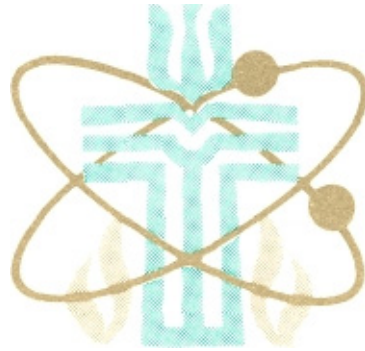


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# CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE IN A NUCLEAR AGE

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A Policy Statement  
Adopted By The 200th General Assembly (1988)  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

**CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE  
IN A  
NUCLEAR AGE**



**A POLICY STATEMENT ADOPTED BY  
THE 200TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (1988)  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

**THE OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)  
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY**

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Copies of the background papers and appendixes for this statement are available at \$2.00 each from the same source (specify PDS order /TOGA-88-102). The background papers and appendixes were not reviewed or considered by the General Assembly.

The 200th General Assembly (1988) adopted the following policy statement and recommendations, as amended.

The statement originated in actions of the 195th General Assembly (1983), the 197th General Assembly (1985), and the 199th General Assembly (1987), in response to overtures from a number of presbyteries. An initial study document prepared by the Advisory Council on Church and Society, along with an extensive body of responses to the study paper, were referred to a task force jointly chaired by the Reverend Dr. Arnold Come, Dean Emeritus/President of San Francisco Theological Seminary, and the Reverend Dr. Albert C. Winn, Moderator of the 119th General Assembly (PCUS, 1979).

The task force subsequently drafted and presented to the 200th General Assembly (1988) the proposed policy statement on "Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age." After many hours of open hearings, discussion, debate, and compromise, the Peacemaking and International Relations Committee of the 200th General Assembly (1988) recommend the paper, with amendments to both the document and its recommendations, to the assembly for adoption. The text contained in the following pages incorporates all changes approved by the 200th General Assembly.

In a separate action, the 200th General Assembly directed the Stated Clerk to make available upon request the background paper and appendixes for the policy and recommendations of the "Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age" policy statement. The background paper and appendixes are available for purchase, and will carry the printed notation that the background paper was not reviewed or considered by the 200th General Assembly.

## **A STATEMENT OF POLICY AND DIRECTION**

Since the adoption of Peacemaking the Believers' Calling in 1980-1981, peacemaking has become increasingly important in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The Research Unit estimates that by 1987, 47 percent of the church's 11,600 congregations had made a commitment of some kind to the cause of peacemaking through their sessions. Peacemaking committees and committed individuals have been exploring and implementing ways to put those commitments into action. Out of all this interest and activity, questions have inevitably emerged as to the most appropriate peacemaking strategies for individual Christians and for corporate bodies: congregations, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly.

From 1983 through 1987 the General Assembly has been requested, through overtures from presbyteries, to develop policy on the applicability of the criteria of the just war doctrine to nuclear war, a theological position on peace, nonviolence as a means of social justice, the present law on "frivolous tax returns," tax resistance, and the morality of nuclear deterrence. These matters have all been referred to the Advisory Council on Church and Society for study and report. The council reported to the General Assembly that it viewed these separate referrals as aspects of a larger policy question: What is the proper shape of Christian obedience in a nuclear age? The council then sought to engage members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in the search for answers to that larger question.

### **The Shape of Christian Obedience**

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a long-standing tradition of Christian obedience in response to the loving action of God, which obedience is revealed in Scripture, taught in the Reformed tradition, and explicated in many past pronouncements of General Assemblies. Both Christian individuals and the church have responsibility to the God of peace and justice as known in Jesus Christ and responsibilities to society and government for the maintenance of the highest possible degree of peace and justice.

The primary calling of Christian individuals and the church is to: "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29), and the second requirement is to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus

19:18 and Mark 12:31). These two requirements have implications for our response to the question put to the General Assembly through the presbytery overtures. Thus, at the outset, we affirm the following:

a. We are called to be faithful to Jesus Christ and the biblical vision of peace and justice and to work for its manifestation in every possible way.

b. We are called to work through established social and governmental structures for just peace which requires order and equal justice for all citizens.

c. We are called to expose and oppose every violation of the spirit of God's rule of peace, righteousness and justice. This means that our "Yes" to God's will for peace may require a "No" to civil authority, resulting in noncooperation or civil disobedience if the policies of the civil authority fundamentally contravene God's purpose of peace for the world.

### **The National Setting for Our Christian Responsibility**

As citizens of the U.S.A., we can be grateful for the setting in which we are called to exercise Christian responsibility: a government based on such original political covenants as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, including the Bill of Rights. Those covenants seek to guarantee freedom from the exercise of absolute and arbitrary authority and power and to establish a rule of law. Government is to derive its "just powers" from the "consent of the governed" and its purpose is "to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."

One of the legitimate functions of civil government, according to the Reformed tradition, is the defense of its citizens through the maintenance of the necessary military and police forces. Military forces have served to defend the nation and to preserve the safety, harmony, freedom, and peace of its citizens. There is a long Presbyterian tradition of individuals serving in the armed forces. Many Presbyterians have decided that obedience to God leads them to participate in the military and to work from within for policies that will reduce the nuclear threat and promote justice.

Our history as a nation is marred by grave injustices to many people; for example, women, Native Americans, blacks during and after slavery, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, as well as others. Nevertheless, our original political covenants, modified through years

of painful and costly struggle, have afforded oppressed groups and those with uneasy consciences grounds for resistance and helped to make our society more just and inclusive. Such changes give us continuing hope that our "Yes" to God can be at the same time a "Yes" to civil authority, as is normally the case.

Under certain circumstances, however, noncooperation with, or disobedience to, duly constituted authorities has been deemed an appropriate Christian response. Few would criticize the disobedience of early Christians to Roman Emperors, of the American colonists to the British crown, of the Confessing Synod in Germany to Adolf Hitler, of many pastors and church leaders around the world today to oppressive governments of the right and the left. The critical questions for American Presbyterians today are whether the current situation justifies such response to our own government and whether such response will be individual or corporate. Discernment of the nature of the current situation is absolutely crucial in determining any policies which the General Assembly is to suggest to the church.

### **The Shape of the Nuclear Age**

Certainly the current situation of nuclear arms buildup is extraordinary and unprecedented in human history. The overtures referred to above cite the fact that the writers of our older confessions of faith and the framers of the just war doctrine could not have imagined the situation in which we find ourselves today. Albert Einstein's words still ring true: "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our way of thinking, and we thus drift toward unparalleled catastrophe." Since 1945 a number of governments, chiefly the United States and the Soviet Union, have developed, accumulated, mounted, and aimed weapons which, if fired, could possibly bring human history to an end in an incalculable and unimaginable holocaust. The entire ecosystem would experience havoc and it is a matter of grim debate among scientists what forms of life might survive on the planet. Acknowledging these facts is so painful that most people succumb to some form of "nuclear numbing," and try to live as though nothing has changed. Governments also become numb to the human consequences of these weapons, speaking of them in antiseptic and often misleading terms, planning to fight "limited nuclear wars," and continuing a seemingly unending race for more devastating, more accurate, more invulnerable, "smarter," and "cleaner" weapons.

The nuclear arms buildup is part of the global militarization of society which is characterized by: (1) the pervasive and profound

preoccupation of governments with military-security concerns; (2) the diversion of a large part of scientific and technical talent plus industrial plant and labor force from production of civilian goods to the production of military materials; (3) the budgetary dependence of institutions of higher learning on contracts for military related research and development; (4) the breakdown of open society—secrecy, censorship, surveillance, withholding information, manipulation of the public through the media; (5) the devotion of a large proportion of national resources to military research and production, or the purchase of weapons, at the expense of education, housing, employment, medical care, and other human and environmental needs; and (6) the increase of military themes and symbols in the popular culture, including film, television, popular music, and even in the toys and games available to children and youth, which teach them that war is play and violence is acceptable. In varying degrees these characteristics mark even the poorer countries of the Third World. Militarization in our country has increased with few pauses since 1945, regardless of the party or administration in power. It is as much a mark of the present age as is the specific presence of nuclear weapons.

Militarization is fueled around the world by the perception of threats posed by enemies. There is reality in such threats. Our country must be realistic about the implications and potential threats involved in competition with the Soviet Union and other countries whose ideologies or interests differ with our own. But there is distortion as well. The pictures people draw of their enemies are sufficient evidence of the power of hostile imagination—they appear inhuman. “Anti-communism” has become such a powerful force in the United States that we tend to explain all revolutions of the oppressed as communist inspired. We tend to justify policies clearly out of keeping with our own ideals as necessary to combat communism and we refrain from policies of compassion out of fear of being labeled “soft on communism.” The Soviet Union responds to the United States with perceptions of and attitudes towards the enemy reflecting its own unique history and tradition. This mutual, exaggerated enmity is another mark of the present age.

The awful and deepening deprivation of millions in much of the world, with its many interconnections to pervasive militarization, is another mark of the present age. To speak of “forty years of peace” achieved by the nuclear stand-off seems a travesty to people in the Third World. Millions have died in armed conflict and governmental repression in their countries since World War II. Deaths, mostly of children, from malnutrition amount to the total of a Hiroshima-type bomb every three days. A large percentage of the people with whom we share God’s earth and resources live in a perpetual state of hunger and



malnourishment that endangers health, limits human potential, and ultimately threatens life itself. Desperate poverty has become more desperate; developing countries as a whole have experienced a decline of about 10 percent in per capita income through the 1980s. Because of such grim realities, the nuclear problem itself is not an urgent concern in the Third World, though Christians and others there see the militarization of the superpowers and their confrontation throughout the world as a major source of their continuing tragedy. Diversion of resources to supply arms in their own countries and continuation of the enormous world expenditures for military wares robs the resources needed to address the problems of millions suffering oppression, hunger, malnutrition, and displacement. The issues of deep-seated economic injustice must not be obscured in our urgent concern about the threat of nuclear devastation.

### **The Just War Doctrine**

Christians across the ages have asked whether and under what circumstances going to war may be justified. Beginning with the premise that it is wrong for human beings to take the lives of others, any willful act of violence must bear the burden of proof. There must be a greater and realistically achievable good to justify the evil done by waging war. Out of that conviction, theologians and philosophers have developed the just war argument and the various criteria for determining both when and how war may justly be fought.

Several overtures asked whether or not the criteria of the just war doctrine are applicable to war in the nuclear age. We believe that they are. It is precisely on the basis of the just war doctrine that participation in nuclear war must be condemned. Such criteria as “proportionality” (that the costs in life and property of engaging in war are in reasonable proportion to the good that is to be achieved) or “discrimination” (that civilian, noncombatant targets are to be spared) cannot be met when nuclear weapons are used. The just war criteria are particularly useful in moral discourse beyond and outside the church, for they have become embedded in international law.

The overtures also requested a clarification of apparent references to just war doctrine in the official teachings of the church. Though such references have been used in the past more often to justify war than to avoid it, they can now be used to condemn nuclear war. We do not believe that an attempt should be made to change these confessional statements.

## Nuclear Deterrence

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? A serious question is also raised by the teachings of Jesus. He clearly condemns revenge. Yet deterrence is based on the threat of “massive retaliation.”

The policy of nuclear deterrence and the technical, political and ethical complexities involved have been the subject of study by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (*The Challenge of Peace*, 1983), the United Methodist Council of Bishops (In Defense of Creation, 1986), the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, D.C. (*The Nuclear Dilemma*, 1987), and the National Association of Evangelicals (*Guidelines: Peace, Freedom and Security Studies*, 1987). Extensive study of these matters by the Presbyterian Church is reflected in statements by preceding General Assemblies and the essays on deterrence and just war published by the Advisory Council on Church and Society and the Council on Theology and Culture in *The Peacemaking Struggle: Militarism and Resistance*.

The 183rd General Assembly (1971) stated that nuclear deterrence is not morally defensible unless it is for the sole purpose of buying a little time to work for peaceful alternatives. The same position was taken by the Roman Catholic Bishops in 1983. In that “little time,” the arms race and dependence on nuclear deterrence have continued. The General Assembly believes with the Methodist Bishops that “the moral case for nuclear deterrence, even as an interim ethic, has been undermined by unrelenting arms escalation.” Synod of the Piedmont *Overture 41-87* states that “a national policy of nuclear deterrence is immoral, because it implies the willingness to destroy another nation, with no way to avoid the inclusion of civilian populations in the destruction.” 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.

Does this require immediate unilateral nuclear disarmament? Though some believe so, we agree with the report of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington (1987), which states that mutual vulnerability and the existing policy of nuclear deterrence are conditions that cannot immediately or easily be changed. Sudden and unilateral change in any “stable” relationship could in fact be dangerous. However, that neither justifies

the policy nor its continuance. Since the policy of nuclear deterrence is in danger of becoming an end in itself, we must exercise our individual and corporate influence to effect a change in national policy as rapidly as possible. We also have the obligation to suggest alternative ways of defending the nation in a dangerous world.

### **Alternatives to Nuclear Deterrence**

The Strategic Defence Initiative (space-based defense) has been presented as an alternative. The 198th General Assembly (1986) approved a lengthy resolution concluding that this alternative was not acceptable not only because it provided the basis for a new round of highly sophisticated armaments, but also because it was seen as assuring hostility with the Soviet Union for decades to come. The Assembly, therefore, called upon the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union “to cease research, development, and testing plans for space-based ballistic missile defense systems, and to enter into bilateral and multilateral negotiations in order to ban the testing and deployment of weapons in space and to develop cooperatively peaceful uses of outer space.” We have found no reason to question that judgment or the recommendation.

A strategy of civilian-based defense, grounded in nonviolent resistance, is now a matter of serious study at several major universities. Civilian-based defense involves work stoppages, strikes, slowdowns, boycotts, demonstrations, disabling key components of the infrastructures and other nonviolent means as ways of refusing to consent to be governed by an invading power. There is risk of failure in such an alternative, as there has always been in conventional military defense. For civilian-based defense to have a chance at success would require a degree of national consensus, discipline, and devotion which we do not believe exists in this country at the present time. We do believe, however, that the church needs to give careful study to the growing literature in this field.

Negotiation is the alternative of choice in the present situation. We agree with the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, D.C., that “the primary way—perhaps the only way—out of dependence on the current balance of terror is through steady modification and improvement of political relationships. There is no escape via technological fixes.” Issues for negotiation include: (a) A halt to research on, and the development and testing of new generations of nuclear weapons (comprehensive test ban);

- (b) A halt to production and deployment of additional nuclear weapons (nuclear freeze);
- (c) A mutual pledge of “no first use”;
- (d) The immediate and substantial reduction of existing nuclear stockpiles;
- (e) The phased elimination of all nuclear weapons by a given date (2000 is often suggested);
- (f) The demilitarization of space;
- (g) The strengthening of existing non-proliferation treaties;
- (h) The search for negotiated ends to regional conflicts which would result in the reduction of militarization in many countries.

The 1988 INF Treaty calling for the elimination of intermediate range nuclear missiles in Europe provides momentum for steady, strenuous efforts toward the negotiated elimination of all nuclear weapons, toward the establishment of a reliable basis for peaceful existence on the planet, and ultimately toward the abolition of war as a method for settling disputes between nations.

### **Just Peace**

The church in the nuclear age must shift its energies from considerations of just war to the urgent and primary task of defining and serving a just peace. A nuclear stalemate or even the elimination of all nuclear arms, is still far from God’s shalom. Shalom is the intended state of the entire human race. It involves the well-being of the whole person in all relationships, personal, social, and cosmic. Shalom means life **in** a community of compassionate order marked by social and economic justice. Peace without justice is no peace; that is why the Bible so often reflects God’s special concern for the poor and powerless.

The great biblical visions of global peace—swords into plowshares, every family under its own vine and fig tree—are fundamental to thinking about just peace. Such a peace is ultimately God’s gift; we need to avoid the proud illusion that we can create it by human effort alone. But Christian obedience demands that we move toward that peace in all possible ways: by extending the rule of law, advocating universal human rights, strengthening the organs of international order, working for common security and economic justice, converting industry to peaceful production, increasing understanding of and reconciliation with those we identify as enemies, developing peacemaking skills, constructing concrete manifestations of just peace across barriers of conflict and injustice, and other means.

## **Strategies of Transformation**

The embodiment of just peace in the policies of nations and the practices of people will require nothing less than the transformation of the social order. The Reformed tradition has given particular emphasis to the calling of Christians to seek such transformation. While we take the power of evil seriously and do not expect transformation to be easy, total, or permanent, we have confidence that the creative, redeeming, and transforming power of God is at work in human society as well as in the church.

Faithful, energetic and resolute commitment to social transformation shapes Christian obedience in a nuclear age as in every age. As we noted at the outset, the church and all the people of the church are called to expose and oppose every violation of the spirit of God's rule of peace, righteousness and justice, and to work for the manifestations of the biblical vision of peace and justice in every possible way.

On the basis of what has been said thus far about the shape of this age and of what we have heard from the reflection and response of Presbyterians in the United States and Reformed churches around the world, what strategic options are available for the exercise of this Christian responsibility in our time?

### **1. *Extraordinary Use of Ordinary Means***

The extraordinary nature of our time demands that the ordinary means of seeking the transformation of political and economic policy be pursued with extraordinary vigor and imagination.

There is a broad consensus in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that the primary course to be pursued in seeking the transformation of political and economic policy necessary to just peace is the vigorous and creative use of the ordinary and legal means available to us as citizens of the United States. Responses from study across the spectrum of the church's diversity were also in remarkable agreement that neither the corporate structures of the church nor the great majority of individual members have yet pursued this strategy of transformation in a truly serious and sustained way.

What is envisioned by the extraordinary use of ordinary means is not the formation of a Christian political party, or the endorsement of parties or candidates by the denomination. Rather, it would involve continuing efforts by the General Assembly to fashion policies of just peace and advocate them in the public order, enhanced focus by General Assembly agencies and governing bodies on peacemaking strategies and

resources concentrated on public policy transformation, and strenuous political involvement by all Presbyterians as individuals.

Such strategies must be directed to using the political process fully and creatively. Voting in elections is essential, but voting is not enough. Our democratic system opens to Presbyterians the possibilities of helping to select candidates; of questioning prospective candidates concerning these important issues; of participating in campaigns; of writing, telephoning, and interviewing elected representatives; of circulating petitions; of appearing before party platform committees or before legislative committees. Presbyterians can help educate office holders regarding critical matters by providing facts and reading materials to their staffs, by giving first-hand reports of travel to global flash-points, even by persuading candidates and elected officials to visit such places themselves. There is, finally, the opportunity to stand for public office or to enter government service directly.

Such strategies must also be directed to influencing public opinion. The transformation of society does not come about only through the political process narrowly defined. In our democratic society, public opinion is a powerful determinant of what legislation is passed and how presidential policy is executed. Participation in public policy interest groups can have an effective impact on elected officials as well as on public opinion. A letter to the editor may effect more change than a letter to a member of Congress. Church school classes and other study groups can lead people to reexamine their opinions. In a day when the power of the media is so great, we must work far more seriously at guaranteeing a presence and hearing for our perspectives and policies. We must meet with editorial boards of papers, managements of radio and television stations, find out the issues they are interested in and the formats they prefer, and then provide them with material that will advance the cause of just peace in the world.

Such strategies must also be directed to influencing corporate policy. The policies and decisions of the great business, financial, and economic institutions of our nation can help or hurt the search for just peace as much as government decisions. Decisions to buy, to sell, to invest, to disinvest, to hire, to fire, to develop new products, to terminate old ones, to open plants, to close them—all affect economic justice and thereby the peace of the world. Some affect very directly the manufacture of arms, the stability or instability of the nuclear stand-off, and other matters vital to the life and death of our planet. Far more Presbyterians are in these institutions than in the government, and their opportunity to influence corporate policy is considerable. Through their investments, the General Assembly and the governing

bodies and Presbyterian institutions have legally defined opportunities for seeking corporate dialogue and policy change.

In short, Presbyterians must exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens as they have never done before. This must be a major thrust for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), encouraged and enabled in every way possible by the General Assembly and all other governing bodies of the church.

## ***2. Noncooperation and Disobedience***

There are Presbyterians whose consciences are not fully satisfied by efforts to transform government and corporate policies by ordinary means. Because of the human suffering that presently results from those policies and because of the unimaginable destruction of life which is their possible result, these brothers and sisters feel that their obedience to God's authority compels them to follow various courses of non-cooperation with or disobedience to civil authority.

There is a long history of Presbyterian resistance to the state in the name of obedience to God. It is grounded in the recognition that the biblical presumption of obedience to duly constituted human authority acknowledges clear exceptions to the general rule. When the human authority becomes tyrannical or genocidal, thoroughly unjust, dangerously irrational or incompetent; when the human authority demands worship, requires idolatry or forbids the preaching of the gospel, obedience to God calls forth resistance to human authority.

Our Reformed theological heritage also recognizes the occasional exception to the basic stance of obedience to civil authority. John Calvin wrote: "But in the obedience which we have shown to be due to the authority of governors, it is always necessary to make one exception, and that is entitled to our first attention: that it does not seduce us from obedience to God." John Knox, told that his judgment opposed the common order, replied: "I am more sorry that the common order is contrary to the institution of Jesus Christ." And John Witherspoon, answering an "advocate for submission," put it this way: "to refuse this inherent right (of resisting a government) in every man, is to establish injustice and tyranny and leave every good subject without help, as a tame prey to the ambition and rapacity of others."

In the present time, some Presbyterians led by conscience to seek transformation of social policies through noncooperation or disobedience see their obedience to God to require decisions about vocation, leaving jobs or not entering them. Others refuse to register for the military draft, or seek recognition as conscientious objectors. Some

Presbyterians shape their investment activity so that it does not “cooperate” with military production or support injustice or oppression; others engage in tax resistance. Some Presbyterians have prayed and demonstrated at nuclear weapons facilities; others have occupied government offices or entered military installations. Presbyterians provide sanctuary for Central American refugees in disobedience to existing government policy.

Most actions undertaken in noncooperation are within the law; many undertaken in disobedience break the law. It is not illegality that characterizes this strategy of Christian obedience, but the individual’s decision that obedience to God requires a definitive “No,” expressed in action. Any action involving civil disobedience should of course be open, nonviolent, and undertaken with full readiness to accept the legal consequences.

Because of the strong presumption for obedience to duly constituted human authority in both Scripture and the Reformed tradition, actions of noncooperation or disobedience to that authority should not be undertaken quickly, rashly, unthinkingly, or automatically. They should be undertaken only after study of the Word, prayerful waiting on God, and searching moral discourse with brothers and sisters in the faith.

At the same time, because of the extraordinary and unprecedented nature of the current situation, cooperation with and obedience to duly constituted human authority should not always be automatic. Neither those who resist nor those who obey should be arrogant toward the other. Both should continually face the possibility that they could be mistaken. Both, moreover, should be united in their conviction that the imperative of just peace requires transformative actions.

“God alone is Lord of the conscience,” and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels should respect and affirm the right of individuals to follow either course. This principle, which many believe to be a triumph for private judgment, is in fact an awesome responsibility. Believing individuals are thereby called, with the community of faith, to search the Word of God, the teachings of the church and a reasoned understanding of human thought and history; and on the basis of that search, through prayer and debate, to discern what obedience God requires in their particular circumstance.

Several overtures in 1983 specifically requested guidance on the question of withholding tax payments as a means of resisting military policies. Although based on responses to studies, tax resistance seems to be more seriously questioned in the church than most other forms of resistance, we believe that what has been said in the preceding paragraph



applies equally to this particular form of obedience to higher authority. When on the basis of informed conscience Christians conclude that obedience to God forbids the willing payment of a specific tax, the church must respect their actions as honorable expressions of Christian conscience. Those who take such action are advised to secure good legal advice, a strong support group, and be prepared to suffer the full penalties of the existing law. Care should be taken not to involve others in those penalties, unless others have agreed ahead of time to be so involved.

According to the “frivolous tax return” law (Section 6702 of the Internal Revenue Code), taxpayers who submit an honest return but seek to explain on the face of the return why they are not paying a portion of their tax, out of conscience, and also taxpayers who pay the full tax due but protest it in writing on the return are assessed a \$500 penalty for filing a “frivolous return.” This is in addition to the usual penalties for any late payment or nonpayment. Although “frivolous” has a technical legal meaning of “without basis in law,” the law seems to carry an extreme penalty for an act of conscience.

The “Peace Tax” bill before the Congress would enable citizens for reasons of conscience to designate a portion of their tax that would otherwise support military expenditures for a U.S. Peace Fund instead. We reaffirm the support of previous General Assemblies for this legislation and call for its redrafting to include those who object to “war taxes” on “just war” grounds as well as those who are conscientious objectors to all wars.

### ***3. Concrete Manifestations of Just Peace***

The church has a unique opportunity to create throughout the world concrete local expressions of just peace in the midst of and around all of the lines of conflict, enmity, and misunderstanding. The church of Jesus Christ is a worldwide community; it is not defined or bound by the borders and limits, the conflicts and enmities of the many nations within which it exists. While the church understands that “nations may serve God’s purposes in history” and works to influence their political and economic policies toward just peace, the church neither waits nor depends on the civil authorities to build it.

The biblical vision of shalom calls us to live as brothers and sisters with all of God’s people. We can model the meaning of this vision of just peace by joining with Christians in other places to create concrete local manifestations of reconciliation, compassionate order, and just economic and social relationships in the midst of alienation, disorder, conflict, poverty, and oppression. We can work toward the construction

of just peace, city by city, project by project, place by place, in the conviction that the expansion of such islands has its own transformative effect on the larger social order. This strategy requires not so much the willingness to resist the policies of governments as the readiness to ignore or transcend the barriers they so often erect.

The marks of this strategy for transformation are several. It envisions the direct personal participation of Presbyterian Church members with other Christians “behind the lines” to accomplish a specific result, not merely financial support of projects. It envisions a result that is visible and concrete—a clinic, a church, a cooperative, a community center, housing, a water system—not merely new awareness and friendships, though all parties may well develop increased concern for justice and peace. It envisions an interaction and presence over a period of time, not merely a visit.

Ulrich Barniske, pastor of the Reformed congregation in Brandenburg in the German Democratic Republic, told participants in the International Peacemaking Consultation of Reformed Churches of the destruction of the fine old parish church by American bombers just a few days before World War II ended, and showed photographs of the walls that still stand. The vision of “concrete manifestations of just peace” is generated by reflection on that reality. What if a governing body of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) were to covenant to work with the Christians of East Germany to restore that church? Architects, carpenters, masons, builders, and resources from our church joining East German counterparts to repair the wreckage of an awful war across forty years of alienation and ideological hostility—to become indeed in Isaiah’s vision those who “raise up the former devastations . . . and repair ruined cities.”

Congregations and presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are encouraged and should be enabled to establish such projects of reconciliation and just peace in countries and communities traditionally identified as “enemy territory” and those where injustice, alienation, and oppression are most terrible.

### **Nonviolence as a Means of Advocating Social Justice**

The 1983 General Assembly specifically requested study of an issue that cuts across all discussions of strategies of transformation: the role of nonviolence in the search for social change.

Though the Reformed tradition has justified the resort to violence in response to particular forms of oppression, its emphasis on the

reconciling vision of love presumes that the choice of nonviolence is more appropriate. Nonviolence is both a way of life and a tactical method. As a way of life, it seeks peacefully to affirm creation, to respect the value and dignity of all human beings, and to recognize the potential for human fulfillment in all of God's people. As a tactical method, nonviolence asserts the value of peaceful methods of change, such as voting and peaceful assembly and petition for redress of grievances; and, when led to resistance, it attempts to use modes such as civil disobedience that are appropriate to the ends of a just peace. As a way of life, nonviolence requires a total commitment to nonviolent principles; as a tactical method, it advocates a selective employment of nonviolent, peacemaking strategies.

Jesus warned against violent responses to personal attacks and lived nonviolently in the midst of violence. The dominant tradition of the early church prior to Constantine was nonviolence. The tradition of personal nonviolence continued in the monastic movement, and is a vigorous part of contemporary Christianity among Mennonites, Quakers, and Brethren as well as among pacifists in mainline denominations, including our own.

The embrace of nonviolence as a strategy that can be employed by large groups of people seeking social change has become more prominent in recent times. The movements led by Mohandas Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King, Jr., in the United States are the most frequently cited examples. When trained, dedicated groups of people assert their rights and refuse to strike back when others try forcibly to deny those rights, the others often become violent. The capacity to inflict suffering must then be matched by the capacity to endure it. This means that nonviolent persons must not only avoid physical violence, but must also attempt to reject the internal violence of the spirit.

When nonviolent efforts at social change involve the breaking of law, as they did for both Gandhi and King, the strategy is characterized as civil disobedience. Nonviolent, open civil disobedience, rooted in conscience, is a demanding tactic as well as a principled one. There are procedural elements that must be recognized if civil disobedience is to be distinguished from capricious breaking of law or advocacy of anarchy: regular means of social and political change must have been attempted; the particular law or policy that is being challenged must be judged unjust on the basis of higher standards of justice; the law must be broken openly and nonviolently; respect must be shown for those who enforce the law and for the law itself by a willing acceptance of its penalties if they are assessed.

Whereas, the General Assembly does not believe resistance is normative, it is the judgment of the General Assembly that in a country

like the United States, where the rule of law is in effect, actions of resistance should be nonviolent. When such actions involve breaking a law, the procedural elements of civil disobedience should be followed.

### **The Corporate Stance of the Church**

The question as to whether a faithful corporate response of the church related to nuclear weapons and militarization should be included in one of our church's confessions has been central to the discussion of these issues for at least the last ten years. The full implications of such a stance are not clear, but at the least it would appear to mean that opposition to the possession of nuclear weapons and the militarization of society would be held to be matters of confessed faith for all Presbyterians. Many Presbyterians now make such a confession of faith for themselves. However, recent study indicates that the authentic general consensus that would make such a confessional statement meaningful and effective for the corporate church is not present at this time.

The whole thrust of this policy statement is to recognize the faithfulness of Presbyterians who make a variety of responses in the interests of just peace, when those responses stem from serious search and informed conscience. The question of such a confessional statement will undoubtedly remain a part of the church's ongoing dialogue as to its faithful response. Our polity plainly sets forth the procedure by which the church makes official confession of its faith in a new situation. Any statement of faith or required mode of confession growing out of this dialogue should be made through the regular constitutional process.

We prefer the term "a stance of obedience to God" to the suggestion that the General Assembly might adopt "a stance of resistance." Such a term emphasizes that Presbyterians are responding to God in their efforts to transform the policies of the state and society toward just peace, whether through cooperation and obedience in relation to the state or through noncooperation and disobedience. As we affirmed at the outset, ultimate obedience is to be given only to God and not to the state, recognizing that "Yes" to God may sometimes require "No" to the state. This we believe to be the authentic, historical Presbyterian stance, but it is well to enunciate it afresh in this extraordinary time.

From a stance of obedience to God, the General Assembly can encourage and enable Presbyterians in the extraordinary use of ordinary means for seeking transformation of the social order. From a stance of obedience to God, the General Assembly can also choose to affirm Presbyterians in acts of resistance, as it has done in the case of sanctuary workers, conscientious objectors to military service, and civil rights workers.

From a stance of obedience to God, the General Assembly can re-order its corporate mission priorities to focus more clearly on creating

concrete manifestations of just peace. From a stance of obedience to God, the General Assembly can also evaluate its own involvement in the industrial-military-academic complex and act decisively, as past General Assemblies have in the matter of investments; and it can urge synods and presbyteries as well as colleges and seminaries related to the church to similar exercise of corporate efforts toward transformation.

In short, the corporate church as well as each member is called first and always “to be faithful to Jesus Christ and the biblical vision of peace and justice and to work for its manifestation in every possible way.”

### **Communities of Dialogue and Support**

We have referred repeatedly to the fundamental Presbyterian affirmation that “God alone is Lord of the conscience,” and the commitment of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to respect and support the right of individual members to walk the path of Christian obedience dictated to them by informed conscience. We have called all Presbyterians to a renewed searching of conscience concerning the shape of Christian obedience in a nuclear age.

The church has a duty not only to respect conscience but to help form it. Conscience is an individual matter, but it is not properly informed by unbridled individualism or in isolation. Conscience cannot be mandated by the General Assembly or any other governing body of our church, but the insight of the church through the ages cannot be ignored.

The development and nurture of Christian conscience best occurs in communities of dialogue and support in which the leading of the Holy Spirit can be discerned through “study of the Word, prayerful waiting on God, and searching moral discourse with brothers and sisters in the faith.” The congregations of our church are the best place for the formation of such communities. All members of the congregation should be invited and encouraged to participate. These communities should be small enough for genuine dialogue and diverse enough to include people with differing initial opinions regarding Christian obedience. The aim of such communities should not be to arrive at a single position, but to enable members to establish and ground their own convictions clearly, having studied and prayed together and having heard and explored the convictions of others. Through such continuing communities, members of the congregation would covenant to respect and support each other as they act on their varied convictions of conscience.

Presbyterians will be both encouraged and sustained by such communities of dialogue and support as they undertake the demanding vocation of social transformation toward just peace to which Christians are called in this time.

### **The Presbyterian Constitution**

In this statement, the General Assembly has taken positions on issues that are controversial and have stirred great emotion across the church. We have called the members and governing bodies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to a new engagement with God's Word and Spirit and a rigorous search with sisters and brothers for the meaning of Christian obedience in this time of unprecedented danger. We have sought to take these positions and to sound this call in faithfulness to the Constitution of our church as well as to the Lord we know through Scripture.

In the Book of Confessions we find that

... the members of the church are emissaries of peace and seek the good of humanity in cooperation with powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics. But they have to fight against pretensions and injustices when these same powers endanger human welfare. Their strength is in their confidence that God's purpose rather than human schemes will finally prevail. (The Confession of 1967 (9.25).)

Further, that

... the church in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace. This search requires that the nations pursue fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at risk to national security, to reduce areas of strife and to broaden international understanding. Reconciliation among nations becomes peculiarly urgent as countries develop nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, diverting their manpower and resources from constructive uses and risking the annihilation of mankind. (The Confession of 1967 (9.45).)

In the Book of Order, we find an array of statements about the duty of both the corporate church and individual members to seek peace in the world. We read of "the recognition of the human tendency to idolatry and tyranny, which calls the people of God to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word of God" (G-2.0500) and of "sharing with Christ in the establishment of his just, peaceable, and loving rule in the world" (G-3.0300). Ministers and other officers promise to "work for the reconciliation of the world" (G-14.0206 and G-14.0405).

The General Assembly has been asked to give guidance to Presbyterians on a variety of issues related to living in the nuclear era. There is no better way to summarize the positions taken in this paper than with words already in the Constitution of the church. What remains is to live out these words in both personal and corporate life.

No sphere of creation or culture is exempt from God's dominion, and in them all God is to be glorified by the obedience of faith and of faithful service. Life in all its dimensions—personal and social, private and public, individual and corporate—is to be lived before God and unto God. It is understood as an expression of gratitude to God for the gospel of redeeming grace. As the covenant community gathers to worship God through the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments, so it disperses to serve God in the world. Family, culture, society and government, as well as the life of the individual are subject to the transforming power of God's work in Jesus Christ. The justified seek justice, the forgiven show compassion, the reconciled pursue peace, and the redeemed advocate freedom. (S-6.0500)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### *General Implementation*

Whereas, recent General Assemblies have received numerous overtures from presbyteries seeking guidance on the applicability of criteria of the just war doctrine to nuclear war, a theological position on peace, nonviolence as a means of social justice, the present “frivolous tax return” law, tax resistance, and the morality of nuclear deterrence; and

Whereas, for the past five years many of the people and organizations of the church have engaged in prayerful consideration of these issues; and

Whereas, the report on Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age, responding to these overtures and issues, has been considered and approved by the General Assembly;

The 200th General Assembly (1988) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), therefore:

1. Expresses appreciation to the members and groups within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches that have participated in the process of study and response that was part of the preparation of the report on Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age.

2. Expresses appreciation to the seventeen members of the Task Force on Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age for their prolonged hard work and their service to the church.

3. Directs the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to print the policy report and recommendations in a format suitable for study and discussion; to distribute a copy to each congregation, presbytery, and synod and to the educational institutions and resource centers of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as well as to each member church of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches; and to make additional copies available at cost for use in the church.

4. Affirms the creative witness and work toward just peace carried on through the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program and urges increased participation and support for such witness and work called for in the policy and recommendations of the Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age report.

### *Communities of Dialogue and Support*

Whereas, it is the position of the General Assembly that in this extraordinary time decisions to resist should never be hasty, careless or automatic, and decisions to cooperate should not always be automatic; and

Whereas, decisions of conscience require careful study of the Word, faithful waiting on God, and earnest moral discourse with sisters and brothers in the faith; and

Whereas, both the Presbyterians who cooperate with the state and those who do not should avoid arrogance and humbly accept the possibility that they could be wrong; and

Whereas, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels should respect and give emotional support to those who in conscience follow either course, when decided in the careful way and community context described above;

The 200th General Assembly (1988) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), therefore:

1. Urges sessions to develop communities of dialogue and support within or among their congregations for the development and nurture of conscientious decision by Presbyterians about Christian obedience in a nuclear age and for the continuing prayerful support of those Presbyterians as they live out their varied commitments to seek the transformation of social and economic policy toward just peace.



2. Requests the Peacemaking Program staff or other appropriate unit or office to develop a brief manual on organizing and sustaining such communities for use by congregations.

3. Encourages the middle governing bodies to consider occasional workshops and training events for pastors and lay leaders focusing on the understanding and skills necessary for encouraging and conducting dialogue on controversial issues.

4. Urges seminaries to give special attention to courses and events on dealing with controversial issues through preaching and pastoral work and fostering the attitudes and skills needed to facilitate study and dialogue in the presence of controversy and conflicting opinions.

5. Requests the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program to consider convening consultations of persons involved in particular occupations to explore options for supporting just peace policies within their occupations and to communicate the findings and suggestions to the peacemaking structures of congregations and presbyteries.

### *Extraordinary Use of Ordinary Means*

Whereas, the extraordinary nature of our time demands that the ordinary and legal means of seeking the transformation of political and economic policy be pursued with extraordinary vigor and imagination; and

Whereas, such pursuit of transformation involves not only vigorous participation in the political and economic processes of the United States, but also the support and strengthening of the rule of law in the world and the organs of international order and justice, as well as attempts to supplement the concept of “national security” with that of “common security”; and

Whereas, such pursuit of transformation must involve not only the corporate advocacy and effort of the church but also the lifestyle and personal witness of individual Presbyterians and families;

The 200th General Assembly (1988) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), therefore, urges its members, governing bodies, agencies, and officers to strenuous political activity in behalf of those things which make for just peace and in opposition to those things which threaten the human race and contravene God’s peace among all people and nations, and specifically:

1. Requests the General Assembly Council to assess the structures and strategies through which the General Assembly and other governing bodies attempt to represent the just peace and transformation goals

of the church in the public media and make appropriate recommendations for more effective witness and for joining with ecumenical efforts seeking a stronger voice for “mainline” churches with the media and report such recommendations to a subsequent General Assembly.

2. Declares its deeply held conviction that respect for and extension of the rule of law within nations and between them is a fundamental procedural element of just peace in the world and directs the officers and agencies of the General Assembly to advocate to government officials at every appropriate opportunity that the United States Government:

a. conduct its international relations in full accordance with the generally accepted principles of international law and the obligations assumed under the United Nations Charter and the Charter of the Organization of American States respecting the limitations on national sovereignty found there;

b. accept the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and adhere to its judgments, while seeking always to improve procedures for the speedy and equitable resolution of the international disputes that will inevitably continue to arise;

c. join with other nations to impose moral, political, and economic sanctions on nations judged guilty, after due process, of violations against the rule of law;

d. model and cultivate respect for and scrupulous adherence to the rule of law by officials and agencies of the government in the discharge of their responsibilities.

3. Requests the peacemaking, education, and international affairs structures of the General Assembly to consider special emphasis on the concept of the “common security” of all nations as a needed supplement to the concept of “national security” in the preparation of programs and materials for use in the church and report to a subsequent General Assembly.

4. Urges the Unit on Social Justice and Peacemaking to consider ways by which Presbyterian support for organs of international order and justice such as the United Nations and its specialized agencies and the World Court can be strengthened, particularly through programs of education and awareness involving governing bodies and individuals and report to a subsequent General Assembly.

5. Urges individual members and ministers of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to intensify their current participation in efforts to achieve just peace policy goals through the political process and further urges them to consider one or more of the following specific steps as new commitments to personal work and witness:

a. conscious efforts to seek to influence public opinion by taking personal stands in informal groups, by regular letters to the editor, by appearances on radio or television talk shows or call-in programs;

b. utilizing access to corporation policy processes gained by being a director, stockholder, or executive to advocate and work for corporate policies that are humane and just and advance God's peace in the world, taking into account the impact of business policies and practices on all constituencies and communities touched by them;

c. involvement with organizations exploring the economic and political policy connections between developed high-consumption societies and the interrelated problems of global militarization and systemic poverty and working for systemic changes that will bring about greater economic justice and a more peaceful world order;

d. practicing and advocating a lifestyle of modest consumption and using the resources thus freed, through tithes and sacrificial giving, to support the church and other organizations seeking world economic policy change or engaged in direct reconciliation, development and economic justice projects;

e. personal participation in church-sponsored efforts or others consistent with the just peace policies of the General Assembly that are creating concrete manifestations of just peace across lines of conflict and economic injustice throughout the world.

***Demonstration of a Concrete Manifestation of Just Peace Involving Children and Young People, War Toys and Peacemaking***

Whereas, many children and young people have general anxiety and particular fears about nuclear war; and

Whereas, many toys and games now manufactured and sold teach children and youth that war is play and violence is acceptable; and

Whereas, Reformed Christians in other parts of the world are courageously opposing the inculcation of militaristic mentality in children through school programs and war toys; and

Whereas, many Presbyterian children and young people have been creatively and actively involved in church and community peacemaking activities;

The 200th General Assembly (1988) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), recognizing the willingness and opportunity of children and young people to be peacemakers:

1. Urges Presbyterians not to purchase war toys or games in any form.
2. Requests the Ministry Unit on Social Justice and Peacemaking,

in its corporate responsibility work, to enter into discussions and file shareholder resolutions with manufacturers of war toys, through ecumenical coalitions if possible, seeking an end to their production.

3. Requests the appropriate units in the peacemaking and education structures of the church to consider development of strategies and materials

a. to help children think about the impact of toys and play and find ways of creatively disposing of the war toys they already own;

b. to enable local peacemaking groups to initiate or join community efforts to educate the public about the effects of war toys and seek agreement not to purchase them;

c. to assist Presbyterian children and young people to develop “pen pal” ties with children and young people in sister churches in other nations, particularly across lines of conflict and injustice.

4. Requests the appropriate units or agencies to explore the establishment of one or more National Presbyterian Peacemaking Scholarships for high school seniors who have been involved in peacemaking activities and wish to prepare for careers that serve the search for just peace.

### *International Dialogue and Cooperative Effort*

Whereas, participants in the International Peacemaking Consultation of Reformed Churches held at Stony Point, New York, in May 1987 strongly urged continuation of the practice of consultation among the Reformed churches of the world on major global policy issues; and

Whereas, the 194th General Assembly (1982) urged Presbyterians “to undertake a specific ministry of reconciliation with the peoples of the Soviet Union and those under her influence”; and

Whereas, the church is called “to create throughout the world concrete local expressions of just peace in the midst of and around all the lines of conflict, enmity, and misunderstanding”;

The 200th General Assembly (1988) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), therefore:

1. Requests the appropriate ministry units and committees to consider ways of continuing the international dialogue begun in the recent study process on issues of nuclear arms and global militarization, social justice, and visions of a just peace by

a. regularly consulting with churches around the globe and taking initiative in developing ongoing discussions on these issues among churches in the Reformed family and in wider ecumenical circles;

b. encouraging and facilitating the establishment of biennial consultations to which representatives from other Reformed churches and major religious bodies throughout the world are invited to discuss these issues with representatives from presbyteries;

c. maintaining a list of representatives of churches around the world who would be willing to consult with members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and encouraging presbytery peacemaking committees to invite such representatives to work with congregations within their presbyteries for a period of time.

2. Commends the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program and the National Council of Churches for their programs to foster increased understanding between the peoples of the United States and the Soviet Union and urges the governing bodies and members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its related educational institutions

a. to initiate or participate in local ecumenical celebrations in this country of the 1000th anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1988;

b. to foster increased communication between U.S. and Soviet citizens by travel, scientific exchanges, and cultural and religious exchange;

c. to increase the study of Russian history, culture, society, and language in colleges related to the Presbyterian Church;

d. to follow up the 1988 Mission Study theme on the Soviet Union with continuing study by local church groups of Russian history and analyses of current developments in the Soviet Union.

3. Urges the United States and the Soviet Union to undertake a joint major humanitarian project in the Third World to demonstrate symbolically a course of cooperation and redirection of resources on the occasion of retiring intermediate range missiles and directs the Moderator and Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to communicate this recommendation to the President of the United States and appropriate Congressional leaders, and to the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union.

4. Declares efforts to create concrete local manifestations of just peace across lines of conflict, injustice, and misunderstanding throughout the world to be a significant dimension of the peacemaking program of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and urges presbyteries and congregations to undertake one or more such efforts through which Presbyterians can participate directly with Christians in other nations in projects of reconciliation, economic development, and just peace.

5. Requests the peacemaking, social justice, development, and ecumenical relations structures of the General Assembly to develop a coordinated strategy for assisting presbyteries and congregations to discover

and select opportunities for direct involvement with churches or congregations in other parts of the world in efforts to create concrete local manifestations of just peace, for facilitating the resulting participation and projects, and for reporting the experience and results to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as part of the church's peacemaking effort.

### *Conscientious Disobedience*

Whereas, there are times when some Presbyterians feel that obedience to God's authority compels disobedience to civil authority; and

Whereas, there is a long history of Presbyterian resistance to the state in the name of obedience to God, grounded in the Scriptures and the Reformed theological heritage; and

Whereas, overtures submitted to the General Assembly in 1983 and 1985 requested guidance on "the ethical issue of resistance to military policy through withholding taxes" and the matter of the "frivolous tax return" penalty imposed by the Internal Revenue Service; and

Whereas, the assertion that "God alone is Lord of the conscience" is a fundamental constitutional principle of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), leading the church throughout its history to respect and support the conscientious actions of Presbyterians;

The 200th General Assembly (1988) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), therefore, reaffirms the historic Presbyterian stance of obedience to both God and the state but to God alone when the state misuses its power to oppose God's purposes for just peace and, further,

1. Declares that conscientious actions of noncooperation with or disobedience to duly constituted authority, taken in the name of obedience to the higher authority of God should be open and nonviolent and should demonstrate respect for law, even if conscience demands breaking the law, by accepting the consequences and respecting the authorities carrying out the law.
2. Gives respect and emotional support for individual and congregational acts of noncooperation and disobedience that meet the guidelines established in the Report on Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age.
3. Requests the General Assembly Council, through the appropriate instrumentalities, to set up and administer a Fund for Obedience to Higher Authority for the assistance of those who suffer financial loss or difficulty as a result of acts of conscience, the fund to be supported by voluntary gifts designated for this purpose and disbursed according to published guidelines.

4. Encourages the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program to seek ways of facilitating communication among Presbyterians who are led by conscience to choose strategies of noncooperation and disobedience.

***Just War and Nuclear Deterrence***

Whereas, overtures submitted to the General Assembly in 1983 and 1987 requested interpretation concerning the adequacy of the just war doctrine as reflected in the Confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in response to the nuclear age, and a declaration concerning the morality of the policy of nuclear deterrence; and

Whereas, it is the position of the 200th General Assembly (1988) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that “the criteria of the just war doctrine are applicable to war in the nuclear age,” and that participation in nuclear war must be condemned on the basis of the just war criteria; and

Whereas, the policy of nuclear deterrence depends on the credible threat to use nuclear weapons; and

Whereas, the 183rd General Assembly (1971) found nuclear deterrence morally defensible only if “the sole purpose of nuclear deterrence is to buy a little time to work for peaceful alternatives”; and

Whereas, the policy of nuclear deterrence in effect since the end of the Second World War, has been in danger of being regarded as an adequate and permanent means to national security rather than an interim measure of self-defense; and

Whereas, the policy of nuclear deterrence and the technical, political and ethical complexities involved have more recently been the subject of intensive study by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1983), the United Methodist Council of Bishops (1986), the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, D.C. (1987), and the National Association of Evangelicals (1987);

The 200th General Assembly (1988) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), therefore:

1. Declares that since nuclear war cannot satisfy the criteria for just war, it cannot be understood to be in accordance with the provisions of the Book of Confessions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). (The Second Helvetic Confession (5.258), “The Duty of Subjects”; The Westminster Confession of Faith (6.128), “Of the Civil Magistrate.”)

2. Directs the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly to notify the President and the Congress of the United States of the 200th General Assembly’s (1988) conviction that neither the participation of the nation

in nuclear war nor the policy of nuclear deterrence as an end in itself can be justified by the traditional just war doctrine which is fundamental to moral discourse about war and embedded in international law and urging them to the energetic and unremitting pursuit of acceptable policy alternatives.

3. Petitions the Congress and the Executive Branch of the Federal Government to amend the legislation and regulations governing Selective Service to accord the right of conscientious objection not only to those who object to all wars but also to those who object to particular wars on "just war" grounds.

4. Urges all Presbyterians as well as the governing bodies and agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to advocate with renewed vigor realistic negotiations with the Soviet Union for steps which will enable the nations to move away from nuclear deterrence and the militarization of space by reaching agreement on a "freeze" on the production and deployment of nuclear weapons; a comprehensive test ban; a mutual "no first use" pledge; phased, mutual, verifiable reduction of nuclear arsenals and the eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons; demilitarization of space; strengthening of existing nonproliferation treaties; and negotiated ends to regional conflicts.

5. Requests the appropriate ministry unit of the General Assembly Council to provide on request to congregations and presbyteries a bibliography of nonviolent, civilian-based defense materials as an alternative to nuclear deterrence.



INTRODUCTION TO A STUDY GUIDE ON THE REPORT  
CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE IN A NUCLEAR AGE

The purpose of this study guide is to help Presbyterians and other interested Christians to explore and discuss the major topics covered in the report on *Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age* (CONA). Each session covers one of the topics in a one-hour period. Because of space limitations, several of the major topics of CONA are not included in this study guide.

At the beginning of each study session is an indication of the pages of CONA which cover that topic. Give each participant a copy of CONA and read, in advance, the pages covered in the next session.

This study could be done by the session, adult church school classes, appropriate committees, ecumenical groups, Presbyterian Women, or on a retreat.

The sessions are designed to encourage persons of various opinions to discuss these important issues and enable all to participate freely.

Each participant should have a CONA report and a Bible. You will need a chalkboard or newsprint and a flexible meeting space so that both the whole group and small group discussions may take place. Each participant should also have a copy of the background paper of CONA. It is available for \$2.00 from Presbyterian Distribution Service (PDS Order #OGA-88-102).

These are suggested study sessions. Change the designs in a way which will be of maximum use to the group you are leading. For instance, leaders of a small-sized class might wish to keep the group together instead of dividing it into small groups, as is often suggested.

Several resources published by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program might be helpful. They are available at \$.75 from Presbyterian Distribution Services (PDS), 1 Teaneck Road, Ridgefield, New Jersey 07660, until February 28, 1989. After that date PDS will be at 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202-1396.

*How Should Congregations Talk About Tough Issues* PDS #919-88-709

*Dealing With Conflict in the Congregation* PDS #919-85-767

*The Miracle of Pentecost: Peacemaking in the Acts of the Apostles* PDS# 919-88-708

*How Should Christians Be Involved in the Public Arena* PDS #919-86-709

## SESSION I

### GOD'S GIFT OF SHALOM—OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD

*5 Minutes:* Open with prayer, introduce yourselves, and indicate the purpose of the study group. This session is based on pages 1-3, 8, 13 of CONA. We are called to obey God because of what God has first done for us. This fact is exemplified in the Ten Commandments. The passage begins “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt” and therefore God expects the people to respond in a certain way.

*15 Minutes:* One of the specific things God has done is to give us the gift of peace. Work in three subgroups with each assigned one of these passages. Each subgroup will determine and report what that text says about God's peace. (1) In Genesis 1:1-2:4, the gift of God's shalom—wholeness and peace and right relationships—is a part of the created order from the very beginning. (2) II Corinthians 5:18ff reminds us that “all this is from God, who through Christ, reconciled us to God-self and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” (3) Psalm 85:8-13—peace comes when there is justice.

*20 Minutes:* We are, therefore, called to be peacemakers in every part of our lives. Divide the group into five subgroups. Give each subgroup one area, and address “What do the scriptures say about peacemaking and obedience to God in that context?” Peacemaking within: (1) Self: after his sycamore and dinner encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus was changed (Luke 19:1-10). (2) Family: cheated by his brother (Genesis 27:5-27), Esau instead responds with love (Genesis 33:1-11). (3) Church: in Acts 15:1-29, the early church's focus shifts from Jerusalem to “the end of the earth” and controversy erupts. (4) Community: Jesus could have shunned or ridiculed the despised Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7-15). (5) World: swordmaking is for aggression and conquest; and continued plowmaking is for nurture, growth and harvest (Isaiah 2:4). Ask each subgroup to report to the whole group.

*15 Minutes:* God's peace, which includes the experience of justice, is given to nations and groups as well as individuals. As CONA states, “The church has a unique opportunity to create throughout the world local expressions of just peace.” Read the first three paragraphs of “Concrete Manifestations of Just Peace” on pages 13 and 14. As a whole group develop a list of projects the denomination might develop with partner churches around the world to create concrete manifestations of a just peace. Then list similar projects (local and global) in which your congregation might participate.

*5 Minutes:* Describe Session II and close with prayer.

## SESSION II

### PRESBYTERIANS AND THE NUCLEAR AGE

*5 Minutes:* Open with prayer and review Session I. This session covers the topics of pages 3-5 of the CONA report.

*15 Minutes:* Write on newsprint or chalkboard:

The governments of the United States (beginning in 1945) and the Soviet Union (beginning in 1949) have been in competition with each other to build more nuclear weapons with greater accuracy and shorter delivery times. Unfortunately what was often viewed as a means to security has made nations more insecure. For the first time in human history, nations have the capability of killing millions of people in a matter of minutes and even ending civilization as we know it.

Since nuclear weapons were used in World War II, General Assemblies and many Presbyterians have expressed deep concern about the nuclear arms race. Many Assemblies since 1946 have reiterated this concern. During the early 1980s over 130 presbyteries voted to endorse the bilateral nuclear weapons freeze as a way of ending the arms race. Refer to page 32 "Presbyterian General Assemblies and the Nuclear Arms Race."

Discuss the following questions: (1) How would you describe the nuclear arms race? (2) What are its dangers to the world? (3) Why do you think General Assemblies ask all nations with nuclear weapons, and not just the U.S.A., to end the arms race? (4) Why do you think so many Assemblies and Presbyterians have opposed the arms race?

*15 Minutes:* Presbyterians have often given three reasons, based on their Biblical-theological understanding for expressing public concern about the arms race. Divide the group into three subgroups with each assigned one of the reasons. Discuss the rationale, and then present it to the larger group, indicating agreement/disagreement.

1. God alone is the ultimate source of security. Any human effort to play God to attain absolute security, including the development of nuclear weapons, will fail as did the Tower of Babel. Gen. 11:1-9; Ps. 23; John 14:27.

2. The earth is a gift given to humankind by God to enjoy and protect for the next generations. The nuclear arms race hinders our serving as stewards of the earth. Ps. 24:1-2; Lev. 25:23; Lk.12:42-46.

3. God is working in the world granting peace, overcoming brokenness and despair, and offering humankind the possibility of wholeness and peace. The nuclear arms race is a stark and tragic reflection of our brokenness. II Cor. 5:17-21; Eph. 2:14-18.

*20 Minutes:* Each subgroup presents rationale and indicates agreement/disagreement. Ask the larger group to respond.

*5 Minutes:* Briefly describe the next session and close with prayer.

## PRESBYTERIAN GENERAL ASSEMBLIES AND THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE

The following are five of many statements on the arms race written by General Assemblies since 1946:

1. "The General Assembly calls for the cessation of the manufacture of atomic weapons lest we become a contributor to an atomic arms race. The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were only a beginning. International cooperation and control is the only possible long-term solution." (158th General Assembly, 1946)

2. "Since today both the United States and the U.S.S.R. have strategic nuclear deterrent forces that cannot be destroyed by a surprise attack, the initiation of nuclear war by either nation is unthinkable because this would be an act of national suicide. However, future developments could shortly upset this relatively stable balance of terror and increase the likelihood of outbreak of nuclear war. Even to maintain a secure deterrent posture in the climate of the escalating arms race will require increased expenditures which are desperately needed for dealing with critical social ills. Now is the opportune time to halt the strategic arms race." (183rd General Assembly, 1971)

3. "We do assert that no system or weapon developed since the advent of the nuclear age has increased either the permanence of security or the psychological requisites for it. The major military result has been the development and deployment of systems and weapons with the capacity to destroy all life many times over. The argument that deterrence has prevented major war may be valid for the past and this moment. It is no guarantee for the next moment or the future, particularly in light of the spread of nuclear technology and the increased risks of terrorism or accident." (190th General Assembly, 1978)

4. "We know that peace cannot be achieved simply by ending the arms race unless there is economic and political justice in the human family. Peace is more than the absence of war, more than a precarious balance of powers. Peace is the intended order of the world with life abundant for all God's children. Peacemaking is the calling of the Christian church, for Christ is our peace who has made us one through his

body on the cross.” Peacemaking: The Believer’s Calling (192nd General Assembly, 1980, p. 202, 121st General Assembly, 1981, p. 138)

5. “. . . the curbing of the arms race makes for authentic national security, freeing resources to meet the needs of people at home and abroad and removing a major motivating cause for other nations to engage in such an arms race.” (183rd General Assembly, 1971)

### SESSION III

#### JUST WAR AND NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

*5 Minutes:* Open with prayer and review Session II. This session covers the topic of pages 6-8 of CONA.

*5 Minutes:* The traditional Presbyterian and mainstream Christian answer to when to use armed force has not been pacifism, though there are Presbyterian pacifists who believe Jesus’ teachings prohibit the use of armed force. The Presbyterian tradition has been reliance upon the just war theory which has claimed that though war is always an evil, sometimes a greater evil necessitates the use of armed force.

Four of the criteria used to determine if a war is justified are (write beforehand on newsprint or chalkboard): (1) The use of armed force has to have as its end result the restoration of wholeness and health (shalom). (2) The force used has to be in proportion to the danger (you don’t kill a mosquito with a sledge hammer). (3) The use of force has to discriminate between combatants and noncombatants. (4) There has to be a reasonable chance of success. Traditionally, all the criteria must be met for the use of armed force to be justified.

*25 Minutes:* Divide into four small groups to apply the above criteria, asking if the use of nuclear weapons would ever be justified. Use the last 10 minutes for small groups to report to the whole group.

*20 Minutes:* Nuclear deterrence is the belief that possessing nuclear weapons will prevent other nuclear nations from using theirs. Some leaders of nuclear nations believe that possessing these weapons “deters” or prevents their use.

Describe three major views of nuclear deterrence:

1. Nuclear deterrence has prevented nuclear war and conventional wars between the U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. during the last forty years. It has therefore been a moral force in international politics.

2. Nuclear deterrence poses a real threat to the survival of God’s earth since it implies the willingness to use nuclear weapons. Therefore,

the only moral alternative for a nuclear nation would be to begin to unilaterally dismantle its nuclear arsenal.

3. Nuclear deterrence “has been in danger of being regarded as an adequate, permanent means to national security rather than an interim means of self defense.” This view agrees that the use of nuclear weapons is immoral but rejects unilateral disarmament. It argues for multilateral reduction and the cessation of developing more. This is the position of CONA.

*5 Minutes:* Describe Session IV and close with prayer.

#### SESSION IV

#### OUR CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN THE PUBLIC ARENA: THE EXTRAORDINARY USE OF ORDINARY MEANS

*5 Minutes:* Open with prayer and review the previous session. This session will cover the topics of pages 9-14 of CONA.

*15 Minutes:* The Biblical story teaches that God and God’s people are active in the public arena: offering laws, liberating captive people, welcoming the despised, caring for the widow and orphan. We are called, as Christians, to be active in those arenas as well, using methods and processes available to us to further God’s promised peace. Not to act . . . is to decide for the status quo. Bishop Desmond Tutu says, “If an elephant is standing on the tail of a mouse, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

Introduce the session with these words and then read the Good Samaritan story (Luke 10:30-35). What was Jesus attempting to teach us by telling that story? What would the Good Samaritan do if he found a beaten-up robbery victim everytime he traveled that road? Would he continue to heal the wounds or would he attempt to do something about the cause of the problem? Many Christians have concluded that charity and social justice are both important. Besides bandaging victims we must work to change the situations that make more victims.

*15 Minutes:* The CONA document asserts that the arms race is such an enormous threat to God’s earth that a continuous nuclear stand-off cannot be morally justified any longer; we must go beyond “business as usual”, and make extraordinary use of the ordinary means of public influence and social change to move beyond mutual nuclear triggers.

Divide into three subgroups. Ask each subgroup to list the reasons why Christians might assert that our times demand the sustained,

energetic and committed use of the ordinary means of shaping peaceful change. Then list possible reasons why some would say, “No, our ordinary participation in the social and political life of our world is sufficient.” Share the lists with the whole group and ask for reactions.

*20 Minutes:* Back in subgroups, develop a list of concrete “extraordinary use of ordinary means”—efforts church people might initiate to convince the governments of nations with nuclear weapons to end the arms race. Share your lists with the whole group. Read page 10 of CONA and give reactions.

*5 Minutes:* Describe Session V and close with prayer.

## SESSION V

### CONSCIENTIOUS DISOBEDIENCE

*5 Minutes:* Open with prayer. Review the previous sessions. This session will cover pages 11-15 of CONA.

*10 Minutes:* Ask participants to talk about occasions when participants or someone they knew said “no” to intense peer pressure or cultural expectations—like telling racial-ethnic jokes, cheating on their income tax or misusing alcohol. Participants relating the incident should indicate why “no” was said and what helped them say “no.”

*5 Minutes:* Most of the time, most Christians routinely obey the law. In our society, that is the norm. Why is that the case?

*15 Minutes:* Yet as we see in Acts 5:29, people of faith will occasionally proclaim, “We must obey God rather than human beings.” Exodus 20:3 commands that only God is God and only God can require the fullness of human commitment, loyalty and obedience. In our Reformed tradition, we have long affirmed that “God alone is Lord of conscience.” We revere those faithful whose consciences have led them to disobey unjust laws: Moses, Bonhoeffer, Peter and the Apostles, Joan of Arc, Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, and John Knox.

Sometimes, faithful obedience to God may require disobeying the law. Tell this story: Reverend Elihu Spencer was caught in a dilemma. If he obeyed his conscience and concurred with the request of the just-declared revolutionary government and traveled for them to remote parts of the country to promote the revolution, the established government would condemn him as a traitor. Nevertheless, he did it. The year was 1775. Spencer, a Presbyterian from New Jersey traveled for the Continental Congress to North Carolina and recruited support for the

Continental Congress to North Carolina and recruited support for the Revolutionary War. The British tried to arrest him and did burn the manse where he lived.

Ask participants to suggest reasons why Spencer may have chosen to be engaged in a treasonous activity? Where did he find support for his decision?

*20 Minutes:* Back in subgroups, ask participants to indicate what-factors would have to be present for them to consider conscientiously disobeying the law? After a list of those factors has been compiled, ask participants to indicate what kind of support they would want from other Christians. Read the last paragraph of page 11 of CONA and the first of page 12 and give reactions.

*5 Minutes:* Describe Session VI and close with prayer.

## SESSION VI

### COMMUNITIES OF DIALOGUE AND SUPPORT

*5 Minutes:* Open with prayer and review the previous sessions. This session covers pages 16-18.

*10 Minutes:* In many congregations a “tight-lipped peace smiles above coffee cups”. Disagreements are avoided and controversy is shunned. Ask why conflict is so often avoided in the church and list the reasons on newsprint.

*10 Minutes:* Ephesians 4:15-16 suggests that we are called to speak the “truth in love” with the “whole body” participating. Henri Nouwen invites us to be both pastoral and prophetic as we develop our congregations as safe places (pastoral) where we can face our world’s pain (prophetic). Why would anyone deliberately want to look at problems or encourage disagreement? Divide into three subgroups to list the benefits of open discussion of tough issues within a diverse community and report those back to the whole group.

*15 Minutes:* Effective listening is a key to dialogue and decision-making, especially when controversy is present. Practice listening by doing paraphrasing. Choose a partner and talk about any topic for a minute paraphrasing as you go. Paraphrasing is putting in your own words what someone else has said as accurately as possible. After one partner has practiced paraphrasing, ask the other one to do so. When participants are comfortable with the technique, ask each partner to share their opinions about the role of the church in the public arena



with the other one paraphrasing. When the group is finished, discuss “What did we learn from the practice of paraphrasing? How can it contribute to more effective conversation about tough issues?”

*15 Minutes:* Some Presbyterians who have been engaged in conscientious disobedience have asked for our support. Ask the subgroups to answer “Why should we support church members or leaders who are engaged in acts of conscience with which we may not agree?” Ask subgroups to list reasons for offering support and to report those to the whole group. See Appendix suggestions for providing for dialogue and support within the congregation.

*5 Minutes:* Close with a circle prayer, asking participants to say a sentence prayer, if they wish. End with the Lord’s Prayer.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPPORTING ACTS OF CONSCIENCE IN THE CONGREGATION

The tenet “God alone is Lord of the Conscience” has always been important to Presbyterians. This means that though it is true that we are called to be informed by scriptures and the community of faith, our actions and beliefs will be controlled by our individual understanding of what God calls us to do. Sometimes this means that we will be in the minority—maybe even a minority of one. Sometimes it even means disobeying the law as it did for John Witherspoon and many other Presbyterians during the 400 years of Presbyterianism.

A major challenge for Christians is supporting the right of conscience and supporting the persons themselves even if you disagree with their position and their act of conscience. The following are suggestions for providing support to people engaged in acts of conscience in your congregation:

1. The pastor could preach on “God alone is Lord of Conscience.”
2. The session could consider how to support members who take positions which are not shared by the majority. Urge the session to cooperate with other congregations and organizations in providing this support.
3. The session could meet with those engaged in acts of conscience and ask them what kinds of support they want and need. Provide opportunities for them to speak to the congregation.
4. The peacemaking committee could gather information about support and advice available in your community or region which can

be of help to members engaged in acts of conscience.

5. The pastor and (or) other church leaders could provide counseling to those considering acts of conscience. Purchase books and other resources for the church library which can be helpful.

6. The Christian Education Committee could develop a study for junior and senior highs on the nature of conscience. Young people need to make a number of serious decisions about education, vocations, drugs, sex, and draft registration which all require acts of conscience.

7. The pastor could develop a support group for people who are wrestling with whether the purposes of their vocation are consistent with their conscience.

8. The session or a support group could give funds to the “Fund for Obedience to Higher Authority” of the General Assembly which provides assistance to those who suffer difficulty as a result of acts of conscience.

## APPENDIX

### SUGGESTIONS FOR HAVING DIALOGUE IN THE CONGREGATION

1. Ask the pastor to preach on the value of conflict in the congregation. Diversity and disagreements can be vehicles for health and growth and do not necessarily produce divisiveness.
2. Provide training to church officers on conflict management skills. Use the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program resources: *Dealing With Conflict in the Congregation* **and** *How **Should** Congregations Talk About Tough Issues*.
3. Set ground rules for discussion of issues where there will likely be disagreements, e.g.: (a) We will listen carefully to each other, in order to understand, not refute. (b) We will regard disagreement as normal. (c) We will “leave all weapons at the door” —no ridicule, name-calling, or belligerent behavior will be allowed. (d) In a meeting, we will let each person who wishes to speak once before anyone speaks a second time.
4. Ask each organization in your congregation to have a meeting or two on effective listening and finding common ground with people with whom there is disagreement. *How Should Congregations Talk About Tough Issues* (mentioned above) can be helpful.
5. Form a Community of Dialogue and Support in the congregation. Ask people who you know disagree on important issues to promise to be an intentional member of this community for one year. Using an experienced leader, have the group start by studying *How Should Congregations Talk About Tough Issues* and another one of the resources of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program. Write to that office for a list of their resources. Then ask the community to study the CONA report.
6. Christians are a people who have experienced God’s reconciliation in various ways in their own lives. Provide opportunities for members who have experienced reconciliation to share that with others in the congregation.
7. When announcing to members that they will discuss an issue on which there will be disagreement: emphasize the opportunity for forging ties of deeper community, stress the interest and creativity inherent in the issue, and underline the chance of making a difference on something so important. Do not entangle the issue in fear.
8. Committees and task forces with persons of diverse opinions are often stronger than those where everyone agrees. Find ways of celebrating the diversity in your congregation.