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### “TOWARDS JUSTICE AND PEACE”: ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Abstract.** The Christian churches collaborate in the eradication of everything that moves the presence of the Kingdom of God away from this world. A clear example has been the last assembly of the World Council Churches held in Busan, South Korea, where the concrete commitment was assumed by all the churches. This is expressed in the Unity Statement. Article discusses the theological context of the social thought of the ecumenical movement and it presents how this thought is exemplified by the World Council of Churches.

**Key words:** Christianity; Church; Unity; social doctrine; commitment; ecumenism.

In a situation in which the concept of “globalization” characterizes the current state of the world in all its ambiguity, ecumenism also becomes a response to the signs of the times. Christians are called to give specific answers that alleviate the human suffering that adverse circumstances cause on humanity today. It is not a question alien to our Christian essence, it is a living and irrevocable commitment that the Church is called to assume.<sup>1</sup>

The conciliar decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* (UR)<sup>2</sup> of the Second Vatican Council clearly presents the steps to be followed. Today we can celebrate that all churches together seek paths of solution or awareness in the face of social injustice, adversity, poverty and violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Walter KASPER, *Caminos hacia la unidad de los cristianos*, trans. José Manuel Lozano-Gotor Perona (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2014), 398.

<sup>2</sup> Vatican II Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, The Holy See, accessed July 21, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_1964\\_1121\\_unitatis-redintegratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_1964_1121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html).

In this sense, the conciliar document, cited above, recalls in No. 12: Cooperation among Christians vividly expresses the relationship which in fact already unites them, and it sets in clearer relief the features of Christ the Servant. This cooperation, which has already begun in many countries, should be developed more and more, particularly in regions where a social and technical evolution is taking place be it in a just evaluation of the dignity of the human person, the establishment of the blessings of peace, the application of Gospel principles to social life, the advancement of the arts and sciences in a truly Christian spirit, or also in the use of various remedies to relieve the afflictions of our times such as famine and natural disasters, illiteracy and poverty, housing shortage and the unequal distribution of wealth. All believers in Christ can, through this cooperation, be led to acquire a better knowledge and appreciation of one another, and so pave the way to Christian unity.

#### 1. TOGETHER FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

Faced with a reality that often surpasses us as believers, it is of utmost importance to maintain hope in the God of Life and to consider that the magisterium of the Catholic Church recalls in all its forms the social dimension of its salvific message. A message that announces the historical experience of the kingdom of God, full of justice, equality and bread; in all, of happiness. We can not detail all the documents, but we can mention some very briefly.

In the great encyclical of Leon XIII *Rerum Novarum* (May 15, 1891), the condition of the working classes was already dealt with the positioning in favor of the right to assemble (unions) and the right to private property. Pio XI, however, in *Quadragesimo Anno* (May 15, 1931), puts the focus on the work of the state, workers' organizations and fair wages, among other issues. The great *Mater Magister* of John XXIII at 70 years of *Rerum Novarum* (May 15, 1961) is dedicated to farmers who work for food support for humanity. The need for a fair agrarian policy with taxation, social insurance, guardianship of the prices etc.

I do a parenthesis: Today Pope Francis makes a great reference in *Laudato Si*, on the proper use of natural resources in favor of the good of all humanity.

But it is Paul VI in his Apostolic Letter *Octagesima Adveniens* (May 15, 1971), who appeals to social justice, the diversity of situations of Christians in the world, new social problems, emigration and new jobs, making a clear call to action. Saint John Paul II in *Laborem Excercens* (May 15, 1981) the Human Work, focuses on to the reality of the world of work, trade unionism, emigra-

tion, as it is one of the most current encyclicals on the social issue. And on the other hand *Centesimus Annus* which focuses on the changes that have occurred with the communist systems in order to commemorate the one hundred years.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the Catholic Church has taken important and irrevocable steps since Vatican II, in the face of the diverse and adverse realities and social "progress," of which it makes all the people of God participate and, when we say EVERYTHING, we make necessary reference to those who believe in Christ.

The conciliar Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (*GS*), on the Church in the current world,<sup>4</sup> in one of its numerous says:

The industrial type of society is gradually being spread, leading some nations to economic affluence, and radically transforming ideas and social conditions established for centuries. (*GS*, no. 6)

As a result many persons are quite aggressively demanding those benefits of which with vivid awareness they judge themselves to be deprived either through injustice or unequal distribution. Nations on the road to progress, like those recently made independent, desire to participate in the goods of modern civilization, not only in the political field but also economically, and to play their part freely on the world scene. Still they continually fall behind while very often their economic and other dependence on wealthier nations advances more rapidly. (*GS*, no. 9)

But it is essential to be aware, understand and make life what the Council proposes in this document that is even more profound:

Nevertheless, in the face of the modern development of the world, the number constantly swells of the people who raise the most basic questions or recognize them with a new sharpness: what is man? What is this sense of sorrow, of evil, of death, which continues to exist despite so much progress? What purpose have these victories purchased at so high a cost? What can man offer to society, what can he expect from it? What follows this earthly life? (*GS*, no. 10)

Questions that go beyond any confessional and from which one tries to respond from the kenotic experience of Christ in favor of the announcement of the Kingdom of God. A project of God in function of Justice and Peace.

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<sup>3</sup> Doctrina social de la Iglesia, "Las encíclicas sociales", iuris.tk, El sitio jurídico estudiantil de Chile, accessed July 21, 2020, [https://iuris.webcindario.com/central/doctrina\\_social-c03.pdf](https://iuris.webcindario.com/central/doctrina_social-c03.pdf); Pontificio Consejo « Justicia Y Paz », Compendio de la doctrina social de la Iglesia, accessed July 21, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_sp.html#Un%20conocimiento%20iluminado%20por%20la%20fe](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_sp.html#Un%20conocimiento%20iluminado%20por%20la%20fe)

<sup>4</sup> Vatican II Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, The Holy See, accessed July 21, 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

From a theological reflection in light of Psalm 72 we can say: *Your kingdom is life, your kingdom is truth, your kingdom is grace, your kingdom is love, your kingdom, Lord, come to us.*

## 2. ECUMENICAL CHALLENGE

Being aware of the reality of the world, we face great challenges to improve our societies. The society in which we live is usually described as free and pluralistic, and we are all happy to be able to live in such where we can decide and organize our lives without coercion. In such society there is no religion, nor worldview nor public opinion imposed by an authoritarian state or by an all-powerful state party. On the contrary: there are different religious, confessional and political tendencies, different styles and ways of life coexisting. The Churches are only a characteristic element (among others) of that pluralist society.<sup>5</sup>

But these churches are called to correct and improve the reality that affects the human being created as unique in the image of God, that is, of a unique and immense “dignity.” So we affirm that churches are called to be a “diaconal church,” without giving up their truth. The testimony in favor of the truth and its preaching is the primary pastoral task. Jesus himself appears to us as the one who serves: “as one who serves” (Lk 22,27).

This is the “diaconal” testimony that the WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC) has been carrying out since its foundation in 1948, and which currently brings together 350 churches from 110 countries and 560 million Christians, being this Council the voice of all the Christian churches including the Roman one. Through their Ecumenical Assemblies, up to now 10, let me stop briefly, in the last one held in Busan, South Korea in 2013, which places us in a difficult context and indicates the priority and the message to be transmitted.

### KOREA IN NEED OF RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE AND UNITY.

The motto of this Assembly was “God of Life, lead us to justice and peace.” In effect, we are facing the great challenge of justice. The role that the WCC has today is of profound and great importance to the world.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Walter KASPER, *Caminos de Unidad, Perspectivas para el Ecumenismo* (Madrid: Cristianidad, 2008), 243.

Christians are part of history and we must say a word to this world, we have a proposal that we want to share: Jesus as Way, Truth and Life.

This commitment is reflected in the Declaration *Unity Statement (US)*<sup>6</sup> that in Busan is presented to the world:

Within churches we experience a similar tension between celebration and sorrow. There are signs of vibrant life and creative energy in the growth of Christian communities around the world with rich diversity. There is a deepening sense among some churches of needing one another and of being called by Christ to be in unity. In places where churches experience anguish and constant fear of persecution, solidarity between Christians from different traditions in the service of justice and peace is a sign of God's grace. (*US*, no. 3)

The call of God is to unity in an ecumenical way, to present to the world a unique Church, catholic and faithful to its teacher; so the final statement of Busan says:

On our ecumenical journey we have come to understand more about God's call to the Church to serve the unity of all creation. The vocation of the Church is to be: foretaste of new creation; prophetic sign to the whole world of the life God intends for all; and servant spreading the good news of God's Kingdom of justice, peace and love. (*US*, no. 9)

Therefore, called to be prophets:

As prophetic sign the Church's vocation is to show forth the life that God wills for the whole creation. We are hardly a credible sign as long as our ecclesial divisions, which spring from fundamental disagreements in faith, remain. Divisions and marginalisation on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, disability, power, status, caste, and other forms of discrimination also obscure the Church's witness to unity. To be a credible sign our life together must reflect the qualities of patience, humility, generosity, attentive listening to one another, mutual accountability, inclusivity, and a willingness to stay together, not saying 'I have no need of you.' (*US*, no. 11).

We are called, to a clear challenge, to be a community which has justice in its heart, that lives in peace, and which does not settle into the ease of a peace that silences protests and pain, but that struggles for true peace that goes hand in hand with justice. Only when Christians are reconciled and

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<sup>6</sup> World Council of Churches, *Unity Statement*, 10th Assembly, 30 October to 8 November 2013, Busan, Republic of Korea, accessed July 22, 2020, [https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/unity-statement?set\\_language=en](https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/unity-statement?set_language=en).

renewed by the Spirit of God can then the Church give a true witness of the possibility of life in reconciliation for all people, for all Creation.

I now remember the plenary devoted to social justice in the world in which we live and in which the churches were invited to accompany their prayers with action. With an enriching conversation about topics such as HIV, the global crisis, and climate change, the guests at the plenary reflected on: "The prevailing globalized culture seems to accept and legitimize social, economic and ecological injustice. This institutionalization of injustice is an outstanding mark of our present. How can that scenario be transformed from the churches?" This was the question with which the Rev Angelique Walker-Smith, moderator of the plenary.

For Martin Khor, executive director of the South Center, an intergovernmental institution for research and policy analysis in developing countries, it is necessary that developed countries which have harmed the environment change their lifestyle:

We are facing a financial crisis, which has disarmed global economy, and that, is due to the lack of international regulation. Free trade agreements have unfair regulations because they allow rich countries to continue accumulating wealth, facing countries that cannot compete in the market with their products.

In this panorama of ecological and human abuses, it is imperative that churches support the struggles of the people in the defense of their rights.

Dr. Julia Duchrow, head of the Pan Human Rights and Peace Section for El Mundo, in Berlin, Germany, said:

Human rights do not fall from heaven, but are the result of people's struggles, they come from a perspective based on the belief that we were all created in the image and likeness of God. Whatever place we come from we have the right to human dignity.

For both, Dr. Julia Duchrow and Martin Khor, injustice must also be fought by governments: education, health and the fight against poverty are the obligations that correspond to governments. Khor added:

There are two ways of looking at justice, doing justice only when we see that something is wrong and giving money to the poor, but that does not change injustice, the other way is to insist on the structure, on politics.

## THE MISSION OF THE CHURCHES IN CONTEXTS OF INJUSTICE

Injustice has always been part of our lives, but it is the role of the church to fight it. This is the reason why the WCC has historically been linked in the struggles against apartheid, in solidarity with women, for eco-justice, among others. However, gender violence and the stigmatization of people affected by HIV/AIDS continue to be a task that churches must continue to address, says Rev. Phumzile Mabizela from the Presbyterian Church in Africa.

## 3. HOPE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

In the encyclical *Laudato Si'*<sup>7</sup>, Pope Francis makes us a clear ecumenical call, that's to say, all Christians, to be signs of hope in this world:

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. (*Laudato Si'*, no. 13)

In order to advance in this path for justice and to safeguard the resources that allow us to live in peace, it is indispensable to recognize ourselves as limited, finite, that from human nature make it difficult to advance, in short, we need to recognize ourselves as sinners.

We need a change, a reform in our own interior and inside also of our prophetic consciousness:

Nevertheless, self-improvement on the part of individuals will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world today. Isolated individuals can lose their ability and freedom to escape the utilitarian mindset, and end up prey to an unethical consumerism bereft of social or ecological awareness. Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds. This task “will make such tremendous demands of man that he could never achieve it by individual initiative or even by the united effort of men bred in an individualistic way. The work of dominating the world calls for a union of skills and a unity of achievement that can only grow from quite a different attitude”. The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion. (*Laudato Si'*, no. 219)

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<sup>7</sup> Pope FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* on Care for Our Common Home, The Holy See, accessed July 22, 2020, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_ enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_ enciclica-laudato-si.html).

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG),<sup>8</sup> Pope Francis affirms:

Peace in society cannot be understood as pacification or the mere absence of violence resulting from the domination of one part of society over others. Nor does true peace act as a pretext for justifying a social structure which silences or appeases the poor, so that the more affluent can placidly support their lifestyle while others have to make do as they can. Demands involving the distribution of wealth, concern for the poor and human rights cannot be suppressed under the guise of creating a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority. The dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges. When these values are threatened, a prophetic voice must be raised. (EG, no. 218)

To conclude, we face great challenges, which challenge us as Christians, the path of peace and justice, in short, the path of good over evil, are options that we can not renounce and even less if as a Church, we announce the Gospel.

Evangelization also involves a path of dialogue. For the Church today, there are three areas of dialogue that stand out to promote full human development and to pursue the common good. These areas are: dialogue with states, dialogue with society — including dialogue with cultures and the sciences — and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church. In each case, “the Church speaks from the light which faith offers,” contributing her two thousand year experience and keeping ever in mind the life and sufferings of human beings. This light transcends human reason, yet it can also prove to be meaningful and enriching to those who are not believers and it stimulates reason to broaden its perspectives (EG, no. 238). The Church proclaims “the Gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15) and she wishes to cooperate with all national and international authorities in safeguarding this immense universal good (EG, no. 239); at the same time: It is the responsibility of the State to safeguard and promote the common good of society (EG, no. 240), affirm *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Society needs *honest institutions*, both in individual and social life. *Honest institutions* is an institution that highlights the limits of the present forms of social and political life, and refers men in advance to the ultimate reality that embraces their own ultimate determination. The relationship of man with his

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<sup>8</sup> Pope FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, The Holy See, accessed July 22, 2020, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).



ultimate determination can be conscious in his worldly concreteness only if man is sincerely aware of the limits and precariousness of present life, and also if he recognizes his failures and does not avoid its negative aspects.

The Church should be that institution of honesty, *honest institution*. The Church should remit in advance to the particular members of society to the ultimate determination of humanity, the Kingdom of God, through a realistic relationship with present reality. The Church grants participation in the Kingdom of God through the community with Jesus, in whose historical existence the Kingdom of God was already present.

Church that isolates itself from society completely diverts its function. Churches that affirm that are totally occupied in tasks, in this sense, spiritual and that stay away from all social and even political problems, are, in fact, defending the established. But they do not defend in the established what for a fair trial would have to appear as worthy of being maintained, but with their withdrawal to religious interiority, favor the established in an inconsiderate and therefore undifferentiated way. Therefore, acting in the service of the Kingdom of God also means to truly promote the good of society and whoever does this, in this way, also acts in favor of the good of the Church.<sup>9</sup>

Blessed are those who work for peace, because they will be called God's children. Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. Blessed are you when, for my sake, the people insult you, persecute you, and raise up all kinds of slander against you, rejoice and be filled with joy, because a great reward awaits you in heaven. (Mt 5, 9-12)

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Teología y Reino de Dios* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1974), 56; Andrés VALENCIA, *La dinámica del Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ: su presencia en la historia y en la vida Cristiana. El Reino de Dios clave en la Teología de Paul Tillich*. PhD Thesis. University of Valencia, 2017.

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„KU SPRAWIEDLIWOŚCI I POKOJOWI”  
– PERSPEKTYWA EKUMENICZNA

Streszczenie

Kościół chrześcijański współpracują z sobą w sprzeciwianiu się wszystkiemu, co wypycha Królestwo Boże z tego świata. Wyraźnego przykładu takiej współpracy dostarczyło ostatnie Zgromadzenie Ogólne Światowej Rady Kościołami w Pusan w Korei Południowej, gdzie wszystkie obecne na zgromadzeniu Kościoły podjęły konkretne zobowiązania, co odzwierciedla tak zwana Deklaracja Jedności (*Unity Statement*). Artykuł omawia teologiczny kontekst myśli społecznej ruchu ekumenicznego i przedstawia, jak jest ona egzemplifikowana w działalności Światowej Rady Kościołami.

**Słowa kluczowe:** chrześcijaństwo; Kościół; jedność; doktryna społeczna; ekumenizm.