

Peace Message After 60 Years From the End of War World II

The Road To Peace Based On Nonviolence

Now Is The Time To Be Prophetic

To Our Brothers and Sisters in the Church in Japan and To All People of Good Will

<Introduction>

As this year is the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war, we, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, are sending to our brothers and sisters in the Church in Japan and to all people of good will, a peace message on the occasion of Japan Catholic Peace Period.ⁱ

The Bishops' Conference published the message 'Resolution for Peace' fifty years after the end of the war. In it we acknowledged that before and during the war, the Catholic Church in Japan 'lacked an awareness of the prophetic role it should have fulfilled to protect human life and carry out the will of God' and 'asked forgiveness of God and of the people who had to bear such suffering during the war.'ⁱⁱ We also announced our resolve to dedicate ourselves to the realization of peace.

In the ten years since, despite our calling for peace, the world has not been able to shake the chains of various forms of violence. We are very much aware that now is the time we have to perform our role as prophets, that is, 'read the signs of the times and convey the message of God'.

<The Dignity of Human Beings>

The premise of peace is the dignity of human beings. From the teaching of the Bible, we believe that the dignity of human beings is bestowed by God — not created by human society, that it pertains universally, and that no one must violate it. Only if human dignity is our premise will the human rights of individuals be protected, people linked in a multicultural world, and we be able to head toward a relationship of mutual love. These ideas are clearly contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rightsⁱⁱⁱ and the Japanese Constitution^{iv}, and it is because every single person shares this human dignity that we can assert that 'all peoples of the world have the right to live in peace free from fear and poverty.'^v

<Reconciliation and Solidarity with the Countries of Asia>

This spring there were unprecedented anti-Japan demonstrations in East Asia, especially

in China and Korea. There are various reasons for this tension, but one is recent developments in Japan. Among these are interpretations of history, the Prime Minister's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, and debate over the revision of the Constitution.

In his 'Appeal for Peace'^{vi} at Hiroshima, Pope John Paul II repeatedly said that 'to remember the past is to commit oneself to the future.' We Japanese are being called to honestly accept our history, a history which includes the violent invasion and colonization of other countries, reflect on it and share the historic recognition among ourselves. We believe that to do this will be to promise not to repeat the tragedy and also to commit oneself to the future.

Before and during the War, and under pressure from the military government, the leaders of the Catholic Church unwillingly admitted visits to Yasukuni and other shrines as 'rites'^{vii}. We cannot say that this is ancient history and forget about it. Right now we are facing the same crisis again. In the debate about revision of the constitution there are some advocating a relaxation of the principle of separation of Religion and Politics and State trying to get visits to Yasukuni Shrine as 'rites'. The separation of Religion and Politics in Japan (Article 20, number 3 of the Constitution)^{viii} is a principle born from reflection on the fact that the State, with the emperor at the center, used religion to promote its war effort. This is why protection of the principle of separation of Religion and Politics is for us Japanese an expression of our resolve not to repeat the same mistake.

We believe that we need to take a firm stand on this issue in order to regain the trust of the people of East Asia and together with them work for peace.

<Fair Distribution of Wealth and Preservation of the Environment>

At present, the disparity between wealthy and impoverished countries is expanding rather than contracting, and the gap between the rich and poor within both wealthy and impoverished countries is also expanding. Japan is not an exception. Poverty not only makes living difficult, it also spawns problems such as the migration of peoples and the subsequent separation of families and the trafficking of people, drugs and human organs. John Paul II, speaking about the need for the globalization of human rights and life, stated that 'it is not merely a matter of "giving from one's surplus", but of helping entire peoples which are presently excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development. For this to happen, it is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces; it requires above all a change of lifestyle, of models of production and consumption, and of the

established structures of power which today govern societies.^{ix}

With many wars fought over natural resources, we realize that preservation of the natural environment is an important issue that needs to be taken up to work for peace. The limited resources we have must be used wisely, shared equitably, and managed in a sustainable way. Cancellation of the debts of impoverished countries is another way we can contribute to the solution of war. However, we cannot expect to eradicate poverty and protect the natural environment without the assistance of the governments, industry, organizations, and ordinary citizens of the world.

< **Through Nonviolence to Solidarity** >

The attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq have shaken the world and caused deep cracks to appear. These attacks have entangled many civilians and led to a vicious circle of violence. In this situation many people of faith and civilians are calling for an end to retaliation and for reconciliation based on dialogue. John Paul II, following the teachings of St Paul, emphasized that peace will be achieved only when evil is overcome by good, and that this will require a persistent struggle. ‘The one way out of the vicious circle of requiting evil for evil’^x is not the use of force, but the building of peace through nonviolence and dialogue. As Gandhi’s method of nonviolent resistance shows, it draws a response from many people.

This nonviolent spirit appears in Article 9 in the form of the renunciation of war as a means of settling international disputes and the renunciation of arms. ^{xi}Are we not right to be proud of the fact that for sixty years we have not killed anyone in war, and that none of us has been killed in war?

In the midst of a world where it is extremely difficult to break the chain of violence, let us do everything we can to spread the spirit and practice of nonviolence, to construct a new solidarity with the people of the world on the common issues, and thus strive for peace.

< **Afterword** >

Finally, we quote once more the words of John Paul II.

‘To the Heads of state and of Government, to those who hold political and economic power, I say: let us pledge ourselves to peace through justice; let us take a solemn decision, now, that war will never be tolerated or sought as a means of resolving differences; let us promise our fellow human beings that we will work untiringly for disarmament and the banishing of all

nuclear weapons: let us replace violence and hate with confidence and caring.’

We firmly repeat the Pope’s ‘Appeal for Peace’, together pray to God, and ask you to work with us to build a peace based on nonviolence.

Following the wishes of the deceased pope who visited countries as an apostle of peace and played a prophetic role, we, each in our own place, join our hearts with the new pope Benedict XVI and dedicate ourselves to peace.

Japan Catholic Peace Period 2005

Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan

ⁱ The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Japan responded to Pope John Paul II’s 1981 ‘Appeal for Peace’ in Hiroshima by establishing, the following year, Japan Catholic Peace Period (August 6 — 15), asking people to pray for world peace and take concrete action based on the resolution for peace especially during this period.

ⁱⁱ Cf: ‘Resolution for Peace – On the 50th. Anniversary of the End of the War – ‘Feb. 25, 1995

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf: ‘Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’, Preamble, ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. <http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm>

^{iv} ‘The people shall not be prevented from enjoying any of the fundamental human rights. These fundamental human rights guaranteed to the people by this Constitution shall be conferred upon the people of this and future generations as eternal and inviolate rights.’ Article 11, Constitution of Japan

‘The fundamental human rights guaranteed by this Constitution to the people of Japan are fruits of the age-old struggle of man to be free; they have survived the many exacting tests for durability and are conferred upon this and future generations in trust, to be held for all time inviolate.’ Article 97, Constitution of Japan.

^v Cf: Preface, Constitution of Japan

^{vi} On February 25, 1981, in the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima, Pope John Paul II made an appeal for peace to the whole world in nine languages.

^{vii} Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 1936

^{viii} (1) Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the State, nor exercise any political authority.

(2) No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious acts, celebration, rite or practice.

(3) The State and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity. Article 20, Constitution of Japan

^{ix} Number 58, ‘Centesimus Annus’, John Paul II, 1991

^x Message for World Peace Day, January 1, 2005

^{xi} Article 9, Constitution of Japan: (1) Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

(2) In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized. Article 9, Constitution of Japan.