



Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World

A Christian Perspective

Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
World Council of Churches



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Preamble

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). This call to be peacemakers, offered to all disciples of Jesus Christ, is a privilege, a vocation, and a challenge. Its key location as part of the opening of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount emphasizes its fundamental nature.

The urgency and universality of the call to followers of all religions and spiritual traditions to be peacemakers in our world are unquestionable. There are several contributing factors to violence today: poor governance, corruption, the rise of sectarianism, militant secularism, exclusive nationalism and populist movements, regional domination, and global economic inequalities. A particular aspect of most contemporary conflicts is the apparent and sometimes dramatic association between violence and religion. In several regions of our world, religion is manipulated and misused to justify conflict, aggression, and the deliberate killing of human beings. However, the essence of true religion is to promote peace: authentic religion is thus not a part of the problem but a part of the solution.

Aware of this, and of the moral responsibility of Christians, adherents of other religions, and all people of goodwill to work together to respond to this reality, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and the Office of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) have produced this document, which underscores the vital role that education can play in fostering a culture of peace. Drawing on the resources we hold in common as representatives of diverse Christian traditions, this document aims to make a constructive contribution to peacemaking through education in our multi-religious world.

Education for peace becomes imperative in our current context, which is characterized by the loss of human life, the destruction of

homes, property and infrastructure, the immigration and refugee crises, the impact upon the environment, the traumatization of entire generations, and the use of finite resources to fuel the stockpiling of arms at the expense of education and development. Our task becomes all the more important in the context of the increasing visibility of violence in the mass media, which could incite fear and hatred.

The purpose of this document is to encourage churches and Christian organizations to reflect on the structural roots of what has led to the disruption of peace in the world, and on their own current practices and priorities in relation to education and peacemaking. At the same time, it is hoped that the document may assist a wider conversation on education for peace involving followers of other religions, as well as social and political actors in our multi-religious world, taking into consideration specific historical and cultural contexts.

A Christian basis for education for peace

1. Christ is our peace (cf. Ephesians 2:14). The link between Jesus Christ and peace stands at the heart of Christian faith; and it is reflected in his birth, death on the cross and resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit. The birth of Christ is marked by a divine proclamation of peace (cf. Luke 2:14). The primary word and gift of the Risen Lord to his disciples is peace (cf. Luke 24:36; John 20:21). It is a unique gift—"I do not give as the world gives" (John 14:27)—because it eliminates evil and violence at the very root.

2. As beneficiaries of Christ's gift of peace, his disciples are called to be artisans of peace. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, sends his disciples as peace-givers: "When you enter a house, say: 'Peace to this house'" (Luke 10:5). Even in the face of violence, he walked the path of nonviolence to the end. Further, he prevented his disciples from using violence to carry forward their mission (cf.

Luke 9:54-55), or to protect him at the time of his own arrest (cf. Matthew 26:52). To proclaim peace is to announce Christ who is “our peace.” An important sign of the Spirit which is given to the disciples to mark the life of the Church is “peace” (cf. Galatians 5:22), and such peace needs to rule in their hearts to enable them to fulfill their calling as one body (cf. Colossians 3:15).

3. Peace is intrinsically linked to righteousness and justice, for “righteousness and peace will kiss each other” (Psalm 85:10) and to the right of all people to have the resources for a dignified life. The Hebrew word *shalom*, which underlies the biblical vision of peace, speaks of the harmony and flourishing of all creation. It tells us that peace with God, peace within oneself, peace with others, and peace with creation are all interrelated. Just as an act of violence marred the first creation (cf. Genesis 4:8), the presence of peace and wisdom is a mark of the new creation (cf. Isaiah 11:6ff).

4. The cherishing and valuing of education are intrinsic to Christian tradition and practice, and owe much of their significance to the biblical wisdom tradition. The importance of Jesus’ own authoritative teaching role was noted by his contemporaries (cf. Matthew 7:29; Mark 1:22). His use of parables as a primary teaching tool showed his willingness to take seriously the life contexts and situations of those he was addressing. The word “disciple,” which is a key New Testament term for the followers of Jesus, emphasizes their role as “learners.”

5. Peace, also understood as the restoration of right relationships, brings out the fundamental links between sin, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Such an understanding of peace in the Christian tradition finds its origin and centre in the cross and resurrection of Christ and its ongoing expression in the life of the Church, in particular in baptism and the Eucharist (cf. Ephesians 2:14-18). Recognizing the preeminent role of grace in the ministry of reconciliation is a constant reminder of the need for Christians to be self-critical and honest about our failings as peacemakers at many moments in human history.

6. Peacemaking entails paying attention to both the past and the future. Christian faith affirms the need to honour as well as heal past memories, when necessary, through forgiveness. Christ's experience of suffering, death, and resurrection can challenge us to a different way of living, reconciling us with God and with one another. "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10). Jesus' teachings also underline the importance of restorative justice (cf. Luke 18:1-8). Redressing the grievances of the past needs to go hand in hand with care for the future. Such care requires serious commitment to appropriate educational processes for young people, and a willingness to ensure that the future does not repeat the mistakes of the past and present.

7. Christian faith in the Triune God teaches that the divine persons are really distinct from, yet related to, one another. This can inspire peacebuilding in a multi-religious world. The analogy of the Trinitarian communion provides a pattern for Christian engagement with followers of other religions in a way which can hold together both communion and particularity. In the Holy Trinity, a "family" of three persons, there is unity in nature and distinction in persons. This "divine family" is not closed in on itself, but is open to communion. God desires to incorporate us into this reality of communion. We are one human family, and God calls us to understand ourselves as interrelated and interconnected and stimulates us to live in solidarity and mutual love and to work for reconciliation and peace.

Practical steps toward peacebuilding through education

Education for peace in a multi-religious world is a process that needs to include all ages and all sectors of society. Some of the following steps relate to children, others to young people and still others to adults.

1. The right to appropriate education for the contemporary world

A fundamental principle of peacebuilding is the right of all children, both boys and girls, to receive the kind of education that will equip them adequately to contribute as responsible adults in our contemporary world. This means that education for children must include exploration of natural and social sciences, humanities, as well as practical engagement with modern technology. Religious education is important, but systems that focus only or mainly on religious learning and practice, to the exclusion or detriment of a wider curriculum, are an abuse of the rights of the child. Education in which the curriculum for boys or girls is religiously limited on the grounds of gender is an abuse as well. Conversely, however, there can be contexts in which little space is offered for moral and humane values in education, and in such situations the voice of religious communities becomes imperative.

2. Holistic education

Education needs to assist in developing the whole personality, and thus needs to include physical, intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual dimensions (cf. Luke 2:52). The family has a pre-eminent early role in such holistic education, which is important in preparing a person to become a healthy person who can contribute to a healthy society. However, this needs to be gradually complemented by a broader framework which continues to be holistic but which also prepares the child to engage constructively with wider society, in a manner that respects cultural, religious and political differences. Educational systems need to offer opportunities for encouraging the plurality of society and for enabling effective encounter between different groups and communities. Families in which members come from different religious, ethnic, geographical, or cultural backgrounds have particular challenges to meet and unique opportunities to offer. Educational programmes must be directed to the integral development of the human person and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of religion.

3. Education for human beings, created in the image of God

The theological principle that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1:27) needs to inform educational methodologies and practice. For Christians, this principle forms the basis for affirming the inherent dignity and worth of human beings. Therefore, children and young people, as recipients of education, need to be treated with due respect and dignity. There is no place for violence in education. In this regard, corporal punishment of children cannot be acceptable. Moreover, punishment of children in any form which is detrimental to their health and development contravenes their dignity and rights. The physical, sexual, or emotional abuse of children and young people also fosters a climate in which violence is seen as acceptable or normal. By their behaviour toward the children in their charge, teachers are called to be a credible example of journeying together in peacebuilding and of fostering mutual respect between persons and communities.

4. The model of Jesus as teacher

As a teacher who was called “Rabbi” (cf. Mark 9:5; Matthew 26:49; John 1:38, 3:26), Jesus Christ himself provides a unique model for educators. His attentive care for and loving accompaniment of those with whom he engaged was a notable feature of his ministry. He engaged in dialogue with those he taught, often asking questions rather than simply giving them answers. Attentive to the contexts of his listeners, his characteristic method of teaching in parables invited them to become active participants in their own learning. Such a method of inductive learning is particularly important today, especially in learning contexts in which culture has sometimes inhibited questioning by children and by others receiving education. All need to be equipped with the tools that enable critical thinking and the use of reason. Education for peace should include the use of folk wisdom, parables, riddles, and stories which encourage such processes. Non-book methods and sources of education, such as art, music, sports, can also enrich and enhance humanity. The importance given to “wisdom” within

Christian scripture is a reminder that education involves the interweaving of mind, body, and spirit and is more than merely the acquisition of facts.

5. Life-long learning and learning from all

Teaching necessarily includes listening and learning. An acknowledgment that we all have things to learn is an important safeguard to ensure that education always includes a dimension of openness, which is essential for peacebuilding. Those who are designated as religious leaders need to adopt and foster a culture in which continuing to learn throughout life is affirmed and celebrated. The relationship between teaching, authority, and peacebuilding is complex. Leaders need also to be learners. It is important to remember that Jesus pointed to a child as the one from whom his disciples should learn (cf. Mark 10:15). Education needs to become an inclusive process, affirming especially the roles of women and children. In this respect, the role of the dialogue of life in interreligious encounters, which offers more possibilities of mutual and inclusive learning, needs to be recognized.

6. Peace and power

In biblical revelation, peace is much more than the simple absence of war. It is characterized by the flourishing of all life and right relationships. Christians affirm that there is an intrinsic connection between peace, justice, and reconciliation. Since abuse of power is often at the heart of conflicts, inequality, and discrimination, education for peace should include engagement with the question of power. Peacebuilding in the context of violence and conflicts involves speaking truth to power, through nonviolent means, in solidarity with the voiceless. We are called to speak the truth in love (cf. Ephesians 4:15). Education should help shape notions of leadership and power in terms of humility and service (cf. Mark 10:45), encouraging self-critical attitudes and forgiveness, promoting collaboration and helping to prevent and overcome arrogance. Educational methodologies should encourage collaboration as well as healthy competition.

7. Learning about, protecting, and affirming «the other»

Education needs to encourage a positive vision of human beings who are different from us in ethnicity or religion and who are often referred to as the “other” (cf. Matthew 7:12). Any inadequacy and inaccuracy in the presentation of other religions, or minority communities, in situations where members of a particular religious or ethnic group control educational systems and curricula, needs to be addressed. Such bias against minorities may affect not only the curriculum for religious education but also the curricula for other subjects, such as history and literature. It can foster a perception that members of the “other” community are not fully or equally citizens of a nation, or that they have not contributed to nation building. It is essential that in all countries learning about the faith and experience of such others regularly forms part of education, ideally in a way that enables these others to contribute to the process. It is essential, in order to avoid distortion or invisibility, that textbooks that are used to teach about the faith and history of minority religious communities are written, or at least checked, by representatives of the communities themselves. In addition, members of all religious communities need a solid formation in their own religious tradition, as well as good information about the others, as a background to dialogue. When learning about their own religious tradition, people need to do so in a way that does not foster arrogance.

8. Use of media in peace education

“The truth will set you free” (John 8:32). Communication is part of God’s plan to lead human beings toward recognition of truth and affirmation of freedom and universal fraternity. The negative use of information and communication technologies to promote discord and conflict is well known. In this era of mass communication, it is important therefore to make positive use of social media and other means of communication as instruments of education for peace, taking into account local needs and practicalities. This is vital for countering the spread of “fake news.”

In this regard, it is important to create educational programmes aimed at developing skills to identify and combat the scourge of biased and baseless information, as well as xenophobic narratives.

9. Learning from and with our scriptures

For adults, as well as children and young people, the need for serious engagement with their respective scriptures is an important tool in education for peace. It needs, however, to be acknowledged that there are texts in the scriptures of most world religions, including Christian scriptures, that can be, and often have been, interpreted as tolerating or encouraging discrimination and violence. In such contexts, education for peace should foster critical reflection on difficult texts and help rethink patterns and practices of interpretation, encouraging a holistic and positive approach to scripture. Engagement with scripture should go beyond repeating and memorizing particular texts, and involve grappling with the tools that the religious tradition itself has developed as a means of interpretation. Without Jesus and the gospels, we are not Christians. Therefore, the primacy of the gospels within the Christian canon, and the need to read other parts of scripture in the light of the gospels, is a significant interpretative principle for Christians. Other religions have their own criteria to interpret texts. As Christians we need to share our efforts at biblical interpretation both with other Christians and with followers of other religions. We can also learn from the ways in which others interpret their sacred texts. The recent method of “Scriptural Reasoning” is one setting in which this shared learning happens.

10. Worship, spirituality, and education for peace

Worship and spirituality are important means of education for peace because of their didactic and transformative nature. Public worship offers many opportunities to advance the cause of peacebuilding, and yet recent history has taught us that it can also be a potential driver of conflict. Worship consciously or

unconsciously shapes the attitude and behaviour of the believer. Certain scripture passages, religious texts, reflections, preaching, and prayers can either help build peace or lead to feelings of hostility and tension. Genuine prayer enables us to become more aware of our own failings, our need of grace, and of conversion. It can thus become an antidote to fundamentalism and religiously instigated violence, and can transform hearts of stone into hearts of flesh (cf. Ezekiel 36:26). Conversely, the relationship between peacebuilding and the reconciling potential of the Eucharist needs to be explored. The cleansing, purifying, and reshaping of memories, and redirecting them into the larger frame of God's design for humanity is at the core of our communion with Christ in worship. The sharing of peace, which is an integral part of the eucharistic liturgy, offers a visible and powerful symbol of peace and reconciliation. At the end of the liturgy, we are sent out to share with others the peace we have experienced through our worship. Spirituality is "the art of transfiguration." It is a process that begins with personal transformation and then extends to reconciling all of humanity, and the healing of the earth. Through our dialogue with God we begin to express our hope for "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). In this way, we lay the foundations for a peaceful world.

11. Prevention and reconciliation

If education for peace is to be effective, it needs to be aimed at preventing violence and fostering reconciliation. Programmes that include truth-telling and the healing of memories have proved to be especially effective in this regard. Education for peace which focuses on healing can enable victims of violence to overcome physical, psychological, and emotional trauma and then in turn become reconcilers themselves. The crucified and risen Christ who bears the marks of the cross yet holds the promise of a New Creation, calls his followers to become, after his example, ambassadors of reconciliation (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

12. Integrating development and ecological perspectives

Peace is related to sustainable development and the integrity of creation. The present context of inequality and “globalization of indifference” is a grave threat to peace. Hence, education for peace needs to integrate developmental and ecological perspectives that aim at eradicating poverty and injustice, protecting the environment, ensuring the development of every person and of the whole person, and fostering harmony and stability of the whole creation. Today’s ecological crisis is an ego crisis, which is deeply detrimental to peace and the well-being of all. The threat that climate change poses to the earth, “our common home,” summons us to include ecological commitment as an integral aspect of education for peace. There is a need to introduce educational programmes which promote a new and interconnected way of thinking about our relationships with the divine, the human, and nature. Such education can take place in a variety of settings: families, schools, religious communities, work places, and the media.

Recommendations

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Office for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation of the World Council of Churches offer this document for prayerful reflection to the churches, Christian educational institutions, and the national and regional confessional and ecumenical bodies, recommending them to:

Study the document and reflect on what could be effective and contextually relevant methods of education for peace, that can be implemented ecumenically or, where possible, inter-religiously, taking into account ethnic, religious, cultural, and intergenerational factors.

Develop educational resources and curricula that focus not only on the promotion of knowledge, attitudes, and values essential for peacemaking but also on developing skills along with good will to translate them into concrete action and behavioural practice. Enhancing the capacity for behavioural change is essential to education for peace. It should involve elements of prevention and the peaceful resolution of conflict.

Identify potential partners with whom creative, interactive, learner-centred educational tools can be developed for various levels: family, religious communities, educational institutions, and the wider society. Such tools should pay attention to both traditional means of peacebuilding as well as modern means, such as the internet and social media, to counter violence and cultivate peace.

Examine and challenge the past and present structural factors that have contributed to violence either in specific societies, or between different peoples, and develop an integrated approach to education for peace, taking into consideration how issues relating to religion, economics, politics, gender, culture, and ecology sow seeds of violence and conflict.

Encourage Christian institutions of learning and church agencies, particularly those offering catechetical programmes for children and young people, to integrate elements of education for peace in spiritual and human formation.

Audit how elements of religious life, including scriptural engagement, public worship, prayer and liturgy, can contribute to fostering human solidarity for a more just and peaceful society.

Request Christians from constituencies across the world to study prayerfully the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct” to overcome disputes related to conflicting understandings of mission, conversion, and proselytism. It is important to recognize that Christian disunity scandalizes the world, hinders common witness, and damages the cause of peacebuilding.

Recollect the life stories of extraordinary persons who have wrestled ecumenically and interreligiously with questions of justice and peace and ecological well-being. It is important to learn how such people have been able to share a common ethical vision on peace and justice while deeply rooted in their respective Christian and religious identities.

Call on governments to shape education in ways that promote and prioritize peace as a means toward strengthening fundamental human rights and safeguarding the dignity of all, dispelling injustice and discrimination, respecting legitimate differences, and enabling greater openness to the other.

Pray together for the cause of peace. Prayer awakens our conscience, expels inner fears, heals wounds, disarms the violent, tears down walls of enmity, facilitates forgiving and pardoning, brings about reconciliation, opens hearts to the cries of suffering, urges us to eradicate social sins, enables us to see everyone as our brother or sister, and transforms us to be peacemakers.

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