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God's Unilateralism: Towards a Theology of Peace

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Abstract
The difference between "Pax Christi" and "Pax Romana" is discussed. Sölle suggests that Christians cannot have the peace of Christ in their hearts while the Pax Romana guarantees the continuation of the world order. The following people responded to her lecture: Fred Block, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania; Laura Lyn Inglis, Assistant Professor of Religion, Stockton State College; Joan Martin, Chaplain, Temple University; William Werpehowski, Associate Professor of Religion, Villanova University.

Comments
Boardman Lecture XXV. Edited and foreword by Joanne D. Bosky.

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God's Unilateralism: Towards a Theology of Peace

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Including Responses to the Lecture
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Foreword

The twenty-fifth George Dana Boardman Lecture in Christian Ethics at the University of Pennsylvania was delivered by Professor Dorothee Sölle, Harry Fosdick Visiting Professor at Union Theological Seminary, and Lecturer in Theology at the University of Hamburg. Prof. Sölle is the author of many distinguished works in theology and ethics, including The Arms Race Kills—Even Without War and The Strength of the Weak: Toward a Christian Feminist Identity. Her talk, "God's Unilateralism: Towards a Theology of Peace," was the second lecture given since the Lectureship was reinaugurated in 1984 by the Religious Studies Department, which was entrusted with the responsibility for coordinating and administering the Lectureship in 1979-80.

Dr. Sölle's lecture was delivered on October 10, 1985, and a panel discussion was held the following morning in response. The panel was moderated by Dr. E. Ann Matter, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and was made up of four respondents: Dr. William Werpehowski, Associate Professor of Religion at Villanova University; The Rev. Joan Martin, Temple University Chaplain and founding member of the Women's Theological Center in Boston; Dr. Laura Lyn Inglis, Assistant Professor of Religion at Stockton State College; and Dr. Fred Block, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. The panel's responses, as well as Prof. Sölle's ensuing remarks, are included in this publication.

I would like to thank many persons including Ted Bergren, Prof. Robert A. Kraft, Mary LaRue, Prof. Ann Matter, Leonard Norman Primiano, Prof. Guy R. Welbon, Benjamin Wright, and especially Dr. Ramsey, without whom this publication could not have been prepared.

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GOD'S UNILATERALISM: 
TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF PEACE

1. PAX CHRISTI AND PAX ROMANA--WE HAVE TO CHOOSE

The New Testament talks about two different concepts of peace which show up in the story of the birth of Jesus according to Luke's gospel. In the very first part of this Christmas gospel we hear about Caesar Augustus' decree that all the world should be enrolled for purposes of taxation. Joseph and Mary have to travel from Nazareth to Jerusalem because of this enrollment. It is a legal measure of the Roman Emperor in order to exploit and keep under control the subjected inhabitants of the Roman provinces. The Roman administration had to get hold of the people in these provinces, to register them and enlist them.

This measure was a part of a system which was called the peace of Rome, or Pax Romana. It consisted of a center which was Rome and a periphery which was the conquered provinces. In the geopolitical center of this world order there was material abundance, greed for new commodities and pleasures, moral corruption, psychic emptiness and lack of human feeling. On the edges of this order, in the dominated provinces, there was unbelievable misery, and lack of food, water, shelter, work and education; there was also an apathetic hopelessness among the masses of the impoverished. The hired workers in the vineyard in Jesus' parable (Matt. 20:1-16) who wait all day long to be hired mirror the economic situation. Many other texts of the New Testament talk about the landless and possessionless masses, about their hunger and their diseases. The historical situation of all these stories is the Pax Romana, the Roman peace comprised of domination over the impoverished. It was a well perfected system constituted so that the rich could become richer and the poor become poorer. It was called peace, pax, by those who loved it and profited from it.
But the story in the second chapter of Luke talks also about a different peace, a peace which is announced to the poor. Peace on earth does not simply mean peace in heaven after this life; it does not simply mean peace with God within your individual soul. It means that the Peace of Christ begins here with the poor who have buried their hopes a long time ago. This other peace leads the shepherds from hopelessness and fear into a "great joy which comes to all people" (Luke 2:10). The Pax Christi is the good news for all who suffer under the Pax Romana. It is news that later will reach out to the center as well. This other peace, which is not built upon oppression and military domination, leads the people who seek it into persecution. The messengers of Christ's peace are silenced, or not listened to, persecuted, and, if necessary, eliminated by the state police as Paul was. There are many ways to silence people and to make them believe in the system of the Pax Romana. The background of the Christmas story is the financial politics of Caesar Augustus. He and Pontius Pilate stand at the beginning and at the end of Jesus' story. Taxation, enrollment and torture specialists represent Roman power. It was an organized system of violence and militarism which was necessary to secure the exploitation of the provinces in order to maintain the luxury of the few in the center.

These are two very different concepts of peace: the military peace of Rome that starts with intimidation through a bureaucracy, and the other peace among people with whom God is pleased, namely—and especially—the poor.

One cannot understand the New Testament without keeping in mind the difference between Pax Romana and Pax Christi. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot have the peace of Christ in our hearts and for our inner selves while the Pax Romana guarantees our lifestyle and the continuation of the world order in which we live.

When I learned history, the textbooks spoke about the glory and beautiful culture of the Pax Romana. No one told us about the blind, the lame, the crippled and the sick you find on almost every page of the New Testament. The whole education I got echoed the Roman propagandists who called the subjugation of other people "peace," the exploitation "order," and those who were opposed to this system "terrorists." But in reality, terror was a major means to keep this
sort of peace. Any peace built on militarism works through terror. The permanent preparation for war, the preparedness to kill, is called in strategic terms “deterrence.” But in the word “deterrence” there is embedded the word “terror.” The means to keep the world under domination of Rome were taxation politics, economic dictatorship, price control, and counterinsurgency, including torture, interrogation, and militarism. Pax Romana was a terrorist system that meant, for the majority of the then known world, living under the subsistence level in a day to day war for survival. It we look around our own world, we easily see that there is a war going on right now, the war between the rich and the poor. According to the most moderate estimation there are 15,000 people each day “falling” in this war; they die from hunger and other curable diseases. The bombs which we produce in preparing ourselves for war are falling now on the poor.

In the old days the Roman propaganda historians called the system “peace”; they named Caesar the “peacemaker,” as seen on Roman coins. Jesus took this word away from those who misused it for their peace, and gave it to those who work and live for a different kind of peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers," he said to women, fisherfolks and other ordinary people. It was not the Pax Romana he had in mind. For him, peacemaking did not mean to terrorize people through militarism.

The Peace of Christ, the Pax Christi, is built on justice. There is no other way to truly have peace. We have to choose which kind of peace we seek and work for.

II. THE BOMBS ARE FALLING NOW

Today's Pax Romana is based on the ideology of deterrence. Si vis pacem, para bellum, as the late Roman war historian Flavius Vegetius Renatus put it. The assumption is that one could plan, think, work for and count on a future while at the same time wanting to prevent this future from happening. This is not a productive contradiction but rather a commonplace self-deception, a
A technical military expression like "political weapon" expresses this lie. The old-fashioned expression "weapon" is about as appropriate for tools of mass extermination as it is for Zyklon B, the gas the Nazis used in Auschwitz. As though one could invent, test, produce, train for and learn to use such things without any real consequences, only "political significance."

It is not that simple with the dialectic of the time in which we live: the future which we design and deliberately plan changes our present without our consent. The militarization of a whole society has to destroy the remembrance of the history of liberation. Germans should not remember the liberation from fascism and militarism they experienced in 1945. But with memory hope dies out, too. The future is—projected but nonetheless real—mother of the present. If we prepare for war, we make war into our mother. In a traditional society a bride lives in preparing herself for marriage. The preparation for love forms her present life. The projected future is the mother of the present. The bride is a symbol of the soul who prepares herself for God. We in the West prepare for the future by breaking down our inhibitions against killing, and this breakdown in turn creates today's violent conditions. Therefore some religious leaders in the First World recognize that in a nuclear age the preparation of war, not just its making, is a crime. The possession of nuclear arms, not only their usage, is a sin, as the Dutch Reformed Church put in in a pastoral letter in 1980.

Armament kills even without war. This is obvious in three areas. Above all, there are the poor people in the Third World whom we cannot feed with bombs. Secondly, there are the disenfranchised people in the rich countries, such as the jobless, the elderly, migrant workers, and the handicapped—the bombs are falling precisely on them. Military rearmament dictates social disarmament; this is happening now in the U.S.A., where the underprivileged are being robbed of their rights and pushed back into their pre-Roosevelt state of disenfranchisement. Thirdly, the bombs are falling on the minds and hearts of ordinary people in the first world who believe in the balance of deterrence and work and pay for the Bomb. Fifty percent of the world's scientists and engineers do their research for military related industries, namely for Death. The Bomb is not only something out there, in the Sierra
Nevada or in the Pentagon; it is already in our own lives. What is the sense of an institution like a school if army officers have free access to it? How can someone within the health care system take part in disaster training in triage, the selection of victims into "don't bother," "not yet," and "to be treated"? How can a West German government official like former defense minister Apel, whose job is to calculate megatons of dead people, hold a speech in memory of the victims of World War II on Memorial Day?

Every form of preparation for the use of nuclear violence destroys those who "prepare" themselves. An old pacifist song says, "I ain't gonna study war no more," and it's right: "study war" is more than preparation for later or never. It is practice in shooting, becoming accustomed to the possibility of catastrophe. "Thinking the unthinkable" is not just a simulation game for staff officers; to keep the loyalty of the masses, it must become a principle of education.

Nuclear armament has a total quality, similar to Hitler's "total war." The mass game "shooting" demands consensus which it is up to the ideological apparatus of the state to produce. Deviation in workplace or school, "too much pacifism," must be repressed. A culture which is dominated by militarism--in its science, its technology and its economy--has increasingly totalitarian tendencies. For a political ideology of "national security," people in Latin America may be tortured; in West Germany they may be blacklisted from their professions, criminalized and slandered; a postal employee who belongs to the Communist party represents a "security risk." But it is clear that the millions of people who are involved in the peace movement also represent a "security risk." Continuation of the present policy demands sharpened internal repression and decreased democracy. The conservatives aren't really wrong when they claim that longing is a major characteristic of the peace movement. Granted, they hardly know what longing really is, what lies in its power; to put it down, they qualify it as "only" or "just" longing. In so doing, they fail to recognize the religious dimension of the peace movement in action. They don't understand that people are seeking God when they begin to become "resistance fighters against death," as nineteenth century religious socialist Christoph Blumhardt called the Christians. One cannot
seek God while preparing for mass murder as a precaution. We cannot truly love each other under the domination of militarism.

III. CHRIST LIVES WITHOUT PROTECTION

Jesus of Nazareth has shown us a different way of life. He lived without protection. That is not a statement of faith but a simple statement of fact. He renounced the protection that a family can offer. He did not want the protection that property can give. He chose to keep silence rather than make use of the protection his eloquence could have given him. He explicitly rejected the protection that weapons and armies can provide. When Peter tried to defend him when he was taken captive, he said: “Put your sword back, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father who would promptly send more than twelve legions of angels to my defense?” (Matt. 26:52-53). If Jesus had wanted protection, he could have asked God for it and let God protect him. But he does not ask God for protection. He live and acts without protection. The officials in power treat him like a dangerous criminal who is likely to resist with violence, but he could have been captured easily in broad daylight in the temple where he taught without protection and without giving a thought to fleeing. “It was at this time that Jesus said to the crowds, ‘Am I a brigand, that you had to set out to capture me with swords and clubs? I sat teaching in the Temple day after day and you never laid hands on me’” (Matt. 26:55-56).

Jesus lived without protection. When his vulnerability became visible, when he rejected the natural response of striking back when attacked, when he refused to hope for the intervention of a higher power, at that point his disciples left him and fled. The apparently could not tolerate vulnerability; if that was the only alternative, they preferred violence; they preferred to be armed; at the very least they preferred to be able to make threats.

But Jesus lived without protection. He did not just put up with his vulnerability; he chose it voluntarily. He chose to live without weapons, without violence, and without the protection that force—even if only in the form of threats—can offer. Jesus was
not armed, and he did not seek out the arms of others to hide behind. This kind of vulnerability has a provocative effect.

This is the very effect that Jesus’ disciples came to feel. And this is why they began one day to call this man who had lived nonviolently among them, without protection and without weapons, the “Son of God.” This was an affirmation of Jesus’ way of living without weapons. “He is the Son of God” did not mean: he has at his disposal all the weapons, all the legions, all the threats, all that he needs to destroy an enemy. It means just the opposite of “God with us” on the field-pack buckles of any army.

Jesus’ vulnerability, his renunciation of violence as the core of our perception of him as the son, friend, heir, manifestor, realizer of God, implies an understanding of God different from the one generally accepted today. If the disciples were right when they called him the “Son of God” and if this expression reveals an essential truth, then the word “God” must have a meaning totally different from the one we usually give it.

God does not want to protect himself or keep himself remote. God renounced violence and the kind of intervention that those in power practice. God does not make use of violence. In Jesus Christ, God disarmed himself. God surrendered himself without protection and without arms to those who keep crying for more and more protection and arms. In Jesus Christ, God renounced violence. And of course he did this unilaterally, without waiting for us to lay down our weapons first. In Christ, God disarmed unilaterally. He took the first step. He did not wait for others, insisting that they be the first to lay down their weapons. In Christ, he began unilaterally, on his own side, to renounce the threat of violence.

Not long ago on television I saw a leader of the Protestant Church speak on the question: “Arms Buildup or Disarmament: Where does the Church Stand?” He spoke primarily about military requirements, and when the reporter interviewing him pressed him for a theological perspective, he responded that from a theological point of view we are all guilty before God. He said, as I recall, that we are all guilty whether we possess weapons or not. The first thing that came to his mind theologically was guilt. When Protestant church leaders stress above all else in disarmament debates that we are all sinners, what they are doing is denying the
existence of a God who refuses to make threats and rejects the use of violence.

If the most essential element of Christian faith is sin and not our capacity for love, if the first thing that should come to our minds in church and in our religious life is our impotence, our weakness, our guilt, our repeated failures, then the die is already cast. Then we cultivate our own fears and coddle our own need for security. We deny that human beings are capable of making peace; we abandon the unarmed Christ and run away just as the disciples did when Jesus was taken captive and when it became clear that protection and weapons were useless now. We are tempted to look for other masters who offer more protection and security.

The old vicious circle takes this form: we are weak and we feel weak. We are afraid and we teach others to be afraid. We seek safety—that is, we wall ourselves in and hide behind the armor plate of power, hide in the control towers of devastation, feel weak again, and therefore feel compelled to press the button.

Christ broke out of this vicious circle in which we still live, this vicious circle of weakness, fear, need for protection, need for security, need for violence. It is not true, he told us, that you are weak. You can do whatever you want if you have faith. You are strong; you are beautiful. You do not need to build any walls to hide behind. You can live without armaments. Because you are strong, you can put the neurotic need for security behind you. You do not need to defend your life like a lunatic. For love of the poor, Jesus says, you can give your life away and spread it around. The mechanism that runs its course from weakness to a need for security to violence is unsound. God is in you. You do not need to protect yourself. It is possible to live without violence and without weapons.

IV. GOD'S UNILATERALISM

Where God works through people and people live as "lovers of Life" as God does, they participate in God's work of creating justice and peace. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10). Peacemaking in this sense
has a quality of unilateral action, or risk, which is embedded in any creative activity.

What happens to peace under the "balance of deterrence" is that it becomes "business as usual." It is based on bilateral agreements, arms control treaties, summit conferences, which all follow the same pattern. Each politician is careful to hold on to as many deadly toys as he can while swindling the other side out of as many as possible. But is this philosophy of peace enough? All this so-called "balance" has accomplished so far is a permanent state of escalation. Arms controls have been counterproductive because outlawing some weapons permitted the invention of others. Peace based on terror is obviously not peace. But the middle-class assumption that peace can be brought about through "treaties" contains a kind of naive rationalism. As though people could hold talks without talking with each other, or make deals without dealing with each other, negotiate before taking action. Only a superficial love of peace praises peace on both sides. Real peace education goes beyond business deals. The arms buildup kills, and bilateralism is no more than business conduct. Isn't it conceivable that some things might not be for sale?

To use a personalist model: a conflict between two individuals can perhaps be eased and made more bearable through agreements, deals, mutual consideration. But only if one of the partners moves out of the stalemate can something change and the conflict be solved; only if one of them doesn't insist that the situation is remaining as it is, but musters the strength for unilateral action; only if one of the partners to the dispute loves peace deeply enough to really put away one's weapons, to really disarm. Insisting on the continuation of prevailing violence through the threat of violence doesn't change the existing strife. But a first step on the part of someone who acts independently of others is constructive and can lead somewhere new.

Preparation for nuclear war is a crime according to international law and even according to the laws of the Federal Republic of Germany. The fact of the assumption that others are committing the same crime makes it no less criminal than does pretending that way is "defense." It's a question of overcoming bilateral thinking. Only those who unilaterally act for peace really
know what it’s about. The more articulate the peace movement becomes, the more clearly we see the idea of unilateral refusal of violence.

The most important mental progress I have made over the last few years—that is, since December 12, 1979 which I consider to be one of the most dismal days in our history—is the step from bilateralism to unilateralism. I learned that my hope for bilateral arms limitation was superficial and not serious.

I find an existential lack of seriousness in bilateral thinking. It sounds like the scream of worried mothers, “Quit fighting, children!” Thus we lie ourselves into the position of observers: it’s the fault of the fighting children. But in reality we are involved, we pay for the madness, we put up with it, we elect the directors of the madhouse who are responsible for us. We, the innocent, we, the innocent taxpayers, are part of the murderous system. With the system’s help, we let the poor die. If we really want peace then we have to start where we are, on this side, which is neither better nor worse than the other, but whose only truth is that it is our side.

We have to begin unilaterally to be able to move on bilaterally. Anything new begins unilaterally, nuclear pacifism as the moral-political minimum won’t be dealt, calculated and weighed out. The oldest and newest lack of peace was and is bilateral. There are some things which are existential in that you can’t do them with reference to other people. For example, in religion it doesn’t matter what you know about other folks and their relationship to God, what you do is what matters. Anything existential is necessarily one-sided, and peace is an existential category. One reason many people, above all young people, distrust politicians is that they don’t believe these gentlemen are capable of peace, because they turn peace into a business. They act like businessmen who deal in fear. In contrast to this, the peace movement has a spirituality which cannot accept this insult to the yesterday’s dead and this crime against today’s poor.

The political issues of peace—in connection with other issues such as imperialism and solidarity with the Third world—necessarily becomes something which we can’t delegate to peace technocrats. It is this depth of personal involvement and vulnerability which drives people into the streets and into countless
groups, initiatives and individual actions. It is as though people were despairingly defending themselves against being locked into an Orwellian bunker.

The thesis "Armaments kill, even without war" has, as I understand it, a theological dimension. Perhaps one cannot understand it without believing at least a little bit in God. Unilateral disarmament is a genuinely religious act of trust in God. The inner strength of the peace movement is that people have chosen God over the bomb, Christ's peace over the Pax Americana-Sovietica, Life over Death. Faith in the peace of SHALOM—which is grounded in justice and implies happiness—hope for the future of the human family and unconditional love of all that lives, are experiences and visions which go beyond the given and visible. Therefore the tradition calls faith, hope and love "supernatural virtues." They presuppose the emphatic notion of life with which the Bible operates. "Life" means more than mere survival amidst the balance of terror. No one can sell people on acquiescence to the capacity for nuclear blackmail by calling in "insuring peace." "The peace of God which passes all understanding preserve our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:17). This peace which surpasses our calculation is not an inner state of harmony into which the individual can withdraw. It is a peace which is "in the world, but not of the world," which gains ground here and grows into a political strength in the peace movement, but does not develop out of the capitalist mentality. The arms buildup kills; it is the peace that "this" world produces. We need a different peace, because we still need a different world.

WILLIAM WIEDEMANN
I have a text from Albert Camus, "ELIMINATION" which is the basis for my paper.
RESPONSES TO THE LECTURE

ANN MATTER:

I'd like to welcome you all this morning to the response panel to the second of the new George Dana Boardman lectures in Christian Ethics at the University of Pennsylvania. We heard a very stimulating lecture last night by Professor Sölle on God's Unilateralism and we have four respondents today. I will introduce each briefly and then call on each to speak for a few minutes about the talk, and then Professor Sölle will respond to each one briefly. We hope that we will have time at the end to have a more full response by Professor Sölle, and to have questions from the audience. I am going to ask you to speak in reverse alphabetical order, because someone named William Werpehsowski really deserves to go first once in a while. I will introduce the panelists in the order in which they will speak.

Dr. William Werpehsowski is associate professor of religion at Villanova, a specialist in ethics and moral theology. The Reverend Joan Martin, a Temple University Chaplain, is a Presbyterian minister and founding staff member of the Women's Theological Center in Boston. Dr. Laura Inglis is assistant professor of religion at Stockton State College, and has written on disarmament and Christian efforts towards world peace. Finally, Dr. Fred Block is associate professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania and a well-known radical on the Pennsylvania campus. He's our representative from the secular world.

WILLIAM WERPEHSOWSKI:

I have a text from Albert Camus' The Plague which is the basis for my remarks.

When a war breaks out, people say "it's too stupid, it can't last long." But though a war may well be "too stupid," it doesn't prevent its lasting. Stupidity has a knack of getting its way; as we should see if we were not always so wrapped up in ourselves. In this respect, our townsfolk were like everybody else, wrapped up in themselves; in other words they were humanists: they disbelieved
in pestilences. A pestilence isn’t a thing made to man’s measure; therefore we tell ourselves pestilence is a mere body of the mind, a
dead dream that will pass away. But it doesn’t pass away and, from
one bad dream to another, it is men who pass away and the
humanists first of all because they haven’t taken their precautions.
Out townfolk were not more to blame than others; they forgot to be
modest, that was all, and thought that everything still was possible
for them; which presupposed that pestilences were impossible.
They went on doing business, arranged for journeys and formed
views. How should they have given a thought to anything like
plague, which rules out any future, cancels journeys, silences the
exchange of views. They fancied themselves free and no one will
ever be free so long as there are pestilences!

Dorothee Sölle, a Christian theologian, might like these words,
for her words to us about current pestilences find not so much
confirmation from them as magnification by them. We deal now not
with a traditional war but with a totalistic preparation for a
non-traditional war. Our stupidity would blind us to the truth that
our work for the future is the mother of the present, that the
nuclear arms race kills, even without war, and that it even wages a
sort of war on the poor and the not-so-poor.

Our work for the future “lasts” into the present, and it would be
our stupidity to believe that we can measure its effects to our
liking, to limit its impact on our lives. But we are destroyed by our
preparation, and the bad dreams our preparation brings us will not
go away. We become accustomed to catastrophe, we ready ourselves
to kill, and our celebrated “precaution” against killing—to threaten
murderously—catches us unaware. We are brutalized by it, either
through the refinement of our belligerency, or the deepening of our
despair, or yet again through the psychic numbing by which we
domesticate horror. Pestilences are not impossible, and we must
not fancy ourselves free. The full magnification of the absurdity of
our present situation, an absurdity that Camus may have appreci-
ated, is that the pestilence, which is the immodest preparation
against pestilence, is our own creation. Dorothee Sölle proposes
that Christians answer absurdity with scandal, the scandal of the
one who renounces violence in the name of vulnerability, and who
thereby displays and enacts the power of God. She asks them to
wrap themselves not in themselves but rather in the crucified and
Risen Lord.

Here are powerful and thoughtful words, and we can return the favor of them and honor the giver with an effort of some thoughtful words of our own. I will try do so briefly with three sets of questions to Professor Sölle, all concerning the sort of peace she commends.

The first set of questions concerns the general character of the peace for which we may hope in human history. She contrasts two New Testament concepts of peace and then insists, rightly, that we cannot have it both ways. "We cannot have the peace of Christ in our hearts and for our inner selves while the Pax Romana guarantees our lifestyle and the continuation of the world order in which we live." That is, Christians must challenge and transform lifestyles and world orders in the name and spirit of the peace of Christ. But this rejection of a private and inward spirituality unrelated to our outward condition may be entirely correct and still beside the point; for what needs explication is how the peace of Christ may be realized in the midst of a system of self-interested claim and counterclaim. One must inquire about the possibilities of attesting to the peace of Christ in a human history characterized by the brokenness of pride and collective idolatry. So let me ask Professor Sölle: what is the nature and extent of the relation between the peace that gives hope to the poor and that is "built on justice," and the renunciation of violence which she recommends after the pattern of Jesus? Is the relation direct so that such renunciation is consistently counted on in history to overcome the domination and terror of the Pax Romana? Is the relation extended beyond our present nuclear predicament and, if so, how far? One could endorse, as did Rienhold Niebuhr, the vision of the nonviolent Christ, but go on to claim that the attainment of justice in history requires a readiness to engage in the coercive conflicts of finite and fallen human existence. Hence justice can be attained here, even justice for the poor, by securing an equilibrium of power among competing groups; and, apart from questions of just revolution, even officers of state may be in the position to protect the value of justice, by violent force if necessary. None of this removes the relevance of the ethic of Jesus since it serves both to inspire and to judge all human efforts for justice; but that relevance would also expose the
ambiguity of any realization of the peace of Christ this side of the Cross.

I do understand that Professor Söllc denies a connection between the current arms race and the establishment of any justice which may be linked in turn to the Pax Christi. I am not disposed to disagree with the assessment. Yet, again, how far might she go in allowing that the state's employment of power, or coercion, or violence can secure a relative justice in history? In particular, could she conceive of any possible situation in which the possession of nuclear arms, a situation other than our current one, may rightly serve such a purpose, serving justice?

The second group of questions addresses the specific character of the prescribed preparation for peace. What exactly does Professor Söllc mean when she speaks of disarming unilaterally? She clearly wants to contrast it with a "bilateral thinking" that follows the logic of a capitalist swindle, and that contributes to the common citizen's disavowal of responsibility for the arms race. The positive implications of her proposal are less clear. Most often, it seems to involve beginning unilaterally to renounce violence, in order "to be able to move on bilaterally." In another one of her writings, Professor Söllc calls for "one-sided (unilateral) disarmament, to be taken step by step, gradually. Now, this language is somewhat reminiscent of the American Catholic Bishops who, while claiming not to advocate a policy of unilateral disarmament, do support the taking of what the Bishops call "independent initiatives" which the United States "could take for a defined period of time, seeking to elicit a comparable step from the Soviet Union." "If an appropriate response is not forthcoming," the Bishops go on to say, "the United States would no longer be bound by the steps taken." The Bishops also urge NATO to move rapidly towards the adoption of a "no first use" policy, "but doing so in tandem with the development of an adequate alternative defense posture." Other Christian ethicists have suggested that the United States gradually and "unilaterally" give up all nuclear weapons that are not capable of any "just use," using just war theory here, and subsequently take its chances. Thus, although we could never control what an opponent might do, we could on our side rule out the possibility of escalation by denying ourselves the weapons to which
we might escalate [in a nuclear conflict]. Perhaps these proposals do not coincide with Professor Sölle's challenge; it is in fact difficult to tell, since we are not given principles which warrant or structure the preferred process of disarmament. Do they coincide? If not, why not? If so, does the language of "unilateralism" and "renunciation of violence" perhaps promise more than is actually delivered? At least for the Bishops, the renunciation seems also to presuppose, tragically, the reliance on a properly limited capacity for violence for the purpose of just protection.

Finally, there is the issue of the primary social location of the Christian witness to peace. I wonder whether Professor Sölle's explicit attention to this matter is framed in categories that bypass an important and perhaps necessary Christian option. On the one hand, from Professor Sölle's text we are told that "peace is an existential category" where "existential" implies that one acts on one's own "without reference to other people." On the other hand, there is a celebration of the extent and variety of the peace initiatives in which Christians may participate with other citizens. The first point drives home the demand to take personal and autonomous responsibility, and the second emphasizes the importance of a more general solidarity. The individualism of the first and non-particularity, although communal non-particularity, of the second still leave room, perhaps, for the sharp reminder that a non-violent Christian community may have to remain a separated and minority community, in which the particular identities of individual disciples could be nurtured and the critique of the larger culture forged. The great promise of "unilateral thinking," as I see it, lies in that form of common life, the common life of a separated minority community, for therein creative initiatives may retain theological integrity and awareness of limits for what can be achieved in public realm. With integrity and that awareness Christians can make tactical alliances with others in the broader peace movement, but be more focused and more resistant to selling out to establishment conceptions of peace and political effectiveness. Does anything in Professor Sölle's paper rule out this plea to locate the struggle for the peace of Christ between existential decision and the citizens' movement, locating it in between the two and ordering both sides, if you will, to the common
life of disciples of Christ?

I will close with Camus for my third question. Camus also said that Christians ought to speak out loud and clear, that they should voice their condemnation in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt, could rise in the heart of the simplest person. They should get away from abstractions and confront the blood-stained race history has taken on today. "The grouping we need, said Camus, "is a grouping of men [and women] resolved to speak up clearly and pay up personally." Here too, Professor Sölle would assent, I believe. Her efforts go far to meet Camus' challenge. In following her lead, my questions are directed towards helping us go a bit further.

JOAN MARTIN:

Last night I looked at the information sheet that introduced us to you, and I saw that we are called "ethicists, theologians and political thinkers who will respond to Dr. Sölle." I would like to speak, instead, as a pastor, because I basically see myself as a campus pastor and as a parish minister, one who deals with motivating people, with the emotional fallout of psychic numbing, and with trying to help people to move from that state and organize in some respects. In that light, then, I would not so much like to offer objective criticism as a kind of response a pastor would, at least a pastor from my position. My question is: how useful is your material in working in a parish situation, trying to speak to people who generally do not think about these things because their issues are much more on a survival level. I think from the perspective of the black religious tradition (and I use that in a very broad sense), both from the prophetic tradition which called the black church into being, over and against a segregated Christianity--the reason for the black church coming into being, not because it chose to be so--but in a more recent history coming from a feminist perspective as well, I think primarily biblically, in the way in which I view the world, and to the people with whom I speak.

So I want first to address the issue of the Pax Christi. It is for me, as a motif of liberation theology, very important because it stems consistently from not only the biblical Hebrew understanding of shalom, but in fact is consistent with what I understand to be an
empowering God that comes out of the Exodus faith that is grounded in a social, economic and political context such as was found in Egypt. As we understand the story in Exodus, the kind of concretized description of oppression that is present in that text, then we understand Pax Christi not so much as a political system which Christians adopt to wage struggle in the secular arena against nuclearism, but as a biblical description that in fact is very accurate about what the natures of the structures of oppression are, and how that is consistent, calling us to a new historical understanding, a new historical description that continues to bring us to an authentic understanding of shalom. That is to say, biblically, as I would understand making Christian faith alive in the context of the black church, I would have to talk about a historical God that is present, not only incarnationally as we have traditionally talked about it in pietistic terms in the black church, but to make that reformation, that entrance into history concrete, a concrete expression.

We in the black church have moved away from that since the first statements of black liberation theology in the late sixties and early seventies, and I think your understanding of Pax Christi can help us return to a more prophetic understanding of the historical concrete entrance of God into history. This is not locked into the Exodus event, or into the exile or into the incarnation of Christ in the first century, but it can happen in this historical present. Now to the people I preach to on Sundays that is an important dimension because the overall structure of pietistic American Christianity has allowed even the prophetic nature of black Christian tradition to fall into an inner Pax Christi and an outer Pax Regni. And I think that is important for us, or at least for me, as I preach to a people who work as janitors, as low-level civil servants, and people who don't think very much about nuclearism and the threat of nuclear war because that just is not in their frame of survival.

My second comment about the importance of Pax Christi is that, again, biblically speaking, it emanates from a Jesus of Nazareth, who, according to scripture, as you highlighted for us last evening and in your paper, lived a life of vulnerability, one without property, one without arms, one without protection, a vulnerability which he chose. And therefore he is the son of a God who renounces violence.
and disarms Godself. I think that your theme of God's unilateralism, as it emanates from a Pax Christi, is important; but it is not without concern to the view from below. My organizing question, then, is to what constituency, to what community, do you speak? I think there is, in fact, as I read your work and have read prior works, a clear articulation for a certain group of people, and I'd like you to articulate further who that group of people is.

The larger question comes from several questions that have to do with how you conceptualize and image, and I do not hold those two things the same. The conceptualization is the way we think about God, or about nuclearism, or about justice; but our images are the deep symbols by which we really behave and live. And so I would like to ask a question about community. What community do you address yourself to? What is the prior understanding of the nature of God that you conceptualize and image, as imaged by North American European Christian traditions, that a new conceptualization and image of a disarmed god is an appropriate image for a time? That is to say, you give us an understanding, or at least last night you spoke about, a god who disarms. But you did not tell us about the God who was present prior to disarming, and about how European/North American theology has conceptualized and imaged that God so that a new image and conceptualization is needed. What is wrong with what North American/European theology has imaged and conceptualized as God? The second question in the broad framework also has to do, then, with the vulnerability of a Jesus of Nazareth. In a male-dominated society, a Jesus who lives vulnerably without protection and without arms lives like a woman. In a racist society, a Jesus of Nazareth who is vulnerable without protection and without arms lives as a black person or a person of Hispanic nation origin. In the case of our struggle in Central America, perhaps he lives as a Salvadoran or Guatemalan or Costa Rican refugee, and, thereby, without the rights of protection from society. A Jesus who lives vulnerably, without protection, without arms, in a class society is a poor person who lives with no access to the resources of society.

In that sense, then, given the question about what community you address in your comments, how do we begin to understand an empowering God who gives us strength and vulnerability? And what
connection does that have, then, with the community which you address? It seems to me when I drive across a place like (and this is local and you will not know it) the corner of 33rd and Diamond, just as you exit out of the park, and see a sign on the wall that says: "This is the territory of the Wartoys," a local gang with a territory at 33rd and Diamond, I think. From the perspective of folks who I talk to on the streets every day, to talk about a Jesus who is vulnerable, who is without protection, without arms, may in fact be an understanding that comes from liberation theology and is helpful in certain particularities of liberation theology. But how do we relate that vulnerability to the kind of vulnerability you call for, and to the community you are calling to adopt it?

The third question is about an understanding of sin. How do we understand what it means to be sinful in light of nuclearism? Again, the question is what community do you address? As women in a patriarchal, male-dominated society, sin has always been our attempt to take on strength and power and to be self-determining. Now, that is a very generalized concept of patriarchal religion. For black liberation theology, sin has always been to stand and be who you are told to be—be the slave who is meek and mild and loved by one's master. For poor folks, sin is to know that yours is the kingdom to come, as you said last night. The question of sin, again, is how do you define sin for the community to which you speak, and how does that relate to the communities who are down under? I would like to raise just two more particular points. One is to thank you for enunciating, not in so many words but in some particular words to me, that the personal is the political. You spoke in a paraphrased way: as though one could invent, test, produce, train for and learn to use military nuclear technology without any real consequences. But your political message in fact suggests to the community to which you speak (I am guessing what that community is, although I think I have a pretty good idea) that we cannot any longer think what we do as individuals has no implication, even though we do not necessarily, personally see ourselves tied to the preparations for nuclear war. That is to say that, biblically, the call to discipleship which you state, and which Bill put in a different way, asks the question: which side are you on? Choose it and do something about it; to do that automatically throws you into
the political realm. Whether or not you take your strength from a small Christian community, or a Abrahamic minority, or whether you try to create that as part of the larger ethos of society, you force us to understand that the personal is political, and we cannot avoid that.

My last comment is about language. Language is important both in the black community and in the feminist communities, and I find your language is very helpful. First, you use inclusive language about God, and I want to thank you for that. Second, I want to say you demystify what for many people I deal with are very hard issues. They would not necessarily understand "unilateralism"—it's not something we talk about—but they do understand, because they are poor and they are black, and many are women, that their ultimate trust is in God, and that is a lesson that a larger dominant society has yet to learn. The concern as we talk about that language is how do we talk about the language of the party for people at the bottom, so that unilateralism isn't just for folks who already have experienced trusting God from the bottom, but they are joined in a significant way with those who experience it for the first time. You also give language to people in a very concrete and helpful way, and that demystifies the pulls of the patriarchy of a racist, classist society by saying that the Defense Department really is the War Department, and that bilateralism is really just a way to talk about a business agreement by which lots of people are cut out. And it's also a way, then, to talk about the fact that those who have been denied the rules of learning the technology and the language of technology can appropriate it for themselves and turn it on its head. This is a promise of what the kingdom would be: a great reversal.

So, my comments to you have to do with thinking biblically, asking questions about the nature of God, the nature of sin, the nature of empowerment in light of the community to which you speak. And, finally, to thank you for lifting up for me two important issues: the personal as political, and the nature of language.

DOROTHEE SÖLLE:

(TO WILLIAM WERPEHOWSKI) I understood your first question about the general character of peace. The question is: how can you
talk about militarism if you don't talk about capitalism? Or, what sense would it make to talk about militarism if militarism necessarily flows out of capitalism, going back to Lenin and others who said this at the beginning of this century? I now think I was attracted for a while in the early eighties to a position coming a little closer to those people in the freeze movement, for example, who have chosen to talk about militarism without talking about capitalism. That's the bourgeois middle class peace movement, which is concerned with its own survival, period, not concerned with other races, groups, the dispossessed, and so on. Now my hope was then that the peace movement would lead those middle class people in God's way, just understanding the peace movement as a pedagogical instrument of God, to lure those people into understanding the whole system better. Because if you think about it, and I respond very clearly, my constituency is the people I live with, the class out of which I come. I hope that not all of them will go to Hell, very natural for me, or stay in Hell, to say it better, where they are right now. (TO JOAN MARTIN) So the group to whom I address myself is not you, sister, you who do your thing. You do it better than I could do it for you; that's ridiculous. I have to talk to my sisters—doctors, lawyers and all of rest of the middle class which is so similar in West Germany and the United States. One of my questions is: is there hope for this class? Is there any hope for that class; is there conversion for that class? Is there possibility for change and redemption and salvation? In light of this I would like to say that I think I'm more skeptical now than I was three or four years ago about the possibilities of such a limited perspective on peace.

(To WILLIAM WERPEHOWSKI) Maybe people really don't see la peste, and they cultivate la peste, and then they are surprised when it is over them. And I think that is surely a certain unclarity in this paper; that I haven't clarified the issue enough, I think, to make people understand. We have a phrase, I think it's by Walter Benjamin or one of the others of the Frankfurt school, who said don't talk about fascism if you have chosen to silence capitalism, or the analysis of capitalism, because fascism isn't just something which drops out of the blue sky. It is the legitimate child of the capitalist order if it is in trouble, and it chooses to forget human rights, and
everything else that it has on its file, so to speak. I think this is a
danger in any of us who work in those movements, because, if I think
about my own class, how can a white middle class person be saved,
how can the rich young ruler in the gospel, what could possible
happen to him, and his sister as well? I think human rights
advocacy and the nuclear issue are calls. This is the God calls this
class—Amnesty International as opposed to “religious religion” has
really educated thousands and thousands of people into truth which
they didn’t know before. They started in with just their good hearts,
because they didn’t like tortures, many decent people don’t like it so
much; but then they finally went to find out why there is this
enormous increase of torture: who is interested in it, who pays for
it, who trains the torturer, and so on. It is not just a human rights
question in the sense of if we didn’t have all these sadists around
we would be better off. That’s not the point. The point is quite
different. It has to do with the suppression of those who are seen
as terrorists and oppose the socio-economic order.

But I think you remind me of the need to be more specific, more
clear on that question, and that leads me now to asking you, turning
your question back. The Bishops are good, but they could be better;
everyone says that.

WILLIAM WERPEHOWSKI:
That’s the beginning of an answer to my question...

DOROTHEE SÖLLE:
Specifically on the Bishops’ letter, which I still see as one of
the very big steps forward, consider what the French bishops have
said. They told us in the letter that communism was devilish, that
was all that they had to say. Their so-called peace letter was cold
war, ice cold war; it was simply Reaganite. And so in the light of
other bishops, including my own West German Catholic bishops, it’s
still the best we have on this road at this point in history, so let’s
praise them for that. I wish they had moved farther, first on a clear
condemnation of nuclear arms as being irreconcilable with any
understanding of a just war theory. They come very close to it, but I
wish their language would be a little clearer. I think the World
Council of Churches has done a better job, and some, like the Dutch
Reform Church, have said this very clearly. When I think about my own country, it's quite irritating to me that on the East, the East Germans and the churches in East Germany, and on the West, our neighbors the Dutch in the Reformed Churches, say these wonderful, clear things, whereas our bishops and church leaders in West Germany are still using the wish-washy language of the Heidelberg Thesis. Although it is hard, we must debate this into the ground so that it doesn't come again. That is one point. The other point on which I wish the bishops had been clearer is unilateralism as an option for the few resisters or the small groups of resisters, thinking of the Catholic left and its actions of civil disobedience. It's a different means of the struggle if you go a dismantle a nuclear weapon and go into prison for that; that's a different thing than signing freeze petitions and mailing postcards to the White House. I think they should have given more attention to that. They make this almost a personal way to sanctity. This is a very Catholic tradition which I, as a Protestant, dislike, to tell you the truth. I believe in one road to the kingdom and not so much special saints. We are all saints if we believe in Jesus Christ and God and own the spirit. So these distinctions don't sound right to me, and I think of that option of resistance in memory of some of the resisters in our century: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Sophie Scholl and others. If they had been more clear on that, they would have emphasized that in a system of injustice the responsible Christian has to be resisting.

WILLIAM WERPEHOWSKI:
Any Christian...

DOROTHEE SÖLLE:
Yes, it's not a special something.

WILLIAM WERPEHOWSKI:
A counsel, in contrast to a precept, as we put it.

DOROTHEE SÖLLE:
Yes, I think that's what I mean. Let me make just one more remark. I used the language of existentialism, or existentialist philosophy, which I would like to understand as different from
individualism. Individualism is, as I understand it, the soul of capitalism, the deepest form of capitalism, all its highest values are placed on individualism. This t-shirt is made for you, and your personal relationship to your God, and all of that. That's the individualist culture which convinces people that the deepest point in the human life is where you are alone with your God. I think that is really the greatest distortion of Christian faith we have in our times. Now existentialism, if I'm correct, and you began by quoting Camus, is an attempt to overcome this but yet to have the same depth of the "me." When the black spirituals sing it's "me," they are not talking of this stupid individualism, or an individual being. There is a danger in the black church to interpret it in this way, but I would rather interpret that spiritual on an existential basis and say this is "me," that means this is the point of no return, this is where I am, this is where I want other people to be, but it's not individualism in the bourgeois sense.

(To Joan Martin) I was very glad about the questions you asked me. Responding to the first, I think one should speak where one is. I am a German woman after Auschwitz, that says pretty precisely where I am and what consequences I draw out of these facts of my life. I try to speak to my people specifically, but also to my "chosen people," many of my American friends, and to understand their situation and develop a theology of liberation inside of the First World for the citizen of the First World. Now, that does not mean that I believe that the historical struggle for liberation will be done and won by that class. We will be the last to be liberated, and God's liberation of the Exodus starts with the poor. But the political and also theological question for me is how far are the white middle class able to join the struggle? How far is it possible to have a humanist religious coalition between the dispossessed of the earth and those people of conscience inside of the otherwise very blind middle class? And I think the historical task of the church at the end of the century is to prepare people and educate them for that. That is why God still allows something which is called the church to move around and be in our midst; that is, to educated them towards reality, reality being primarily the reality of two-thirds of the human family today. That is the primary educational goal of the church, to make people aware of what is
going on. My understanding of the church in our times is to understand her as a teacher. This is the most important role in a time when people actually see seven to eight hours of television a day, getting all of this brain-washing garbage into their minds and souls. I mean, imagine the poisoning of the inner self in such a culture. The church has the obligation basically to teach the people who are increasingly unable to read. And that's what I work for in coalition with God's primarily chosen people, the poor, the dispossessed, in that sense.

I was also glad that you were asking about sin. I try to say that sin, as I see it more and more, is the sense of powerlessness of the more conscious people of this middle class. I get this again and again. Let me give you one example. I went into Mutlangen, the place where the Pershing II missiles are deployed in Southern Germany. It's a small village, absolutely conservative, voting for the last thirty years, under the leadership of their Catholic captain, for the Christian Democrats. I talked to many people on the street there for a few days, and the surprising thing was that I heard a very contradictory message. One thing they said, after some thought, was always "Yes, you are right, you peace people. It is true, it has always led to war. That is what we know--it was never different. With Hitler it was the same." They go so far as to say this, "with Hitler it was the same." It started with armaments, the arms buildup, in the end it went to Stalingrad, to Auschwitz and other places; so they know that. People are not so dumb. But then a few minutes later, they would say: "But there is nothing we can do about it." These two things are so contradictory: they see what it is, but there is no God because there is no empowerment. It's the most blasphemous, unethica thing you can say in our time, to say there is nothing we can do about it. I mean it's a pre-democratic understanding of yourself and society, by the way, but one which is very German, I think; but it's not much better here. But it's also absolutely non-Christian; it's blasphemous; it's saying that there is no God whether you talk about a God, a supreme being or something, or not. It doesn't really matter. But in reality, there's no faith, there's no trust, there's no empowerment; there is no God. That is, I think, the deepest sin. If sin is opposed to faith, which I believe, in theological terms, then if you are in sin, you don't have faith. It's
not that you are unclean or something. It's not a moral issue; it is a theological issue. In a sense, I think that is what I understand about sin. And that is very close to women's sin, in general being disempowered and then even believing that it is good to have no power. That is the utmost case of being lost, having given up your own identity, inner light, soul, or however we call that. But empowerment which may empower all of us and communicate the empowerment we sometimes get out of our tradition—the Bible, singing, the communication—to move this also into a public communication; I think that is one of the things we have to work on.

Now, on the image of God, let me say one more thing. I think feminist theology is important. I have said before that I was a feminist theologian before I knew that I was. In my first book, which was on Christ the Representative, I was struggling with an all-powerful God all the time and trying to overcome that, and I ventured to say that God is dead at this point, namely that God of the male image and being, having force, invulnerability, the loneliness of the God as a "he," as the tradition calls it. That was actually the God with whom I struggled. And I tried to talk about Christ in different words, which made it clear that Christ was vulnerable or relational, God being relational. As Buber said: "in the beginning was relation."

ANN MATTER:
Why don't we again have two comments, and then your response?

LAURA LYN INGLIS:

Pacifism is an old Christian commitment. It has taken the threat of nuclear devastation for the mainline Christian community to see peace as something more than the utopian idealism of the traditional peace churches. The prospect of ultimate destruction has forced the Christian churches, with the rest of humanity, to seek disarmament as a practical necessity in the modern age. A part of that recognition involves the rediscovery of the tradition of peacemaking proclaimed within the Christian heritage. Dorothee Soelle has in her essay "God's Unilateralism: Towards a Theology of Peace" made a significant contribution to that effort.
Sölle makes a distinction between Pax Romana and Pax Christi. She draws a parallel between the policies and legitimating claims of the Roman imposition of peace on subjugated peoples and the current actions and structures of the American military-industrial complex. These policies and strategies of power are shown in continuity with the oppressive structures that Jesus knew and rejected. The continuity between Pax Romana and "Pax Americana-Sovietica" also establishes the current relevance of Jesus' opposition to the forms of power employed by Roman control. Jesus Christ offers an historical alternative relevant to our own search for the proper response to the nuclear balance of terror. Jesus' life testified to the reality of the Pax Christi, while calling all Christians to a rejection of the legitimacy of military arguments.

Pax Christi and Pax Romana represent real alternatives. Our acceptance of the Pax Romana is a choice, made consciously or unconsciously. Christians are called to make a conscious choice. We are called to make a choice in the face of impending disaster. Yet there is a danger in the distinction between Pax Romana and Pax Christi. The danger has to do with the distance between, the unrelatedness, of the two options. Pax Christi is something we agree with on Sunday. Pax Romana is something we live with on Monday. There is no neutral territory from which to weigh the two options and make the appropriate choice. Sölle has clarified the ideal, but set it so far against our entanglement with the structures of nuclearism that the result is either compromise or hypocrisy.

Our involvement in Pax Romana constitutes our point of departure. Crucial, therefore, to the practical implications of Sölle's argument is her ability to discuss guilt. She is clearly aware, however, that there is a problem in defining guilt as the starting point. The position which claims the universality of guilt has also tended historically to support the status quo. Pax Christi appear infinitely distant from our own practical reality of life in Pax Romana. Realism requires a setting forth of attainable incremental steps on the way towards Pax Christi. The result is an affirmation of the status quo as relatively close, and at the same time infinitely distant from, Pax Christi. Pax Christi loses its unique capacity to criticize Pax Romana from the standpoint of a qualitatively different, yet equally possible, alternative. Instead,
Pax Romana and Pax Christi become a continuum along which all positions have the capacity of appearing equally Christian, and equally in need of salvation. Guilt becomes not only universal, but inevitable, undermining any attempt at radical social change.

Compromise between Pax Christi and Pax Romana blunts the critical edge with which Pax Christi addresses the world. Pax Christi cannot appeal to those sources of political, social, and economic power which might force Pax Romana to change. Rather, the one thing Pax Romana demands from the religious heritage is legitimation. The history of Christianity has been a history of innumerable regimes claiming Christianity to be the guardian of the legitimacy of their rule. The compromise between Christians and the powers of this world has been disclosed in the willingness of Christians to allow oppressive regimes to be defenders of the faith. Christian attempts to influence governments, while remaining on friendly terms with the basic underlying assumptions which inform the nation-state, have resulted in a Christian apologetic for everything from slavery to star wars.

Compromise by its nature implicitly acknowledges the legitimacy of both parties. The consequence is that the possibility of Christ's peace cases to operate as a realistic possibility and is relegated to the next world, leaving this world to business as usual.

Against such compromise, Söll insists that Pax Christi be taken seriously as a real possibility in the real world. Only so long as the contrast between Christ's peace and the peace established through world domination remains as vivid as Söll has made them, is the illegitimacy, the "anti-Christ," of the war machine visible. Only as long as Pax Christi is maintained as a real possibility in the real world do we avoid selling this world in the marketplace of "viable alternatives" and "acceptable compromises." The meaning of Christ's message in this world calls unilaterally for a rejection of the whole structure of reliance on nuclear weapons.

Yet this rejection is inherently ridiculous. It is perhaps possible, in that Jesus did it as a real man in a real world. Pax Christi is a real possibility, but its relationship must be shown to our current guilty involvement. We already live our acceptance of the structures of war preparation. The task before us, once the contrast between Pax Romana and Pax Christi has been so vividly
drawn, is to find the term which leads to Christ’s peace that does not become involved in incrementalism. This term must both acknowledge our present entanglement in war-making and show the meaning of choosing a new alternative. Without such a term, the contrast Sölle has drawn forces us to live a double life between guilt and utopian idealism.

Perhaps the mediating term which can maintain the distinction without compromise is the willingness to encounter the ridiculous itself. Pax Christi is a real possibility for any people willing to endure the consequences. The only pathway to repentance is enduring the costs of guilt. A realistic assessment of the consequences of unilateral disarmament in our world requires naivete on an immense scale or a willingness to face consequences few pacifists discuss.

“Realism” in this case does not mean an acceptance of the status quo as the only “realistic” option. Rather, it means acknowledging the possible consequences of actually practicing Pax Christi in an actual world dominated by world politics. Pax Christi is not a guarantee of peace. The Soviet Union’s quest for world domination will not inevitable cease if we disarm. The Third World would have considerable historical justification for distrusting our commitment to peace. Vulnerability is more than a word; it has consequences. We are not serious in our commitment to change if we suggest that Pax Christi will result in a world just like Pax Romana, only without unhappiness, poverty, or nuclear weapons. Christ’s peace resulted in crucifixion. No guarantees are given that acts of peace lead to peace. The only thing we can be sure of is that this is the way God leads—and that all other ways lead to war.

The spiritual element in proposals for unilateral disarmament is that it opens onto a future we cannot humanly predict. We continue to trust Pax Romana because we understand the status quo. Pax Christi as a policy is dangerous. It always was. Our trust in it is ultimate and must acknowledge the realistic potential for tragedy. Even so, it is our only way out of a status quo which marches confidently to its own destruction.
FRED BLOCK:

I entered this discussion with some trepidation as the token secularist, and token non-Christian, and my trepidation was further deepened by the confusion as to on what level I should respond. As an academic? As a political person? As a member of the middle class? I must confess that my temptation before last night was to respond as an academic, but after hearing the talk I left determined to respond as a comrade. That's the level at which I will try to respond because I found myself agreeing, despite my distance from the Christian discourse, with about ninety percent of what Professor Säile had to say. There are a couple of points I want to highlight and reinforce as being important, and then, since simple agreement, even among comrades, is not interesting, I want to point to a problem which I think might be the flip side of the problem that Laura was addressing.

It seems to me that one of the points that was made even more strongly in the written text than in the spoken version (but it was there as well) is the extent to which the arms race rests on neurotic desire for protection, for safety. It is there in the section where she speaks of Christ living without protection. The social psychology of the arms race, I think, is extremely important, particularly for understanding how easily people in this society are manipulated. I could just point out that the two great propaganda campaigns of the Reagan years, the Bulgarian connection and the downing of the Korean airlines, both were designed to prove that the Soviet Union is the source of all evil in the world. In both cases, the evidence presented to us to support the claim of fundamental Soviet perfidy would not be sufficient for a passing grade in a freshman English class. But when arguments take place at this level of insecurity, there is no need for logic and evidence in discourse.

Closely connected to this point is another, which is what persuades me of the validity of the unilateralist approach; and I might say that rather than calling it modified bilateralism I would call it modified unilateralism. But the political reality behind the strategy that Säile suggests is precisely that at every step of the arms race, the U.S. has been in the lead, has been the instigator of the next round of escalation. The actual history of the arms race dribbles out at about twenty-year time lag. We know now, for
example, that at the first critical stage in 1950 when the famous document NSC-68 was prepared, a document which essentially theorized the major effort at U.S. rearment after World War II including the decision to go ahead with the hydrogen bomb, decisions were reached in the aftermath of the Soviet testing of their first nuclear device in 1949. NSC-68 and the political discussion at that time was filled with these charges that the Soviets posed a fundamental threat to us at that point and that they were, by the middle fifties, going to be ready to attack us with nuclear weapons. We now know, for example, it wasn't even until some time in the 1960s that the Soviet Union had the air force capacity to attack the U.S. with nuclear weapons. So, we prepared this first major round of escalation in 1950, ten years before the Soviets really were a threat, so that by the time of our next round of escalation in the early Kennedy years, the nature and immediacy of the Soviet threat was again greatly exaggerated. This is the cycle that the President is continuing with the rearment.

But let me shift to the more theological dimension, about which I am far less comfortable. I think that I am very comfortable with the idea of a language, of a discourse, for empowering people, for creating a social movement which is committed to end the arms race, to ending exploitation. I think this is a project that we share, and, obviously, I think that this common language has to both build on a religious tradition but also speak beyond that tradition. And I'm concerned in the construction of that common language, that discourse of empowerment, about some of the potential limitations of the idea of Pax Christi. Max Weber (and this is where I am slipping into academic discourse) wrote in "Politics as a Vocation" that "He [and I shall add she] who seeks the salvation of the soul, of his own and of others, should not seek it along the avenue of politics, for the quite different tasks of politics can only be solved by violence." Now, the quote brilliantly illustrates the capacity to embrace Pax Romana and Pax Christi at the same time. Even if we reject that aspect, we still have to recognize there's a fundamental validity to Weber's insight, that politics ultimately rests on violence. Even our vision of a post-liberation society, of a good society, must recognize the inevitability of politics, of a state, and the existence of some forms of coercion. In terms of the
process of achieving that society, the inevitability of that political power rests on the reality that a society must allocate resources; things must be taken from some people and given to other people. Even where there happens to be a great deal of consensus, ultimately some people will not consent. And so, it is the exercise of power, albeit hopefully, in the good society, not with militarism, not with great violence; but it is still the legitimate monopoly of political violence that the state controls which would undergird the social order. I mean that even in the good society, even when we have eliminated the scourges of capitalism, racism and sexism, there will be forms of behavior that some people will insist on carrying out that are socially destructive, and we would want to use the force of political power to control those types of behavior.

This point about the necessity of political power even in a liberated society is absolutely critical, in part, because it is a central issue on which the Marxist tradition, my own tradition, has come to grief historically. Marx and Engels imagined an end to politics, a withering away of the state after the socialist revolution, and, as a result, Marx and his followers failed to address adequately the issue of how one could institutionalize democratic forms in a post-revolutionary society that could control the exercise of state power. Obviously, we are all aware of where this failure led in the Marxist tradition. And in the contemporary Marxist discourse, this issue of how, in fact, one controls this inevitable exercise of state power has become one of the central theoretical issues. But it's also important to recognize that this problem has not only plagued the Marxist tradition, it is really a problem of the liberal tradition as well, because the liberal tradition in its laissez-faire ideology also rests on an anti-political discourse. The basic idea of laissez-faire is that we can avoid the messiness of politics in resolving our conflicts and rely entirely on the free market. It is the power of that anti-political discourse in liberalism that Ronald Reagan, the consummate anti-politician, is able to take advantage of; and hence we have the historical paradox of this anti-politician who builds up the most formidable military apparatus in the history of the world in the name of principles of the free market and the laissez-faire state.

34
Now, my concern is that the vision of the Pax Christi that Sölle invokes can also be understood (and I trust, from what I have heard her say subsequently, could be, from her point of view, misunderstood) as also invoking an anti-political politics. I am quoting from the written version, which, in turn, quotes from Luke: "the peace on earth that leads the shepherds or proletarians from hopelessness and fear into a great joy which will come to all people," seems to me to imply the same escape from history in which we will somehow no longer have to face the reality of politics and of constructing a human community in which conflicts will endure. In fact, it seems to me that this escapist moment in the Christian doctrine makes it easier to understand the historical mystery that was at the center of the talk last night, that Pax Romana and Pax Christi were somehow reconciled. It seems to me that the reconciliation came about because both the neurotic desire for protection through militarism and the fantasy of an escape from politics through achieving peace on earth are expressions of the same regressive fantasy desire for protection, and hence they are, in a sense, a mirror image of each other. Obviously I am referring to the pietistic element in the Christian tradition that Joan has talked about.

Now it seems to me that the point of our social movement must be to empower people to live without the need for that fantasy of protection, without the fantasy of an escape from the inevitability of politics. This point, and I am going to invoke my own text here, has been made explicitly by the social theorist Karl Polanyi, one of my intellectual heroes, who sought in the 1940s to fuse elements of the Christian and socialist traditions. Polanyi was primarily concerned with developing a critique of the laissez-faire tradition of liberalism as well as Marxism. He saw the inevitability of politics in a complex society as the only basis for freedom and emancipation. Let me quote, and I will then shortly stop. He writes:

"We invoked what we believed to be the three constitutive facts in the consciousness of Western man: knowledge of death, knowledge of freedom, knowledge of society. The first, according to Jewish legend, was revealed in the Old Testament story. The second was revealed through the discovery of the uniqueness of the person in the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament. The third
revelation came to us through living in an industrial society. No one great name attaches to it; perhaps Robert Owen came the nearest to becoming its vehicle. It is the constitutive element in modern man’s consciousness. 

Polanyi goes on to say:

Robert Owen was the first to recognize that the gospels ignored the reality of society. He called this the “individualization of man of the part of Christianity and appeared to believe that only in a cooperative commonwealth could “all that is truly valuable in Christianity” cease to be separated from man. Owen recognized that the freedom we gained through the teachings of Jesus was inapplicable to a complex society. His socialism was his upholding of man’s claim to freedom in such a society. The post-Christian era of Western civilization had begun, in which the gospels did not any more suffice, and yet remained the basis of our civilization. 

He goes on to quote what he describes as the “inspired words” of Robert Owen: “Should any causes of evil be irremovable by the new powers which men are about to acquire, they will know that they are necessary and unavoidable evils; and childish, unavailing complaints will cease to be made.”

Now, it seems to me that this presents a fundamental political challenge because so much of our language of empowerment, both in the secular and Christian radical traditions, has been based on an anti-political politics. But we do have examples in recent histories of social movements that have been able to build themselves on an understanding of the inevitability of complexity, and ultimately the inevitability of politics. I’m thinking here of strands of feminism, I’m thinking here of Solidarity in Poland. I think there is a fundamental truth to Polanyi’s insight, and here I’ll quote one last time. He says: “Uncomplaining acceptance of the reality of society gives man (or woman) indomitable courage and strength to remove all removable injustice and unfreedom.”

DOROTHEE SÖLLE:

I feel strange and in-between. In other circles, I always feel myself on the fringe, but now I am so much at the center. My fringe comrade and sister tell me that there is much less hope on this
earth. Their view is much less mainstream than mine, maybe; their talk is closer to anarchism. I always try to integrate anarchism as one necessary element of a Marxist understanding, where reformism would be another necessary element. When you lose one of these, then you end up where it has ended up: you kill the anarchists and lose reformists out of your sight. But I am not convinced that this whole experiment has completely failed. I dislike the talk of "post-Marxist" times, especially in a society which is so pre-Marxist, where the vast majority hasn't got the slightest idea of what Marx is all about. Yes, I think I'm in a sort of middle road, what in Christian theology is talked about with the help of the notion of eschatological reservation, which many people in liberation theology have stressed.

(TO LAURA INGLIS) You say that Pax Christi in unattainable; your outlook on history is absolutely pessimist. You say we will be destroyed if it goes well, and if it goes not well we will be the destroyer. That is what I heard, that the best thing we can hope for, which would mean that we would at least disarm ourselves and not work for evil, would be that we could offer ourselves up to be destroyed as members of that society.

(TO FRED BLOCK) I didn't hear you say any more hopeful things if I'm correct. Now I think, I do believe, that there is more hope for other forms of solution. And it makes me think, when I understand the tradition and position of the peace churches, of the main question I have about it. Isn't it that they withdrew very much, keeping their hands clean and not taking the sword, but letting other people do it for them? I am reminded of the quote in Brecht, where he says take care that when you leave the world you are not only clean, not only pure, but have left a different world. I think that one should rather strive for change in the world than for staying as pure as possible. And, in that sense, I think you made me aware of how much my position is a compromise. It comes out of the experience of the German peace movement, or the European peace movement, in the last years. This includes is a very broad and different people, from pietist church women to radical communists, and all the rest of us in between: greenish and reddish people, all over the place. This is a very broad grouping of people with very different understandings, and the only thing we could agree upon, really, is
that we don't want those 572 American missiles on European soil. That was the unifying factor, and not much more. You make me aware that this is not enough. At this time, when this struggle has failed basically, then all these differentiations come forward and become visible, and we have to find a different basis for our struggle.

But that does not lead me to this complete despair about democracy and something which I would call democratic socialism, which is my political position; and I still think that the most enlightened self-interest of the vast majority of people would be with that and not against that. It is not irrational, it's not undoable. It is not in the interest of state communism, and neither in the interest of the form of capitalism we have right now. But I still believe that my trust in enlightenment is stronger than yours. I don't know what really divides us, I mean, in the depth. What is it? Why can't we go on together? Am I too optimistic? This seems strange to me, because it is usually Europeans who bring all the nihilism forward. Maybe things have changed; I really don't know. I see some of the distinctions which have been made and I feel the challenge. I feel that same challenge with some of my left-wing Catholic friends. I feel there is a difference between theology of liberation which is brought forward with power, with the hope of empowerment of the masses, of the people, and a much more individualistic theology of resistance where you only hope for small circles of resisters who will die, who will become martyrs. Nothing will change, and yet the truth is with them.

Now I think that these two, the theology of resistance and the theology of liberation, are the options for Christians today, as opposed to neo-orthodoxy, fundamentalism, and liberal wishy-washy. So, forget for a second almost all of them, and just concentrate on serious piety, and the struggle for justice and peace. There is, I think, a sort of tension between them, and there are many overlappings, as I see in my own position. For example, two friends whom I both love and maybe consider some sort of saint, Ernesto Cardenal and Daniel Berrigan, are both completely opposed to each other over the Sandanista involvement and the question of pacifism. And I don't want to have to choose between them, I really don't. I think I need them both. I need both of these positions, I need both of
these spiritual powers which come out of what they stand for. I mean, that's all that I have to say.

I was really struck by the similarity of you two, coming from such different positions, your anti-political thing. It seems to me that you are talking about the kingdom of God in terms which make it absolutely impossible even to see it come in small events, or movements, or historical places, and I tend to disagree. Let's just think in comparative language, say a more just society, wouldn't that be a nice thing? Even if it is not the just society, we still need a little bit of police to keep people who violate the basic laws of such a society. And in this sense I think the human being is a zoön politikon. And it's a false dream; if Jesus' dream was in that sense a-political, then he was a false dreamer. But I don't believe that. I really think that Jesus had a vision of the kingdom, as he called it (which is a political term) and worked in politics, confronting the powers that be, which was maybe more moderate, and in this sense more realistic.

ANN MATTER:
Well, it is 12:30 and, unfortunately, time to stop. This has been a wonderfully stimulating discussion, with so many different points of view. I want to thank all of our panelists, and, of course, our speaker, Professor Sölle. And thank you all for coming.
Notes


4 National Conference of Catholic Bishops, p. 49.


7 The original work for this response was done in conjunction with Peter Steinfield.


10 Polanyi, p. 258A.

11 Polanyi, p. 258B.

12 Polanyi, p. 258B.