

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Acceptance Speech for the Award of Pacem in Terris

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Your Graces, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I humbly stand here as a servant of God to receive this Pacem in Terris Award. I would like to thank those who initiated my name and those who believe in the mission Christ has put on my heart. I thank you that you have included me among the great cloud of witnesses who have previously received this award. My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has taught me "When you have done all that you were ordered to do, say: 'We are worthless slaves, we have done only what we ought to have done.'" (Luke 17:10)

I was very touched when I received the letter of nomination for this award, as I have always admired His Holiness Pope John XXIII and his prophetic work and words. Coming from the Reformation tradition, I consider Pope John XXIII to be one of the reformers of the Church in our modern times. He initiated Vatican II, which continues after more than half a century to bear a harvest within the ecumenical movement, interfaith dialogue, and the life of the church in general. For this reason, I consider it a great honor to receive this award which bears such a great saint's name.

When we read the encyclical Pacem in Terris today, even after fifty-six years, it is clear we are reading the Magna Carta of Catholic engagements in human rights. The basis of this encyclical was the theological doctrine of Imago Dei. What a prophetic voice his was, not only within the Catholic Church but to other churches and to the world. Two significant theological ideas have come to me through this encyclical:

First: Peace is dependent on respect for human dignity and human rights. Every human being, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, political or religious affiliation, is created equally in the image of God. For Pope John XXIII, this is

the basis of a new world order built upon four pillars: Truth, Justice, Love, and Freedom.

Secondly: *Pacem in Terris* has linked the modern movement of human rights to the church's central mission. This means the Church as a whole is called to carry the Gospel of love and dignity into the public sphere. To defend human rights (including gender justice) is an integral part of the mission of the Church, not a side issue. It is the primary role of the Church not only to speak on the rights and concerns of Christians, but to lift up the necessity of human rights for all people. We must understand human rights to be both individual and communal.

Even if we celebrate the UN Human Rights Charter, we still stand in this world with many challenges and violations of human rights, on every continent. We must ask ourselves: Do we have one standard of the implementation of human rights, or do we have various standards—one for so-called friend countries and one for so-called enemy countries? Today more than ever, Christ's Church must be prophetic, raising its voice to insist on one standard of human rights for all people and implemented by all states. It is the concept of *Imago Dei* which gives Christians the evangelical call to defend the dignity of every human being, wherever they are and whoever they are.

The strength of the Church today is at stake. Church members expect that their clergy and community will challenge world leaders when human rights violations occur. Through social media and the internet, we have become more globally connected to one another. No longer can we ignore the needs, the pains, and the oppression of others who live far away. As we increasingly see each other as interconnected, so we see our human rights as interconnected, indivisible, and interdependent upon one another. It is no longer sufficient to insist on human rights only for one nation, for one people, for one religion. Lutheran pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it this way: "The church is the guardian of the State. The church is the conscience of the State." If this is so, then the church and all its members are called to secure the human rights of all of us, as we are all made in the Image of God.

Some would say that *Pacem in Terris* was written in a time of fear and Cold War. However, fear and the threat of war have not ended in the present day. There may be no Iron Wall, but some governments, out of fear, have secured themselves with walls and fences. There may be no Cold War, but as His

Holiness Pope Francis and His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan have both warned, we do seem to be on the brink of a Third World War.

And there may be talks happening related to nonproliferation of weapons, but in fact there is still competition on nuclear weapons, and nations still struggle to pass reasonable gun policies. On these issues, the Church must stand up and say clearly that guns and other weapons are always tools to destroy and kill. The Image of God in each of us calls us to work diligently for a nuclear-free world and gun-free states. The Image of God in each of us calls us to insist that world leaders to take immediate steps toward general disarmament of all weapons of destruction—conventional, nuclear, chemical, biological, and others newly emerging. The world is much safer and more secure without these tools of war. We want a world which reflects the words of Jesus who said, “I have come that they may have life and life abundantly.” (*John 10:10*)

The fear of the Other is the source of all conflict, violence, greed, extremism and war. Today we see how some politicians and groups use this fear to create an atmosphere of mistrust among peoples and nations. It is no wonder that secular populism and racism are infecting the world. The Church can counteract this disease by inoculating our youth and our elected leaders with the Gospel of love and trust, mercy and understanding. Christians and all people of good conscience can and should stop the spread of such sick ideologies as white supremacy, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, sexism, and other evils. We are not powerless in the face of these forces. We can counteract them by clearly respecting and loving the Image of God in the Other. The Church can and must speak truth to power, working for peace based on justice, upholding the rights of refugees and immigrants, and promoting reconciliation based on forgiveness among all peoples. Peace and justice are inseparable, as are truth and reconciliation.

When we seek to speak truth to power, we most often mean we are addressing the structures of the temporal government in our own countries. Indeed, there is much to address in every context. Even in the developed countries of the world, structural injustices and inequalities abound. The current debate in Europe and the United States over immigrants and refugees is a clear opportunity for the Church to influence both public policy and public rhetoric. We want to see the flourishing of all human communities, rather than reinforcing forms of male chauvinism, white supremacy, and populism. The prophetic response to foreign policy takes us even further beyond ourselves,

asking if perceptions of national security and national interests truly justify the harm our actions may cause to the people of other countries. How, specifically, could Christians more forcefully address the excesses of other global powers?

Last month I attended the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of Religions for Peace in Lindau, Germany, under the theme “Caring for Our Common Future: Advancing Our Shared Well-Being”. This theme is very timely. In a broken world, how can different religions and peoples claim the common values of living together, working for peace, and combatting fanaticism, fundamentalism, and extremism? Extremism based on any religion is the antithesis of love, and it is a blatant perversion of religion. It is the role of all religions today to be prophetic and to work for an alliance of values and allegiance of virtues based on accepting the otherness of the Other. It is imperative that all religions teach their adherents to see the Image of God in those who are different. St. John teaches us, “Those who say, ‘I love God’ but hate their brothers and sisters are liars, for those who do not love the brother or sister they have seen cannot love the brother or sister they have not seen.” (1 John 4:20) This is our call. Religious leaders must be the brokers of robust moderation, not agents of hatred. We must be agents of love—God’s love.

Many politicians and NGOs are talking about freedom of religion in the world. This is a very crucial theme for us today. Freedom to worship and to pray as one desires should be a right for every human being and in every country. Again, there should be an equal standard of freedom of religion for every person. Reports tell us that Christians are persecuted in many countries—but Muslims are persecuted in other places, and Rohingyas, Dalits, and Yazidis in others. Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are spreading and infecting societies in multiple countries. As the Church, we cannot allow the concept of freedom of religion to become a tool to oppress people who do not believe like us. If there is violation of religious freedom in any country, then the international community must address such violations equally. We cannot pick and choose based on our political or cultural agendas.

The concept of Imago Dei pushes the world, and especially the people in my region of the Middle East, to promote the value of equal citizenship. I notice how in many countries this principle is being challenged. What we need is not more division, but equal citizenship with equal rights and equal responsibilities. We need democratic constitutions which embrace diversity. No citizen of any country should receive more rights or privileges than another

based on gender, ethnicity, religion, sect, or political affiliation. If God has created us equally, who are we to discriminate based on Otherness? I always have insisted that even if the followers of one religion are the majority in a certain country, the doctrine of Imago Dei requires us to advocate even more strongly for equal treatment of the minority, no matter how small they are in number. The equality of every human being is the guarantee of justice and peace in every state and in all the world.

When people learn that I come from Jerusalem, I am often asked if I am optimistic or pessimistic about our situation today. It's true that the political situation in the Middle East, especially in Palestine and Israel, is very tense. However, I continue to promote and believe in a two-state solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side based on the 1967 borders, in peace, justice, equity and reconciliation. I continue to promote and insist upon a Jerusalem that is shared between the three religions that call it holy—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—and that it must be a shared capital for both Israel and Palestine. As long as I live, I will continue to teach my children and grandchildren to see the Image of God in Israelis and I pray my Israeli neighbors will see the Image of God in us as Palestinians. Once we accept the Image of God in the Other, then we can mutually recognize the human, political, civil, and religious rights of the Other. Only then can the Holy Land become truly holy, a home for both Israelis and Palestinians.

I may not always be optimistic, nor am I pessimistic, but I remain hopeful. I remain hopeful, for true hope has never come out of Washington D.C., or London, or Berlin, or Rome. Hope comes from the City of Resurrection and New Life. Hope bursts forth from the cross and the empty tomb. True hope comes from my home, Jerusalem, and therefore I will never give up hoping for a future of dignity, respect, liberation, and human rights for Palestine and Israel and indeed for the whole world.

Finally, again I would like to express my deep thanks for this esteemed award. This honor does not signify my retirement, but rather will motivate me to continue in ministry, boldly promoting the Image of God in every human being. I pray God will strengthen me for many more days to advocate for human rights, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and gender justice. I believe this is my evangelical call, which I share with each of you. In a world that is in pieces, I am grateful for the call to be an instrument of peace, a broker of

justice, a minister of reconciliation, and an apostle of love. Please pray for me, for this demanding, Christ-given call.

May God bless you and keep you, all the days of your life.