

# Ökumenisches Netz in Deutschland

## Organisationen und Netzwerke im Konziliaren Prozess

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### **Proposed Declaration by the Ecumenical Network in Germany (ÖNiD) for the second version of the Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace**

*The Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence is to be concluded in 2011 by an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation and an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace. The World Council of Churches (WCC) sent an Initial Statement to member churches by way of preparation. They were requested to make suggestions for a second version of the statement. The EKD had already made its contribution to DOV in the 2007 memorandum “Live from Just Peace – Care for Just Peace”, later supplemented by comments on the Initial Statement. The present proposal by ÖNiD expresses the views of the ecumenical grassroots in Germany. We have not proposed amendments to the Initial Statement but are presenting one of our own, for the following reason.*

*The Initial Statement is a relatively abstract study of the topic of just peace. Current, real-life problems only appear as examples in lists. There is an urgent need of analysis of the direct structural and cultural phenomena of violence and the way they interact. Such analysis is totally lacking, which seems to us inappropriate in view of the dramatic crisis of civilization, especially in its economic, political and ecological dimensions. The biblical considerations also make little use the contextual method needed to understand the texts more precisely and thus be able to relate them to our own context. Moreover, there are no clear proposals for action for the churches.*

*This is why we offer to the WCC this proposal for the second version of the Declaration on Just Peace. In the second part of this document we give the reason for our proposal in the time-honoured steps “see, judge, act”.*

**Germete, 24.10.2009**

*Annual meeting of ÖNiD  
(Ecumenical Network in Germany)*

Im Ökumenischen Netz in Deutschland (ÖNiD) arbeiten derzeit mit:

Arbeitskreis Kirche und Ökonomie Berlin, Bayrische Pfarrbruderschaft, Christen für gerechte Wirtschaftsordnung, Christliche Friedenskonferenz, Frauen wagen Frieden, Hendrik-Kraemer-Haus Berlin, Initiative Aufbruch anders besser leben, Initiative Kirche von unten, Ökumenische Initiativgruppe Eine Welt Treptow-Köpenick, INKOTA, KAIROS Europa, Kirchliche Arbeitsstelle Südliches Afrika, Kommunität Grimnitz, Ökumenische Initiative Eine Welt, Ökumenisches Netz Bayern, Ökumenisches Netz Mittelrhein, Ökumenisches Netz Niedersachsen, Ökumenisches Netz Nord- und Osthessen, Ökumenisches Netz Rhein-Mosel-Saar, Ökumenisches Netz Württemberg, pax christi – deutsche Sektion, Plädoyer für eine ökumenische Zukunft, Pro Ökumene, Solidarische Kirche im Rheinland, Solidarische Kirche in Westfalen, SÜDWIND

## PROPOSED DECLARATION

### **Life in Just Peace**

Humanity and the earth are undergoing a unique crisis. Above all, this is manifested in the form of the financial and economic crisis, in the food crisis, the social crisis (the growing gap between those who are becoming poorer and those becoming richer), the energy crisis, the climate crisis, the crisis of the extinction of species and the crisis of increasing violence at all levels – from the family and schools to imperialist wars. The causes of these crises are clearly related to the dominant civilisation, which from the “West” has conquered the entire globe in the areas of economics, politics, ideology and the understanding what it means to be human. This crisis is threatening life itself. As we see it, just peace must therefore be understood as leading toward a new culture of life at all levels – from institutional to spiritual life.

The necessary turnaround toward a life in just peace includes at least three dimensions:

a spiritual vision of a new, emerging culture of life, based on faith or a humanist motivation  
the fundamental rejection of the dominant economic, political, violence-producing culture and world order, for the sake of the integrity of faith and the very being of the church  
short, medium and long-term steps toward realising this vision.

We therefore present the following declaration, which is based on the biblical message and affirms decisions by the assemblies of ecumenical organisations, inviting all churches, congregations and Christians to embrace it and to publicly advocate for the implementation of its demands.

#### ***1. Which god shall rule?***

**We believe** that God created the whole universe in love inviting all people to cooperate with God’s ongoing creative work in mutual solidarity and respect for God’s gifts. “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Psalm 24:1). With faith in God’s Trinitarian dynamic we confess with all Christians the sociality of God as the source of the unity of all creatures.

**Therefore, we reject** the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism – using both structural and direct violence. We reject every claim to an economic, political and military empire that attempts to subvert God’s order of life and whose actions stand in contrast to God’s love and justice. We reject an economic system and way of life which exploits nature and propagates unlimited growth so that the conditions of life for future generations are forcibly destroyed and the survival chances of the entire earth are threatened.

**The power of God’s Spirit frees us** as individuals and churches to resist the ruling political-economic-cultural system and to work for crucially necessary alternatives.

#### ***2. God’s good gifts for all should not be privatised by force.***

**We believe** that God is a God of life and desires the fullness of life for all creatures. “I came that they might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

**Therefore we reject** a policy, which through the privatisation of collective and common goods produces wealth for the capital owners but scarcity and poverty for the vast majority of the world’s population – the worst kind of violence (Ghandi) – and which exploits and even destroys nature. With particular emphasis we reject the patenting of seeds and of medicines which are necessary to meet people’s basic needs; no to the privatisation of genes as well as acts of biopiracy; no to the privatisation of water and other gifts of nature; no to the privatization of services of general interest such as energy, transportation, health, education; also no to the destruction of solidarity-based social insurance systems through privatisation; no to their submission to profit-oriented insurance companies and at the same time to speculative finance markets. All of this is structural violence at

the service of the rich. But especially we reject the direct violence of a policy which wages wars to realise these private interests and wastes immeasurable resources on armaments.

**The power of God's Spirit frees us** as individuals and churches to work for the democratizing of the economy and the solidarity-based social systems towards serving life, among ourselves and in society, so that all might have enough, so that neither hardship nor excessive consumption prevails and that the earth can remain intact for future generations. Economic systems should be for the common use and not for the expansion of capital. For this reason goods and services for basic needs as well as global common goods must be publically run for mutual benefit, so that in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights all governments recognize their responsibility for the welfare of their citizens. We pledge to struggle for an order at all levels, in which economics and politics are put at the service of life for all and thereby overcome the fundamental causes of violence.

### ***3. God's good earth should not be destroyed by greed.***

**We believe** that God entrusted human beings with a rich and beautiful earth. "The Lord took the human beings and put them in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15).

**Therefore, we reject** an economic and social order which converts God's gifts into commodities and in so doing increasingly destroys them. We especially call on Christians, congregations and churches in the industrialised countries to recognize their enormous ecological debts, particularly their destructive climate debts, toward people who have been living in impoverished regions for the past 500 years and at least offer symbolic compensation, to radically reduce their harmful greenhouse emissions and to oblige their governments to pass national and international laws to keep global warming under two degrees and to stop the extermination of species.

**The power of God's Spirit frees us** as individuals and churches to set an example and reduce our consumption of energy and the environment as well as to force our governments to establish binding rules for reduction under international law (allowing for transitional arrangements for newly industrialised and developing countries). All in all, we will work for a cyclical economy which makes the gifts of nature available for a just and sustainable use.

### ***4. God liberates working people from violent exploitation.***

**We believe** that God intends human labour to become participation in God's creative power and as a means for self-sufficiency in human societies, without exploiting working men and women. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other Gods before me" (Gen 20:2).

**Therefore, we reject** an economic order, in which working people, especially women are (structurally or directly) violently exploited and driven into unemployment. We reject governments which tax workers more and more but levy less and less taxes on capital gains from profits and fortunes and refuse to abolish tax havens.

**The power of God's Spirit frees us** as individuals and churches to struggle in cooperation with labour unions for legal systems and economic decisions in which those able to work can find useful employment and socially meaningful jobs – and, owing to increased productivity – comprehensive reduced working hours. In reaching these decisions all of those involved in the productive process must have a voice.

### ***5. God does not want any accumulation of wealth beyond that which is necessary for life.***

**We believe** that God despises the accumulation of wealth for the few at the cost of the majority. "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Mt 6:24). "You shall not covet

your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, nor ox nor donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour" (Ex 20:17).

**Therefore we reject** an economic order which stimulates and rewards greed, which is dependent on nature-destroying and socially antagonistic growth, because it makes money and capital a commodity and its increase an end in itself.

**The Spirit of God frees us** as individuals and churches to overcome the violent power of money and especially its speculative misuse as a "financial weapon of mass destruction". We ourselves will only use money at the service of genuine economic activity. In concert with social movements we will struggle to induce political institutions to make money a national and international public good which only serves useful economic activity and to ensure that all use of property becomes socially and ecologically beneficial to all.

#### ***6. God wants to create human security through justice rather than through military means.***

"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). "...until a spirit from on high is poured out upon us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever"(Isaiah 32:15-17).

**Therefore we say no** to the institution of war, which – under the conditions of present day weapons technology – cannot be justified under any circumstances; no to the more than one billion US dollars wasted annually for armaments while more than 30 million people die from the causes of hunger. Arms do not murder only when they are used but already while they are being produced. In particular we reject the imperialist wars, which stand in violation of international law, such as those against Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the unlimited "War on terror". Therefore we reject the presence of more than 800 US military bases, under whose protection authoritarian and pseudo-democratic regimes such as the Philippines and Columbia commit notorious violations of human rights and also the arming of the European Community with international rapid intervention forces. When the international community needs to intervene in individual countries and regions because of notorious violations of human rights this must only be done by police forces under the umbrella of a democratised United Nations.

**The power of God's Spirit frees us** as individuals and churches to refuse to cooperate in any way with waging war. Instead, in the spirit of Jesus and Gandhi we wish to confront all injustice with readiness to accept conflicts and suffering, to cooperate in reconciliation processes therapeutically and in terms of prevention and contribute to a political stance which seeks to outlaw war.

#### ***7. Weapons of mass destruction are blasphemy against God.***

**We believe** that weapons of mass destruction are blasphemy, since human beings are created in the image of God. "Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in God's own image God made humankind (Gen. 9:6)".

**Therefore, we reject** unequivocally the production, deployment and use of means of mass destruction, which always shed innocent human blood and can even eliminate all life on earth. We reject the strategies of the USA and NATO; which claim the right to a nuclear first strike and already are making use of enhanced munitions with disastrous effects for the people targeted.

**The power of the Spirit of God frees us** to refuse to collaborate under any circumstances in the production, deployment or the use of weapons of mass destruction or to vote for any political party which has not declared its support for the complete abolition of any means of mass destruction. We call on all members of Christian churches to do likewise. Especially we call on the government of

the USA as well as on other governments to make deeds follow their words and to create a nuclear-free world. Only then can governments now working to achieve a nuclear capacity be prevented from realizing their plans.

**8. *God has created a people, which has invited all peoples to a life with a just peace.***

**We believe** that God has called us to be a people which lives a life of justice and peace and can so become the light of the world, the city on the hill and salt of the earth (Mt.5; 13-16). “Many peoples shall come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that God may teach us God’s ways and that we may walk in God’s paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” (Is 2:3-5, NRSV).

**Therefore, we reject** all misuse of the name of God and Christ for achieving power, be it by governments, political parties, groups, theologies or churches. We especially reject prosperity theologies, fundamentalist crusade theologies, and ideologies, which in the name of freedom increase the wealth of capital owners and even support the use of imperialist violence to this end.

**The power of God’s Spirit frees us** as individuals and churches to follow Jesus and to participate in building God’s domination-free kingdom, God’s life-affirming order with a human face. This includes collaboration in developing

- (1) a new economic approach based on solidarity and serving life
- (2) the practice of non-violent behaviour for conflict resolution and therapy, avoiding and reducing violence at all levels, from the family to a world peace order, and
- (3) a style of life which promotes ecological and social justice.

We seek the company and cooperation of people of other faiths or of none, who respect and promote the lives of the most humble human beings and of the endangered earth. In the name of Jesus we ask God for the spiritual power to rejoice at the wonderful gifts of creation, to lead a life of justice and peace and to work toward the day when this will be enjoyed by all people.

## STATEMENT OF REASONS

“Gloria Dei, homo vivens” – “That the human being has life is the glory of God”  
Church Father Irenaeus, quoted by Archbishop Romero

“Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.

If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right – if he... does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not take advance or accrued interest, withholds his hands from iniquity, executes true justice between contending parties, follows my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances, acting faithfully – such a one is righteous; he shall surely live, says the Lord God.

If he has a son who is violent, a shedder of blood, who does any of these things ... shall he then live? He shall not. He has done all these abominable things; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself.

But if this man has a son who sees all the sins that his father has done, considers, and does not do likewise... observes my ordinances, and follows my statutes; he shall not die for his father's iniquity; he shall surely live. As for his father, because he practised extortion, robbed his brother, and did what is not good among his people, he dies for his iniquity....

But when the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. Again, when the wicked turns away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life.

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live.”

From Ezekiel 18 (NRSV)

It is becoming ever clearer that the world population and the Earth are currently facing situations affecting their very survival. Moreover, more and more people are noticing that it is not just a matter of life-threatening individual actions but structures, policies and lifestyles, which will plunge the world into disaster if nothing is done to stop them. Those most able to change the course of this Titanic and bring about another world are the groups now most suffering under the situation. They are the prophets who call us to repent and choose a life of justice and peace.

The World Council of Churches is an international fellowship of churches. It links people in all regions of the earth and at the same time experiences the global situation of people and earth. “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it” (1 Cor 12:26). In the present situation this means the challenge to clearly recognise and name the interaction between local life crises and the global crisis, and to work together for a life of justice and peace.

That is why the World Council decided to conclude DOV with adopting and publishing the Declaration on Just Peace. Prior to that, it organised a number of mutual visits, called Living Letters, (2 Cor 3:3).<sup>1</sup> Visits were made to *Africa*: Angola, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, South Africa, Sudan, Kenya; to the *Middle East*: Israel and Palestine; to *Asia*: Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia; to *Latin America and the Caribbean*: Uruguay, Bolivia, Columbia, Nicaragua, Honduras and Haiti; in *Europe*: Germany; in *North America*: the USA. In all these countries there are conflicts – some a matter of life and death - involving direct, structural and cultural violence. As far as the causes are concerned, global systemic problems mix with specifically local ones. When seeing, judging and acting it is thus necessary to note how the different levels interlock – from the local to the global.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/iepc/living-letters-visits.html>

## *I. See*

Colombia illustrates clearly the interconnection between the different levels and between injustice, direct violence and the destruction of nature. This country was visited by a Living Letter team from 6 to 12 December 2008. (<http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/peace-convocation/living-letters-visits/colombia.html>). The United Nations have described the situation in this country “as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises”.

One of the regions visited was the Chocó. The ecumenical team writes:

“The Chocó region is of military importance for all parties to the conflict that has involved the army, two groups of left-wing rebels and right-wing paramilitaries since the 1960s. Close to the border with Panama and covered by tropical forest, it is a key area for arms trafficking. The region is also of great economic interest. It is potentially the site of a canal linking the Caribbean and Pacific Oceans and of a highway linking Panama and Colombia. It is also rich in minerals, cultivable land, timber and biodiversity. The area's population, which individually and collectively has legitimate property rights to land whose value has multiplied tenfold since 1996, has become an obstacle in the way of military actors and powerful economic interests. Today, transnational companies use extensive areas of this territory for African oil palm plantations and for cattle rearing. ‘We have seen how economic projects use the armed conflict as a pretext to evict peasants and steal their land’, said Rev. Christopher Ferguson, the WCC representative to the United Nations and member of the Living Letters team. ‘Transnational companies are responsible for the suffering of these communities,’ he added.”

The report on the visit to two groups of internally displaced persons states:

“Since 1999, some of the displaced people in Curvaradó and neighbouring Jiguamiandó have tried to return to their homes with the support of non-governmental organisations, including the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission. In 2001, a military and paramilitary attack caused new displacements. This exodus coincided with the introduction of African oil palm plantations on the evicted communities' land. Less than a decade later, the tropical forest has become a ‘green desert’ of oil palm trees.”

There are also the kidnappings and murders of people who oppose socio-economic and political violence:

“It is difficult to estimate the number of enforced disappearances committed by the military and paramilitary groups as part of their counterinsurgency strategy. Amnesty International puts the figure at between about 15,000 (the number of cases being investigated by the office of the general attorney) and 30,000 (denounced by human rights organisations)”.

As the culprits for this situation the team identified the government of the country, supported by the United States:

“The visit and the evidence gathered by the team led it to criticize President Álvaro Uribe's government. ‘There is a major contradiction between the government's portrayal of itself as democratic and its markedly authoritarian character’, said Bishop Etchegoyen. He also criticized the ‘Plan Colombia’, through which the United States channels ‘large sums of money for the purchase of arms in the guise of humanitarian aid’.”

It becomes clear from such experience that in Colombia the life of people and the Earth is threatened by violence from economic structures, the military and cultural ideology. Since colonial times a handful of families have owned and controlled most of the land and its mineral wealth. They cooperate with transnational corporations in exploiting oil and ore, or more recently, oil-palm and other cash crops to produce agrofuel. Together they deploy paramilitaries to protect and extend their “property”. The latter evict farmers and the indigenous population from their land, terrorise and murder not only their leaders but also unionists and journalists who report on the acts of violence, along with those in solidarity from social movements and churches. The government and the military cooperate with the paramilitary – supported by the US military stationed in the country and

the related military aid. All this takes place in the political and legal framework of the “Plan Colombia”. This guarantees the neoliberal structure of the economy, “free trade” and military security. The media controlled by the powerful classes protect the system in cultural terms.

The grounds given for this system of violence from economic structures, the (para-)military and cultural sources are the “war on terror”, in this case the guerilla movements FARC and ELN. No one asks why these movements were formed over fifty years ago and have since then engaged the country in civil war. This war began after the killing of the popular politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948. Since then, there have been many attempts to find a political solution to the social and armed conflict. But whenever the opposition dares to come out of the underground – on the basis of deals – and seeks a public debate on policy their leaders have been brutally murdered.

The upshot of this development is four million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and four million people who have gone into exile. Every year sees the murder of several thousand leaders from unions, indigenous organisations, social movements and professional groups defending the rights of the resistant victims, i.e. lawyers, journalists etc. At the same time, fertile land is being destroyed for specific economic interests.

So we are dealing here with a clear mingling of economical structural violence, and direct military and paramilitary violence. The cruelty of the killings – people are not just tortured but their bodies chopped up – shows the brutalising and dehumanising effect of violence on individuals but also on society as a whole.

We could tell similar stories from other countries affected by the history of European and US colonialism and imperialism. The Living Letter team visiting Colombia included Bishop Solito Toquero of the United Methodist Church of the Philippines. He immediately discovered parallels with the situation in his own country:

““The visit of this group made us feel that churches from all over the world have been here. It has given us spiritual energy and encouraged us to persevere as a church committed to the life of those suffering from forced displacement,” said the Rev. Gloria Ulloa, executive secretary of the Coastal Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia. ‘It was compelling to listen to Bishop Solito Toquero, of the United Methodist Church of the Philippines and observe how many similarities there are in the conflicts in our two countries,’ Ulloa added. ‘The commitment of the Philippine churches re-energizes our effort to move forward with ours’.”

““The Rev. Jorge Zijlstra, secretary for the Caribbean and Great Colombia region of the Latin American Council of Churches, based in Puerto Rico, said the Living Letters' mission does not end with the visit to the country in question. ‘If you send a letter, you expect a reply, and perhaps from now on we can be 'living letters' from Colombia to the world, and make the voice of those who are suffering here heard in places that are unaware of the situation in this country.’”

Other examples of Living Letters from other countries and continents could be described and commented on.

The Living Letters are thus examples of finding out about one another in the worldwide body of Christ. They help us to learn to see similar situations in different places, to discover what this has to do with global structures and also to note how Christians are waking up to things in the countries mainly responsible for wrongdoing and violence and taking a stand against them. In order to understand what we have seen, however, and find ways of containing and overcoming the prevalent violence, we need to analyse it and listen to God’s Word

## *II. Judge*

From the margins one recognises most acutely what violent, systemic mechanisms are at work, threatening the lives of people and the Earth. This is a life-and-death matter. Here between 30 and 40 million people die of hunger every year – particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Proxy wars rage (e.g. in the Congo), and rising seas threaten to flood the fertile land as a consequence of climate change (e.g. in Bangladesh). In the centres of power and wealth, however, life seems to continue as usual. Here it is a matter of maximising the well-being on the Titanic. The biblical witnesses guide us to take God's perspective: to hear cries, to see distress (Ex 3), to show solidarity with the "least" (Mt 25:31ff.) and to transform the "groaning of creation" with the help of God's spirit-power into the freedom of God's sons and daughters (Rom 8:19f.). In short, overcoming violence is ultimately about overcoming all that endangers God-given life – the "holy gift of life" – in all human dimensions of the body, soul and spirit, but also in the cosmic dimensions of the earth. What is needed to enable the living conditions of people and earth in this situation is justice and peace. Hence we suggest calling the ecumenical declaration "Life in just peace".

### *1. The violent tendency of modern civilisation leads to death*

In 2007 the World Council of Churches and the Council for World Mission (CWM) jointly organised a consultation in Korea entitled: "Transforming Theology and Life-Giving Civilization" (<http://www.oikoumene.org/de/dokumentation/documents/oerk-generalsekretaer/speeches/13-08-07-chang-seong-korea-transforming-theology.html>). The report begins with the paragraph:

"Today we are faced with life-killing civilization, manifested in economic injustice, ecological destruction, the threat of Empire, and the escalation of religious conflicts. This compels us to urgently explore the possibility of life-giving civilization which affirms relationships, co-existence, harmony with creation, and solidarity with those who struggle for justice."

Accordingly, violence with its lethal effects can only be overcome in the global context if we get to know the foundations and elements of the prevailing western civilisation and set out towards a completely new culture of life.

The economic, political and cultural structures of this life-threatening civilisation are connected with an understanding of God and humankind that developed in the modern age. This was articulated by several philosophers who always, openly or covertly, draw on theological sources.

*René Descartes* supplied the fundamental categories for modern culture. He defined a human being as "lord and owner of nature". Nature was no longer a gift of God, but the object of conquering and dominant humans. *Francis Bacon* had said that human beings had to squeeze the secrets out of nature like a torturer out of witches. For "knowledge is power". According to Descartes, the human subject is purely rational, and male to boot. In his view, women are basically determined by nature and emotions. The European modern age has been thus essentially defined by sexism. Equally, non-European peoples were understood as "natural peoples", which is the basis of European racism. God was understood as the clock-maker who created the world as clockwork that runs on automatically and thus can be mastered in a calculating way by the rational subject.

*Thomas Hobbes* added another category. He projected experience with the emerging capitalist market society into the nature of humankind. In his view, human beings are to be understood as isolated individuals, driven by the desire for more power, wealth and reputation. Society is understood as war of all against all. This war has to be curbed by a strong state by enforcing the recognition and imposition of property and contractual rights.

*John Locke* continued this approach by defining human beings exclusively as property owners. True, the Earth was created for all but God says: "Be fruitful and multiply." That is why one should

appropriate the earth through work. However, in that people have agreed on the introduction of money that does not spoil when you hoard it, rational and hard-working people can also accumulate more property than others. The state has no other task than to protect this (unequally distributed) property. Whoever rebels against this (bourgeois) order can be struck down like a wild animal or made a slave. After the Glorious Revolution (1688) Locke thereby legitimised the appropriation of North American land by English settlers, the extinction of the resistant indigenous peoples and the enlargement of the British Empire. He increased his personal fortune through slave-trading.

Finally, the founder of liberal economics, *Adam Smith*, used a theological argument to legitimise the egoistic striving for more wealth. He claimed that the invisible hand of the market formed the selfishness of individuals into the wealth of nations, i.e. general prosperity. This ideology conceals the fact that the market in fact strengthens the strong and weakens the less privileged.

These interpretative patterns arising in the European modern age are based on an understanding of God that diametrically contradicts the biblical God. This god rewards calculating, competing individuals who use the gifts of nature with the aid of means-to-an-end rationality and monetary accumulation mechanisms to accumulate private wealth and power. All of life becomes subject to the logic of capital accumulation. Thus the money increasing in the market becomes the god of the modern age. Anyone who does not voluntarily subject themselves to it is forced to do so or wiped out. The destructive consequences of this approach are explained away as undesired (unintentional), regrettable side-effects, “collateral damage” so to speak.

Anyone who understands the roots of modern civilisation will also understand the present. It is characterised by the *neo-liberal, imperialist globalisation* of this western capitalist civilisation. In many countries of the South, the ground having been prepared by dictatorships and violent subjugation of all opposition forces, almost all societies were broken open for the dominance of the world market. Global capital movements were liberalized and deregulated. The main players here are transnational corporations, banks and investment funds, which acquire resources all over the world, exploiting people and nature for their own purposes along with local elites. Ideologically, these economic and political crusades have been successfully planned and accompanied by networks like the Mont Pèlerin Society, think tanks, media, university institutes and forms of theology such as prosperity theology. The calculated thinking in terms of money and competition has meanwhile penetrated the poor, middle and rich classes in all countries. This type of civilization can only survive – despite its violent, destructive consequences – if the majority of people accept it.

But even many of those who resist fall prey to the same logic. They respond to the systemic economic and political terrorism with counter-terrorism. And where hunger, chaos and ecological degradation grow, ethnic, religious or social groups turn against each other instead of resisting together and cooperating to work out viable alternatives. Indeed, competitive behaviour penetrates even families and schools. Violence against women, violence in schools and violence in the streets is essentially reinforced by the general culture of violence. In many cases, the mass media are likewise dominated by winners of the economic and political system, and the role they play is well known.

In view of the enormous crises of life at all levels, which are now unmistakably generated by this system, people have an enormous opportunity to learn to judge in a new way and to change direction. Here the churches face the great challenge of reinterpreting God’s biblical witness and making it heard. They must shake off their conformity to the destructive elements of the modern age and learn to work with communities and movements of another – or no – faith to build a life-enhancing culture and praxis.

## 2. *The biblical witness to life with justice and in peace*

With few exceptions, the Hebrew Bible and the Messianic writings of the Second Testament do not portray an ideal world from the angle of the powerful. On the contrary, they report on how God hastens to assist those threatened by violence, who then build new communities in which a life with justice and peace becomes possible. God frees the Hebrew slaves exploited and oppressed by imperialist powers from the hands of the Egyptians (Ex 3), God grants a new beginning to the Judean upper classes deported to Babylon for their own faults (Is 40-55). In Galilee and Judea, groaning under the heel of the Roman occupation, God builds new, actively non-violent communities through Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. God sends spiritual power to penetrate the whole of the Roman Empire with a new, non-violent lifestyle based on mutual solidarity. The end of the Bible, in the middle of the persecution by the Roman Empire, presents a cosmic dimension. There we have the vision of a new heaven and a new earth, on which life with justice and in peace is possible. All these situations are not just about overcoming violent structures, but also always about liberating people inwardly from the power of sin.

What is this power of *sin*, which tempts people towards death-bringing acts of violence? After the disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Jewish upper class to Babylon, all circles of the people of Israel start to think again. What are the causes of the disaster, they ask, and how can they avoid similar mistakes in future? Here the writings of the prophets gain in importance. The powerful elite had rejected their messages from God and persecuted them, e. g. in the case of Jeremiah. After the disaster the priestly circles now brought forth the prophet Ezekiel, who called for repentance. As a ripe fruit of the 50 years of exile, these circles, having engaged with the imperialist ideologies of Babylon, had developed a new understanding of Israel's traditions, indeed, of the whole history of humankind and creation. This priestly document recalls original history (Genesis 1-11) and God's good creation, but also what human beings have made of it. The core of the interpretation is the violence arising in all dimensions of life from a wrong basic stance, and the way in which God again and again enables life, even in such situations.

What is this *wrong basic stance*? According to Genesis 3, the first couple, Adam and Eve, breaks out of fellowship with God and eats the fruit of the tree that, according to the serpent tempter, gives knowledge of good and evil. "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate" (3:6). It was not enough to enjoy God's rich gifts together in the garden. The ego came to the fore and wanted to take possession of (eat) the fruit, i.e. to "privatise" it. The direct upshot was shame before each other. Not only was their relationship with God troubled but also their relationship with each other. The man and the woman no longer saw themselves in a natural, mutual relationship. A further consequence was the dominance of the man over the woman (v. 16). The relationship of the man to the earth was disturbed (v. 17), and they were both befallen by death. Their elder son, Cain, killed the younger one, Abel (Gen 4). Lamech, a descendant of Cain, introduced unlimited vengeance (4:23f.). In the story of Noah we then hear the general judgement: "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth" (6:11f.). The story of the flood that follows this corruption is the clearest biblical perception of the fact that human sin destroys not only social relations but the earth itself. This motif surfaces repeatedly in biblical writings. Injustice linked with idolatry leads, in the time of the prophet Elijah, to the cessation of rain and a terrible drought. The climax of the general story of violence in the Book of Genesis is Empire. It is symbolised by the building of the Tower of Babel, which is used to supervise the members of subjugated peoples working as slaves and, at the same time, to worship the God of power. The dominance is also consolidated by the fact that only the language of the Empire may be used, an expression of cultural violence.

The power of sin enticing people to selfish appropriation is not an inexorable fate. God says to Cain, before he kills his brother: "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do

well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it” (4:7). And even if people yield to sin and the consequent violence, God lovingly offers a new beginning. God clothes Adam and Eve, who are ashamed of their nakedness, protects the fratricide Cain from revenge, places the bow of war in the clouds – as a sign, with the Covenant with Noah, that the survival of the earth is guaranteed and that the violence-ridden earth is not even to be destroyed by flooding (9:12ff.). God calls Abraham in order to make him and his descendents a blessing for the peoples, calls prophets, when the peoples are untrue to their mission and finally sends the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, to create a new humanity in his spirit. This will cancel out the dominance and power relations between men and women, between male owners and slaves, and between different peoples and cultures (Gal 3:26-28).

With respect to the modern-age *culture of violence* it is important to see that its *preliminary forms* spread out in the Ancient Near East from the 8th century BC, and also that resistance was offered by those remaining loyal in Israel, stemming from their trust in God. Even before, the court and the aristocracy had enriched themselves at the expense of the land-owning farmers. And they had to guarantee their inherited property, used to guarantee the subsistence of the families, against attacks (1 Kings 21). But now a form of economy was introduced to the Ancient Near East in which land was regarded as private property, to be accumulated with the aid of interest and money. The farmers had to get accustomed to the monetary economy because they had to pay tribute to the great powers, as reported in Nehemiah 5. The consequence was the division of society into large land-owners and such families as had to borrow seed when the harvest was poor, but who could not pay back the loan plus interest. They lost their mortgaged land and had to work for the large land-owners as debt slaves in order to pay off the debt.

The climax of these early forms of modern violent civilisation was the *Hellenistic empires and the Roman Empire*. Besides the normal tribute, the property-interest-money economy was imposed with its divisive consequences, its slavery and the dominance of cities over the countryside. The accompanying ideologies were totalitarian i.e. the globalising of an economy based on property and money came hand in hand with military dominance and subjugation of peoples.

Starting with Amos, the *prophets* rose up against such economic mechanisms based on plundering and violence: “They covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance” (Micah 2:2; cf. Amos 2: 6f.; Is 5:8). The prophets were partly successful in that they achieved *legal reforms* (the Book of the Covenant in Ex 21-23; Deuteronomy; Leviticus). They notably prohibited the charging of interest. And if anyone got into debt the debts were remitted after seven years, in the sabbatical year; the debt slaves were freed and the arable land was left to rest. The land, too, was not to be exploited to the maximum. It was not a commodity but a gift to provide for the needs of families and to be treated carefully. No exploitation of human labour and of nature was permitted, nor any desire for accumulation. For: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me” (Deut 5:6f.). The other godheads had names like Baal – lord and owner – or Mammon, the god of collecting treasure.

Ancient Israel countered all that with the vision of an *economy of enough for all*. We hear in the manna story: God gives bread as a gift for all – and the instruction, “Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’ The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed” (Ex 16).

*Jesus* and his followers take up this economy of enough for all. Jesus, referring back to the manna story, rejects the temptation of the tempter to turn stones into bread, with the words: “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). He gets the

4000 people to share what they have and they are all filled (Mk 8:1-10). The Book of Acts says about the young congregation of disciples, filled with God's Spirit (4:32f.): "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul and, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

At the same time, Jesus countered the harsh Hellenistic-Roman rule by building up a community free of violence and dominance, instructing the male disciples as they jockeyed for power:

"You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all."

Mark 10:42-44

The Kingdom of God is precisely such a non-dominant, life-friendly new order, turning the old orders upside down – and that is the heart of Jesus' preaching and practical life. This new community in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount is then light in a dark world order and "salt of the earth" (Mt 5:13ff.) – the missionary call to all Christians down the ages. Today such a life of justice and peace is possible in the Spirit of Jesus. If we realise it as a worldwide ecumenical community in the dramatic crisis of the dominant world order, and are willing to face conflict and suffering, then we are the mission community of Jesus.

### *3. A life of justice and peace in other faith communities and culture*

The crisis is global. The socially and ecologically destructive neoliberal capitalist economic order is global. It is serviced by the global, imperialist policy of the USA and its allies. Individualist, competitive and thus implicitly violent ways of thinking and life are spreading globally. It is thus unthinkable that Christianity alone can bring forth the new culture necessary for life and serving a life in dignity, along with the new institutions that this would require – quite apart from the fact that western civilisation was brought forth with the direct participation of post-Constantine Christendom and is supported by many Christians to this day. So it is not only a matter of prompting the Christian churches to seek fundamental repentance and renewal from biblical instruction and inspiration, but also of encouraging them to ally themselves with other forces in other faith communities that are willing to be renewed from their own sources and to struggle together for a new, peaceful culture of life with justice.

This has already begun, in many different ways.

In the tradition of the Prophets and the Torah there are a host of *Jewish* movements and organisations working for justice and peace – precisely against the violent policies of the state of Israel. One example is Gush Shalom (<http://www.gush-shalom.org/english/intro.html>) in Israel or the Network of Spiritual Progressives (<http://www.spiritualprogressives.org>) with their magazine *Tikkun* in the United States.

Such movements may also be found in *Buddhism*. When the new property-money economy started to spread in the Ancient Near East, it got as far as northern India, from whence came the ideas of *Buddha*. The experience of incipient poverty and the accompanying suffering caused Gautama, a prince, to abandon all his goods and titles out of empathy, in order to find a way to overcome suffering in society. He began to realise that poverty and suffering are caused by greed, which is why his solution was the overcoming of greed through meditation and casting off all superfluity. His enlightenment was based on the insight that it is an illusion to regard people as isolated selves, having to extend their life potential through increasing property even at the cost of others, then having to defend it aggressively with the use of force. After all, the whole of life is only possible in

relationships to other living beings. Life and all living things are in relationship. Being attentive to this at every moment means reducing and overcoming violence and suffering.

Many Buddhists are today rediscovering this in view of the suffering caused by the dominant world system. They are joining together at the local and international level in order to demonstrate and struggle for a new culture of life in relationship. An example is the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (<http://www.buddhanetz.org/netzwerk.htm/>  
[http://www.inebnetwork.org/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid=48](http://www.inebnetwork.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid=48)), and many studies and books have appeared on the subject.

The same applies to *Islam*. Not only did social justice play a central role for Mohammed himself, within the then merchant culture. In addition, by the Koran's adoption of the biblical ban on interest, the policy of Islamic banks takes on relevance today, in view of the financial crisis of speculative capital. Furthermore, there are international networks here too, offering cooperation for a life of justice and peace, e.g. the Asian Muslim Action Network (<http://www.arf-asia.org/aman.php>) or the Muslim Peace Fellowship (<http://mpf21.wordpress.com>). South Africa even saw the emergence of a Muslim theology of liberation during the anti-apartheid struggle (<http://uk.geocities.com/faridesack/fereviewqlp.html>). Also the joint statement (*A Common Word between Us and You*) of 138 Islamic scholars of 2007 is an outstretched hand to the Christian churches to work together for peace and justice (<http://www.acommonword.com/>).

In *Hindu* tradition, *Gandhi* stands out as the "brother of Jesus". He offers a comprehensive counter-approach to the possessive western culture of violence. Gandhi clearly recognised that "possessiveness creates violence". By contrast, he developed a community economy starting with local self-supply and a non-violent political strategy of active resistance against unjust structures and constructive forms of participatory democracy (Satyagraha=holding to the truth). For him, faith in God was directly linked to political commitment to justice and peace. His ideas still thrive in many social movements in India, and also in international organisations such as the World Conference on Religion and Peace (<http://www.swarthmore.edu/Library/peace/DG051-099/DG078WCRP.html>).

Indigenous populations can offer perspectives and approaches of great significance for a new culture of life. The *original ties of indigenous peoples with Mother Earth* are also reflected in their traditional forms of faith. Ecofeminism links up with this approach, but there is meanwhile a very vital branch of Latin American liberation theology and especially Bible reading that is creatively led by representatives of indigenous peoples.

Furthermore, the above-mentioned consultation organised by the WCC and CWM on "life-giving civilization" has brought the African "ubuntu" and the Asian "sangsaeng" into play. They are very stimulating when it comes to turning from a possessive culture of violence to a culture of living relationships:

"*Ubuntu* is an expression of human relations lived in community and in harmony with the whole of creation ('African anthropology and cosmo-vision lived in community'). *Sangsaeng* is an ancient Asian concept 'of a sharing community and economy which allows all to flourish together'.... The convergence of *Ubuntu* and *Sangsaeng* highlights the **conviviality and relationality of all God's creation**, while offering a possibility of reflecting, analyzing and protecting life based on the *Ubuntu* principle "I am because you are, you are because I am." Both these principles are about the eradication of hate, anger, private wealth without sharing, oppression, exploitation as well as harmony and peace with the cosmos."

However, do the different faith communities not pray to different gods? Does that not hinder the necessary cooperation? The Initial Statement on Just Peace contains elements of an answer to these questions. It roots the peace mission of the churches in *God's Trinitarian dynamic*. Sections 22-25 state:

- “22. The eternal and dynamic coinherence (in Greek: *perichoresis*) of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, reveals on the one hand the all-pervading unity of the divine. This all-pervading unity of the divine is also on the other hand a unity with and within diversity, the eternal One in Three and the Three in One.
23. This also reveals the nature of creation: Creation is a seamless whole within its diversities, within the all-embracing *energeia* (the outward movements of the Trinity) that are designed to reveal in a sacramental manner the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The harmony and beauty of created existence, manifested through its diverse dynamisms, cannot therefore be detached from the all-embracing Trinitarian Reality of the God of Peace.
24. God and creation are thus not set at infinite distance from each other. Rather they are in profound relationship with each other, as the differences within the beauty of creation mirror the *perichoresis* or co-inherence of the Three Persons that are the Trinity. It is that encircling, mutual, embracing set of relationships between them that reveals to us the reality of God - creating and sustaining, healing and redeeming, bringing to fulfilment and reconciliation in peace.
25. The *oikos* of the world and of the Church, the *oikoumene* of God’s design and purpose therefore, are not arbitrary constructs. The *oikos* finds its meaning and purpose in the Trinitarian *perichoresis*, an embrace of love, peace, and beauty. Building peace is our participation toward that *perichoresis*, that eternal dance. Therefore, peace-building is not just about repairing what has been broken, but about expanding and completing relationships that make the *oikos* the mirror of the Trinity.”

Precisely the apparently exclusive Christian view of the Trinity thus turns out to be a bridge to the other faith communities and cultures, which – by contrast to the modern, western combination of competitive individualism and deist, mechanical dominance-god – perceive all of life and the cosmos as a web of relationships and consequently maintain life-friendly relations. In the old-church phraseology of biblical tradition, God is not an arbitrary, imperial ruler (monarch), but the source of community as relations, of mutual relationship in love and with justice – the fruit of which is all-embracing peace, shalom. Difficulties with other faith communities only arise when the doctrine of the Trinity is claimed to be an incomprehensible dogma. Relationality takes precedence over substance ontology. Here biblically founded Christian faith encounters all the above named forms of faith and cultures. But even if there should be differences in certain questions of faith: God, as testified to by Jesus, asks about the humanity towards needy, suffering creatures, and in this respect it is even often those who know nothing of Jesus who fulfil God’s loving will (Mt 25, 32ff.).

#### *4. A culture of life is not only necessary, it is possible – and already growing*

Everywhere in the world people are waking up – in groups, NGOs, churches, faith communities, sciences and humanities, and even sometimes in political institutions. They are offering resistance to death-bringing structures and shaping elements of a new civilisation of life with justice and in peace. The huge crisis apparent since 2008 has shown – if this was not clear before – that there is no point in appealing to people in terms of a “value decision” as a matter of individual ethics. Everyone and the whole of humanity need an ethic of life. Back in the 1960s, it was said: “Peace is the life condition of the scientific and technological age.” Today it must be put in the broadest terms: there will be no life without placing business, academia, politics and culture in the service of a life of justice and peace. More and more people are getting the message. Some only have a sense of it and are waiting for further guidance – this is an immense challenge to us Christians, and churches. In this context we can build on impressive beginnings.

What is fundamental is a new understanding of what it means to be human. *Brain research* has proven, for example, that we have mirror neurons in our brain. They have the effect that we spontaneously feel pain when we see the pain of another person. That means we are not – as capitalist anthropology suggests – “by nature” simply individuals competing selfishly for more power and wealth. Rather we are also compassionate, empathic beings. A person’s striving to survive also serves life – but only if it is linked with the insight and practice that we can only survive together. If by contrast, we behave in a purely selfish, calculating way, we will not survive – at least under today’s scientific and technical conditions. And modern western civilisation is driving us into precisely this wrong behaviour. As churches we must confess our share of guilt here too. The way in which we have taught that individual sin is, so to speak, part of human nature, supports the

social misconception of the selfish nature of people, with which capitalist ideology legitimises its way of doing business and an authoritarian political system justifies its power.

Another view of humanity is growing in *psychology* too. Instead of seeing a person as an individual dominated by drives, relational psychology shows that we only become subjects through intersubjectivity. That means that our self can only arise and remain healthy in mutual recognition. Even happiness research proves and shows on the basis of the self-estimate of interviewees that happiness is not felt to be “having more” than a good life, but it means flourishing relations – and this related to the whole social, international and ecological field, not just personal relations.

In brief, sciences and humanities are also discovering relationality as a priority for being human. Compassion, cooperation and solidarity do not stand against the nature of a person but are elements of a desired and fulfilled life. Our efforts to survive will only succeed if we allow ourselves to be guided by them. Otherwise our efforts will lead to destruction. It is true that social conditions and technical progress can cause us to repress this realisation. However, in particular in view of the crisis, more and more people are allowing this realisation to come forth. What does that mean, however, for the development of economic, political and cultural alternatives?

*Economically* speaking, the outdated, wrong alternatives of the modern age are: absolute private ownership or an absolute, centralist, imposed plan with state ownership. In both cases power is centred above and most of the people depend on or are even objects of the rulers and owners. What could the alternative of a democratic economy in the service of life be like?

The starting point is rediscovering the old biblical insight that the earth with its air, water and land is a gift of God and thus has to serve the life of all creatures. That is being described anew today with terms like commons. According to UN calculations, it is beyond dispute that there would be more than enough for all to live, at least with respect to basic needs, if a small minority of people did not systematically rob humanity for their own affluence. Resolute resistance to this structural violence of unjust economic circumstances has been effectively suppressed by the powerful – if necessary using direct violence. However, the earth will not tolerate this exploitation and the related pollution for much longer. Growing environmental disasters and crises are the writing on the wall. That is why people and earth will only be able to survive if the commons are managed in a socially just and ecologically sustainable way.

A central point here is breaking the absolute dominance of private property going beyond utility property to increase the monetary fortune of a few. The central point of reference is going back to winning priority of utility property for all, coupled with a sustainable cyclical economy, in which more is not taken from nature than it can sustainably regenerate. Here the form of property may vary, depending on practicability, between cooperative common ownership, communal ownership and public-state ownership. In addition, usage rights can certainly be accorded to private individuals but only after being checked for the public obligation to the common good and the sustainability of nature. The commons basically belong to all and so procedures must be found to grant usage rights. The market will thereby also be freed from the capitalist pressure to accumulate wealth and it will be placed at the service of general welfare. Even technology can be freed from the captivity of wealth accumulation and placed at the service of the cyclical economy.

Many examples from different levels show that this is possible in practice. At the *local and regional level* there is a growing worldwide movement for *solidarity-based economics*. Owing to the strength of this movement the Brazilian government has even set up a separate ministry for solidarity-based economy. Many municipalities are liberating themselves from the privatisation illusion and are recommunalising their supply of water, energy and transportation. At many places producer-consumer communities are springing up between agriculture and urban populations. Alternative cooperative banks provide the real economy with loans.

But it is not sufficient to change things only at the local and regional levels. This transformation would be destroyed if the *national, continental and global political economy* continued to impose their destructive logic of capital accumulation onto humanity and the earth. Social and ecological movements all over the world have already begun to form strong coalitions in order to place the economy at the service of life through new macro-level approaches and institutions. One central approach is the struggle against further privatisation of public goods and services. The main global agent of pressure to privatise in the service of capital interest, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), has been effectively blocked by social movements since 1999, even though the rules have tended to be tightened up to the detriment of the South. That is why the struggle for a more just international economic order must go on. The global crisis is being used by the social movements to develop fundamental alternatives to the monetary and financial system. A central factor here is to reconceptualise and institutionalise money as a public good to facilitate the real economy, as proposed by John Maynard Keynes. Money must not be a commodity to earn more money, something even John Calvin criticised. In the financial system, all derivatives and institutions such as hedge funds must be politically prohibited if they only exist for speculation on the value of money and thereby do serious harm in the real economy.

The same renewal is possible and necessary regarding *work*. Technology does not eliminate jobs, as neoliberal ideology would have us believe, it reduces the necessary amount of labour needed to produce goods and services. Distribution is the central problem when it comes to the gifts of nature. If socially necessary work were justly distributed there would be no unemployment. But the technologically possible productivity gains are all creamed off into the accumulation of capital. This is compounded by the non-respect for reproductive work in the capitalist economy, which – given the still largely prevalent division of labour between men and women – puts women at a huge disadvantage. As part of the development towards an economy based on utility goods and services, labour must thus be re-appraised and redistributed. There are many examples of this happening here too, particularly at the local and regional level. For example, non-viable factories within the capitalist system were taken over by the workforce in Argentina after the crisis there in 2001; this shows that it is possible to democratise the economy in larger units as well.

The same applies to *consumption*. The prevalent opinion in the rich countries is that fulfilling needs and wishes is only possible by “more of the same”. There is no doubt that over one billion people in the global South cannot even fulfil their basic needs for that reason. “A child that dies of hunger is murdered,” says Jean Ziegler. Apparently this insight does not suffice, however, to bring about a change in the consumer pattern of the global North. For that reason, many initiatives here attempt to show that living differently, i.e. with social and ecological responsibility, means living better. It is particularly clear here that happiness comes about through flourishing relationships – both with other people and with nature. That also applies to overcoming the extreme gap between North and South. The pressure to destroy rain forests, biodiversity and social cohesion exerted by the North on the South through the capitalist system will end up destroying the quality of life of people in the industrialised countries in less time than we think.

Taken together, all this means that the global economy does not need automatic, quantitative growth if resources, work and consumption are distributed more or less fairly. That includes there inevitably being more growth in the South – though considering other criteria to measure growth. That has also long been seen in research on the question of indicators for economic success. The absurd, purely monetary assessment of the gross domestic product (GDP) sees socially and ecologically damaging processes (e. g. poisoning rivers, traffic accidents and their consequences) as positive, only because they are generated through abstract economic growth. Alternative indicators measure only that which is both socially and ecologically successful, i.e. benefits humankind and cares for nature.

*Ecologically* speaking, there are also a wealth of alternative approaches, policies and ways of life. It is central to understand that the energy of the future, after the exhaustion of fossil fuels like oil – and hopefully beforehand – will be available in a decentralised form: sun, wind, water and biomass. Many examples show that, with these energy sources, municipalities can become completely independent of capital-intensive energy oligopolies. We saw that the basic economic question was a new property order “from below”. And in terms of energy, too, the local and regional level is the starting and arrival point of economic activity. After all, that is where people live and that is where destroying or caring for nature matters.

There are also many examples of a cyclical economy by now. Processes have been developed to reduce artificial products like plastic, electro-scrap etc by refrigeration (kryo-recycling) to their elementary parts and use them again. By contrast with agribusiness, organic farming can guarantee food security, food sovereignty and sustainability. There is a growing readiness to recognise – and partly compensate for – the ecological debts of the North towards the South. Social movements and ecumenical networks in the North are taking up the demands of Jubilee South and the WCC to urge the governments of the North to use at least one percent of their GDP to provide sustainable technologies and support for organic farming in the countries hardest hit by climate change, particularly Africa. Ecumenical agencies work increasingly to stop the further growth of ecological debts by emissions and other kinds of pollution.

All these new ways and options in the area of economic, social and ecological justice are already an – albeit inadequate – contribution to *overcoming the causes of violence and war*. But there are also direct peace-policy approaches to lessening and overcoming violence. *Public opinion* is crucial here. When the USA attacked Iraq with the “coalition of the willing” millions of people went out and demonstrated worldwide. Surveys in different European countries show that over 70% of populations strongly reject not just this war but also the NATO-led war in Afghanistan. The problem is that these majorities do not organise themselves. Here the ecumenical movement could play a major part with other faith communities and social movements. That also involves organising resistance to the growing build-up and marketing of arms. Above all, however, President Obama should be held to his word about creating a nuclear weapons-free world. And it should take issue with the scandal that the USA, NATO and now Russia continue to reserve themselves the right to a first strike with nuclear weapons.

Above all, *forms of active non-violent resistance* to wrongdoing, oppression and direct violence need to be supported and further developed. Here too there are numerous admirable examples. One of the most impressive is the weekly resistance of the village called Bil'in in the West Bank. Every Friday, non-violent activists including Israelis and international volunteers, organise a protest against the building of the wall that is increasingly separating Palestinians from their land. The Israeli military hits back each time with tear gas, rubber bullets and arrests and conducts nocturnal attacks on the village. Despite this state terrorism and its consequences the people are holding out. Here and in other such cases the WCC could organise a worldwide campaign of solidarity. “When one member suffers, all other members suffer.”

A positive example of church solidarity with the oppressed is the ecumenical peace service EAPPI, where international volunteers in Israel and Palestine monitor the observance of human rights at checkpoints and other flashpoints of violence, stepping in to provide protection if need be.

In the last few years *voluntary peace services* have developed in astonishing numbers. Both for conflict prevention and also for conflict solution and follow-up in the aftermath of conflicts there are a myriad of successful examples, e.g. in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Rwanda and many other countries. In Germany peace groups and churches have organised structured training courses, and shalom ministries. That makes it clear that peace-building is an essential component of being church – as are other branches of diaconal ministry. However, it is not just voluntary peace services

that carry out this peace ministry of the church. It is far too little known that many churches and councils of churches in cooperation with the WCC have quietly contributed to finding a solution to conflicts, thus avoiding armed conflict, e.g. in southern Sudan, between Namibia and Botswana, and in Nepal. Another case is the revolution in the German Democratic Republic in 1989. This went off peacefully thanks to the churches, with their practice of prayers for peace in the context of the ecumenical process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

God's all-embracing shalom is not yet complete but God became a human being and in discipleship we can help to make the world more humane. We cannot guarantee success, which is why praying for peace is the basis of all action. But the Kingdom of God is among us, says Jesus. Hence we have hope beyond short-term failures.

After critically and constructively judging the dramatic crises of life, what consequences must we draw at all levels?

### ***III. Action for life with justice and in peace***

#### ***1. Reaffirming ecumenical decisions***

So that the action of Christian churches receives a clear perspective at all levels and in all its social forms, it is necessary together to reject the present possessive system of violence. Based on the Bible we must develop a vision of the way in which predominant circumstances have to be transformed. To that end, *we reaffirm the decisions* of the latest assemblies of ecumenical organisations (cf. respective assembly reports).

The assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) declared in 2003 in Winnipeg:

“(59) Through our diverse experiences, we are facing the same negative consequences of neoliberal economic policies (i.e., the Washington Consensus) that are leading to increased hardship, suffering and injustice in our communities. As a communion, we must engage the false ideology of neoliberal economic globalization by confronting, converting and changing this reality and its effects. This false ideology is grounded on the assumption that the market, built on private property, unrestrained competition and the centrality of contracts, is the absolute law governing human life, society and the natural environment. This is idolatry and leads to the systematic exclusion of those who own no property, the destruction of cultural diversity, the dismantling of fragile democracies and the destruction of the earth.”

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) named and rejected the coupling of the economic system and imperial power at its General Council in Accra in 1994:

“(18) **We believe** that God is sovereign over all creation. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24.1).

(19) **Therefore, we reject** the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defy God’s covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political, and military empire which subverts God’s sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God’s just rule.” (General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra in 2004)

The WCC assembly in Porto Alegre in 2006 summed up the work in the joint ecumenical process for alternative globalisation addressing people and earth (AGAPE) in a prayer and commitment (Call to Love and Action). It concludes:

*“Creator God, may the power of your grace transform us,  
Christ, give us courage and hope to share our life with each other and the world,  
Holy Spirit, empower us to work for justice for people and the earth.  
God, in your grace, transform the world. Amen.*

In the spirit of this uniting prayer, we challenge ourselves to have the courage to take action. The AGAPE call invites us to act together for transformation of economic injustice and to continue analyzing and reflecting on challenges of economic globalization and the link between wealth and poverty.

### **1. Poverty eradication**

We recommit ourselves to work for the eradication of poverty and inequality through developing economies of solidarity and sustainable communities. We will hold our governments and the international institutions accountable to implement their commitments on poverty eradication and sustainability.

### **2. Trade**

We recommit ourselves to work for justice in international trade relations through critical analyses on free trade and trade negotiations, and to collaborate closely with social movements in making those agreements just, equitable and democratic.

### **3. Finance**

We recommit ourselves to campaign for responsible lending; unconditional debt cancellation and for the control and regulation of global financial markets. Investments should be redirected towards businesses that respect social and ecological justice, or in banks and institutions that do not engage in speculation, nor encourage tax evasion.

### **4. Sustainable use of land and natural resources**

We recommit ourselves to engage in actions for sustainable and just patterns of extraction and use of natural resources, in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, who seek to protect their land, water and their communities. We recommit ourselves to challenge the excessive consumption of affluent societies so that they will shift towards self-restraint and simplicity in lifestyles.

### **5. Public goods and services**

We recommit ourselves to join the global struggle against the imposed privatization of public goods and services; and to actively defend the rights of countries and peoples to define and manage their own commons. We recommit ourselves to support movements, groups and international initiatives defending vital elements of life such as bio-diversity, water and the atmosphere.

### **6. Life-giving agriculture**

We recommit ourselves to work for land reforms in solidarity with landless agricultural labourers and small farm holders; to advocate in various ways for self-determination over food concerns. To oppose the production of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) as well as trade liberalization as the sole directive. We commit ourselves to promote ecological farming practices and to stand in solidarity with peasant communities.

### **7. Decent jobs, emancipated work and people's livelihoods**

We commit ourselves to build alliances with social movements and trade unions that advocate decent jobs and just wages. We commit ourselves to advocate for those workers and bonded labourers who work under exploitative conditions and are deprived of their rights to form trade unions.

### **8. Churches and the power of empire**

We recommit ourselves to reflect on the question of power and empire from a biblical and theological perspective, and take a firm faith stance against hegemonic powers because all power is accountable to God. We acknowledge that the process of transformation requires that we as churches make ourselves accountable to the victims of the project of economic globalization. Their voices and experiences must determine how we analyze and judge this project, in keeping with the gospel. This implies that we as churches from different regions make ourselves accountable to each other, and that those of us closer to the centres of power live out our first loyalty to our sisters and brothers who experience the negative impacts of global economic injustice everyday of their lives. This AGAPE call is a prayer for strength to transform unjust economic structures. It will guide our reflections and actions in the next phase of the ecumenical journey. Our engagement will build on the findings, proposals and recommendations to the churches from the AGAPE process as outlined in the AGAPE background document.“

In this declaration we reaffirm these decisions and commitments of the common ecumenical process.

Furthermore, we adopt the commonly found positions and options for action in the area of ecology and peace commitment of churches and ecumenical organisations.

Regarding *peace with the earth*,

- WARC called on the churches in 2005 to turn away from agribusiness and help to set up life-enhancing agriculture ([http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news\\_id=437&navi=45](http://warc.jalb.de/warcajsp/side.jsp?news_id=437&navi=45)).
- In 2008 the LWF conducted a survey on climate change and the resultant challenges for theology and the church ([http://www.lutheranworld.org/What\\_We\\_Do/OCS/LWI-2008-PDF/LWI-200805-EN-low.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/OCS/LWI-2008-PDF/LWI-200805-EN-low.pdf)).
- The WCC working group on climate change is working intensively at a theology and strategy for the churches to participate in a thorough-going, life-enhancing transformation of culture (<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and->

responsibility-for-creation/climate-change-water/05-2009-wcc-working-group-on-climate-change-meeting.html).

- In 2008 an interreligious climate summit was held in Uppsala, that adopted a noteworthy manifesto (<http://www.peaceforlife.org/resources/liferesources/2008/08-1129-uppsalainterfaithclimate.html>).

That means that in all faith communities there is growing awareness and readiness to act and fight for the preservation of life on our planet. What is at stake now is to change our own personal and institutional behaviour at all levels and in all places, and to exert tough pressure on the predominant economic and political forces to change their hitherto irresponsible actions as fast as possible.

In the *area of peace as overcoming direct violence* the ecumenical movement has already taken basic decisions. The WCC's Vancouver assembly adopted a statement on peace and justice, in which it clearly stated that not just using but also manufacturing nuclear weapons was a crime against humanity:

- "a) a nuclear war can under no circumstances, in no region and by no social system, be just or justifiable, even the fact that the magnitude of devastation caused by it will be far out of proportion to any conceivable benefit or advantage to be derived from it;
  - b) nuclear war is unlikely to remain limited, and therefore any contemplation of "limited" use of nuclear weapons should be discouraged as dangerous from the outset;
  - c) all nations now possessing nuclear weapons or capable of doing so in the foreseeable future should unequivocally renounce policies of "first use", as an immediate step towards building confidence;
  - d) the concept of deterrence, the credibility of which depends on the possible use of nuclear weapons, is to be rejected as morally unacceptable and as incapable of safeguarding peace and security in the long-term;
  - e) the production and deployment of nuclear weapons as well as their use constitute a crime against humanity, and therefore there should be a complete halt in the production of nuclear weapons and in weapons research and development in all nations, to be expeditiously enforced through a treaty; such a position supports the struggle to cause one's own nation to commit itself never to own or use nuclear weapons, despite the period of nuclear vulnerability, and to encourage and stand in solidarity with Christians and others who refuse to cooperate with or accept employment in any projects related to nuclear weapons and nuclear warfare;
  - f) all nations should agree to and ratify a comprehensive test ban treaty as a necessary step to stopping the further development of nuclear weapons technology;
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The 1989 Ecumenical Assembly in Dresden (then still in the GDR) stated even more broadly:

"(3) We declare our rejection of the spirit, logic and practice of deterrence based on weapons of mass destruction. A true peace order, guaranteeing the security interests of the people and states and international communities must finally renounce the unfitting and irresponsible means of weapons of mass destruction. We want to strongly support the transition to new, political ways of securing peace that is now finally beginning."

The First European Ecumenical Assembly in Basel in 1989 also supported this commitment:

"75. We consider it to be vitally urgent for humanity to abolish the institution of war and to overcome deterrence based on weapons of mass destruction. We feel the need progressively to free the world from all weapons of mass destruction. We commit ourselves to the nonviolent settlement of conflicts throughout the world. We will work for an international peace order. In particular, we must together achieve concrete treaties which form the basis of an international peace order."

These decisions are again highly topical and should be expressly ratified and implemented by the churches. In the National Security Strategy (2002) the USA still retained the possibility of a nuclear first strike, as does NATO. Weapon development continues. The churches should denounce this openly and constantly as a crime against humanity. This is a good moment. President Obama has announced that he wants to launch a process for a nuclear weapon-free world. The churches in all countries possessing nuclear weapons should apply strong pressure on their governments to make this announcement come true.

However, the problem is far more comprehensive. Imperialist wars contrary to international law still continue. Particularly what the US government calls war on terror has been waged since 2001 in a

law-free space. In Afghanistan NATO is even escalating the war. The attack on Iraq by a US-led coalition of the willing brought unspeakable suffering on the people, with the second Gulf War in 1991 and its consequences having caused over one million deaths. Under the guise of war on terror the US government also indirectly supports the killing of human rights and peace activists in countries like the Philippines and Columbia, and likewise the oppression of the Palestinians by the state of Israel. But the EU, too, is developing intervention troops instead of defence troops to protect its economic interests worldwide and has legalised this change of direction in the Lisbon Treaty.

In addition, climate wars will increase with climate change. The latest of this kind has been the war in Sudan. The number of civil wars will also increase as societies become more chaotic through the social consequences of the neoliberal capitalist economic system. This shows that the economic causes of social and ecological violence must be removed, simultaneously with selective opposition to specific peace-policy threats such as the existence of weapons of mass destruction and the imperialist stance of the West. Peace policy is not possible without working for social and ecological justice. The converse is also true: there can be no social and ecological justice without peace.

In view of the all-embracing systemic crisis, it is therefore of paramount importance that the World Council and its member churches make a new binding effort to put the interconnected issues of justice, peace and creation on the agenda. That applies both with respect to the structural and cultural causes of the all-embracing crisis and the consequent clear rejection of the prevailing system, and also to working on conditions for a new, life-enhancing culture, including new politico-economic structures and ways of life. As has always been the case in the conciliar process of mutual commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation, it is here too a matter of the church being church, in loyalty to God and on the basis of biblical witness.

That is why we here declare our faith in God's love of life in just peace, our rejection of the culture and structures of death, and our liberation for a life in mutual commitment.