

DECLARATION OF A CHURCH LIVING THE GOSPEL OF PEACE
(Peace Declaration of the Reformed Church in Japan)

FOREWORD

As we approach the 80th commemoration of the end of the Second World War, our world is now amid new international political tensions. In particular, the political and military tensions in East Asia that have manifested since Russia's invasion of Ukraine at the beginning of 2022, foreshadow the advent of another 'age of war', in which even the use of nuclear weapons is increasingly becoming a reality.

In the context of these circumstances, we, the Reformed Church in Japan, as a church living from the 'Gospel of Peace' realised by the Lord Jesus Christ, hereby declare our calling and responsibility for peace in this country and in the world.

In our founding declaration and in our 30th anniversary 'Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and State', we confessed the sins of Japanese Christian churches committed against God and our neighbours during WWII. Such sins include that they did not resist the military-led government's policy of church unification, and that, except for a handful of witnesses, they did not boldly assert the Biblical truth nor fulfil their prophetic duty of being a watchful guard against the state. In addition, they even indulged in state Shinto rituals that deified the emperor and furthermore refused to identify with their brothers and sisters in (neighbouring) Asian countries, thereby actively cooperating in the aggressive invasions that were waged in the name of holy war.

We, the Reformed Church in Japan, confess that we bear joint responsibility for the sins committed before the eyes of the Lord by the Japanese churches during the war. At the same time, and under the grace of religious freedom granted after the war, we founded our Reformed Church on the Word of God and on a theistic (Christian) world view. We have worked hard for mission and church formation, asserting the autonomy of the Church over the State. However, when we reconsider our history, we acknowledge that we have lacked the strength and zeal to respond to our mission as a church living from the gospel of peace. We admit that we have not truly expressed enough empathy and awareness, especially towards those who have suffered social or ethnic discrimination within and outside the church, and for this we beg for forgiveness before the Lord.

After its defeat, Japan reflected on the war and pledged in its Constitution (Preamble and Article 9) never to wage war again, thereby renouncing war itself. This pacifism and renunciation of war are the starting points of post-war Japan and the origin to which the Japanese people should return again and again. On the other hand—as is clear in cases like the Korean people in Japan and the Okinawa issue—we must not forget that the post-war period was built on the sacrifice of those who were deprived of their basic human rights because they were ousted for being different, to maintain the Japanese state system centered on the emperor.

Today, as the memories of the disastrous war fade, legislation is being developed to make it possible to wage war again without questioning its consistency with the Constitution. Defense spending is being increased and the installation of offensive weapons are being pushed ahead. Moreover, the justice administration is abandoning the state's violation of the separation of religion/church and politics/state, while the movement to restore the power of state Shinto and to revise the constitution has not abated. Furthermore, it is impossible to overlook the fact that the power of 'structural violence' is continually expanding in the actual lives of the people living in this country. This power devalues the weak in favour of economic efficiency, including poverty, discrimination, human rights violations, and environmental destruction, which undermines the right to live in peace.

Amid these realities we pledge our commitment to the realisation of Christ's peace, as we pray for the Lord's mercy and sense that now is the time to respond to his words, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Mat 5:9), and as we clarify our responsibility to the Church today and to the future Church: not to repeat past mistakes.

1. THE PEACE OF GOD AND THE PEACE OF THIS WORLD

'All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation' (2 Cor 5:18).

'Peace' (*shalom*), as the Bible describes it, means not only the absence of war or strife, but above all freedom and happiness in a spiritual relationship with God, physical wellbeing, and material contentment, as well as harmony and joy in human relationships. Peace is nothing less than the 'very good' world given to us by God the Creator (Gen 1:31). However, us humans, because of our own desires and self-centredness, have destroyed and corrupted this peace, bringing about a world full of violence and chaos that is hostile to God and indifferent to our neighbours. Nevertheless, the God of peace loves humanity and sent his Son to restore true peace to this world. Jesus Christ, Son of God, not only healed those who were vulnerable and sick, nor only satisfied the hungry and gave joy to their hearts, but he also broke down the dividing wall of hostility by his suffering and death on the cross, thereby establishing eternal peace.

The Lord Jesus Christ himself *is* our peace (Eph 2:14). The Church of Christ is therefore a community that worships God in unity and joy in the Holy Spirit of the Lord, that respects all people, that embodies the peace of Christ towards its neighbour, and that lives in the 'Gospel of Peace', which brings about true reconciliation and blessing in this world. The peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has already been realised in Christ but is not yet complete. Until the end of the world, hatred, and conflict—rooted in human sin—will never cease. Yet, as those who live from the peace of Christ, which this world can neither give nor guarantee, we continue to preach the gospel of reconciliation, pray for peace, and participate in every work that brings true peace to the world.

2. WAR, PEACE AND THE STATE

'He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.' (Isa 2:4).

The peace of God and the peace of this world cannot be equated, but neither can they be separated. This is because the world belongs to God. The human world, which is full of sin and misery, overflows with violence. In particular wars, conflicts and terrorism, which involve large numbers of people, have killed countless people in every age, and the trauma of those caught up in it never fades away. No war in this world can absolve us of guilt before God.

What God is ultimately trying to teach us through the biblical accounts of war in the ancient world is the truth that *'all who draw the sword will die by the sword'* (Mt 26:52), so that his people will trust in him as their Lord rather than in their own military power. So-called 'just wars' or 'lawful wars' in Christian history were also originally condoned as a last resort to deter war and maintain justice and peace, let alone the claim of 'holy wars' to actively promote war in the name of God, which is a fundamental error. Therefore, the Lord's Church should not justify war as a means of settling disputes, much less affirm contemporary wars that use weapons of mass

destruction.

We call for the defense of all human life—created in the image of God—to be the path to peace, without being deceived by national politicians and the mass media, who create enemies and try to replace peace issues with military security issues. Therefore, we actively cooperate in all non-military work to avert war and create peace among nations, and more particularly, as the Church in the only country to have experienced the devastation caused by nuclear weapons, we demand the abolition of all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

Peace in this world is indeed temporary. Nevertheless, we pray that national administrators will rightly exercise the authority entrusted to them by Christ for the realisation of peace and justice in the world. However, when they absolutise their own power and abuse their authority from Christ, thereby threatening the lives and human rights of people, we stand firm and protest by declaring the will of the Lord. Moreover, prompted by the Holy Spirit, we will resist state coercion to obey God rather than humans, and in the case of forced conscription, we stand in solidarity with those who refuse military service as a matter of conscience.

3. PEACE, JUSTICE AND DEEDS OF LOVE

'I will listen to what God the Lord says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—but let them not turn to folly ... Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.' (Ps 85:8, 10-11).

God's peace, justice, and faithful love (mercy) cannot be separated. The Commandments of the God who delivered Israel from hardship and oppression, demands that His people live in justice and mercy. Just as the Old Testament prophets harshly criticised societies that lacked justice and mercy as societies without peace, so the Church, living the gospel of peace, cannot remain indifferent to the injustices that human societies generate. For it is the Lord's will that *'justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!'* (Amos 5:24).

The God of justice is above all a God of love who has compassion on those who fall victim to unjust societies. The loving deeds (*diakonia*) of Jesus Christ, who bore the woes of human sin, indeed concretely manifest God's peace in this world. For true peace is created not by forceful domination, but by justice, fairness, and neighbourly love. Loved by Christ, we choose to remain close to the victims of discrimination, violence and injustice that fill the world, and to be neighbours to those who are distressed and terrified. We also actively search for ways to make peace through forgiving love, humbly remembering that we are sinners ourselves, even if we hold perpetrators accountable. For the Church that upholds the Cross of Christ can no longer live in hostility and hatred.

We are entrusted with the responsibility to seek peace and justice in God's created world and to govern it well (stewardship). Therefore, we also remain concerned with peace and justice with respect to the environment, including ecological destruction and nuclear power plant issues that threaten the lives of all human beings, as we strive for the preservation and restoration of creation.

4. COLLABORATION AND SOLIDARITY FOR PEACE

'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.' (Rom 12:18).

'All your children will be taught by the Lord, and great will be their peace.' (Isa 54:13).

Loving fellowship in the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation of God's peace. We cooperate and stand in solidarity with all Christians, across ethnic and national borders and beyond denominations, to establish peace. For the unity of God's children in Christ is the most vivid proof of God's peace in the world. Creating peace in a

world of sin, filled with all kinds of contradictions, requires patience, wisdom and faith discernment based on the Bible. We work together for the realisation of peace and justice in the world, holding fast to our convictions, while at the same time respecting all people across all differences of thought, creed, religion, ethnicity, race and gender / sexual orientation. We humbly engage in dialogue and work together through the ministries and relationships given to everyone. For it is the will of the Lord that we live in peace with all people.

Peace in this world will be lost if it is not continually generated. Hence, peace education for the next generation, who will learn from the mistakes of the past and shape the future, is an important responsibility and task of the Church. We rejoice in God's peace with the next generation of young people and raise up peacemakers through concrete projects of mutual learning, speaking and labouring in church, family and society.

5. ULTIMATE HOPE AND PRAYER FOR PEACE

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33).

At the end of time, God will bring perfect peace to this world. Until that day, we must still contend with the reality of sin, in ourselves and in the world. But our Lord has already accomplished the victory. First and foremost, we build the peace of Christ in our own hearts, we overcome hatred and despair by the power of rejoicing in this peace, and we continue to seek peaceful ways without ever giving up.

We stand armed with the armour of God against the evil spiritual powers of this world, and as we await the coming of the Lord of Peace, we lift our hearts high in prayer:

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace,

In a world of hatred and conflict, help us to live by the way of peace that you have given us through your Son.

Cleanse us of our sins and use us as instruments of your peace.

Let us not end up with peace in words only but grant us, by the Holy Spirit, the wisdom and power we need to bring about peace.

May the rulers who have been assigned by you be given the courage to ‘beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks’ and may they work for peace.

Above all, may the Lord Himself speedily bring about the coming of his kingdom of love, justice and peace.

We pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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(All Bible quotes are from the New International Version)

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