WALKING TOGETHER
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Theological Reflections on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

Edited by Susan Durber and Fernando Enns
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The global fellowship of 348 churches that together form the World Council of Churches has for several years been on pilgrimage, and it is proving to be an exciting, if challenging and bracing, journey toward authentic and relevant discipleship for us as churches and as individuals. This book invites you to join that journey of faith.

I welcome this rich work and its flowering of insights into the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. It demonstrates, through story and analysis and reflection, how the spiritual and theological heart of this motif orients and animates Christian commitment in the many regional and confessional and personal life situations of churches around the world.

The experience and wisdom of these pilgrim churches that are featured in this volume can inform, illumine, and inspire our personal and local commitments, too.

We owe a real debt of gratitude to Susan Durber and Fernando Enns for their dedication to the pilgrimage, for their critical theological exploration of this territory, and for their skillful development and editing of this volume. She comes to it from the doctrinal and pastoral side, he from the peace-making and peace theology side, to encourage us to venture forth in search of God’s justice in this world. They demonstrate that our unity is not a static state of being but a dynamic praxis of love.

Olav Fykse Tveit
As Christians, we often identify spirituality with our solitary encounter with God, and there is truth to that. But it is not the whole truth. Our journey of faith is personal yet never fully private. In fact, our relationship with God draws us ever closer to those around us, learning from and accountable to those in need and those who live at the margins. This volume shows us what it means to live as pilgrims journeying on toward justice, and what it means to see not just ourselves but also our faith communities and our whole life together in this way.

So walking together is not something we do only after we are converted. As the contributors’ stories reveal, walking together is how we are transformed, a continuous recreation of ourselves by meeting God in God’s creatures and God’s demands along the way.

Pursuing justice and making peace are not peripheral add-ons to the Christian life but the catalyst or occasion for our continual conversion to a deeper walk with Jesus.

As we walk further and further in our pilgrimage, I am ever more keenly aware, too, of a convergence and clarity within the ecumenical movement—about the church and its mission, about service and witness in the world for justice and peace—that intersects directly and creatively with the world’s pressing needs and humanity’s aching hunger for justice, peace, dignity, meaning and human oneness. Working at that exciting, if daunting, juncture is where we belong as Christians in the world today.

Theologically, then, we see here how engagement in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace entails rethinking not only justice and peace but also what we mean by church, discipleship, salvation, and being human.

Indeed, as it is unfolded in the contributions here, the pilgrimage is a way of capturing these insights and faith imperatives and of encouraging the churches’ ever-deepening engagement in this work. Listening to these stories and pondering these realities, may we be inspired to see how our own pilgrimage can lead us to the heart of the world’s need and perhaps to glimpses of the realm of God.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary
World Council of Churches
Introduction

Susan Durber and Fernando Enns

We intend to move together. Challenged by our experiences in Busan, we challenge all people of good will to engage their God-given gifts in transforming actions. This Assembly calls you to join us in pilgrimage

– Message of the 10th Assembly of the WCC

Our hope is that the voices collected in this book will convince you that the World Council of Churches’ (WCC) call to the churches to a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is more than pious words, but is rooted in the world’s need and in the mission of the church. We hope that the voices that surface here will make that phrase sing with life, meaning, and passion.

In seeking direction for this joint movement and in search of deeper theological reflection on what pilgrimage – as a profound metaphor or as a real, literal, journey – might entail, a theological study group on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace was called into being. We began our reflections in Jerusalem in February 2016.
We came to share the conviction that “going out” and being “on the way” are central to Christian discipleship. Jesus sent his disciples out, to walk, to be vulnerable and dependent on the hospitality of others, and to find God on the way. In the early church, and in the centuries since, the Holy Spirit has continued to propel the disciples of Jesus to walk in his steps and those of his first apostles. Pilgrims are fundamentally what we are as the followers of Jesus. You might even say that, ultimately, our expression of our faith in terms of pilgrimage is grounded in the perichoresis of the Holy Trinity.

We also discovered the ambiguity of pilgrimage. From within the Bible and throughout history, there have been people who have critiqued pilgrimage and called those who claim to be pilgrims to return to justice and peace. There is perhaps something intrinsic in the very nature of pilgrimage that lays it open to the possibility of corruption. From the prophets to the crusades, from those profiting from the faithful to those who turn pilgrimage into tourism and consumerism, from those who confuse mission with colonialism to those who enforce pilgrimage on others, there is a repeated call to rediscover a quality of Christian discipleship or pilgrimage that is always qualified and defined by justice and peace. The constant need for repentance, tellingly described in the biblical idiom by the verb “return,” is an essential aspect of the churches’ pilgrimage of justice and peace.

We recognized the need and the responsibility to keep on thinking as deeply, critically, and theologically as possible about what pilgrimage is – and to take time to dwell on what a pilgrimage of justice and peace might unfold for us all on the ecumenical journey.

We saw a strong connection with the incarnation of Christ – who is the Way and who is God with us. Pilgrimage is real when it is about the physical effort of “being with”; and it is not about perfect ideals but about the struggle and the joy of moving with others. We recognized that there is something about pilgrimage that does not let us escape into abstractions or theories, but that keeps us close to the ground in the very human experiences of shared life.

Together, we came to believe that seeing the church as a pilgrim church is a fruitful image for the church as servant of God’s kingdom in the world; the church walking with those who, for example, must walk because of migration, fleeing poverty, war and injustice.

So it is that one of the first fruits of this theological study group is the book you hold in your hands. We have invited ecumenical leaders and theologians from different contexts and traditions to share their perspectives, experiences, and their wisdom. Their guidance undergirds the pilgrimage on which we have,
in faith, embarked. Our purpose here is to unfold the theological depth of the idea and image of a pilgrimage of justice and peace, revealing how it can indeed lead us into the unity to which Christ calls us.

The collected contributions of this book show that the WCC’s Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace speaks across contexts and traditions and stirs a new spirit among us. We hope you will discover how “pilgrimage” has real power to capture imaginations, deepen insights, and stir us into an active, participative, and hope-filled ecumenical journey. These collected voices, arresting and inspiring in style, while also challenging the reader, offer the kind of theology that is gripping, clearly rooted in the authenticity of experience and in the integrity of scholarship as well as prayer. We hope that they make this the kind of book that you will recommend because it is a joy to read and because it invites further thought and reflection. We express our sincere thanks to all who have contributed, from so many different contexts, churches, and experiences.

We have long needed a new paradigm for our ecumenical reflections and actions, and we urge you to discover the potential of this language, which is both old and new. We believe that it can speak to those who have long been part of the ecumenical movement and those who are new to it. It ignites a new passion for unity, justice, and peace, to move not only minds but also hearts, not only thought but also action.

This book has been edited for leaders among all different churches: those working in ecumenical posts of all kinds, theological students and their teachers, theological thinkers in ecumenism and in mission, those who are shaping the church of today through their speaking and writing, as well as church activists and campaigners.

Other theological resources associated with the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace are emerging, including web-based Bible studies, contextual theological reflections on the pilgrimage, and youth reflections on the Lord’s Prayer, among others.

When we see our journey toward communion with one another in unity as pilgrimage, it honours those moments when we are “on the way” and alongside, and not only the final and perfect goal of full, visible unity. Pilgrimage conveys something of the reality of our being on the way, growing in communion, and the moments when we can talk, be together, begin to love and care for one another while not yet being there at our final destination. We can see fruitful potential for envisaging the ecumenical journey as a pilgrimage that is itself marked by justice and peace.
Our hope and our prayer are that this book will support our “walking together” as ecumenical pilgrims, not as an end in itself but in order to participate more fully in God’s mission.

May the churches be communities of healing and compassion, and may we seed the Good News so that justice will grow and God’s deep peace rest on the world.

– Message of the 10th Assembly of the WCC