

**World Council of Churches**  
**Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Consultation**  
**Towards the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC)**  
**Leros, Greece**  
**15-22 September 2009**

***Called to be 'craftsmen of peace and justice'<sup>1</sup>***

**Preamble**

1. Responding to the invitation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to offer a theological contribution to the process leading to the 2011 International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) in Kingston, Jamaica, an Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Consultation was held in the island of Leros, Greece, 15-22 September 2009.
2. The gathering was graciously hosted, on behalf of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, by H.E. Metropolitan Paisios of Leros, Kalymnos and Astypalaia, in the Dodecanese islands, Greece.
3. The meeting brought together twenty-five participants from nearly all Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, hierarchs, priests, members of monastic communities, university professors, lay persons male and female, and WCC staff. Leadership was provided by H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima (Ecumenical Patriarchate).
4. The encounter took place in the context of daily prayer and in the spirit of Christian fellowship. Participants in the consultation experienced the genuine hospitality of the local church, the civil authorities and the people of the island of Leros who welcomed them warmly into their communities. They had also occasion to witness the traces – ancient and contemporary – of the extraordinary encounter of cultures, faiths and histories in this place.
5. The consultation provided an opportunity to deepen the understanding of peace and justice in the light of the Orthodox Tradition. The deliberations, in plenary and group discussions, were inspired by presentations, focusing on the Convocation's motto "Glory to God and Peace on Earth" and also exploring its four main themes. Participants were invited to reflect together and grasp the richness of Orthodox theology, spirituality, liturgical experience and witness to the contemporary world, which is full of rapid and radical changes; it is also tormented by the violence of wars, conflicts, poverty, violation of human rights, and ecological disaster, and longs for reconciliation and peace.
6. The consultation acknowledged the importance and significance of the process leading to the IEPC as a harvest of Churches' contribution to reconciliation and peace and, more concretely, as a celebration of the Decade to Overcome Violence which had already begun in 2001. Highlights of the conference included the planting of an olive tree as a symbol of the Inter-Orthodox contribution to the IEPC and the celebration of the International Day of Prayer for Peace (21 September).

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. St Nicholas Cabasilas, *Life in Christ*, PG 150, 676.

7. The core message the Consultation would like to convey is that Orthodox understanding of peace and justice embraces all dimensions of human existence and speaks to the entire world. Such an understanding goes beyond earthly realities, but has to be seen also as God's continuing work in history, manifested through the Church of Christ under the guidance and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

8. The Consultation intended (a) to introduce a deep theological and ecclesiological content to the concepts of peace and justice, (b) to explore concrete ways for cultivating and communicating peace in the present global situation, and (c) to offer some basic reflections, practical recommendations and examples of the four sub-themes of the IEPC.

9. Participants particularly expressed their hope that churches will reaffirm their commitment to reconciliation for a non-violent, peaceful and just world.

10. In 1986, the Third Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference had already provided a solid theological and pastoral support meant to encourage and guide the Orthodox public witness and involvement. However, it was recognized that there is still the need to develop and learn practical ways, pastoral projects and opportunities that would allow Orthodox churches and faithful to actively participate in nurturing and defending a culture of peace.

11. Thus, the Report of the Consultation is offered as a contribution to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation and invites Orthodox churches to prayer, further study, and action.

### **I – Peace as God's Gift and Vocation**

12. In an increasingly complex and violent world, Christian churches have come to recognize that working for peace constitutes a primary expression of their responsibility for the life of the world. They are challenged to move beyond mere rhetorical denunciations of violence, oppression and injustice, and incarnate their ethical judgments into actions that contribute to a culture of peace. This responsibility is grounded on the essential goodness of all human beings by virtue of being in God's image and the goodness of all that God has created. Peace is inextricably related to the notion of justice and freedom that God has granted to all human beings through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit as a gift and vocation. It constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God's love for the world. The dynamic nature of peace as gift and vocation does not deny the existence of tensions, which form an intrinsic element of human relationships, but can alleviate their destructive force by bringing justice and reconciliation.

13. The Church understands peace and peacemaking as an indispensable aspect of its life and mission to the world. It grounds this faith conviction upon the wholeness of the Biblical tradition as it is properly interpreted through the Church's liturgical experience and practice. The Eucharist provides the space in which one discerns and experiences the fullness of the Christian faith in the history of God's revelation. It reflects the image of God's Trinitarian life in human beings and relates in love with the totality of the created world.

14. This eschatological experience of being in communion with God and participating in God's love for the created world provides the hermeneutical key by which the community

existentially interprets the fullness of Christian tradition, including Scripture, and structures the Church's life and mission to the world. Love is the core of God's revelation as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. Thus, in the Patristic tradition the violent texts of Scripture were understood to refer to the spiritual struggle of the believer against the devil, evil and sin. This interpretation implies that in their view the God of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith cannot be identified with violence.

15. Peace in Scripture, as well as in the liturgical life, is a blessing and a dynamic grace-giving word (cf. Jn 20:19-21); it signifies communion with God, which leads to salvation. Jesus Christ is the peace of the world, since He is the bond of communion (cf. Eph 2:14-17): "We live in peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1). God's peace is accessible to the world through the active presence of Holy Spirit in it that guides all into unity (cf. Acts 2:1) and grants peace, justice, love, and joy (Rom 14:14).

16. The Christian understanding of peace and how it is advanced in the life of the world is guided by the eschatological peace that God grants to the world through the Church, the reality of being with God and participating in the glory of His reign. It is a subversive principle that questions every necessity that legitimates violence. Those who have been reconciled and united with God long for the Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven and embrace in love all human beings who constitute an indivisible unity because of the active presence of God's breath in them.

17. Since peace is constitutive of the Christian Gospel, Christian believers are involved in a permanent process of becoming more conscious of their responsibility to incarnate the message of peace and justice to the world as a sign of their unity with Christ. This is clearly stated by St. Basil: "Christ is our peace," and hence "he who seeks peace seeks Christ... [W]ithout love for others, without an attitude of peace towards all men, no one can be called a true servant of Christ."<sup>2</sup> Orthodox do not only pray for peace and believe that God has destined the world to live in justice, peace and unity, but as a result of their faith they are called to be active peacemakers. As St. Nicholas Cabasilas states, "Christians, as disciples of Christ who made all things for peace, are to be 'craftsmen of peace.'" They are called a peaceable race since "nothing is more characteristic of a Christian than to be a worker for peace."<sup>3</sup>

18. It has always been contrary to Orthodox theology to elaborate systematic theories that justify violence under the pretext of a just war or crusade. It has instead developed a dynamic commitment to the *praxis* of peace. One has to speak of the Christian peace concept and its contribution to the general peace movement not as an absolute one in a general religious, self-sufficient sense, but as a radical particularity which is unique in that it goes to the primary causes of war and violence. While military intervention may be tragically necessary to sustain a just peace in given circumstances, such uses of force fall short of normative Christ-like ways of responding to evil.

19. The Church may tolerate the limited use of force as a tragic necessity for the defence of justice and the preservation of the imperfect, yet still imperative, peace that is possible among the nations and peoples of the world in given situations. In every dimension of life, the faithful are called to embody the way of Christ as fully as possible in the circumstances

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<sup>2</sup> Letter 203,2

<sup>3</sup> *The Life in Christ*, PG 150, 676

that they face: to forgive enemies; to work for the reconciliation of those who have become estranged; to overcome the divisions of race, nationality, and class; to care for the poor; to live in harmony with others; and to use the created goods of the world for the benefit of all.

20. Whenever there is harmony, justice, forgiveness, respect for human dignity, generosity, and care for the weak in the common life of humanity, people witness a blessing of the Lord and catch a glimpse - no matter how dim and imperfect - of the peace of Christ. Orthodox Christians should work for and welcome even broken and obscure manifestations of "just peace" which fall short of the fullness of the eschatological Kingdom of God. The uniqueness of the Christian claims about the eschatological nature of peace and justice could definitely become a necessary and positive counter-balance against all kinds of unilateral, human-centred and godless peace making.

21. It is important to differentiate the gift of God's peace and how this gift is received, acknowledged, and communicated by the Church and the faithful to the world. While the gift of God's peace is given through the Church to all by virtue of their identification with Christ, it is not equally true that the faithful or even the churches are always the vehicles of God's grace and peace to the world. Christian responses to situations of violence are always subject to God's judgement that compels the Churches and the faithful to ask God's forgiveness for all their failures to be active agents of His peace to the world. Whenever people or communities resort to violence to resolve their conflicts, they are putting at risk their unity with God and they are in danger of losing their humanity. In the midst of violence, fragmentation, and injustice, Christian faith recognizes the active presence of God's Spirit that leads all to unity in God's justice, peace and love.

22. Peace is not a moral good by and in itself; it is linked with the most basic human values and practices as a permanent improvement of the human condition on all levels. The Christian churches, while they support all human efforts that repudiate the logic of violence and war, must not forget their greater mission to lead the world to address the deeper issues that plague human existence and life. Defending the dignity of every human person and the sanctity of life cannot be disengaged from the quest for greater justice and freedom as the foundation, source and origin of real and permanent peace. The exploitation of the natural world and the abuse of the resources of the creation disclose a pattern of life that leads to death, the ultimate consequence of sinful relation with God, creation, and humanity. The abuse of nature based on greed and self-serving interests and pleasures gives rise to wars and struggles, for they make nations and peoples competitors for scarce natural resources. If human beings wish to be at peace with one another, they must also be at peace with the environment.

23. The contribution of the Orthodox Church in advancing peace with justice and freedom depends upon their total commitment to the Gospel of love and reconciliation and on their courage to speak and act accordingly beyond any kind of temporary affiliations in the socio-political realm. Alienation based on age, class, race, and nationality may be overcome. St. Paul wrote, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

## **II – Cultivating and Communicating Peace**

24. The Orthodox Church, in light of its Trinitarian theology, cultivates peace by affirming unity within diversity (Jn 17:21) and rejecting imposed uniformity in a globalized context. It is important to oppose trends that threaten to endanger the uniqueness of the spiritual experience of particular churches, communities, and individuals. Christian education and pastoral guidance help people grow in acceptance of appropriate diversity among persons, nations, and religious and ethnic groups. There is much truth inherent in these different traditions, cultures, and communities. It is important to begin dialogue with what unites our communities, rather than with what divides them.

25. By always encouraging ecumenical dialogue and cooperation that recognize unity within diversity at the local level, congregations welcome migrants, asylum seekers, and other displaced and marginalized persons. As peacemakers, Christians need to look actively for the highest good of others. At local and international levels, they witness to the peace of Christ by showing love and service to everyone in need without being ignorant of or aggressive toward other religious communities. Examples of such compassionate witness to peace are abundant in the lives of churches in countries where Christians constitute a minority.

26. Spiritual formation cultivates peace within oneself, with God, and with others. An initial resource is liturgical life. The beginning of the Christian life is baptism in which one puts on Christ, “for He Himself is our peace” (Eph 2:14). The Eucharist nourishes the members of the Church to manifest Christ’s peace in the world. According to the Tradition, they are called to reconcile with their enemies before receiving Communion, for they cannot be at peace with God until they are at peace with our brothers and sisters. As St. John wrote, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 Jn 4:20).

27. By addressing the causes of the fragmentation of the family, peace is cultivated. Helping people to develop a healthy view of the place of marriage and parenthood in the Christian life offers an alternative lifestyle in which broken relationships can be restored. The ascetical practices of fasting and almsgiving play a significant role for the healing of passions and broken relationships with others. As St. James wrote, “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?” (James 4:1). The Christian life is a permanent process of repentance and forgiveness in which people confront their conflicts with others and work to overcome them.

28. The cooperation of the Orthodox Church in the past with people of other faiths and with movements for disarmament, resource justice, and care of the environment has produced positive results. In order to cultivate and communicate peace, such collaborative efforts need to be continued. The cultivation of peace requires cooperation with secular and other religious movements. Christ’s peace is manifested worldwide whenever enemies are reconciled. The Church welcomes insights from the social sciences and various philosophies and cultural traditions that share the same concerns about establishing peace in the world. It encourages the laity to work creatively in their professions and other endeavours to promote peace.

29. The call for communicating the Christian message of peace is underscored only by love. Compassionate understanding of and insight into the actual life situations of people to whom the message is addressed are essential for effective communication. Apart from the

conventional channels of communication, such as sermons, catechism, Sunday school, and programs for youth and students, Christians are called to open new channels to reach people by means of blogs and groups on the internet, printed media, TV, and all other means of mass communication. Theological institutions and seminaries can play a key role in promoting and disseminating the peace message.

30. The Orthodox Church cultivates peace by supporting ministries and services to victims of violence and abuse. Social plagues such as domestic abuse, drug addiction, and alcoholism create victims who need help in order to stop the cycle of violence. In order to address these issues, clergy and laity should cooperate with local organizations and agencies that have expertise in this area.

31. Orthodox cultivate peace with the environment by recognizing that they are part of God's good creation which has been redeemed by the blood of the crucified Christ. As St. Paul wrote, "For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him God was pleased to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of His cross." (Col 1:19-20) When the environment is abused, human beings fall short of their original vocation to be good stewards of God's world. They also produce the causes of conflict and war by selfish consumption of scarce natural resources. Individuals and institutions should discern how to practice environmental stewardship in a way appropriate to the circumstances of their life.

### **III – God's Peace Connects All the Spheres of Life**

32. In this concluding section, some basic reflections, practical recommendations, and examples are offered on the four sub-themes of the IEPC. The aim is to emphasise their interconnectedness and mutual relationships, as the vicious cycles of violence invade and damage all aspects of life, from the personal to the global.

#### **A. Peace in the Community**

33. "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they are called God's children." (Mt 5:9)

34. Our Lord Jesus Christ has given us the ministry of reconciliation and called us to be ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor 5:18-20). Peacemaking has therefore become a challenge and a commitment of the Church through its ministers and members, and a testimony of our faith and discipleship to Christ. The way of peace is to respond to the action of the Holy Spirit within us and in our life, for peace is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).

35. Peace begins with ourselves, our families, and our neighbours. From an Orthodox theological point of view, the Trinitarian model of relationship and the Eucharistic practice (*liturgy after the Liturgy*) leave no space for aggressiveness, violent behaviour or injustice. They leave no space for a passive attitude, but only for a dynamic dialogue and action for the change and transformation of oneself and the world. However, there are critical questions of theology and anthropology that need further and more profound analysis. On the basis of Tradition and patristic heritage, Orthodox must grow in our self-understanding, especially in relation to the challenges raised by domestic violence and the ongoing quest for peace in the community. Important theological texts by Fathers of the Church, such as Sts. John Chrysostom and Basil the Great, address the need for mutual respect and love among the members of the family and the broader community. Unfortunately, they have not been

given the necessary attention, but should be used either as educational material or as sources of reflection and spiritual development.

36. Orthodox pursue ways in which to make the forgiveness, justice and mercy, and love of God visible in *the community* by which "one may edify another" (Rom 14:19).

37. At home, members of the family are called upon to monitor their own behaviour, reactions and spirituality; they are called upon to cultivate a culture of peace within the family, and avoid any kind of domestic violence, through dialogue which creates an open channel of communication both with family members and others. They have to be engaged and committed to practices of peace, forgiveness, human solidarity, the well being of all creation, and mutual understanding.

38. The Orthodox Church, likewise, has a positive role to play. It should bring the members of the body of Christ and all the creation into union with the Head (cf. Acts 20:28). The Church is called to alleviate and heal the suffering of its members, to support the oppressed, to extend help to those in need, to advocate peace and to reject conflict. These tasks may be accomplished not only through sermons, lectures and preaching, but also through activities that speak in another way to minds and hearts. The Church serves peace in the community by encouraging people to overcome racism, sexism and similar practices that violate the lives of so many, as well as by establishing pastoral care institutes, counselling centres, peace camps, special magazines, virtual chat rooms, TV channels, university youth groups, and programs and ministries for women.

## **B. Peace with the Earth**

39. Orthodox theology affirms that God created everything out of His own will and love. It also affirms the Scriptural teaching that the human being is created in God's own image and likeness. The Church Fathers made the connection between the image of God in every human being and all creation, which also received the seal of God's love and will. There is no humanity without the rest of creation; there is no meaningful creation without the human being in God's image (cf. Rom. 8:21-22).

40. According to Saint Maximus the Confessor, the Church is one and the creation is a cosmic church.<sup>4</sup> Orthodox theological reflection on creation begins with the fundamental unity of all created reality rooted in the Holy Trinity. In the Divine Liturgy, the recurring peace-blessing "Peace be to you all" is usually understood as addressing the faithful gathered in the Church. However, according to the spirit and scope of the Holy Liturgy, this peace gesture is given to all creation. It makes a radical difference in our attitude and understanding if this peace blessing is perceived to be extended beyond the immediate liturgical community to all human beings and their daily struggles, to all living beings and their environments, to the whole cosmic order and its continuous unfolding. The peace that passes all understanding has to be received, nourished, and radiated by human beings in God's image and likeness. A very profound ethical and spiritual responsibility is placed on every member in the simple act of peace-giving in the liturgy.

41. The unity between human beings and the whole creation is also expressed in the Orthodox tradition through different prayers and blessings for parts or all creation. We

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<sup>4</sup> *Mystagogia* II, PG 91, 669

would also like to underline that the Orthodox care for creation has been very clearly expressed during the last period of time though the many ecological actions initiated by His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who has been called for the action "the green Patriarch". In order to promote the concerns and responsibility for the whole creation, the Orthodox Church has proposed 1 September as the day of the protection of the environment.

### **C. Peace in the Marketplace**

42. Humanity nowadays is facing challenges, born by the globalising economies grown into the Global Market, which make all people without exception its participants. Globalization has not only political, legal, economic, and cultural-informational dimensions; it also has spiritual repercussions. "This is a crisis of values, of the worldview. History unambiguously confirms the fact that the ways of resolving political, economic and humanitarian problems of today's humankind are to be sought not only in the realm of material resources' reallocation or in improving management technologies, but in the spiritual dimension."<sup>5</sup> The Orthodox Church is called to reflect on and to take initiatives, which would not only address the current financial crisis, but would also promote economic justice and peace in the market. It is called to propose a fairer model of sharing goods, mineral resources and energy.

43. The Orthodox Church, while calling people to seek first "the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Mt 6:33), does not forget about their need for "daily bread" (Mt 6:11); it believes that everyone should have resources sufficient for a life in dignity. At the same time, the Church warns against the extreme attraction to wealth, denouncing those who are carried away by "cares and riches and pleasures of this life" (Lk 8:14). The Orthodox attitude to property does not ignore material needs; but neither does it praise the opposite extreme, the aspiration for wealth as the ultimate goal and value of life.

44. The Church proclaims that overcoming the present crisis is possible. According to theology and Tradition, "it is very important to bring the economic system closer to the needs of an average individual, creating possibilities for his/her active and creative involvement in economic life... the new model of world development should be based on the principles of justice, efficiency and social solidarity ... on the values of ... self- limitation, moderateness, self-sacrifice."<sup>6</sup>

### **D. Peace among the Peoples**

45. Building peace among peoples is a major task for the churches, which requires openness, willingness and the respect of difference. In light of this commitment, the Orthodox Church reaches out to other faith communities and secular institutions. There cannot be peace among peoples and cultures without peace among religions; and peace between religions demands sincere dialogue between faith communities. Dialogue enables religions to rediscover their forgotten human values and practices.

46. Protection of human rights is a vital ingredient of a culture of peace and a major challenge for all religions. The peace commitment of the Orthodox theology of peace

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<sup>5</sup> *The Statement of the Experts' Council "Economy and Ethics" under the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, 27 July 2009*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*



includes the promotion of human rights as a precondition of human dignity, freedom, and social and environmental justice. The commitment to human rights is an expression for the conviction that peace is more than the absence of war.

47. Together with the other Christian churches and faith communities, the Orthodox Church is ready to work against war, as well as violence in all its destructive forms. Therefore, the Third Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference in Chambésy/Geneva (1986) affirms: “war, in particular nuclear war, causes destruction of creation and annihilation of life on earth...Nuclear war is a crime against humanity and a mortal sin against God.”

48. A primary task is also to contribute to the delegitimization of warfare on religious grounds, to oppose fanaticism and fundamentalism, and to promote mutual understanding and cooperation at all possible levels. As the Primates of the Eastern Orthodox Churches affirmed: “Orthodox Christians share responsibility for the contemporary crisis of this planet with other people, whether they are people of faith or not, because they have tolerated and indiscriminately compromised on extreme human choices without credibly challenging these choices with the word of faith. Therefore, they also have a major obligation to contribute to overcoming the divisions of the world”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Message of the Primates of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, Phanar/Istanbul, 12 October 2008, p. 6.