



Pacem in Terris, 50th Anniversary

The Vatican, 3 October 2013

Cardinal Turkson,

Your Eminences and Excellencies,

Sisters and brothers in Christ, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I greet you on this significant anniversary from the fellowship of the World Council of Churches (WCC), 350 Orthodox and Protestant churches around the world. I come to you from Geneva, a city for peace and justice, representing the many in our fellowship working and praying for peace, such as the Christians of North Korea whom I visited last week and the church leaders from South Korea visiting Geneva last Friday. To all of us, the name of John XXIII will always be remembered in the member churches of the WCC for calling the Second Vatican Council and for his ground-breaking encyclicals. His Pontificate was marked by bringing the church up to date in response to the *signs of the times*. His encyclical *Pacem in Terris* was and remains a watershed in the public teaching of the Catholic Church and an influence far beyond. This is true:

- for the recognition of human rights after decades and centuries of rejection,
- for the firm statement the common good corresponds to a social order that puts the person at its centre,
- for the unmistakable declaration that racial discrimination cannot be accepted, and
- for a clear “no” to nuclear warfare that also calls into question the centuries-old notion of a “just war”.

A new horizon opens up because John XXIII addressed the encyclical not only to all the faithful, but to all people of good will. Peace is not a matter only of states, but of people, of all people of good will and not only Christians amid the growing interdependence of humankind.

Much was written about the context of the encyclical in the 1960s when the world was on the brink of a nuclear war, peoples were overcoming colonial rule and joining the United Nations, and the civil rights movement was changing the United States and giving new meaning to democracy. Surely, the encyclical responds to the contemporary context and is, indeed, reading the signs of the times. Yet its real impact goes far beyond this. We can discern the consequences of *Pacem in Terris* today when His Holiness Pope Francis calls for a peaceful solution in Syria and condemns the proliferation of wars and

conflicts. His call corresponds well with the outcome of a WCC consultation on Syria which I called in Geneva last month. Church leaders from Syria, Russia, United States, the UK, France, Germany and Turkey took part. We discussed with one another and with Mr Annan and Mr Brahimi from the UN, listening to their advices what we could do to contribute to peace and reconciliation in Syria. Our joint communiqué said that “Churches worldwide have spoken out against the war in Syria [and] must continue to raise their voices in their congregations and with their governments. We must strengthen the public outcry so that those in power will protect the common interest of humanity.”

The World Council of Churches is very close now to its Tenth Assembly, which begins soon in Busan, Republic of Korea. Both the theme of the assembly -- *God of life, lead us to justice and peace* -- and the immediate context of the divided Korean Peninsula compel us to intensify our commitment to the reconciliation of deep divisions, to a world free of nuclear weapons, and to peace.

The concept of “just peace” is related to our theme and runs in the bloodstream of this Assembly and in the Council’s future work. Just peace is providing us with a new horizon and a “leitbild” in our pursuit of peace with justice.

Towards the Way of Just Peace

The Way of Just Peace is a pathway where more and more of the ecumenical family is invited to accept God’s promise of peace, to set forth in faith, and to walk together. Naturally, like *Pacem in Terris*, it pursues the common good. It invites people of different confessions, disciplines and political persuasions to journey into God’s purpose for humanity and all creation. Inspired by the Song of Zechariah in the Gospel of St. Luke, we trust that God will “guide our feet into the way of peace”.

In our rendering, the way of just peace has four reference points – rather like a compass. The journey of peace takes place in four contiguous spheres: Peace in the Community, Peace with the Earth, Peace in the Marketplace, and Peace among the Peoples. The WCC’s Ecumenical Call to Just Peace explores each of these in turn.

The frame of reference here is peace-building, constructive action, life-affirming discipline. It is the belief that, as Christian engaged in public life, we are required to put many times more energy into building peace and preventing violence than into discussing whether moral conditions for use of military means may have been met. Wherever possible we must avoid the familiar trap of belated action and no good options, when violent incidents or armed conflict have already broken out. The responsibility to protect must be explored by all political and peaceful means first.

An awareness of the preventive nature of just peace is spreading among the WCC membership, and beyond. We find considerable consensus on this in other churches as

well, including Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. There is a strong move towards a united Christian understanding of our call to work for peace.

Prevention comes into view in the Middle East, where recent consultations in Jordan, Lebanon and on Syria have made clear that – while there is no way back to the past – there are peaceful pathways leading forward. For example, towards full citizenship and equality in traditionally divided societies, towards a negotiated all-party settlement to the crisis in Syria, towards a second Geneva conference on Syria (and away from military solutions). There is now a move forward with the total elimination of chemical weapons; and forward with the negotiated resolution of other Weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East region.

Preventive and peace-building will come into focus when the Busan Assembly is invited to launch an Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. Such a pilgrimage will shape the public profile of the WCC and its churchly foundations. We have differences on questions of justice and peace. Yet we are learning that our fellowship is a home for peace-makers, a movement uniting different peace traditions and a forum for varied peace initiatives. The pilgrimage would embrace respect for life in various ways: in continuing concern for the protection of human rights; in economies of life which promote the common good while safeguarding creation; in the responsibility to prevent violence, armed conflict and war; and in conflict transformation when peace-building and prevention fail.

A Word from East Asia

Examples of this spiritual and inter-disciplinary concern for life are evident in current ecumenical statements by and with member churches from Northeast Asia, in the lead-up to the WCC Assembly there. In these statements, linkages between the problems of nuclear weapons, destructive uses of energy, misuse of science, unsustainable lifestyles and the domination of others are consistent with the call for just peace. Listen to these voices from the region that is now suffering the consequences of the disaster of Fukushima even as citizens still suffer the consequences of the disaster of Hiroshima:

“The Korean expression *sang saeng* means a mutual caring for life. ...We strongly oppose all nuclear weapons and nuclear power generation because they are life threatening. ...Nuclear energy use puts an unacceptable burden on our children, their children and the planet.”¹

They go further, into a new experience of tragedy, the growing threat to peace with earth: “We have enjoyed the sweetness of plentiful energy through nuclear energy; now we must learn the bitterness of closing nuclear reactors and dealing with radioactive waste...[and] liberate ourselves from the nuclear culture based on greed and

¹ *Pre-Assembly Nuclear Advocacy Consultation Working Paper*, Seoul, December 2012.

consumerism. ...We urgently proclaim the need not for the security of the status quo of nuclear-armed states but for the securing of life for all humanity and creation.”²

Such convictions today lend new vigour to the compelling but still unfulfilled call of *Pacem in Terris* for a ban on nuclear weapons and the end of the arms race (paragraphs 110-117).

Two Just Peace challenges ahead

Christians are to understand peace and peace-making as an indispensable part of the common faith. Peace constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God's love for the world.³

Public policies of the WCC provide evidence of a fundamental transformation that has taken place in the ecumenical position on war and peace, violence and nonviolence. This development has affected the traditional positions of both the advocates of Christian pacifists and those who have been accepting as a last resort a right to self defense and a responsibility to protect, even with military means. Both have found themselves to be working allies time and again:

All weapons of mass destruction violate both Just War (just means) and pacifist criteria, so these Christian peacemakers have stood side-by-side in opposition to nuclear arms and worked together for nuclear disarmament. They joined in anti-apartheid campaigns in Southern Africa and anti-regime campaigns in Eastern Europe. They sought truth and reconciliation processes in Africa and elsewhere. For the so-called “war on terror,” they rejected the crusade tradition whereby any just cause justifies all means necessary to achieve it.⁴

At the WCC's International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in 2011 in Jamaica the Ecumenical Patriarch pointed out that the present situation of the human race is at least two ways quite unprecedented. First, never before has it been possible for one group of human beings to eradicate so many people simultaneously; second, never before has humanity been in a position to destroy so much of the planet environmentally. Humankind is faced with radically new circumstances, which demand of us an equally radical commitment to peace.

² *Faith Declaration for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Energy*, Korean Ecumenical Consultation, Seoul, March 2012.

³ *Message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, Kingston, Jamaica, May 2011*

⁴ *Just Peace Companion, paragraph 48, WCC, 2011*. The emergence in world Christianity of a broadening consensus on war, and the independent Christian response to rejecting war as a Christocivic responsibility, is relatively new. The ecumenical movement has been instrumental in promoting this shift in Christian self-understanding with regard to war and the structures of political power. (*JPC, para 43*)

Paradoxically, however, most of us become aware of the impact of our attitudes and actions on other people and on the natural environment only when we are prepared to sacrifice some of the things we have learned to hold most dear. Many of our efforts for peace are futile because we are unwilling to forgo established ways of wasting and wanting. We refuse to relinquish wasteful consumerism and prideful nationalism. In peace-making, it is critical that we perceive the impact of our practices on other people (especially the poor) as well as on the environment. This is precisely why there cannot be peace without justice.⁵

The protection of life is a collective human obligation as never before in history. Responding to this concern, the “way of just peace” sees building peace and living without resort to arms not only as a political imperative to protect life but also as a process of environmental, economic and social transformation to sustain and nurture life as well.

We invite the Roman Catholic Church and the Pontifical Council to join us in finding the way of peace as we take up the ecumenical pilgrimage of justice and peace.

By its basis and vocation the Christian church is intended to be a congregation of peace-makers.⁶ My reading of the core ecumenical text, John 17:21, in the light of the whole mission of Christ and his legacy to the Church, is that churches are included in God’s work for peace. May we become a more credible witness for peace in a world in need of justice and peace, in a world yet also graciously endowed with God’s truth, justice and love. This is the world which *Pacem in Terris* holds up so carefully for all of us to see.

⁵ *Keynote address by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, Kingston, Jamaica, May 2011*

⁶ *Just Peace Companion, paragraph 34, WCC, 2011*