

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 1

H. ETHICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

War, peace and conscientious objection to service in war

Prepared by the Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions. Adopted by the General Synod, 1987, as the replacement for the 1970 Statement.

1. The church, in response to Christ's mandate, preaches the gospel and administers the sacraments. This is its mission in the world. Since faith is always active in works, members of the church are rightly also instructed in the nature and scope of their social responsibility for the world in which they live. Christians ought to be informed people and need to have guidelines for their moral decisions and social actions.
2. The church understands that governments exist by the will and providence of God. The apostolic testimony points to the origin, authority, and mandate of governments, namely, that they exist by the will of God, that their authority as 'ministers of God' comes from him, and that they are to attend to their people's welfare (cf Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-21).
3. The church lives in a fallen, sinful world in rebellion against God's laws and institutions, against his will and ordinances. It 'carries the burdens of others' (cf Gal 6:2), especially of people oppressed and suffering injustice inflicted on them by those who, instead of justice, exercise brutal power. With the prophets and apostles, it proclaims God's judgment against those who do such evil.
4. The church realises that, in a conflict-ridden world, wars are initiated as a result of greed, rivalry, suspicion, lust for power, etc. Against such evils and their disastrous consequences, the church raises its warning and pleading voice.
5. The church urges governments and warring factions to seek peace rather than war. It warns nations against violation of the principles of justice, so that the common good of all people may be secured.
6. The church views with deep concern and sadness the enormous build-up of nuclear and other destructive armaments in the world today, i.e. the so-called 'A-B-C arsenal' (= atomic, biological, and chemical). The escalation of weapon systems and their

possible use create anxiety, fear, and unrest throughout the world, and pose a real threat to present and future generations and their natural habitat.

7. The church pleads with governments and the citizens of their countries to embark on nuclear disarmament. It cannot under any circumstances support either wars of mass destruction or armed conflicts which violate the mandate of peace and the principles of justice.
8. The church denounces the use of financial resources required for help in the existing areas of global human need (e.g. hunger, homelessness, disease, and poverty) for the manufacture and deployment of weapons of mass destruction.
9. The church is aware of the moral and political difficulties surrounding the concept of deterrence and its application. Deterrence may be seen as part of either a Strategic Offence Initiative (SOI) or of a Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI).

The pursuance of deterrence in the world today has led to an escalating arms race in weapons of mass destruction. This situation is fraught with acute dangers of accident, miscalculation, or exploitation. The balance between offence and defence may be achieved if mutually verifiable arms-reduction agreements eventuate.

10. The church upholds its view that military service in principle is not against the word of God. When a government is authorised by the nation to engage its citizens in a military conflict clearly in defence of their country, such demand should not be regarded as being against the word of God or our informed Christian conscience.
11. The church however accepts the validity of a person's refusal to engage in military service if he or she is convinced that participation in a military conflict amounts to the transgression of God's commandment 'You shall not kill'.
12. The church refuses to support the government's engagement in war if and when the government subverts its God-ordained functions (cf par 2) and acts in contempt and violation of the laws of God. Under these circumstances, the church will support with all available non-violent means the conscientious stand of its members against participation in such wars or conflicts.
13. The church maintains that warfare which potentially and actually involves the mass destruction of human beings is never justified (cf par 7), and therefore involvement in such immoral activity is always against an informed Christian conscience.
14. The church supports legislation which recognises the validity of conscientious objection of citizens who firmly believe that participation in war or military conflict in general is against their conscience. Conscientious objection against participation in a particular war or military conflict (= selective conscientious objection) demands of the objector a careful assessment of the nature, relevant available facts, and circumstances of the war or military conflict.
15. The church gives witness to governments about its commitment to the word of God and to prayer for peace. It will inform the authorities of its views on relevant legislative and political decisions, socio-moral issues, ethical concerns, economic circumstances, and other matters which affect the well-being and security of the people. The church cannot afford to be silent in the face of mounting armaments and increasing national and international tensions; to do so would be to fail in its obligation to help prevent mass destruction and to minimise global conflict.