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JUSTICE, PEACE AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

A challenge for ecumenical theology*

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Abstract

The article offers in outline a proposal for an ecumenical and contextual theology of peace. The curbing of violence, the promotion of justice and the conservation of nature are all essential elements in the search for peace. But the concept of peace itself can have different, often conflicting connotations. The pax Romana, based on the logic of exclusion, represents in essence a system of domination, while the Biblical shalom, based on the logic of inclusion, is a design for living together. The latter forms the background for the ideal of an Ecumenical Peace Council. Because mankind is now in a position of wiping itself out entirely, the overcoming of the institution of war poses a special challenge to an ecumenical theology of peace and to the Christian community. The churches' commitment to peace, therefore, should be characterized by a preferential option for non-violence, for the poor, for the conservation of nature and for a prophetic mission of the church.

All great theological concepts in the tradition of Christian thinking are answers to their own historical experience. We find examples of this in all periods of Christianity. Augustin, for instance, developed in the first half of the fifth century a theology of history which answered to the historical experience of the end of the West-Roman Empire. Luther and Calvin went back to the Biblical sources of the Christian faith in the period of transition from the hierarchical structure of the

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Middle Ages to the modern world. The theology of crisis of Karl Barth and others answered to the so-called Christian culture in the First World War. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's ethics of responsibility is an answer to the experience of a brutal dictatorship in Germany. The theologies of liberation of our day react to the experience of socio-economic dependency and of political oppression. But also theological concepts in both parts of Europe are today answers to the historical experience of our century.

For a European theologian there are mainly two names which became symbolic of those historical experiences: the names of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Auschwitz is the name of one of the concentration camps where millions of Jews were murdered during the Nazi-regime. Hiroshima is the name of the Japanese city where the first nuclear bomb was dropped - with effects for the victims which still persist today. In both cases Christian teaching and Christian theology share in the guilt for those developments. An anti-Judaistic theology allowed the emergence of manifest anti-Judaism. And a misunderstood doctrine of a just war justified even the use of means of mass-destruction as a means of warfare.

So from a European perspective, theology today has to be a theology after Auschwitz: a theology based on a new understanding of the Jewish-Christian relationship. And theology today has to be a theology after Hiroshima: a theology of peace. But in South Africa many people would prefer to say: theology today has to be a theology after Crossroads or Soweto, after Alexandra or Khayelitsha. And so it has to be a theology of justice or a theology of liberation.

It is not at random that one of the most controversial issues in the ecumenical debate of our day is the question whether there is an alternative between peace and justice as predominant principles of Christian thinking and action. And it is evident that this controversy is reflected also within the theological debate in South Africa. In this paper I want to contribute to this ongoing debate by means of my contextual theology: a theology of peace growing out of a European experience, but confronted with the global discrepancies of our days.

1. The incapacity for peace

The Second World War ended without an official conclusion of peace, without an overall peace treaty. The symbolism of this fact was something that hardly became apparent at the time. Today, however, we can express its significance in terms of hard figures. At the end of the Second World War there were three atom bombs in existence; the bomb that was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, with consequences that still spell suffering for many of its inhabitants today, had a destructive capacity of twelve or thirteen thousand tonnes of TNT. Today there are fifty thousand nuclear weapons in the stockpiles all over the world. Taken together, they are more than a million times as powerful as the Hiroshima bomb. The aggregate nuclear arsenal is sufficient to set off a tonne of explosive every second for the next thousand years. The eighteen thousand megatonnes of destructive capacity that the nuclear

weapons in existence all over the world represent, is beyond human imagining. And it is this very incomprehensibility of the forces of annihilation that would then be unleashed that makes it possible for the politicians of the world and the people they represent to tolerate this, our incapacity for peace. At the same time, however, Hiroshima stands, in the eyes of many, as a reminder that we must never allow ourselves to take the existence of nuclear weapons for granted. The historic task that our generation faces is the prevention of any renewed deployment of nuclear devices and the discontinuation of their use as a deterrent.

There are fifty thousand nuclear weapons on this earth. Only very few of us have actually seen such a weapon. This invisibility is what makes the likelihood of their actual use seem so unreally remote. Living permanently under this threat of violence is something we can only render tolerable by pinning our hopes on the idea that it is precisely the threat of aggression that is the sole perpetual guarantee that we will never actually have to use this violence.

As a citizen of the Federal Republic of Germany, I have first-hand experience of the tensions that the attempt to prevent aggression via the threat of aggression actually engenders. Hard as it may be to face up to the fact, it is extremely improbable that this gigantic experiment will be crowned with any lasting success. Serious-sounding threats to use nuclear weaponry are highly likely to lead to their actual use at some juncture in the future. In other words, nuclear war remains a probable threat as long as the system of global deterrance is maintained. Uttering a warning in this connection is not mere apocalyptic alarmism. It is an expression of the simple, factual responsibility that devolves upon Christians as soon as they look this danger squarely in the face, and try to find ways of obviating it.

This is why, in the last few years, Christian action groups, parishes and churches have become agents of protest against the incapacity for peace, an incapacity that finds its megalomaniac expression in an extension of the arms race into outer space. The Christian perspective on this problem is a very particular one: the perspective of the 'least of these my brethren', whose cause Christ himself takes up (Mt 25:31 ff). The Christian view of history is the view from below, the perspective of the victims and sufferers. Hence Christians view today's arms race between the superpowers from the perspective of the members of future generations; the way they will live in the future is determined now, in the present, just as much as the fate of the anonymous victims of nuclear tests. But above all, seeing the incapacity for peace from the perspective of actual and potential victims, means facing up to the connections between armament and underdevelopment. The fateful link between the absence of peace and the absence of justice reveals, as it were, in negative profile, and hence the more starkly, the indissoluble unity of peace and justice.

No generation before us has had cause to be so intensely concerned about the threat to peace. Never before in the history of humanity have sheer survival and peace been so inextricably linked as they are for those alive on this planet now. Peace is the very stuff of survival, not only for those actually living under military oppression, but also for all those living in the force-field of the arms race between the two superpowers and their alliance systems. For the people in the highly industrialised NATO and

Warsaw Pact nations, peace is first of all absence of war and military aggression. They are coming to realise increasingly clearly that the boosting of nuclear strike potential does not lessen the probability of war, it increases it. The disputes about the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) show that the arms race continues to jeopardise peace even when it is declared to be for defensive purposes. Facing up to these facts makes the peace problem today a major and particularly important question within the whole issue of Christian responsibility.

But the headlong growth of aggressive military potential is not only a challenge because it increases the probability of war. The real provocation it presents is rather the increasing discrepancy between the funds that the prosperous nations of the earth are willing to invest in arms and those they are prepared to marshal to help combat hunger. Whether peace has any future is inextricably bound up with the reduction of injustice. It is just as much an incontrovertible truth that there can be no lasting peace at the expense of justice, as that the cause of justice cannot be promoted without the preservation of peace.

Our experience of the present is also, and finally, determined by the realisation that there can be no peace within humanity without a reconciliation with nature. Modern industrial culture, as exemplified primarily by Europe and America and today in an especially intense form in Japan, but partly also in South Africa, is originally characterised by the notion of human dominion over nature. God's injunction in Genesis to 'subdue' the Earth (Gn 1:26 f.) has been used throughout the last four centuries, albeit wrongly, as justification for this dominion. Today, this subjection of nature has taken the form of massive, life-destroying violence. The advantages brought by scientific and technological progress are offset by the profound harm done to the biosphere. Humanity's irreversible interference with the workings of nature increases day by day. With it increases the burden of responsibility falling on those generations living on this earth today for the way future generations will live and the options open to them. One of the major experiences that have marked our generation is indeed the realisation that there is no such thing as peace within humanity without the reconciliation with nature.

Curbing violence, promoting justice and conserving nature - these are the essential and inextricably-linked ingredients of the task posed by the problem of peace. It was this that the Ecumenical Movement had in mind when at the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver in 1983, it called for a conciliar process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Where the curbing of violence, the promotion of justice and the preservation of nature together are seen as the substance of peace, peace itself becomes a synonym for the successful organisation of communal life in a shared, finite habitat: the planet earth.

2. Two concepts of peace in conflict

In Judaeo-Christian tradition, this unity of peace, justice and reconciliation with nature has a name - *shalom* - a word that covers all the multiplicity of successful and

fulfilling relationships, both small- and large-scale, with God as well as those within humanity. Christian thought orientated towards the tradition of *shalom* takes a committed stance in the contest between conflicting conceptions of peace.

I should like to illustrate the rivalry between existing understandings of peace with reference to the European tradition. In European thinking we have two major peace conceptions pitted against one another, the tradition of *pax Romana* and the tradition of the Biblical *shalom*, the one - *pax Romana* - a system of domination, the other - *shalom* - a design for living together.

The *pax Romana* took shape in imperial Rome. At that time Rome was an extensive hegemonic state. Peace in the empire was safeguarded by the system of centralised power. This power used mainly two instruments: bureaucracy and armed forces. Specific functions were delegated to the prefects of the provinces. There was a general motto of Roman domination which they had to follow: 'to give an order to peace, to be careful with the dominated and to crush all revolt'. This rule of domination includes three elements: the predominance of order over real peace, the interest to organize an adapted majority and to co-opt parts of the dominated people, and the attempt to break the courage of resisting minorities with cruel violence. This concept forms the background of the death-punishment by crucifixion. Realized in public, the crucifixion is a means of deterrence against all resistence and revolt.

Such a concept of peace will necessarily imply that peace no longer obtains outside the frontiers of the area controlled by this centralised power. Where the empire ends, the Barbarians begin. 'If you want peace, prepare for war', is one of the mottos of such a view of peace. And it finds its perpetuation right up to the present day of two concepts: the concept of national security, which tries to prevent the self-determination and the full participation of people by means of open military oppression inside a country, and the concept of deterrence that seeks to avert the outbreak of war by visibly preparing for eventual hostilities and by partitioning the earth into zones of hegemonic influence. In both concepts we find the prolongation of the guiding principle of *pax Romana*, but equipped now with the most up-to-date technological devices.

Espousing the biblical concept of peace, *shalom* means developing a culture of community or conviviality that overarches all the various forms of communality. The *shalom* of the Hebrew Scriptures includes the peace between humanity and God as much as it refers to the successful co-existence of tribes or peoples. Human treatment of non-human nature is as central to it as is political organisation and administration. The members of the people of Israel and those of the Christian communities greet each other with this word *shalom* - 'peace be with you'. In this salutation, people pass on to each other the peace they have been granted by God. This peace, which they have God, and not themselves to thank for, thus becomes a fundamental feature of human communality and solidarity. Where peace between people and peoples is jeopardised or disrupted, there is thus always more at stake than earthly non-aggression. What is at stake is the way we cherish a precious gift that has been entrusted to us.

The concept of *pax* follows a logic of exclusion. Its basis is the opposition between my own peace and the peacelessness of the other, between my own freedom and domination over others. *Pax* in this sense is a peace of domination. Violence is a lasting means of securing this peace. On the contrary *shalom* follows a logic of inclusion. My peace is dependent on the peace of the other. Security is understood as common security with the other. Freedom is understood as a shared freedom on a common basis. Its fundamental idea is not domination, but successful and fulfilled common life. So *shalom* is directed at overcoming the use of violence. This is why God's rejection of the use of armed force is an integral part of the history of Biblical faith. The history of the people of Israel commences with the notion that *Yahweh* is prepared to make use of warfare as a means of imposing his design for the history of the world. The taking of Israel and the defence of the Promised Land are bound up with hostilities in the course of which *Yahweh* intervenes on behalf of his chosen people. But the history of Israel culminates in the prophetic vision of an era in which swords shall be beaten into ploughshares, and spears into pruninghooks (Is 2:4, Mi 4:3).

The vision is taken up by the New Testament. It conceives of peace as the blessing of reconciliation, as a gift that makes love of one's enemies possible. The meaning of peace is revealed in the reality of reconciliation through Christ's death on the Cross; this is why the mission of the Christian church is described as the 'ministry of reconciliation' (2 Cor 5:17 ff). The church is the one place where the logic of inclusion is lived in an exemplary form. So the Christian community can open the way for an alternative political development, which is not orientated towards the logic of exclusion, but towards the logic of inclusion.

The universal historical significance of the message of reconciliation in the New Testament, its relevance for human history as a whole is that in it Christ, the Son of God, sacrifices Himself. In his Son God himself takes part in the suffering of his creation. That's what reconciliation means. Where such reconciliation is lived out, there can be no projection of guilt onto a scapegoat which is then banished into the wilderness (Lv 16:22 ff). By representing the sinners before God and the God of reconciliation on earth, Jesus heralds the end of the scapegoat mechanism. Here we have the liberating power of reconciliation, but it is a power that has often been denied in the history of Christianity. The Christian concept of peace is negated, in practical terms, wherever the cohesion of a society is ensured at the expense of some victim, arbitrarily singled out and cast for that role. The campaigns against the 'heathens' and the burning of heretics to be found in the annals of Christianity were frequently of such a character. Crusades, witch-hunts and autos-da-fé are instances where the Christian church failed in its peace mission. Even today we find the avowal of reconciliation and the practical consequences of that avowal gone back on wherever certain groups are forced into the role of scapegoats: the Jews in Nazi Germany, the blacks in present-day South Africa, foreign workers or those seeking asylum, young people or old people, communists or capitalists. In opposition to all these processes we have to state that the consequence of the message of reconciliation is the de-victimization of society.

Reconciliation means liberation from projection, liberation from the constraint to see in others only what is bad, and to see what is bad as the exclusive property of others. That is why the Sermon on the Mount describes the love of one's enemy as the consequence of reconciliation:

'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy". But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons and (daughters) of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:43-48).

For the Christian faith, the grounding of this exhortation to love one's enemy lies in God's readiness to do the same, in God's love of sinful humanity, that is God's love of humanity in his hostility towards God. God's triumph over this enmity is the foundation stone for the love of one's enemies. The path to this attitude involves a learning process in three elementary stages.

It includes the realisation that human life is constantly characterized by conflict and dispute. Understanding the reality of hostility is the first step towards loving one's enemy. This reality pervades not only the private sphere, but also social, political and religious life. The injunction to love one's enemy is thus in no way restricted to private morals, it includes the public dimension of life.

To love one's enemy involves a radical change in perception. We are accustomed to thinking of the behaviour of others as bearing the seeds leading to the emergence and aggravation of hostility, while regarding our own actions as devoid of any kind of antagonism. Loving one's enemies involves relinquishing this attitute that the others are the source of all conflict, and asking oneself bluntly what it is in one's own attitudes that others may interpret as being a potential threat, a sign of aggression and ill-will. Perceiving a conflict from the point of view of the others involved in it is a specific form of Christian realism. It is a decisive Christian contribution to political ethics.

Finally, loving one's enemy encourages social sensitivity and parries the power of violence with a display of disconcerting and disarming gentleness. The Sermon on the Mount gives three examples of a striking concrete nature. If in a private altercation our adversary should go as far as to deal us a particularly humiliating blow with the back of his hand, we are enjoined to 'turn the other cheek'; if in an action at law our opponent lays claim to our coat, we should let him have our cloak as well, although at the time this outer garment was exempt from legal confiscation because of its uses as a blanket to protect its owner from the cold night air in desert regions; and if a Roman soldier, as a member of the occupying forces, should requisition the services of an Israelite to act as a bearer for a mile, the latter should overcome this situation of constraint and hostility by volunteering to go along an extra mile (Mt 5:38 ff). Personal quarrel, legal dispute and foreign occupation are the three areas of encounter from which Jesus selects his examples, instances all of

them where the social sensitivity occasioned by an attitude of charity towards one's enemies can break down established fronts of antagonism in all areas of human life.

Thus, as early as the New Testament, the learning processes triggered off in this way are no longer restricted to our personal and private dealings. They have a political dimension, eschewing organised channelling of aggression onto our putative 'enemies', and thus representing a fundamental motive for the recasting of political attitudes as well as practical political action. This is not in any way an 'idealistic' or 'naive' programme. It is rather the product of objective insight into the structures of hostility and the realisation that with modern-day weapon technology as advanced as it is, living out one's hostilities would be suicidal. Hence, hostility must be curbed and overcome. And 'intelligent love of one's enemies' (C F von Weizsäcker) can serve towards this end.

The Bible's message of peace, which Christians take as a basic design for living, is thus particularly relevant to our present-day situation. The extensiveness of the biblical *shalom* corresponds to the massiveness and the acuteness of the dangers to which the preservation of peace is exposed in our times. God's promise of peace is an invitation to humanity to embrace peace as the guiding principle of life. It combines within itself the curbing of violence, the promotion of justice and reconciliation with nature. To take the Bible's message of peace seriously and to concentrate on its call for reconciliation, is to make the injunction to love one's enemy a guideline for practical peace-making and peace-keeping. It is the most important contribution that present-day Christians can make to the preservation and promotion of universal peace.

3. The idea of an ecumenical peace council

In the worldwide crisis of our day Christianity is faced with the responsibility of investing the full weight of its united authority, and formulating in unison the consequences of its ethical insights for actual political action. This is why many members of the ecumenical community hope for a Peace Council in which Christians the world over would join in making such a binding declaration. The idea of a Peace Council is a focus for the hopes which many people today attach to ecumenical Christianity.

Seeing Christians combining into one great community and professing their common convictions in a 'genuinely universal Council', is a devout ecumenical wish. That the challenge posed by peace must unite Christians and Churches from all the countries of the earth has been a central tenet of the ecumenical movement since its earliest beginnings.

It was at an assembly in the early years of the ecumenical movement that the idea of a genuinely ecumenical council for peace was formulated for the first time. And it was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, speaking at the ecumenical conference in Fanö in August 1934, who first expounded this idea. Towards the end of a searingly committed

speech, the young German theologian addressed his audience in Fanö as the 'great ecumenical council of the Holy Church of Christ in all the world'.

His actual words were spoken in English: 'How will peace come? Who will call us to peace so that the world will hear, will have to hear? So that all peoples may rejoice? The individual Christian cannot do it. When all around are silent, he can indeed raise his voice and bear witness, but the powers of this world stride over him without a word. The individual Church too, can witness and suffer - oh, if it only would! - but it is also suffocated by the power of hate. Only the one great Ecumenical Council of the Holy Church of Christ all over the World can speak out so that the world, though it gnash its teeth, will have to hear, so that the peoples will rejoice because the Church of Christ in the name of Christ has taken the weapons from the hands of their sons, forbidden war, and proclaimed the peace of Christ against a raging world.

'Why do we fear the fury of the world powers? Why don't we take the power from them and give it back to Christ? We can still do it today. The Ecumenical Council is in session. The nations are waiting for it in the East and in the West. Must we be put to shame by non-Christian peoples in the East? Shall we desert the individuals who are risking their lives for this message? The hour is late. The world is choked with weapons, and dreadful is the distrust which looks out of all men's eyes. The trumpets of war may blow tomorrow. For what are we waiting? Do we want to become involved in this guilt as never before?'

Bonhoeffer's prophetic cry went unheeded. The Fanö conference did not see itself as an Ecumenical Peace Council. It did not take the weapons from the sons of Jesus Christ. In fact, when five years later the world experienced a second global war, initiated on German soil, Christians participated in it on both sides. When it was over, the call for a Peace Council was voiced once again, this time from within the Catholic Church. The American Catholic priest, Father George Zabelka, who ministered to the pilots who flew the atom bombs destined for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, now took up the cry: 'It is imperative that an ecumenical council be convened with the specific aim of stating unequivocally that war is absolutely incompatible with the teachings of Christ.'

Bonhoeffer's impulse was finally taken up at the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver in 1983. It was the delegates of the Federation of Protestant Churches in the German Democratic Republic who called for an intensive ecumenical approach to the questions of peace, justice and ecology, and who asked in this connection 'whether the time is ripe for a general Christian Peace Council such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer called for some fifty years ago in the face of an imminent Second World War.' This initiative was worked into the plan of the World Council of Churches to make the conciliar process towards Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation one of its major topics in the years before its next Assembly in 1991.

There is, however, no mention of the term 'Council' in the Vancouver resolutions of 1983. It makes its first reappearance at the Assembly of German Protestant Churches (Kirchentag) in Düsseldorf in 1985. On this occasion, the physicist and philosopher Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker made the following appeal: 'We ask the

churches of the world to convene a Peace Council. Today, peace is the very condition of human survival. But it is by no means assured. At an ecumenical Council called together in the interests of securing peace, the Christian churches must speak out in joint responsibility in a way that cannot be ignored by humanity. There is no time to be lost. We ask the church leaders to do everything in their power to ensure that the Council be convened as quickly as possible. And we ask the churches at parish level to give this call for such a Council the strength of their explicit support.'

Since this appeal was made, the idea formulated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Father Zabelka has communicated itself to many people with renewed vigour. Pope John Paul II took up this impulse by inviting representatives of the various Christian churches and other religions to Assisi to a communal prayer for peace. This prayer meeting, which took place on October 27 1986, was an impressive demonstration of the fact that religious leaders can cross the boundaries of churches and religions in the cause of peace. Another thing that this prayer made clear, was that assembling for common prayer was only the first step. Further steps must follow. As Bonhoeffer stated, the call of the church must be 'to pray and do what is just'.

These steps will have to be taken in a situation which is truly without precedent. Never before in its history has mankind had the means at its disposal of wiping itself out entirely. A collective response to this challenge with the full, united weight and authority of assembled Christianity would be equally unprecedented.

It was thus proposed to give this planned assembly a new name, with a view to evading certain problems of church law posed by the term 'Council' for the Roman Catholic Church and for the Orthodox churches. In January this year, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches thus adopted the suggestion to speak of a 'World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation'. The General Secretary of the World Council of Churches has also asked the Roman Catholic Church to join the World Council of Churches in issuing the invitations to this World Convocation, which is scheduled to take place in 1990. At the time of writing there has as yet been no final response from the Vatican. It would be the fulfilment of the hopes and prayers of very many people if the churches of the world would indeed join in this way for a common initiative in the cause of peace. A conciliar assembly of the Christians of the world is necessary to formulate the Christians' pledge for peace and make this pledge resoundingly heard. The road to such an assembly is a long one. But first important steps have been taken. I hope that the next decisive steps will soon follow. For if the churches are unable to find the strength to speak in unison in the face of the dangers now assailing peace and human survival, when will they ever?

In many countries there is evidence of a movement in this direction at the level of Christian groups and parishes. A conciliar assembly of world Christianity for peace can only grow out of the grass roots of parish commitment and small-scale initiatives. These are the true potential origins of a movement that can be taken up and expanded upon by the higher levels of church hierarchy. Commitment to peace will grow wherever such nodal movements come into being. A Christian parish in a

small German town is transformed because it supports the construction of a youth centre in the neighbourhood of a former concentration camp in Poland; a Christian action group practises solidarity across the borders by identifying itself with the cause of people affected by forced resettlement measures in South Africa; volunteers from American Peace Churches demonstrate the hope of reconciliation by going to Vietnam and spending their days and nights doing nothing but clearing away the mines that America's military presence left behind. Christians witnessing for peace in Nicaragua go a similar way. Such experiences and examples encourage active commitment to peace, despite all the difficulties and disappointments.

The conciliar process in which Christian groups and parish communities pledge for peace with others beyond national and religious borders, is already under way. It needs to be strengthened and expanded; but it has begun. However, an essential part of this conciliar process is the actual 'Council' itself, an assembly of representatives of world Christianity for the sake of peace. It should be fully representative in character and, in its prayer for the presence of the Spirit, spare no pains in its quest for the truth.

4. Overcoming the institution of war

Christian responsibility for peace, then, is attuned to the comprehensiveness of peace as defined in the Bible, the bountiful peace of *shalom*. It focuses equally on the peace promised to humanity by God and the peace between people. Peace is reconciliation between people and reconciliation with nature. Peace is successful communal living in the broadest possible sense. The overcoming of need, the protection from violence and the reconciliation with nature, taken together, are the thematic substance of the conciliar process in which ecumenical Christianity is involved. But just as essential as the breadth of the thematic substance, is the concentration on those insights and steps to which ecumenical Christianity today can jointly and fully pledge its allegiance.

I should like to highlight three of these in the course of my remaining remarks. I restrain myself here to the aspect of curbing violence as one of the three aspects which I distinguished earlier.

In the discussions conducted by various Christian churches, the response to the dilemma posed by nuclear weapons was for a long time essentially the following: in no circumstances can the actual use of nuclear weapons be approved or tolerated from a Christian perspective, but for a transitional period their existence as a deterrent for purposes of maintaining peace in a context of freedom must be regarded as being within the bounds of Christian acceptability.

Since the late seventies and early eighties there has been a definite move away from this stance within the ecumenical fellowship of churches. In their Pastoral Letter of 1983, the Catholic Bishops of the United States provided the most impressive example of this new development. The fundamental insight formulated by them - and endorsed by many others - is that if the actual use of mass-destruction devices is

a crime against humanity, then the threat of using these devices is not acceptable either. For a threat invariably implies the intention of actually using what one is employing as a threat, if the need arises. Hence, today the Christian answer is 'no', not only to the actual use, but also to the production and deployment of highly destructive weapons, be it nuclear or conventional, chemical or biological.

This insight is one that unites churches in East and West, across the Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox denominations. And above all it represents a stance in which both major Christian approaches (pacifist and just war traditions) to the ethics of peace are in full agreement. The present crisis thus gives rise to qualified optimism with respect to a clear and binding statement on the part of the churches, in that it gives these two distinct approaches to a Christian peace ethic the opportunity of speaking out with one voice.

The one school of thought in this matter does not fundamentally dispute the primacy of non-violence over the use of force. But it does concede the state is right, in cases of emergency and as a last resort, to protect law and peace via threats of and the actual use of armed force. The Just War Theory represents an attempt to answer the question pertaining to the criteria that determine when such use of force on the part of the state is for Christians tolerable. The Catholic bishops of the United States concentrated on three points in connection with this theory. Any use of violence must be geared to the goals of preserving peace. For that reason the use of means of force must stand in a reasonable relation to this goal. Hence, in all warfare soldiers and civilian population must be distinguished, as must military and civilian targets. We can call these three criteria relationality, proportionality and discrimination. All of them show their validity today not only with relationship to the problem of war, but also with relationship to the problem of resistance. When in a situation of resistance against the systematic violation and denial of basic human rights, violence as a last resort cannot be avoided, the criteria of relationality, proportionality and discrimination are comparably important. In the case of modern technologies of weaponry (not only nuclear) these three criteria lead to the conclusion that neither the use of weapons of mass destruction, nor the threat to use them can be compatible with Christian conscience. The Just War Theory leads to the blanket rejection of warfare and preparations for war involving weapons of mass destruction.

In this conclusion the American Catholic bishops are in agreement with the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. In the message it sent out early in 1986 on the subject of 'War and Peace in the Nuclear Age', the Synod committed itself to the standpoint that war which employs nuclear or other equally indiscriminating weapons which can destroy humanity and all life on earth, can never be justified by the criteria advanced by the Just War Theory.

In Christianity, The Just War exists alongside the tradition and practice of total renunciation of the use of violence. It takes its lead from Jesus' pacifism, and for that reason refuses to have any part in the use of political violence. In the face of the war machinery in existence today, this tradition sees the active commitment to non-violence as gaining even greater urgency. By refusing to do military service, its adherents anticipate the universal attitude that one day will have to assert itself.

Today, the Just War Theory and the total renunciation of violence still remain two fundamentally distinct possibilities of Christian orientation. But both these approaches agree with the conclusion that the production, deployment and use of weapons of mass destruction, whether nuclear or not, are not compatible with a Christian conscience. The first thing to be expected of a conciliar assembly of worldwide ecumenical Christianity would be that this realisation be formulated jointly and unequivocally.

But - and this is the second question - would that mean that war with conventional weapons would be reinstated for Christian thinking as a legitimate political agent? This would be a fateful result. Christians should rather agree on a different conclusion. The unimaginable cruelty of war in our century has shown that war must be overcome as a means of settling political conflicts. Wars are not, as was taught even by Christian churches far too often and far too long, a natural occurrence, but the result of human - or humanly fashioned - history. Unlike hunger, thirst and sexuality, they are not part of human nature. They are - like slavery or serfdom - institutions of human history that can be superseded. Replacing the institution of war by other methods of conflict does not mean ushering in the Golden Age. A world without war would still be imperfect, riven by conflict. But it remains a brave goal, a goal forced upon us by the destructive potential of modern technology and hence a feasible goal, to regulate the conflicts between nations by other means than war. There are regions on this earth where such a transition has already taken place. Western Europe is one of them - against a backdrop of a bloody history full of the horrors of organised hostility. No one imagines at the moment that there will be another war between Germany and France or Great Britain. Overcoming the institution of war is a bold but feasible, and above all, a crucial aim. Calling to mind God's eschewal of war, as recounted in the Scriptures, the churches should join to realise this aim. They should declare that war as an institution can and must be overcome. But the decisive condition for the overcoming of war as an institution is the just shape of societies in which justice not only includes the fairness of the conditions of exchange (*justitia commutativa*) and the adequate distribution of wealth (*justitia distributiva*), but also equal chances of contribution and political participation for all (*justitia contributiva*).

I should like to make a third point here. The system of deterrence implies a notion of security according to which one's own side can only live in safety when the risk for potential adversaries is incalculable. Our own security is then the result of the insecurity of others.

It is time to relinquish this notion. Despite the differences in social organisation and political order from which the conflict of hegemony between the USA and the USSR springs, one thing is obvious - both sides live in one and the same world. They will either have to agree to differ, or else they will both be eliminated from the face of the earth together.

The realisation that security can only be mutual is the objective result of quite mundane reasoning processes. But the obstacles resisting this insight are unusually massive. Thinking in black and white terms, of friend and foe, reasserts itself and

leads to an attempt to secure for one's own side the very security of which one seeks to deprive the other side, whilst at the same time ascribing purely offensive motives to the armament drive on the other side and purely defensive intentions on one's own side. Such notions are not only to be found among individuals without political office or mandate. They can also be instrumental in determining the results of summit talks and hence affect the chances of effective disarmament. Such mental obstacles are a main reason why it is still legitimate to doubt whether effective steps towards disarmament can in fact be instituted between East and West. And today such steps are more urgently necessary than ever before.

Such obstacles in our thinking are potentially lethal. Christian faith and Christian ethics can contribute to dismantling them. The injunction to love one's enemy, that we may once more call to mind in this context, is not an injunction suddenly to look upon one's enemy as a simply peace-loving innocent and to ignore reality to the point of extending indiscriminate feelings of blind friendship to one's foes. What it does is to accept hostility between people as a reality that both sides play their part in engendering and sustaining. Mental obstacles are dismantled wherever exposure to menace and security requirements are seen with the eyes of the other side. This is today the essential prerequisite for a policy of Common Security. The churches can pave the way for it. And Christians can play their part by doing their best to encourage greater mutual understanding of the life of the so-called other side, and of their historical experiences. So Christians can begin to overcome their own prejudices and the prejudices of their own societies and governments.

5. Towards a Church of Peace

We look to a 'Peace Council' to come out with something to which humanity cannot turn a deaf ear. If the churches want to do this, then what they say must be binding upon them too. It must have the character of a pledge. The churches must commit themselves to the obligation of drawing the necessary conclusions for their own conduct and their own social organisation from the truths of Christian teaching that they seek to communicate. Churches joining together to form a Peace Council must become churches of peace. The central theme of a Peace Council is hence the churches' own commitment to peace. For this pledge, this active commitment is the churches' weightiest contribution to political peace, to peace on earth.

In conclusion, I should like to indicate the form that such commitment could take. In so doing, I intend to make use of an argumentative strategy which proved its viability in the Catholic discussion on the Theology of Liberation. In this strategy, God's taking the part of the poor, as testified to in the Old and New Testaments, was taken as the basis for a 'preferential option for the poor', and this in its turn as a basic ingredient of churches' political witness. I intend to draw upon this method of argumentation in putting forward four points with respect to the churches' commitment to peace.

The churches' commitment to peace is characterized by the preferential option for non-violence. Standing up for the primacy of non-violence means asking oneself first of all what one can actually do to help ensure that situations of gross unjustice (such as the continuation of *apartheid* in South Africa) can be overcome without the use of military force. It involves contributing to the outlawing of war as a means of international conflict settlement and the rejection of the spirit, logic and practice of deterrence. Pastoral care of soldiers and the position of the churches towards consistent pacifists and conscientious objectors are areas in which this commitment can take tangible and concrete form. This option can lead into conflicts with the preferential option for the poor. But even in the situation of the last resort all means of mass destruction have to be clearly excluded. And when Christians in their concrete situation come to the result that the violence of resistence is inevitable, their decisive criterion is and has to be the minimisation of violence itself.

The churches' commitment to peace is marked by the preferential option for the poor. An ecumenical Peace Council can be a starting-point from which new forms of ecumenical solidarity can develop and existing forms of such solidarity can be confirmed. One such form is the refusal of economic developments which lead to a further aggravation of present socio-economic disparity. The increased military spending is one important aspect of it. Another is the attempt to anticipate, in the relations between the churches, the justice that is required in political and economic relations between the peoples of the world.

The churches' commitment to peace is marked by the preferential option for the conservation of nature. The incorporation of non-human nature in God's design for Creation is one of the basic tenets of the Christian profession of faith. One of the necessary consequences of this today is to acknowledge nature as not being given over to humanity as we think fit. The churches must show how damaging the effects will be if economic maximisation is given pre-eminence over ecological preservation. By their own example they have to develop examples for an alternative: the pre-eminence of ecological preservation over economic maximisation.

The churches' commitment to peace is marked by the preferential option for the prophetic mission of the church. As a general rule, clear-cut statements by the churches on the subject of peace and justice falter as soon as a concern for their pastoral duties lead them to attempt to harmonize in the church context all the currents manifesting themselves in a given situation or society. This concern is, in a sense, well-founded, for it is the churches' obligation to preach and spread the gospel to all. But it reaches its limits where the truth, to which the church has to bear witness, obliges it to make clear statements. It reaches its limits where the profession of faith is at stake. Thus, for this reason, it reaches its limits where the future of God's beloved Creation is endangered by human action and intervention. Because the church represents the truth of the gospel, it must commit itself in such conflicts to the preferential option for its own prophetic task.

In these four directions I'm searching for a theology after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, after Soweto and Crossroads. In these four directions I'm searching for the outline of an ecumenical church of peace. To build up such a church could be the answer of

today's Christianity to Jesus' blessing of the peace-makers: 'Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called sons and daughters of God.'