



Day of Reflection, Dialogue and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World

30.11.2011 | Olav Fykse Tveit

Remarks of Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the World Councils of Churches, 27 October 2011, Assisi

Your Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI,

Your All Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew,

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Fellow Religious Leaders,

St Francis offers us inspiration for how faith in God, open dialogue and genuine encounter can lead to significant contributions to a just peace.

The world needs peacemakers of faith. The faith communities – like the 349 member churches of the World Council of Churches – need the young “Change Makers” of the world. Francis was a young man when he surrendered his life to God. His passion for the goodness of creation and example of radical daring for peace show the significance of faith and the courage of young people. What Francis accomplished as a young man in his twenties is a salutary reminder to us of the important role that young people need to and can play both in the faith communities and in wider society. Without this, we would not be here today.

Also today, peace in the world requires the perspectives and the contributions of young people. A great obstacle to a just peace today is the high level of unemployment among young people all over the world. It feels as though we are gambling with the welfare and happiness of a generation. We need the vision and the courage of young people for the necessary changes. We see how young people lead processes of democratization and peace in many countries today. The young people of today are witnesses and agents for peace even when they become victims of violence and terror like in Norway this summer. We have to acknowledge that we have not always been good at honoring and fostering the contributions young people can make in our religious communities. We elders standing here need to work together for peace between generations and to give young people throughout the world real hope for the future.

The world needs the encounters between the leaders of faith communities. In the course of a war being fought which had Jerusalem as its ultimate prize, Francis came to share experiences of faith with the Sultan in Egypt. As many crusaders, he came to convert the other. He became changed, converted, himself.

We are here to let the conversion of Francis speak to us and to let the conversation between us become a source for justice and peace. There is more to win through the respect for the other. A sustainable peace requires that there is a space, a safe and secure space, not only for me but also for the other. Christians are reminded that the cross is not for crusades but a sign of how God's love embraces everybody, also the other.

For the World Council of Churches a clear commitment over the coming years is to work for just peace in Jerusalem and all the peoples living there and around that city with Shalom – Salaam in its name. It is the city called and named to be a vision of peace, but which throughout history has so often become a place of conflict. As I visited Pakistan some days ago, I was reminded how other peoples are suffering under clashes of interests as a consequence of the fact that the conflicts around Jerusalem are not solved. This city, holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims, is a visible symbol of our longing, our highest and best desires, our love of beauty and our desire to worship God. But it is also a powerful reminder of how this best also can go wrong. Throughout history, human beings have found it so difficult to love without also seeking to possess exclusively.

Let us as religious leaders pray for justice and peace for Jerusalem and for all who live there. In a mysterious way, Jerusalem does not simply unveil these realities about the human condition but also challenges us at the same time to address them. Christians believe that all humans are created in God's image, thus affirming the undeniable human dignity of every person and the oneness of humanity. We are called to participate in the re-establishing of peace for Jerusalem, for the re-creation and the repairing of God's world. We are accountable to God and to one another for the peace in our time and for what we say and do not say to achieve it. Let us together follow the example of St Francis and others, young and old, women and men, to muster the courage to make just peace.