

Baptist seminary professor asks Mobilians to support bi-lateral nuclear freeze

A Southern Baptist seminary professor has asked Mobile Jews and Christians to join him in supporting a bi-lateral nuclear freeze by the United States and the Soviet Union.

THE CALL for support came from Dr. Glen H. Stassen, professor of Christian ethics at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., to participants of the Mobile Area Jewish-Christian Dialogue.

Speaking in a meeting at First Baptist Church of Mobile, Stassen said a proposal for a nuclear freeze has become "a people's movement around the country, a movement supported by churches and synagogues, former leaders of our government, political scientists, military people and just plain old people like you and me.

"IT'S MOVING us out of a situation where we don't even want to talk about the issue because we don't think there's anything we can do about it. Now we have something to do about it."

Stassen said, "We can sign petitions for the freeze. We can meet in synagogues and churches and talk about the freeze. We can write to congressmen and senators and the White House about the freeze."

The professor said that "if the nuclear-arms race continues for five more years, both sides (the United States and the Soviet Union) will be in a situation where they fear the other side can destroy their ground-based ICBMs (Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles) and half their bombers and half their submarines in our case or 85 percent of their submarines in the Soviet Union's case because most of their submarines are usually in port.

"THAT WILL mean that we will both move toward a hair-trigger launch-on-warning policy most probably, which will make nuclear war far more likely.

"That's why my sons Michael, Bill and David don't have a whole lot of hope of living out their lives. I'm not talking ideology. I'm talking my children, people I love."

STASSEN TOLD the Mobilians, "What I'm saying is not something that's peculiar to my own description.

"President Reagan says the same sort of thing when he uses the term 'window of vulnerability.' That means the time is going to come sometime soon when the window opens so that our ground-based missiles are vulnerable to Soviet first-strike attack, and the same thing is true for the Soviets" in response to U.S. missiles.

THE PROFESSOR said that "we're turning a corner toward great danger" because "there are policies and there are procurements of particular kinds of weapons which are moving us toward the situation where we prepare actually to fight a nuclear war and then hope it will stop before it gets too big."

Stassen, who holds a doctorate in social ethics from Duke University in Durham, N.C., earlier earned his bachelor's degree in physics from the University of Virginia.

He told his audience a personal story. "I WORKED for the Air Force doing physics research. I was working in the electronics of the distant early warning radar line.

"That line was designed to tell us whether the Russians are coming over the North Pole to attack the United States with nuclear weapons.

"We did our electronics and got the radar up and got it hooked up to the computers and wanted to see how it would do, and it ran fine and was sensitive.

"A FLOCK of geese flew over northern Canada, and it (the warning system) said, 'The Russians are coming. The Russians are coming,' which showed that it was sensitive. We had done our job well.

"In a little while the full moon rose, and it (the warning system) said again, 'The Russians are coming. The Russians are coming.'

"As you know, we survived those false warnings, and there's a simple and easy reason. The reason is that at that time we knew full well that the Russian missiles were not so accurate that they could destroy our missiles, our ICBMs in the ground.

"IF THEY had done their full attack, done all they wanted to, we could have waited a week, figured out how much the damage was and then made our counter attack with our ground-based missiles as well as our bombers and so forth."

Stassen said the two false warnings he described are among 153 false warnings that have occurred thus far in the United States.

He said the false warnings can mean a nuclear war when weapons become more accurate and when hair-trigger launch-on-warning policies are developed.

STASSEN SAID, "Every American president since the first use of the atomic bomb (in 1945) has said the nuclear-arms race is building toward destruction and it is wrong and it must be stopped."

Yet, Stassen said, "the solution that the government always discovers, the way out that it always chooses, the salvation that it always decides for is to build yet more dangerous nuclear weapons while the Soviet Union also builds yet more dangerous weapons."

The seminary teacher said, "It's as if the super powers were in bondage to an idol."

HE TALKED about biblical prophets Isaiah and Hosea, who "tell us clearly that there is a kind of idolatrous trust in military buildup which leads to our destruction."

As a Baptist, Stassen said, "I get some guidance from the teaching of Jesus."

Jesus taught his followers to "take a transforming initiative to make peace."

AMONG EXAMPLES given by Stassen: "The Roman soldier has the right to force a Jew in the first century to carry his pack for a mile. It was a hated kind of thing to have to do.

"Jesus says carry it a second mile, and we assume, talk to thim on the way while you're going. Take a transforming initiative. Make peace on the way."

Stassen said, "I believe the bi-lateral nuclear freeze is that kind of transforming initiative.

"It stops both the Soviet nuclear buildup where it is and the U.S. nuclear buildup where it is, and if we can do that, that will have a profound effect upon the ability of our countries to start solving other problems, to start talking" about solving other problems.

Stassen said, "Let me be clear that I'm not naive about the Soviet Union."

HE SAID, however, the United States and the Soviet Union have some mutual national interests which should serve as motivation for seeking a bi-lateral freeze.

One mutual interest is that high military expenses are "wreaking havoc with our economy. They're a worse burden for their (the Soviet) economy because their economy is only about half as big as ours."

Among other mutual interests named by Stassen was that government leaders in both countries know a nuclear war will mean death for both sides, not one side.



(Mobile Press Register photo by Wayne Flesher)

Glen H. Stassen