GKKE

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Our Understanding of Just Peace

Discussion paper of the Task Group "Contribution of Churches for Just Peace in Africa"

1. *„Just peace is a journey into God's purpose for humanity and all creation. It is rooted in the self-understanding of the churches, the hope of spiritual transformation and the call to seek justice and peace for all. It is a journey that invites us all to testify with our lives. " (Preamble at the Tenth Assembly of the WCC in Busan 2013)*

2. The ecumenical discourse on peace ethics which led to various common activities and from which the guiding principle of Just Peace derives from, sees itself as a contribution for peace and mutual understanding ever since World War II. It is an encouraging outcome of these endeavors that today we do not find any fundamental disagreement on peace ethics among the churches, and that the guiding principle of Just Peace is an essential base of our common actions.

3. The guideline of Just Peace in the roman-catholic church goes back to the peace doctrine of the church which has systematically been refined in the 20th century by the means of teaching traditions since Augustine. The experience of the World Wars, the international social question, the nuclear threats as well as uncountable peace and reconciliation attempts had a deep impact on the development of peace teaching for the Popes, the Second Vatican Council and many local churches. The guiding principle of Just Peace takes up significant understandings of the Catholic social doctrine and places them in a horizon of peace ethics. In this context the picture of human dignity and human rights is drawn from the image of God. Guiding perspectives of justice and solidarity are applied to political, economical and social circumstances. They aim at overcoming violence and reaching reconciliation.

4. The model takes up the violence-critical intention of the doctrine of the just war and enforces it against the purposely legitimation of violence. The pastoral letter „Just Peace" (JP) of the German bishops published in the year 2000 cites from the theological foundation of the Ecumenical Assembly in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) of 1989: *"Having through necessity overcome the institution of war, the doctrine of a just war intended by the Churches to humanize war is likewise becoming invalid. That is why we need to develop a doctrine of just peace now, grounded in theology and oriented by virtue of its openness towards universal human values ".* (JP 1)

5. In accordance with the Catholic understanding of the Church, the Church does not simply formulate a doctrine of peace, but understands itself in its deepest essence as the embodiment of a doctrine of peace *"in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men… '(Lumen Gentium No. 1). "* (JP 162) Therefore, Just Peace is understood not *"primarily as a political program for society as a whole but as a gift from heaven that works through the Church as a sacrament of peace and brings about change in the world ".* (JP 164)

6. In 2007, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) published a memorandum entitled "Living from God's peace - ensuring a just peace". She emphasizes that the unity of peace and justice and their realization is ultimately the subject of divine promises. (74) It says further: *„According to the biblical witness, though, the world will be perfected in righteousness and peace only in the kingdom of God and not through any political order."* Nonetheless, in the EKD memorandum, the distinction between four dimensions of just peace (protection against violence, promotion of freedom, reduction of need, recognition of cultural diversity) introduces a *„socio-ethical model to the political task of pursuing peace".* (78) It should be noted, as stated in the GKKE discourse, that primarily European order concepts can not be used without further contextual reflections in other cultural contexts, for instance *state building* in Afghanistan.

7. Furthermore, the EKD emphasizes the process character of the model and formulates coexistence in justice as an aim of political action: *"Processes that promote peace both within and between states share certain characteristics: they foster the rejection of the use violence, the promotion of freedom and cultural diversity and the alleviation of want. Peace does not mean merely the absence of violence; it aims at enabling a just coexistence. This kind of just peace is the ultimate goal of political ethics." (80)*

8. The ecological dimension or, to put it another way, peace with creation was barely in view in the first phases of the formulation of the model. But already in the year 2000, the pastoral word of the German bishops dedicated to "preserving the resources necessary for the sustenance of life" a separate chapter (96-99) and denounces consumer behavior and human greed as causes: *" It is not only economic constraints that make environmental destruction inevitable but a deeply rooted cultural obsession with the search for more, for a quantitative increase in everything – whatever the cost. We can only free ourselves from this pattern if we re-discover our own selves, our real needs and a deeper meaning to life. For us Christians, this means re-discovering ourselves as God's creatures and as part of creation."* (98) The German bishops thus address a dimension that is unfolded in detail 15 years later in the encyclical LAUDATO SI by Pope Francis.

9. Just peace is not possible without economic justice. Churches are therefore faced with the task of striving against poverty and inequality and for an economy that serves life and therefore humankind. In the declaration on the Road to Just Peace of the Tenth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), held in Busan, South Korea in 2013, under the heading "For just peace in the economy – so that all may live with dignity" noted: *" There is something profoundly wrong when the wealth of the world's three richest individuals is greater than the gross domestic product of the world's 48 poorest countries. Such deep socio-economic injustice raises serious questions about economic growth which ignores social and environmental responsibility. Such disparities pose fundamental challenges to justice, social cohesion and the public good within what has become a global human community."*

10. In the WCC's statements, the centuries of ministry and witness of the Historic Peace Churches have found expression. The primacy of the civilian is undisputed. Conflicts are strictly to be solved non-violently, weapons of mass destruction are mandatory to outlaw. The question of whether and when in extreme exceptional situations the use of "Law-abiding force" can be legitimate and appropriate remains open in the task group. The task group emphasizes in a special way the reduction of need and protection against violence, which, despite their contradictory nature, are interdependent and inseparable. But the promotion of freedom and the recognition of cultural diversity also are central components of Just Peace. Even if in the group's understanding it is a Christian model, it has a central point of reference in the inalienable and indivisible human rights as the basis of all human coexistence.

11. The spiritual dimension must ultimately be at the core of a Christian model. This is deepened by the German bishops in JP under paragraph 205: *„Service for peace is no leisurely, unhurried experience but*

'combat and contemplation'. There have been many occasions on which it meant imitating Christ to the extent of suffering martyrdom in order to stand firm against the forces of evil and pierce the vicious circle of hate. It is precisely in those situations in which violence is imminent or has broken out that we need the spirit of truth that gives us courage and steadfastness and the support that protects us from fear and despair." The EKD covers this dimension in the already quoted memorandum in paragraph 39 with the reference to the Christological foundation of the model: *„Because God in Christ creates peace, Christians can live in the power of this peace in the midst of a world scarred by violence. We are made aware of the presence of Christ's peace every time we worship God together."*

12. The Christian model of just peace is all-embracing. Based on peace with God, it includes the dimension of peace with fellow human beings and peace with creation. It is not to be understood primarily as a political-ethical guideline. However, it is the basis for a framework on peace ethics. The model of a Just Peace is an extensive vision of peace, which inspires us to act and witness to the Christian message of peace. The model invites us to a common learning process. Let's go on our way!

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