from the chill of the wind— Even in a moment of quiet and stillness, you can hear people breathe—A woman sobs, a child snuffles, and a man coughs. Shoulder to shoulder, we stand in prayer and remembrance—Love thy neighbor, no exceptions.

# Plato, the Pits, and the Violence Harming ALL:

# P.I.T.S.

By Christina Yao

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) used to be known as combat fatigue, battle fatigue, or shell shock. It wasn't until World War II that PTSD was recognized as a disorder due to trauma and was treated more effectively. During the Vietnam War, it was recognized that veterans needed to be treated for the disorder. In 1980, the disorder was officially named Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.<sup>1</sup> PTSD is traditionally thought of as a victim's disease—soldiers were afraid of being shot at or seeing others die. Now it is believed that veterans can also develop PTSD from killing in a war. This is supported by the fact that PTSD increased among Vietnam veterans who had killed during the war, and was manifested in increases in flashbacks, nightmares, unwanted cyclical thoughts, hypervigilance, and alienation.<sup>1</sup>

Peace psychologist Rachel MacNair saw a blind spot in the field of PTSD research.<sup>2</sup> She has studied the trauma that perpetrators of violence endure. She has created the theory of "Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress", also called "Participation-Induced Traumatic Stress" (PITS). PITS is a subset of PTSD that affects many different perpetrators of violence, from the veteran to the abortion doctor. PITS is stress that is not at the level of a disorder, but brought on by committing violence, and is not necessarily "post" violence. PITS is any form of PTSD committed by a perpetrator of violence.<sup>2</sup>

One of the first historical mentions of PITS is in Plato's *Gorgias*, in which Socrates states that those who do wrong suffer the most. Social worker Jane Addams took note of what MacNair labels as PITS during the early 20th century. Addams noticed what would now be diagnosed as symptoms of PTSD in men who had killed. She particularly noticed veterans who kept having hallucinations of killing.<sup>2</sup> Addams also wrote that when veterans came home from war, there was one train car filled with men who had gone insane.<sup>3</sup>

Another historical example of PITS is the Nazis. MacNair singles out a group of Nazis called *The Einsatzgruppen*. The *Einsatzgruppen* were directly responsible for the killing of Jewish people. This was known to be very difficult emotionally, and captains

wouldn't make their men kill too often. It was widely known that these men were heavy drinkers and had nervous breakdowns, with some suicides. Nightmares were also common among these Nazis. At first, the extermination of the Jewish people was very close and personal—the Jews were shot at from a very close distance. But when Heinrich Himmler, leader of the SS, saw this, he was very disturbed. Himmler wanted a "more humane"<sup>2</sup> way of killing, which led to the gas chambers.<sup>2</sup>

MacNair looks at the PITS suffered by German soldiers of World War I as a precursor to the atrocities of the Nazis. In the first World War, PTSD was not treated effectively by German psychiatrists. It was the attitude that the best treatment of PTSD was to send men back into battle. This attitude shaped the beliefs about violence and killing of the youth at the time, who grew up to be the Nazi leaders. PTSD can be a known precursor to violent activity, and it seems like the Nazi party attracted those with PTSD and/or PITS. For example, the commander of Auschwitz was previously jailed for murder. His description of being in jail sounds like he was experiencing PITS. He described nightmares, as well as being anxious and irritable. At one point he describes himself and others as having "prison psychosis"<sup>2</sup>, which sounds very similar to PITS.<sup>2</sup>

Veterans are among the largest group of sufferers from PITS, particularly veterans of the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War saw much more firing from soldiers than wars in the past. In other wars, only 15-20% of soldiers shot their weapons. In Vietnam, this number rose to 90-95%.<sup>2</sup> The National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Survey (NVVRS), done in the 1980s, gives researches much insight into the trauma experienced by Vietnam veterans. Using this data to run her own analysis, MacNair found that there is more severe PTSD among combat groups. The more intense and horrifying the combat, including the killing of women and children, the more intense the PTSD. Veterans who have PITS are in touch with their anger, but their anger also makes them afraid and anxious. They are afraid that if they get too angry, they might kill someone. They are also afraid that their anger is disconnecting them from others. Anger seems to be a cover-up for guilt. The veterans are getting angry and seemingly judging others while they are really judging themselves. The idea of veterans having PITS is controversial because it implies that the soldiers or the military itself did something wrong.<sup>2</sup>

Even more controversial than PITS in veterans is the theory of PITS in abortion clinic workers. If abortion is indeed the taking of a human life, then PITS would almost certainly occur. One late-term abortion provider from New Mexico spoke of being angry at the women having the abortions as well as himself. Another doctor would detach by juggling the remains of an aborted fetus in a medical glove. Many workers refuse to talk about their day-to-day tasks, even with their co-workers. Many of the workers have nightmares. Even those who are strong advocates of legalized abortion have reported dreams in which it was obvious they were killing a baby. In a National Abortion Federation workshop, workers revealed "... their dreams, in which aborted fetuses stare at them with ancient eyes and perfectly shaped hands and feet asking, 'Why? Why did you do this to me?'" In 1981, *ObGyn News* reported that of abortion workers who performed D and E procedures, one-quarter had an increase in abortion-related dreams or nightmares. Judith Fetrow, a former Planned Parenthood worker who became pro-

life, reported that there were two types of women working with her at the clinic: those who had found some way to cope with the spiritual and emotional toll of abortion, and those who had disconnected emotionally.<sup>2</sup>

MacNair's theory was put into context at the Rehumanize Conference with panelists, Annette Lancaster and Thad Crouch, sharing their experiences of working in violent situations. The panel was moderated by Rachel MacNair who added her own comments at the end.<sup>4</sup>

Annette Lancaster was recruited by Planned Parenthood to do administrative work. She was hired as the Health Center Manager of Planned Parenthood the South Atlantic in North Carolina. Lancaster had worked in healthcare prior to being headhunted by Planned Parenthood and wanted to stay in the field to continue helping people, especially women. It didn't take her long to realize once she started working that she had been sold a job during the recruitment process that was very different than the one she would be performing on a day-to-day basis. For example, she was told that her center performed a large number of mammograms. In reality they did not have a mammogram machine. She was told to lie to patients and feed them certain lines of speech. Even though, she did not have the certification to do ultrasounds, she was an ultrasound technician for ultrasound guided abortions.

Lancaster stressed that until you have seen an abortion done, you cannot know how bad it is. As she continued her job, her work took an emotional and psychological toll on her. She started getting in trouble for encouraging women not to have abortions and for not meeting specific abortion quotas. She also started to make morbid jokes, such as calling the freezer where the aborted fetuses were kept the "nursery."

Lancaster then discussed how her family was affected by her job. Her family could tell she was changing. She realized the drinking she was doing to cope with her job was negatively affecting her relationship with her family. She helped her 18-year-old niece attain a job at her center, which led to her niece abusing over the counter drugs and having nightmares.

When Lancaster complained about the vulgarity and sexual innuendo that she witnessed by her co-workers, she was told that was the culture at Planned Parenthood. Eventually, Lancaster was told "you don't fit in here." She thought about the sidewalk counselors she had seen telling her she could leave the industry, and one instance where her car was covered in cards saying she could quit. Although her boss urged her to throw all the cards away, Lancaster kept one. Once Lancaster got connected with And Then There Were None, she helped get seven of her co-workers leave the abortion industry, as well as her niece.

Then, Thad Crouch shared his story. Crouch wanted to be a soldier because he dreamed of making the world a better place for freedom, democracy, and human rights. Crouch was extremely proud to be a soldier, training other soldiers in South America at the "School of the Americans." From 1987-1989, Crouch trained men to "go and kill communists." At the time, Crouch trusted the leaders who told him what he was doing was right, but now realizes he was psychologically restrained and resocialized by the army. When Crouch attended a Pax Christi meeting, a Haitian speaker discussed the negative actions of the School of the Americans. It was mentioned how the school trained death squads. At

first, Crouch was skeptical of the man's views, but realized he was right. Crouch accepted that the United States' foreign policy is not always ethical.

Parallels were then drawn between the military and the abortion industry. Both the military and Planned Parenthood have large recruiting campaigns. There are many lies in both, as well as hostile feelings after one leaves. Additionally, both the military and Planned Parenthood spend large amounts of money recruiting youth. When one enlists in the military, the military is not obliged to keep anything in their part of the contract. After Annette left Planned Parenthood, the clinic claimed she took two weeks worth of deposits and said they were going to sue. Annette had to fight for her innocence. Comparatively, in the military, it is illegal to quit. Those who choose to leave face a dishonorable discharge and jail time.

In addition, dehumanizing language is used in both organizations. In the military, an enemy is called a target or "tango." "Collateral damage" is the idea that sometimes civilians have to be killed to take out an enemy target. In reality, 90% of those killed by war are innocent bystanders. At Planned Parenthood, doctors would comment about the looks and smell of their patient's vaginas. When a woman said she couldn't stand the physical pain of her abortion procedure, the Planned Parenthood employee chided, "Something else was stuck in there."

MacNair then told the story of how she developed the concept of PITS. In the 1980s, MacNair wanted to see if doctors reacted to killing during an abortion the same way soldiers responded to killing on the battlefield. She then sought out how to prove that killing is traumatizing overall. In every case she studied, with the exception of police, MacNair found that killing is traumatizing. She then found that government statistics on the traumatization of soldiers was misleading and that there was very little information on US soldiers.

With her theory of PITS, MacNair has taken a blind spot in psychology and turned it into a lesson in restorative justice. Towards the end of her book *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: The Psychological Consequences of Killing*, MacNair points out that we can use the theory of PITS to have a better understanding of how to prevent violence. We can know who is at risk to commit further acts of violence, and intervene to rehabilitate them. We can halt the cycle of violence and the passage of trauma. We can return to what PITS proves human beings are made for, which is a peaceful existence.<sup>2</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> MacNair, Rachel. "PITS-- What is it?" (n.d.) Rachel M. MacNair, Ph.D. <http://www.rachelmacnair.com/pits>

<sup>2</sup> MacNair, Rachel M. *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: The Psychological Consequences of Killing*. 2002. Preager Publishers: Westport.

<sup>3</sup> MacNair, Rachel. "Personal Stories" (n.d.) Rachel M. MacNair, Ph.D. <http://www.rachelmacnair.com/pits-stories>.

<sup>4</sup> Annette Lancaster and Thad Crouch, "Walking the Fine Line: Loving the Offender & Opposing the Violence" (presentation, Rehumanize Conference, Duquesne University, October 14, 2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGP5CqA5Blg&t=1545s>.

# Regaining a Sense of the Sacredness of Human Life: *The Challenge of Peace's* Critique of Nuclear Weapons and Abortion

By MyLan Metzger

Thirty-five years ago, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops published the pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, which is their longest and most influential statement on nuclear weapons, deterrence, and disarmament. In addition to detailing the morality (or lack thereof) of nuclear weapons, the letter condemned all acts of violence taken against any person, including, and in particular, the violence of abortion. Despite the fact that the geopolitical landscape has changed tremendously since 1983, the message of the American bishops remains a salient call for all people today. While the bishops envisioned a world without nuclear weapons and abortion, our society and country still rely on both forms of institutional violence. This article will examine and summarize the bishops' claim that until both threats to human life are taken seriously, abortion and nuclear weapons will continue to find their place in society because when human life is threatened and degraded the dignity of all life is attacked.

While there is no formal, detailed position on nuclear strategy for the Catholic Church, there has been a great discussion of the issue and the development of just war theory and Christian nonviolence in relation to nuclear weapons. Through *The Challenge of Peace*, the American bishops furthered the conversation on the morality of nuclear weapons, particularly in the United States, drawing on previous statements by popes and church councils such as the Second Vatican Council. By entering into this conversation, the bishops were appealing to more than just an American Catholic audience. They wanted to shape the secular debate over nuclear weapons and challenge the Reagan administration's acceptance of nuclear deterrence and proliferation policy. While they apply principles that arose from the Christian tradition, the letter's implications and call to defend human life spoke beyond just American Catholics. Because this letter applies centuries of Catholic tradition, the statement on nuclear weapons is both careful and nuanced. It is first necessary that we understand the morality of nuclear weapons to see how this violence also relates to the violence of abortion.

*The Challenge of Peace*, in line with many other Catholic state-

ments on the considerations of nuclear weapons, argues that the use of nuclear weapons was a violation of just war principles, and therefore always wrong. One principle of just war theory is that the state must have a reasonable hope of success in accomplishing lasting justice and peace when deciding to enter into war. *Jus ad bellum* requires that peace must always be the object of an action in war, therefore any action should be geared towards that end. The bishops argue that nuclear war holds very little chance of reasonable success at accomplishing peace given that it would inevitably and indiscriminately cause the death of whole populations people. There is little hope of success when superpowers engage in warfare with the known intention of such atrocities. While the doctrine of "mutually assured destruction" (or MAD) may be meant to keep peace, it relies on the fact that all parties involved would be irrevocably devastated were nuclear weapons utilized, which according to the bishops, does not qualify as a "reasonable hope of success in bringing about justice and peace."<sup>1</sup>

They also argue that the use of nuclear weapons violates principles of *jus in bello*, including the distinction between combatants and noncombatants. In order for an action to be just, the state cannot intentionally kill an enemy's civilians. For this reason, nuclear weapons cannot be used to destroy population centers or target civilians, even if the nuclear strike were a retaliatory response to our own population centers being attacked: "No Christian can rightfully carry out orders or policies deliberately aimed at killing non combatants."<sup>2</sup> Another principle of *jus in bello* that the bishops believe would be violated would be the teaching on "proportionality," which means that all acts of violence in war must be deemed proportional to the goods that they are attempt to accomplish, particularly whether or not they will harm the poor and the helpless. The letter poses the following question: "Do the exorbitant costs, the general climate of insecurity generated, the possibility of accidental detonation of highly destructive weapons, the danger of error and miscalculation that could provoke retaliation and war - do such evils or other attendant upon and indirectly deriving from the arms race make the arms race itself a disproportionate response

to aggression?”<sup>3</sup> The the use of nuclear weapons cannot be judged proportionate. Citing Pope John Paul II, the bishops posit that nuclear weapon use can have catastrophic effects on populations that can in no way be deemed proportional. The bishops are also quite skeptical of the ability to keep nuclear war limited to proportional means and to prevent it from hurting noncombatants. Given what we know about technology and human nature, the bishops do not view it morally acceptable to initiate nuclear war. An example of nuclear weapons use in Nagasaki shows the inability of these weapons ever being used within the bounds of proportionality and thus the bishops are understandably skeptical of nuclear arms being utilized without harming combatants. Therefore, there is moral responsibility to avoid nuclear weapon use.<sup>4</sup>

Because nuclear weapons use invariably breaks just war requirements, the bishops give qualified support to nuclear deterrence and full support to nuclear disarmament. Although the bishops argue that it would be wrong to build up nuclear weapons for the purpose of using them against an enemy, they do understand the strategic and safety value of nuclear deterrence. While they are skeptical of deterrence as an effective long-term policy, they accept that it can be used as a method for establishing peace.<sup>5</sup> They understand the responsibility that the United States holds to prevent other countries, especially in Europe, from being under the control of Soviet Union, a very pressing fear during the Cold War, and see nuclear possession and deterrence as permissible for this reason. They are also hopeful that nuclear deterrence could prevent nuclear proliferation and nuclear war.<sup>6</sup> However they make clear that nuclear deterrence requires only nuclear sufficiency. Attempting to attain nuclear superiority is not morally equivalent to nuclear proficiency. By drawing this distinction, it is clear that the bishops only support the acquisition of nuclear weapons by the United States for self-defense purposes in the case of nuclear deterrence.

If nuclear deterrence exists only to prevent the use of nuclear weapons by others, then proposals to go beyond this to planning for prolonged periods of repeated nuclear strikes and counterstrikes, or ‘prevailing’ in nuclear war, are not acceptable. They encourage human and moral consequences. Rather, we must continually say ‘no’ to the idea of nuclear war.<sup>7</sup>

Nuclear deterrence is only acceptable as a building block for nuclear disarmament. The bishops prefer nuclear disarmament, and nuclear deterrence is only a temporary solution to the current political climate, which they believe needs to be resolved.

Nuclear disarmament is the ultimate goal, given that nuclear weapon use is immoral, violating many principles of just war theory. For this reason, *The Challenge of Peace* calls for “immediate, bilateral, verifiable agreements to halt the testing, production, and

deployment of new nuclear weapons,” “negotiated bilateral deep cuts in the arsenals of both superpowers,” and “support for the early successful conclusion of negotiations of a comprehensive test ban.” Of course, it seems incredibly unlikely that some type of bilateral agreement with the Soviet Union could have been achieved overnight, so the bishops nominally accept the possession of nuclear weapons for deterrence as a form of peace instead.<sup>8</sup> The bishops attempt to apply just war principles to the nuclear age, based on not just Catholic social teaching but also technological and strategic information. However, their answers also bring further ethical questions. Their acceptance of nuclear weapons for the sake of deterrence raises the question of the morality of threats. Is it morally acceptable to threaten what would be morally wrong to do?<sup>9</sup> Additionally, many critics have pointed out that deterrence is simply an empty threat if one believes that it would be wrong to carry through on the threat and thus would not. For this reason, some may argue that nuclear deterrence and nuclear warfare are either both morally permissible or morally prohibited.

Thirty-five years later the Soviet Union is no longer a nuclear threat to the United States, and while the United States/ nuclear weapons stockpile has decreased and weapons reduction treaties have been signed, the United States continues to hold onto her nuclear weapons; the threat of other countries developing or using their nuclear weapons remains.

The bishops’ moral acceptance of deterrence was qualified and conditional: it applied only to the situation with the Soviet Union. Deterrence was not to be viewed as a moral longterm policy. Ten years after *The Challenge of Peace*, the American bishops published another pastoral letter on justice and peace, *The Harvest of Justice is Sown In Peace* in which they reaffirmed their position in *The Challenge of Peace*. They praise the implementation of the START I and START II treaties, both of which reduced the United States’ nuclear arsenal but demand that in a post-Cold War era, continued effort for disarmament is all the more necessary. Disarmament has never been accomplished, and while a nuclear summit with North Korea in Singapore could be a positive step,

President Donald Trump speaks frivolously, even on Twitter about nuclear war:

“North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the ‘Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times.’ Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!”<sup>10</sup>

As the bishops warned thirty-five years ago, until all human life is treated with dignity, nuclear weapons will continue to exist, so this reality should hardly be a surprise.

The possibility of living in a peaceful world, void of nuclear weapons, will require an end to abortion. It will require a view of human life as sacred, because once it is devalued in any way, the dignity of all life is threatened.

One of the strengths of *The Challenge of Peace* is that it does not treat nuclear weapons as an isolated issue. Instead, the bishops called for a whole culture that would defend life against all attacks of violence, especially against abortion. The bishops argued that war (including the use of nuclear weapons) will be inevitable if we live in a society where violence is accepted.

Violence has many faces: oppression of the poor, deprivation of basic human rights, economic exploitation, sexual exploitation and pornography, neglect or abuse of the aged and the helpless, and innumerable other acts of humanity. Abortion in particular blunts a sense of the sacredness of human life. In a society where the innocent unborn are killed wantonly, how can we expect people to feel righteous revulsion at the act or threat of killing noncombatants in war.<sup>11</sup>

The possibility of living in a peaceful world, void of nuclear weapons, will require an end to abortion. It will require a view of human life as sacred, because once it is devalued in any way, the dignity of all life is threatened. The bishops acknowledge that this stance may set them apart from other peace activists; but they believe that to omit these other acts of violence in the discussion would be a failure to properly promote peace.<sup>12</sup> Nuclear weapons continue to exist because society has chosen to live in a world where forms of violence are deemed acceptable solutions to societal problems at the expense of groups of human beings.

Thirty-five years later, while the arms race with the Soviet Union is history, we continue to live in a world with both nuclear weapons and abortion. Furthermore, the United States can no longer claim

deterrence or protecting against Soviet aggression as justification for its development of nuclear weapons. The qualified acceptance of deterrence no longer applies. The bishop's pastoral letter is therefore still salient, and the call to defend life from every threat still goes unanswered by many politicians, voters, and advocates. Until society can acknowledge all acts of violence as a threat to human dignity and life, abortion and nuclear weapons will persist for another thirty-five years.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> NCCB, *The Challenge of Peace*, no. 152.

<sup>2</sup> NCCB, *The Challenge of Peace*, nos. 147-148.

<sup>3</sup> NCCB, *The Challenge of Peace*, nos. 103-106.

<sup>4</sup> NCCB, *The Challenge of Peace*, nos. 103, 152, 181.

<sup>5</sup> McMorrow, "Creating Conditions of Peace," 47.

<sup>6</sup> NCCB, *The Challenge of Peace*, no. 154.

<sup>7</sup> NCCB, *The Challenge of Peace*, no. 188.

<sup>8</sup> NCCB, *The Challenge of Peace*, no. 191.

<sup>9</sup> Lonsdale, "Nuclear Strategy and Catholicism," 187; Richard B. Miller, "Causality, Pacifism, and the Just-War Tradition in the Post-Cold War Era," in Powers et al., 204.

<sup>10</sup> [https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/94835557022420992?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cnn.com%2F2018%2F01%2F02%2Fpolitics%2Fdonald-trump-north-korea-nuclear%2Findex.html](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/94835557022420992?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cnn.com%2F2018%2F01%2F02%2Fpolitics%2Fdonald-trump-north-korea-nuclear%2Findex.html)

<sup>11</sup> NCCB, *The Challenge of Peace* no. 285.

<sup>12</sup> NCCB, *The Challenge of Peace* no. 287.





# Apocalypse Averted:

## *The Brink's Tale of Near-Nuclear War*

By John Whitehead

The world might have come close to ending in the early 1980s. Tensions had been rising between the United States and the Soviet Union for years, and Soviet leaders were convinced that their American counterparts were planning to launch a nuclear war. The Soviets became hypersensitive to possible warning signs of an impending American or NATO attack and responded with heightened military preparations of their own. An annual NATO military exercise known as “Able Archer,” meant to rehearse procedures for using nuclear weapons, caused special alarm among the Soviets in the fall of 1983. In such circumstances, a minor US-Soviet confrontation, a false alarm, or some other moment of bad luck could have led to World War III.

This extraordinarily dangerous episode—and how both sides ultimately de-escalated tensions and avoid war—is the subject of Marc Ambinder’s *The Brink: President Reagan and the Nuclear War Scare of 1983* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018). Ambinder, a journalist and professor at the University of California’s Annenberg School, focuses on a period of less than 10 years during the Cold War. He begins with the dramatic cooling of US-Soviet relations in the late 1970s and ends in 1985, when US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev met for the first time and began a new, more cooperative phase in their countries’ relationship.

The friendlier US-Soviet relationship of the 1970s ended partly because of the Soviet Union’s 1979 invasion of Afghanistan and decision to deploy a new class of intermediate-range nuclear missiles,

known as the SS-20s. The SS-20s could hit targets in Europe, so the United States countered with plans to deploy its own intermediate-range weapons to Europe. These American plans only provoked the Soviets further, as did the election in 1980 of arch-Cold Warrior Reagan. Shortly after Reagan became president, the KGB began a special intelligence-gathering project known as “RYAN”—an acronym for the Russian phrase “nuclear missile attack.” Soviet intelligence would watch the United States and NATO carefully for warning signs of such an attack.

The international situation did not improve in subsequent years, and by the 1983 Able Archer exercise they had reached fever pitch. Shortly before the exercise’s start, Soviet Defense Minister Dmitri Ustinov warned Soviet allies of “the grave escalation of the international situation and, in consequence, of the growing danger of war.”<sup>1</sup> Soviet and allied forces, including nuclear forces, went on alert. Many SS-20 missiles were ready to be launched in less than 3 minutes, if necessary. As SS-20 commander Ivan Yesin recalled, he and his superiors feared “under the pretenses of those [Able Archer] exercises that a sudden nuclear strike could be delivered.”<sup>2</sup>

The NATO exercise ended without a conflagration, but western intelligence agencies had noticed unusual Soviet behavior that fall: Soviet and allied planes and air defense radar on alert, increased intelligence-gathering flights by Soviet planes, and other signs of military readiness. An especially valuable source of information on Soviet activities was Oleg Gordievsky, a KGB agent in London who was secretly working for British intelligence. When a major US military exercise early in 1984 prompted a massive Soviet military

exercise, that provided more evidence of Soviet fears.

In 1984, the awareness that the Soviet Union feared imminent war finally reached Reagan and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Both took steps to ease tensions. Reagan decided, over the objections of Caspar Weinberger, his hawkish secretary of defense, to meet Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Thatcher met with Gorbachev, who was soon to become the Soviet Union's top leader. Reagan met with Gorbachev the following year and the risk of war receded. As Jack Matlock, a close advisor to Reagan, described this change, "the world breathed a sigh of relief."<sup>3</sup>

*The Brink* has definite strengths. It is full of information about the political, military, and intelligence activities of both sides during this important period. The narrative moves quickly; Ambinder keeps his chapters short and writes straightforward, non-academic prose. Nevertheless, the book is full of so many people, agencies, and military plans and operations that keeping everything straight is difficult. (Even a glossary in the book's front matter cannot cover all the terminology and acronyms used.) Moreover, the book contains a number of basic factual errors: Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter's national security advisor, is misidentified as Carter's secretary of state; Reagan's speech to the British parliament is described as being in Westminster Abbey when it should be the Palace of Westminster; a group of Soviet Pentecostal Christians who took sought asylum in the US Embassy in Moscow are erroneously referred to as "American Pentecostal Christians," and so on. Also, the book has numerous typos, which is particularly annoying.

Flaws aside, *The Brink* offers valuable insights into international relations and the challenges of making peace. The central theme is how nations can dramatically misread the intentions behind each other's actions. The Soviet Union misread American actions as preparations for imminent war, while the United States almost missed this fear of war that lay behind Soviet actions. Even while certain intelligence sources sounded the alarm about international tensions, a CIA assessment of the time dismissed the notion that Soviet leaders seriously feared "imminent conflict or confrontation with the United States."<sup>4</sup> Absent an understanding of Soviet actions as motivated by fear, the heightened Soviet military readiness and exercise of the early 1980s could easily have been interpreted as signs of aggressiveness or even that the Soviets were preparing for imminent war. Mutual distrust and suspicion between the superpowers could simply have deepened, leading to global catastrophe.

Preventing such a catastrophe required western political leaders who were willing to consider the perspectives of their Soviet adversaries and how those adversaries might interpret American and NATO actions. In a word, they needed to have empathy. They also needed to be open to alternative explanations of the information they received from intelligence sources. Last, they needed to want peace and be willing to work for peace, even when risky. Whatever their other flaws and limitations, Thatcher, Reagan, and (once he came to power) Gorbachev did show these qualities during this crucial period.

Over 30 years have passed since the nuclear crisis of 1983-1984, but the great power tensions and the nuclear danger have not gone away. Relations between the United States and Russia have returned to something like Cold War-levels of hostility. One of Reagan and Gorbachev's greatest achievements, the Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty—which abolished weapons such as the SS-20s and their

American counterparts—is now collapsing: President Trump has threatened to withdraw the United States from the treaty.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, conflict looms between the United States and other nations, such as North Korea, China, and Iran. Political leadership that displays empathy, open-mindedness, and a willingness to seek peace is sorely needed. The lessons from *The Brink* remain relevant today.

#### Notes

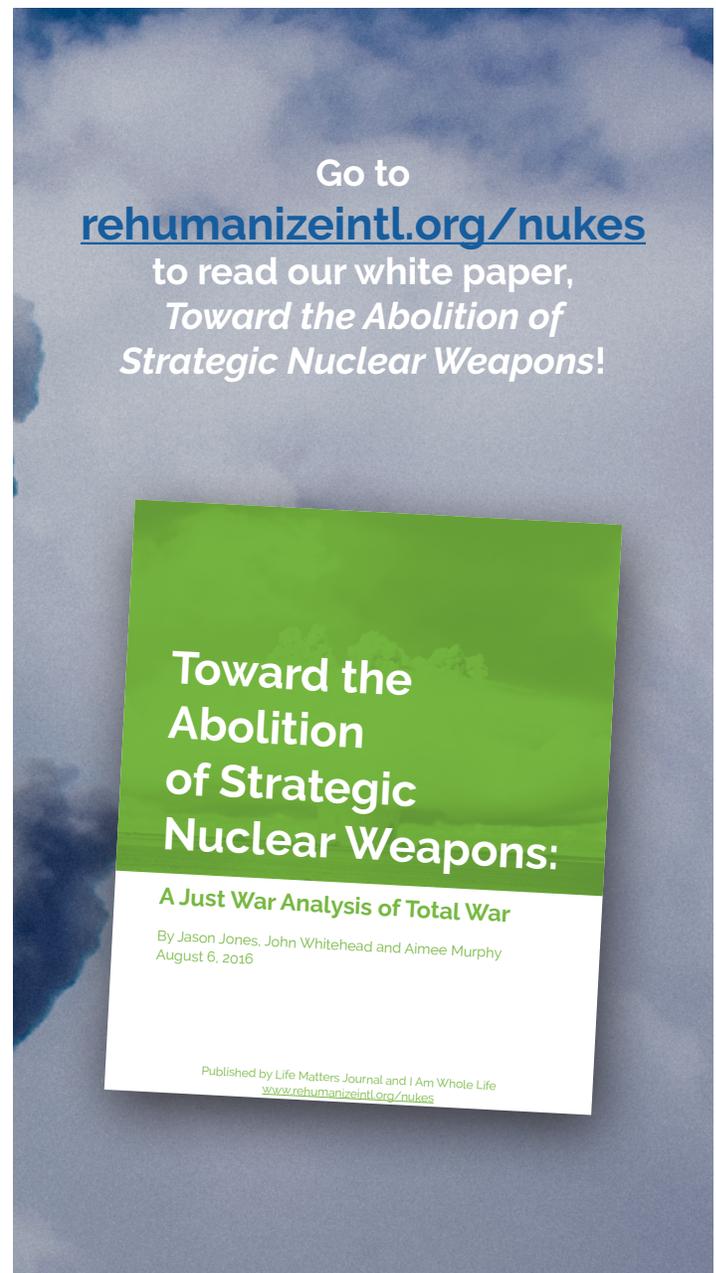
<sup>1</sup> Marc Ambinder, *The Brink: President Reagan and the Nuclear War Scare of 1983* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), 196.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>5</sup> Zeke Miller and Michael Balsamo, "Trump Says US Will Pull Out of Intermediate Range Nuke Pact," Associated Press, October 20, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2QFuerf>.





# And Let it Begin With Me: Peace Beyond Politics

By Julia Smucker

## Nonviolence has been a value instilled in me for longer than I can remember.

I have always been taught it and have never had any difficulty believing in it. And yet more often than I'd like to admit, what has come less naturally has been connecting it to my own life in practical ways.

Despite my deep and lifelong convictions, it was only in early adulthood that I began to realize more consciously that peacemaking and service were not simply ideals to be deferred to some yet-to-be-discovered vocation, but principles and practices to be lived in the here and now. Through my post-college years, I have been gradually discovering something of what that means. Although activism is often thought of as a product of youthful zeal, I have found it in my own life to be something I've been maturing into in my 20s and 30s, as I find new and often localized ways to advocate on peace and life issues.

But what has remained constant, however I have lived it or failed to live it, is a commitment to nonviolence that precedes and transcends any politics. For me even issue-based activism has never been about political affiliation but is fundamentally rooted in a deeper tradition of reverence for all human lives.

Especially during an election year, much is made of the impact of electoral politics and the significance of voting. And of course elections do have consequences, and voting is one way to participate and – to some limited extent – to give voice to one's principles. Yet its moral weight is often overstated as the only way to participate meaningfully in civic life, to the exclusion of many others. There are at least two specific problems with this.

First, electing the “right” candidates is often presented as a panacea for all social ills in a way that is naïve and reductionistic at best. That the imperative to vote, and vote rightly, is frequently reduced to single-issue appeals is especially problematic from a consistent-life perspective. Even if the solution on any given issue were reducible to simply voting in the right candidates and voting out the wrong ones, which is already doubtful, there are few if any who could reasonably be depended on to apply nonviolent principles consistently. Determining who the right and wrong candidates are to begin with is rarely if ever straightforward.

Second, among the available means of advocacy, voting by itself

is a relatively passive one. Strictly in terms of the electoral system, choosing which flawed human beings to trust to better represent our concerns is a necessary function of a representative democracy. The problem is when we fail to see beyond the electoral system, putting a disproportionate amount of faith in the power of a vote to express those concerns, to the point that it can blind us to the availability and impact of other, more direct actions. Rather than allowing that inevitable act of trust to lull us into post-election passivity or despairing in the knowledge that our elected representatives will invariably be flawed, we should take that knowledge as motivation to advocate for consistent-life concerns ourselves at a personal and community level.

In my own experience becoming connected to various forms of local and issue-based action, I have found them not only to have a frequent advantage of visible (though small-scale) effectiveness, but also to be unavoidably relational. For one thing, wherever there is direct association or interaction with fellow human beings for whom we're inspired to advocate, it forces us to see those people not as political pawns, nor even as a noble yet abstracted cause, but as flesh-and-blood humans. And even more challengingly, it can bring into view the humanity of those who are dehumanizing others. This is often where it's most difficult to be truly consistent in advocating for peace, and I still cringe to think of times when I've argued in favor of nonviolence while nursing my own animus toward the very people I sought to persuade.

As I have become more involved in issue-based advocacy, however, the experience of working alongside people on certain issues, and sometimes finding myself on opposing sides with the same people on certain others, has served as a jarring reminder of human complexity and opened doors to dialogue that may not have otherwise existed. Such experiences bring particularly close to home the lesson I take from the example of human rights icon Martin Luther King, one of the greatest peace advocates of modern history: there is a place for confrontation of injustices, but never for demonization of human beings.

The challenge for those of us who believe in universal human dignity is that, to be fully consistent, we must respect that dignity even in people who show disregard for the dignity of those we are seeking to defend. Only then can we really begin to live the words of the famous song, “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.”

# Interested in getting involved?

Want to join the movement against aggressive violence? For information on volunteering or writing for the next issue of *Life Matters Journal*, send an email to [info@lifemattersjournal.org](mailto:info@lifemattersjournal.org).

For information about available internships and upcoming events, check out our website:

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