

"The Future We Want – Life, not Destruction"

The Message from Mainz – German Ecumenical Assembly 2014

For decades the ecumenical process for "Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation" has found expression in a number of Ecumenical Assemblies. The recent appeal from the Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Busan in 2013 which called for a seven years' "Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace" encouraged more than 500 people from Austria, Switzerland, Germany and other countries, many of them committed experts in their respective fields, to meet in Mainz from April 30th to May 4th 2014. In many workshops, lectures, open space breaks and public hearings we discussed the actual problems caused by the capitalist organization of our economies and of our lives. We agree with Pope Francis when he writes: Such an economy kills." We are in search of and struggling for a new approach to an "Economy of Life".

Aspects of Justice Today

People are still suffering under the constraints caused by inequality and hunger in spite of the fact that there is enough available for all. Therefore, we call:

- for a world wide solidarity to secure the basic needs (Grundbedürfnisse) for everyone,;
- for the reduction of the differences in income and personal wealth;
- for a just access to all resources for present and future generations;
- for the exclusive right of democratic public authorities to create money.

Aspects of Peace Today

People are being held captive by a devastating spiral of power which dominates the patterns of their socio-cultural and economic behavior. Therefore, we call:

- for an immediate stop to the export of weapons;
- for a staggered reduction of our involvement in military organizations and activities;
- for the recognition of non-violent communication and civilian solutions of conflicts.

Aspects of Protection and Integrity of Creation Today

Humankind which thinks of itself as being the "crown of creation" (Schöpfung) has become the "crown of exhaustion" of the world (Erschöpfung). Therefore, we call:

- for the rejection of the dogma of continuous economic growth;
- for an end to the exploitation of the world's resources (nature and humankind);
- for the recognition of the ecological diversity of all cultures.

Therefore, we are convinced of the necessity for a great and joint transformation of our socio-economic systems and lifestyles.

The following text explains these main theses in further detail.

“No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, and love the other: or he will respect the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Mt.6,24)

We consider ourselves as an ecumenical grass roots movement and see ourselves in a situation which asks for decisions like those for which Jesus called 2000 years ago (Mt.6). Today, we translate the Aramaic word “mammon” as “capital”, and we believe that the critical moment (Kairos) for a fundamental acknowledgment the need for responsible action has come. Our present model of civilization is challenged because of its social, ecological and economic effects. Early Jewish prophets, representatives of other world religions, and Jesus of Nazareth took a public stand on this, and so we join together with all to whom justice, peace and the protection of creation is a serious concern world wide.

Vision (Via Positiva)

The ecumenical movement is a vital process in our world today. It finds its expression in manifold local, regional and international groups and institutions. We continue to work towards our aims, encouraged and strengthened by the grace and power of God, in the face of increasingly serious crises in the last 30 years and in spite of the mantras saying that there are no alternatives to the official policies.

The vision of the Kingdom of God and of Shalom, Buen Vivir, Sangsaeng, Humanitas and Ubuntu give us an idea of the world as we would want it to be.

Scandal (Via Negativa)

Often we miss the support of the leaders of our churches. In international gatherings, criticism of the existing situation deepens and alternative scenarios and proposals are worked out. In spite of the huge amount of critical knowledge about the dangerous situation in which large parts of the world and growing groups of the population in our countries have to live, these alternative concepts play only a minor role in the everyday lives of decision makers and of most people.

We contradict, therefore, the conclusions of the recent joint declaration of the leaders of the German Protestant Churches (EKD) and the German Catholic Bishops’ Conference; their paper accepts the neoliberal social system with a slight ecological touch. We declare that for ethical and ecological reasons we cannot accept our present socio-economic model and the economic system as practiced.

The lives of our people are dominated by a capitalistic logic of accumulation and growth which has become a “state religion” and controls large parts of our everyday lives. Many of us understand that we profit from this system, yet we allow ourselves to be used to legitimize this system and do not realize the damage it does to others.

In living this way, we become guilty of serious crimes against large parts of humankind. Our failure finds its expression in many ways:

- in the exploitation and misuse of our connatural world (Mitwelt);
- in social polarization (e.g. large numbers of people die of hunger, whereas large quantities of food are wasted or destroyed);
- in the exclusion of disadvantaged people or those who are being discriminated;
- in the rejection of refugees seeking protection in our regions of wealth and liberty (“Fortress Europe”), and
- in arms production and armed conflicts to serve our economic targets, and largely financed by the taxpayers.

Challenge and Change (Via Transformativa)

What Can Churches Do?

The assembly in Mainz has again brought home to us how important is cooperation and joint effort of all the groups in our churches who are working on alternative ways of thinking and living. The present reality of the “Good Life” for few has to be confronted with a new reality of the “Good Living Together” of all people.

The ecumenical movement, therefore, should promote a fundamental transformation on the social, ecological, economic and political level – as propagated in Busan in 2013. In working for this transformation we can rely not only on the wealth of biblical traditions, but also on those in other philosophies and religions. We want to work for radical changes in our present civilization and its values, for active compassion for all people, for respect for all life, for the protection and healing of creation, and for non-violence in personal as well as international conflicts. The disturbed relations between people, between humans and nature, between past and future cannot be overcome by developments that deepen divisions, but only by creating a world-wide community of “Good Living Together”.

Our parishes can become places of transformation, workshops for social and ecological initiatives and non-violent communication. Pilgrims on the way of learning to practice justice, peace and the integrity of creation need such places of retreat and experimentation. Therefore, we are all called to engage in projects of reconstruction inspired by the Pauline concept of “oikodome”, since each building project and each section on our pilgrimage can only be accomplished jointly. At present, we are walking on an important section of this Via Transformativa. Let us go on and walk it in solidarity with our society.

What Can Civil Society Do?

We reject the notion of a “market based democracy” (cit. Chancellor Merkel); instead, we support a “democracy based economy” and the abolition of all oligarchic structures. We need an economy in conformity with our constitutions. In our Constitutions the basic values of cooperation and the common good are enshrined and not those of competition, exploitation and profit orientated enrichment.

The concept of an “economy of solidarity” (Solidarische Ökonomie) is based on the two principles of “cooperation instead of competition” and “meaning instead of gaining” (Sinn statt Gewinn). These principles, enlarged by the idea of an economy orientated towards the common good lead to concrete political demands. The present system of private money creation has to be transferred to the public sector and controlled by democratic rules. Each credit should be evaluated according to its contribution to the common good; thus, the total amount of money creation will be linked to progress in the direction of an economy of solidarity oriented towards the common good. In this context we should acknowledge the biblical ban on taking interest and the prophetic denunciation of speculation with food products.

A further concrete demand on this pilgrimage is the liberation of all people world-wide from the constraints of hunger, disease and the lack of chances for developing themselves.

Therefore, we advocate a universal guarantee of human security (Grundsicherung) which includes access to food, clean water, habitation, health care, education and regional mobility as human commons (Gemeingüter) for all people. This could be organized by local and regional non-profit cooperatives as examples show world-wide. A church parish could locally set such an example.

This is a concrete alternative to the illusions of the capitalist economy. An “economy of solidarity” with decentralized administration can not only achieve food self sufficiency, but also energy sovereignty on the basis of renewable and sustainable energy resources. Particularly with respect to the necessary reduction of CO₂ to 2 t per person and year, and the limitation of climate change to 2 degrees, it is important that we make substantial progress in energy sufficiency (responsible consumption) and energy subsistence (production by end users). We therefore believe in the necessity of an industrial “disarmament” (a substantial reduction in industrial production world wide).

Against this background, we reject the transatlantic free trade partnership agreements which are currently being discussed (TTIP for EU – USA, and CETA for EU – Canada). They must be prevented by widespread and strong protests from civil society and lobby work, since they would jeopardize all the standards of an economy in the service of life which have already been achieved or are still being pursued. We, therefore, support the campaigns of civil society, e.g. that of the alliance “Unfairhandelbar” (unfair negotiable), which advocates that the forthcoming European elections be used as a vote against TTIP and CETA. We need structures that facilitate fair trading and are orientated towards ecological, social and peace-promoting policies.

We suggest that the Ecumenical Network in Germany (Ökumenisches Netz in Deutschland) invites all interested groups engaged in working towards the great transformation of society, such as trade unions, social movements and all initiatives, for a strategy conference.

We object strongly to the military involvement of the Federal Republic of Germany and of all other countries. Participants in our Ecumenical Assembly 2014 proposed setting up a working group composed of experts in civil conflict management, development cooperation, alternative economic and ecological sciences and of the peace movement. Their aim should be to draw up a concept for a military phase-out, i.e. peacekeeping and responsibility to protect without military means. This concept is to be publically discussed. A ban (Ächtung) of the threat or the use of military force in conflicts is a precondition for eventually reaching valid agreements based on international law for the protection of the global climate and a fair global economy. Such a ban is also the prerequisite for the long overdue termination of the scandalous arms research, production and export.

Technological development has reached a level where comprehensive surveillance is possible. Since the disclosure of the activities of the NSA and other secret services we know that these possibilities are in fact being used. We reject every kind of surveillance and demand the protection of privacy.

The universal respect of human rights leaves no room for their limitation or non-observance. Violations of human rights must be named, brought to court and prosecuted, no matter by whom and against whom they have been committed.

Obviously, it is of fundamental importance for the survival of humankind that we enable our children and grandchildren to unfold and use the capacities with which they were born: their basic trust, their inquisitiveness towards everything about them, their happiness and creativity. Change in the attitude towards life in our culture, which includes the education system, is being brought about as a consequence of encounters in mutual respect, by acknowledging the equal value of different opinions and by appreciating others in mutuality. This will open the space for children to comprehend diversity as a chance and opportunity and will enable them to reach consensual solutions in sensitive, trustful and loving relationships among one another. Thus we express in a salutary way our comprehensive boundedness to one another.

Under these auspices, we have entered our ecumenical pilgrimage and ask for the support of all people of good will and of all groups in society working for the survival of humankind, and in turn offer them our support.

What Can Each Individual Do?

Every one of us personally has to answer the question: when and what is “enough”? Therefore, participants of the Ecumenical Assembly in Mainz/Germany 2014 have formulated a concrete personal commitment:

Hereby, I, (name), commit myself to a new departure. I will participate in the seven years' ecumenical pilgrimage of Justice, Peace and Integrity of the Creation.

Therefore, I pledge:

- to live in such a way as to enable “Good Living Together” of all men;
- to protect the human commons such as water, air and soil;
- to acquire knowledge and share it with others in better understanding the structural conditions, like the gap between rich and poor and the unequal distribution and use of resources;
- to work for an oikoumene of cooperation between all religions and worldviews against intolerance and discrimination towards peoples and social groups;
- to a greater appreciation of all kinds of labour (work);
- to develop a culture of welcome for asylum-seekers and refugees;
- to check my own consumer behavior and to share my financial resources;
- to transmit these ethical values to my family and to those close to me.

We cannot pursue this path alone. We need each other and we need God's support on our way of transformation.

We pray with the words of Dorothee Sölle (2001):

(Wir schlagen vor, dies in Deutsch zu übernehmen)

This Ecumenical Assembly needs a follow-up within 3 to 4 years to assess the commitments and projects that we have accepted here.

Mainz, May 4th, 2014.