

TO THE FAITHFUL, PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

## **RESOLUTION FOR PEACE**

— On the 50th. Anniversary of the End of the War—

Fifty years now since the close of World War II it is only natural that our minds travel back over the past and more especially to the events that led to this tragedy. And surely at this time our first thoughts are for the dead. It is our duty, humbly and sadly to lament the countless lives sacrificed in that war and the many other wars this country has engaged in. Enlightened then by the light of Christ, we, the Catholic bishops of Japan, together with all the faithful, take this opportunity to trace once more the way our nation has come, sharpen our awareness of the sin that is war, and resolve anew to spare no effort in realizing peace for the future.

### **I. DIGNITY OF LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF THE BIBLE**

#### **1. War means the destruction of God's creation and gifts.**

The Bible says: "God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good" (Gen. 1:3). The world that God has created is a wonderful world filled with order and harmony. Our life is the irreplaceable gift of God. War destroys that world and that life.

#### **2. War is a denial of the worth of human life**

God created man in his own image. That is the real measure of man's worth. War, in destroying life, denies its worth.

#### **3. War brings sorrow to the family**

Family life, blessed by God, provides rest, support, joy, hope and purpose for every human being all along the rigorous journey of life. War separates wives from their husbands, children from their parents. It tears families apart and brings them nothing but sorrow.

#### **4. War tramples on the love shown us on the Cross**

God sent His only Son into this world to save sinful man. Christ's death on the Cross is proof of the extent of God's love for us. War, that scorns and tramples on human life, tramples also on God's love.

#### **5. War runs counter to the commandment of love**

Jesus left his disciples a commandment of love. "Love one another as I have loved you". To practice this commandment is to establish true peace. When love is lacking in our treatment of one another, the relationship becomes one of force: the strong dominate the weak and this paves the way for conflict and war.

#### **6. People who willingly take part in war close the way to eternal life**

Man was born for eternal life. We open the way to eternal life by practicing the commandment of love. "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Whoever does not love, remains in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer". (I John 3:14) Agitators and instigators of war, and those who willingly take part in it, close to themselves the way to eternal life.

## **II. LOOKING BACK ON THE PAST TO ENSURE THERE IS A FUTURE**

Now is the time to reflect on the past and ascertain where we went wrong. It means admitting our mistakes and asking forgiveness; it means accepting responsibility for compensation. Furthermore we must be quick to spot omens and forebodings of war in society, and be prompt to act. We must marshal the courage to say "NO", and oppose every such movement.

### **1. Responsibility as Japanese**

When the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) held its plenary session in Tokyo in 1986, Archbishop (now Cardinal) Shirayanagi Seiichi, President of the Japanese Bishops' Conference, made an honest confession of war responsibility: "As Japanese and also as members of the church in Japan, we, the Japanese bishops, ask the forgiveness of God and of our brothers in Asia and the Pacific area for the tragedy brought upon them by Japan during World War II. During that war we were responsible for the deaths of more than

twenty million people in Asia and the Pacific region. It saddens us to know that the wounds inflicted by us are still to be seen in the lives and culture of the people”.

It is a fact that during that war, fifty years ago, the Japanese army trampled on the lives of people in the Korean peninsula, China, the Philippines and other areas. They not only ignored and violated the people’s human dignity, but killed countless unarmed civilians, including women and children.

At present living close to all of us there are many Koreans, both from the North and the South, who were forced to come here. There are also the former army “comfort women”. These people who still cry out with anger and grief, are living witnesses to the fact that Japan was the aggressor in World War II.

It is our duty to recognize these facts frankly and apologize. We must bear the responsibility to compensate for the war wounds which still affect the various Asian peoples. Further, we wish to emphasize here again that this responsibility must be taken over by the new generation who did not take part in the war fifty years ago.

We must remember also the unhappiness and sadness the war brought to us Japanese. We cannot count the number of our fellow countrymen who lost their lives on the battle field. Just before the end of the war, when the Allied forces landed in Okinawa, the island was reduced to a burnt-out ruin. On the mainland, houses were burnt to ashes by repeated air raids;homeless thousands wandered the roadside. Then, when the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, hundreds of thousands of lives were snuffed out in an instant. A great number of people are still suffering from the effects of those bombs.

We must not forget that in that war our fellow countrymen experienced an agony that cannot well be described. If we are not to waste their sacrifice, let us urge people never to go to war again. We especially, who have experienced the destructive power of nuclear weapons, are valuable witnesses who bear a responsibility to go on appealing for the total abolition of nuclear weapons.

## **2. RESPONSIBILITY AS CHURCH COMMUNITY**

In the Archbishop’s confession quoted above, there is a phrase “as members of the Church in Japan”. It is a signal to us to look back on what the attitude of the church community should have been during the war.

Before and during the war, the Catholic Church in Japan was looked upon coldly as a foreign religion. It was oppressed and persecuted. It was pressed by the military to cooperate with the war effort. We could not carry out church activities freely. It is a fact that the end of the war signalled the liberation of the Church in Japan. Let us take this opportunity to pay our respects to the missionaries and the many people who went through extraordinary hardships to support the Church in Japan during all that time.

On the other hand, we have to confess that, while Japan, at that time riding the crest of nationalism, was solidly united in marching its armies over the Asian continent and the Pacific region, the Catholic Church of Japan failed to realize how inhuman and out of all harmony with the gospel were the elements involved. It lacked an awareness of the prophetic role it should have fulfilled to protect human life and carry out the will of God.

Let us now frankly admit these facts. Let us ask forgiveness of God and of the people who had to bear such suffering during the war. Let us resolve to make amends for our sins and pray that we can keep that resolve. As a sign of our good faith, let us all, each according to our station and ability, try to use some of the means we shall outline below.

### **III IMPLEMENTING PEACE**

Here then are some concrete ways for us as Christians to become reliable "Workers for Peace".

#### **1. With Christ, in Christ, by Christ**

The peace we aim at is based on the reconciliation between God and mankind which was realized by the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. Christ must be the center of our march toward peace as Christians. This will only be possible by uniting with Christ and having Christ's support and guidance.

At the Last Supper, Christ established the Eucharist with the ardent desire "that all may be one". Through this sacrament of Thanksgiving, he is enlightening us in our work of bringing peace to the world, strengthening us to fulfill the task. We can do it if we are sincere in trying to renew our faith and deepen our relationship with Christ.

Further, the Church of Japan, while sparing no effort to push ahead with

the work of evangelization at home, must try to make a contribution to world peace by renewing her awareness of the gospel of Christ who is “our peace”, by living up to it and spreading it. It is Christ who lights the torch of love in hearts that hate and are divided from each other by sin. Christ disarms our hearts, heals their wounds and builds a foundation within them for the unity of mankind and a permanent peace.

## **2. Construct a World of Love, Truth, Justice and Liberty.**

Fifty years since World War II ended, the world we see around us, both at home and abroad, is far from peace. Within our own nation, broken homes and the problem of bullying among children are proof that relationships between people are not always built on love and understanding. Abroad, there still remain the serious aftereffects of colonialism and the socialist regimes, while the North-South problem caused by unfair distribution of wealth, is becoming more and more acute; conflicts brought about by nationalism break out in many places; there is no sign of reducing international tensions caused by economic friction and drug traffic. And it all points to the one conclusion, that peace is hard to come by. And yet, while admitting that, we must not relax in our efforts to achieve it. On this the 50th. anniversary of the end of the war, let us, as men and women of faith accept the challenge.

But let there be no mistake — world peace must be built on the harmony of love, truth, justice and liberty. Even in our own time, the Church, in a variety of Social Documents (Note 1), has been urging not only Catholics but all people of good will to work for a peace based on the harmony of love, truth, justice and liberty in the light of the gospel. While taking that teaching to heart and practicing it ourselves, we must tell others of it, spread it around and work hand in hand with all people of good will in consolidating peace.

## **3 Toward a True Recognition of the War that Ended 50 Years ago and a Re-assessment of the Trends that Led to it.**

As we prepare to enter the 21st. century. Pope John Paul II is calling out to us to reflect on the past history of the Church. This is what he says.

“If we are aware of what has happened in the Church during these thousand years, (Note 2) it is clear that we must ponder well all that has occurred in order to pass this turning point in history. The Church cannot cross the threshold

of the coming millennium without advising her children to purify themselves and repent of the mistakes of the past—our unfaithfulness, our lack of consistency, our slowness to act, and all the rest. To admit past weakness is a sincere and courageous act that strengthens our faith. It alerts us to the temptations and challenges of the present and prepares us to deal with them”. (John Paul II, *The Arrival of the 3rd. Millennium. Preparing for the Holy Year 2000*)

Now, at this turning point of history, the 50th. anniversary of the ending of the war, let us respond to this call from the Pope. As human beings and people of faith, sincerity demands that we take a hard look at what led to the war 50 years ago and heighten our perception of the truth. While praying for the grace of purification based on repentance let us accept the challenge to work for world peace and renew our dedication to it.

#### **4 For the Realization of a World at Peace**

We can promote peace by contacting, helping and understanding each other. Each one of us, in his or her own position and in his/her own possible area of influence, should promote international exchanges and contribute to the building of a more peaceful world. In reference to that, here are some ideas for practical activity.

- a. Let us strive, with the warmest sympathy and consideration, to restore human rights to the people who were trodden upon and deprived of those rights during the war.
- b. Let us weave a great network of harmony among people, that will transcend racial and national boundaries.
- c. Let us collaborate in efforts to assist the people of Asia and the Pacific regions in their struggle for self-reliance and co-existence.
- d. Let us show our respect for God-given life by encouraging the movements that strive to protect it, from the moment of conception to the hour of death. Let us give our backing to the social and ecological trends that protect and nurture life.
- e. Let us act to enforce the prohibition of arms exports, the abolition of nuclear weapons and the reduction of military expenditure.
- f. Let us respect the human rights of women, the handicapped, minority groups at home and abroad. Let us act to abolish every kind of discrimination against special communities in our society, the so-called buraku-min, resident Koreans both North and South, and migrant workers from various countries.

g. Let us educate our youth for peace, in our families, in our churches and in our schools.

## IN CONCLUSION

Fifty years have gone by since the end of World War II. During that period, thanks to the efforts of her own people and of others, Japan has been able to build an economically prosperous society. Unfortunately, however, on the other side of that prosperity we find lurking elements that are out of all harmony with the gospel of Christ, factors that threaten the lives of people and truly endanger real peace. As Catholics we bear the heavy responsibility of discerning those elements and discharging our prophetic role by pointing them out. At this turning point, the 50th. anniversary of the ending of the war, we bishops, accepting the lessons of the past, must try to draw from them light to build a peaceful future. It is our earnest prayer that all the faithful, of one heart and mind with us will renew their faith from its very foundations. Let us keep a sharp eye on this complicated society of ours and in solidarity with all people of good will, let us as Catholics fulfill our responsibility to bring about world peace.

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Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan

Note 1: Pope John 23, *Pacem in Terris*, 1963

Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965

Pastoral of the Japanese Bishops' Conference, *Hopes for Peace*, 1984

Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987

Note 2: Here the Pope is referring to history after the 11th. century