

Quotations of Religious Leaders on Nuclear Weapons

Mirza Masroor Ahmad¹

“These days, every major power possesses an arsenal of nuclear weapons, and even poor countries are joining this race. Mankind stands on the brink of the pit of destruction, whilst the Holy Quran teaches us not to harm the innocent. The fallout from the atom bomb causes physical disabilities, generation after generation; and so, this crime is even worse than murder.”

Pope Benedict XVI²

“What can be said, too, about those governments which count on nuclear arms as a means of ensuring the security of their countries? Along with countless persons of good will, one can state that this point of view is not only baneful but also completely fallacious. 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.”

Pope Benedict XVI³

“... one can only encourage the efforts of the international community to ensure progressive disarmament and a world free of nuclear weapons, whose presence alone threatens the life of the planet and the ongoing integral development of the present generation and of generations yet to come.”

John C. Bennett⁴

“The churches at this point have a great responsibility not to advocate over-all idealistic solutions but to emphasize the distinctively Christian message that is relevant to these issues, to help their members to see the world without the characteristic American ideological blinders, to challenge many of the prevailing

¹ Mirza Masroor Ahmad, “Essential guidance for a troubled world,” *Al Islam*, June 25, 2008.

http://www.alislam.org/khilafat/fifth/Essential_Guidance_for_Troubled_World-20081126MN.html

Mirza Masroor Ahmad is the head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and Fifth Successor (Khalifa) to the Promised Messiah and Imam Mahdi.

² Pope Benedict XVI, “In truth, peace,” *Chiesa News*, Jan., 2006.

<http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/43497>

Pope Benedict XVI (born Joseph Alois Ratzinger) is the 265th and current Pope and head of the Roman Catholic Church.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, “If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation,” message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, Jan. 1, 2010.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliiii-world-day-peace_en.html

Pope Benedict XVI (born Joseph Alois Ratzinger) is the 265th and current Pope and head of the Roman Catholic Church.

⁴ John C. Bennett, “Christian ethics and international affairs,” *Christianity and Crisis*, Aug. 5, 1963.

<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=391>

Rev. Bennett (1903-1992) was the 11th president of the Union Theological Seminary, and was a co-founder with Reinhold Niebuhr of the magazine *Christianity and Crisis*.

assumptions about the cold war and nuclear armaments, and to encourage the debate on public questions about which most people prefer to be silent. In this way our churches can be, more clearly than they are at present, part of the world-wide Christian community that never allows us to forget the humanity of those beyond the barriers that limit our understanding.”

Robert McAfee Brown⁵

“I believe that there are at least two kinds of issues forcing Americans closer and closer to the kind of decision demanded of Germans during the 1930s: when saying Yes to God forces one to say No to certain policies and demands of one’s nation and its leaders.

The first of these is the issue of nuclear weapons. I sometimes fear that just as Germans today look back on the early 1930s and say, ‘How could we have been so blind as not to have seen the peril of Hitler?’, so people of a later generation (if, indeed, there is one) will look back on us and say, ‘How could they have been so blind as not to have seen the peril of nuclear weapons?’ ”

Robert McAfee Brown⁶

“There is no excuse whatever – moral, military, psychological, or geopolitical – for dropping an atomic bomb on a city.”

Robert McAfee Brown⁷

“When we move, however, from conventional warfare to nuclear warfare (the ability to kill everyone and destroy life on the planet in the bargain), it seems clear that we no longer have the luxury of a variety of options. Knowing as we do that the unleashing of nuclear weapons would almost certainly destroy all life on the planet, either by the direct impact of the weapons or by the radioactive fallout that would ensue, we have to come to a stern conclusion. ... we are called to an unqualified rejection of the manufacture, possession, or use of nuclear weapons.”

Mustafa Cerić, Michael Kinnamon, and William F. Vendley⁸

⁵ Robert McAfee Brown, *Saying Yes and Saying No: On Rendering to God and Caesar*, p. 24, Westminster, John Knox Press, April 1986.

A Presbyterian minister and author of 29 books, Rev. Robert McAfee Brown (1920-2001) was an international leader in civil rights, ecumenical and social justice causes.

⁶ Robert McAfee Brown, *Reflections over the Long Haul: A Memoir*, p. 59 Westminster, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky (1986)

A Presbyterian minister and author of 29 books, Rev. Robert McAfee Brown (1920-2001) was an international leader in civil rights, ecumenical and social justice causes.

⁷ Robert McAfee Brown, *Religion and Violence*, p. ix, Westminster, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1973.

A Presbyterian minister and author of 29 books, Rev. Robert McAfee Brown (1920-2001) was an international leader in civil rights, ecumenical and social justice causes.

⁸ William Vendley, “Nuclear Theology,” *Huffington Post*, May 3, 2010.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-vendley-phd/nuclear-theology_b_561267.html

Mustafa Cerić is the Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon is General Secretary National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. Dr. William F. Vendley is Secretary General of Religions for Peace.

“To be human is to be responsible to God. Where humanity tends to be selfish and violent, proud and wasteful, the fact that we are under God’s authority calls us to humility and stewardship, and to peace based on a wisdom greater than narrow individual or national self-interests. Nuclear weapons are the rejection of humanity under God; they have placed a power previously imagined as God’s alone in our collective grasp. Possessing them, we claim the globe as acceptable collateral for our interests. . . . Religious leaders of all faiths must work together to reject this terrifying ‘theology’ of nuclear weapons. If we are beings under the authority of God, we dare not arrogate to ourselves the authority to destroy all life.”

William Sloane Coffin⁹

“Even if, by the grace of God, we succeed in ridding the earth of weapons of mass destruction, the ability to make them will forever and ever be part of the storehouse of human knowledge. Of all thoughts about the world’s future, few are more sobering, for it would be utterly naïve to believe that a nation at war would gracefully choose to go down to defeat rather than reconstruct nuclear weapons had it the ability to do so. In other words, having bitten the nuclear apple there is no returning to innocence. It’s hard not to conclude that humanity has outlived war — but doesn’t know it.”

Alaeddin El-Bakri¹⁰

“Islam and other religions came and flourished at a time that there was no mass destruction weapons, self defense wars were allowed at a time when soldiers fought one on one with swords, that allowed for strict rules, no killing of woman, children, old people, non combatant citizens, no burning of farms, homes, or destruction of public property, in a nutshell ‘only fight a soldier who is charging at you with his weapon.’ I still have a problem with using bombs period, let alone nuclear bombs, religions do not accommodate modern warfare let alone regulating them.”

Episcopal Church¹¹

“Resolved, That this General Convention urge the Government of the United States to exercise leadership among the nations, especially the nuclear weapons states, by immediately initiating negotiations for an International Treaty on Comprehensive Nuclear Disarmament in all its aspects to include a deadline for the completion of nuclear disarmament.”

⁹ William Sloane Coffin, “A new ‘credo’ for humankind,” *The Globalist*, 1/22/2004.

<http://www.theglobalist.com/StoryId.aspx?StoryId=3706>

Ordained in the Presbyterian Church, associated with the United Church of Christ, and Chaplain of Yale University from 1958 until 1975, Rev. William Sloane Coffin (1924 – 2006) was a leading civil rights and peace activist.

¹⁰ Shaykh Alaeddin El-Bakri is currently serving as Khateeb (one who delivers the sermons) at Saratoga Masjid in California. He has served as Imam at several Islamic centers, established full-time and weekend Islamic schools, and served as a founding board member of IMAN (Inner City Muslim Action Network) in Chicago and as a book editor for the international education foundation IQRA (Iman Quwwah Rushd Adab).

¹¹ Resolution 1997-D022, “Support the goal of total nuclear disarmament,” General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church*, Philadelphia, 1997 (New York: General Convention, 1998), pp. 231-232.

http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=1997-D022

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America¹²

“Christians need to be prepared to say ‘no’ to wars in which their nation participates. These principles are important in international law and in military codes of conduct. They are the basis for our church's unequivocal rejection of nuclear war and for its support for ‘selective conscientious objection.’ ”

Friends Committee on National Legislation¹³

“ Although national security is widely perceived to depend on military strength, more weapons do not provide enduring security. Military expansion provokes fear and potential retaliation. Threats tend to increase the hostility and distrust that lead to war. We believe that nations must move toward comprehensive disarmament. We urge the elimination of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.”

David P. Gushee¹⁴

“Nuclear weapons threaten life’s sanctity. Their very existence marks an absurd and terrifying negation of life. Thousands of them were left on the table when the Cold War ended, as if somehow they would dismantle themselves when everyone’s attention turned to other issues. They did not dismantle themselves. We human beings must do that. We created them, we must uncreate them. The most heavily armed nation in the world, the United States, must take the lead. The leading religious community in the United States, evangelicals, must help build the moral consensus required to move toward this goal. To do so, America’s evangelicals must learn to see nuclear weapons as perhaps the ultimate sanctity of life issue, and respond accordingly.”

Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama¹⁵

“By far the greatest single danger facing humankind – in fact, all living beings on our planet – is the threat of nuclear destruction. I need not elaborate on this danger, but I would like to appeal to all the leaders of the nuclear powers who literally hold the future of the world in their hands, to the scientists and technicians who continue to create these awesome weapons of destruction, and to all the people at large who are in a position to influence their leaders: I appeal to them to exercise their sanity and begin to work at dismantling and destroying all nuclear weapons.”

¹² Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “For peace in God’s world,” adopted as a social statement by the fourth Churchwide Assembly on August 20, 1995, at Minneapolis, Minnesota.

<http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Peace.aspx>

¹³ Friends Committee on National Legislation, “FCNL Policy Statement: Part I, Section 2, Feb. 20, 2007.

<http://www.fcnl.org/priorities/freewar.htm>

Established by the Quakers in 1943, the FCNL is a nonpartisan public interest lobby with the following mission statement: “We seek a world free of war and the threat of war. We seek a society with equity and justice for all. We seek a community where every person’s potential may be fulfilled We seek an earth restored..”

¹⁴ David P. Gushee, “Nuclear weapons, evangelicals, and the sanctity of life, *Reflections*, p. 59, Spring, 2009.

A Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University in Macon, GA, Dr. Gushee is the president of Evangelicals for Human Rights.

¹⁵ Dalai Lama, “A Human Approach to World Peace.”

<http://www.dalailama.com/messages/world-peace/a-human-approach-to-peace>

Donald Harrison, speaking of Abraham Joshua Heschel¹⁶

“Susannah Heschel [daughter of Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel] said her father believed in intellectually challenging his audiences, rather than in telling them what they wanted to hear. Because of that, she suggested that Rabbi Heschel today in death is probably more popular than he was while alive. She recalled that he sometimes would ask rabbinical students whether gelatin is kosher, and they would argue based upon this or that citation in the Halachah. And then he would ask, ‘are nuclear weapons kosher?’ and the students would suddenly be silent; they didn’t have the language to describe that.”

Her father believed that the opposite of good was not evil, rather it was indifference. If humans were made in God's image, then they had to question what was being done in their name.

M. Jan Holton¹⁷

“Many in the community of faith work hard not to look the other way when we pass someone who is hungry, lost, or in pain because we understand that there is a moral responsibility to tend to those in need. But it is much more difficult for us to grasp that we have the same responsibility to pay attention when our family, neighbors, and this earth, which has been entrusted to us, are at risk from any variation of nuclear attack. How do we begin to see the dangers in this world with open eyes? Tillich suggests that it takes a particular kind of courage, a courage grounded in God that moves us beyond apathy and sustains us with a strength that resists panic. This courage does not make us fearless; rather, it gives us strength to acknowledge and stand in the face of our vulnerabilities.”

Reinhold Niebuhr¹⁸

“We have to risk a nuclear war in order to escape capitulation to communism. For all I know, we may stumble into this terrible war. But no nation can say, ‘We will capitulate to tyranny rather than accept a speculative fate’ – to accept an absolute fate as alternative to a speculative one. No nation can do that.”

Grayde Parsons¹⁹

“This initiative [the New START Treaty] resonates with the vision of the prophet Micah who looked toward the day when nations ‘shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks’ (Micah 4:3). Guided by this Biblical vision, General Assemblies of the church and its predecessors have understood that following Jesus and working for God’s intended order and life abundant involve seeking international disarmament and arms control measures.”

¹⁶ Donald H. Harrison, “Susannah Heschel explains her rabbi father's concept of 'praying with my legs',” *Jewish Sightseeing*, March 10, 2006.

http://www.jewishlightseeing.com/dhh_weblog/2006-blog/2006-03/2006-03-10-heschel.htm

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972) was one of the leading theologians and philosophers of the 20th century, and was a leader in the American civil rights movement.

¹⁷ M. Jan Holton, “Confronting an age of fear, *Reflections*, Yale Divinity School,, pp. 31-34, Spring, 2009. Dr. Holton is an Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care at Yale Divinity School.

¹⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr in an interview by Mike Wallace, April 27, 1958.

<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/niebuhr-rediscovered/wallace.shtml>

Famous for his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Reinhold Niebuhr is an American theologian who was particularly influential in the period between the end of World War II and the Vietnam War.

¹⁹ Full citation needed. Rev. Grayde Parsons is Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Presbyterian Church²⁰

“The application of the just war doctrine in the nuclear age raises serious questions regarding the morality of nuclear deterrence. If the use of nuclear weapons cannot be justified on ‘just war’ grounds, can the possession of them be justified? If a nuclear war ‘must never be fought,’ can the credible threat to fight one be morally acceptable? ... The policy of nuclear deterrence has been in danger of being regarded as an adequate, permanent means to national security rather than an interim measure of self defense. Such a policy is not morally defensible. The work for peaceful alternatives needs to be vigorously pursued.”

Second Vatican Council²¹

“The horror and perversity of war is immensely magnified by the increase in the number of scientific weapons. For acts of war involving these weapons can inflict massive and indiscriminate destruction, thus going far beyond the bounds of legitimate defense. ... Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation. ... Scientific weapons, to be sure, are not amassed solely for use in war. Since the defensive strength of any nation is considered to be dependent upon its capacity for immediate retaliation, this accumulation of arms, which increases each year, likewise serves, in a way heretofore unknown, as a deterrent to possible enemy attack. Many regard this as the most effective way by which peace of a sort can be maintained between nations at the present time.”

Talmud²²

“Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world.”

Desmond Tutu²³

“Sceptics tell us, and have told us for many years, that we are wasting our time pursuing the dream of a world without nuclear weapons, as it can never be realised. But more than a few people said the same about ending entrenched racial segregation in South Africa and abolishing slavery in the United States. Often they had a perceived interest in maintaining the status quo. Systems and policies that devalue human life, and deprive us all of our right to live in peace with each other, are rarely able to withstand the pressure created by a highly organised public that is determined to see change.”

²⁰ The Office Of The General Assembly, The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), “Christian Obedience In A Nuclear Age,” a policy statement adopted by the 200th General Assembly (1988).

http://presbypeacefellowship.org/files/nuclear_age_0.pdf

See also “Statements on Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and Its Predecessors -- A Brief Summary (June 2004) -- <http://www.pcusa.org/get/resources/resource/5070/>.

²¹ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes (Joy and Hope): Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Sections 80 and 81, Dec. 7, 1965.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

²² Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 4:1 (22a)

²³ Desmond Tutu, “It’s time to rid the world of nuclear weapons,” *Guardian*, May 22, 2010.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/may/22/nuclear-weapons-non-proliferationtreaty>

Archbishop Desmond Tutu is primate of the Anglican Church of South Africa and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

Desmond Tutu¹⁹

“Nuclear abolition is the democratic wish of the world's people, and has been our goal almost since the dawn of the atomic age. Together, we have the power to decide whether the nuclear era ends in a bang or worldwide celebration.”

Tyler Wigg-Stevenson²⁴

“Nuclear weapons will never be moralized out of existence, perhaps most fundamentally because there are very few people in any era willing to decide questions about their own security based on a moral abstraction. That said, morality has an vital role to play in the current abolitionism: you just have to know what to ask it to do. Morality complements the security and technological arguments: i.e., we must abolish for our safety, we can abolish verifiably, and we should abolish because it is consonant with our deepest values not to threaten indiscriminate destruction. Must-can-should: a powerful triad.”

Tyler Wigg-Stevenson²⁵

“An indefinite reliance on nuclear weapons elevates America – and all other nuclear powers – above that which God has ordained any nation to be. And this places us squarely in the face of his coming judgment. I know it is horribly unfashionable, embarrassing, and even impolite to talk about the wrath and judgment of God. But I do not know how to read the Bible, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ without believing that that which he saves us from is nothing less than the righteous judgment of *El Elyon*, God Most High, whose anger against this blood-soaked world is the proof that what we do to each other matters to God.”

William Thompson²⁶

“The production and deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity and must be condemned on ethical and theological grounds.”

Unitarian Universalist Association²⁷

“We believe all people share a moral responsibility to create peace. ... We repudiate aggressive and preventive wars, the disproportionate use of force, covert wars, and targeting that includes a high risk to civilians. We support international efforts to curtail the vast world trade in armaments and call for nuclear disarmament and abolition of other weapons of mass destruction.”

²⁴ Tyler Wigg-Stevenson, in a response to M. Krepon, “Morality and the bomb,” Arms Control Wonk, July 31, 2009.

<http://krepon.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/2402/morality-and-the-bomb>
Tyler Wigg-Stevenson is an evangelical Baptist minister and founder of the Two Futures Project.

²⁵ Tyler Wigg-Stevenson, “One superpower, under God,” *Reflections*, Yale Divinity School, pp. 10-13, Spring, 2009.

²⁶ William Thompson, Presbyterian Church USA, Vancouver Assembly, 1983.

http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/2009/09/04_wcc_nuclear_free.php
A similar statement appears in L. Bruce van Voorst, “The churches and nuclear deterrence,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 4, pp. 827-85, Spring, 1983.

²⁷ Unitarian Universalist Association 2010 Statement of Conscience.
<http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/socialjustice/statements/13394.shtml>

United Methodist Council of Bishops (U.S.A.)²⁸

“It is the idolatrous connection between the ideology of deterrence and the existence of the weapons themselves that must be broken. Deterrence must no longer receive the churches' blessing, even as a temporary warrant for the maintenance of nuclear weapons. The interim possession of such weapons for a strictly limited time requires a different justification – *an ethic of reciprocity* as nuclear-weapon states act together in agreed stages to reduce and ultimately to eliminate their nuclear arms. Such an ethic is shaped by an acceptance of mutual vulnerability, a vision of common security, and the escalation of mutual trust rather than mutual terror. It insists that the positive work of peacemaking must overcome the fearful manipulation of hostility.”

United Methodist Council of Bishops (U.S.A.)²⁹

“... the bishops in their pastoral letter stated unequivocally that ‘we say a clear and unconditional No to nuclear war and to any use of nuclear weapons. We conclude that nuclear deterrence is a position that cannot receive the church's blessing.’ ”

Jim Wallace³⁰

“To reverse the habits of the heart – the assumptions and policies that have dominated U.S. national security policy for more than 60 years – will be a monumental achievement. And the pressures against that happening will be enormous. Indeed, this is a job for faith -- and for the kind of social movements that faith at its best has always inspired. The energetic commitment of a new generation of believers in accomplishing this magnificent goal will be absolutely crucial. Perhaps after all the years of struggle on the huge theological and political issues surrounding nuclear weapons, the time for a new beginning has finally come. It's time to end the nuclear threat to our world, our humanity, and our faith.”

World Council of Churches³¹

“God of all times and seasons,
You have presented us with a season of hope and a time of opportunity for a nuclear-weapon-free world.
May we not squander this opportunity
but find ways of working together to make a difference for the whole global family.
Fill us with the vision of your kingdom,
where the lion lies down with the lamb, and weapons are turned into farming tools.
Empower us to declare that authentic security is found
in enhancing our human interdependence in your one creation.
Enable us to live this declaration in our relationships with neighbors, near and far
and to you be all glory and praise, now and forever.”

²⁸ United Methodist Council of Bishops (U.S.A.), “In defense of creation: The nuclear crisis and a just peace,” 1986. Reproduced in *War in the Twentieth Century*, R. B. Miller, Ed., p. 428 (Westminster John Knox Press), 2004.

²⁹ United Methodist Council of Bishops (U.S.A.), “In defense of creation: The nuclear crisis and a just peace,” 1986. Excerpt reproduced in <http://www.zero-nukes.org/religiousstatements2.html#indefenseofcreation> .

³⁰ Jim Wallace, “A new movement to abolish nuclear weapons,” July 22, 2010.
<http://blog.sojo.net/2010/07/22/a-new-movement-to-abolish-nuclear-weapons/>
Rev. Jim Wallace, the founder of *Sojourners* magazine, is an evangelical Christian writer and political activist.

³¹ World Council of Churches, “Statement of hope in a year of opportunity: Seeking a nuclear-weapon-free world,” Sept 4, 2009.
<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2009/reports-and-documents/report-on-public-issues/statement-of-hope-in-a-year-of-opportunity-seeking-a-nuclear-weapon-free-world.html>

Helian³²

“Morality has a great deal more to do with emotion than logic. It is subjective, and exists only in the minds that host it. Other than that, it has no objective existence in itself. It exists as an evolved trait of our species because it promoted our survival. It did not evolve in response to the threat of nuclear weapons. Therefore, assuming one actually does want to survive, it would be illogical to apply it to the nuclear weapons debate. This is an instance in which one must disconnect the issue from moral considerations, and consider logically what course of action will best promote one’s survival. Survival, after all, explains why morality exists to begin with. To the extent that it doesn’t promote our survival, it is pointless. There can be nothing more immoral than failing to survive.”

³² Helian, “On the ‘morality’ of nuclear weapons,” Aug. 4, 2009.

<http://helian.net/blog/category/nuclear-weapons/>

“Helian” is the *nom de plume* of a nuclear engineer. His view is representative of those secularists who see the existential threat of nuclear weapons as being so great that moral considerations are actually irrelevant.