



# Together on the Way Towards Just Peace

A Declaration on Peace

by Students of the University of Hamburg / Germany

## Preface

In 2006 the delegates of the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) decided to mark the end of the “Decade to Overcome Violence. 2001-2010” with an **International Ecumenical Peace Convocation** in 2011. On the one hand this will be the culmination of a ten-year common journey of formation, not only for the member churches of the WCC. On the other hand the Peace Convocation shall provide a stimulus for the next steps.

On the way to the Convocation an **Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace** is to be developed, which will be adopted in its final version at that Peace Convocation. This requires a participatory process, which should provide an opportunity for many to contribute to the development of such a declaration.

In spring 2007 a letter was sent out by the WCC to universities, theological faculties and seminaries all over the world, inviting them to become part of this process by offering respective courses. In such courses the goal would not simply be to teach contents, but the students are invited and asked to in fact elaborate their own peace declaration. In the Institute of Peace Church Theology at the University of Hamburg and in the department “Overcoming Violence” of the Northelbian Ev.-Lutheran Church we instantly agreed to get involved in this adventure of learning by writing in a group process.

The project was designed for a period of two semesters: in the Winter Term we concentrated on the German context, starting with an analysis of the Barmen Theological Declaration of 1934. The founding of the WCC in 1948, which was strongly influenced by the discussions on peace theology and the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt of the Protestant churches in Germany provided the historical-political starting point for further explorations: we read and discussed the peace declarations of the Evangelical Church in Germany, starting with the Heidelberg Theses of 1959 up to the latest one “*Aus Gottes Frieden leben – für gerechten Frieden sorgen*”, which was issued during our first term. In order to gain an ecumenical perspective it was indispensable to add documents from other church traditions: the Roman-Catholic Church, the Methodist Church as well as from the Historic Peace Churches. Several meetings were spent discussing the theological and ethical implications of the Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation in East- and in West-Germany, especially the Ecumenical Assembly in the former GDR and its political implications and influence in society, up until the massive changes in 1989.

In the Summer Term of 2008, equipped with this knowledge we were ready to do some “deep drilling” – with additional help by some experts – into some of the current global challenges, which should not be missed in a peace declaration of the 21st century: interreligious relations, economic globalization, and the “new wars” influenced by it. We explored strategies to overcome violence like the pacifying function of law and new approaches of restorative justice, the concept “Responsibility to Protect” and initiatives to build a culture of non-violence. We became aware of how much the assessment of different dimensions of violence and overcoming violence

depends on our own point of view: the context, the religious formation, level of education, theological positions as well as preconceptions, which become evident in dialogue.

In the accompanying tutorial the new insights were to be converted into a common text. We soon recognized that this was not an easy task. Unanswered questions had to be discussed further, dissensions had to be resumed or tolerated, and only after that were we able to start to formulate a text. The seminar as well as the tutorial were characterized by an atmosphere of mutual appreciation and acceptance, which made it possible for the participants to enter into honest dialogue.

In the end we had many additional meetings, which were attended by the students voluntarily – far beyond the required seminar hours. It became in fact an adventurous learning process for all of us. Additional motivation arose from the invitation to present our project to the international *Team-Visit* of the WCC to Germany at the end of our Summer Term (in the framework of the Decade to Overcome Violence the WCC sends out international teams to different regions of the world in order to get a picture of the violence and the attempts to overcome it in that particular context).

We thank all who have contributed to the fact that we can now present this little paper as “our” Declaration on Just Peace to the international ecumenical community. For us it is a means of self-assurance and a contribution for further discussions with others. Special thanks to Mareile Rösner (tutor) and Stephan von Twardowski (assistant), who have pushed this process tirelessly with great diligence and patience, Joachim Wöbke for translations, and the invited experts for helping us immensely with information, their experience and their own theses.

May our result encourage young and old, men and women to write and discuss their own peace texts. New ecumenical horizons will be opened, which will contribute to building a culture of overcoming violence – in accordance with the New Testament calling us to be peace makers. This project has left none of us unchanged and it is certainly not our last word on this matter.

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## Together on the Way Towards Just Peace

### Preamble

This declaration on peace has been developed in an ecumenical course of the *Institute of Peace Church Theology of the University of Hamburg / Germany* (winter-semester 2007/2008 and summer-semester 2008), in collaboration with the department “*Overcoming Violence*” of the *Northelbian Evangelical-Lutheran Church*. The seminar followed an invitation of the World Council of Churches within the framework of the *Decade to Overcome Violence. 2001-2010: Churches seeking Reconciliation and Peace*, to participate in the development of an ecumenical peace declaration. With this contribution we intend to take part in walking the way of just peace.

As a theological seminar we deal with the Christian message and tradition. For us this includes historico-critical analysis of the Bible as a basis of our argumentation. Following our Christian self-conception we are oriented to the commandment to love God and our neighbour as it has been determined in the Torah (Deut. 6:4f.; Lev. 19:18; Mark 12:29-31).<sup>1</sup> We recognize this commandment also in other religions.<sup>2</sup> We are conscious that for some people assertions of faith and Christian points of view may appear strange and that they may feel excluded. This declaration on peace invites all to join us in critical analysis, reflection and further deliberation and wants to encourage dialogue. The commitment to peace and justice is a responsibility of every human being.

Our understanding of **peace** is founded on the biblical notion of *shalom*. *Shalom* implies more than the mere absence of war. *Shalom* is social life in just relations and stands for being whole, holy and well. This is God’s peace we hope for, this is God’s peace we strive for. We believe that this peace is God’s will for our world and that God enables and calls all people to participate.

Peace and **justice** belong together and are promised by God, according to the biblical witnesses: “*The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness*

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations according to New Revised Standard Version (1989). Deut. 6:4ff. “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*” Lev. 19:18: “*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord.*”, Mark 12:29-31: Jesus answered, “*The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.*”

<sup>2</sup> On October 11th, 2007, 138 Muslim scholars wrote an open letter to all the Christian churches and leaders, underlining that a common peaceful future is a precondition for the survival of humanity. This letter is accessible under: [www.acommonword.org](http://www.acommonword.org).

*quietness and trust forever*” (Is. 32:17).<sup>3</sup> The biblical notion of justice does not mean an objective judgment, but defending the poor, justice for those deprived of their rights and the restoring of those being burdened with guilt. Justice means healing of broken relationships and the restoration of just conditions. This is why mercy and truth are integral elements of God’s justice. In this sense we are oriented towards a “just peace”.

To accept and confess personal and social **guilt** is indispensable for the concept of just peace. We must recognize and admit that in our world we incur guilt with regard to people and Creation when we act, but also when we refrain from action. To realize this does not exempt us from the responsibility for our decisions.

As God loves us guilty as we are and forgives us, we can exercise **forgiveness** among each other. The ability to forgive and to experience forgiveness fills us with hope that we are able to proceed on the way of just peace.

*“What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet”* (Ps. 8:4ff). We as human beings are **responsible** for this world. Often humankind misuses its power in the sense of a violent and absolute claim to rule. However, responsibility reminds human beings of their duty to treat this world with care as this responsibility sets limits to a violent execution of power. These limits exclude exploitation and misuse of people, of our co-creatures, of resources and nature. Each single person and society as a whole has the duty to act responsibly for the welfare of every human being.

For us the commitment expressed at the end of each paragraph is a step to assume personal responsibility. In this commitment we are carried by the word of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: *“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ...Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”* (Matt. 5:5-6:9).

## Together on the Way – For a Just Life in Solidarity, Freedom and Equality

*“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”* (Gen. 1:27).

Jesus says: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”* (Mark 12:30).

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<sup>3</sup> In the context of the Hebrew Bible this describes a process which is promised to the People of Israel, when the Spirit will be poured out over them from the heights as part of the events of the last days. Law and justice are fundamental to profound *shalom* that includes nature and humanity. If we as Christians are oriented towards this promise, we include the People of Israel.

**We recognize** that the respect for the dignity of many human beings and with it also human security and solidarity are in jeopardy in our society.

In our view this happens, among others, by

- the increasing use of state control and surveillance mechanisms,
- the frequently unquestioned faith in a largely self-regulating market which reduces human beings to their role as market participants and consumers, and which results in unemployment and destitution of a growing part of our society,
- the growing expenditure for arms, the export of arms – pushed also by Germany, and the national and international military conflicts resulting out of this,
- the insufficient recognition and lack of integration of immigrants, of people with migratory background and of refugees from other countries,
- stigmatizing people of other origins and religions and by suspecting them of being terrorists,
- the growing governmental control and supervision mechanisms,
- the disproportional use of government force,
- the latently existing racism and the revitalization of Nazi ideology in parts of our society,
- the approval and exercise of violence by extremist groups,
- the lack of recognition and encouragement of children and young people by society at large that can be found in many places.

**We confess** that we, too, actively and passively disregard the dignity of our fellow human beings in our daily lives, and thus refuse to love God.

**We believe** that God, Creator and Keeper of the world, has created every human being to his image. In their diversity, created by God, all human beings are equal before their Creator, without distinction of their ethnic, national or social origin, their sex, language, religion, their cultural character, sexual orientation and political or other opinion. As God's image every human being possesses an inviolable and inalienable dignity.

**We believe** that God, in the act of justification, affirms every life. Therefore, reducing a human being to his or her deeds is impossible (Rom. 3:28).<sup>4</sup> The distinction between person and deed in the unconditional justification by God's grace elucidates the dignity inherent in each human being. This dignity endows all human beings with equal and inalienable rights, forming the foundation of liberty, justice and peace. God's love frees us to take action for peace.

Believing in the One God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ puts us in a responsible relationship with our fellow human beings, our neighbours and our enemies. The One God corresponds to One Creation, One World, One Humankind that in all its diversity shares in the unity and uniqueness of life.

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<sup>4</sup> Rom. 3:28: "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law."

**We commit ourselves**, in the freedom bestowed on us by God, to practise the love of God and of each other in our communities and wherever we encounter others.<sup>5</sup> We want to break exclusion, oppression and injustice and – starting even in small things – contribute to the creative formation of a free, just and manifold society, in which every single person, male and female, can experience a life in fullness.

**We commit ourselves** to actively stand up for *human* security (as opposed to solely national or military security) wherever government regulations cast indiscriminate suspicion on groups and individuals, stigmatize and exclude them and thus restrict the freedom rights that all human beings are entitled to.

**We commit ourselves** to oppose the idea that human security and the recognition of human dignity can be restored by any form of physical, psychical or structural violence.

**We commit ourselves** to request the persons responsible for international relations in our country to speak up firmly in international negotiations for the complete abolition of the death penalty and of torture of any kind, and to oppose uncompromisingly every watered-down definition of torture.

**We commit ourselves** – also in our personal lives – to live in solidarity with people endangered by threats, exclusion and need and to seek dialogue and a community-building way of life with them.

## Together on the Way – Remembering, Healing and Shaping a Reconciled Future

*“...in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” (2 Cor. 5:19).*

**We recognize** that we – also as members of the church – are part of a history of approval and exercise of violence that has victimized uncountable numbers of people. All of us, as descendants of victims and perpetrators, bear the consequences: in personal mourning, in manifold experience of loss, exclusion and need. The responsibility for what has happened leaves its marks on our lives and also on the lives of following generations.

In the *German* context this is, above all, true for the suffering of many nations caused by the Second World War, and in particular for the *Shoah*. Part of our very recent past is the injustice inflicted on our own nation that was initiated by the party leadership in the former German Democratic Republic, and in which many citizens were involved and caught up.

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<sup>5</sup> Gal. 5:1: “Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”

In the *global* context there also exist forms of violence grown and handed down historically. Until today we are unthinkingly caught up in some of them, and it is difficult for us to be aware of their effects and to change our behaviour. We recognize this, for example, in the economic perpetuation of colonialist patterns of dependency (in the exploitation, for example, of human beings and in deficient standards of production in low-wage countries) and in the undesirable effects of globalization resulting from them.

**We believe** that God sees injustice, makes human beings aware of it and does not consign it to oblivion. He calls us to change and to re-orient ourselves (Mark 1:15).<sup>6</sup> We trust in God's justice and mercy and want to listen to the word of reconciliation that makes us aware of open and concealed violence, and which grants us the power to resist and to overcome.

**We therefore commit ourselves**, in following Christ, to play a part in overcoming injustice and to stand up for just peace. In doing this we must accept responsibility for the guilt of the past, in order to take new steps in a spirit of reconciliation. We contradict the spirit of conformity to a prevailing justification and exercise of violence and the indifference to the consequences of former injustice.

**We commit ourselves** – also in our personal lives – not to forget the events of the German past, to keep up remembrance and to support a mature and critical debate, in order to prevent any rise of inhuman ideologies.

## Together on the Way – Being Church for a Just and Peaceful Society

*“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God ... for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! ... Pay to all what is due them – taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due”.* (Rom. 13:1-7).<sup>7</sup>

**We recognize** that the government has the function of keeping order in the community and limiting power. Its task is to create space for everybody for a non-violent, just and participatory life in the society.

In a democratic and constitutional state the law is oriented to justice, the realization of

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<sup>6</sup> Mark 1:15: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”*

<sup>7</sup> In the history of Christianity this text has often been used as a theological legitimization for all forms of exercising governmental authority, up to the idolization of power structures. This interpretation is, however, contradictory to the real intention of the text which only deals with the function of state authorities of keeping peace and order.



which *all* human beings must try to achieve in a constant public dialogue. According to E.-W. Böckenförde “the free, secularized state (...) depends on foundations that it cannot guarantee itself”.<sup>8</sup> The enforcement of law oriented to justice is the precondition for all human beings to feel secure in the state’s community. Such security of the law serves, first of all, the weak and most vulnerable and makes the keeping of justice necessary and credible.

**We recognize** that in a government’s monopoly on the use of force there is the danger of misuse, which in a democratic and constitutional state is prevented by a balance of power. In German history the misuse of power became reality in the time of National Socialism as well as in the former GDR. The respective governments did not shape the law according to justice, but to help them stay in power, they bent the law and put injustice in the place of justice. Many Christians, especially church leaders, remained silent in the face of injustice during the Nazi dictatorship or even supported it to their own advantage. They legitimized this rule and its actions even theologically and thus justified the Nazi ideology of a racially defined people.

It is the courage of those Christians who were prepared to accept personal disadvantages and to take considerable risks up to risking their lives in their commitment for justice, peace and the integrity of creation that calls upon us today, too, to make a clear confession, especially when the government transgresses its limiting and limited functions.

**We recognize** that state and church have two different mandates in society. The mandate of the state is primarily political, not without ethical responsibility. The mandate of the church is primarily ethical, not without political responsibility. The church must respect the political task of the state. She must, nevertheless, follow her ethical mission and evaluate the governmental institutions and actions against the state’s original task. In doing so she must be independent of the state in her judgment and in her structures. A clear separation of state and church is necessary so that they can point out to each other their tasks and limits – for the good of society.

**We believe** that we as the church, as the community of believers, have been entrusted with a prophetic mandate and that we must speak up clearly to the government if it does not meet its duties or transgresses its limits. The mandate of the church includes the ministry of a critical watch (*Wächteramt*) in relation to the state<sup>9</sup> that makes her

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<sup>8</sup> Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, (1991) *Recht, Staat, Freiheit. Studien zur Rechtsphilosophie, Staatstheorie und Verfassungsgeschichte*. Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 914, Frankfurt am Main, p.112.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. thesis V of the Barmen Theological Declaration: “‘*Fear God. Honour the emperor.*’ (1 Peter 2:17). Scripture tells us that, in the as yet unredeemed world in which the church also exists, the state has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace. [It fulfils this task] by means of the threat and exercise of force, according to the measure of human judgment and human ability. The church acknowledges the benefit of this divine appointment in gratitude and reverence before him. It calls to mind the kingdom of God, God’s commandment and righteousness, and thereby the responsibility both of rulers and of the ruled. It trusts and obeys the power of the Word by which God upholds all things. We reject the false doctrine, as though the state, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the church’s vocation as well. We reject the false doctrine, as though the church, over and beyond its special commission, should and could appropriate the characteristics, the tasks, and the dignity of the state, thus itself becoming an organ of the state.” [www.creeds.net/reformed/barmen.htm](http://www.creeds.net/reformed/barmen.htm).

continuously reflect and realign the social life of *all* human beings, to take a stand for human dignity and critically to accompany the actions of state authorities – in solidarity. The church must be the advocate of the weak, the voice of the voiceless, and she must actively represent the rights of those who are denied elementary human rights.

**We commit ourselves** to follow political events and developments attentively and to take part in shaping this state responsibly and actively. This includes showing the government its limits in a reminding, warning and critical manner, to oppose unjust action, to suggest possible solutions in the spirit of the gospel and to offer alternatives to foster a life in peace and justice.

## Together on the Way – Shaping Globalization in a Just Way

*“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?” (Is. 58:6ff).*

*“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.” (Ex. 20:2ff).*

The time we live in is usually characterized by the term “globalization”. Globalization describes a process of several dimensions. It includes the *technological dimension*, by means of which communication has become possible worldwide and which is being enhanced continually, the *political developments*, which form the conditions for cross-linked activities worldwide, *socio-cultural shifts* from local to global and the thereby increasing heteronomy, and finally the *economic dimension*. Economic globalization is the result of political decisions aiming at enforcing market principles like liberalization, deregulation and privatization worldwide.

**We recognize** that the one-sided pursuit of these market principles allows unjust structures to emerge and to aggravate. Economically weaker countries, in particular, cannot withstand the competition of the market, but in the economically stronger countries, too, the gap between the poor and the rich is widening.

**We recognize** that the logic of the capital market is declared to be the all-deciding foundation of societal and international relations. Moreover, in the course of economic globalization a financial market has evolved parallel to the real economy that is based exclusively on capital speculation, not depending on productive achievements. As a result the economy and thereby the means of livelihood of many countries and people is severely damaged.

**We recognize** that today’s worldwide economic system exercises structural violence,

harming human beings and animals and destroying the environment. This system leads to direct violence, sometimes to the use of military force in order to gain economic power by controlling natural resources. Ultimately, pursuit of control over natural resources is also a reason for the exploding arms expenditure of the industrialized countries and for the “new wars” in economically poorer countries.

**We recognize** that the negative effects of economic globalization make us feel resigned. Frequently the question about alternatives to the seemingly inevitable way of one-sided globalization is simply scotched.

**We believe** that God is a God of peace and justice, who wishes to free us from the bondage of unjust structures. The life of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of God’s Kingdom show that God takes the side of the poor, the disenfranchised, the excluded and the oppressed. God calls upon us to return to him, to expose unjust and violent structures and to seek new forms of communal life that do not make capital the only and absolute criterion of success.

**We believe:** Another world is possible that is characterized by just structures and a life in fullness for *all*, if we understand that we are *one* world. In doing this we want to obey the First Commandment, not serving idols but God only (Ex. 20:2ff).

**We commit ourselves** to question our way of life and to change it. We want to take part in shaping communal life that is based on just relations and rests on God’s shalom. This calls upon us to become active and – within our own capabilities – to work towards an alternative way of globalization.

**We commit ourselves**, in the framework of parishes, networks or initiatives, to seek political and – through our consumer habits – economic ways of influence. Thereby we aim at a communal life in a just world that makes sharing and participation possible for *all*.

## Together on the Way – Living Responsibly in an Endangered Environment

*“God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’.”* (Gen. 1:28).

**We recognize** at the beginning of the 21st century that humankind has irretrievably destroyed a great part of creation. Almost every day new scientific studies prove that climate change is strongly influenced by human activity, and that by humanly caused global warming natural resources are extremely threatened. “‘There is no scientific study that might show that another factor except humanly caused emissions is responsible for global warming,’ says Martin Claussen, meteorologist from Hamburg

University.”<sup>10</sup> Human beings force nature to retreat everywhere, every day many species of animals and plants are harmed and wiped out through human fault. Thus, destruction of the environment also leads to misery and death of our fellow creatures.

**We recognize** that changed eating habits have caused a higher demand for meat. This demand is being met by an industrialized animal agriculture beyond all measure, not appropriate to these species. The production of animal feed necessary for this takes away cultivation areas especially from people living in poverty, it damages bodies of water and groundwater and increases the danger of epidemics and hunger in the world.

**We recognize** that the humanly caused destruction of the environment increases the division between the poor and the rich already existing in the world, because the economically poorer countries suffer disparately due to the destruction of the environment. Changes in nature force a lot of people to leave their homes and lead to competitive fighting for important natural resources and water, in which people from economically poorer countries are left with almost nothing. Nature is the basis of *all* life. If it is destroyed, the precious living environment for human beings is also destroyed, which leads to new violence and military conflicts, to misery and death.

**We believe** that creation is the good work of God (Gen. 1:31a).<sup>11</sup> God, who gives and affirms all life, has entrusted the world to humanity. From God’s trust in human beings and their being created in God’s image arises our mandate for a responsible stewardship and a caring way of dealing with creation.

**We commit ourselves** to accept nature as something precious, created by God, and to not exploit it for our own benefit. We want to resist conditions in our society that are not in accordance with God’s good creation. Protection of the environment demands investments from all of us, for example in saving energy, in the use of regenerative energy-sources and the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. We want to take a stand for a policy that does not allow agricultural subsidies to go to companies that harm the environment, make animals suffer and increase hunger in the world.

**We commit ourselves** – also in our personal lives – to do what is possible for us to protect and to preserve God’s creation. We want to examine our life styles and our consumer habits critically and to support the preservation of creation actively.

## Together on the Way – Listening to Each Other in Respectful Cooperation

Answering a scribe’s question about which was the most important commandment of all, Jesus said, quoting the Torah: “*The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall*

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<sup>10</sup> [www.taz.de/index.php?id=archivseite&dig=2006/09/25/a01110](http://www.taz.de/index.php?id=archivseite&dig=2006/09/25/a01110) [download: 2007-12-09].

<sup>11</sup> Gen. 1:31a: “*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.*”

*love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”* (Mark 12:29-31).

*“I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”* (Rom. 9:1-5).

**We recognize** that the multi-cultural and multi-religious diversity we live in is a crucial challenge for our living together. Frequently lack of knowledge, one-sided opinion-forming and polemics, influence exercised by the media, prejudices, suspicion and fear, lead to the rejection of faiths and religions unknown to us, thus threatening a free practice of religion. This freedom, however, is part of our understanding of our faith and rightfully belongs to basic human rights. Religious diversities often lead to tension, conflicts, divisions and violent fighting. Belief and religion are often misused to instigate and legitimize violence and wars.

**We recognize** that interreligious dialogue is absolutely necessary on the way to just peace.<sup>12</sup> At the same time it is an enrichment and an opportunity. Such a dialogue demands frankness with one another in order to discover commonalities, but also differences and contradictions. It requires our courage to mutually address controversial subjects and opinions and the willingness to listen to, respect and accept each other.

**We recognize** that, because of the common root of both religions, the Jewish-Christian dialogue is indispensable. We recognize that Christians often consider Jewish contents of faith to be exclusively Christian. This is because, from lack of knowledge, they negate their root which is in the Jewish tradition, and understand the Christian tradition to be a super-revelation or even a substitute. Bearing in mind the Hebrew term “shalom”, we must remember Israel was the first to receive the promise and the commandment to love. This remembering needs to be done not as of an event in the past, but in a way that understands history as part of our present. We must remember God’s relationship to Israel and all human beings, because God remembers his covenant, too. It is the essence and the task of the church to seek encounters with the People of Israel in order to recall the lasting connection.

**We recognize** that currently we are particularly confronted with conflicts between Christian and Muslim believers. We often feel we are competitors and make use of differences to treat each other with hostility, instead of looking for commonalities and, based on them, to reflect differences as being constructive and inspiring. Such

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<sup>12</sup> This necessity extends to the dialogue with all religions and denominations. In the following we confine ourselves, though, to the dialogues between Christians and Jews and Christians and Muslims, because we have dealt with them in our seminar. From the Christian perspective the relationship to Israel is of particular significance.

commonalities, for example, have been newly emphasized by “An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders to the Religious Leaders of Christianity: A Common Word between Us and You.”<sup>13</sup>

**We believe** in the One God, the Merciful, who is common to us and to people of Jewish and Muslim faiths and who connects us with each other. We believe that this One God is a faithful God (Ex. 32:7-14).<sup>14</sup> God’s faithfulness pertains to *all* human beings. Competition between adherents of different faiths and claims to exclusivity must not determine their relations. A dialogue, on the contrary, demands mutual acceptance, each side on the basis of their own faith.

**We believe** that the commandment to love our neighbour urges us to encounter *all* people – regardless of their particular religion – with love, even our enemies (Matt. 5:44-45a).<sup>15</sup> This means to take up respectful and equal relations and to recognize the dignity and the freedom of each and every human being. We believe that we share the wish for peace and justice. From this we draw our hope for a non-violent settlement of current conflicts and a common peaceful future.

**We commit ourselves** to take up a dialogue on equal terms with people of other faiths. Its aim is to discover and to overcome misunderstandings and misinterpretations, to discover commonalities and differences and to state them clearly, and to listen to each other without bias, with a firm will to understand. This requires from us to know our own position and to be prepared to examine it critically, to point out and to reject prejudices on our part and on the part of our fellow human beings.

## Together on the Way – Opposing War and Promoting Peace

*“He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”* (Is. 2:4).

*“...to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”* (Luke 1:79).

**We recognize** that up to this day people are losing their lives through military force,

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<sup>13</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>14</sup> Ex. 32:7,11,13ff.: *“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely’; ...But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, ‘O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?’ ...Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’ And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.”*

<sup>15</sup> Matt. 5:44-45a: *“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”*

and that immeasurable suffering that cannot be compensated for is inflicted on the survivors of violently fought conflicts. This happens in spite of the experience of two world wars and the numerous efforts to prevent armed conflicts. A third global and possibly nuclear war has in fact been successfully avoided so far, the East-West confrontation has been ended and in Europe a largely peaceful living together of nations has also been institutionally secured. Still root causes of war and centres of conflict exist in many parts of the world and have triggered off hundreds of wars in the past decades. It can be observed that these wars are less and less frequently fought by the deployment of large military units, which would cause high costs. In the wars of the last few decades highly armed states have confronted adversaries that were considerably inferior in arms technology. On the other hand, so-called “new wars”, often originating in state failure and the accompanying vacuum of power, were and are fought by economically poorer countries, warlords, rebels and revolutionaries, by using cheaper weapons taken out of service in other armies, and by recruiting children and youths. They produce a constant threat to the civilian population. Decisive factors causing these excesses of violence are the unjust economic conditions, poverty and lack of perspectives. As there is often no common interest among the permanent members of the UN Security Council in ending such conflicts, they often last for years and decades, cause high numbers of victims and – in the long run – they destroy the natural resources in these regions as well as the trust of generations in the possibility to live together peacefully.

**We recognize** that at present there exist no internationally agreed and firmly pursued strategies to end these conflicts and wars worldwide, to heal their wounds and consequences and to deliberately prevent the outbreak of further violent conflicts. Attempts in this direction are in fact being made by some states and alliances, but they often fail because of conflicting interests. On the way to worldwide peace, therefore, an international legal order is needed that is accepted and practised by all and that is committed to peace and human security worldwide and not only regionally.

**We recognize** that it is difficult to find solutions, in view of the complexity of the causes of conflict and the lack of international agreement. This leads to widespread resignation and often to the false supposition that there will always be wars, that people ought to be prepared for them, and that they must be ready to fight with arms in hand for the protection of peace.

**We believe:** God calls us as human beings to preserve the earth – God’s creation – in peace and security and to live together peacefully. Violence and war are contrary to God’s will. Trusting in God’s promise we find the strength to overcome resignation in the face of widespread and, as it seems, inevitable violence, and the hope to be able to contribute to creating a peaceful life together.

**We believe** that God is on the side of the victims of any form of violence. This implies, for states and every human being, to perceive war and violence from the perspective of the victims. Never must the suffering of the victims be the price that is paid for supposed settlements of conflicts. Therefore governments, in their efforts to establish peace and security, must not place their hopes in the establishment and

preservation of military strength, but must aim at non-violence and prevention of violence through the development of civil possibilities of resolving conflicts. They must accomplish this by way of international law, a judicial system, and disarmament. Part of this is long-term confidence building in international institutions.

**We commit ourselves** – within the limits of what we can do – to foster and support initiatives of states, churches and non-governmental networks and organizations that are aimed at recognizing and removing the causes of violent conflicts effectively. In the sphere of the churches this is especially important with regard to winning Christians for cooperation in the Ecumenical *Decade to Overcome Violence*, to have its aims of a culture of non-violence and reconciliation permanently embedded in the life of churches and parishes.

**We commit ourselves** to urge governments and parliaments to use financial resources for human security increasingly for setting up civil conflict resolution structures, and, for this purpose, to try to achieve international agreements. The establishment of international and non-military police forces and the support of international civil organizations are also part of safeguarding these agreements and of the protection of populations at risk.

**We commit ourselves** to help to heal the repercussions of war and to remove the grounds of future conflicts by active work of reconciliation. Here, too, we as Christians believe we have particular responsibility actively to support the work of our churches in the ecumenical community and in all parts of the world.

**We commit ourselves** – on the way to achieving active non-violence – to take a stand for the abolition of still existing compulsory military service. Especially the recruiting of children and youths in conflicts is to be outlawed and to be prevented effectively. It is a crime against humanity.

## Together on the Way – Towards a Culture of Non-Violence

Together we want to go ahead. We hope for God's shalom. It is this **peace of God** that we strive for. We believe that it is this peace that God wants for this world and that he calls on all human beings to stand up for such a just peace.

Drafting this peace declaration was a **continual process**. In it each of us was challenged to critically reflect his or her own position in dialogue. We experienced our discussions and debates as expanding our horizon and beneficial to the development of our own identity.

The **subjects of our theses** mirror the main points of this two-semester seminar. It referred in its first part to the peace discussions of the last 60 years in the German context, in order to then focus on international themes. With the end of the seminar the



formulation of our peace declaration that reflects our discussions and thus presents our current point of view has also come to an end. Many important themes that we could not deal with are still left and call for further consideration.

While drafting this declaration and in the respective discussions about expressions and particular phrases we realized how much we take the use of **words** for granted in **daily usage**, without further examining them. Often we are not conscious of which forms of violence we express or even legitimize implicitly.

The practice and realization of a **culture of non-violence** are indispensable for living together in our society as in the global community and for us to belong to the way of just peace.

Part of this culture of non-violence is the **active renunciation of the use of force** in conflicts and thereby the investment in alternative, non-violent conflict resolutions. Many initiatives for the prevention of violence, civil peace corps and networks have already successfully developed models and capabilities of non-violent conflict settlement. They have found a solid place in our society, too, and frequently start out with the encouragement of children and young people.

On this way that includes life in just relationships and which stands for wholeness, healing and well-being, the commitment to justice, peace and the preservation of creation shall be the basis for our personal activities.

We want to go ahead on our way – to new encounters, discussions and debates, developing new perspectives.

*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* (Rom. 12:2).

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