

# JUSTICE, PEACE AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

## THE CONCILIAR APPROACH

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Respected Chairman and All Friends at the Oekumenischer Stadtkirchentag in Bremen,

You have done me a great honour indeed in asking me to be present at this Stadtkirchentag and to deliver the keynote address on Gerechtigkei, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schoepfung. I am no expert on the subject, but ever since the Vancouver Assembly of the WCC formulated this theme in 1983, I have been keenly interested in the subject, though I was not present at the JPIC World Consultation in Seoul, Korea, in March this year, or at the European JPIC consultation earlier.

### I. Brief History of the Theme

The World Council of Churches has had, from its very inception, two grand concerns -i. concern for the greater manifestation on earth of the unity of Christ's Church; and ii. concern for making more effective the churches' united service and ministry to the whole world. These two central concerns of the ecumenical movement have converged in the theme of Gerechtigkei, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schoepfung. It is meant to give orientation to the churches' efforts to promote just, peaceful and environmentally healthy societies in all parts of the world, and at the same time to bring the churches together in closer unity in pursuing that task.

This view has been questioned by some in WCC circles. They ask, for example, whether the World Council is thus moving away from a unity based on a common faith in the Triune God and in the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity, to unity based on a common social commitment of the churches to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, i.e. whether the WCC was adopting JPIC as some kind of a new basis for Christian Unity.

There is an important point here which should not be ignored. Of course a common Christian faith should be the basis of the Unity of the Church; but division in the Church is caused not only by questions of Faith and Order. Social, political and economic as well as ideological questions also divide the churches. Our views and commitments in the area of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation are not totally independent of our faith. Christians do not live in two separate compartments, one for faith and order, and another for socio-political activity. The latter arises from

the former. There is no doubt that if Christians could agree on the socio-political goals to be pursued, that would unite us even more closely, than doctrine by itself.

JPIC was never intended as a substitute for Faith and Order, but as a logical consequence of it. This was very evident at the First Assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948. The dispute between Josef Hromadka of Czechoslovakia and John Foster Dulles of the American Presbyterian Church was not occasioned by theological differences as much as by ideological polarities. Dulles attacked the Communist political economy that was coming into being in Eastern Europe, and wanted Christians in socialist countries to resist it and fight against it. Hromadka wanted to discern the mission of the Christian church within a socialist political economy, the form of Christian obedience within an avowedly atheist system which denied the Church the freedom to propagate the Gospel.

Even today, the differences in political-economic perspective between churches in advanced industrial countries and those in developing countries continue to create disunity within the fellowship of the Church. Perhaps in this Stadtkirchentag too, such differences may come up to the surface and create tension. The polarity between a basically market economy oriented ideology and a socialistically oriented ideology has not come to an end with the current changes in Central and Eastern Europe. Even in a united Germany such polarities may cause strife and discord within the churches.

Historically, in the WCC we have moved, so far as socio-political orientation is concerned, from "Responsible Society" to "Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society" and again, since Vancouver, to "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation"

The first transition, which followed the epoch making Church and Society World Conference in Geneva, 1966, was a direct consequence of the large influx of newly independent churches from the Two-third world into the membership of the WCC in the sixties. Till then many of us inside the WCC felt annoyed but helpless about the paternalism of the Trans-Atlantic churches which dominated the World Council. At the Uppsala Assembly in 1968, where it was recognized that "development" was the key issue to be tackled, that paternalism was still evident: I remember very vividly the late Barbara Ward (Lady Jackson) trying to reassure us that if we in the Two-third world were patient and did what the Europeans had done, we could be just as affluent as they now are. The late Eugene Carson Blake had succeeded Dr. Visser t'Hooft as WCC General Secretary in 1967, and his robust footballer's faith tried to reassure us that if all the western churches, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, would put together their

resources, the problem of world poverty could be solved within a short time. It was to provide such a forum for Protestant-Roman Catholic collaboration in Development that the Commission of the Churches for Participation in Development was set up soon after the Uppsala Assembly. But those who held the purse-strings of the churches, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, found it difficult to part with their power by putting all their resources into one common kitty as had been proposed. Dr. Blake's meeting with Pope Paul VI in Rome turned out to be frustratingly unproductive, even though Pope Paul had made the statement that "The new name of Peace is Development".

I remember very well the early debates in the more modest CCPD which emerged as a WCC sub-unit. People like the late Professor Parmar of India faced squarely the Trans-Atlantic paternalism which still talked about Aid for Development as the solution.

Parmar and others brought forward the argument that fair terms of trade were more important than the aid which was only a minute fraction of the wealth that the rich countries of the world have been taking away from the poor countries through unfair terms of trade. I was a participant in that debate, until I was driven out of CCPD by clever bureaucratic strategies. We were a group of people arguing that the people of the developing countries had to take the initiative in solving their own problems, of course with the aid of the world community. For us Aid for Development was only exacerbating our poverty and plunging us deeper into debt and dependence. So we argued that Social Justice, Self-reliance and Participation were the key issues to be pursued.

We saw that Developmentalism was a clever ideological trap set by the rich to hook the poor and to exploit our people more efficiently. In the first place, ever since the end of the second World War, a global economic system of banking and finance, of fixing prices unevenly for the White countries' export commodities and for their imports of raw materials and agricultural commodities, of tariffs and quotas and other protective walls for the rich, of co-opting a few beneficiaries from the countries of the Two-third World into the global exploitative system, and of using political and military as well as economic pressure to induce the developing countries to follow the Capitalist rather than any Socialist path to development, had already been set up. This is the system which we call Neo-Colonialism, the new form of Imperialism without political colonialism. In this system, whatever development takes place anywhere, the structures will see to it that the major part of the production flows into the coffers of the already rich, and into enlarging and sustaining a new middle class in the developing countries. Here is where the crux of the issues of justice and peace lies.

We were stunned by the discovery that Development is not the new name of Peace, but the new name of a newly installed system of Exploitation and Injustice. Whether it was military aid or development aid, it served the interests of the global military-industrial-academic-financial clique more than the interests of the poor and the exploited. Without a radical overhauling of this system, justice and peace are not attainable. It is this system that has received new strength by the recent accession of Central and Eastern Europe as well as China to that system, making it truly global, and therefore more menacing.

Whenever we openly expressed these sentiments, we seemed to be hurting the feelings of our dear Christian brothers and sisters, not only in the West, but also in our own middle classes in the Two-third world. It was most disconcerting to be regarded primarily as sources of irritation by one's fellow-Christians. Those who were friendly gave some kind advice to some of us. I remember two pieces of advice of a German church leader whom I still love: "Father Paul, it is better that you stick to your good Bible teaching and not dabble in politics and economics." The same person once said to me, with great affection: "Father Paul, you need our money for the development of your people, but you are too proud to admit it."

All this may seem irrelevant and inappropriate to some of you. But I want you to know one thing, which is important. Beginning with the Sixties, the German churches have been bearing a proportionately larger share of responsibility for the financial support of the WCC. As the U.S. currency lost its value in relation to European currencies, the share of the American churches, which once was 80% or more, has been gradually dwindling. As Europe became progressively more and more affluent after the tragic destruction of the World War, European churches have been increasing their contribution to the WCC and to its programmes and projects. This has led to a shift in the power centre of the WCC from America to Europe. I want to state publicly in this assembly that that shift has not in all cases led to more progressive policies in the WCC. The good people of Germany should understand this and do something about it. I think I have said enough. The rest you can read between the lines, or make your own assessments.

To bring this historical account to a close, I want to state that ever since the Seventies there has been a concerted effort on the part of certain forces to wrest power in the W C C away from those arguing for fundamental social change, and to mute the urgent cry for justice from especially the Two-third world. Money power is only one of the weapons used by the conservative forces. Character assassination is another very effective technique. Bringing in other

legitimate but distracting issues has been another strategy.

Take the feminist issue for example. Women all over the world are really oppressed and exploited. They have to fight for their emancipation from male chauvinism and male domination, in church, family and society. It is a very urgent and legitimate cause. But one of its effects has been to distract attention from the more urgent cry of the oppressed and exploited men and women of the world. It has sought to divide the ranks of the poor between men and women, by making the feminist issue independent of the issue of global peace and justice. It has recruited into its ranks a large number of middle class women from the Two-third world, hoping that they would give higher priority to the feminist issue over the justice issue, and thereby obscure the fact that both forms of oppression and exploitation belong to the same system.

The Human Rights issue is a similar case. It has been very effective in breaking down the socialist system; by placing emphasis more on the individual human rights like the freedom to protest, dissent, organize, worship, propagate religion, publish, etc., rather than on the more structurally enforceable rights like freedom to work, to have a roof over one's head, to have the means of sustaining a standard of life worthy of a human being. To Common Security of the people and on similar social and political rights, it has again managed to distract attention from the issues of justice and peace.

The emphasis on the handicapped was a similar legitimate issue: again, as a matter of human compassion and service to those marginalised by society in a direct and visible manner, it helped distract from the urgency of the call to justice and peace and Global Common Security.

Between Nairobi (1975) and Vancouver(1983), the WCC launched JPSS or Towards a Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society, giving equal emphasis to Social Justice, Self-reliance and the environmental concern which came into focus at Nairobi. But JPSS did not include the Peace Issue except obliquely as "Threats to Survival". Staffwise it was administered in such a way that the radical issues of neo-colonialism would not be at the centre of the concern.

The new JPIC programme was formulated in 1983, but gained momentum only in 1987, executive decisions being taken only in March 1988 at the Istanbul meeting of the WCC Executive Committee. In July 89 the Central Committee said that the covenanting of the churches should be on three key issues:

- a. Justice: International Economic Order & Debt Crisis;
- b. Peace: Total Security strategies and Militarism.
- c. Environment: The Greenhouse Effect.

The Seoul Convocation in March 90 showed how difficult it was for churches to agree.

### The Idea of World Churches Covenanting Together

The idea that Christian churches should come together in some kind of ecumenical council in order to resolve their differences and to regain their original unity is at least as old as the Reformers, particularly Martin Luther. Of course it is a classical Christian idea. From the very first Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, the idea has been there, and became very prominent in the time of the Christian Roman Imperium of the 4th century. Hundreds of councils were held, to settle disputes among churches. The churches at that time did not recognise any single authority (the bishop of Rome had a jurisdiction only in a very limited area) as capable of resolving differences among the churches. The conciliar pattern became the only expression of global Christian unity.

The historical reality, however, is that Councils occasioned as many divisions as they resolved disputes. The first three ecumenical Councils, Nicea (325 AD), Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431), drove out many who claimed to be followers of Christ: Arians, Eunomians, Docetists, Nestorians and so on. The Council of Chalcedon (451) caused the first major cleavage in the Imperial Church, the majority of non-European Christians opposing that Council as Imperial. The Council of Trent in the 16th century finalised the division of European Christianity into Catholics and Protestants. The idea that Councils contribute to Christian unity was quite strongly opposed by St. Basil the Great, on the ground that Councils only magnify differences rather than resolve them. The World Convocation in Seoul earlier this year did not quite finalise any divisions, since it was not a representative Council of the churches. It revealed the differences among the churches and among individual Christians. It did not resolve them.

The covenanting process is supposed to be a contribution to Christian unity, but the reality is likely to be that only a few Protestant churches will be the main signatories of the Covenant. When Carl-Friedrich von Weizsaecker first made the proposal some years ago to convoke a council of the western churches, Catholic and Protestant, to condemn the use of Nuclear weapons, he did not think in terms of global justice or global co-operation to conserve the biosphere. If I am not mistaken, he was thinking primarily of the urgent need for the moral conscience of European Christianity to express itself clearly and unitedly on the issue of nuclear weapons. He was not thinking of the "conciliar process" as an ongoing thing to express the unity of Christ's Church. He saw the impending catastrophe that Europeans may use nuclear weapons and cause a global holocaust which may destroy civilisation; he wanted to avert the peril, and saw a united expres-

sion of the European moral conscience through the European Christian church.

The idea of a Church Council to deal with a social problem is something new. Luther did not propose an ecumenical council to solve a social problem, but to unite the Church again. Bonhoeffer may have thought of a Council to deal with the Nazi menace; that was clearly a Protestant idea somewhat new in the Christian tradition. Von Weizsaecker was following the Bonhoeffer line rather than the Luther line. Roman Catholics expect the Pope to pronounce on moral issues, and do not depend on a Council to do that. When the WCC adopted the idea of a conciliar process to deal with the three main problems of society, namely global injustice, war and impending eco-disaster, the WCC was also following the Bonhoeffer line rather than the traditional Christian approach that Councils were to solve internal problems of the Church. Clearly Roman Catholics and the Orthodox have difficulty accepting this untraditional idea, and that was one of the problems that emerged in Seoul, 1990. That problem is still with us, and will need considerable theological discussion and debate. That debate has hardly begun.

### **Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation - One Single Issue.**

The three issues are closely inter-connected, and one can enter the whole complex through any one of the three issues. Two-third world people usually prefer to enter by the door of Justice, and relate Peace and Environment as different aspects of the Justice issue. In the western world, Environment has become the central issue, and most people prefer to enter by that door. Peace activists may want to enter by the Peace door. If Peace really means not just the absence of war, but a flourishing society, then clearly only a just society can be really flourishing, and if the biosphere is not maintained in a healthy state, there cannot be flourishing societies anywhere.

Though there is no reference to the unity of Humanity in the title Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schoepfung, it is now generally recognized that in our inter-dependent world, all three issues are global in scope. Justice within a nation is dependent on justice among nations and without justice there is no peace either within or among nations. Pollution recognizes no national frontiers and acid rain in Canada may be produced in the USA. Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) produced in any country can damage our common Ozone shield. Deforestation in a few countries can alter the global climate.

The three issues are thus not only one inter-related problem; it is also a problem for all humanity and we must co-operate globally to solve it. There is not much

use seeking to justify oneself by blaming others. As Reinhold Niebuhr told us long ago, the rich serve no purpose by blaming the poor, nor do the poor serve the cause by simply blaming the rich. The poor are not entirely innocent. They have neglected to develop awareness and understanding of their own situation, and to organise themselves to do something about it. Others are not going to solve their problems for them.

But we Christians have to accept some of the blame, even without others accusing us. Accepting the blame is not in order to feel more guilty, but only to accept a greater responsibility. The urban-industrial culture has been created by Christian nations; it is that culture that is ridden with injustice, militarism and environmental disruption today. The nations of Christian Europe and America have created the two world wars of this century. They are the largest exploiters of this world today; they created colonialism, and they benefit most from the global neo-colonial system; they have exterminated or nearly destroyed many cultures in the last 500 years. In global injustice, they are the primary beneficiaries; they make most profit out of war and unfair terms of trade. They control the banking and financial structure of the world which creates the heavy burden of indebtedness on the poor. Their contribution, as heavily industrialized and militarized nations, to disruption of the biosphere is the largest. The Christian nations are the largest "merchants of death" in the form of weapons of war. They control the largest markets for drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

All this is not to say that other nations are free from blame or can shirk their share in the common responsibility. It may be to suggest that the present urban-industrial neo-colonial global and national structures may well be beyond repair, and call for radical solutions. Such radical solutions are sometimes provided by history; then they are all the more costly. It is better for people to give more attention than we have been able to give to the question of an alternative pattern of civilisation and world order - not just an alternative style of life, though the latter may well emerge from the former.

Such radical change may well begin outside the Christian nations; but that seems very unlikely, unless China or Japan becomes more creative. It is more probable that such a change would begin in the west, for three reasons: it is in the west that power is now concentrated; western nations have developed better awareness than others of the faults of the system; the west is still eminently creative.

I need to say a word about the present global situation, especially at this time when we all rejoice in the unification of Germany. I always thought that the two Koreas



would be reunited before the reunification of Germany, since a united Korea need be no threat to anyone. I see that I was mistaken; history has surprized me. I never thought the European nations would so easily lay aside their fears of a united Germany and agree to its creation. I see the problem that the United Germany can be either, on the one hand, a very strong force for the strengthening of European unity, or on the other, a source of much internal tension within a united Europe, reviving the traditional rivalries among Britain, France, Germany and the Soviet Union. Perhaps it will do both. Much depends on what kind of an economic and political system Germany will come to have in a few years, whether it will incorporate more positive features in relation to global justice, global demilitarisation, and global care and protection of the biosphere.

It is more than a year since the dramatic turn of events in central and eastern Europe, beginning with the victory of Solidarity in Poland in August 1989. In less than five months we witnessed one of the most unexpected turns in our history. Its basic catalysing factor has been the abandoning in the Soviet Union of the Brezhnev doctrine of the military defence of Socialist solidarity, and its replacement by the Gorbachev doctrine that Socialism which is not rooted in the people's will and desire has no validity. Its immediate result was a wave of euphoria, not only in central and eastern Europe, but also all over the world, including the Soviet Union. The exhilaration of new-found freedom was intoxicating in its effect; and may still prove to be a source of many irrational errors.

Before we reach the end of the century, we may have to think some new thoughts, especially about the comparative advantages of capitalist and socialist systems. United Germany is already facing some of them: large-scale unemployment, a wave of mutual accusation and recrimination for the personal benefit of the accuser; great lamentation, leading later to social protest, on the part of those who were formerly in a socialist system, about the loss of government subsidy for education, health, housing and sports, and hence about the high cost of living, especially for those who are either unemployed or not fortunate enough to earn such high wages as others. In other ex-socialist countries one is sure to witness a rise in the crime rate and in corrupt social and economic practices, as well as great disparities in income level and participation in power. All that has just begun and will grow to alarming proportions in this decade itself.

We have not seen the end of socialism; socialism in power has been a disaster, thanks to Stalin. As a movement of the dispossessed and marginalised, of the oppressed and the exploited, it is still full of promise; in fact for the poor of the world, it still seems the only hope. The triumph of the market economy system may well prove to be

short-lived, though it has been substantially boosted by the events not only in eastern and central Europe, but also by the veering towards a market economy by China and the Soviet Union. It may also be temporarily helped by the developments in the Middle East, providing new markets for the "merchants of death". In that process oil prices will shoot up, disrupting the economies of oil-importing countries, including the USA, though the oil companies will still make a neat pile. The market economy system, which has successfully managed to survive many crises in the last four decades, is still rather fragile. A stock market crash can initiate recession, and possibly a depression. Certainly that will lead to power shifts on a global scale. History has still many surprises ahead for us, even in this millennium itself.

### Conclusion

What is the way ahead? What should be done? How do we make progress towards greater justice, more secure peace, and a better caring for the biosphere? Covenanting among the churches is a good thing, but within or without such a covenant, Christians will have to pursue many differing paths, depending on where and under what conditions they live. The path to be pursued in Germany will be different from that which we have to pursue in India; but we cannot afford not to be concerned about each other. Priorities established in Europe may not fit our situation, even as they do not now.

Whatever framework we create for action, it will have four divisions: short-term and long-term, global and local. The four will have to be related to each other, and sufficiently specific to be relevant. I refer here only to the global, since the local cannot be globally generalised except within limits.

1. Short-term Global: International debt relief, remission and rescheduling according to capacity and with justice; easier, but more responsible, credit to the developing countries globally administered; an international democratic authority, related to the United Nations to fix fair and equitable terms of trade and to settle disputes about them; greater authority and power of implementation for the International Court, and making it more easily accessible by creating regional courts for settling international disputes according to an amplified code of international law; greater authority and power to the United Nations for peace-keeping and for further globally binding international legislation; greater cultural and technological co-operation among the nations and regions, as well as within regions; promotion of more exchange and dialogue among the cultures and religions of the world in order to promote mutual understanding rather than confrontation and conflict; the creation of a trans-national authority to regulate the activities of Trans-National

Corporations and enterprises; giving more authority and budget to the U N Environment Programme for effective monitoring of the global environment and to provide assistance, both technical and financial, where needed; a crash programme for the conversion of military enterprises to civilian production and redeploying the resources, including science/technology, for purposes of environmental protection, for effective and pollution-free waste disposal, and for providing for all more easily accessible and affordable health facilities without deleterious side effects, partly by reviving and bringing up-to-date traditional forms of medicine in many cultures. These are meant only as random suggestions to form the basis for initiating a discussion.

2. Long-term and Intermediate Term Global. I see here three sets of problems on which thoughtful discussion and pioneering action should begin very soon. One can only mention these here very briefly:

a. Working out the contours and structures for a less commodity-oriented and more culture-oriented civilisation, with greater justice, less utilization of finite resources and energy; greater peoples' participation, and a definite moving beyond narrow ethnic, national or racial loyalties, towards a sense of global community living under conditions of comprehensive global common security for all peoples;

b. developing political-economic structures that would ensure that wealth, power and influence are not concentrated in any group or individual, that the people are not at the mercy of the commercial and industrial establishments, that the state apparatus does not develop into a colossus that stifles human creativity, that the money for the political process is provided by the people as a whole and not by interest groups;

c. paying particular attention to the fact that a basically mistaken secular philosophy has come to dominate human civilisation and academic activity; that this philosophy has unjustifiably absolutised time and space as final reality and has arrogantly ruled out as outmoded wiser perspectives on the nature of reality from the world religions; while what modern physics has actually rendered untenable are the assumptions of the prevailing secular philosophy; this means a re-examination of the fundamental assumptions and value orientations of the European Enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries, including the limits of critical rationality, of scientific investigation and of technological progress. The just, free, peaceful and environmentally sustainable societies of the future will have to be built on spiritual and intellectual foundations radically different from those of the present European civilisation.

I thank you for your patient attention. God bless you all.