

## ‘Justice and peace kiss each other’ 9 points for evangelical discernment

**The complexity of the international situation requires believers not to remain silent in indifference or to clamour in partisanship, but to speak clearly, as a result of a conscience formed by Scripture. A commentary by the Italian Evangelical Alliance.**

*Goodness and truth have met; justice and peace have kissed” (Psalm 85:10)*

**The Italian Evangelical Alliance addresses churches, institutions and civil society with the awareness of those who are called to listen in two ways: listening to the Word of God, which remains firm in the heavens (Psalm 119:89), and listening to the cry that rises from a torn land.**

The complexity of the international situation and the increasing number and intensity of conflicts require believers not to remain silent in indifference or to clamour in partisanship, but to speak clearly, as a result of a conscience formed by Scripture.

Scripture also teaches us to look clearly at the nature of sin: it is radical (it touches the heart), diffusive (it infects people and peoples), extensive (it permeates every area of life) and multidimensional (spiritual, moral, social, cultural and institutional). It also wounds creation, which groans under the weight of human corruption and violence (Romans 8:19–22). For this reason, no purely political analysis is sufficient and no purely technical solution can suffice. And yet, precisely because sin is so pervasive, redemption in Christ does not only concern the inner self, but also generates truth, justice, mercy and reconciliation in our common life.

We confess that the living God is Lord of history and judge of the nations (Psalm 2; Daniel 4:34–35). From this confession, and not from a political agenda, springs our duty to speak publicly, which we desire to be sober in form, rooted in the gospel, and oriented towards the good of all those involved. With this perspective, we propose the following points for discernment.

### **1. Inviolable dignity and rejection of falsehood**

The foundation of all ethics is theological rather than legal: every human being is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). For this reason, the dignity of the person is not a privilege granted by some political authority, but a fact of creation that no reason of state, no security emergency, and no territorial claim can nullify.

From this also derives a duty to truth. “We mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15), we oppose any rhetoric that reduces the adversary to a subhuman being, and we denounce propaganda, wherever it comes from, as a primary form of moral violence. ‘Put away lying, and each one speak the truth with his neighbour’ (Ephesians 4:25). Without truth there is no justice; without justice there is no peace. And this order cannot be reversed.

## 2. Condemnation of terrorism and moral limits on the use of force

It is necessary to make a clear distinction between what our times often tend to confuse. We unreservedly condemn any deliberate attack on defenceless civilians and all forms of terrorism: striking the innocent is an intrinsic evil that no cause, however just it may be perceived to be, can legitimise (Exodus 20:13; Proverbs 6:16–17). Terrorism is not resistance, but systematic violence masquerading as politics.

Precisely because we defend human dignity, we also affirm that the military response of civil authority, which Scripture recognises as having the task of curbing evil and protecting the weak (Romans 13:1–4), cannot be transformed into an unrestrained power exercised without limits. It remains subject to rigorous and verifiable moral criteria.

Christians “do not repay evil with evil” (Romans 12:17–21); and political authority, in turn, cannot take vengeance, which belongs to God alone (Romans 12:19), as its operating principle. Those who respond to terror with terror do not defeat evil: they multiply it.

## 3. Against theocracy and tyranny

At this point, further clarification is needed, because the way power is conceived directly affects the possibility of peace. One of the deepest and least mentioned roots of many conflicts is the fusion of political power and religious authority. The Italian Evangelical Alliance expresses grave concern and open condemnation of all theocratic regimes and dictatorships, whatever religious denomination or ideology claims to legitimise them.

When the name of God is invoked to seal the absolute dominion of a man, a party or a clergy, religion does not govern the state: it is the state that hijacks religion. This applies to theocracies that deny fundamental freedoms in the name of divine law, and it applies equally to authoritarian regimes that exploit the sacred for the purposes of consensus and repression.

Scripture is well aware of this temptation: it was the sin of Israel when it asked for “a king like all the nations” (1 Samuel 8:5), and it was Jesus' response in rejecting any earthly throne founded on coercion (John 18:36). The kingdom of God is not imposed by the sword of the state, and the state is not sanctified by appropriating the language of the kingdom.

We therefore affirm the functional distinction between civil authority and the community of faith, not as a hostile separation, but as mutual autonomy and complementary responsibilities. For believers, both are called to give account before God, under his sovereignty, without confusing or absorbing each other: the Christian community fulfils its vocation with the tools Christ has entrusted to it—preaching, discipleship, discipline, diakonia, mission, and public witness—while the state fulfils its calling to promote justice and protect public order. Both remain under the lordship of Christ and answer to God, each according to its own mandate, without confusing or absorbing each other. Where this distinction is abolished, even by people who profess to be Christians, conscience is violated and the gospel is betrayed.

## 4. Condemnation of idolatrous nationalism

When throne and altar are confused, the nation often claims a form of consecration. We firmly denounce any form of nationalism that sacralises the state, ethnicity or territory, elevating them to the absolute. When the nation becomes an idol, politics becomes liturgy and war becomes sacrament: this is the logic that produced some of the worst tragedies of the twentieth century and which today re-emerges with disturbing familiarity.

“The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1): no people can claim unconditional possession of what belongs to the Creator. The polarisation that runs through international debate, the reduction of complex realities to slogans, the tribalisation of consciences and the demonisation of the other poison the very possibility of discernment at its root.

We call on the evangelical churches, with particular urgency, not to allow themselves to be captured by any nationalist ideology or partisan vision, remembering that our ultimate citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20) and that in Christ the distinction between peoples is crossed, not abolished, by grace (Galatians 3:28; Revelation 7:9).

## **5. International law**

If idolatrous nationalism corrodes discernment, the concrete consequence is often contempt for common rules. We observe with growing alarm how international humanitarian law, the expression of an ethical consensus painstakingly developed after the catastrophes of the 20th century, is treated as an optional constraint, applicable to the weak and suspendible by the strong. This erosion is extremely serious.

We say this without absolutising international law or sacralising it as if it were, in itself, an automatic guarantee of justice. Even rules can be applied selectively, even institutions can be exploited, even courts can be exposed to pressure. Precisely for this reason, however, their weakening does not liberate peoples: it makes them more vulnerable to arbitrariness, propaganda and the law of the strongest.

When nations ignore conventions, circumvent the rulings of international courts and render the resolutions of multilateral bodies meaningless, the only common framework that still restrains the law of the strongest is lost. The Scriptures do not know modern international law, but they know the principle on which it is based: the rejection of arbitrariness and the submission of power to justice. 'Do not judge according to appearance but judge according to justice' (John 7:24).

We call on all actors involved to fully, verifiably and non-selectively respect international humanitarian law, and on the community of nations to have the political will to enforce it consistently, without the hypocrisy of double standards, which is its most insidious denial.

## **6. The nuclear risk**

In this context, the lowering of moral thresholds makes the issue of weapons of mass destruction even more disturbing. We cannot remain silent, it would be irresponsible, about the atomic risk hanging over the region and, with it, the entire world. Nuclear proliferation and the rhetoric of total annihilation constitute a threat that transcends any geopolitical calculation and affects the very survival of the human family.

The use, or even the credible threat of use, of nuclear weapons would represent the height of arrogance: the creature's claim to dispose of creation. 'You will destroy those who destroy the earth' (Revelation 11:18).

We urgently call for every nuclear programme for military purposes to be subject to real, transparent and non-selective international control, and for the community of nations to pursue disarmament and non-proliferation as a clearly moral imperative, not just a strategic one.

## **7. Justice and peace**

The decisive point derives from the dignity of the person, from truth, from the limits of force and from the submission of power to justice. Psalm 85 does not juxtapose justice and peace as separate goods to be balanced with diplomatic prudence: it unites them in a kiss. This prophetic image is our compass.

It excludes a peace built on the removal of wrongdoing, on forced oblivion, on the acceptance of an unjust status quo; and it excludes a justice that has degenerated into perpetual vengeance, devoid of any prospect of reconciliation. 'The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever' (Isaiah 32:17).

We recognise realistically that reconciliation takes time, but refusing to undertake it is already a condemnation. 'If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone' (Romans 12:18).

## 8. Protection of minorities and religious freedom

The search for a just peace is also measured by the protection of those most at risk. In the spiral of conflict, minorities, and often Christian communities among them, suffer persecution, intimidation and a silent erasure that rarely makes the headlines of the international press.

“We call for freedom of conscience, worship and witness to be recognised and protected as an inalienable dimension of human dignity, not as a revocable concession of power” (*Lausanne Covenant*, 13). ‘We commit ourselves to defending religious freedom for all—for Christians and for people of other faiths—without confusing this civic commitment with theological approval of every belief’ (*Cape Town Commitment*, 2010, Part II, 2.C). We also call for specific attention and effective protection for prisoners and those who suffer harassment because of their faith, as well as a concrete and verifiable commitment to their release, without allowing ourselves to be intimidated.

Let us not forget the warnings of the Lord Jesus that persecution is inevitable (Matthew 5:10–12; John 15:18–21). Precisely for this reason, we reaffirm that obedience to God comes before any human imposition: “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

## 9. Prayer

Public responsibility is accompanied by spiritual responsibility, which is not evasion but intercession. We encourage you to take to heart the biblical exhortation: ‘I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and all those in authority’ (1 Timothy 2:1–2).

In light of what is also recalled in the Lausanne Covenant regarding freedom and persecution, we invite churches to pray for civilians who have been affected, for the wounded and displaced, for prisoners and hostages, for those unjustly detained because of their faith, for rulers and negotiators, for those who rescue and care for others, for the cessation of hostilities and the laying down of arms, and for hatred to give way to repentance.

But prayer that does not generate works is faithless (James 2:17). We therefore commit ourselves to accompany intercession with action: concrete and verifiable help, hospitality, care, support for reliable local communities and organisations, and specific attention to those who are persecuted or deprived of their freedom because of their witness.

With the firmness that comes not from presumption but from hope, we await the fulfilment of the promise: ‘Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven’ (Psalm 85:11). Until that day, with humility and determination, we work so that justice and peace may kiss again, even in our time.

*‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God’* (Matthew 5:9).