

Just Peace with Earth

Reykjavik October 2017

Our conference has a rich theme: “Just Peace with Earth”. We all want it. But we do all know that each and every one of those words is quite problematic. Not only “Just” and “Peace”, but also “Earth” – and even “with”!

Just

“Just”, in this theme, stands for justice. Of course, we all know that justice in our societies is not eternally fixed, but relates both to values fairly unchanged over time *and* to values currently widely accepted in the discourse. And times and discourses change.

We have to recognize, though, that the field we are on, when talking about “Just” and “justice” has constantly grown over the last centuries. Justice was an issue of the clan and the wider family when this island was colonized. It became an issue of the *free* inhabitants when this nation was established as part of Christendom. But in Christendom slavery was tolerated for a long time and “Just” and “Justice” surely did not fully apply to slaves. When Hugo Grotius published *Mare Liberum* in 1609, it was a sign not even that “justice” linked to territories did fully cover what was needed. The growth of what we do call International Law, the founding and fall of the League of Nations and the establishment of the United Nations, are all examples of the fact that the field of justice is growing and has to grow in order to cover realities in an ever-growing interdependence between humans, nations – and species.

Most of us can happily say that we live in nations that are governed by law. Democracy under law. But law is not always just. A constant wrestling with issues and realities and public opinion has to be there, if democracy is to be preserved and the law relevant and respected. And the wrestlers have to be many. Not only those already seen and recognized since before. They may very well be the very privileged ones.

Most mature religions have an ethical center around “Do to others what you want them to do to you”. That ideal doesn’t lead to identical laws in all times and in all places, but it leads to reflection and to cultivation of conscience. That is our task! And that ideal, “do to others what you want them to do to you”, now has to be stretched out in geography – and history, that is in space and time and from individualism to co-existence. Justice always turns out to involve more actors and subjects than ever thought of before. As it might have been said too many times before: All negotiations should have empty chairs to remind us of those not present: One empty chair for the yet unborn, one for the down-trodden, one for creation in its totality *et cetera*.

Peace

“Peace” is also problematic, but I think, in general, we are more aware of that. The discussions from the sixties and seventies made us aware. Surely, peace is not only the absence of war or immediate violence. Peace requires justice, balance and many other things. But now, when we realize that *Holocene* is followed by *Anthropocene*, we must ask ourselves whether peace is only a matter of

relations between humans or if it is also about the relations between humans and nature in general? Also here, the ideal of “do to others what you want them to do to you” is most helpful for us, but the ideal has to be stretched in time and space and expanded to address society, not only single persons.

Earth

“Earth” is of course Earth, but we will gradually find out that Earth is not independent. It is an integrated and even an integrating part of Universe. The field is ever growing!

With

“With” is a most important word. “Just peace with Earth”. To me “with” is reciprocal. “Just peace on earth” would also be a most important and indeed overwhelming conference-theme, but our thing these days has its starting point in the understanding that there are certain Rights also for the Earth, not only a fear of the Earth striking back – and the much greater moral responsibility which follows from that.

Through history most peoples have been totally dependent upon nature. Most all people have lived constantly on the verge. That taught them respect for and care of nature. Now, that knowledge is nearly only carried on by indigenous peoples, living traditional lives. They are the ones most seriously threatened by climate change. And here in the Arctic the rise of temperature is double the level of the world average and destroys lives and civilizations.

The technical developments, the optimism and alleges supremacy of the white West – and of western forms of Christianity, lifted the majority of inhabitants out of realities, into a dreamed independence of Earth.

The *with* makes all the difference. Just Peace with Earth.

Let me go on with a somewhat different perspective, a perspective of

Gift, response and responsibility.

It makes a great difference if nature is here to be lived in by us and others *or* if nature is here to be ruled over by us. The anthropocentric approach of the last centuries has brought about an unparalleled rise of wealth, knowledge and material living conditions. The resilience and redundancy of nature have made it possible. It is tempting for us to think that this will be possible also for the future. Tempting and comfortable – but untrue. We are approaching limits. We have passed limits.

Consumerism has sparked economic development – but it is a development that does not measure the costs nature and coming generations pay and will pay. Cheap fossil fuel has not only quickly expended reserves, built up over millions of years, but also polluted and changed climate.

Consumerism easily promotes an irresponsible individualism. In his Large Catechism Martin Luther explains the First commandment by asking “Who is your God” and continues by saying that your God is the one from whom or what you expect all good. God for us easily becomes health, wealth, growth, position *et cetera*. Luther sure is contemporary in this! God in very many of our societies *is* Economic Development.

Economic Development is fairly simple to measure and money is an excellent means for interchange and sharing. I cannot see anything wrong with economic development and money – as long as they are means. The problem is when these means become ends in themselves.

We all have to have overarching ideas of what this living basically is all about. The religions give us that, and also the kinds of religion which only hold respect for Life as the over-arching value, with no personal God involved. We have to have ideas of what we want to use the resources and challenges for, what is the More Important End than even health, wealth and growth.

In one of the creations myths in Genesis, it is said that “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it”. The gift is given. Till it and keep it, is what the Lord God said. The Lord God did not say: waste it and dispose of it. This, of course, was said before the fall. It is after the fall that the response to the gift through greed, fear and selfishness led to wasting and destroying.

A restricting force when it comes to responding to the gift is responsibility. In this anthropocentric time humans easily see themselves as responsible mainly to themselves and secondly to some other contemporary humans. Even respect for coming generations of humans has been suppressed. Severely limiting their choices and opportunities is in direct opposition to the ideal of doing “to others what you want them to do to you”. Of course there are no simple answers to conflicts of interests between generations but they have to be kept noticed and discussed and respected. And those who cannot speak for themselves have to be spoken for.

Responsibility has often been linked to punishment. Talk about divine judgment has been silenced in modern society. Partly so because it has been misused so often before in history, but partly also because we ourselves fear responsibility and judgment so much that we suppress all mentioning of it.

But gifts received require responsible responses, especially when the gift is to be stewarded, as is the perspective of the Abrahamic religions. We are responsible, not only before ourselves and some contemporary humans, but before creation, before the living and the not yet living – before God.

God gave life, in order to have some to share his gifts with, as I think Ireneus said. God gave us life, and our responsible response is to enhance life and make room for life in its ever more developed forms. If that is not done there will never be any “Just Peace with Earth”.

As a Christian, with Incarnation and Communion being central, God’s presence in and by the world, I do not find my real life if I do not try to keep heaven and earth together.

“Do to others what you want them to do to you”!