

Therefore Choose Life

One of the most powerful sermons I ever heard was preached by ^{my}hero, the late Ernest Fremont Tittle of the First Methodist Church, Evanston, Ill., on September 16, 1945. It was Tittle's first sermon following his summer vacation, and it was just after the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima which occurred on August 6, 1945. We happened to be in Chicago and that Sunday ~~xxxxxx~~ were able to attend First Church. Dr. Tittle took as his text a passage from Deuteronomy which has been emblazoned in my mind ever since. The words were these: ~~"See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey my commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day . . . I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live. . ."~~ They ~~were~~ come from the long covenant which God had commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey ^{the} ~~my~~ commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day . . . I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live. . ."

As every educated person in the world knows, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, ushered in a brand new age in the history of humankind on this planet. Some darkly opine that it will be the last age of recorded history. But one thing we know for certain: during these last 37 years we as the human residents of this planet earth have faced the necessity of choosing between life and death. I think it is not irrational to point out that the so-called "nuclear freeze" referendum upon which we voters may cast a ballot ~~on~~ this coming Tuesday, is not without substantial reality in making that choice. That referendum simply reads:

Shall the Secretary of the State of Wisconsin inform the President ~~xxxxxx~~ and the Congress ~~and the Congress~~ of the United States that it is the desire of the people of Wisconsin to have the government of the United States work vigorously to negotiate a mutual nuclear weapons moratorium and reduction, with the appropriate verification, with the Soviet Union and other nations?

That seems simply stated though there are those who say that it is ambiguous and that the referendum is nothing more than a vote for "apple pie." If I

were convinced that it is nothing more than a vote for "apple/ pie," which I am not, then I would at least vote for "apple pie" rather than ^{a plate of} poison. However, unimportant or ineffectual you might regard this referendum, I would like to point out that in a world of tyranny, dic^Tatorship and oppression the very presence of that referendum on our Wisconsin state ballot is a ringing witness to the true greatness of our nation, "the ~~land~~ ^{home} of the ~~home~~ brave and the ^{land of the} free." Can you imagine that the oppressed peoples of Russia, or Poland, or Iran, would have the privilege of casting such a vote?

Right now I want to make ~~one~~ ^{two} point^s absolutely clear: ~~First~~ ^{First} the democracy I cherish would make no sense if ~~ex~~ I did not accord honor and ^{respect} ~~sincerity~~ to the people who oppose this referendum. In no way do I imply that those who vote "no" and those who disagree with me are either war-mongers or believers in the necessity of a nuclear holocaust. In democracy of our kind there is no integrity if we impugn automatically the motives of those who pull a different lever in the voting booth. ^{Furthermore,} I do not disparage

~~On the other hand, I want to say~~
those who work professionally in the military. There are many persons in our congregation who have had or now have careers in the military. I may disagree with some of their parti^{ti}cular views but I do not ^{denounce or} denounce them. They are as sincere as I. ^{And a second point is that this referendum does not call for unilateral disarmament on the part of the U.S. It speaks to the Soviet Union as much as to the U.S.}

My support of this referendum is primarily theological. I will not ^{recital of the} try to support my views with a technical knowledge of the precise measurements of the power and destructiveness of nuclear weapons. I am not expert in this in any way. All I know is that these weapons are of such magnitude as to threaten, if used, the continuation of life on this planet. My concern is how the planet came to be and why we are stewards over its ^{sacred} beauty and riches. No one in his right mind would deny in 1982 that life on this planet could be ended in our lifetimes. We have the lethal power to do that, and it is partly in our hands. At this point in history, there is clearly before us a choice: the choice is between life and death, blessing and a curse.

Perhaps some of you noticed a particular episode in the so-called "comic strip" "B.C." in early August. (8-8-82) Two primitive-looking men are

leaning on a ~~xx~~ hill. One is speaking:

"Just imagine how beautiful this world would be without people
... Just animals and birds and fish ... And trees and
flowers ... And wind and rain and puffy white clouds and ..."
The other man interrupts: "No people. ~~What is the possibility of~~
~~gaining by this?~~

The first man replies, "No people."

The second man, again: "What could possibly be gained by that?"
"A planet."

Early in August Betty and I ~~made~~ made a long auto trip to the northwest corner of Iowa. Gliding over the gorgeous golden plains, through hundreds of miles of tall, stately stalks of corn, crowded together in a wondrous cornucopia of food and fiber, terraced and marbled by alternating fields with equal ~~sumptuous~~ ^{and Growing} sumptuous acres of soy beans glaring in the light of the life-giving sun, I was simply overwhelmed. ^{It was a Visual Feast of Extravagant Beauty.} And I thought to myself: all of this uncounted and unimaginable treasure available to us on this planet earth, and all of this ~~threat~~ threatened by the very real possibility of a nuclear firestorm, fueled by the passions of human beings ^{who} ~~that~~ war and rage against each other. So it may be thought by some to be no more than a sentimental longing for "apple pie" ^{but} ~~AI~~ I will vote on Tuesday for "America - and the world-Beautiful!",

For amber waves of grain
For purple mountains majesties
Above the fruited plain:

I want to say to the politicians and diplomats, both foreign and domestic, that in ~~the~~ consideration of the aeons of time, the ~~my~~ millions of years it has taken for God to thus cultivate this Good Green Earth, that we as a human race would be the most wicked creatures in all of the universe to strike the nuclear match that would ~~rape~~ ^{torch} and ~~ravish~~ ^{trash what} the Creator has made. I want to say to these leaders of the world, "You must find a better way. You must work for the salvation of this earth!" ^{We support you!}

I hear that Creator saying to us: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil ... I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live." When nuclear power first ~~exploded~~ exploded humanity was

presented with a definite choice: Either that nuclear power could be employed as a source of ^{boundless} energy to drive our vehicles, light and heat our homes, and ~~provide~~, ultimately, enable us to plow and harvest our fields; or, it could be used to scorch the earth and burn away every living thing. Yes, a blessing or a curse; life or death.

Now to be sure that nuclear power is fraught with frightening hazards. Peaceful nuclear plants can break down, and the disposal of nuclear wastes is a vexing problem. But given the depletion of fossil ^{fuels} ~~fuels~~ and ^{the} never more ~~ravenous~~ appetite of Western civilization for energy, nuclear power might become necessary for peaceful uses. We could choose it as a blessing, as a way for continuing life on earth. But ~~its~~ ^{incalculable} destructive use is a curse of unimaginable horror. It could mean global death.

Admiral Rickover, the American genius ^{who} ~~to~~ developed the Nautilus, the first nuclear-powered submarine, after a long and distinguished career was finally forced to retire - long after the usual age. In exiting he engaged in some very straight talk. Senator Proxmire asked him: "What do you think is the prospect, then, of nuclear war?" Admiral Rickover replied: "I think we will probably destroy ourselves, so ~~what~~ what difference does it make? Some new species will come up that might be wiser." Then Rickover declared: "I think it would be the finest thing in the world for the President of the United States to initiate immediately another disarmament conference where we at least stop that." (QUOTED in the N.Y. Review of Books)

Rabbi Harold Kushner in his best-selling book WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE, tells of an Israeli mother who every year on her son's birthday, would go into her bedroom and cry. She cried because he was one year closer

to military service. Every ^a Israeli mother knows that her tiny country is surrounded by the guns of death. Well, I too go to bed every night terribly worried about the possibility of a nuclear holocaust. ^{I cry for my children and grandchildren} I cannot believe that humans would allow this marvelous planet to be fried in a nuclear firestorm. But I do have one small choice. Prayerfully I can cast a vote - without any illusions of certain success - saying that I want this madness to be inter-

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rupted and the mad plunge to ~~death~~ global death stopped.

So when you go to the polls on Tuesday you don't have to entertain illusions that Wisconsin's referendum ~~on~~ nuclear armaments is in itself going to ~~change~~ ^{save} the world. You ~~can~~ ^{may} indeed be cynical about voting, which means that you will be cynical, ~~nee~~ ^{ess} necessarily, about democracy. Not many people will vote for any referendum or candidate for office. They don't think it is important, that the big choices are already made by the captains of industry and governmental power. But in this case it is striking that all five candidates for the office of governor, the ~~current~~ ^{incumbent} governor, ~~most of~~ the state's leading newspapers, and both of our Wisconsin senators have recommended a favorable vote on this referendum.

Martin Luther King once said: "The choice today is no longer between violence and non-violence. It is either non-violence or non-existence." I hear God saying to us today: "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day . . . I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live."