

## THE LEUVEN DECLARATION OF THE SECOND WORLD ASSEMBLY

1974

**“I walk on thorns, but firmly, as among flowers.”**

The Second World Conference on Religion and Peace, meeting at the University of Leuven/Louvain in the summer of 1974, longs to speak directly to all religious communities of our troubled planet.

Buddhists, Christians, Confucianists, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Shintoists, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, and still others, we have sought here to listen to the spirit within our varied and venerable religious traditions. Whatever our religion, we know that we are one with the whole of humanity and that all of its problems are our problems. Our faith compels us to search for effective, viable solutions. We have faced together the enormity of the perils presently threatening the human species and its home. We have looked hard at the massive evidence of the political, economic, social, and cultural offenses against humanity that are inherent in the growing world disorder. We have grappled with the towering issues that our societies must resolve in order to bring about peace, justice, and an ennobling quality of life for every person and every people. Drawing upon the inexhaustible resources of our spiritual heritages, we have experienced together the truth expressed by one of the poets in our midst:

*“I walk on thorns, but firmly, as  
among flowers.”*

Our debt to the historic First World Conference on Religion and Peace, held in Kyoto, Japan, in 1970, is very great and gratefully acknowledged. High standards for the ministry of peace and justice in all religions and lands were set forth at Kyoto, and here in Louvain [Leuven], we have been able to go forward because of their guidance. Or all the things we learned at Kyoto, none has marked us more deeply than the discovery that the integrity of the commitment of each to his own religious

tradition permits, indeed nurtures, loving respect for the prayer and faithfulness of others. We have contemplated together the inalienable dignity of every human being, as it is affirmed by each of our traditions.

We rejoice that through the profound experiences of conferences like these, and multilateral dialogues undertaken by official religious institutions, the long era of prideful, and even prejudiced, isolation of the religious of humanity is, we hope, gone forever. *We are resolved henceforth to serve humanity together, each in the way most in keeping with the convictions of his spiritual family and local circumstances.*

## **War Cannot Be Avoided; It Can Only Be Overcome**

Peace can no longer be regarded as an ideal which may be cherished or discarded at will. It is a practical and immediate necessity arising out of the present situation where men have acquired such immense power that they are now in a position to conquer the stars or to annihilate themselves completely along with the globe they live on. We therefore dedicate ourselves to work together for the total abolition of war.

We plead with all people of faith and good will to recognize that there is no future for humanity if worldwide nuclear war is simply postponed or temporarily avoided. The delicate “balance of terror” has given the superpowers, and all other nations with them, nothing more than a reprieve - a little time to correct action to end the nuclear arms race. *We urge that the religions of the world mount every possible pressure on the nuclear weapons governments to halt the proliferation of destructive nuclear armaments and to roll back all existing nuclear weaponry until the stockpiles of nuclear devices have been safely dismantled and destroyed. We also ask all religious bodies to press other governments now capable of initiating nuclear weapons programs to renounce any such undertaking.*

In the four years since our Kyoto Conference, we confess that we have not known how to mobilize religious people so that they might contribute effectively to the

prevention of even limited local or civil wars. Bangladesh, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, the Southern Philippines, Southern Africa, Cyprus, and Indochina are among those places where the conflicting forces, including the political decision-makers, are largely composed of members of our various religious communities.

With utmost regret we recognize that the Indochina War was not ended by the Paris Peace Agreements of January 1973, and that another hundred thousand Indochinese lives have been lost since that disappointing “peace” was declared. We understand and respect the Vietnamese Buddhist campaign cry: “DON’T SHOOT YOUR OWN BROTHER.”

Wherever wars are now going on, we express our deep sorrow over the suffering of all who are involved even as we call upon them and their governments to seek alternative solutions through negotiation, mediation, or arbitration, as well as to strive for imperative political, economic, social, cultural, and moral change by means more appropriate to their respect for life and their vision of human destiny.

*Whatever conscientious religious people decide in respect to the use of violence, we urge religious leaders everywhere to work ceaselessly in the first instance, for the reduction of the level of violence in all social struggles with the final elimination of violence in favor of peaceful solutions as their firm objective. To respond to violence with violence without first seeking to eliminate its cause is to embark upon the course of unending escalation.*

## **Liberation plus Development = Peace**

Peace is a supreme value for all religions, a state of personal and social existence that, according to all prophets and teachers, is far more than mere absence of conflict. The world without war envisaged by our seers is warless because of its health, its wholeness, its intrinsic justice, its at-oneness with the universe. Therefore, those who truly seek the peace of the nations should begin with the rigorous spiritual disciplines that bring peace to their own hearts, peace in their families, peace in their cities, and peace with the natural world. Such peace is not possible for men and women unless they learn to master

themselves, sublimate their combative energies into productive channels, refuse to accept enslavement in any form, and freely offer themselves in the service of their fellowmen and their eternal lord.

We have come to see human liberation, economic development, and world peace as a dynamic triangular process. People liberating themselves become capable of helping others become free. A truly free people constitutes a productive and cooperative society rather than an exploitative and domineering overlord among their neighborhood. All the inhabitants of the globe today need to progress toward such basic liberation, such genuine self-development, such a harmonious and peaceful world order. Tyrannical systems, elitist ruling groups, and some transnational economic enterprises - whether private or governmental - prevent multitudes of people from participating in the shaping of their own future. *We encourage every religion to arouse its people to seek resolutely their own integrated liberation and development, and that of their fellow human beings, near and far.* With special insistence we turn to those religious communities that are numerous among the affluent and powerful nations, requesting that they act boldly to end every form of domination among the African, Asian, and Latin American peoples whether by their governments or their economic and cultural institutions. *We press religious people to condemn profiteering by the affluent world from the weakness of the developing countries, or the racist oppression of the black majority as in Southern Africa, working for such fair policies in economic and technical aid, trade, and investment as will help all such peoples pursue their own developmental way. We specifically ask all nations to implement the New International Economic Order advocated by the Sixth Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly, because it is only through a fundamental restructuring of the world's economic system that a just use and distribution of raw resources, trade, and monetary policies can be achieved.*

With a high sense of religious responsibility for the balanced growth of the human race, we call upon all religions to work for social, economic, and population policies in every nation that promise the fullest respect and opportunity for each child, and the most sensitive care of the environment on which his life and that of posterity depends.

## The Rights of Man and the Independence of Religion

The peace we seek is nowhere more endangered than in societies ruled by sheer power unlimited by impartial law. Wherever the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is given but lip service or openly scorned, conflicts are repressed rather than resolved, making violent struggle likely. The United Nations Charter is in harmony with the highest religious insights when it affirms that the love of peace is incompatible with the violation of basic human rights.

We therefore appeal to religious people in every kind of social order to meditate, to pray, and to witness for government policies that will hold inviolate the spirit of man, and guarantee his physical and cultural well-being. Where religious communities are surrounded by grave denials of civil and political rights, or the refusal of social, economic, or cultural justice, we declare our solidarity with them as they demand freedom for their peoples.

Fundamental independence from all earthly powers and total dependence on the truth that has called them into being is essential for all religions that would offer a fully authentic ministry to society. We therefore ask all religious bodies to strive for their own freedom from entangling alliances, covert or overt, that could limit their freedom to work for the general freedom of man. Vigilantly maintaining the integrity of their own social organizations, religious communities should freely cooperate with all who sincerely seek to advance the cause of justice, peace, and human rights in their own lands and beyond.

In their own internal life, we urge that religious communities encourage all those who bear educational responsibilities to include in the spiritual and moral education of youth an important place for the imperative of peace and the means to attain it.

On the worldwide front of the struggle to defend and to enhance the dignity of man, the United Nations and its specialized agencies daily undertake many of the tasks religious seers have long urged upon mankind.

As the most extensive network of voluntary associations on the earth, the great religious communities here represented can help the United Nations carry forward its appointed work in behalf of peace on earth and justice among all men.

*We call upon the religious communities of the world to press their governments to ratify the covenants and conventions that alone can make the United Nations standards operational in the life of the nations. Through study and action, we urge these communities to concern themselves and their governments with the strengthening of the United Nations.* The grave human predicament created by the nuclear threat has recently been aggravated by the acute environmental crisis. The fear of instant annihilation is now mingled with the anguished vision of the gradual extinction of life through the depletion, contamination, suffocation of the planet. The dawning realization that the creation of a right relationship between man and nature is an indispensable part of the struggle for peace and justice has brought a new dimension to the work of our Conference.

The religious insight that there is an essential interdependence of all being and all things is age-old. Now we are still more aware that there must be not war but profound harmony between the human species and the natural world. *We plead with our religious communities to evoke among their peoples a fresh sense of awe before the mystery of existence and a recovery of the value of humble self-restraint in the conduct of personal and social life.* Men and women motivated by religion should provide mankind with a shining example of simplicity of life-style, getting along with minimal dependence on material things and deriving their happiness from the quality of their spiritual, aesthetic, and cultural pursuits.

But the global challenge of the environmental crisis calls for technical and policy changes on a planetary scale. The issues are at once scientific, economic, political, and moral. Not only the natural environment we have inherited, but the artificial environment we have created, must now be examined from the spiritual perspective. Religious people, leading personal lives in sensitive respect for the rights of nature, must also contribute through their choices as citizens and as workers to the development of a new social vision of environmental ethics.

In cooperation with scientists, government planners, industrial managers, and all those who inform and from public opinion, religious thinkers should seek to shape and implement a technology for contemporary civilization that will safeguard nature and enhance the general quality of our common life. This great goal will require the full realization of the productive capacity of every person and nation in order to give solid meaning to the social justice we seek for the world's burgeoning population. *We appeal to the religious communities of the world to inculcate the attitude of planetary citizenship, the sense of our human solidarity in the just sharing of the food, the energy, and all the material necessities which our generous habitat, unlike any other yet perceived in universal space, will continue faithfully if only it is well loved and respected by mankind.*

As each of us turns to prayer and meditation, we seek a conversion of heart to bring about the spirit of sacrifice, humility, and self-restraint which will further justice, development, liberation, and peace. May the spirit that has blessed us in the Conference at Louvain touch all believers who receive this Declaration in churches, gurdawaras, mosques, pagodas, shrines, synagogues, and temples throughout the earth. May our message become their message as they address their people. May this call for action be heard and needed by all those who exercise power in the public affairs of mankind.

**Religions for Peace** 