

Responsibility to protect: A Christian Perspective

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Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen!

I am honored to speak here and I thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to present a Christian perspective on the Responsibility to Protect. I am also honored to represent the World Council of Churches here in Rome and in this conference. The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of over 340 member churches all around the world, representing over 600 million people in more than 115 countries. It is composed of several Christian denominations such as most of the Protestant churches (Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Mennonites, Quakers, Reformed, etc.), churches of the Orthodox family and the Anglican Church. Some denominations such as the Pentecostal movements are not represented in the WCC. The Catholic Church is a very important guest and observer and takes part in some commissions and joint working groups.

The World Council discussed the Responsibility to Protect several times. The message of the Peace Convocation of the WCC 2011 in Kingston/Jamaica reads:

“We continue to struggle with how innocent people can be protected from injustice, war and violence. In this light, we struggle with the concept of the “responsibility to protect” and its possible misuse. We urgently request that the WCC and related bodies further clarify their positions regarding this policy.” (Glory to God and Peace on Earth, The Message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, 2011)

And the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches 2013 in Busan/Korea expressed in the Statement on the Way of Just Peace: “Together we recommend that the World Council of Churches: Undertake, in cooperation with member churches and specialized ministries, critical analysis of the “Responsibility to Prevent, React and Rebuild” and its relationship to just peace, and its misuse to justify armed interventions... (Statement on the Way of Just Peace, 2013)

Not only the churches joined in the World Council of Churches but all churches and many religions and a lot of people are struggling with the question how to protect innocent people from injustice, war and violence – and how to avoid a misuse of justified armed interventions. And that is the reason why we are here.

But now let me present Christian perspectives – in plural – because there are three main traditions in the history of the churches:

1. The pacifistic tradition
2. The tradition of the just war theory
3. The tradition of just peace

1. The pacifistic tradition was the predominant tradition for the first three centuries of Christianity. Christians refused to join an army, which follows a sovereign who is worshipped like a God. They wanted to follow Jesus and his message of nonviolence and loving your neighbors and loving your enemies. The bible says in the Gospel of Mathew, Chapter 5, Verse 38 and 39: “You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

Today the tradition of pacifism is very active in the Historical Peace Churches like Mennonites, Brethren and Quaker. But it is also alive in mainline Churches.

Christian pacifism is not only an individual decision but also a political option – although many people say that you cannot transfer an individual decision to a political option in a world full of violence and war.

Christian pacifism is not a passive way of life, which accepts suffering. It is an active way of looking for non-violent solutions to conflicts. And so the Christian pacifism is an important part of the churches – challenging and permanently asking, if the churches are drawn into the logic of violence and war. The Peace Churches are very active and creative in developing instruments of non-violent conflict transformation.

The pacifistic churches would agree to the R2P – especially to the prevention and rebuilding – but without the option of using military force in the stage of reaction.

2. In the fourth century Christianity became an official religion or a state religion. Christians joined the army to defend the state. So the Church and the theology had to think about the relationship between the gospel of Jesus and the participation in war. And they took very seriously what the Apostle Paul said in the New Testament, in the letter to Rome, chapter 13, verse 1: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” So they felt the duty to defend the state also by arms.

Saint Augustin and Saint Thomas Aquinthen shaped the just-war-theory. The name of this theory is misleading. It is no legitimation of a holy war or a license to kill. The intent of the just-war-theory was to limit and reduce the recourse to war as a legitimate means of resolving inter-state conflicts.

The criteria of the just-war-theory found their way into international law and are well known also from the R2P: just cause, right intention, proportional means, reasonable prospects, right authority, last resort. I think there is no need to explain it any further.

For a long time the just-war-theory was the most important and all-dominant paradigm – and it is still dominant in many churches and in international law as we can see in the R2P.

The risk of the just-war-theory was and is that it can be misused – and it was misused in the history. On the other hand the just-war-theory can be used as an instrument to avoid war or to evaluate wars. A lot of people evaluated the second Iraq-war as a not-just-war – using the just-war-criteria.

I think that the just-war-theory is still useful but today it can no longer be used in an isolated and detached way. It has to be integrated in a greater framework of peace.

3. The third tradition is a young one: the tradition of just peace – and I dare to call it a tradition. In the 1940s the term of just peace emerges. Then, motivated by the Conciliar Process of Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation in the 1980s, Just Peace became the motto and the vision of a new ecumenical paradigm. I already marked the statements of the World Council of Churches. Also the Catholic Church shares this vision – for example in the encyclical “*pacem in terris*” from 1963 or

“Gaudiumetspes” from the II. Vaticanum – or in the memorandum “Just peace” of the Conference of Catholic Bishops in Germany in the year 2000.

The basic idea of this vision is that peace is more than the absence of violence and war. It is a holistic approach to peace in the biblical meaning of "Schalom". Peace, justice and law belong together. And peace is a process of decreasing violence and increasing justice. The vision of Just Peace marks a fundamental change (paradigm shift) in peace ethics and peace policy away from the doctrine of just war and towards the prima ratio of the preferential option for non-violence: "If you want peace, prepare for peace" (Latin: *sipacem para pacemvis*) and not “If you want peace, prepare for war” (*Si vispacem, para bellum*). There is a strong connection of peace, justice and law. No peace without justice, no justice without peace.

The idea of just peace is not a pure pacifistic one. There is violence in this world and we have to protect people from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. In these cases – and when all other instruments failed – there is a moral right to use force in a way of counterforce. In the memorandum of the Evangelical Church in Germany “Live from Gods peace – care for just peace” from 2007 we speak of “law-abiding force”.

Consequently the criteria of the just-war-theory are not obsolete but integrated in a greater and wider framework of just peace – in which the main effort prevails to all instruments of prevention of conflicts and of non-violent conflict-transformation.

In most churches we have a great consensus about the priority of prevention and non-violent instruments of conflict-transformation, the disaffirmation of war as an instrument for peace in the long run and a damnation of the idea of holy wars. You can imagine that the pacifists in our churches quarrel with the option of using counterforce. And we have to admit that there are churches or Christian groups who still speak of holy wars and of God’s will in a way of violence.

If we look at the vision and concept of Just Peace and the Responsibility to Protect we recognize that there is a great accordance between both ideas and concepts:

- The significance and dignity of every person as God’s creation and recipient of the love of God in the theological and spiritual sense and the importance of the concept of

human security in international law and the protection of every single life – more than interests of states.

- The importance of prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding in the framework of Just Peace and of the Responsibility to Protect.
- Strong criteria for the use of military force in case of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing.
- A multilateral perspective and emphasis on the United Nations and international law.

On the other side there are still many questions relating to the R2P:

- The fundamental question of the relationship between the sovereignty of states and the protection of human rights in the case of failed states is very important. The sovereignty of states and territorial integrity was a great achievement of international law after the Second World War. There is still a need to come to a balance between protection and sovereignty.
- Is there really a priority of prevention and reaction in a non-violent way in the R2P?
- How can the R2P be protected against misuse - like the regime-change in Libya - in my opinion - shows?
- Which body in the UN has to decide - the Security Council or the general assembly? And how can the UN be reformed?
- Does the UN have enough resources to act in the sense of the R2P? There are not enough Blue Helmets – including from western states.

Let me underline some aspects in the sense of the just peace idea:

- All the crises in the world and the great number of refugees coming for example to Europe in these days show the necessity to tackle the causes of conflicts. Poverty, hunger and a life without a perspective for the future are often the reasons for conflicts. The strong connection between peace and justice is obvious. The bible says in the book of psalms: “Righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky. (Psalm 85, Verse 11)

The Sustainable Development Goals emphasize this correlation. Consequently the R2P has to be integrated in a holistic concept of peace and justice.

- There is a need to set a clear priority and to strengthen the concept of prevention and of non-violent instruments of conflict transformation. That needs enough resources. The peace churches always remind us to invest in non-violent instruments instead of investing in research and development of new weapons.
- We need a strong and well-equipped United Nations - politically and financially. Especially the Catholic Church emphasizes in many statements a common welfare grounded in a strong UN. And the vision of just peace agrees with that. I am curious whether there are some details on that issue later in this conference.

One last point I want to address: The idea of just policing. This is not a concept yet but an idea, which seems to be a bridge between pacifists and others in the ecumenical movement. The pacifists also agree with the responsibility of states and the international community to protect and enforce the law. But this force has to be a police-like force. The goal is to avoid the logic and force of military. I am not sure if this is an alternative to military force but I do think it is worthwhile to work further on a concept of just policing.

Thank you for your attention.