The Religious and Spiritual Dimension of Peace

■ Walter Cardinal Kasper

The understanding of peace in world religions

In today's usage, peace is the state in which existing conflicts between human beings, social groups or countries are conducted without violence according to legally regulated norms. The concept defines a state in the relationship between peoples, countries and social groups which excludes the use of force, particularly war, for the implementation of policy. The word therefore plays a role not only in relations between countries but also between groups within a country: in internal political conflicts (breach of the peace), in labour relations (industrial peace), in public behaviour (disturbing the peace), within households (domestic peace) and so on. In its final sense we also speak of peace in the relationships of religions and churches.

The religions themselves of course have a more comprehensive understanding of peace. This includes rather than excludes the political and social understanding of peace, but means far more than the absence or the prevention of war and conflict. Most religions do in fact also possess militant texts, like the Old Testament imprecatory psalms for example, but these are overcome step-by-step within the Bible itself in a process of critical transformation. On the whole, peace has an essential universal significance within a cosmic order. Peace is to a certain extent the ideal description of an intact and salutary state of reality, and refers to both the cosmos and humanity in the whole of the cosmos. If this peace is disturbed, the disturbed harmony must be reconciled and restored through sacrifice and atonement.

It is only possible to make a few fleeting references in this present context. For Asian thinking the idea of harmony is fundamental. Hinduism acknowledges the concept of *ahimsa* as foundational. In its basic meaning it signifies the rejection of the use of force and of whatever is harmful. In the more recent phases of Hinduism this concept gained currency as a rule of conduct. Mahatma Gandhi above all renewed the ancient *ahimsa* ideal in the sense of non-violence, and applied it to all spheres of life including the political. For Buddhism all life is suffering. Empathy (*karuna*) means sympathetic compassion for the suffering and fate of all people and all living creatures. The attitude of *karuna* encounters all beings and all phenomena of this world with love and helpfulness.

In ancient Chinese Taoist thought all reality is determined by constantly changing relationships and by the harmonious complementarity of the two primal principles of "Ying" (the receptive, feminine, the earth) and "Yang" (the creative, masculine, heaven). Thus in world religions the word peace acquires the meaning of inner peace in the sense of inner calm, the peace of the soul, "peace of mind". The internal attitude of peaceableness is seen as the prerequisite for creating external peace in the world.

In this context I can only deal with the biblical meaning of peace in the Old and the New Testament in greater detail. The Hebrew word *shalom* (like the Arabic word *salaam* derived from the same word stem) means far more than the English word peace. It is still today used among Jews as a greeting in which the person who is greeted is granted peace in a performative act. It is therefore a kind of benediction. It has the meaning of comprehensive happiness and wholeness, a state of individual and communal contentment. *Shalom* is therefore not only understood as internal, but is essentially grounded in righteousness (Ps 85,9ff). "Opus iustitiae pax" (Is 32,17; cf. James 3,18). This state of wholeness can only be granted by God. We ask him for peace and thank him for peace (Ps 122,6ff); God himself is in fact identified with peace (Judges 6,24: "The Lord is Peace"). The prophets foretell an eschatologically understood comprehensive state of salvation (Is 2,2ff). The Messiah is awaited as the Prince of Peace (Is 9,6).

The New Testament expands on the Old Testament message of peace. The birth of Jesus is proclaimed as peace on earth. (Luke 2,14). The kingdom of God announced by Jesus is understood as the kingdom of peace and righteousness (Rom 14,17). This high esteem is expressed already in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, where the peacemakers are praised as blessed (Matt 5,9). Jesus intensifies this message through the command to love one's enemies (Matt 5,44; cf. Rom 12,14.20). The disciples are to speak peace in the name of Jesus (Luke 10,5f). The Resurrected One greets the disciples: "Peace be with you!" (Luke 24,26; John 20,19.21.26). and leaves them his peace (John 14,27). Paul opens his letters with the greeting of peace (Rom 1,7; 1 Cor 1,3 etc). God is a God of peace (Rom 15,13; 16,20; 1 Cor 14,33 etc). Jesus Christ is our peace; on the cross he established peace and reconciliation, and in his body he reconciled those who were divided with God (Eph 2,14ff). Peace is a fruit of the spirit (Gal 5,22). It is to rule in our hearts (Col 3,15). Through Christ God has created a state of peace that now obligates us and also enables us to live in peace with all mankind (Rom 12,18; 2 Cor 13,11: Heb 12,14 etc).

This message of peace lives on in the liturgy, for example in "passing the peace", "Pax vobis", the reciprocal address and exchange of *Pax*, and in the

chant "Agnus Dei", "Dona nobis pacem". The Christmas gospel and the Christmas liturgy are characterised above all by the message of peace (*pax homibus*).

So according to the biblical message, peace is a universal good of salvation which in view of the chaos and unrest of the world can only be granted by God, but which demands our service in all spheres of life. Engagement for peace is the form taken by Christian responsibility towards the world. The advent of universal, perfect and lasting peace of course remains something to be hoped for, which God alone can bring to fulfilment eschatologically. That distinguishes the Christian message of peace from purely interior utopias of peace.

The historical legacy of Christianity

The statements made about both Asian religions and about Christianity are more or less descriptions of the ideal, of what should be. One can always find sufficient counter-arguments to them in both Christianity and the other religions when one looks at the lived historical reality. The monotheistic religions, and here again Christianity in particular, are at present often accused of being conflict-laden or even aggressive. That the Christian churches have in the course of history repeatedly been the cause and have even initiated conflicts, including military conflicts and outbreaks of violence – for example in the Crusades or the persecution of heretics and religious wars – no sensible person would wish to deny. The same is true of other religions. But one can reduce Christianity and church history to such phenomena only if one adopts a one-sided and selective ideological perspective.

In the following discussion I cannot enter into the peace-making powers of Christianity (such as in the "Peace [or Truce] of God" [*Treuga Dei*] of the early Middle Ages) or of the great saintly figures who proved to be peace-makers (Francis of Assisi, Albertus Magnus, Bruno von Querfurt, Nikolaus von der Flüe etc). Instead I wish to point to the most significant and historic theology of peace which Augustine has bequeathed to us as cultural heritage for humanity in his monumental work *De civitate Dei*.

Augustine is writing in the face of the collapse of the Roman Empire. That caused a great shock at the time, as the empire had functioned as the guarantor of peace. St Paul had made use of the *Pax Romana* for the propagation of the gospel, and referred with pride to being a Roman citizen (Acts 16,37; 22,25). But now this empire was collapsing under the onslaught of the barbarians. Many were asking: why? Many blamed the Christians because they had destroyed the heathen religion. In this very accusation it is clear that even according to heathen universal human thinking, no peace and no lasting order was possible without religion.

Augustine wishes to invalidate this grave charge. Peace became for him a key theme of his monumental work. For our context the 19th book (Chap. 11-17.21.24) is of critical importance. It is hardly possible to adequately summarise the wealth of Augustine's ideas. Augustine firstly demonstrates that peace is what everyone wants. Even wars are fought in order to arrive at peace; peace is the desired goal of war. Even a person who rebels against the existing order of peace must at least work together in peace with his brothers-in-arms; he too wants peace, but a different peace.

But peace can only prevail in the ordered relationship of all parts: in our personal life, in the family as well as in the state. Peace is – that is Augustine's famous definition – tranquillity in order (*tranquillitas ordinis*). But since the gods of the heathen were not real gods but demons, and because the God of the Christians alone is the true God, real and lasting peace can only be found in him. Certainly, according to Augustine there is also earthly peace, and he admonishes that it should be maintained. It is also of value for the people of God. Earthly peace in ordered co-existence and prosperity and the peace of the city of God can exist together in harmony.

But because we with our sinful deeds always lag behind God, this earthly peace will always be imperfect: it is, as Augustine says pointedly, solace in misery rather than enjoyment in felicity. In this world the church treads the pilgrim road between the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God. Lasting peace, which is the highest good of humanity, can only be the eternal peace in which we are one with God and in God with our neighbour. In the last chapter of his work (Book 22, 30) we find an inimitable description of this peace "where no-one shall suffer opposition either from himself or any other"; "There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain to that kingdom of which there is no end?"

It would lead too far from our topic to explain in detail how Thomas Aquinas takes up Augustine's ideas (*S. Th.* II/II q. 29). For Aquinas too, peace consists in harmony, *concordia*, but a harmony which presupposes inner contentment and, to that extent with specific reference to Augustine, peace in order. With that, inner peace for Aquinas acquires a constructive role, which then became important for mystical movements derived from Aquinas: Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Seuse and others. One important difference from Augustine must of course be mentioned. In contrast to Augustine, Aquinas emphasises the relative intrinsic value of earthly realities and so also of earthly peace. While Augustine says the City of God makes use of the earthly state, for Aquinas this has its own value, although relative, because for him earthly peace remains related to peace with God and in God.

Augustine has often been held responsible for the use of force. Certainly, when all the dialogue and arguments against the Donatists were unavailing and Donatist bands moved through the land killing and burning, he finally called in the imperial police with the words "*Cogite entrare*!". I think that today too we would act in just the same way. With the best will in the world, Augustine himself could not predict in the situation of the collapse of the old Roman Empire the medieval situation in which 500 years later in a new Holy Roman Empire secular and religious unity would be integrally interwoven with one another, so that any offence against the peace of the church was at the same time an offence against the peace of the secular order.

This concept was also normative for the Reformers. For Martin Luther too temporal peace was the highest good on earth, comprising all other temporal goods within itself (WA 30/II, 538). Therefore Christians too should participate in all the corresponding applications of force, and evildoers should be punished with the sword (CA XVI). In this, he dissociated himself from the Anabaptists, who as a consequence were cruelly persecuted by both the Lutheran and Catholic sides, while the Baptists, like the Mennonites, Quakers, Moravians and other pacifist Christian communities still call themselves peace churches today. Basically these free churches have in many respects prefigured the situation in which the "established" mainline churches find themselves today.

The new situation developed when, in the process of secularisation at the beginning of the 19th century, the medieval and early modern imperial church declined and the church expanded to other continents for which the medieval pre-history, with its unity of ecclesial and secular order, had never existed. That set new parameters for the question of peace and order. The Enlightenment sought a new approach with the aid of the rationalist understanding of natural law and human rights. Today in a pluralist world – in both the religious and the philosophical sense – the question arises anew, since there is no longer any consensus on a metaphysically anchored or rational universally binding order, much less on whether or to what extent the earthly order of peace has a religious correlation. That does not mean that this order and this correlation do not exist, but that in our pluralist world there is no agreement on its ultimate foundation and therefore of its practical application.

That places us today in a new situation in relation to Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and even Martin Luther, in which we must re-think the legacy of our understanding of peace and actively engage in debate in its behalf in order to make it fruitful once more. In the meantime thinkers like Jürgen Habermas, who do not come from the Christian or any religious tradition,

point out that without the impulses of religion, especially Christianity, humanity is hardly in a position to cope with the great challenges with which it is confronted. On the other hand, reference to the eschatological dimension of peace has attained a function as ideology critique in respect to interior peace utopias which wish to construct world peace by force according to their own understanding.

One last sign that the peace-making tradition of Christianity is still alive can be seen in the Christmas Truce during the First World War on 24 December 1914 and the following days, when a more-or-less spontaneous ceasefire came about, leading in part even to the fraternisation of the hostile troops. Pope Benedict XV had issued the call for that truce. Similar scenes are said to have taken place to some extent during the Second World War battle of Stalingrad. So it seems that even in this hell of Stalingrad a last remnant of European-Christian culture seems to have persisted.

Current significance for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue

In this context it cannot be our task to present and analyse the messages of peace which the Popes of the last and of this century, since Benedict XV, have sent forth into the new situation in the history of the world and the spirit. Pius XII (Condemnation of total war and atomic war), John XXIII (*Pacem in terris*, against the arms race), Paul VI (Development as a new name for peace), John Paul II (Peace through acknowledgement of the dignity of the human person and human rights), Benedict XVI (Peace in truth and as the fruit of love). In the Ecclesial Constitution *Lumen gentium* the Second Vatican Council defined the church as a quasi-sacrament of unity with God and between human beings (LG 1,9 etc) and in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* proposed a detailed ethics of peace (GS 77-90).

Of fundamental significance is the declaration of the Second Vatican Council on freedom of religion *Dignitatis humanae* and the declaration *Nostra aetate* on relations with non-Christian religions. In the light of Jesus Christ which shines in each human being (John 1,9), inter-religious dialogue is to gather the seeds of truth (*logoi spermatikoi*) in other religions and in the cultures of humanity (NAe 2; AG 9; 11), to purify them and to bring them to full maturity. In the light of Jesus Christ, who is the key, the core and the goal of the whole of human history (GS 10,45), inter-religious dialogue is to contribute to the elimination of conflict, to better understanding and to collaboration between religions in the service of world peace, as an anticipation of the eschatological fulfilment and a preliminary foretaste of it. It is the only possible alternative to the widely feared clash of cultures, ethnicities and religions.

The idea of peace between religions is found already in Nicholas of Cusa's *De pace fidei*, and in the spirit of Christian humanism of Erasmus of Rotterdam's *Querela pacis*. On the basis of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II took up the idea of religious peace by initiating and proclaiming the inter-religious World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi (1986; 1993; 2002), which was continued by Pope Benedict XVI (2011). This initiative has been taken up both by official dialogues and individual groups and movements (such as Sant'Egidio and Focolare), as well as by charitable organisations, by church service organisations for peace and development and mission societies, and also Christian peace movements, which have become vocal in all churches particularly since the Second World War.

At this time reference is often made to the significance of religious peace for world peace. The "Golden Rule" can serve as an appropriate starting point. In its negative formulation it states, "That one should not do unto others what one would not wish for oneself". In its positive formulation it says that one should do unto others what you would have them do unto you. This rule can be found in one form or another in all religions. It is also found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7,12; Luke 6,31) (cf. Tobit 4,14; Sirach 31,15; later Did. 1,2 f). According to Augustine this rule has been inscribed by God into the hearts of humankind (*De ordine* II,25; *Confessiones*, I,18,29). It is a tradition of humankind and as such forms part of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

This demonstrates that none of the great religions of humankind, if they remain true to themselves, can glorify violence or advocate ruthless self-assertion. According to the fundamental principles of all religions, any link between religion and violence represents a misunderstanding, a misuse and a distortion of true religion. So Christian ethics can be linked to a universal religious tradition, it is not a hermetically sealed separate morality but can be presented in a universally comprehensible manner and made communicable. That means that it is open to inter-religious dialogue, capable of connecting and communicating within a universally comprehensible ethics of humankind.

Nevertheless, one must not allow it to degenerate into a commonplace generic morality which encounters all the others at the lowest common denominator. It has already often been pointed out – for example by Immanuel Kant – that the Golden Rule is intrinsically ambiguous. George Bernard Shaw remarked sarcastically and ironically, "Do not do unto others as you expect they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same". The Golden Rule therefore needs to be refined and to be interpreted within the total context of the relevant religion. Thomas Aquinas speaks in this sense of a *determinatio* (*S. Th.* I/II q. 100 a. 11). In regard to Christianity,

this rule must be understood and applied – as Jesus does in the Sermon on the Mount – within the context of the command to be merciful and to love one another, even one's enemies. Thus it can according to the Church Fathers be acknowledged as the sum and as the stated goal of Christian behaviour (Did. 1,2 f; Justin, Dial. 93,2; Clemens of Alexandria Paed. II,2).

Understood and lived in the Christian sense, the Golden Rule is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. He knows and understands the sighs and the birth pangs of creation, and he is at the same time the first fruits of the hoped-for coming kingdom of freedom of the children of God (Rom 8, 21–30). In this both painful and hopeful process of human history, the Golden Rule can, through empathy and sympathy, sensitivity and compassion within interreligious and intercultural dialogue, be a helpful bridge and serve as the Golden Rule for world peace.