

The priest who blessed the bomb

FIT FOR VIEWING by persons aged 15 YEARS OR MORE

Contains images of victims of war: please warn your classes
That they might find these images upsetting

Length 10 minutes

TEACHERS

- ✓ Before showing *The priest who blessed the bomb* ask your class to bear in mind, as they watch it for the first time, possible completions to the following statements displayed on a flip chart:

{1} Atomic weapons were first used in
{Time code: 00:06}

{2}were killed by the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki
{Time code: 5:05 – 5:07}

{3}possess nuclear weapons today?
{Time code: 5:36– 5:55}

- ✓ When the credits and soundtrack come up at the end of the film encourage your class to listen to the lyrics.
- ✓

AFTER SCREENING

When *Contempt of Conscience* finishes ask your pupils/students to:

TASK 1

WRITE or SKETCH down the most memorable image or statement that sticks in their mind.

SHOW a friend their image or statement and explain the reason why they chose it

DISCUSS what they consider to be the most important message of the film

EXCHANGE their findings with the rest of the class.

TASK 2

RECALL what they've just watched. If they were able to interview any **ONE** of the people appearing in *The Priest who blessed the bomb*, **WHO** would they most like to cross-examine?

WRITE DOWN the main question they would want to ask that person?

- ❖ Think back over what you have just seen. If you were able to interview Father George Zabelka, the priest who blessed the bomb, what would be the main question you would want to ask him?
- ❖ If you were able to interview the survivors of the atomic bombings what would be the main question you would want to ask them?

DISCUSSION

Split up into three groups. Nominate a scribe from your group to take notes. You have 15 minutes to read and discuss the following before exchanging your group's ideas to the rest of the class:

- *“The ethics of mass butchery cannot be found in the teachings of Jesus. In Just War ethics, Jesus Christ, who is supposed to be all in the Christian life, is irrelevant. He might as well never have existed. In Just War ethics, no appeal is made to him or his teaching, because no appeal can be made to him or his teaching, for neither he nor his teaching gives standards for Christians to follow in order to determine what level of slaughter is acceptable.” {Father George Zabelka}*

- ***“You are just as dead if killed by a bullet as you are from being vaporised by a five megaton nuclear blast.’ Does this fact prove that the moral issues concerning nuclear warfare are no different from those concerning conventional warfare?”***
- **It has been argued that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought World War Two to a quick end and saved the lives of countless people who would have died if the war had continued in the Far East. In the light of this, do you think that the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was morally justified?**
- **President Truman was the USA President who made the final decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His chief of staff said after the bombings that his country had: *“Adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians in the dark ages”*.**

WRITTEN WORK

- **Write a telegram (maximum 30 words) dated 6 August reminding a friend about ‘Hiroshima Day’.**
- **Write a letter to a magazine about the dangers of nuclear war.**
- **Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament website www.cnduk.org provides information about British nuclear weapons, especially Trident. Log on and write an article explaining the arguments of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament {CND}.**
- **Write a paragraph answering the question ‘Can a nuclear war ever be called a Just War?’**

HANDOUTS FOR PUPILS

Statements

Below are some statements. READ THEM ALL and choose a statement you consider to be the most interesting. After you’ve made your choice, compare,

contrast and share your chosen statement with TWO other people in your class. Be prepared to support your choice, with reasons. Are there statements your friends have chosen that are different from yours? Argue the case for the importance of YOUR chosen statement, above theirs.

Now exchange your views with the rest of your class.

Here are the statements:

{1} *'Those that survive a nuclear war would envy the dead.'*

{Nikita Krushchev, former President of the USSR}

{2} *'On the assumption that a Third World War must escalate to nuclear destruction, I can tell you that the Fourth World War will be fought with bows and arrows.'*

{Albert Einstein, scientist}

{3} *'We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. There is such a thing as being too late. Over the bleached bones of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words "too late". If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the dark corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality and strength without sight.'*

{Martin Luther King, Baptist Civil Rights Leader}

{4} *'Before the bomb, man had to live with the idea of his death as an individual; from now onwards, mankind has to live with his idea of death as a species.'*

{Arthur Koestler, writer}

{5} *'The monstrous power of nuclear weapons will have fatal consequences for life on earth. Justice, right reason and humanity therefore urgently demand that the arms race should cease ... nuclear weapons should be banned.'*

{*Pacem in Terris*, Roman Catholic statement, 1965}

{6} *'We have guided missiles and misguided men.'*

{Martin Luther King}

{7} *'The human race has today the means for annihilating itself either in a fit of complete lunacy, i.e., in a big war, by a brief fit of destruction, or by careless*

handling of atomic technology, through a slow process of poisoning and of deterioration in its genetic structure.'

{Max Born - Atomic Scientists}

{8} *"No one in his right mind would play Russian roulette even once. Yet we are continually playing nuclear roulette in which the entire world is at stake. The only way to survive nuclear roulette is to stop playing the game, to put down the gun globally, to move beyond war. If we want to avoid the world's imminent suicide, we must shift totally the way we think about war. We no longer can accept it as a means of settling disputes, as an extension of politics or as an innate ingredient in the nature of man".*

{Martin Heldman, Professor of statistics and probability}

{9} *"We can all live together as brothers and sisters or we are doomed to die together as fools in a world holocaust".*

{Father George Zabelka}

{10} *"The gospel of the Just War is a gospel that Jesus never taught"*

{Father George Zabelka}

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Split up into groups of three/four. Read and discuss the following pieces of writing. Nominate a scribe from your group to take notes and report your group's thoughts to the rest of the class.

1. *"It's a lovely summer's morning. The streets are full of people going to work, people going to shop, children going to school. The air raid siren sounds but no one runs, no one goes to shelter. There is only a single aircraft in this enemy raid. The aircraft steers a course across the city. Above the centre, something falls – 20 seconds, 30 seconds ... and then there is a sudden searing flash of light, hotter and brighter than a thousand suns. Those who are looking at it have their eyes burned in their sockets. In the streets below people vanish, utterly consumed in the furnace of the flash. There are no ashes, even on the pavement – nothing but black shadows x-rayed on the stones. Then the blast! For two kilometres, in all directions, every building is levelled to the ground. Lorries, vans, animals, men, women, babies, prams, are picked up and hurled like bullets, hundreds of feet through the air. Then fire-balls swept by tornado winds become a single fire storm and tens of thousands of people are trapped by walls of flame hundreds of feet high - and*

swiftly, or in longer agony - burn to death. And everything goes black. The mushroom cloud rises to the very vault of heaven. I knew a woman who looked for three days for her little grandson in Hiroshima. When she found him he was still breathing, but all the doctors in Japan could not save his little life."

{Adapted from a speech by Lord Philip Noel-Baker, Nobel Peace Prize, read to the House of Lords in 1980 and used at the beginning of 'the priest who blessed the bomb'}

2. "We have to convince the public that the continuation of current policies, in which security of the world is maintained by keeping nuclear weapons, is not realistic in the long run because it is bound eventually to result in a nuclear holocaust in which the future of the human race would be at stake. We must convince public opinion that the only alternative is the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Due to their indiscriminate nature and unprecedented destructive power, the use of nuclear weapons has always been considered as immoral. It is claimed that the possession of nuclear weapons is necessary for world security, but actually what such a policy amounts to is to rest the security of the world on a balance of terror. In the long run, this is bound to erode the ethical basis of civilisation. I would not be surprised if evidence were found that the increase of violence in the world - from individual mugging, to organised crime, to groups such as al-Qaida - has some connection with the culture of violence under which we live.

I am particularly concerned about the effect on the young generation. We all crave a world of peace, a world of equity. We all want to nurture in the young generation the much-heralded "culture of peace". But how can we talk about a culture of peace if that peace is predicated on the existence of weapons of mass destruction? How can we persuade the young generation to cast aside the culture of violence when they know that it is on the threat of extreme violence that we rely for security? I do not believe that the people of the world would accept a policy that is inherently immoral and likely to end in catastrophe. And I do believe that - if properly explained - the moral argument would win general support and lead to a new campaign for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Thanks largely to the fantastic progress in technology our world is becoming more and more interdependent, more and more transparent, more and more interactive. We are all, primarily, human beings, anxious to provide security for our nearest and dearest and peace for fellow citizens of our nation and all the

world. We want to see a world in which relations between people and between nations are based on compassion, not greed, on generosity, not jealousy, on persuasion, not force, on equity, not oppression. These are simple, some will say romantic, sentiments, but they are also realistic necessities. In a world armed with weapons of mass destruction, the use of which might bring the whole of civilisation to an end, we cannot afford a divided community, with its inherent threat of military confrontations. In this technological age, a global, fair community, to which we all belong as world citizens, has become a vital necessity”.

{Professor Sir Joseph Rotblat: nuclear physicist and a Nobel peace laureate, 2005}.

3. *“Now, brothers and sisters, on the anniversary of this terrible atrocity carried out by Christians, I must be the first to say that I made a terrible mistake. I was had by the father of lies. I wore the uniform. I was part of the system. When I said Mass over there I put on those beautiful vestments over my uniform. Now I can’t help but think of the words of Christ applying to me: “Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing.”*

{Father George Zabelka, the priest who dropped the bomb}

FOR TEACHERS

SOURCE MATERIAL FOR FURTHER WORK

A. A nuclear war could begin in many ways, including the deliberate decision to launch a nuclear strike, some form of nuclear terrorism, a systems malfunction, or escalation from conventional war. The last is the most likely; as new war breaks out in the world almost every month. This century we have already seen standoffs between two nuclear powers India and Pakistan. Escalation becomes more likely as more states gain a nuclear strike capability. In the Gulf War during 1991 we became used to seeing troops wearing protection from both chemical and nuclear attack. In a way it is not difficult to see how the world could begin to accept the use of nuclear weapons in a conflict.

B. The psychological bomb: The threat of a nuclear war or a nuclear accident affects us all on a deep level. Many people fear the future and have a sense of helplessness. This helplessness is deepened by the fact that even when the majority is strongly opposed to either war - as people were in 2003 when Britain and America invaded Iraq – or to the possession and development of nuclear weapons, political leaders go ahead with their deployment. So great are the vested interests in nuclear weapons that military affairs are not dealt with democratically. Fortunately there is hope. Human instincts for survival are strong and we can learn to develop a culture of peace. Millions of people are now actively seeking an end to fear and a new world that is at peace.

C. Weapons of mass destruction and the Just War Theory

If we apply the `Just War' theory to the question of whether it is morally justifiable to use nuclear weapons we find that while some conditions may be met (their use could conceivably be authorised by the UN, although nuclear weapons could still be in the hands of non-governmental groups) other conditions are certainly not. Some Christians might argue that the Just War theory may have applied in the pre-nuclear world, but, in the nuclear, biological and chemical age, modern weapons of mass destruction make nonsense of the theory. There would be no justice afterwards -- children (*if* there were any survivors) would be born with genetic defects for generations to come, and innocent civilians would be killed. Nuclear weapons do not prevent wars, and even though there are an estimated 36,000 nuclear weapons worldwide today there is military conflict worldwide too.

***If* the decision is made that a Christian may participate in war as a last resort, then the first decision must not involve an automatic acceptance of all and any methods. All methods of preventing war must first be tried and continued. Participation does not rule out the deepest personal abhorrence of violence. It might be thought, however, that the reality in the nuclear world rules out war completely. As more states acquire nuclear weapons, the danger of world annihilation increases. Even in a supposedly justifiable war there would be no justice left to preserve.**

Against this thesis may be set the numerous arguments suggesting the tactical use of nuclear weapons in limited stages of war. In the face of complete lack of experience of such wars – although Britain and America have used depleted uranium shells recently in Iraq - it is impossible to predict

consequences with certainty. Even here there are important grades of activity. It is clearly better to destroy military bases than centres of civilian population. It is clearly better to build nuclear shelters, if we may assume that they may give some degree of protection, than to pursue a policy which deliberately solves the problem of emergency food supply by ensuring that 50 per cent of the population will not survive an initial attack. Whatever we may think necessary in an extreme situation there can be no doubt that any policy which results in the destruction of people is abhorrent.

D. Depleted Uranium: 300 tons of Depleted Uranium - remaining radioactive for 4:5 billion years - were dropped and fired by British and US forces on Iraq in 1991. It was the first time such weapons had ever been used in warfare. The use of these devastating “nuclear” shells – causing Gulf War Syndrome, a devastating illness that plagues thousands of Gulf War veterans in Britain and in the USA - has made parts of Iraq a radioactive toxic wasteland and doctors are certain that the depleted uranium is responsible for the region’s significant increase in cancer and birth defects. A staggering 1,500 tons were dropped on Iraq during the invasion of 2003.

E. Trident: The British government want to replace Trident at a cost of between £25 billion and £40 billion. That’s the equivalent of 120,000 newly qualified nurses every year for the next 10 years, or 60,000 newly-qualified teachers every year for the next 20 years. If Britain shows the world, by replacing Trident, that we think our security depends on having nuclear weapons into the far future, then other countries without them will want them as well. So the danger of accidents and international crises increase. Pakistan and India are more insecure with nuclear weapons today than they were when they did not have them; while concerns over possible Iranian plans to develop a nuclear bomb could lead to conflict that would have devastating consequences not only for the Middle East but for the world at large in the 21st century.

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