

Come and See



**A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage
of Justice and Peace**

World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order

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Faith and Order Paper Number 224



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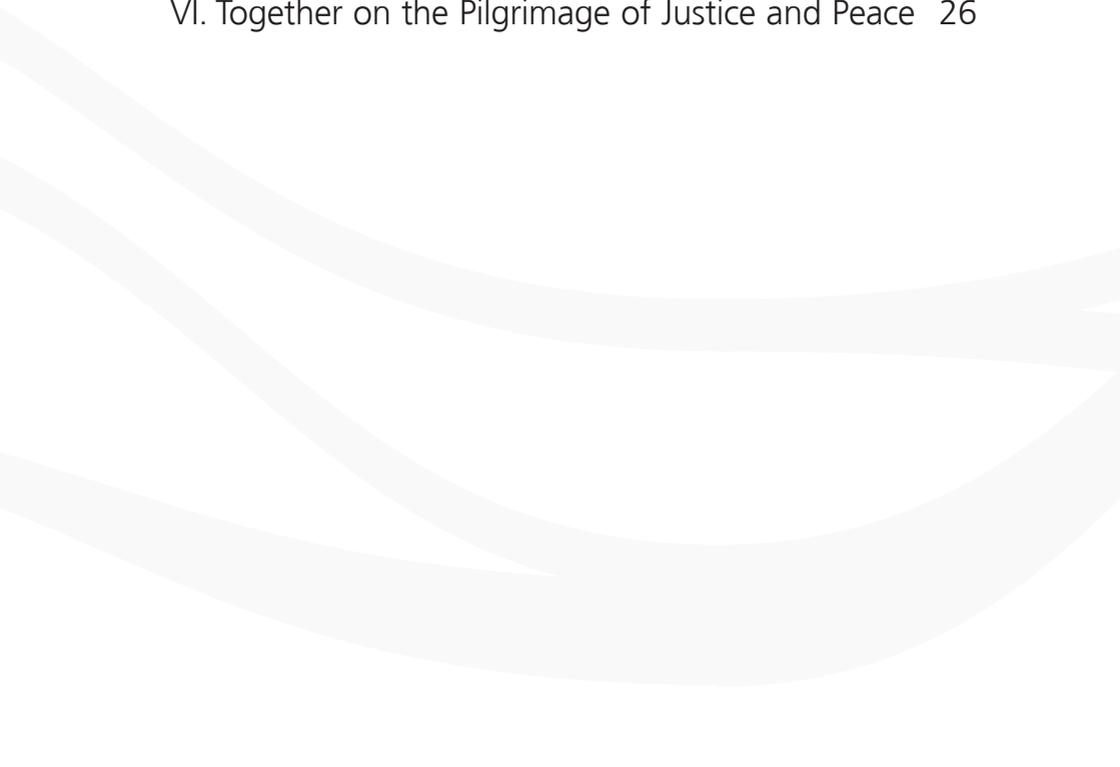
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Cover design and typesetting: Albin Hillert
ISBN: 978-2-8254-1725-6

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I. Introduction

1. “Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage” (Ps. 84:5).¹ The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) chose the “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace” as the theme to guide the council’s efforts to foster greater unity among Christians and to respond, within the context of today’s religiously plural world, to the challenges facing the human family in our time. In taking up the theme of pilgrimage, the central committee in 2014 noted that it was making a shift from the message and language of the 1st Assembly in 1948, “We intend to stay together,” to “We intend to move together.”²

2. This document invites the churches to explore the ways that “pilgrimage” can help the churches deepen and express the commitment to oneness in their work. Pilgrimages are transformative journeys that are ultimately directed toward the reign of God. As they move together and face the challenges of the journey, pilgrims may be opened unexpectedly to new

1 This quotation is from the New International Version. All other quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

2 “An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,” Revised, Doc. #GEN 05 Rev, July 2014. See also Olav Fykse Tveit, “The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace,” in *The Ecumenical Review* 66:2 (2014): pp. 123-134; here 128: “We must make decisions about all our programmes in light of our understanding of this call to move together, defining and organizing them as a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. All projects must contribute to make this happen. All projects must be seen as serving this purpose.... The idea of pilgrimage is not something besides or beyond what we are supposed to do, nor is it simply a rhetorical device to provide programmes with a title. It is a way to speak the language of faith and hope in the complex reality of today and tomorrow.” See also Matthews George Chunakara (ed.), *Building Peace on Earth: Report of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 196-197 and 206.

experiences of the holy and be renewed in heart and mind. How does this focus on walking and acting together affect the churches in their search for “full visible unity”? Do such actions impel the churches to seek more urgently for ways to resolve their ecclesiological differences? Do they permit the churches to recognize more fully each other’s faith and ministry? At its best, the way of pilgrimage also opens new ways of understanding and living toward unity, justice, and peace among churches and, indeed, among all humanity. A theology of pilgrimage challenges the churches to reflect on these questions and to consider how the churches can continue to travel from broken communion to full visible unity.³

3. The classic statements about the unity of the Church that have been adopted by several assemblies of the WCC lay the groundwork for a theology of pilgrimage. While the member churches of the WCC are already deeply committed to witnessing to Christ and to the promotion of justice and peace, pilgrimage offers them a way to move forward together through working and being with one another. It is rooted in their shared faith in the Triune God, in Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, and in obedience to the scriptures, as expressed in the basis statement of the WCC.⁴ Churches on pilgrimage together may strengthen their awareness of and witness to the unity they already share in Christ.

3 The invitation to the churches to seek unity while also seeking justice and peace is not new. In February 1993, the WCC/ Faith and Order study report “Costly Unity”, produced in Rønne, Denmark, began by stating: “The ecumenical movement suffers damage so long as it is unable to bring the justice, peace and the integrity of creation process (JPIC) and the unity discussion into fruitful interaction.” Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra, eds., *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 2; published also electronically: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/vi-church-and-world/ecclesiology-and-ethics/costly-unity>).

4 For the WCC basis statement, see <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us/self-understanding-vision/basis>.

4. The Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, held in the historic pilgrimage city of Santiago de Compostela in 1993, provided an occasion to recall that the ecumenical movement itself has often been seen as a pilgrimage of churches journeying together toward visible unity. Many faithful pilgrims who have made the journey to Compostela and other sacred places over the centuries, searching for God and longing for greater wholeness, have found their lives changed by the experience. By asking the churches to embark upon a pilgrimage of justice and peace, the WCC invites all churches to be communities in which justice and peace flourish, so that they might be a credible, prophetic witness in the world to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

5. In this text, we will offer perspectives on pilgrimage from the Christian tradition, and from two significant issues affecting the churches as we journey through the world: moving toward a just and sustainable world, and searching for peace in interreligious relationships. A theological account of pilgrimage can help us to find the links between the healing of Christian divisions and the healing of creation and of human relationships in the world.

II. Pilgrimage: Perspectives from the Bible and Christian Traditions

A. Perspectives from the Bible

6. Journey and pilgrimage are found at the heart of the scriptures. Pilgrimage involves responding to God's calling and promises by journeying toward a sacred place. Generally, it is a difficult journey to an unknown destination, one that is sustained by hope of renewal and liberation. Abraham and Sarah were called to leave their home and kinfolk behind and to follow God to a land that God would show them (Gen. 12:1-9). Of fundamental importance for the identity of the people of God was their liberation from slavery in Egypt by the Lord, who established a covenant with them on Mount Sinai and accompanied them

on their journey through the desert to the Promised Land. They were to recall that deliverance every year in three celebrations: the feast of unleavened bread or Passover, the feast of weeks or Pentecost, and the feast of tabernacles (Ex. 23:14-17).

7. Many of the psalms were the songs of pilgrimage. After the temple was built in Jerusalem, these feasts were to be celebrated there, requiring for many an extended journey. The pilgrimages were often arduous and dangerous, marked by the uncertainty of being on the road far away from home. As they approached the holy city they sang: "How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Ps. 84:1-2). Psalms 120-134 are the joyful hymns of ascent, which the people prayed in journeying up to Mount Zion. As the people assembled for the feasts, they expressed the hope and joy of restoration and renewal. Broken community would find healing; the dry land would flow with springs; and even swallows would find nests to shelter their young (Ps. 84:3, 6).

8. The prophets addressed the people of God as sojourners and exiles and reminded them of God's call, deliverance, and covenant. Eventually some of the prophets would describe the messianic age as the streaming of all nations toward Jerusalem: "Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain to the house of the God of Jacob" (Isa. 2:3; see Isa. 2:1-5, Micah 4:1-3). But they also criticized the people for external observance of ritual and law while continuing to mistreat their fellow human beings.

9. Journey is a significant metaphor for interpreting the gospel narratives. Each gospel portrays Jesus in movement: as an itinerant teacher, and in "setting his face toward Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51) as the culmination of his ministry. These journeys, however, take place in ways that disrupt the way the world is ordered. Jesus' travels are constantly interrupted by the sick and the troubled, who ask him for healing. At the midpoint of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus begins to warn

his disciples that he will suffer, die, and rise in Jerusalem (Mark 8:31-33; cf. Matt. 16:21, Luke 9:21-27). To journey with Jesus is to take up one's cross, he says (Mark 8:34-35).

10. This costly journey involves a puzzling and uncertain future. In the Gospel of John, Jesus travels back and forth to Jerusalem, each time doing signs and healing and feeding miracles that heighten interest in his ministry. In all four gospels, he finally enters Jerusalem in a procession that is at once royal and humble. When Jesus reaches the holy place, the temple, he makes a whip and drives out those conducting business there, accusing them of making it a "den of robbers" (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:18). The climax of Jesus' journey is traumatic and foundational: sham trial, brutal crucifixion, and resurrection. Like the prophetic writings, the gospels thus complicate and deepen the notion of "pilgrimage"; they suggest that what matters is the motivation and way the journey is carried out, and the need for openness to the pain and liberty that one encounters in a true effort to "worship God in spirit and in truth."

11. The rest of the New Testament is permeated by a portrayal of the Christian life itself as a way of conversion and ongoing transformation. Jesus presented himself to his disciples as "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6); Acts then refers to Christianity simply as "the way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). The Letter to the Hebrews states, "For here we do not have an enduring city" (13:14). Instead of the earthly Jerusalem, Christians now "have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22). Hebrews also refers to the ancestors in the faith as "strangers and exiles on the earth" (11:13), an expression that the First Letter of Peter applies to Christians (1:1; 2:11).

B. Perspectives from Christian traditions

12. From earliest times in Christian communities, journeying to distant places where significant Christian events occurred or

significant witnesses lived, such as apostles, martyrs, or saints, was a meaningful practice which became well established by the fourth century. The diary of Egeria, for example, describes Egeria's pilgrimage to Egypt and Palestine in the late fourth century⁵ and offers an especially valuable witness to how Christians in her day already had developed the practice of pilgrimage.

13. As well as engaging in the practice of pilgrimage, churches developed accounts of pilgrimage as a spiritual metaphor. Early writers reflected on the spiritual pilgrimage of the Christian life. For example, *The Epistle to Diognetus* describes Christians as resident aliens⁶ sojourners living full earthly lives but with their citizenship elsewhere – in heaven. Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*⁷ offers a spiritual account of Moses' ascent to Sinai to describe the journey of faith. It offers the imagery of ascending the mountain of God to meet the Lord and receive the Lord's revelation and then descending back into the world accompanied by divine illumination. Gregory also described the entire Christian life as a continuous pilgrimage without end, with the deification (*theosis*) of the believer being an endless dynamic journey into the infinity of the divine life (*epektasis*).

14. Some early Christians sought liberation from the temptations and distractions of a newly privileged Christianity by journeying

5 *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage*, (New York: Newman Press, 1970), trans. George E. Gingras, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, 38. Original Latin text with French translation: *Éthérie. Journal de voyage*, (Paris: Cerf, 1948), Hélène Pétré (ed.), *Sources chrétiennes*, 21.

6 Original Greek text with English translation: *The Epistle to Diognetus (with the Fragment of Quadratus)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), V, 9, p. 145, introduction, text, and commentary, Clayton N. Jefford (ed.).

7 Original Greek text with French translation: Grégoire de Nyssa, *La Vie de Moïse ou traité de la perfection en matière de vertu*, (Paris, Cerf, 1955, 2nd ed.), introd. and trans. by Jean Daniélou, *Sources chrétiennes* 1; English translation: Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, (NY, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1978), trans., introd. and notes by Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson, preface by John Meyendorff.

into the wilderness, where they could pursue an ascetic spiritual life and pray for the world. Some desert fathers also journeyed back to the cities from which they came at times when the church faced serious possibilities of division.⁸ For some monks, including desert mothers,⁹ their ascetic pilgrimage was a spiritual one: they remained in one place as they journeyed deeper into the divine mysteries. Others traveled constantly from place to place to avoid attachment to the material world. In the medieval period, the act of pilgrimage grew in importance and popularity, as holy sites gained prominence as spiritual destinations. Margery Kempe (c. 1374 – after 1438), a fourteenth-century English laywoman, went on extensive pilgrimages that also fed her interior mystical life.¹⁰

15. While the practice of pilgrimage has proved spiritually nourishing for Christians throughout the centuries, this practice, at its worst, has sometimes been corrupted and turned into an occasion for consumerism, acquisitiveness, injustice, or even violence. Throughout history up to the present day, pilgrimage to distant places can be an elite practice, accessible only to those with the financial and physical means to undertake it. Gregory

8 For example, Anthony of Egypt returned from the desert to Alexandria to denounce the Arians. See Athanasius, "Life of Anthony" (*Vita Antoni*), in *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, (New York, Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892), in Philip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* vol. IV, p. 444. Original Greek with French translation: Athanase d'Alexandrie, *Vie d'Antoine*, (Paris, Cerf, 1994), G.J.M. Bartelink (ed.), *Sources chrétiennes* 400. Other such examples can be found in Theodoret of Cyrrhus: Greek original with French translation: *Histoire des moines de Syrie*, (Paris, Cerf, 1977-1979), P. Canivet, A. Leroy-Mollinger (eds), *Sources chrétiennes* 234 and 257; English translation: Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, (Collegeville, Minn.: Cistercian Publications, 1985), trad. Intr. and notes by R. M. Price, *Cistercian Studies Series* 88.

9 See Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, p. 184-186.

10 Her mystical and pilgrimage experiences, dictated to two writers between 1431/1432 and 1436, are published in B. A. Windeatt (ed.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, (London, Penguin Books, 1994, 2nd ed.).

of Nyssa recognized that priority in pilgrimage is given to its spiritual dimensions above its physical ones, without denying the rich spiritual experience many Christians receive through physically journeying to sacred places.¹¹ In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther and John Calvin denounced the distorted practices of pilgrimage in their contexts, protesting the abuses they witnessed and the notion that pilgrims could earn salvation.¹² They objected to the notion that certain practices, such as pilgrimage, constituted higher expressions of the Christian life. However, pilgrimage still carried strong resonance as a metaphor among the Reformers and their descendants; drawing on Augustine, Calvin taught Christians “to travel as pilgrims in this world” as they aspire to heavenly glory¹³. Even many of those who do not practice physical pilgrimage have continued to utilize the spiritual sense of the notion. “Pilgrimage,” “journey,” and “way” have remained root metaphors for the Christian experience, John Bunyan’s seventeenth-century *The Pilgrim’s*

11 See, for example, Paul Brazinski, “Early Christian ‘Anti-Pilgrimage’ Literature: The Case of Gregory of Nyssa’s Letter 2,” in *Hortulus: The Online Graduate Journal of Medieval Studies* 12:1 (Autumn 2015), <https://hortulus-journal.com/journal/volume-12-number-1-2015/brazinski/>.

12 See Martin Luther, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation”, and “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” in *Three Treatises*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973, 2nd ed.); John Calvin, *A Treatise on Relics* (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter & Co, 1870, 2nd ed.) trans. from French by Count Valerian Krasinski, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/32136/32136-pdf.pdf?session_id=0b3ec3523ee48a0454b5ed6116898008382bda39s; and *Ordinances for the Supervision of Churches in the Country in Calvin: Theological Treatises*, (London, SCM Press, 1954), p. 77-82, J. K. S. Reid (ed.), Library of Christian Classics 22.

13 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.7.3; cf. 3.9.4-5; 3.10.1 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), ed. by Tony Lane and Hilary Osborne; Augustine, “City of God”, 15.6, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), ed. By Boniface Ramsey; introd. and trans. By William Babcock; Latin: *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol 40, Vienna, 1899-1900.

Progress (published 1678) and the nineteenth-century text, *The Way of the Pilgrim*, being perhaps the best known and most enduring examples. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw both the renewed popularity and renewed criticism of the practice of pilgrimage due to the emergence of new sites, such as Lourdes, and increased accessibility due to mass transportation. In recent decades, the numbers of persons going on pilgrimage has increased, with the practice of pilgrimage being increasingly embraced by Christians from numerous traditions.

16. An ever-growing expression of pilgrimage throughout Christian history has recognized the spiritual blessings that pilgrimage can involve: along with ancient sites of pilgrimage, new sites have emerged in connection with the global growth of Christianity, as can be seen, for example, in African Instituted Churches.¹⁴ Pilgrimages can be a great source of renewal in which “new insights are given. Deeper understanding is attained.... Blessings are received and healing takes place. Life is seen with different eyes. Nothing will ever be quite the same again.”¹⁵ Christians undertake pilgrimage desiring to intensify prayer and the spiritual life; as an act of repentance and personal responsibility; to offer thanksgiving for God’s blessings; out of a strong desire to receive God’s help; and in quest of strength for the struggle for justice and oneness with humanity and creation. Pilgrimage may allow Christians more fully to appreciate humans as created earthly beings and to honour the sacred gifts of physical spaces: both specific sanctuaries and indeed the creation itself.

14 See Obed Kealostswe, “The Nature and Character of the African Independent Churches (AICs) in the 21st Century: Their Theological and Social Agenda,” in *Studia Historiae Ecclesasticae* 40:2, December 2014, p. 227-242, esp. p. 237.

15 Report of the Meeting of the World Council of Churches’ Theological Study Group for the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, 9-11, February 2016, Jerusalem, p. 2.; quoting Macrina Wiederkehr.

III. A Theology for the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

17. The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is not ultimately directed to a particular holy place but rather toward the fulfilment of the reign of God. It finds its ultimate source in *the love of the Triune God*, who has created the world, who empowers and renews it through the Holy Spirit, and who perfects and reconciles all things in Christ at the end of time. Jesus Christ enters into the world through his incarnation. His journey on earth takes him through the cross to his resurrection and exaltation in glory, as portrayed in the *Christological* hymn of Philippians 2:5-11, so as to redeem and transform creation. He reconciles all things in himself (Col. 1:15-20) and hands over the kingdom to the Father so that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24-28). The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace not only has this Christological foundation, but also a *pneumatological* basis. The churches move together, energized by the Holy Spirit, whom Christians confess to be “the Lord and giver of life” in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The Spirit of truth leads the churches to a vision of God’s will for human relationships, it moves them to discern the will of God within the various contexts in which they find themselves, and it empowers them to serve that design by prophetic witness and action in their various societies. This pilgrimage can be understood to imply and necessitate a *theological anthropology*, that is, to teach about and express the dignity and destiny of human beings as created in God’s image, redeemed in Christ, and sanctified by the Spirit. Concern for justice, peace, and care for creation necessarily flows from the way Christian faith understands the relation of human beings with God, with one another, and with nature. The pilgrimage can find its origin and rationale in Jesus’ inauguration of the reign of God, as well as its *eschatological goal* in the hope for its full realization. As God led the people of Israel to freedom through the desert in a cloud by day and fire by night, and as Jesus leads his disciples forward to the new promised land with the words “follow me,” so the churches, under the empowerment and guidance

of the Holy Spirit, move together to follow him toward the fulfilment of the new heavens and the new earth (cf. Rev. 21).

18. Pilgrimage also has *ecclesiological* dimensions. It means living in communion with other disciples of Jesus, nourished by hearing the Word of God, and celebrating the sacraments of faith. Christian existence is a shared pilgrimage undertaken as God's people. The pilgrim people of God experience a foretaste of the heavenly banquet every time they join in celebrating the eucharist. Luke's gospel highlights several other ecclesiological themes in this regard. Jesus tells of how a master sends his servants out to bring in guests from the highways and the byways – from the periphery – to share in the banquet he has prepared (Luke 14:15-24), while it is on their journey to Emmaus that some disciples recognize the Lord in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:35). Although in the current state of their division the churches have not yet arrived at the point in which all are able to celebrate the Lord's Supper together, since reconciliation with God and with one another is at the heart of the Lord's Supper, many Christians find this to be a moment, not only to pray for, but also to become strengthened and equipped to serve the Lord as messengers and agents of the gospel of justice and peace.

19. The theology of pilgrimage also has social and ecological dimensions.¹⁶ Each human being and, indeed, the whole of humanity, can be said to be on a kind of pilgrimage from creation to the final fulfillment of justice and peace. Pilgrimage involves being attentive to and walking in solidarity

16 After quoting the canticle that Zechariah prayed at the birth of his son John the Baptist (Luke 1:78-79), the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches announced the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace with the words: "Economic, ecological, socio-political and spiritual challenges confront us. In darkness and in the shadow of death, in suffering and persecution, how precious is the gift of hope from the Risen Lord!" See "Message of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches: Join the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace," paragraph 5, in *Encountering the God of Life*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2014), p. 36, ed. by Erlinda N. Senturias and Theodore A. Gill, Jr.

with fellow travelers: especially victims of war and brutality, victims of religious intolerance, refugees and migrants who are compelled to flee their homes, those exploited by unjust economic practices, those oppressed because of race and ethnicity, those who have suffered sexual violence or human trafficking, families in distress, children and youth who live in despair, and those who are marginalized by society. Throughout the scriptures, voices of prophecy and truth come from those who are poor and disinherited, who suffer, and who have been enslaved and imprisoned. It is from these sites of God's visitation – from society's margins – that a new world will take shape, and it is here that the pilgrimage needs to take shape. Not only are these the places where humanity encounters God as liberator, the margins are also privileged spaces where God reveals God's self as the just God who desires the fullness of all life. The margins are also spaces where Christians live and witness to their faith. Within and from the margins God calls Christians to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

20. The abuse and destruction of the environment is an offense against God and an injustice to people of the present and of future generations. For this reason, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has a strong ecological dimension, recognizing the unique position that human beings hold, in terms of taking responsibility and ensuring that life is not violated. When Christians marvel at life and the diversity in the creation, there is a sense of God's greatness, and that everything that exists has inherent value. Thus, pilgrimage involves honouring the integrity of creation in the journey toward a just and sustainable life on earth.

21. Journeying together on pilgrimage creates unity in our differences. It invites individuals to conversion side by side with their brothers and sisters. The experience of pilgrimage can strengthen communion within and between our churches. The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace invites churches to greater communion with one another in responding to their common calling to serve as agents for that justice and

peace, which are essential dimensions of the reign of God, inaugurated by Jesus and realized in the Holy Spirit. Since the experience of pilgrimage promotes and enhances unity, it is related in an essential way to justice and peace, both of which make actual the relationships between God, humanity, and the world that embody the divine design for creation.

IV. Justice and the Challenge of Moving toward a Sustainable World

22. Throughout the world, Christians encounter many situations that cry out for justice and peace. Moving toward a just and sustainable world requires repentance for those interpretations of creation and providence which sometimes have been distorted and corrupted by the logic of domination. The care or abuse of God's earth and its resources is not merely one justice issue to be set alongside other justice concerns. Rather, reverence for God's creation is of foundational importance for all existence and identity. Justice for suffering human beings cannot be sought apart from the context of living in a way that is respectful of the environment. Justice is not an abstract reality to be realized within human community alone, but it is how we as humans and as Christians live in the web of life in reciprocity with all human beings, other creatures, and the rest of creation. In anticipation of the fullness of the reign of God, all of creation groans because of the threats to justice and well-being – threats that are especially present among marginalized communities and endangered environments.

23. God created the world and saw everything that God had made was very good (Gen 1:31). God is not distant or detached from creation; in fact, creation implies relationship: "The whole earth is full of God's glory" (Isa. 6:1-3). The scriptures testify that creation is God's first act of revelation, and this first act reveals God as not only Creator of the earth, but as present in

creation. God the Creator is present in and continues to work with humans and all creatures, the land, rivers, and seas to give life and hope. God wants the whole creation to have life in its fullness (John 10:10). God's providential journeying with creation continues with a covenant relationship with all creatures (Gen. 8:20-22). In Jesus, the entire history of salvation, beginning from the creation itself, is revealed as a kind of pilgrim journey toward the eschatological reign of God, a rule "of justice, peace, and joy that is given by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

24. The challenge of moving toward a just and sustainable world calls the churches to develop concrete proposals and engage in prophetic activity to counter injustice and violence, affirming human dignity and the integrity of creation.¹⁷ Among the deplorable effects of injustice and violence, which have drastic effects especially upon people living in poverty and augur tragic consequences for future generations, is the degradation, objectification, exploitation, and commercialization of God's creation. The earth suffers from the assault by pollution of air and water. Global warming has had disastrous effects upon human life, requiring migration at an unprecedented scale, causing widespread eviction of indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands, leading to a breakdown of traditional values and land-centred spirituality. The oppression and marginalization of people living in poverty and the degradation of creation are profoundly interrelated.

25. In the context of the suffering of creation and of those living on the margins, the movement toward unity serves

17 Our churches and their leaders have given forceful commendation to a just and sustainable world. See, for example, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, who is sometimes called the "Green Patriarch" for his environmental efforts (see <http://spiritualecology.org/contributor/his-all-holiness-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew>); and Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* (Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of The Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home, May 24, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_ enciclica-laudato-si.html).

the healing of the whole inhabited earth. “The Church was intended by God, not for its own sake, but to serve the divine plan for the transformation of the world. Thus, service (*diakonia*) belongs to the very being of the Church.”¹⁸ The intention of the gospel includes the liberation of God’s creation. St. Paul emphasizes this holistic perspective when he affirms, “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). The church’s unity flows from this profound promise. If the churches are to be in pilgrimage together, it can only be in the context of journeying toward the unity of the church within creation. Work for the healing of creation is not an end in itself. Christians know that the life of this world as it is will cease. Nevertheless, as *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* pointed out, they are called to promote here and now the summing up of all things in the perfection of the life and love of God.¹⁹

V. Peace: Living the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in a Religiously Plural World

26. The peace that Christians proclaim is the peace of Christ, “the peace which passes all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). The Hebrew word *shalom* points to the wholeness of justice and reconciliation in the flourishing of all creation. Peace is not simply an absence of discord. Christians are called to bring the just and reconciling peace of Christ to a contemporary world divided by greed and inequality and torn apart by religious and secular fundamentalisms. In the journey of faith, Christians share together the hope of reconciliation, which is a complex process of “truth, memory, repentance, justice, forgiveness, and love.”²⁰ This means that they do not simply withdraw

18 *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, 58, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), Faith and Order Paper 214.

19 *Ibid.*, 43.

20 *Mission as Ministry of Reconciliation*, 39. (<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/other-meetings/mission-and-evangelism/>)

from those who are different from themselves or even from their enemies (cf. Matt. 5:44), but that they are impelled by the love of Christ to move toward and encounter the other with Christ's reconciling love. "Love encompasses the whole process of reconciliation as the very sign of its authenticity."²¹

27. The pilgrim Church is not a community closed in on itself; rather, it is called to share the joyful news of the gospel in a vibrant and inviting way in the complex realities of today. This is even more evident as contemporary societies become increasingly characterized by a secularized spirit which marginalizes or entirely dismisses faith in God. We are called to proclaim Christ and the gospel of justice and peace in a humble, respectful, and dialogical way which, at the same time, is confident, faithful, and relevant to the cultures of the various societies around the world today.²²

28. Scripture proclaims both that God desires the salvation of all human beings, and that there is only one mediator, Jesus Christ, "who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:4-5). According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus commissioned his disciples to proclaim the good news to all: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20). Each of the four gospels closes with such a mandate and the Church has, throughout the ages, been dedicated to proclaiming in word and deed the good news of salvation in Christ. There is need further to consider the way Christians move together and how

preparatory-paper-10-mission-as-ministry-of-reconciliation).

21 Ibid., 57.

22 See "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct" of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance, approved on 28 January 2011, and available at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world>.

witness happens with truthfulness and integrity in a pluralist context. This should occur in a way which shares the gospel without imposing it on others, recognizing the co-pilgrimage of all creation with whom the church shares the world and inviting the world to participate in the good news (Rom. 8:22-23).

29. As *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* observes, "Today Christians are more aware of the wide array of different religions other than their own and of the positive truths and values they contain."²³ As an issue of justice, Christians acknowledge the freedom of religious conscience as one of the fundamental dimensions of human dignity.²⁴ Jesus' encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:25-30) and the Samaritan woman (John 4) suggest the need to respect human dignity as Christians walk and engage in dialogue with others across religious difference. They can share the riches of the Christian faith without making judgments which belong to God alone. Christian witness should always be respectful of those who hold other beliefs, realizing that as Christians approach dialogue and witness to the faith with humility, they may learn something more about their own faith from such interaction and from the experience of others. "Sharing the joyful news of the truth revealed in the New Testament and inviting others to the fullness of life in Christ is an expression of respectful love."²⁵ As Luke 10:5-6 reminds us, the proclamation of the reign of God involves the proclamation of peace: in a world of violence and death enacted for religious reasons, Christians seek to witness to the peace of the Prince of Peace, who brings life in abundance.

23 *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, 60. On questions relating to this topic, see "Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding" (2005) at: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/other-meetings/mission-and-evangelism/preparatory-paper-13-religious-plurality-and-christian-self-understanding>.

24 By the term "freedom of religious conscience" is meant not only religious freedom but the freedom to practice one's religion fully within the bounds of one's conscience as a fundamental human right.

25 *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, 60.

30. We recognize that across the world, Christians find themselves in different situations in terms of the power they have in society. Where Christians live in a society in which they possess power, they engage in dialogue and witness from a safe and confident place. However, such confidence and safety are not the situation of many Christians who are minimally tolerated as a group or find themselves persecuted. From the earliest times, the Christian tradition has linked witness and persecution, as the word *martyria* testifies. In situations in which Christians face threats, intimidation, and persecution, they find themselves united in the faithful witness of the holiness of their lives in Christ in taking up their cross and following him (Mark 8:34). All Christians are called to remember before God the martyrs of the faith and to pray for those facing persecution at the hands of violence enacted in the name of religion. At the same time, Christians join in confessing the inhospitality and persecution that some Christians have at times enacted when they have been in positions of power. We also recognize that there are members of other religious traditions who have offered and continue to offer kindness and hospitality to Christians who find themselves as strangers in their own lands.

VI. Together on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

31. In the account of the calling of the first disciples in John 1:38-39a, Jesus asks the disciples what it is they desire. They reply that they wish to know where he is staying. The invitation that Jesus offers in response is, "Come and see." The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace invites the churches to follow Jesus, and to journey together toward visible unity so we may come and see where he abides. The word "pilgrimage" suggests movement, a source and a goal, a way that is followed and sought, and a journey. In choosing the theme Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, the WCC has not only affirmed the desire to move together, but also it affirms that its movement is directed toward the

reign of God, that it is a transformative way of faith and life, and that it is a journey which churches take together with other companions and in the context of the whole world.

32. This document extends a theological invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. A theology of pilgrimage offers the opportunity to adopt a dynamic vision of the Church and of ecumenism. The questions which appear in the introduction to this statement (#2) call for a positive response. Walking and acting together for justice and peace may and often do have a profound effect on efforts to cooperate with God's grace, which impels churches toward visible unity. Such journeying together in faith and in hope may and often does inspire churches to resolve their differences and to recognize more fully each other's faith and ministry. Walking together, even now while not yet fully united, can and often does build community among Christians. Very importantly, it can help to overcome a characterization of the ecumenical movement which has sometimes placed efforts to seek unity in "doctrine" in competition with efforts to collaborate in "service." Being together on pilgrimage implies that Christian service is rooted precisely in our common faith in God's saving and renewing plan for the world. Empowered by the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the people of God may respond together to Christ's invitation to "Come and see."

33. One way of summing up the extent and scope of God's saving design may be found in the Letter to the Ephesians: "He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ ... to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:9-10). The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace invites our churches to offer together, even now, their shared willingness to be open to the new ways in which the Spirit is responding to the petition which countless Christians around the world pray every day: "Thy will be done."



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