

---

# Pro Rege

---

---

Volume 11 | Number 4

Article 9

---

June 1983

## War and Peace in a Nuclear Age

Don King  
*Dordt College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege)



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), and the [Christianity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

King, Don (1983) "War and Peace in a Nuclear Age," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 11: No. 4, 37 - 38.

Available at: [https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro\\_rege/vol11/iss4/9](https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol11/iss4/9)

This Incidentally is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Dordt Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Dordt Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu](mailto:ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu).

# Incidentally

by James Koldenhoven

## War and Peace in a Nuclear Age

In the coming year, the American political scene will be increasingly dominated by political figures like former Vice President Mondale, Senators Baker, Cranston, Glenn, and Hart, and unannounced others positioning themselves to challenge the current leadership in the 1984 presidential race. One unavoidable issue demanding a response from each candidate will be the continued development and deployment of nuclear arms. The scene for national debate on this issue has been set by the current Administration's plans to continue to expand our arsenal of nuclear weapons, with projects such as the MX, Cruise and Pershing II missiles and Trident II submarines. In contrast, several communities and states across the country have pledged support for a freeze on nuclear arms. The Conference of Catholic Bishops has also concurred with this call for a moratorium in their pastoral letter released in May.

To bring greater understanding and Christian insight to this debate, Dr. John Bernbaum, Director of the American Studies Program in Washington, D.C., presented the Staley Foundation Lecture Series entitled "Peacemaking in the Nuclear Age," at Dordt College, on March 1-2, 1983.

Bernbaum laid the foundation for his series with a Chapel presentation on the "Biblical Concept of Peace" in which he discussed various manifestations of "shalom" (the Hebrew word for peace) in the Christian life. He followed this with his first lecture, "Christian Views Toward War and Peace," outlining the historical development of nuclear weapons. He drew attention to the total absence of any response from the evangelical Christian community to the ad-

vent of nuclear weapons until the most recent discussions in the 1980's of engaging in "limited" nuclear wars.

Contemporary Christians have adopted one of four basic positions on modern warfare. The first group characterized as "Political Realists" gives precedence to the preservation of our national interests over the Biblical injunction to be peacemakers and therefore defends the deployment of nuclear weapons as a pragmatic necessity in an imperfect world. The "Crusaders" identify communism as the single greatest evil in the world and call upon Christians to use whatever means are available to restore justice. Bernbaum regards the third group, "Christian Pacifists," as an increasingly influential group that seeks to emulate the life of Christ and the early Church and defines all opposition to military programs as a "test of conversion." The final group comes out of the Christian tradition which has struggled to articulate a just war theory and includes both those who defend the possession of some limited nuclear arms as a deterrent and those who argue that we must rely on conventional weapons and under no circumstances resort to the use of nuclear arms.

Bernbaum discussed the emerging consensus between the "Christian Pacifists" and those who identify with the concept of a just war because of their common struggle to apply the Word of God to the present situation and halt our present course toward unavoidable nuclear holocaust. Much of the discussion between members of the Anabaptist and Reformed communities comes out of their agreement on the spiritual bankruptcy of present U.S. policy.

In his second lecture "The Cold War: Past

and Present" delivered Tuesday evening, Bernbaum chronicled the history of U.S.-Soviet relations from the U.S. atomic monopoly in 1945 to current discussion of a winnable nuclear exchange. As the warning time of a pending nuclear attack has been reduced by sophisticated technology and will shortly be limited to about five minutes, nuclear war will hang on a "hair trigger," says Bernbaum, driven by a "use them or lose them" mentality. The opportunity to check for error is narrowed to a few moments for fear of losing our entire defensive capabilities to a first strike.

The frightening implications of our current military strategies are exceeded only by a consideration of the potential effects of a nuclear assault. Those effects were discussed Wednesday evening in Bernbaum's final lecture, "The Nuclear Crisis: The Challenge to the Christian Community." His descriptions of the destructive impact of a nuclear explosion—the initial blast, the immense fireball, the intense radiation, and the prolonged secondary effects—were sobering and unimaginable. He shared his deeply personal convictions about the responsibilities of the followers of Christ and discussed why he felt compelled to adopt a stand of nuclear pacifism. "Evangelical Christians have always been the vanguard in the struggle to

bring justice to society," he argued, citing the abolition of slavery, the early days of the labor movement, and the more recent pro-life efforts, "and this vision of justice was never more needed."

The reduction and control of nuclear arms is part of the broader pro-life view, noted Bernbaum, and once again the major impetus is coming from the Christian Church, as many Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, and Charismatics are advocating a nuclear freeze. As indicative of this common effort, Bernbaum cited the conference on peace and nuclear arms in Pasadena, California, this spring where many of these groups will come together for the first time to engage in meaningful dialogue.

Bernbaum closed this penetrating and challenging series by calling upon all those who love Christ to become informed, to institute discussions in their homes, schools, and churches, and to assert with confidence the Lordship of Christ over the nation's public policy. The question is not whether we can be successful in influencing governments, said Bernbaum, but whether we are responding obediently to the Word of God by seeking peace, justice, and righteousness.

Donald E. King, Jr.

## Spring Lecture Series

The Spring Lecture Series, which was sponsored this year by the Department of Business Administration and Economics, was held on April 4 and 5. The series focused on the subject "Economic Justice and Christian Responsibility: Biblical Directives and Current Alternatives." The series began on Monday afternoon with a lecture by Mr. Tom Rose, Associate Professor of Economics at Grove City College (Grove City, Pennsylvania), entitled "Biblical Directives on Economic Wealth, Poverty, Freedom, Responsibility, and Justice." On

Monday evening the second lecture in the series was presented by Dr. Wendell Primus, a Senior Staff Economist for the (U.S.) House Ways and Means Committee. The title of this lecture was "Who Are the Poor and to What Extent Are They Assisted by Current Government Programs and Policy?" Dr. Primus lectured again on Tuesday afternoon on "Meeting the Needs of the Poor: Opportunities and Options Involving Government." Dr. Rose concluded the series on Tuesday evening with a lecture entitled "Meeting the Needs of the Poor: Oppor-