



## Security in a Fresh Perspective

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When Kathryn Koob was held as a hostage in Iran, she never doubted that sooner or later she would walk away from her captivity alive. I had regarded that as part of her buoyant optimism, but in an address here she gave us the deeper reason for her hopefulness. A fellow Iowan had helped Katie understand it herself by suggesting to her: “Don’t you suppose that the reason you felt that you were coming home was that finally you didn’t have to come home because your ultimate homecoming is in God?” It was that deep security which Katie had which made it possible for her to sustain a fresh and hopeful perspective during 444 days.

Another fresh perspective she had during that ordeal was her attitude toward her captors. As she told the students here at Wartburg upon her return, she decided early on in her captivity that she would not allow hate to consume her. That has been evident in all her public comments since her return as well. What makes it possible for a person to transcend hatred when shouts for her death were continuously rising from the streets outside? To be free from hatred under such circumstances requires a deep sense of security. It is like the security expressed by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans:

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (8:38-39)

That is the basis for our security as Christians, and that is the source of our freedom. No one can be free unless he or she has a sense of intimate and strong security as the foundation for that freedom. (The insecure person is compulsive about proving that he or she really does amount to something.) It is that freedom which is celebrated by the same Apostle Paul who expressed his deep security. He did it in a ringing call which deserves frequent repetition: “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). One of the manifestations of that freedom in the life of Christians is the free-

dom to see things in a fresh perspective as Kathryn Koob did even through 444 days of duress.

That is a mark of our personal lives—and of our lives as citizens as well. It is made possible because the Christian citizen, like Kathryn Koob, is one who has a security that transcends his or her nation. It is a security that is not finally dependent even on the survival of America, a security that is rooted so deeply in the grace of God that being at home in him is the

final resting place. Out of such security Christians are free to live in the world, free to have a fresh perspective on things. Because we don't have to hold onto this life at all costs, we are free to live in it fully.

Karl Marx called religion an opium. He believed that Christianity, like other religions, had a tendency to make people numb to the problems that were at hand. They couldn't see the real world because they were preoccupied with some other kind of world. There is, of course, more truth to that than we are usually willing to admit. At the same time I believe that history has demonstrated that Christianity does not remove us from the reality of the world, but that it gives us a fresh perspective on what is real in the world. Kathryn Koob demonstrated that in a personal way, but it's been happening throughout history.

In the history of our own country, before the Civil War, slavery was accepted as an institution, and everybody thought that it could not be changed without a collapse of the whole economy. But a quiet man, John Woolman, persuaded by his Christian faith, went from slave-owner to slave-owner, and tried to convince them on the basis of their Christian conviction to dismiss their slaves. Everybody thought he was a fool; he did not see things that were real. Yet, it was only a few decades later that those same slave-holders freed their slaves. John Woolman had a fresh perspective that was not open to other people. He was free to see the way the world really was because he was a Christian and a citizen.

The devastation of Europe from the Second World War left thousands of refugees. It was the Christians who influenced public policy of this land to open its doors to people, even people who had been our enemies but a few months before. That is a fresh perspective.

Finally, it was surely out of Christian convictions that Martin Luther King had his dream of blacks and whites being able to vote equally and having equal access to the things of our society. At the time that he first spoke it, it seemed like an unrealizable dream. But today, who among us would disagree with the reality of what he saw? His Christian faith did not hide reality from him but made it possible for him to see reality in a fresh perspective.

## I. A CONCRETE EXAMPLE: NUCLEAR WARFARE

My task here, however, is not to discuss this subject in theoretic terms, but to address it in terms of a concrete reality of our times: "How can a Christian be a citizen in a nuclear age?" But before getting at that question, let us first review the realities in a nuclear holocaust. There is general agreement on this information regardless of the perspective which people may take in relation to it.

Consider how much explosive power the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. have in their nuclear weapons. There is the equivalent of 15 1/2 tons of TNT for every per-

son not only in America, Russia, their satellite countries, and China. We have stockpiles of 15 1/2 tons of TNT equivalent for every man, woman, and child on this earth!

Now it is true that this power is concentrated in high energy bombs and can't be sprinkled evenly over every person's head. So let's consider what would actually happen in a nuclear attack. These figures come from the Office of Technology Assessment, a group authorized by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to assess the impact of nuclear war.

This report drew on a wide range of research by many groups, and it is one important

point of reference for shaping our public policy. Four specific scenarios are described in this official appraisal of the effects of nuclear warfare, and I shall review two of them.

For the first example: what would happen if Russia would attack the United States in order to destroy its military and economic power without especially aiming at people? A variety of studies has been made. The lowest figures indicate that within 30 days of that attack 70 million people in the United States would be dead, one-third of our population. The highest estimate is 160 million, two-thirds of our population. Let's just take the figure half-way between, 115 million, and that makes about half of our population. Now that's without aiming at people. If they were to aim directly at population centers, there would be another 20 to 30 million dead. Is that even imaginable to us? After the thirty days millions more would be afflicted with the burns and tortured with the radiation, and the genetic defects would go on for generations. Surely, the target of it all, our economic structure, would collapse completely. There would be no possibility that democracy could continue in this land. We could survive only by martial law. That is Scenario One.

But let's take a less horrendous scenario. In the summer of 1980 President Carter in Presidential Directive 59 announced that the United States is now prepared to make the first assault. We are officially committed to a policy in which we would attack first. What would such an attack mean in terms of human life? Suppose that that attack were limited only to the ICBM sites in Russia not the airbases, not the submarines, and not Soviet cities. In the process of assuring the elimination of most of those sites, the number of people that would be killed incidentally would range from 6 million (that's the lowest estimate) to 27.7 million, which averages out to 17 million people. That is the official policy of the United States government today. It is what has been announced in your name and mine. We are prepared to slaughter 17 million people before an attack has been brought against our country. Now we all pray devoutly that that will never happen. Even if it does not, think of what it has done to us. Who are we that we would take the initiative to kill 17 million people? What does that do to our psyche? What does it do to our moral sensibility? What do we represent in the world?

A survey was taken a few years ago asking people whether they expected that there would be a nuclear war and that they would be killed in that war. It is incredible. Eighty-five percent of the people in that survey expected that they would die in a nuclear war. What kind of pall is hanging over us? My colleague Dan Thomas and I have been teaching a class in War and Peace. We took a survey of students, asking them on a scale of 1 to 10, "How likely do you think it is that there will be a nuclear war?" Their scale averaged "6." In their judgment there

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was a 60% chance of a nuclear war. Imagine what it is for the young people of this college, the young people of our nation, to live with a 40% chance of surviving a nuclear war! One little boy said to his grandfather on his sixtieth birthday, "Granddaddy, I'm glad you're 60 years old; I wish I could get to be 60 some day." His Grandad asked him why he wouldn't. He said, "Because the bombs will get me first." That's a six-year-old. Even if there would not be a nuclear war, the toll on the psyche and moral life of our nation is terrifying.

## II. DO WE HAVE ANY RESPONSIBILITY?

Our immediate reaction to this situation is that it is too overwhelming. We really can't

change it. It is inevitable. People have told me, “Let’s face it. Never yet has a weapon been invented that has not eventually been used. How do we expect to change the whole course of history and say that this one will not be used anymore?” Others say, “Well, it’s too bad. But that’s the price we have to pay in order to be strong.”

In Greek mythology Damocles was jealous of the god Dionysius because of all the great wealth and power that he had. Dionysius once said to him, “If you like this position so much, why don’t you sit on my throne for awhile.” Damocles said, “I would love to. “ So he sat on the throne of Dionysius, and before him was spread the gourmet food of the palace. As he was enjoying this great feast, he relished every bit until he saw a giant sword suspended above him, held only by a thin thread. Understandably, Damocles did not enjoy the rest of his meal. That’s what Greeks believed about life—that there is an inexorable fate so that when you are in a position of power, sitting on a throne, you will inevitably have the Damocletian sword hanging over your head. Many people today believe that we shall just have to learn to live with that sword. That is the kind of stern courage that is called for us in these days. However, that is finally a counsel of resignation.

Is it possible to gain a fresh perspective on even this horrendous thing? Is it possible to believe that this does not necessarily need to be so? Christians know the reality of evil and sin. They see it within their hearts, and they face it fully around them. But there is a cross and empty tomb as evidence of the fact that we do not need to succumb to it. It is possible to have a fresh perspective, to see beyond those bars, beyond the cries of death. It’s possible to see that death is not the end. It is possible to believe that it was people who put those missiles there and that people can take them away again. It is possible to take hold of this monster and tame it.

Tom Stoppard’s contemporary play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, is built around two minor characters from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*—a play which ends with great carnage. It was not only Hamlet who died by treachery. So did King Claudius and Queen Gertrude while Laertes was a victim of his own poisonous rapier. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had been spying on Hamlet on the orders of the King, so they played a small part, too, in that bloody scene which had brought down the throne of Denmark. In this new play Stoppard has the two of them leaving that awful flow of blood behind and heading toward England. As they head across the channel Rosencrantz turns to Guildenstern and says, “There must have been a time somewhere near the beginning when we could have said ‘No.’”

The German Church still today is going through great trauma for having

lived through that terrifying Nazi era. After it was all over, after the bombs had ceased, after the prisons had been opened, after the Holocaust had been revealed to the world, those German Christians without a doubt said, “There must have been a time somewhere near the beginning when we could have said ‘No.’” Should a new Holocaust come upon us—with 115 million people dead at our feet, and many more burned and radioactive bodies around us—surely then we would say, “There must have been a time somewhere near the beginning when we could have said ‘No.’”

### III. A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

Might this be such a time? Is our security as Christians deep enough that even in the

midst of a nuclear arms race we have the freedom to consider security from an entirely fresh perspective? In spite of all the momentum might it be possible to think about calling a halt to the race?

What are some reasons that this might be worth considering? The first is a matter of proportion. Most of us are not pacifists. We believe that any war which we would be willing to fight must be a Just War. A Just War does not mean that any old war we happen to be fighting is justified. In order to be just a war has to meet certain criteria, one of which is the principle of proportionality. Billy Graham used this principle when he announced his opposition to the nuclear arms race: "I do not think our differences are worth a nuclear war." What would be worth the lives of half of the people in the United States? Or, for that matter, the lives of 17 million creatures of God, human beings, in Russia?

There is a second principle, the principle of security. It is the responsibility of the state, of government, to provide security for its citizens. Does the nuclear arms race offer that security? In tracing the history of the arms race the story is consistently that the U.S. makes a development of some kind, and three to five years later the Soviet Union obtains the same thing. (One exception to that was the ICBM missile. In response to our overwhelming fleet of bombers the Soviet Union actually preceded the U.S. in developing that delivery system.) With that one exception the arms race has been a spiral of action and reaction: the first nuclear reaction by the United States—five years later a nuclear reaction in the Soviet Union. Detonation of the A Bomb by the U.S.—three years later detonation of an A Bomb by the Soviet Union. Development of the thermonuclear bomb by the U.S.—then by the Soviet Union. "Tactical weapons" deployed by the U.S.—then by the Soviet Union. Polaris-type missiles developed by the U.S.—then by the Soviet Union. MIRV multiple warheads by the U.S.—then by the Soviet Union. And on and on the spiral goes.

How high do we have to get on that spiral before we are safe? And will our going round in that spiral one time, two times, three times more make us one bit safer than we are at this moment? Is there any doubt that for anything we invest in and develop the Soviet Union will invest everything it has to match us? Is there ever going to be a time when the Soviet Union says, "Now you have shown that you are much better than we are; we're going to stop the arms race"? And if we don't expect that to happen, where is the end of the spiral, and what advantage is there to moving one notch higher in that spiral?

I'm reminded of the biblical image of David as he went out to fight Goliath. First he checked in with King Saul, but Saul objected to having the victory of the

nation hinge on this boy. When Saul finally consented, he wanted to equip him with everything that he needed. He wanted to be sure that he was secure. He gave him his own set of armor. David put on the armor and set out to fight Goliath. He got about two steps out the door, and he said, "Look, this isn't going to work. This armor is doing me more harm than good." So he shed the armor there so he could be more effective in his battle with Goliath. There is a point in the affairs of a nation when the armor does more harm than good—not only to our enemies, not only to our country, but to the world. Has such a time come for us? Is it not possible that we may be more secure by travelling light?

There are some honest and serious questions raised about this perspective. One was

voiced by the people in a theological study group while discussing this issue: “But can we trust the Russians? Suppose that we do agree somehow to halt the spiral right where it is now, how do we know the Russians are going to stop?” Let me make three observations in response. First of all, the Russians are gaining no more security than we are by the spiral. It is as much in their interest as it is in ours to stop it. That’s fundamental and obvious, providing a basis for conversation.

The second observation is that satellite verification is at a point of great precision. When SALT II was explored by the Senate committee, they called in the leaders of the armed forces—air force, navy and the army—to report to them as to whether or not this treaty is indeed verifiable. We do not have access to their report. As a consequence of those hearings, however, the issue of verifiability seems to have been satisfactorily settled for both sides. We do know that the capacity we have in our satellites is such that when we see anything suspicious we can zoom in on it with our satellite lens and take a picture so accurate that it will read the license of a car in Red Square, Moscow. Verifiability does not seem to be a point of argument any longer. At the very least we could stop the race at a point that is agreed to be verifiable.

The third observation is in response to the important question raised so frequently: “What about compliance by the Russians? Suppose we spot something that is irregular. What do we do about it? Aren’t we putting ourselves in a terribly vulnerable position?” On April 15, 1981, while in Washington, D.C., I picked up a copy of the *Washington Post*, and in that issue was a report from Robert W. Buchheim, the person who has been representing us for the past four years in secret meetings held in Geneva by a group called the U.S.-Soviet Standing Consultative Commission. He reported when he returned from his assignment, “The commission has never yet had to deal with a case of real and substantial noncompliance.” Then the article goes on to say, “No clear-cut cases of cheating have been uncovered, and the commission has been successful in getting questionable activity either explained or stopped before it became a serious problem.”

The Russians are not as innocent as naive optimists insist. On the other hand, they are not as demonic as some of our propaganda makes them. They are playing the same wily game for world influence that we are playing. It may be that in escalating the spiral of violent weaponry we are unwittingly creating the size of our own enemy.

A second objection to this perspective is that the reason we are not willing to pursue the nuclear arms race is that we have a lack of will. Let me only ask, Which takes more will—to stay on the rollercoaster, or to have the courage in the face of all the momentum in that race to say “No” while we are yet somewhere near the beginning?

#### IV. CAN WE DO ANYTHING THAT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Is it possible that this fresh perspective could be translated into action? In the first place, effective action must be timed right. Alan Geyer, who heads a research institute which serves churches, suggests that there are critical moments when we can enter into this spiral to halt it. One such moment is now when the two great powers have a rough equivalency of fire power and when both would benefit by investing otherwise in their own economies. George F. Kennan, who was the architect for the policy of containment which initiated the Cold War, has just proposed that this is the moment when the U.S. and the Soviet Union should dismantle 50% of their nuclear weapons.

In the second place, effective action requires that enough people are concerned and make that concern known where it counts. In April of 1981 my father received a church paper from Wuerttemberg which reported on the delegation of German bishops which came to visit with the Lutheran bishops in the U.S. The purpose for their visit was to ask “How can the church contribute, so that the insanity of a third world war can be prevented?” The conclusion reported by the bishops back to their constituency in Germany was that the Christians in the U.S. have the responsibility of exerting themselves much more in the halls of Washington if they are to be responsible Christian people. They observed that other Christians in the U.S. are doing this more effectively than Lutherans.

Every spectrum of the Christian faith is converging on these concerns. The Episcopalians have made a strong statement. Billy Graham has said, “The nuclear issue is not just a political one; it is a moral and spiritual issue as well. “ He continued, “I believe that the Christian especially has a responsibility to work for peace in our world.” The Mormons have expressed themselves officially for the first time on a matter of public policy by saying that the MX would increase the first-strike capacity of the U.S., but they don’t want to be responsible for a first strike.

Are we prepared for a fresh vision? Are we free enough to explore some alternatives while we are gathered as brothers and sisters whose security is in Christ?

In the third place, effective action requires a responsive government. I’m confident that the government of our country will respond. It has already demonstrated its response to the concerns of citizens. If a wellspring of concern sprang from the citizens of this country, from people who are morally concerned and Christianly committed, from one church group after another, from Billy Graham to Catholics and everywhere between, that would be a force which would get a response. In the process we would have an opportunity to offer what may be the best gift that we as Christians could present to our country—to initiate the consideration of a fresh perspective on security.

We may disagree on the details. However, it seems clear that there are two fundamentally different alternatives before us: Shall we resign ourselves to the status quo of a continuing spiral of nuclear armaments? By doing so, will we be inviting our own destruction? Or, on the other hand, can we consider now, somewhere near the beginning, while there is still time, that we may yet say “No” to death and “Yes” to life?