

ARTICLE

# Proclaiming and Embodying Peace in Pacifist Japan: a Reformed Church Perspective<sup>1</sup>

Stéphan van der Watt

## Abstract

This article assesses a significant Peace Declaration which was recently released by the Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ). Through this declaration the RCJ affirms her calling and responsibility – as a missional church which is part of a 1% Christian population – to proclaim and embody peace in Japan and beyond. The article uses an integrative literature review and in-depth theological reflection as its main research techniques. The systematic review addresses the question: What is the significance and meaning of the RCJ Peace Declaration within the wider field of Peace Studies and in connection with the notion of pacifism in Japan and globally? It is argued that theological understandings of peacebuilding can indeed constructively promote peace and justice in worldwide conflicts. The article further explains how a vast corpus of knowledge and practice includes the body of Christ in Japan which, through the RCJ Peace Declaration, represents a pro-active vision of God's *shalom*. Public witness is not an add-on to the church's mission. Instead, the Church realizes its missional calling when it publicly engages in testifying to true Christian peace by rejecting imperial claims.

**Keywords:** Peace, Pacifism, Japan, Reformed Church, East Asia, *Shalom*

Following Japan's loss in World War II, the nation renounced war in its Constitution (Preamble and Article 9). The foundation of post-war Japan has been laid by this pacifist stance. Now, however, approaching eight decades after the war, the memories of the conflict are fading, and authoritarian tendencies in Japan are intensifying. These tendencies include a resurgence of Shintō nationalism since the late Meiji Era (also

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known as State Shintō) and efforts to rewrite the country's laws and constitution to officially make it a fully war-capable nation once more (Shimazono and Murphy 2009).

Globally, the frightening destruction caused by an increasing number of authoritarian regimes continues unabated. Current conflicts make it clear that those who intentionally make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable. The destructive battles worldwide serve as a warning against oversimplifying complex conflicts between good and evil, as well as against readily taking sides and dividing the world into "oppressor and oppressed" or "colonizer and colonized". Rigid viewpoints like these lead to odd conclusions, like the idea that innocent civilians killed were somehow deserving of it. What we can however safely conclude is that the wounded world we live in is in desperate need of peace.

Reformed theology has often underlined that all governments should be respected because the state is God-given and can employ power to combat evil. But many governments become corrupted and do not respect religious freedom. As "watch-keeper" over the state, the church is called to remind state leaders to protect vulnerable people and promote justice and peace. Is this strategy viable today, and how might it apply in current political contexts, for instance in Japan, where Christians represent a mere one per cent of the population?

In Reformed thought, the right to resistance was often tied to "just war" (*jus ad bellum*) principles, greatly derived from the moral roots of Augustine of Hippo's apologetic book *City of God*. During the Reformation this tradition guided Reformed theologians between the poles of pacifism and the justification of a "holy war". International humanitarian law now incorporates some just war ethics. The issue is whether international legal terms alone can define justice (Sweeney 2003), because there is an evident dearth of virtue-ethical consideration in contemporary just war discourse (Vorster 2015). Moreover, how can theological understandings of reconciliation and peacebuilding promote peace and justice after conflicts?

In consideration of these questions, this article presents and assesses an important Peace Declaration which was recently released by the Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ). Through this declaration the RCJ affirms her calling and responsibility – as a missional church in a 99% non-Christian population – to proclaim and embody peace in Japan and beyond. The primary research methodology employed in this article involves, first, an integrative literature review of relevant materials collected on the subject matter (Torraco 2016: 62). The interpretation and synthesizing of important data follow the examination of pertinent documents. An in-depth process of theological reflection eventually results in the identification of core findings and the formulation of a conclusion.

The systematic review of applicable literature addresses the basic question: What is the significance and meaning of the RCJ Peace Declaration within the wider field of Peace Studies and in connection with the notion of pacifism in Japan and worldwide?

## Reconsidering the Meaning of Peace Today

How can peace be properly understood? Peace can imply apathy and the acceptance of injustice when it is defined narrowly. However, peace is more than the absence of war; it also maintains order and justice and promotes the movement toward freedom and human flourishing. Norwegian peace studies pioneer Johan Galtung's typology of violence – direct, structural and cultural – helps us comprehend peace today (Galtung 1990). According to Galtung (2008: 92–105), direct violence is visible in terms of aggressors, victims and harm. But structural violence – caused by socio-economic and political institutions that inhibit human freedom – is more subtle. Galtung also helpfully distinguishes between negative peace (where there exists no direct violence) and positive peace (with fair and equitable institutions and structures).

With the laying down of weapons, negative peace is achieved, but positive peace is still far off. Importantly, the most economically, politically, or socially marginalized members of society are frequently those worst affected by the lack of positive peace. Thus, whilst negative peace can simply mean the absence of war, positive peace implies concurrent justice. Significantly, Meiji Era Christian and Japanese pacifist Kanzō Uchimura (1861–1930) made a similar positive/negative distinction in terms of pacifism. He asserted that objection to war is a negative part of pacifism, whilst its positive part consists of creating, fostering and maintaining well-being and peace in society (Moroi 2012: 378).

Peace studies – also known as “irenology” – have been neglected for centuries and only became a discipline in recent decades. Peace studies specialist David Cortright (2008: 1–5) notes that the first peace-related academic programmes and institutions appeared after World War II. To better understand the processes that lead to a more desirable human condition, peace studies identify and analyse both violent and nonviolent behaviours as well as the structural mechanisms attending social and other conflicts. Today these concerns have increased importance and require serious theological contemplation due to the geopolitical aspect of many ongoing global conflicts, in which religion often plays a role.

The nature of war has altered drastically in recent decades, with intrastate wars surging while interstate wars have declined. Nations now often fight battles over ethnicity, language, religion, or geography, with currently 114 global armed conflicts being fought (Geneva Academy 2024). How should we theologically interpret (geo)political violent conflicts? Can Reformed theology make a constructive contribution to debates and practices concerning these issues?

Religion may “justify” aggression and terror but it can also promote peace and reconciliation between adversaries and borders. Religious views influence ethical and political discussions over (non-violent) resistance to oppression or protecting innocent people with force. Intrastate violence has increased international humanitarian intervention and peacebuilding. The UN and other global and regional institutions have institutionalized peacemaking efforts to identify and change war’s root causes (Bellamy 2010). This article explores the ways in which the RCJ Peace Declaration can support such peacebuilding goals in Japan and beyond.

## Pacifism in the Early Church Era

Though many sacred books also contain arguments in favour of violence, the religious traditions of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism all include peace-making fundamentals and activities (Cortright 2008: 183–210). The absolute pacifism of the early Christian communities reflected the gospel of Jesus’ unwavering dedication to love and non-retaliation to harm. Theologians during the first three centuries of the Christian era all agreed that Christians should neither fight in wars nor serve in the armed forces. They held that seeking peace was required by their theological convictions, drawing on the life and teachings of Jesus (Rae 2014: 29–40). Quotations promoting pacifism abound in the writings of Tertullian (AD 155–220), Clement (AD 150–215) and Origen (AD 185–253), and in the testimonies of martyrs like Marcellus (mid third century–AD 298) (Burkholder and Holl 2005: 2; Kreider 2016: 159–60). Early Christians were against war because of Christ’s commandment to love one another and because they thought that soldiers’ oaths to the emperor were an act of idolatry. Significantly, Mennonite historian Alan Kreider (2016: 233–34) describes one core effect of *The Teachings of the Apostles (Didascalia Apostolorum)* in the early church as creating an “ecosystem of peace”. As a concrete embodiment of this ecosystem, the peace greeting formed part of worship services led in Tertullian’s and Cyprian’s churches. The Christians carried peace with them as it were, saying “Peace to this house”, from home to home. Kreider therefore argues that “The ‘peace’ built a sense of transgeographical family. Communities in Egypt received strangers from other cities as ‘brothers,’ allowing them to take part in the Lord’s Supper and no doubt sharing materially with them when they came ‘in peace’ with the recommendation of another church” (2016: 220).

Peace appears throughout the *Didascalia*. In the Gospels, Jesus exhorted his disciples to follow him in peacemaking, according to the *Didascalia*’s authors. They believed Jesus’ peaceful path was salvific and that he invited his Church to represent his work by living in peaceful relationships and unity of spirit. However, according to Kreider (2016: 295–96), today Western Christians live in a post-Enlightenment and post-Christendom world where Christianity is often deemed violent, and that “Christian

mission – however loving its professed intentions – is essentially an exercise in imperialism.”

Kreider thus calls for a return to the humble patience of early church pioneer Christians like Cyprian (AD 210–258), Origen and Tertullian, because after them followed Augustine (AD 354–430), whose habitus seemingly lacked patience and peace. Augustine turned a corner in the early fifth century. He used top-down means for Christian purposes and encouraged rulers to serve God and spread the Christian faith. Augustine believed he should abandon the patience-saturated Christian missional approach and instead rationalized the notion of just war. Moreover, the conversion of Roman Emperor Constantine (AD 272–337) in the early fourth century led to military service being fully accepted among Christians. Consequently, core convictions concerning Christian peace and absolute pacifism quickly began to waver.

## Notions of Pacifism after the Twentieth Century

Many modern theologians in the West have exerted considerable influence on the debate about war and peace. Reinhold Niebuhr, an American Reformed ethicist, is one of them. According to Niebuhr (2011), the core mistake of pacifism is its rejection of the Christian concept of original sin and belief in human perfectibility. Another very prominent theologian is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose peace ethic and his participation in the plot to destroy Hitler and National Socialism originated in his Reformed theology. Insightfully, Green (2019) links the evolution of his Bonhoeffer's peace principles to a type of conditional pacifism that primarily focused on Christological, ecclesial and biblical-dogmatic aspects.

Following World War I, the word “pacifism” came to refer to a previous, more narrow tradition of non-resistance, or the religiously motivated refusal to support or take part in any kind of warfare. The more popular traditions of pragmatic or conditional pacifism, which rejected war in principle but acknowledged the use of force in self-defence or to defend the weak, were different from this absolutist stance. Furthermore, Augustine's just war doctrines were not the same as extreme pacifism. Just war theories limited, yet still justified, war (Cortright 2008: 8–10).

Pacifism thus existed as a movement and established idea long before the actual word was coined in 1901 (during the 10th Universal Peace Congress in Glasgow). But pacifism does not mean social passivity. Political programmes and social reforms were all part of it. Pacifism contrasted with quietist religious sects, and after World War I the notion of pacifism was scrutinized and debated. Although often overlooked, Cortright (2008: 334) believes the distinction between absolute and pragmatic pacifism is crucial. Nuclear pacifism absolutely forbids the use of indiscriminate, destructive weapons. However, pacifism is conditional and pragmatic in other conflict dimensions. Conditional pacifism assumes a presumption against armed violence

but recognizes that force, restrained by strict ethical criteria, may be necessary for self-defence and for the protection of innocent people.

Cortright (2008: 335) concludes that pacifism has been distorted beyond repair and may not be worth reconstructing. Peace theory and practice may benefit from using peacebuilding and peacemaking instead of the notion of pacifism. Peace may never be achieved, and conflict prevention needs proactive human behaviour. Peacebuilders are more practical and probably wiser after the twentieth century's painful experiences. They have learned to not ignore repressed victims' suffering and pleadings or the links between peace, democracy, social justice and human rights. Peace activists know that justice and peace are linked and care strongly about those victimised by repressive regimes and armed groups.

## Christianity's Role in Asia and Japan

Christianity's role in Asia is particularly complex because of its identity and status as a minority religious tradition among numerous and dominant ethnic and religious groupings. To fairly evaluate Christians' involvement in both peace and violence throughout Asia, Christianity must be analysed with reference to various, unique circumstances that are characterized by interrelated and shifting political, social, cultural and religious dynamics. From a historical standpoint, these social change dynamics in Asia may be traced back to the globalizing currents and practices of different periods, i.e. colonial, postcolonial and post-Cold War. More specifically the Pacific, Korean and Vietnam Wars need to be taken into consideration (Fernando 2014: 283–84). This article takes cognizance of these realities, although a detailed exploration thereof falls outside its purview.

The difficulties that Asian churches have are (1) how to work towards changing political structures and distributing power, and (2) how to cultivate a theology of peace amid nationalist strife. In numerous ways, Christians have supported efforts to promote peace in Asian ethno-nationalist conflicts. For example, in Japan, certain churches have opened small windows for much-needed peace and reconciliation in the region by admitting their government committed war crimes during the Pacific War and by pleading for forgiveness with the relatives of those killed (Fernando 2014: 291–92).

During the Pacific War most Japanese churches embraced the regime's imperialist doctrine under government duress. They may have done this out of fear of being hounded by the government as unpatriotic. However, not all churches fully succumbed to governmental pressures under the State Shintō powers during World War II. A handful of denominations protested and did not join the United Church of Christ in Japan (called the *Kyōdan*), the body which united all the different pre-war Protestant denominations under a legal religious "umbrella" of strict bureaucratic

and Imperial domination. Several congregations who wanted to re-establish their religious autonomy apart from state control in the post-war era came together and created the Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ) in April 1946.

Having given brief historical overviews of how peace and pacifism have been viewed and of Christianity in Asia and Japan, the discussion now turns to consider the challenges that Christianity and the Church face in proclaiming and embodying peace in East Asia generally and in Japan in particular.

## **East Asia and the Quest to Conquer through Strategic Partnerships**

During the past few years, the East Asian region has seen an increase in the level of security cooperation. South Korea, the United States, and Japan recently conducted their first joint aerial exercises, which included a nuclear-capable B-52 strategic bomber aircraft from the US. The Japanese Defence Ministry planned a record-breaking budget of ¥7.7 trillion in the last few months, to restructure the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) and equip them with an enormous arsenal of weapons and new, joint headquarters that will enable Japan to engage in protracted combat on the front lines of the Indo-Pacific region (Johnson 2023).

With the long-standing Japan-ASEAN cooperation, Japan has strengthened its private-sector cybersecurity collaboration with several South-East Asian nations and is considered a partner of choice in terms of defence and security (Dominguez 2023). At present, in Okinawa, on the south-western tip of Japan, military training is being performed on a large scale at the US Forces' Japan bases. In recent months, recruitment advertisements for the Japanese SDF have appeared nationwide in convenience stores. Levels of alertness among Japanese citizens are significantly on the rise, with the looming Taiwan Strait crisis adding to the anxious uncertainty.

## **Proclaiming Peace in Japan, in Unison with Global Christian Faith Communities**

Since the experiences of Japanese Christians in the wake of World War II were distinct in several ways, it is not sufficient to see Japan's post-war context as a mere addendum to world Christianity. It is important to note that Japan was both a defeated aggressor and a devastated victim in World War II. Moreover, the people of Japan are the only people in the world who have lived through the horrific experience of atomic bomb attacks (Van der Watt 2023a). This places a unique responsibility on the body of Christ in Japan to respond. How have churches reacted? In the past, several church denominations have responded to the issue of war, for instance the Presbyterian Church in Japan released a statement in 1993 (Jennings 2003).

The recently adopted Peace Declaration of the Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ 2023) is one example of a church denomination that takes a pro-active, prophetic stance in this matter.<sup>2</sup> The RCJ, as a small but vibrant church in a 99% non-Christian country, is called to be a strong and credible witness to God's peace and justice, whether the Japanese government take due note of its Peace Declaration or not. In an era of great relativity, where "anything goes", the RCJ's unmistakable evangelistic nature and scripturally trustworthy preaching are commendable. Congregations are battling to survive in a socio-political context that is hostile, albeit clandestine.

The RCJ's proclamation of peace should be viewed as a particular faith expression, as part of the worldwide Christian faith community. The RCJ proclaims peace in unison with many other churches, for instance with the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa which by its Belhar Confession of Faith calls the church blessed because it is a peacemaker. Globally, for example, churches are urged by the World Council of Churches to walk hand in hand and see their shared existence as a focused walk of faith, a religious pilgrimage of justice and peace, "and to join together with others in celebrating life and in concrete steps toward transforming injustices and violence" (WCC, n.d.; see also Enns and Mosher [eds] 2013).

As a concrete example of this pilgrimage, the WCC also recently initiated its Emerging Peacemakers Forum (WCC 2023). At an international meeting for peace held in Berlin in September 2023, WCC General Secretary Jerry Pillay aptly contended, "Indeed, it takes courage to choose peace as it often implies taking risks, pushing boundaries, and daring to be different, to be disliked, to be criticized and even to be condemned. In today's complex world, *achieving and maintaining peace is perhaps one of the most audacious acts imaginable*" (Pillay 2023, emphasis added).

In addition the WCC has recently created various very significant documents. *Together towards Life* is an ecumenical mission affirmation which seeks to further God's mission of justice and peace so that life may flourish. The affirmation argues that Christian mission and evangelism involves active struggle and public resistance. *Missio Dei* works for justice, peace, and reconciliation to bring about the fullness of life for everyone on earth. It should be countercultural "because mission belongs to the God of Life, justice, and peace and not to this false god who brings misery and suffering to people and nature" (WCC 2013, par. 108). The church's evangelism cannot be forceful or violent if God's life represents/is peace. The affirmation duly ends with the prayer: "God of Life, lead us into justice and peace!"

In other global Church circles, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) – representing roughly 600 million Christians in over 140 nations – has also added its voice to the

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2 This declaration can be downloaded from <https://tinyurl.com/39yet4rp> and although it cannot be included here (because of a limited word scope), should be read in full as integral part of this article.



“New Agenda for Peace” which was launched in July 2023 by the United Nations. The WEA strives to actively participate in Christ’s call to peacemaking and the creation of resilient societies characterized by “positive peace” (Global Peace Index 2022: 70). Therefore, the WEA’s Peace and Reconciliation Network proactively joined the global conversation by submitting their appeal to the UN as follows: “A New Agenda for Peace in a globalized and pluralistic age should welcome and include the convictions, learnings, insights, contributions, and corrections of faith communities that are forming people who inhabit, labor, and serve within the areas and pillars that require crucial attention for the global public good” (Schirrmacher et al. 2023).

It would be fitting to view the RCJ’s Declaration of Peace as a relevant, local expression of a similar desire to contribute to the global public good, or in biblical terms to God’s holistic *shalom* in this world (see also Lausanne Movement 2010, *Cape Town Commitment* part II.B and part I.5.c on peacebuilding). *Shalom* is a complicated and profound concept that defines peace as the harmonious expression of all human ideals. *Shalom* embodies the conditions and principles required for war prevention, such as self-determination, economic well-being, social justice, human rights, and dispute resolution through nonviolent means (Schwarzchild 1994: 18).

The beliefs and actions of Christian faith communities aimed at *shalom* and the global public good – like the RCJ, however apparently insignificant the church may be in terms of numbers in the Japanese context – indeed have a deeply formative potential. This potential can (but should not) be ignored by power-wielding politicians or international leaders (see Van der Watt 2023b: 3–6 on the issue of power and the gospel).

## Revisiting Japan’s Constitution, in particular Article 9

Demilitarization, democratic principles and the redistribution of power and wealth were all impacted by the post-war (US-led) Allied occupation (1945–52), which also cleared the path for Japan to experience unparalleled economic prosperity. However, the US military leaders’ intention – led by US General Douglas MacArthur’s Chief of the Government Section at GHQ, General Courtney Whitney – with the new constitution introduced during the occupation had another double-edged irony: the constitutional gift of peace and democracy was, as Douglas Lummis (1982: 43) contends,

not merely a good idea supported by reason, it [was] also a command supported by the most terrifying power in the history of the world, the power of the atomic bomb. The Pacific War and the Occupation of course played a tremendous role in shaping the post-war historical stance of both nations, but the lesson each drew from the experience was different. What the Japanese people learned was hatred of war, contempt for militarism, love of democracy and awe for technology. To the

Americans, on the other hand, the Occupation gave the opportunity to experience the sweetness of absolute power, and to convince themselves that the atomic bomb, if in U.S. hands, is a democratic force.

How this historical issue can or should be interpreted remains very contentious and exceeds the limits of this short article. However, the issue that is indeed relevant here is the fact that, notwithstanding Article 9's clear ban on war, Japan maintains a capable modern military force. Although the pacifist constitution was enforced by the US in 1946 and "made the emperor and the Japanese people into instant pacifists" (Kimijima 2009: 170), its ban on the upkeep of armed forces was rapidly being circumvented. To keep American military supremacy in the Western Pacific and restrain communism during the Cold War period, US policymakers looked to Japan as a possible strategic ally. The Japan-US Security Treaty was signed after the Korean War broke out in June 1950 and gave – and still gives today – the US extensive authority over Japanese foreign policy (Cortright 2008: 120). Considering the above, a complex conundrum remains: How much of Japan's development vis-à-vis pacifism was self-determined and how much was because of US influence?

Over the past three decades, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there has been a great deal of political discussion regarding changing Article 9 and other provisions of the constitution. The leading Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) drafted constitutional amendment plans in 2005 that included the removal of Article 9, which states unequivocally that the "Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes" (Japan 1946).

In 2012, the LDP published a comprehensive draft constitution with numerous modifications, including a rewrite of Article 9. Two years later, the constitution was interpreted to include "collective self-defence", and more recently, in 2022, Japan updated three important security documents, giving the country extra "counterstrike capabilities". Scholars and opponents have branded Japan's expanding military as a "de facto denial of Article 9" because of these amendments (Harrison et al. 2023: 1–2). In addition, the conservative government is attempting to restore loyalty to the state utilizing the emperor and Shintōist symbols. For example, the current government actions harken back to 1890–1945, when all Japanese school children were systematically indoctrinated into Japan's nationalist ethos by the regular, solemn recitation of the Imperial Rescript on Education (Hastings 2003: 113; see also Hardacre 1989 and Ion 2003).

The post-war Japanese anti-militarist stance has no (explicit) theological roots, in contrast to many notions of pacifism in the West. The Japanese pacifism is borne from the existential impact of war. A significant portion of the Japanese population has responded to the country's ongoing militarization with great fear and discontent.

In the early decades following World War II, many peace movements made progress in providing a strong opposition against the revision of Article 9.<sup>3</sup> After the war, each time the Constitution's pacifism was tested the Japanese people reaffirmed it, adopted it and survived the crisis (Kimijima 2009: 173). Mari Yamamoto (2004) therefore rightly contends that Japan is unique among nations in the size and breadth of its grassroots peace movements.

However, as Sakamoto (1982) argues, after the 1960s the fragmented nature of such initiatives made it impossible to create a consolidated, effective peace movement. Moreover, "The absence of a national catalyst like the church and the general depoliticization of national labor unions which used to take political leadership in popular movements have created an additional difficulty in identifying national actors for a unified peace movement" (1982: 4).

## Peace Studies and the Notion of Pacifism in Japan

Peace studies in post-World War II Japan has largely focused on the issue of pacifism. Very often leaders from the Meiji Era onwards, many of them Christians or social activists – like Kanzō Uchimura and Toyohiko Kagawa (see Tao 2019) – are referred to as pioneering figures. Much fewer attempts have been made to give a comprehensive description of the intellectual history of the development of the notion of peace in Japan. Robert Kisala's book *Prophets of Peace* is a welcome exception to the rule. Kisala (1999: 16–19) aptly emphasizes the often-ignored fact that Japanese intellectual history, stemming from Confucian inner morality (or so-called "philosophy of the heart") and the pervasive focus on stability and order, predates the Meiji Era (1868–1912) discourse on pacifism. Until this Meiji period Japan has only been involved in conflicts with very few external combatants, but after the turn of the twentieth century pacifist and just war notions entered Japanese discourses, mainly via prominent Christian leaders.

Today Japanese people view peace as a moral and political commitment tied to human rights, democracy and economic well-being. *Heiwa Shugi* (平和主義 – Japanese for 'peace' and '-ism' – is the usual phrase for peace campaigning. Many people confuse absolute and conditional pacifism because of the term's ambiguity. *Heiwa Shugi* has no English equivalent, although the Glasgow definition of pacifism was

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3 Anti-Vietnam War protests, including nuclear armaments docking in Japan, also took place during these years. How much protests were against such "de facto" military acceptance of US initiatives or against an alleged revision of Article 9 needs delineation. However, such delineation exceeds the scope of this article.

meant to reflect the Japanese term's principled yet pragmatic peace commitment (Yamamoto 2004: 10).

## The Reformed Church of Japan's Prophetic, Proactive Response

Japan has a conflicted past concerning its relationship with Christianity. In previous eras Christians have suffered considerably when professing their faith. Although Japan's postwar pacifist constitution includes religious freedom, the challenge remains: how do Christians take up the responsibilities that accompany this freedom today? Christians in Japan (from all denominational backgrounds) are called – as elsewhere – to proclaim and embody peace. Many realists typically write peacemakers off as hopeless romantics or, worse, paralysed prophets of doom who refuse to face reality. Yet, Jesus said that peacemakers are to be blessed as children of God (Mt. 5.9), clearly indicating God's will for peace and his blessing upon those who make peace instead of war (Rae 2014: 32).

Church confessions are typical of Protestant (especially Reformed) churches. The RCJ Synod initiated its Peace Declaration, in a sense, as a reaction to the (above-mentioned) Japanese government's proposed change of its Constitution's Article 9. The Peace Declaration, however, not only prophetically speaks to and critiques crucial decisions made during times of war, but it also directs the Church in the actions that are needed in times outside of war. The question "How should we then live, now?" constantly needs to be answered. As the body of Christ in Japan, the RCJ is determined by Christ-centred biblical theology that teaches them to focus on deeper spiritual realities with their eyes wide open to the indescribable suffering in this world.

The RCJ Peace Declaration can serve as a shared foundation of thinking about a complex variety of issues from the perspective of peace. For instance, in people's daily lives, where structural violence – based on social injustice and intolerance, including poverty, discrimination, human rights violations and environmental destruction – undermine the right to live in peace and is increasingly prevalent, this declaration can edify the next generation of peacemakers. There are already some projects planned which will be executed in the next few years, to embody the declaration practically.

## Conclusion

What is the significance and meaning of the RCJ Peace Declaration within the wider field of Peace Studies as well as in connection with the notion of pacifism in Asia and worldwide (as explicated in this article)? As we face complex issues and try to make

sense of continuing global conflicts, what can we learn from this Peace Declaration in our varied (church) contexts today?

The Peace Declaration is aimed at a wider audience than just Japan. There are several reasons why it is important for those outside the RCJ and outside Japan to engage with the Peace Declaration's content. First, such a conversation can edify all participants who engage in peacemaking. Christian faith takes shape and grows deeper and wider across political, cultural and linguistic boundaries. The Church of Jesus Christ is both universal and local in nature. Christians need to be reminded regularly of the greater reality of God's work around the world.

Second, the theme of peace itself must be continually exposed to renewed exploration and discussion among Christians (and others) in general. In times of war, our longing for peace should grow stronger. Other items on our socio-political agenda could hardly be more urgent to consider now. A changing post-Covid world order forces us to pay fresh attention to the urgent realization of peace and justice, as emanated by the Triune God of the Bible.

Thirdly, the RCJ's Declaration of Peace offers a unique perspective of (Reformed) Christians in Japan, the only nation in the world that lived through the indelible devastation of atomic bombs. Reformed Christians in Japan have something to share that should be taken to heart by other members of the body of Christ across the globe. After all, despite our radical differences, there is but "one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope ..." (Eph. 4.4)

We can benefit from a renewed reflection on the issue of peace, as we continue to heed Christ's call to become peacemakers in our own time and place. In this way, we participate in the ongoing, transformative history of the body of Christ in connection with biblical *shalom*. By critically reclaiming our history and constructing our future identities from the ground up, we are constantly and constructively reforming: *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* (the church reformed, always reforming).

The Early Church participated in public witness by overturning the status quo. Speaking truth to power as a public witness is the Christian practice of presenting critiques and alternatives to reform our societies, based on the vision of God's Kingdom. Public witness is not an add-on to the church's mission. Instead, the church realizes its missional calling when it publicly engages in testifying to true Christian peace by rejecting imperial claims.

The corpus of knowledge and practice around peacemaking has grown because of the simultaneous contributions of religious leaders, philosophers, moral reformers and many others for the sake of a safer, less violent society. This article has explained how this corpus of knowledge and practice includes the body of Christ in Japan. The RCJ, as a minority group in Japan, deeply identifies with the predicament and convictions of the Early Church. Therefore, it is important to note that the RCJ Peace Declaration embodies and declares God's *shalom*, *not* from a position of power, but from

the margins of society and from below. The Peace Declaration indeed gives a vivid Christian *raison d'être* for realistic peacemaking efforts.

Finally, the RCJ's Peace Declaration itself (under its second heading called "War, Peace, and the State") speaks to the core of its pro-active peace vision:

*What God is ultimately trying to teach us through the biblical accounts of war in the ancient world is the truth that "all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Mt 26:52), so that his people will trust in him as their Lord rather than in force of arms. So-called "just wars" or "lawful wars" in Christian history were also originally condoned as a last resort to deter war and maintain justice and peace, let alone the claim of "holy wars" to actively promote war in the name of God, which is a fundamental error. Therefore, the Lord's Church should not justify war as a means of settling disputes, much less affirm contemporary wars that use weapons of mass destruction.*

*We call for the defense of all human life – created in the image of God – to be the path to peace, without being deceived by national politicians and the mass media, who create enemies and try to replace peace issues with military security issues. Therefore, we actively cooperate in all non-military work to avert war and create peace among nations, and in particular, as the Church in the only country to have experienced the devastation caused by nuclear weapons, we demand the abolition of all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. (RCJ 2023)*

## About the Author

Stéphan Van der Watt is a Research Fellow of Stellenbosch University Faculty of Theology. He is also a full-time lecturer of Mission Studies and Pastoral Theology and Care at Kobe Reformed Theological Seminary, where he teaches in Japanese. This position, as well as his work as ordained co-operating missionary, generates ample opportunities to study relevant practical theological issues in intercultural ways. Contact: jsvdwatt@gmail.com

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