

Thoughts of a Modern Centurion

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I was born and raised in Bremen, a city in northwest Germany, in a middle-class family. At age fifteen, I became interested in politics, joined a neo-orthodox communistic "cell group" at high school, and absorbed Marxist philosophy with a passion. Thousands of young Germans were experiencing the same passion in the late 1960s to create a new society dominated by peace and justice. In 1968, riots at the universities signaled a strong resistance to the establishment and an opposition party outside Parliament was founded by some radicals.

In 1970, I was in crisis. I discovered that the people I most wanted to help were not experiencing peace and justice but hate and despair. With despair of my own, I abandoned the idea of changing society by pressure and revolution. Instead, I began exploring ways of changing individual members of that society. Part of my search was a religious quest.

One day I encountered two missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when they were tracting in my neighborhood. After three weeks of investigation and a tough internal struggle, I gained a testimony that God really existed and that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was not only a social reformer ahead of his time but the son of God. I became a member of the Church in 1972, the only member in my Protestant family to do so.

I attended the University of Bonn; and in 1975, I joined the armed forces of Germany as a volunteer where I am now an officer. My choice of a profession is unusual but not unique for a Latter-day Saint. About a hundred German members, including perhaps forty draftees, are currently serving in the armed forces. Among them are the branch presidents of Wuerzburg and Heide and high councilors from Hanover and Munich stakes. Still, it is not a popular

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choice and I have been forced to think deeply about my religious and civic commitments as peace movements in Europe have gained intensity and momentum.

Since the late 1970s and in the face of growing NATO concerns, the Soviets have built up a force of SS 20 intermediate-range missiles, each with three warheads, each ten times more powerful than the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. Two-thirds of these are aimed at Western Europe. West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt voiced his worries in a landmark address in London in October 1977, pointing out that the alliance had no system comparable to the SS 20. He called for parity in such missiles because the two superpowers were agreeing in the SALT negotiations to parity at the strategic or intercontinental nuclear level. At the end of 1979, NATO adopted a "two-track" policy, negotiating with the Soviets to limit deployments of SS 20 missiles in Europe and simultaneously making plans for new NATO deployments of Pershing II and Cruise missiles, beginning December 1983.

Anti-nuclear groups in West Germany organized, reorganized, and intensified their activities. Millions of men, women, and children began participating in demonstrations and marches. September 1983 marked the beginning of Germany's *heisser Herbst*, hot autumn. Politicians and pundits anxiously predicted riot-caused deaths as a result of these massive protests.

No one died, fortunately, despite some spectacular brawls between demonstrators and the police. The first of the new generation of atomic weapons were stationed within the Federal Republic, frustrating the first main goal of the peace movement. Nevertheless, they have channeled their efforts into picketing and blockading U.S. bases, holding demonstration marches, sponsoring public lectures to inform Germany's citizens on the dangers of a nuclear war in Western Europe, and organizing boycotts against the numerous nuclear energy plants. This "hot autumn" was not a seasonal phenomenon.

This explosive public discussion about nuclear weapons, disarmament, and aims of the arising "peace movement" did not stop at the church doors, and German Latter-day Saints struggled to find their own positions on the issue. These efforts were both helped and handicapped by the lack of an official Church statement comparable to the pastoral letter for Catholics which spells out the moral and ethical implications of modern peace endeavors, produced by West Germany's Catholic bishops in April 1983.

The appearance of this letter suddenly sharpened the focus on religious aspects of the peace question. Members reported their confusion and even embarrassment when colleagues and neighbors asked them for their opinions "as a Mormon." Although many of them had personal opinions, they did not know what the "Mormon" opinion was. Several approached me, knowing I was serving in the army. Occasionally the topic came up in Sunday School classes, but in most cases, nobody answered. In one ward, the bishop and many members decided to join with several anti-nuclear groups for a peace demonstration. All the churches of the city had been invited to participate and the bishop felt that it would be appropriate to have the ward represented. He asked the stake president for clearance a month in advance. After three weeks

of hesitation, the stake president forbade participation, then only days before the meeting was to occur. I also heard reports that several ward and branch sacrament meetings heard talks on the subject but that the priesthood leaders firmly squelched any follow-up and rebuked those who had spoken, fearing that any topic with political potentiality would create dissension.

Nearly every week, a letter comes, asking for my opinion on the subject. Most of them say that they have talked to a bishop or stake president, but that these leaders have not been able to give them any information. The Church has no official position; no guidance in the handbook or article in an official magazine seems to point a direction. Only two articles on military services have been translated in German, both as part of the seminary program. "This is your choice," they say, or "The Church has no position." The implication clearly left in the members' minds is not that they are free to come to their own conclusions, but that any conclusion is somehow suspect because it is not approved by the Church. Lack of an official position does not open the door for a variety of personal positions but instead makes any position at all questionable.

The discussion was spurred by the active number of groups in the peace movement, all of them vigorous. A diversity of opinions arose among the German Mormons, and the local priesthood leaders tried to keep the meetings aloof from these discussions, sometimes in vain. The wide variety of opinions within the movement made this decision especially difficult.

To elucidate this it is necessary to explain the broad structure of the divergent groups of the peace movement.

Most of them can be associated with one of the three approaches: the leftists, the Christians, and those offering an alternative ideology.

Within the peace movement in general, communists loyal to Moscow comprise the largest and most active grouping, but the leftist banner also includes conscientious objectors as well as several other organizations. Led largely by active members of communistic parties, they moved quickly and received a lion's share of the early publicity, giving the total peace movement a reputation of being communist-led and/or -inspired.

The Christians may be characterized as the most enthusiastic pacifist faction within the peace movement, at least partly in an effort to counter this reputation. Their most important principles, such as non-violence and civil disobedience, have influenced both the other main camps. Among the Protestants, four initiative groups have been formed: *Christen fuer die Abruestung* (Christians for Disarmament), *Aktion "Ohne Ruestung Leben"* (The "Life Without Arms" effort), *Frieden schaffen ohne Waffen* ("Create Peace Without Weapons"), and *Sicherung des Friedens* (Securing the Peace).

Securing the Peace must be regarded as a counter-movement to Life Without Arms since it argues that peace must be secured by military means. Among its leaders are strategy-researcher and former general Wolf Graf von Baudissin (Count Baudissin) and political scientist Kurt Sontheimer, both very influential in Germany today.

Catholic Christians have organized themselves within "Pax Christi," the worldwide peace effort founded in France in 1944. They participate actively

in the peace movement with the dual demands of "Disarmament and Security." Also, the German Catholic youth organization BDKJ (*Bund deutscher katholischer Jugend*, Alliance of German Catholic Youth) makes repeated appeals to the public.

An interdenominational initiative, *Schritte zur Abruestung* (Steps toward Disarmament), composed mainly of peace scholars, journalists, and ministers, entered the discussion in significant numbers in May 1981, centering on the basic concepts of "Pax Christi."

The third column of the peace movement is comprised of the so-called *alternatives*. This diverse set of groups has become a significant force, unified mainly by its position of a morally superior consciousness from which they radically criticize technical progress, denounce modern patterns of consumption, and practice a counter life-style of, for example, living in the country and eating no processed foods. A unified subset is the "Greens," an ecologically oriented political party that has, since its organization in 1980, become the fourth largest party in the West German parliament after the Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and Liberals. All these alternative groups strongly reject the use of nuclear energy and the construction of nuclear power plants and are committed to oppose with all nonviolent means the stationing of new nuclear weapons on German soil.

All three broad movements unite in questioning NATO's basic premise of deterrence and, failing that, a willingness to use nuclear weapons first to stop even conventional Soviet aggression. All urge a doctrinal shift away from nuclear weapons toward nonnuclear means of defense. Most members of these movements also demand nonviolent means of resolving conflict since they are conscientious objectors. The Federal Republic currently requires fifteen months of compulsory military service from all male citizens, although those who obtain conscientious-objector status may complete so-called *Ersatzdienst*, or alternate service, in the social sector — for example, in hospitals or homes for the elderly. Members of the peace movement call their *Ersatzdienst* "peace service" and denounce military service in the armed forces as "war service."

An open confession of fear of nuclear war characterizes the peace movement, coupled with an appeal to emotion which deliberately counters the "technocratic rationalism" of the military, security agencies, and government bureaucracies. Such tactics lead to typically spontaneous drives and activities, rather than long-range plans and careful preparation. Some of its own people worry, consequently, about burnout and boredom; but the peace movement has been politically active longer than its opponents had hoped and has achieved a significant place in the political spectrum. A survey in September 1983 showed that 65 percent of German citizens were opposed to the stationing of additional American missiles in their country,¹ a change of 25 percent since 1980. This figure would probably be about the same now.

Germany, the boundary between East and West, has been a divided nation since 12 September 1944, when representatives of the United States of Amer-

¹ *Das Parlament*, 31 March 1984, p. 2.

ica, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain agreed on the demarcation line between the future occupation zones of the Western powers and the USSR. That line today forms the 950-mile border between the German states, defying geographical, historical, and economical logic.

Thus, members of the Church in West Germany live with the daily reality of the Iron Curtain. Many have relatives in the German Democratic Republic. The experiences of Nazi fascism and World War II left still-deep scars. Many older members who survived these years are convinced that any kind of militarism is unrighteous. Some totally reject militarism in any form and try to influence the young men to become conscientious objectors — in their view, the only real choice for a Mormon Christian. When I joined the Army, five other young men in the ward were contemplating the same action. Local priesthood leaders were sufficiently influential that the other four changed their minds. One elders' quorum president refused to shake hands with me after he heard of my decision. Since that time, I have felt the reservation of some members even when I have served in a stake presidency or on a high council. I have heard criticism of the "rough, military atmosphere" I create — possibly a fair criticism!

I am sympathetic with these members who have had the experiences which led to such aggressive pacifism. I am not convinced, however, when they argue that since Germany began two world wars, we can never take up arms again although the United States is apparently free to. The situations are not, in my mind, so completely different.

Their aggressive pacifism is underscored by the destruction of explicit patriotism as a result of the way the Third Reich corrupted the German love of homeland. As a result of their Church membership, many German members feel a certain bond with the United States, but it does not necessarily include harmony on political issues and is far from a universal sentiment in any case.

LDS peace proponents are still searching for a direction. There is no official Church position on this matter, and local priesthood leaders hesitate to take a stand. Vigorous debates on both sides can be supported from the scriptures. More contemporary counsel from General Authorities is unavailable because the majority of members lack sufficient knowledge of English to read statements on modern war and advice to servicemen.

An exception is the First Presidency statement on the basing of the MX missiles, 5 May 1981, particularly the second paragraph: "First, by way of general observation we repeat our warnings against the terrifying arms race in which the nations of the earth are presently engaged. We deplore in particular the building of vast arsenals of nuclear weaponry. We are advised that there is already enough such weaponry to destroy in large measure our civilization, with consequent suffering and misery of incalculable extent." This statement has circulated widely in unofficial translation, and many members apply it to the German situation without considering its suitability.

A majority of members avoid many of the questions by not being politically active. A few belong to the Social Democratic party, presumably as a result of

their antipathy towards the Catholic Church, which supplies most of the members of the Christian Democrats. Many young or intellectual Mormons are becoming increasingly sympathetic to the Greens, seeing in their party platform a genuine alternative to environmental pollution and other pressing ecological problems. However, most draw back at the Greens's ideological affinity to socialism. Among the older members, the CDU certainly demands the most respect, although the Liberals also list a small number of Latter-day Saints among their ranks. Most Mormons in Germany try to define peace in terms of the gospel, without reference to political structure. Many believe that the present situation cannot be changed and accept unavoidable war as a sign of the last days. Engaging in open opposition on the nuclear question is most frequently criticized as inappropriate and even baffling behavior.

Although official Church meetings avoid such discussions, they still take place (especially on the question of rearmament) privately. It is probably the single most-discussed topic at gatherings of Latter-day Saint college students. Yet no "Mormon" position seems to be developing — in part at least because of the lack of a medium of their own where this subject can be discussed.

Because of my profession, I have wrestled with many of these questions, perhaps more urgently than some. The first question, "Can a Christian be a soldier?" is deceptively simple. The soldier's work is frequently mentioned, both in the Old and the New Testament, with no hint that it is in itself either dishonorable or unlawful. Soldiers as a group are not, for instance, denounced as are the money changers of the temple (John 2:16). When soldiers came to John the Baptist for advice, he said, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages" (Luke 3:14). He did not suggest they should leave the army; in fact he implied that they should continue to draw their wages as soldiers, but without complaint. It is also remarkable that the four centurions mentioned in the New Testament are all commended in one way or another (Luke 7:9; 23:47; Acts 10:2; 27:43). The centurion at Capernaum is praised for his faith; and the centurion Cornelius was honored to the extent that in his home the first gentile community was founded. There is no suggestion that these two men of faith were to give up their army careers.

Of course, the scriptures can provide precedents without providing detailed answers to specific modern questions. They do not speak specifically of nuclear weapons, which, since 1945, have changed the nature of warfare to make any war in any nation the possible means of ending human life on the globe, even threatening the existence of our planet, or, even on a lesser scale, triggering major and irreversible ecological and genetic changes. The nuclear threat may begin as a political or technological question, but it transcends religious, cultural, and national boundaries. No answer can be satisfactory which fails to consider its moral and religious dimensions.

The nuclear age began almost four decades ago, but the safe and stable system of deterrence in past years is now viewed with moral and political skepticism. A prominent member of the peace movement in Germany, Carl Friedrich von Weizsaecker, compared our situation with that of a mountaineer who suddenly wishes to be in the valley. His wish does not change his situation.

What he has to do is climb down very carefully, a process requiring a great deal of time and patience.

Keeping the peace in our age is a moral and political imperative. But peace is not just the absence of war, nor can it be achieved solely by maintaining a balance of power between enemies. For religious people, peace implies a relationship with God which entails forgiveness and reconciliation. Peace must be constructed on a basis of basic human values like truth, justice, freedom, and love.

One may claim that war has settled some things, many of great importance. It was by war that Lot was saved from the Babylonians. War gave the land of Canaan to the Israelites, and war took it away from them. War established the Roman Empire, giving a century or more of peace as complete as the West has ever seen. War prevented the Saracens from completely dominating Europe. War achieved the American independence and definitely put an end to slavery.

On the other hand, many deeply sincere individuals, keenly aware of the evils of the world, believe strongly that they are best defending peace by refusing to bear arms. Others advocate "active nonviolence" to render ineffective any oppression attempted by force of arms. From the earliest days of the Christian church, some members have committed themselves to nonviolent lifestyles on the basis of their understanding that the gospel of Jesus prohibits all killing. This Christian vision is not passive about injustice and the rights of others. It rather affirms and exemplifies what it means to resist injustice by nonviolent means.

All these options are open to individuals. But a government threatened by armed aggression, whether just or unjust, *must* defend its people. It may not choose nonviolence as long as even a minority of its citizens require defense.

Today, the scale and horror of modern warfare make it totally unacceptable as a means of settling differences between nations. It becomes increasingly difficult to use any kind of armed force, however limited initially in intention and in destructive power, without facing the possibility of escalation to broader, or even total, war. We must, as a political reality as well as a moral imperative, search for methods by which both individuals and nations may defend themselves without using violence. We must refuse to legitimize the idea of nuclear war.

Deterrence is not an adequate long-term strategy. It is a transitional strategy, justifiable only in conjunction with resolute determination to pursue arms control and disarmament. The arms race is a dangerous act of aggression which does not provide the security it promises.

It has long been NATO policy that nuclear weapons, especially so-called tactical nuclear weapons, would likely be used if NATO forces in Europe seemed to be in danger of losing a conflict with conventional weapons. The United States still has the responsibility to protect allied nations from either a conventional or nuclear attack. Especially in Europe, deterrence of nuclear attack may require stationing nuclear weapons for a time, even though their possession and deployment must be subject to rigid restrictions. The need to

defend against a conventional attack in Europe imposes the political and moral burden of developing adequate, alternative modes of defense to the present reliance on nuclear weapons. NATO has to move rapidly toward a "no first use" policy but while simultaneously developing an adequate alternative defense posture.

Building peace within and among nations is the work of many individuals and institutions. We, as Christians and especially as Latter-day Saints, can give an example in our own lives by establishing that kind of peace which Berthold of Regensburg, a most famous preacher in the Middle Ages declared, is peace with God, peace with ourselves, and peace with our neighbors. For "God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7).