

THINKING THEOLOGICALLY ABOUT SECURITY: FOLLOWING CHRIST IN AN AGE OF TERROR

The age of the Cold War, complete with its arms race, came to a dramatic halt in the late 1980s. The most striking symbol that a new day had come was the dismantled Berlin Wall—razed by the people. There seemed hope that other such historical divides might soon be transcended. There was hope that a new day had begun, in which we would move forward in peace, instead of posturing nation against nation for the sake of security. In the wake of September 11, 2001, that hope appears to be gone—at least temporarily. There is a new reality that defines our world—the reality of terrorism. For Americans, the defining mark of this new age is a picture of planes being flown into the World Trade Center in New York. Christians have something important to say to this new reality.

Since September 11, “security” has become the prevailing theme of U.S. public discourse and policy. U.S. President George W. Bush has made security his central platform. People have appreciated this focus. In a time of such uncertainty, citizens want their government to focus on security issues. Security measures have increased in airports, train stations, stadiums, and municipal buildings. People have generally accepted the inconvenience of body and luggage searches. A color-coded alert system has been established to inform the public of times when intelligence information suggests potential danger. The Bush administration has spent additional monies on defense and has created the largest new federal department since the Truman years—the Department of Homeland Security. In addition, new wars have been pursued as part of what President Bush calls “the War on Terror.” In his 2004 State of the Union address President Bush said, “On September 11th terrorists declared war on America, and war is what they’ll get.” Congress, as a body, has supported most of these security measures.

Webster’s dictionary definition for security includes freedom from danger, freedom from fear or anxiety, freedom from harm, freedom from want or deprivation (*Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1990, p. 1,062). Basic safety is another way of speaking of security. Security defined as such is a good thing. In order for humanity to thrive, security needs to be in place, providing a framework within which creativity and progress can be nurtured.

One of the central functions of government is to provide security. The Bush administration is to be commended for the positive things it has done to ensure public security. The men and women in the armed forces, who put themselves in harm’s way to protect national security, are also to be commended.

While this focus on security has been necessary and good, some of the actions and policies carried out in the name of security and the extent to which security matters have so dominated public discourse have been disconcerting. Security-information “overload” has produced anxiety. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once noted that during war times the public risks being “mesmerized by uncertainty.” Uncertainty, prompted by anxiety, has prevented the public from thinking critically, and especially theologically, about some of the policies that are proposed in the name of security.

Examples of decision-making clouded by anxiety can be seen in the assumptions made by the public in the months leading up to the war with Iraq. The war in Iraq was carried out as part of the “War on Terror,” which was a response to September 11. Polls indicated that a large percentage of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein was behind the attacks of September 11. In early 2003 polls indicated that close to half of the American public believed the majority of airplane hijackers to have been Iraqi citizens. Many Americans also came to assume that Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden were somehow co-conspirators. Much of the public support for war in Iraq was connected to clouded thinking and anxiety. Fear drove many Americans to believe war with Iraq was necessary to assure American security. As Christians, Jesus Christ, not fear, guides our thinking about actions and policies related to security.

Following Jesus in a Tradition That Embraces Just War Theory

While the scope of this paper is larger than the topic of war, it must be said at this point that war does have a place within the Reformed tradition. This is not a paper arguing for pacifism, a complete and unfettered rejection of violence used in defense of security. The Reformed tradition has accepted and helped develop the Just War Theory (or theories) first articulated by Augustine of Hippo (354-420 A.D.). The Just War Theory begins by affirming that the way of Jesus Christ is the way of radical nonviolence and suffering love. It begins by stating boldly that war is “not the way it is supposed to be.” War is a breach of the shalom desired by God. But Just War Theory also affirms that due to the sinfulness of humanity there will be war and violence in the world until all things are culminated in the good in Christ Jesus. While all war should be seen as a tragic break from God’s shalom, some wars are nevertheless regrettably necessary for the restoration of justice. “Although we ought never identify the policies of a sinful nation as the policies of God, surely we can say that some national policies are more consistent with the justice of God than others.”

War, within the Reformed tradition, is only justifiable in the context of careful and meticulous reflection and self-examination. Much of that reflection has to be on the particular situation of insecurity in the current time, but Christians should come to that time of reflection deeply aware of Jesus’ approach to security, that current insecurities might be assessed in light of the one upon whom we are invited to cast all burdens and fears.

Jesus Christ Brings Holistic Security through His Life, Death, and Resurrection

Jesus Christ was and is the ultimate source of security. He cares about basic safety. While on this earth he healed the sick, releasing them from harm and deprivation. He fed the hungry, releasing them from want. He invited tax collectors and prostitutes to be part of the kingdom of God. He brought security and he taught his disciples to do likewise. Jesus’ promise of the kingdom of God, a kingdom where all receive holistic security, was put to the test when he was struck down by those in power and hung to die on a cross. In his death it seemed that he had failed to deliver on his promises of security, but after Jesus refused to use any tool or method of violence to defend and protect his own life, God raised Jesus from the dead. Through this self-emptying act Christ gained for us, by the power of God, eternal security, victory over the power of even death itself. Through Christ’s death and resurrection he was able to make promises such as, “I am going to prepare a place for you”

(John 14:2) and “God so loved the world that God sent God’s only son to give eternal life” (John 3:16). The Heidelberg Catechism speaks to the biblical witness about security in Question and Answer 1. “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” “That I am not my own, but belong, body and soul, to my faithful savior Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ never stopped emphasizing security grounded in God’s mercy.

Jesus Christ’s Inclusive Security

Both in his earthly ministry and in the promises connected to his resurrected power, Jesus Christ extends his security to all people. Jesus was not exclusive in who he healed. He came to be the physician of “the sick,” all in need. He didn’t only free some from danger and want; he freed Jews and Gentiles alike, and he commanded his disciples to extend the same securities to every nation.

Jesus was committed to creating a kingdom that extended security now and forevermore. He quickly gathered followers who could extend security to further reaches than he could on his own. He invited others to be the light and salt of his message. He told his disciples to “go into all the world making disciples” and bringing them the security that is found in trust in the Triune God (Matthew 28:19).

His apostles and those who followed him after his resurrection continued extending security in increasingly inclusive ways, in the form of both eternal promises and earthly care, to people of every nation and ethnicity. Paul insisted that the message of Christ, the freedom from sin, from want, disease, and every other insecurity, was for Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free (Galatians 3:28).

Christ’s Security—A Threat to Those with Worldly Wealth and Power/An Equalizing Security

Many who had power and material wealth felt threatened throughout Jesus’ ministry because he challenged social systems that benefited their small, privileged group at the expense of security for all. The laws, regulations, and traditions of faith and politics had been interpreted by the powerful for the benefit of the powerful, and Jesus challenged their assumptions. Almost from the beginning of his life powerful people wanted to kill Jesus because he was a threat to their special interests. Christ’s security is an equalizing security.

Christ’s Security—A Foundation for New Life

Security is only the beginning of Jesus’ gospel message. Jesus brought security to lepers by freeing them from disease, but that freedom simply set the stage for a new life full of possibilities (Luke 17:11-19). Jesus brought security to Zacchaeus, but then Zacchaeus had choices to make (Luke 19:1-10). Security was not the fulfillment of people’s lives; rather, it laid the foundation for meaningful lives. God’s kingdom is at hand when people realize Christ has given them security, setting the groundwork for a world where new life can truly thrive.

Vulnerability as a Component of Christian Security While on Earth

Jesus said, and his disciples soon found this to be true, that the security he offered would lead to their personal peril, in the same way it led to his. Even as they encouraged true security in their human community and promised eternal security, those who feared the believers imprisoned, insulted, and tortured them. Yet they were convinced that nothing could separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus their Lord (Romans 8:39). According to tradition, all but one of the apostles was martyred. During their lives the security they knew in Christ could not be taken from them. They continued, during vul-

nerable times, to live lives made new by Christ's security. At Pentecost, when Peter and those touched by the Holy Spirit were susceptible to the sneering and potential backlash of nonbelievers, Peter quoted King David, saying, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced" (Acts 2:25-26). Being "in the Lord" is to have security for the journey. The apostle Paul, writing from prison, in a place of human weakness, still expressed the higher qualities of beauty, truth, justice, peace, unity, and belonging. Paul's security was so certain that his spirit was untouched by threats.

In the book *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark argues that Christianity grew largely because of the way Christians dealt with crises. Stark cites evidence that during the great epidemic of 260 C.E. Christians ran toward trouble, caring for the sick and dying, rather than running away from it. This was definitely different from the actions of those who did not have a sense of security from Jesus Christ. Stark shows as well that during epidemics, Christians were committed to all people, not only their own group. One hundred years later this was still a distinguishing feature of Christian community. Stark quotes the pagan emperor Julian in 360 C.E. complaining that the Christians were much better at charity than were pagans. It appears that these Christians who truly embraced Christ's message accepted that their security was in Christ and that they had nothing to fear. They also accepted their vocation of giving basic security to others (Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*. San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1997, pp.73-94).

The 1980 General Synod paper "Christian Faith and the Nuclear Arms Race" identified Christian security not as the absence of a threat, but rather as "the presence of One who is 'our only comfort in life and death,' whose love casts out fear, whose power has overcome the powers of this world" (*MGS 1980*, p. 121). Peter, Paul, and the early church all exemplify for us that knowing Christ as the source of security made them more prepared to share security with the world in which they lived. Christian response in different crises is guided by the truth that holds fast in every situation; "because he [the Lord] is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8). For Christians, the security threat of terrorism need be addressed through the lens of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ and Guidelines for Security

Through the lens of Jesus Christ some basic guidelines for security emerge. All security strategies must include rigorous diplomacy and communication, especially with those labeled "enemy." All security strategies need to include national introspection, even repentance, seeking to discover what aspects of national life have offended one's adversaries. Security strategies should include vulnerable emissaries, who face insecurity and take risks, head on, in love. Security strategies need to be understood holistically, connected to the rest of life, leading to "new life."

The Cost of Being Preoccupied with Security

The nation state has a legitimate and God-given role to play in establishing security. At the same time, a nation state that is guided by security programs that differ greatly from the security principles offered by Jesus is a hindrance to the kingdom of God.

In their book *Toward a Human World Order, Beyond the National Security Straitjacket*, Gerald and Patricia Mische talk about the debilitating character of security when it is treated as the highest good. Referring to Abraham Maslow's Theory on the "Hierarchy of Human Development," the Misches show that security is actually one of the most basic of human needs, an aspect of life that need be firmly in place before a person can lift off to the higher basic human needs of belongingness, love, respect, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Beyond those basic needs are endless "meta needs," needs ranging from play-

fulness to uniqueness. In other words, psychologists are restating what we know about security through Jesus Christ. Security is a starting point, not the ultimate goal. The Misches argue that when a basic good becomes the ultimate goal, truly higher goals are denied (Gerald and Patricia Mische, *Toward a Human World Order, Beyond the Security Straitjacket*. New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

There is currently a culture of fear in the United States, and the government has employed an abundance of security measures to address those fears. Yet no matter how many security measures it takes, the government seemingly cannot convince itself or the public that enough has been done. Hundreds of lives and hundreds of billions of dollars have already been allotted for the costs of war in Afghanistan and Iraq alone—and it won't be enough. The first thirty minutes of the State of the Union Address in January 2004 were committed to addressing fear, terror, and security. Fear has led to the United States being in a security straitjacket of sorts. Christians need to say, "enough already." In Christ we've seen that security comes from God above, and that the government needs to be realistic about what level of security it can provide.

A number of present realities illustrate the cost of preoccupation with security in post-September 11 society.

1. Jeopardizing Social Well-Being for the Sake of Security. Being preoccupied with security, the U.S. risks jeopardizing other aspects of its social well-being. Today we use the word "Spartan" to describe an austere, joyless approach to life, referring to the ancient Greek civilization of Sparta, where security and warfare became the sole focus of a society. In the present-day concern for security, we risk becoming a Spartan society. In states across the U.S. funds are being cut from public education, social welfare, government subsidies, infrastructure, and housing vouchers. While the financial struggles of American states began before September 11, 2001, it has been striking to see hundreds of billions spent on war, while states have struggled to maintain social and economic programs that protect vulnerable Americans from want and deprivation.

2. Imposing on Civil Liberties for the Sake of Security. Being preoccupied with security, the American government has dramatically shifted its approach to civil liberties. On October 3, 2001, Prof. David Cole of Georgetown University Law Center warned of the dangers of the newly crafted Patriot Act that had come before the House of Representatives. Cole said, "we should not overreact in a time of fear, a mistake we have made all too often in the past...we should not sacrifice the bedrock foundations of our constitutional democracy" (testimony before the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Property Rights of the Senate Judiciary Committee). Not only did the Patriot Act go forward, new legislation seeks to increase its power. Cole outlined some of the "highlights" of Patriot II, the amended Patriot Act, currently before Congress: secret arrests permitted, police spying permitted, unchecked deportation authority, stripping citizenship for political associations, bypassing judicial oversight, the creation of a DNA database for "suspected" terrorists, eliminating privacy protections, access to credit reports, secrecy, new death penalties, extradition without treaty, and expedited removal for "Criminal Aliens." Fear-driven security measures have encroached on civil liberties.

3. The Alleged Use of Torture for the Sake of Security. Encroachment on civil liberties has extended even to the point of making torture an acceptable option for interrogation, something that in recent decades has been deplored by the U.S. Mark Bowden, writing in *Atlantic Monthly*, explains the tactics of U.S. interrogations, defining previously forbidden practices as "torture lite." In a recent article, published in the Christian journal *Word and World*, Douglas Johnson, executive director of the Center for Victims of Torture in Minneapolis, Minnesota, expressed concern that "in our time of fear following 9/11, allegations are surfacing that the U.S. government is engaging in forms of interrogation that

incorporate acts of torture” (Douglas Johnson, “Restoring the Dignity of the Human Spirit,” *Word and World*, Winter 2004, 12). Johnson states that this is especially troubling since the U.S. has been the primary supporter of torture healing programs around the world” (12). Amnesty International reports, “there have been persistent allegations of ill-treatment and torture of detainees subjected to so-called ‘stress and duress’ techniques including blindfolding, prolonged forced sleep deprivation, and cruel use of shackles.” The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has expressed the same concerns, saying they were “observing a worrying deterioration in the psychological health of a large number of [the prisoners].” The ICRC has urged that prisoners be given access to the rule of law. Even if these allegations prove false, the hesitation of the U.S. government to give access to investigators and lawyers has raised serious questions.

4. Revitalizing the Potential for Nuclear War for the Sake of Security. The proliferation of weapons that could destroy the planet in minutes is one of the clearest examples that the nation is in a security straitjacket. A return to the nuclear security concerns of the 1970s and ’80s is underway. Proliferation treaties are being ignored, and some have even been publicly revoked by the U.S. and other nations. The 1980 General Synod paper “Christian Faith and the Nuclear Arms Race” spoke of the dangers of nuclear proliferation. Even in 1980 the United States had enough explosive force to blow up the world twelve times over. The paper stated that nuclear proliferation is a “false security” and that with escalation of these weapons the world was becoming progressively less secure (*MGS 1980*, pp. 118, 120). Richard Barnet, in his 1981 publication *Real Security*, wrote, “not just the new nations but also dissident groups and terrorist organizations...have the power to make their presence felt” (Richard J. Barnet, *Real Security*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981, p. 91). Little did Barnet know, little did anyone know, just how available these capacities would be not only to small rogue states but also to terror groups and extremists from various sectors. Unlike in years past, when the greatest threats were nation-versus-nation, now the greatest threats can come from anywhere.

The language of nuclear proliferation has even infiltrated discussion of preemptive war, as the President has said that in such a war the U.S. could include the use of weapons of overwhelming force.

5. The Doctrines of Preemption and Prevention, Used for the Sake of Security. Preoccupation with security led the U.S. government to be the aggressor against Iraq, based on the doctrine of preemption. “The question [of preemption] is not altogether new, as the consequences of military mobilizations prior to World War I illustrate” (“Christians and War in the 21st Century,” *Shalom Papers* Vol. 5, No. 1, 2003, 18). The “new” feature was to carry out a full-scale war based on preemption. It was argued that Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction were an imminent threat to the U.S., and therefore it was justified in striking first, based on the doctrine of preemption. The doctrine of preemption had previously been understood within the context of just war doctrine, which put it within a context of moral and legal restraint. However, the National Security Strategy, published in September 2002, asserts that the U.S. will use preemption whenever and wherever it deems necessary, using it as a tool to keep danger from gathering. The Churches’ Center for Theology and Public Policy states, “this doctrine is not a morally defensible position. If it were to become normalized in the international system, it would lead to significantly more bloodshed around the world...furthermore, it is hypocritical for one country to claim such a right of intervention for itself, without extending it to all nation states” (“Christians and War...” 20).

A step more radical than the doctrine of preemption is the doctrine of prevention. Preventive war doctrine justifies a strike against a nation that might have future capability or desire to attack the U.S. New claims of a so-called preventive war are absolutely unprecedented. As it now appears that the risk of weapons of mass destruction (WMD’s)

was greatly overstated, the Iraq war seems more accurately described as a preventive war. International outrage over these doctrines, and the implementation of these doctrines in Iraq, is leading to U.S. isolation from the international community.

6. American Unilateralism for the Sake of Security. This isolation has been exacerbated by a growing unilateralism in U.S. policy. Christ's security looks to include and listen to the voices of others. Refusal to listen to the insights and concerns of world spiritual leaders prior to the war seemed reckless. The disagreement with the U.N. and the refusal to give the U.N. Weapons Inspectors more time to perform their duties in Iraq, led many nations to conclude that the U.S. had little regard for international law and cooperation. In a *New York Times* column on March 9, 2003, Thomas Friedman quoted President George W. Bush as saying, "When it comes to our security, we really don't need anybody's permission." Preoccupation with security gave the administration the green light to employ unprecedented military doctrines and to break relationship with global partners. While the U.S. did have seventeen partners in the coalition, there were many traditional allies that chose not to participate. Also, many of the seventeen partners in the coalition did so without popular support at home.

Christians see and act on the security crises looming large in the world from a unique perspective. Having received the blessing of eternal security from God, and guidance for living in security while on earth through our Lord Jesus Christ, Christians are also called to bless others by being a prophetic voice for the nation and for the world during times of insecurity. To that end the following principles for thinking theologically about security are offered:

1. God, Not "Security," Is Named All-in-All

Security is a basic human need; it is not the greatest good, and certainly not our God. Freed by Christ, believers will not bow down before security as if it were a merciful idol. As Christians, we will not celebrate an agenda that holds up security as the highest goal.

2. Inclusive Security

A Christian understanding of security recognizes that Jesus Christ is for the entire world. God wants security for Nineveh and Jerusalem. God wants security for Baghdad and New York, Palestine and Israel. Security grows when nations talk with one another and new voices are included in the conversations, rather than exhibiting a "go it alone" attitude. Jesus Christ came as a physician for all who needed one, that all the world might be "healthy." He did not differentiate by race, gender, age, nationality, or ethnicity. God has secured a place for all people within God's love and care. A Christian approach to security has to be global in nature. In a world quite literally connected economically, environmentally, militarily, and technologically, security must be understood globally. There can be no "homeland security" unless there is concern for the security of all. The 1980 General Synod paper "Christian Faith and the Nuclear Arms Race" urged the church to call the nations to forge new, nonviolent security systems based not on narrow nationalism but on the vision of global community and world order" (*MGS 1980*, p. 127). Today this call is as timely as ever.

3. Holistic Security

A Christian approach to security is holistic. It looks at all the ways that security is denied around the globe. Jesus addressed the security concerns of hunger, poverty, exploitation, racism, unjust laws, and disease, as well as promising deliverance from guilt, sin, and fear of death. Security needs to be sought in every realm of every society for all people. Where there is hunger, security will come when a plan is created for equitable distribution of food. Where there is strife, security will come when a

plan is carried out to recognize “the enemy” as one’s brother or sister. Where people do not know the security of Christ’s peace, it will come about when the good news is proclaimed.

Christians are encouraged by the fact that the U.S. government has been expressing concern for some holistic security issues. Through the creation and initial funding of the Millennium Challenge Account, the U.S. government is showing that it cares about extending security for the basic needs of people in the poorest nations of the world. Through the increased financial commitment to addressing the AIDS epidemic in Sub-Saharan Africa, the U.S. government has shown concern for their security.

4. Security Is Brought about Primarily by Lovers, Not Superpowers

The great giver of security, our Lord Jesus Christ, was an itinerant, homeless preacher. He brought security not through worldly strength, but rather through offering the most self-giving and legitimate love that one could offer. A Christian understanding of security remembers that security does not come from the top down, through the strongest worldly powers, but rather through the most real lovers—wherever they are found. Real security comes by following in the path of Jesus Christ, who, though he had all the power of God, humbled himself, taking the form of a servant, and offered his life for the sake of the world.