

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE PILGRIMAGE OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

A Commentary on Come and See

The Faith and Order Paper (n. 224), *Come and See: A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, has been published as an appendix to *Walking Together: Theological Reflections on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, edited by Susan Durber and Fernando Enns (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2018). The tenth Assembly of the WCC in Busan (2013) chose the theme of pilgrimage of justice and peace as a way to foster greater unity among Christians. With this theme, the Assembly saw itself acting in continuity with the direction of the WCC since the first assembly in Amsterdam, while at the same time hoping to give new impetus to the search for unity in a new context, marked by religious pluralism and the challenges facing the human community on many fronts. Thus, unity and mission are inextricably linked.

The document *Come and See* (CS) invites churches to explore the ways *pilgrimage* can help them “deepen and express the commitment to the oneness of their work” (CS 2). A constant theme of the ecumenical movement is the imperative of reform and renewal. Reform is seen in a fresh light when viewed through the lens of pilgrimage. Pilgrimages are transformative journeys. The pilgrimage of justice and peace is a journey with the reign of God as its goal. When churches consciously see themselves as journeying together, they expose themselves to new experiences and new challenges. Ever conscious of broken communion, they nevertheless have a way of journeying together – experiencing communion and working in communion at the service of the kingdom. As *Come and See* states, “Journeying together on pilgrimage creates unity in our differences. It invites individuals to conversion side by side with their brothers and sisters. The experience of pilgrimage can strengthen communion within and between our churches.” (CS 21).

Like the Busan Assembly, *Come and See* is focused on the context in which we express our commitment to unity today. The document identifies two significant issues for the churches and the world today. The first concerns moving towards a just and sustainable world. “Reverence for God’s creation is of foundational importance for all existence and identity. Justice for suffering human beings cannot be sought apart from the context of living in a way that is respectful of the environment. Justice is not an abstract reality to be realised within

human community alone, but it is how we as humans and as Christians live in the web of life in reciprocity with all human beings, other creatures, and the rest of creation” (CS 22).

The second significant issue is the search for peace in interreligious relationships. “There is need ... to consider the way Christians move together and how witness happens with truthfulness and integrity in a pluralist context. This should occur in a way which shares the gospel without imposing it on others, recognising the co-pilgrimage of all creation with whom the church shares the world and inviting the world to participate in the good news” (CS 28).

Biblical Perspectives

In the biblical context, the original pilgrims are Abraham and Sarah. They were called by God to leave their home and to follow God to the land God would show them. The goal of this pilgrimage was not simply a geographical place but rather the gathering of the nations.

With the Exodus from Egypt and the pilgrimage to the Promised Land, the identity of God’s people took shape. On that journey, they experienced hunger but also food from God; they rebelled against God, yet were renewed as God’s people. Their pilgrimage was marked by times of singing and worship as they remembered what God had done for them. In worship they renewed the covenant with God.

The journey theme is significant in the gospels. In Luke, Jesus heads towards Jerusalem. The journey continues beyond Jerusalem to the ends of the earth in the Acts of the Apostles. Early in the gospels, Jesus calls disciples to follow him and later, asks them to take up their cross and follow him. *Come and See* reminds us that the gospels “suggest that what matters is the motivation and way the journey is carried out, and the need for openness to the pain and liberty that one encounters in a true effort to ‘worship in spirit and truth’” (CS 10).

Theological Grounding

It is not surprising that the pilgrimage of justice and peace is grounded in the major themes of theology. The starting point is the Trinity and the love of the Triune God, who has created the world and is both the origin and the destination of this pilgrimage. The Trinity is the origin because the love of God calls forth a people to follow God’s ways and to participate in God’s plan for the unity, peace and integrity of all creation. The Trinity is also the destination of the pilgrimage, which is directed towards the reign of God and communion with God and with all creation.

The pilgrimage also has a Christological foundation. Through the Incarnation, Jesus enters the world and journeys on this earth to inaugurate the reign of God. Through his death, resurrection and exaltation in glory he transforms and redeems creation. He is the Way that the churches follow on their pilgrimage of justice and peace.

However, the churches can only follow this Way because they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the pilgrimage has a pneumatological basis. “The Spirit of truth leads the churches to a vision of God’s will for human relationships, it moves them to discern the will of God in various contexts in which they find themselves, and it empowers them to serve that design by prophetic witness and action in their various societies” (CS 17).

The Christological foundation of the pilgrimage of justice and peace and its pneumatological basis lead naturally to its grounding in theological anthropology. Concern for justice, peace and the care of creation flows from a Christian understanding of the human person. The human person is created in the image of God, has been redeemed by Christ and sanctified by the Spirit. From this flows not only the relationship human beings have with God, but also their relationship with each other and with the natural world.

Pilgrimage suggests movement. In following the Pilgrim Way, churches know where they are going; they have glimpsed it in Jesus and his ministry, and in the inauguration of the reign of God. That reign remains the eschatological goal of the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage is a pilgrimage of hope. “As God led the people of Israel to freedom through the desert in a cloud by day and fire by night, and as Jesus leads his disciples forward to the new promised land with the words ‘follow me’, so the churches, under the empowerment and guidance of the Holy Spirit, move together to follow him toward the fulfilment of the new heavens and the new earth” (CS 17).

Ecclesiological Dimensions

The pilgrimage of justice and peace is not a solitary journey, but is embarked upon with others. It is a shared pilgrimage. On this pilgrim way, the church is visible. As the churches move together they listen to the Word of God and celebrate the sacraments of faith. Along the way, the pilgrim people of God will live in the tension between the reign of God of which they already have glimpses and a foretaste, and the brutal reality of poverty, hunger, war, violence, religious intolerance, unjust economic practices and environmental degradation – all of which stand in stark contrast to the reign of God.

For the pilgrim church that listens to the Word of God, these dark moments can become privileged places of listening. *Come and See* explains: “It is from these sites of God’s visitation – from society’s margins – that a new world will take shape, and it is here that the pilgrimage needs to take shape. Not only are these places where humanity encounters God as liberator, the margins are also privileged spaces where God reveals God’s self as the just God who desires the fullness of all life” (CS 19).

As the churches travel on their pilgrim way at the margins, they engage together in service in the world. The pilgrimage theme is an attempt to overturn the old ecumenical adage that “doctrine divides and service unites”. Justice, peace and the integrity of creation are framed in the context of God’s plan for the world; and unity in faith, life and witness is expressed concretely in actions for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. “Being together on pilgrimage implies that Christian service is rooted precisely in our common faith in God’s saving and renewing plan for the world. Empowered by the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the people of God may respond to Christ’s invitation to ‘Come and see’” (CS 32).

Questions for the Churches

The document *Come and See* concludes with an invitation to the churches. “The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace invites our churches to offer together, even now, their shared willingness to be open to the new ways in which the Spirit is responding to the petition which countless Christians around the world pray every day: ‘Thy will be done’” (CS 33)

The questions asked at the beginning of *Come and See* (CS 2) can be adapted for consideration by the churches both individually and together.

1. How does this focus on walking and acting together affect the churches in their search for “full visible unity”?
2. Do such actions impel the churches to seek more urgently for ways to resolve their ecclesiological differences?
3. Do they permit the churches to recognise more fully each other’s faith and ministry?
4. What new ways of understanding and living towards unity, justice and peace among churches and among all humanity does this way of pilgrimage open up?

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