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Thematic Paper: **The Church and Human Security** based on the topic: *Human Security: Sustaining Peace with Justice and Human Rights(Ecumenical Conversation 14).*

Introduction

The Global Ecumenical Theological Institute and the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches presented a myriad of theological issues, human concerns and ecclesial responses for participants. During my time in Seoul and Busan, I was both challenged in my preconceptions of the global ecumenical movement and reassured of the church's mission and agency in some of the most volatile places on the globe. Engagement in GETI seminars, participating in the WCC assembly plenaries and overall theological conversations with colleagues and friends, provided many opportunities to dialogue and engage in theological reflection. However, I left the WCC assembly with the full knowledge that there is a lot of work to be done in every area of human life and advocacy.

In this essay, I will explore and discuss the theme "the Church and Human Security." I have chosen this theme after my participation in Ecumenical Conversation 14 at the WCC 10th Assembly, *Human Security: Sustaining Peace with Justice and Human Rights.*I will present and discuss briefly biblical and theological perspectives of human security, the WCC's involvement in the issue of the human security in past decades, and at the 10th assembly. Finally, I will offer my personal reflection on this theme. The sources used for this essay are: lecture notes from the Global Ecumenical Theological Institutes' seminars, conversations at the World Council of Churches 10th Assembly (both formal and informal), and *Ecumenical Visions for the 21st Century: A Reader for Theological Education* (the GETI textbook).

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Ecumenical Conversation 14: Human Security: Sustaining Peace with Justice and Human Rights.

I chose ecumenical conversation 14, because the issue of human rights has always been of great interest to me personally. I was born and raised in the English speaking Caribbean on the island of Trinidad and Tobago, while I was growing up there was stability and peace on the island. However, I was always aware of the harsh realities of my Caribbean and Latin American neighbors particularly in Haiti, Cuba, Nicaragua and Guatemala. The suffering, lack of resources, lack of basic necessities and vulnerability of my Caribbean and Latin American neighbors left an indelible impression on my life. My social location has changed in the last 10 years, I'm presently residing in the United States. Moving from the developing world to the developed world offers me a unique perspective. I carry with me third world sensibilities. I now work with communities of color in the United States that are on the margins and find themselves in places of vulnerability and volatility.

In a post Universal Declaration of Human Rights[1] era, it is assumed by many in the developed world, that every nation is built on the principle that citizens are protected and treated fairly and justly. Unfortunately, during the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries,it was revealed through various international media that many nations of the globe are violating human rights and threatening human security in one way or another. With the on-going atrocities of civil war, poverty and displacement of people in almost every continent in the world, the conversation on human security needs to be of utmost importance to the Church universal- and by extension the ecumenical movement.

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[1] Declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948 at the Palais de Chaillot, Paris.http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/. Accessed Feb 5, 2014.

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At the very inception ofEC 14, there was extensive discussion about the meaning and definition of the term 'human security.'In my estimation, approximately 80% of participants in EC 14 were under the assumption that human security was synonymous to human rights. However, the panelists challenged participants to think about human security in a broader sense, defining human security as: "the combination of threats associated with war, genocide, and the displacement of populations. As a minimum, human security means freedom from violence and from the fear of violence."[2]Subsequently, the principle of human security is profoundly linked to human dignity, human rights and fullness of life.[3]According to Matthew George Chunakara (one of the contributors of EC 14), the concept of human security values individuals and societies before states, as well as it is concerned about the security of life within and across borders.[4]

Over the course of 4 sessions, the conversation included but was no limited to discussions on armed conflicts and violence, including ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria, Pakistan and Syria. Presentations were also made on internally displaced people in Colombia and Sri Lanka. As the conversations progressed, it became clearer that there is a distinction between national security and human security,the main point posited was thatnational security does not always ensure or procure human security. Furthermore, local, national and international security all hinges on each other- therefore making humans more vulnerable and susceptible to violence. The topic of human security: sustaining peace with justice and human

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[2] Background information for Participants of EC 14, (Document), page 1.
[3] Document EC 14.1
[4] Background Information for Participants.

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rights has been part of the mission of the global church for centuries. No doubt, this continues

to be a crucial part of the modus operandi of the church international, the main goal is to

secure the life and welfare of individuals and their communities. I believe this has become

increasingly important in places of war and instability, but also in places where political and

economic stability is in-tact.

Biblical & Theological Perspective of Human Security

To buttress my argument that the church has to be involved in securing human life and

welfare, I turned to the bible. The biblical text is inundated with the theme of human security,

both the Hebrew bible and the New Testament. The bible makes justice the inseparable

companion of peace, and is reflected in terms such as defense, righteousness, protection and

kindness. Micah 6:8 represents the biblical basis of human security, the text reads: "he has told

you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to

lovekindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"This is both a biblical and prophetic mandate

that the church must follow in faith and works. This text calls the people of God and the 21st

century church, to seek the welfare and wellbeing of people first, *this* is doing the will of God.

Furthermore, if the church claims that it is missional, it must respond to the whole human

condition, the missional church should engage in prophetic practice in faith, courage, bold

humility, and prophetic dialogue and proclamation.[5]

Psalm 82:3is also a pertinent text, it says: "give justice to the weak and the orphan;

maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute." This text further demonstrates the biblical

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[5] Paul John Isaak, "God's Mission as Praxis for Healing and Reconciliation."In *A Century of Ecumenical Missiology* Nov 2011 (UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd) 325.

principle of protecting the most vulnerable. The author of the Psalm is putting forth that there

are categories of people that need to be cared for, the powerless and the marginalized should

be protected and should be priority for those who hold the power and influence in society. In

many ways the Beatitudes found in Matthew 5:1-12 (and Luke's version in chapter 6:20-26),

also relay the message of human security with justice and human rights. According to biblical

scholar Warren Carter, the Roman Empire was the backdrop of Matthew's gospel and the

empire was abusing many of the civil rights of the people in Matthew's community. There was

grave injustice,and human rights were violated throughout the empire.[6] The Beatitudes created

a countercultural discourse for the community, while the Roman Empire abused human rights

and created a culture in which human security was volatile, the Kingdom (or reigndom) of God

offered justice and restoration. God cares deeply for peace, and in the gospels Jesus was and is

that peace incarnate.

The mandate that the church must secure human life, with peace, justice and human

rights is rooted in the theological concept of *Imago Dei.* According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the

imago dei or image of God is best understood not by comparing ourselves to God's being, but

our relationship with God and one another.[7]My understanding of this concept is that human

beings are created in the image of God and as a result, humans have a responsibility to

protection, respect and to uphold the dignity of fellow human beings.This biblical concept of

imago dei presents an anthropological view, humans have a special relationship with God, and

by extension with each other. In keeping with this understanding, John Calvin says that civil

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[6] Warren Carter. Matthew and the Margins (NY: Orbis Books) 2005.
[7]David F. Ford. *The Modern theologians* (UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 50.

government(s) should protect the worship of God, defend the doctrine of the church, to build

community life and to promote peace.[8]According to Calvin worship, doctrine, and a peaceful

community were inseparable in truly being the people of God. I believe that worship without a

commitment to justice is empty, meaningless worship. The church must see the connection

between its worship and its call to action in places where there is chaos and trauma. The Book

of Order of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., explains it this way: there is no peace without

justice, wherever there is brokenness, violence, and injustice the people of God are called to

peacemaking. (BOO 4-700).

Finally, the concept of *shalom* also needs to be considered. Shalom as a 'state' points to

welfare, health, prosperity and peace and signals a state of safety and security.[9]The biblical

concept of shalom has evolved into a theological and ideological concept as well, and it

integrates national and individual security. Shalom considers the whole human experience and

the dignity and honor of God's people. Therefore, the church must be an emissary of peace and

must be involved in the areas of social, economic and racial justice. The concept of shalom calls

us to act in the interest of others, the powerless and the defenseless, furthermore. Shalom calls

God's church to work against all that disturbs, distorts and devalues the human community.[10]

World Council of Churches and the Issue of Human Security

As I engaged in this discussion of human security during the WCC assembly, it was an

appropriate topic in light of the assembly's theme "God of life, lead us to justice and peace." I

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[8] John T. McNeill, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion,* vol 1, trans. Ford Lewis Battles. (KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 1487.
[9] EC Document, 8.
[10] EC Document, 8.

am convinced that there can be no justice or peace without human security. Human security is actually the thread which weaves justice and peace together. The World Council of Churches and the Ecumenical movement have been committed to working for human security in the most vulnerable places in the globe. The WCC also recognizes that human security is inextricably linked to peace and justice, thus, peace is lost when injustice, poverty and disease as well as armed conflict, violence and war, inflict wounds on the bodies and souls of human beings, on society and on the earth.[11] The WCC and all Christians are therefore committed to a transformed ethical discourse that guides the community in the praxis of non-violent conflict transformation and in fostering conditions for progress toward peace.[12]

In the Report of the General Secretary Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, it was clear that the WCC does not and will not stand idly while the security of people are threatened. Tviet highlighted the WCC's intervention and involvement with the Syrian conflict,[13] calling on the government in Pakistan to protect Christians who are being killed,[14] and repudiated the use of the Doctrine of Discovery to justify non-indigenous claims to sovereignty and domination in Canada.[15] These are three of the numerous ways the WCC has confronted and impacted global injustice and violence against humans, and it has worked tirelessly to maintain human security. The WCC also showed its commitment and agency to human security, justice and peace through its Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010), and most recently the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica and its document "An Ecumenical Call to

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[11] GETI Reader, 241.
[12] GETI Reader, 243.
[13] WCC Document No. A 02 #60, 61.
[14] Ibid, #65.
[15] Ibid, #66

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Just Peace." The Final Report of the Continuation Committee on Ecumenism in the 21[st]Century,

Geneva, 2012[16] also includes a subheading "The struggle for Justice and Peace." In its opening

sentence it states that the quest for justice and peace is central to the church's mission; it is the

call of Christ to the Church.[17] All these documents and acts are indicative of the WCC's

commitment to the human cause, but also to the efficacy of the church in the world and the

work of the ecumenical movement.

Personal Reflection

My time at GETI and the WCC Assembly and my engagement in EC 14, have challenged

and empowered me to reconsider the topic of human security in my own social location. While

I was born and grew up in Trinidad and Tobago, I currently reside in the city of Atlanta, GA,

U.S.A. During EC 14, there was some discussion on human trafficking in various places of the

globe, but it might be surprising to persons around the globe to learn of the tremendous

violations of human rights and the vulnerable nature of human security even in American

cities.Atlanta Magazine named the city of Atlanta as "Sex City", the capital of sexual

exploitation in the U.S.Atlanta is known as the number one hub of human trafficking and child

sex exploitation in the United States.[18]This should be of serious concern not only to citizens but

to the American church. Women and girls of all ages, races and neighborhoods are victims of

human trafficking, and the number is increasing daily. While some of the larger city churches

are involved in trying to stop these crimes and in the rehabilitation of women and girls, more

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[16] GETI Reader, 369.
[17] Ibid., 376.
[18]http://humantraffickingatlanta.wikidot.com/. Accessed Feb 5, 2014.

churches need to make their voice heard. The churches in Atlanta need to work together to

protect women and girls from this awful crime which endangers their lives.

The WCC assembly has also compelled me to find ways to empower my congregation

(which I pastor), to advocate for those who live in poverty and may not have access to health

care and other basic necessities. A person diagnosed with HIV/AIDS with no access to health

care and medication is a person whose security is being threatened. According to the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the

health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical

care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment,

sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his

control."[19]Therefore, if people are living without any of the rights listed above, their human

rights are not being fulfilled, and the church cannot stand idly by while people suffer.

The church also must engage in the work of challenging social, economic and cultural

structures which violate human rights anddestroy human dignity. The ecumenical movement

can be a catalyst which effects change in the world by its united effort and the biblical basis

upon which it functions. What is needed is a Christian ethic in which the whole human

experience is considered. A Christian ethic which functions as a source of empowerment to

those whom the church needs to protect, and by default a Christian ethic which disempowers

the evils which continue the abuse of men, women and children. This Christian ethic must be

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[19]http://www.amnestyusa.org/research/human-rights-basics/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.
Accessed Feb 13, 2014.

based on the principle that all human life is important and must be cared for and secured. The

church has a tremendous responsibility in confronting the issues of human rights and human

security, but the church also has tremendous influence and potency. I believe with the

continued efforts of local congregations, the global church and the ecumenical movement,

there can be new hope for human life, even as we pray: "God of life, lead us to justice and

peace."