



Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE)

Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)

Communion d'Eglises Protestantes en Europe (CEPE)

Peace-keeping, Human Security and the Use of Armed Force

A Reconsideration of the Concept of “Just Warfare”

1. Introduction

In the Leuenberg Agreement, the signing churches committed themselves “to stand up for temporal justice and peace between individuals and nations.” (art. 11) They agreed that this would make it necessary to join with others in seeking common and appropriate criteria and play their part in applying these criteria, (ibid.) and that the struggle for justice and peace in the world would increasingly demand of the churches the acceptance of a common responsibility (art. 36)

The churches assumed this common responsibility to be an integral part of the credibility of the churches’ being one in their witness and service to the world, and that this involves a responsibility to examine carefully current issues of disagreement, (art. 29, 40).

CPCE has addressed the issue of international peace and armed conflict as an important aspect of its general work on Protestant responsibility and ethical action in the world. In 1989, churches in Leuenberg Church Fellowship responded to a proposal presented by the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR on “*Just warfare? CA 16 and our responsibility for peace*”, which sought to reinterpret and actualise the notion of “just warfare” as presented in CA 16. Realising the actual historical context of the cold war and an accelerating nuclear armament, reflections on the implications that modern warfare and existing means of mass destruction may have for the concept of “just warfare” were welcomed. The texts also reaffirmed the churches’ steadfast commitment to justice, peace and

responsible dealing with creation. They underlined the essential import of an international code of law to realise and protect human rights and just peace, yet acknowledged the need for instruments of power to maintain such an order, as well as the importance of the churches' possibility to make ethical judgements and counsel the consciences of their members on the use of force even in the event of hostilities.¹

Today CPCE reaffirms these commitments, yet realises how the political context of international conflict and peace has changed, calling for renewed consideration of issues of international peace and human security, and the role of armed force.

2. Current situation and challenges

A number of changes have taken place regarding international politics of peace and security:

- The 1989 fall of the Iron Curtain and ending of the cold war, together with ongoing integrating processes along different traces, have made armed conflicts between European nations highly unlikely.
- But at the same time we have also witnessed severe internal conflicts, especially in the Balkan region, with the Yugoslavian civil war, the Kosovan war, and recurring armed conflicts in the Caucasus region.
- This escalation of intra-state conflicts, rather than inter-state conflicts occurs also at a larger international level, as well as the problem posed by areas with no legislative, executive or legitimate order in place.

¹ Wilhelm Hüffmeier (Ed.): Protestant texts on ethical decision-making. Leuenberger Texte 3. Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck 1997.

- Confined, armed assaults by non-state agents within and across national borders, with international and global implications.
- The threat to peace and human security posed by international terrorism.

Implications for international politics of peace, conflicts and security:

- Civilian populations are endangered not only as a result of conflicts between states, but increasingly also as a result of internal conflicts, lack of legislative and political order and stability.
- Threats are allegedly posed not only by state agents but also non-state agents, they are not only imminent, identifiable threats posed by escalating armed force directly across borders, but by less imminent, less identifiable and more confined causes, possibly originating in areas far away.
- Intra-state conflicts might have “spill-over” effects across borders and affect international order, such as flow of refugees, and escalation of armed conflicts into border areas with weak state control and law enforcement. Given the geopolitical structure of today’s world these problems are likely to first hit areas and states already strongly burdened politically, economically, environmentally etc.

These developments have evoked new responses in international politics:

- On the European level:
 - o The decision of the heads of states and governments of EU member states at the EU 1999 summit in Cologne that “the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed by credible military force, the means to decide to use them, and the readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crisis without prejudice to actions by NATO.”

- The introduction of a common European Security Strategy (December 2003) based on “a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention”, when the first line of defence is located outside the EU-area.
 - The establishment of a European Defence Agency in July 2004, enhancing military capacities, being able to respond militarily also beyond the European area.
- On NATO level:
- The introduction of a new strategic concept in 1999, which involved the principle of so-called “non article 5 operations”, out of area-operations.
 - The decision of the NATO summit 2003 in Prague to take steps to establish its response-force, creating deployable and operational defence systems, able to respond effectively to “new types of threats”.
- On UN level:
- The UN is in the middle of a process of thorough reform of its own organisation, also with the explicit intent of adapting the organisation to the current situation of international security, realising how many threats are interlinked, that development, peace, security and human rights are mutually reinforcing (UN Summit 2005 A/RES/60/1 Ch. III Peace and collective security), in order to uphold the UN as a supreme instrument in international order and peace, and to restructure the Security Council as a more representative organ for international law in today’s international community.

3. Basic theological principles

The Church has been called to an unremitting commitment to work for peace. Created in the image of God, every human being possesses the fundamental value of basic dignity and equal worth. As the one who sustains and renews creation, God summons human beings to stewardship for all God's creation and to protection of human life from violations and infringements against this fundamental value and dignity. As the Church lives by the gift of peace and reconciliation it receives from Christ, it has also been called to engagement in and commitment to peace and reconciliation.

Realising that the full biblical vision of peace, as the perfect, harmonious and just living together of all creation in community with God is an eschatological reality yet to come as a work of God, the Church also realises how this vision inspires and nurtures a worldly, temporal responsibility for peace. This responsibility invites the Church to work unceasingly for the protection of human life and God's creation, and to counter vehemently all kinds of victimisation of human life and usurpation by worldly powers.

The continuous commitment to justice, peace and integrity of creation – elaborated in the Ecumenical concepts of “just peace” - is an essential part of the Church's realisation of this responsibility, imaginatively and creatively seeking new ways of responding to the reality received through God's promise of a new heaven and a new earth. To this belongs the encouragement, even in a sinful world, to seek to settle conflicts justly and peacefully without receding into use of force and violence, but instead to explore the powerful message of reconciliation that Christ has left his Church as a gift.

Some of the churches see this as the only means Christ has willed his Church to exploit in its work for peace and justice, and therefore reject the use of means such as armed force. For them, the use of armed force is sinful and unfair in any way, even when urged by a sense of responsibility. Other churches do not draw this conclusion of complete abstention from use of force. However to all

churches this message of reconciliation is a powerful inspiration to explore fully the possibilities of mitigating conflicts through other means than violence and force. This also includes the coming to terms with past wrongs and guilt, through reconciling processes and healings of memories that can remedy and rectify a history of conflicts.

Having received this message and promise of reconciliation as a gift in Christ, as part of its belonging to Christ as the Lord of the Church, churches of CPCE are especially committed to resisting any instrumentalisation of religion in political conflicts. Its faith in Jesus Christ, and the justification the Church receives from God through God's grace, encourage it to worldly effort and responsibility, yet this is not a political means that can be resorted to in situations of conflict. CPCE member churches acknowledge how they are invited to explore their own tradition as a source of peaceful mitigation of conflicts, and to self-critically avoid and discard ways of appropriating and formulating its tradition that might heighten conflicts. They strongly believe that this potential for reducing and mitigating conflicts is present in all major religious traditions, and encourage such traditions to engage in this joint, self-critical effort to bring out religions' conflict-resolving and peaceful potential more clearly.

In its steadfast commitment to peace and reconciliation, the Church acknowledges that total and comprehensive peace, as described in the biblical vision of shalom, cannot be achieved through political means in this world, but remains an eschatological reality given through God's promise alone. This implies de-ideologising self-constraint on political action, resisting utopian abuse of politics.

4. Concrete responses

How does this theological basis invite churches to respond to recent developments and changes in international politics of security and peace?

Recalling a comprehensive concept of peace, the widened understanding of security, as implying *human security* and not national and state security only, must be welcomed as congenial to a fundamental responsibility for protection of human life.

This widened concept of security also draws attention to the composite picture of potential threats to this security. Correspondingly, an expanded range of responses to address the sources of threats is required. Human security is not sufficiently protected only by peace in the sense of absence of inter-state conflicts. It requires sustainable peace that includes justice and fundamental human welfare in respect for integrity of creation. International peace building projects and trust building measures are therefore a vital element of war prevention. This also accords with a theological image of peace. Security thus understood, therefore, fundamentally requires measures that adequately address issues of poverty, injustice, environmental damage, governance, political and economic stability, etc. By recognising and responding adequately and timely to these root dimensions of human security the need for responding with violence through armed force can be highly reduced, perhaps eliminated. Time and again we have seen how the international community's failure to respond adequately with peaceful means at an earlier point eventually leads to the call for employment of armed force at a later point to resolve conflicts. Preventive measures in order to address issues of security and to strengthen the capacities of the civil society to facilitate peace and justice are therefore of vital importance. Establishing agencies such as a "European Peace-building Agency" is to be highly approved. Under no circumstances should such preventive measures include armed interventions unauthorised by institutions of international law.

Efforts to reduce military tension and remove causes of direct threats are especially important. It is essential to counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Maintaining international treaties, such as the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, committing its parties to reduction and non-acquisition of nuclear weapons respectively, as binding instruments respected by its parties is vital to this end. Signs that the treaty is increasingly undermined by some of its parties are worrisome and destructive of international security, stability and

peace. Likewise effective and comprehensive international instruments regulating export of anti-personnel mines and small arms should be in place. On a global scale expenditures for military purposes have increased steadily for many years. Churches must persistently draw attention to this fact and address its grave injustice as well as its unfavourable consequences to peace and security.

However, where conflict escalates in spite of early warning and a wide repertoire of responses, endangering populations and eroding international order, there is a need to respond also when means abstaining from use of force remain without effect. In such situations the question arises whether the use of armed force can be justified. Churches find themselves especially challenged by the question of use of military force in terms of armed intervention against a state to protect an endangered civilian population or avert a pending genocide. The changes in international politics described at the beginning have given these questions a different framing and new conditions. States are no longer the only relevant agents of armed conflicts. Armed conflict is not necessarily a question of “declared war” of one state against another, and changes in the international power balance since 1989 have changed the conditions and possibilities for employing military force in conflicts in other countries.

Within the churches there is a long-standing tradition of approaching matters like this in terms of “just war” tradition. Several of the doctrinal confessions of CPCE churches contain references to this tradition (CA 16; Conf Helv Post 30, Irish Religious articles from 1615, Art. 62, Erlauthaler confession from 1563, Art. 36 (37). Similar provisions can also be found in Methodist tradition or in the Waldensian Church). Their main objective, however, is to determine whether it is at all allowed for a Christian to hold certain public offices that entail the state’s use force against its citizens, such as soldier, rather than to determine the criteria for acceptable warfare. On the one hand, the just war tradition contains principles that are still essential, on the other, changed conditions of international politics of security also require reconsideration of this tradition in order to provide an adequate understanding of it and when it can be

ethically defended to intervene in another state in order to protect its population.

It must be underlined that state sovereignty is an important instrument to protect citizens, and a correspondingly essential principle in international law only to be overruled on very strict conditions (UN charter art. 1 and 42, based on decisions in UN Security Council). An international order where state sovereignty is gradually eroded through lowered thresholds against intervention in a sovereign state is not necessarily in the best interest of citizens or conducive to protection of human security. There should, therefore, be a priority for maintaining and respecting state sovereignty, but accompanied by strengthened efforts to support democratic and legal structures.

Still, there might be situations where a state is unwilling or unable to ensure sufficient protection and security of its citizens. There could be situations where it can be ascertained that a regime is planning or about to commit genocide or other large scale atrocities, where a local regime refrains from assisting or allowing assistance of its population after big disasters such as famines, or in cases of “failed states”, i.e. where no effective political order is in place and massive internal conflicts emerge. Under such circumstances the international community cannot dismiss responsibility for an endangered civilian population of another state. Still, these situations do by no means automatically legitimise armed intervention. Also in these situations, the possibility of non-military means should be fully depleted. When military force appears as the only possible response in order to alleviate situations like this, it requires legitimate authority to employ it and restrictive use of criteria. In the current state of international order the UN Security Council is the institution authorised by the international community to intervene militarily against a state in situations where “international peace and security are threatened”. Although itself an arena for political power, the Security Council is still the instrument of international law best able to ensure legitimacy of armed interventions. Compared to the currently alternative model of “coalitions of the willing” it has the formal legitimacy of the world community, and is better suited to avoid the dominance of one set of interests over another.

Yet although it cannot be ruled out that situations like this might allow use of armed force as the lesser evil to avoid an even worse evil, it is necessary to be aware of the danger of escalation in use of military force to solve problems of conflicts and security. The restructuring of international defence alliances and organisations for international cooperation, in order to enhance military capacities, making them more efficient and better able to engage in international operations other than self-defence, makes this point especially relevant. There is a risk that the focus on military capabilities will also redirect attention towards military responses to international conflicts rather than strengthening exploration of non-armed responses at an earlier point. The churches have a specific responsibility for being attentive towards this danger and to advocate for non-violent conflict solutions.

Likewise there is a need to be aware of the dangers of human self-aggrandizement in a sinful world. There should be a critical awareness of the danger of disguising national or regional self-interest (economically, politically, culturally, natural resources etc.) as concern for the common good or for a persecuted civilian population. For this reason as well, use of armed force should only be accepted when applied according to rules and decisions of international law. It is true that principles of international law must be backed by force, but it is even more true that force must be applied according to principles of international law.

5. Security, reconciliation and trust

Means of force can never be a fully sufficient or adequate safeguard of peace and security nor can military actions overcome terrorism. Peaceful coexistence between people and peoples basically requires attention to and acknowledgement of fundamental features of the human condition. Unless these features thrive and are given space, peace in its more full sense will not thrive either. Unless distrust is transformed into trust as the fundamental and indispensable ingredient to human interaction and community, peace and justice will not thrive. Likewise, attempts at eradicating human vulnerability

through political and even military measures will ultimately turn into its destruction. Vulnerability is, like trust, an essential and unavoidable ingredient to human community, cooperation and interaction. True enough a political order and the force to back it is necessary to protect vulnerable persons against exploitation and violations, but equally true attempts at removing vulnerability entirely will in effect be de-humanising. The strength of a stable and secure international order is not to be found in eradication and denial of vulnerability, but in its adequate protection and respect. By virtue of their belief in God who creates, sustains and renews the whole creation and all mankind, churches therefore assert that measures to ensure and establish international order and security must be accompanied by a fundamental and deep-seated recognition of a common humanity, which the churches recognise as the gift of God.

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The Presidium of CPCE:
Prof. Elisabeth Parmentier, Strasbourg;
Prof. Michael Beintker, Münster;
Council President Rev. Thomas Wipf, Bern



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At present 105 Protestant churches in Europe (including five South-American churches originating from Europe) belong to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist along with pre-Reformation churches such as Hussites and Czech Brethren grant each other pulpit and table fellowship on the basis of the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973.

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