

Quakers

NEDERLANDSE JAARVERGADERING VAN
HET RELIGIEUS GENOOTSCHAP DER VRIENDEN

Postbus 2167, NL-7420 AD Deventer, 0031-(0)570-655229; secretariaat@dequakers.nl

To the World Council of Churches
Coordinator International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC)
150 Route the Ferney
CH-121 Geneva 2
Switzerland.

Subject: Response to the WCC *Initial Statement towards and Ecumenical Declaration of Just Peace*.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Neither for the Kingdoms of this world, nor for the Kingdom of God will we fight and war with outward weapons¹

Response from Netherlands Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) to the *Initial Statement towards an Ecumenical Declaration of Just Peace of the World Council of Churches*

As one of the representatives of the so-called historical peace churches believing that non-violence is an integral part of following Jesus we are grateful that the World Council of Churches has placed the issue of the use of deadly force in conflict situations high on the agenda by its endeavour to develop a 'declaration of just peace'. In the draft document questions are raised we are requested to respond to from our living tradition.

The concept of Just Peace is being introduced as a synthesis of the former antithesis between those churches that embraced the Just War doctrine and those churches that opted for a radical pacifist position. Although we applaud that the churches of the former category, which are in the majority in the WCC, have become much more cautious in condoning the use of violence, the antithesis mentioned cannot yet be said to be overtaken. In our view this antithesis is incorrectly being presented as a gradual rather than a principal difference, particularly in chapter 3. Although adherents to the just war doctrine became so-called 'nuclear pacifists' and –as is stated- 'stood side by side' with Christian pacifists in the struggle against the deployment of cruise missiles in Europe, this does not mean that profound differences in vision have been overcome. These differences come to light when one asks what the political consequences of the gospel message and the task of the church in today's world are. As far as we are concerned the Initial Statement has been written whilst still accepting the age-old concept of the Corpus Christianum, in the context of which the church allies itself somehow with the worldly powers. The traditional peace churches however have always

¹ Summary of the declaration of Quakers to King Charles II in 1660 which is still regarded as the basis of the Quaker Peace Testimony.

opted to form a countermovement, thus making it possible to render a prophetic witness over and against the worldly powers. In our Quaker tradition this is referred to as ‘speaking Truth to Power’. Because these are the most important issues at stake from our perspective we begin by responding to the questions raised in chapter 3.

In ‘*On the way towards Just Peace: the scope of the Churches’ engagement*’ we are asked whether the approaches outlined correspond to our tradition. Unfortunately we have to answer this question negatively. The reason is that under the heading of Just Peace the possibility to use deadly violence in conflict situations –albeit under strict conditions- is still kept open, just as was done in accepting the UN resolution on Responsibility to Protect. We cannot agree to this. Moreover the World Council contradicts itself when it is stated in paragraph 56 that ‘refusing to condone violence, and following the way of non-violence indicate how Christians are to respond to a world replete with violence. Jesus met his own violent death with non-violence and this remains the model for Christians to follow in overcoming violence’. This is why we join the response to the position taken by the World Council sent in by Church and Peace last year. This response declared amongst else: “*We invite all churches to resist – together with us- the temptation to use deadly violence, even as a last resort*”.

Moreover it must be observed that the consequent application of the just war doctrine in today’s world should turn its adherents really into radical Christian pacifists for at least two reasons. First of all many weapon systems available for warfare today –not just ABC weapons- can neither be characterised as proportional, nor make the required distinction between soldiers and civilians. Secondly, the Just War theory was developed to limit conflicts between nation states. In today’s world most armed conflicts are no longer conflicts between nation states. Very often these are internal conflicts, conflicts within states. During the attack on Iraq even the United Nations denied that one could speak of the required ‘just authority’, there was serious doubt whether there was the required ‘just cause’ or the listed ‘right intentions’, whilst proportionality and correct behaviour (respecting human- and international rights) clearly left much to be desired. It becomes even more complicated if we become aware of the fact that many armed conflicts today are asymmetrical. These are no longer conflicts between states. Examples in case: Afghanistan and Sudan, or violent resistance and wars of independence, as in Shri Lanka and Palestine. Here all of a sudden the states involved no longer speak of uniformed soldiers confronting one another, but of ‘enemy combatants’ confronting the military. This leads us to be convinced that the criteria of the Just War theory can no longer be applied to the armed conflicts we are witnessing in today’s world.

We can therefore agree with the World Council if it likes to state that the just war theory has been superseded, but not when this implies at the same time that the differences between those churches that adhere to the just war doctrine and those that are dedicated to radical Christian pacifism has also been overcome. From our perspective this antithesis still persists, even when the just war theory is replaced by that of ‘just peace’ as presented in the Initial Statement. An additional objection against the concept of ‘just peace’ is that sometimes the move from micro- to macro-level is made far too easily, taking e.g. the existing power structures and the structural economic injustice involved insufficiently into account. Similarly we note in paragraph 95 that the position of a police force operating under strict national legislation is being juxtaposed against the destructive powers of the military in international conflict situations.

Grounded in our deep conviction as Quakers we therefore continue to reject the use of deadly violence in all circumstances and choose a different path. Thus we opt for the non-violent (civil) interventions in conflict situations following the model of the Christian Peacemaker

Teams and Peace Brigades International; for the transformation of the international system, both in the economic arena and that of international cooperation on peace and security: the World Council should support the United Nations more vigorously in realising the Millennium Goals, the reform of the Security Council and strengthening the newly formed Peace Building Commission (PBC).

We are also asked whether we can agree with the way in which the first chapter entitled ‘*The God of Peace and the Peace of God*’ reflects on Biblical sources, human sin and the nature of violence and develops a Trinitarian approach to the God of Peace. As a first response to this question we noted that you stated in the covering letter accompanying the Initial Statement that specialised theological language was to be avoided as much as possible. However, we have to admit that –certainly in the first chapter- this is not the case. It is- particularly for the laity- a largely inaccessible text that may be characterised theologically rather orthodox. We assume you do know that in our tradition we are extremely careful using systematic theological language. So you will not be surprised to learn that –although we appreciate that you have grounded your statement in the Biblical message- we have some difficulty with those parts of chapter 1 that are very theological and Trinitarian in nature. Moreover we feel that a dogmatic foundation of our testimonies is not essential. In our tradition we would rather ground an ecumenical declaration of Just Peace on the message of peace that Jesus preached, amongst else in the Sermon on the Mount and his own non-violent way of life, maintained consistently until the cross, thereby breaking the vicious cycle of violence. The peace that he has left his disciples, the world cannot give us (John 14: 27)

As far as the second part of the question at the end of chapter 1 is concerned we agree that committing violence –in whatever form- is a trespass, a sin. However we need to keep in mind that this does not just refer to manifest, but also to structural violence. The worldly institutions and structures – e.g. the dominant economic model- cause inequalities and offers unequal opportunities that may in turn result in violent resistance. Likewise the climate crisis mainly caused by the so-called ‘developed’ nations is a serious threat to world peace. Climate change should be unanimously combated. In this respect the *mitigation* deemed necessary in your document (paragraph 110) is definitely insufficient! Our economic system and our lifestyle need to be urgently transformed. The challenge to do this is should be should be central when building Just Peace, because it is not just (only) peace, in the sense that violence is absent- but is *Just* Peace because it involves an encompassing just and sustainable global society in accordance with the Biblical notion of *Shalom*. A precondition for this kind of peace is also the Biblical notion of justice. We note therefore with gratitude that in several paragraphs of your document this is witnessed to. These are paragraphs where you note that it is necessary to expose the inequality and injustice in the world, where you argue that the earth and fellow creatures are exposed to violence, exploitation and indeed extinction caused by us humans! We therefore agree with your conclusion that Just Peace is not just about ‘peace on earth but also about peace with earth’! However in our view this also implies that we have not completed the conciliary process Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation at all, we have only begun!

In the second chapter ‘*In the name of Christ: churches as communities and agents of peace building*’ questions are asked about our involvement in peace work and peace education, as well as our commitment to sustainability. Based upon the conviction that the peace testimony is an integral part our faith, Quakers have, since the inception of the Religious Society of Friends in the seventeenth century, worked for peace and reconciliation. Quakers conscientiously objected to military service and fulfilled alternative civil service instead.

Quakers engaged themselves in reconciliation after a war by for example rendering emergency aid in Germany after the Second World War and organising work camps between youngsters from France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Thus we were also co-founders of the workcampmovement *Service Civil International* and peace movements such as *Church and Peace* and *Eirene*, as well human rights movements as *Amnesty International* and environmental movements like *Greenpeace*.

In conflict situations efforts were undertaken to mediate behind the scenes, to win the confidence of both parties involved and get negotiations under way, for example during the war of secession of Biafra in Nigeria, the war between North and South Vietnam and the conflict in Northern Ireland. Moreover the Quakers have been recognised as an accredited NGO by the United Nations and ‘Quaker diplomats’ are active at the UN-offices at New York and Geneva. Here the focus is especially on fostering economic justice, human rights and disarmament. Diplomats from various countries are invited to jointly develop e.g. a first draft treaty against certain types of armaments, like cluster bombs or landmines. This activity by the Quakers also resulted in the Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to the Religious Society of Friends some 40 years ago.

At the European headquarters of the European Union and the Council of Europe, Quakers are similarly engaged: more than 25 years now the Quaker council for European Affairs has been active in the fields of economic justice, reform of the judicial and prison systems, human rights and peace. Already in the early 1980’s high-ranking diplomats and officers in the military from both Western- and Eastern-Europe were invited to enter into dialogue at Quaker House Brussels by the Quaker-Mennonite Workinggroup on True Peace. Lately Quakers stimulated the NGO’s working for peace at Brussels to unite forces and coordinate their efforts by establishing the *European Peace Liaison Office*.

However, Quakers, be it in their own way, are also a worldwide church. In this chapter the World Council also addresses the work for peace before, during and after a violent conflict. For many Quakers in the southern hemisphere, particularly Africa, living out the peace witness undoubtedly is not as easy as it is for Friends in the northern hemisphere. As conscientious objectors – a human right- in many of these countries they are still being excluded from studying at Universities or jobs in the civil service. On the other hand they are often actively involved in peace and reconciliation in countries that suffer(ed) from civil war and armed conflict, especially in Eastern and Central Africa.

Concerning peace education Quakers developed whilst working with inmates in prisons the *Alternatives to Violence Project* which is now an effective peace education and training programme applied in well over 60 countries worldwide. In the Netherlands one of our members offers an ‘quarrel school’ for pupils and youngsters to learn creative ways to solve conflict.

Next to the ‘peace testimony’ Friends have a ‘simplicity testimony’ : live as simply as possible so that others may simply live. In recent years this is being related more and more to a sustainability testimony. Groups of Quakers all over the world are increasingly concerned and undertake action, as individuals and as a community. This will also be reflected in the work programme of the Quaker United Nations Offices and the Quaker Council for European Affairs. During the recent UN Climate negotiations at Copenhagen a joint statement by European Quakers has been presented calling on the participants to develop effective and just policies to combat climate change.

Finally the question whether we have any concrete recommendations on the route towards the planned Ecumenical Peace Convocation at Kingston, Jamaica. We would like to offer following suggestions:

- To consider the meeting in Jamaica no longer as the completion of a campaign (Decade to Overcome Violence) but to save from the seeds presented there some for a *new planting season*: finally starting the campaign that Bonhoeffer envisioned: towards a worldwide ecumenical Council of Peace in 2021 where we evaluate how far we have come with the target: to finally ban war during this 21 st century!
- Working towards an ecumenical declaration of Just Peace that actually calls us to follow Jesus example of practising non-violence and will be an inspiring starting-document for the above mentioned campaign.
- To implement a WCC-policy that is clearly aiming at abolishing war and the use of deadly violence as means of settling conflict.
- To engage the WCC seriously in campaigning for the abolishment of ABC- and other categories of weapons , as well as the termination of arms production and arms trade, in close cooperation with other world religions.
- To stimulate the churches to contribute to non-violent conflict resolution (also financially!) and to actively commit themselves to working for peace and reconciliation at home and elsewhere.
- To inspire the members of our churches to adopt a lifestyle that enables all citizens of this one world to live a sustainable, just and peaceful life.
- The world wide church could serve as an ‘early warning system’ when and where conflicting interests threaten to develop into armed conflict, so that non-violent intervention will be made possible at an early stage by the local and the (inter)national authorities, as well as the churches themselves. The World Council of Churches is well placed to facilitate the effective development of such an ‘early warning system’.

In conclusion we wish you an inspiring and fruitful journey towards a truly Ecumenical Declaration of Just Peace that may contribute to building the Kingdom of God and the peace of Christ here and now in our one world!

On behalf of Netherlands Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Kees Nieuwerth

Clerk.

January 2010.