

Message from the 43rd Congress of Theology: War and Peace: Is there a way out in sight?

From 6 to 8 September 2024 we held the 43rd Congress of Theology on WAR AND PEACE: IS THERE A WAY OUT IN SIGHT? Participants from different countries and continents and specialists in different disciplines have helped us to better understand the international conflict scenario.

1. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace, there are 56 active conflicts with 92 countries involved, the highest number since World War II. Record military spending has been reached, amounting to 2913 billion dollars, 190 times the amount used to fight hunger. The conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza are the main drivers of the decline in peace.
2. Ukraine is living in a situation of war following Russia's invasion, which denies it its independence and sovereignty in violation of international law. The United States and the European Union are rearming Ukraine, provoking a long-lasting conflict with numerous victims on both sides, without any peace proposal.
3. Palestine lives under the Israeli colonial system, one of the foundations of which is religious Zionism. Since 7 October 2023, when Hamas militants killed 1150 people and kidnapped 240 others, which constitutes a war crime, the Israeli army has been carrying out a genocide with 41,000 people killed, mostly children and women, 92,000 wounded, and an ecocide with 75 percent of the infrastructure destroyed. All this with the political and military support of the United States and the European Union, and in the face of the passivity of the international community. Israel violates international humanitarian law with impunity and is not subject to sanctions.
4. War conflicts are causing destruction, deaths, social fragmentation, poverty, hunger, suffering, destruction of nature, massive displacement in precarious conditions, feminicide and infanticide. The people never win the wars and always provide the dead.
5. We are witnessing an alarming growth of warmongering narratives that present war as the inevitable option. More and more sectors ridicule the defence of peace, human rights and international law. Impunity is growing, the banality of evil is normalised and victims are reduced to mere numbers.
6. In the face of hegemonic, patriarchal, racist and anthropocentric discourses, we have taken an ecofeminist look at war and peace, which has revealed to us the existence of other places and forms of war such as the sexual division of labour and gender violence, which attack the hearts, minds and suffering bodies of women and girls, and LGBTBIQ people, as well as ecocide on a planetary level. A decolonial gaze has shown us the survival of colonialism in global conflicts. We denounce the gender apartheid to which oppressed, silenced, invisible and sadly forgotten Afghan women are subjected.
7. There are also scenarios of peaceful resistance to colonial and patriarchal logics and genocide, as well as sisterly affections and networks of solidarity and care that fight for peace and are committed to life.
8. Biblical texts are illuminating in the work for peace, which is inseparable from justice, as Psalm 85 beautifully states: "Justice and love have met together. Justice and peace kiss each other. Truth springs from the earth. Justice looks down from heaven". The prophets of Israel/Palestine consider that peace is the fruit of justice. There is, therefore, no peace without justice, and no justice without peace. Jesus of Nazareth declares peacemakers to be blessed. The Hebrew term that best expresses the ideal of peace is Shalom, which is not to be understood simply as the absence of war, but as integral well-being: being in harmony with nature, with other human beings and with God.
9. In the face of the panorama described above, we cannot remain silent, nor can we be neutral, as we would become accomplices. Nor can we fall into defeatist and fatalistic attitudes, which would lead us to fold our arms in the face of wars and injustice. It is necessary to put ourselves on the right side of history, which are the suffering individuals, collectives and peoples, and to seek alternatives to prevent war from becoming eternal.

10. The priority in the struggle for peace is the elimination of inequality gaps based on gender, sexual identity, ethnicity, class, culture and religion. It is also necessary to imagine non-dystopian futures and to speak differently from the hegemonic narrative. The ideal of peace requires social and personal justice and care for the integrity of the earth, its rights and its biocapacity.

We conclude this message with Kapuscinski's ethical proposal: "We must always be with the people who suffer" and the motto of this Congress: "If you want peace, support the fabric of life".

8 September 2024