

To our brothers and sisters in the World Council of Churches:



**Mending the Cloth of God**  
**A contribution from Church and Peace**  
**to the Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace**

Church and Peace is a European network of Peace Churches, communities, peace organisations and individual Christians. Members share the conviction that the vocation of the Church is to be a witness to God's peace. Christians are called to a life of discipleship, seeking God's Kingdom and following Jesus on the path of nonviolence, and learning from him how to love all people, even enemies.

We from Church and Peace have engaged in consultations to respond to the World Council of Church's call for contributions leading toward an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace. After the publication of the WCC's own Initial Statement "Glory to God and Peace on Earth", we have decided to frame our own peace declaration in the form of a dialogue with this Initial Statement. We call it "Mending the Cloth of God", borrowing your image of the seamless cloth of creation, whose harmony and beauty has suffered from rips and unravellings.

We begin by thanking you for this text and its wonderfully comprehensive vision for the peace of Christ among us. We applaud in particular the reflection on the Scriptures in this document, beginning with God's own Peace Declaration in the announcement to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem (Lk 2) and then including biblical passages throughout the document. We affirm the importance of hearing the word of God as the foundation for articulating our own vision of faith. The four themes of the 'Meditative Introduction' set the tone of the document: that the source of peace is our Creator whose compassion is especially with the disenfranchised, the poor and the sick (§4), that the achievement of God's peace stands in tension with the powers of this world (§5), that the goal of peace is to transform our world now and not to wait for some unknown time when peace might arrive (§6), and that the workplace of peace is in the communities of those who are faithful to Jesus Christ (§7).

We also applaud the manner in which the Initial Statement reaches out to and engages many different Church traditions in the development of a comprehensive vision. We mend the cloth of God when we take up the loose strands of our traditions and weave them together. We are thankful for the importance given to the concept of discipleship in §100: that the call to follow Jesus in the Gospels should be understood as a challenge to adopt the lifestyle of Jesus in our communities of faith (serving one another, valuing every person equally, filling the needs of all, resisting all means of domination) and that this calling constitutes a whole way of life that challenges injustice and works for justice and reconciliation. This is connected to, but different from, the important challenge to develop a spirituality of peace ("soul-craft", §86), which focuses more on the personal contemplative qualities of peace in the soul and character of the individual. In the Peace Church tradition, our spirituality of peace leads us to emphasize the social and corporate dimension of peace practice.

Furthermore, we affirm that pursuing God's peace involves confronting the "principalities and powers" of Ephesians 2: the mechanisms and institutions of violence, greed and hatred, which do not acknowledge the Lordship of Christ (§§5, 81-82). We agree

as well that it is important for us to recognize that we too exercise power and that we must learn to disarm ourselves, giving up the weapons of manipulation and control in order to take on our Lord's servanthood (Mk 10:43). This implies especially sharing our wealth and disavowing the use of domination, whether direct or indirect. We must cease to define violence from the perspective of the powerful – asking when and how much violence is allowed – and must begin to understand violence from the perspective of those who are its victims.

We appreciate the concrete proposals for how the Church can act as peace-builder: offering protection to all those suffering from dangerous conflicts, urban violence or domestic violence (especially women and children, the aged and the ill), sponsoring relief agencies and offering mediation services (§63). While we agree that regional and national churches ought to work to mediate in armed conflicts "in settings where Christians are in the majority" (§64), we would also hold out the hope that this is possible when Christians are in the minority, for in our weakness God's voice will be strong (2. Cor 12:10).

We agree with your vision that our salvation cannot be separated from the wellbeing of creation (Gen 8:21-22, §6). In this way you have successfully integrated the theme of the conciliar process, Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, into your Initial Statement on just peace. It is important to acknowledge the interconnectedness of the various crisis situations facing us: economic, food, ecological, climate crises (§§12, 111). We therefore subscribe to the need for an "all-encompassing and seamless vision of God's peace with and for creation" (§§12, 15, 26). In view of this we need to work for peace on earth and peace with earth (§45). All of the threadbare worn-out scraps of life in God's cloth need mending; humanity and the whole universe want peace.

And finally we applaud the importance given to the distinctiveness of the Church as the Household of God. It is important that we see divine peace as being a practice within the communities of faith, and that these communities are distinct from the political constituencies in which they live. At the same time, it is good to emphasize that the Church is also in the world and for the world (§§19-25). God's peace can be modelled in the Church, but it needs to be brought to the world.

In all of these points we have gained greatly by studying the Initial Statement. We thank you for your contribution to a general statement of the Churches that will help to strengthen our common witness to Christ's overcoming the violence of our ripped and torn world. As you will see from what follows, there are issues where we want to remain in dialogue with you from a Peace Church perspective.

## CHAPTER 1: THE GOD OF PEACE AND THE PEACE OF GOD

We acknowledge the effort to bring the areas of Trinitarian theology, sacraments and liturgy into the discussion of peace theology. Nevertheless, the introductory letter to the Initial Statement emphasized the importance of avoiding specialized theological language, so that the vision of peace in Christ would be comprehensible for all members of the Church and indeed for all non-Christians as well. In light of this, we are surprised by the highly specialized terminology used in the section on the Trinity (§22-25).

Moreover, instead of founding peace theology primarily on the concept of the Trinity, we would encourage you to further develop the approach found in your preamble emphasizing the message of the Jesus of the Gospels. As Peace Churches, we believe the Church's calling to follow Jesus and his teachings on nonviolence found in the Sermon on the Mount is the very core of the Gospel and must be included in our thinking about and practicing just peace. A vision of God's peace in Christ should not only lead us to reflect on the nature of the Church as a mirror of the Trinity, but must also motivate us to act in the world.

Concerning the justifications for war, we agree with your claim that the churches must learn to go beyond just war theory. The focus of just war thinking is too narrow: it merely sets conditions for limiting wars (§12). We affirm your much broader concept of a Just Peace: "the need for an all-encompassing and seamless vision of God's peace with and for creation" (§101). This must lead the Church to act against all forms of injustice that are the causes of war.

It strikes us therefore as a contradiction within the Initial Statement when just war theory is later qualified by naming it "justified use", "the *exceptional* and highly occasional use of lethal means *as the last resort*" (§90). Was that not also the rationale for the just war theory? In addition, we find it very troubling that pacifism and 'justified use' are grouped together with the claim that they "share the same Christian norm for the use of force – nonviolence". This is simply not true. Nonviolence does not admit to limited amounts of violence "as a last resort". It means no violence at all! We agree that pacifism and justified use share the same ultimate goal, overcoming violence. But focussing on their common task and goal obscures the real difference between these two views: For pacifists the ends do not justify the means. Not even in exceptional cases. We appeal here to the example of Jesus, who rejected violence in all his teachings (Mt 5, Mt 26) and who refused to establish his Kingdom by violent means. As we stated to you in our Declaration on the Responsibility to Protect: "We invite all churches to resist together with us the temptation of justifying the use of deadly weapons even as a last resort."<sup>1</sup>

We think that the Initial Statement fails to reflect on the implications of Jesus' word to "love our enemies". What is needed is not an "ethic for enemies" (§81), but a commitment of the churches to rather lay down our lives than to take the lives of others as a last resort. Where the churches are moved with compassion for the plight of vulnerable populations, we affirm that the heart of Jesus' message is justice and mercy for the poor, the captives and the oppressed (Lk 3:18-19). Here the churches need to do more than send international observers into these regions. We need to train groups of nonviolent peacemakers who work with and stand alongside those who are suffering. We applaud the WCC's emphasis on prevention and nonviolent alternatives to violence. But we call on the WCC to engage itself even more in organizing and supporting such nonviolent peace forces like: Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Nonviolent Peaceforce and Operation Dove.

As mentioned above, we find it encouraging to see the importance given to naming the powers of this world which are enemies of God's peace (§5). And yet, the document does not seem willing to admit that when states abuse their powers, they oppose the Lordship of Christ and become part of what the New Testament calls the

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<sup>1</sup> "Declaration by Church and Peace on the Concept of Responsibility to Protect (R2P)", Church and Peace Annual General Meeting at Bienenberg, June 2009

fallen “principalities and powers” (Eph 6:12). Nor does it draw attention to the resurrection as a victory over the powers (Eph 1:20-2, Col 2:15). Through this victory the powers have been defeated; we must confront them by “speaking truth to power”. In this sense, the nonviolent church can conceive of its life as being a sign of this same victory.

§69 draws the conclusion that the churches need to work to develop “structural justice” in societies that are torn by strife and conflict. Here we would want to lay special emphasis on two aspects: first of all to economic injustice, especially as practiced by small groups who hoard the financial resources of impoverished countries and by large conglomerates of the industrialized world who exploit the developing nations of the South. Secondly, we believe strongly that mention should be made of the dangers of chauvinistic nationalism as well as the international structures (globalization) that introduce forces of domination and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. Is it not the case that in order to achieve just peace the fundamental presuppositions of the world’s political and economic structures need to be called into question? For example, we cannot accept the concept of “sustainable economic growth” (§110): you cannot have both sustainability and economic growth in a finite world.

## Chapter 2: IN THE NAME OF CHRIST: THE CHURCHES AS COMMUNITIES AND AGENTS OF PEACE-BUILDING

As an organisation, Church and Peace engages in peace education through publications and international study conferences, often held in places significant in the history of conflict resolution. In the following section, we answer the questions posed in your Statement, citing examples of experiences in the Church and Peace network and the wider community of nonviolent church groups and organisations:

### 1. On "Being the Church" as a Peace Witness:

**Family communities, monastic communities and local churches** are places where God's peace and justice can be experienced and practiced on a daily basis. They offer a space in which a culture of peace may develop and Christ's peace becomes visible. Being the Church in this way is an ongoing process with successes and failures, repentance and new beginnings.

- *Community as a school of reconciliation*: the **Grandchamp** community has experienced reconciliation between its German, Dutch, French and Swiss members in the years following the Second World War and keeps renewing the process of reconciliation on a daily basis, stressing the importance of healing of memories and accompanying guests on this path through prayer, silent retreats, and counselling.
- *Community as a basis for an ecological, nonviolent lifestyle*: the **Arche of Lanza del Vasto** community stresses the importance of the integrity of creation through organic farming, a very cautious use of resources and energy, vegetarianism, initiation of and participation in campaigns and actions of civil disobedience or nonviolent resistance, for instance against nuclear tests or against the use of genetically modified seeds. Volunteers who share the life of the community for some weeks or months become directly acquainted with its lifestyle. Seminars for individuals, families and youth are organized on a regular basis in order to sensitize them to an ecological and nonviolent lifestyle and to the methods of nonviolent conflict resolution.

- *Community as shelter*: Other communities welcome refugees, poor and handicapped people in their midst. **Brot und Rosen**, located in Hamburg, Germany, for instance, gives refugees a home, assists them as they attempt to start a new life in German society and is involved in advocacy for the rights of refugees in general.
- *Community as a place where biblical justice is practiced*: Some peace communities focus on the sharing of financial and material resources and live in solidarity with the poor within and outside Europe. The **Basisgemeinde Wulfshagenerhütten**, for instance, sustains itself through a workshop that produces wooden playground equipment. The weak and the handicapped have their legitimate place in the community. Human needs, rather than productivity, are the guiding criteria of economic sharing.

In the examples given above, peace education is an integral part of daily experience. Peace and reconciliation are communicated not just as principles but as a lifestyle.

## 2. Peace service as an integral part of the ministry of the Church:

**Peace service** brings the ministry of the Church to places where conflict and war destroy social networks and relationships. One of the models of how the Church can work effectively for justice and peace is the work of **Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)**, one of the founding members of Church and Peace.

Overcoming the customary division between friends and enemies, MCC demonstrates God's love by working among people suffering from poverty, conflict, oppression and natural disaster. MCC serves as a channel for interchange by building mutually transformative relationships. MCC strives for peace, justice and the dignity of all people by sharing experiences, resources and faith in Jesus Christ.

The two other historical peace churches (the Religious Society of Friends and the Church of the Brethren) are similarly involved in peace service work. This kind of peace service is a contribution to peace at three levels and can serve as an example of a forthright Christian version of R2P:

- *Prevention*: **Eirene** is involved with volunteers in numerous programmes around the world, with the goal of working at the changes that are necessary in order to reduce the gap between the privileged West and other parts of the world. These changes include turning away from a purely growth oriented lifestyle towards a simpler and more sustainable way of life, searching for more equitable relationships, social justice and community living, raising the awareness of the need to work for peace and development and promoting intercultural dialogue.
- *Intervention*: **Christian Peacemaker Teams** desires to enlist communities from all denominations in an organized, nonviolent alternative to war. Initiated by Mennonites, Brethren and Quakers, CPT places violence-reduction teams in crisis situations and war zones around the world at the invitation of local peace and human rights workers. CPT embraces the vision of unarmed intervention involving committed peacemakers ready to risk injury and death in bold attempts to transform lethal conflict through the nonviolent power of God's truth and love. CPT emphasizes creative public witness, nonviolent direct action, protection of human rights and is active in the Middle East, Latin America and Africa.
- *Reconstruction*: **Rand**, a Croatian organization, offers inter-faith seminars in South-eastern Europe. Nonviolence as a way towards peaceful coexistence is at the heart of the training. The aims are rebuilding relationships that have been destroyed by war and closing the divide between religious and ethnic

groups. **Bread of Life**, a Serbian ecumenical humanitarian organization, has helped thousands of refugees during the war in former Yugoslavia. Today it concentrates on job creation, peace education programmes among the youth, especially among Roma children and programmes for the elderly. The Quakers have developed the **Alternatives to Violence Project**, which started in prisons in the USA in 1975 and now operates worldwide in communities and schools as well. AVP is a training programme enabling participants to deal with potentially violent situations in new and creative ways. Workshops are being held for churches, community associations, businesses, street gangs, halfway-houses, women's shelters etc.

### 3. Training for the peace ministry of the Church:

Training for peace and reconciliation is actively pursued by several organisations and institutions in the Church and Peace network. In these institutions the spirit and the methods of nonviolent conflict transformation are made available for church workers and church members.

- The **Dutch Mennonite Training and Mediation Centre** (Geweldloos Samenleven) trains mediators to train others in mediation and for work in church and society. It offers courses in resolving church conflicts and does mediation work and coaching in congregations.
- The curriculum of the **Bienenberg Theological Seminary** in Switzerland includes courses on the peace witness of the Church. In 2009 it established a special institute, Compax, devoted to training in spiritually-based conflict transformation.
- The German association **Oekumenischer Dienst Schalomdiakoniat** (OeD) has set itself the task of providing learning opportunities in the area of nonviolent conflict transformation for women and men from different churches, countries and occupations. Participation in OeD courses qualifies them for professional or voluntary work for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. People who have attended OeD courses work in projects in their own countries or abroad, on a longer or short-term basis.
- The Brussels-based Association **Sortir de la Violence** offers seminars to parishes and groups that want to learn to deal with conflict in a constructive way,

### 4. Further types of peace ministry:

We consider it important to introduce two additional types of peace ministry that are not mentioned in the WCC's Initial Statement.

#### (i) Resistance:

Witnessing for peace as the Church also means clearly saying no to violent structures. The groups we have already described are involved in different kinds of nonviolent resistance, but we now offer three further examples of resistance to the "principalities and powers" in the name of Christ:

- The **International Fellowship of Reconciliation**: Since its founding in 1919 IFOR has opposed war and preparation for war. Member branches coordinate a variety of campaigns and involve themselves in public education and training programmes. They provide encouragement and support to people who are promoting nonviolence in their home communities and nations. IFOR members support conscientious objectors to military service, they campaign for a ban on land mines and oppose nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. Many young people are well integrated into IFOR planning and are actively involved in its campaigns.

- The **Anglican Pacifist Fellowship** established the Week of Prayer for World Peace and continues to play an active part in it. APF is a body of people within the Anglican communion who reject war as a means of solving international disputes, and believe that peace and justice should be sought through non-violent means. APF is also involved in campaigns against arms exports.
- The **Conscience and Peace Tax Campaign International** unites believers in many different countries who resist taxation for military purposes. This organisation of conscientious objectors is recognized as an NGO by the UN and lobbies for the human right of conscientious objection to military service to be extended to include taxation for military purposes.

**(ii) Lobbying:**

- Since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has shared that organisation's aims and supported its efforts to abolish war and promote peaceful resolution of conflicts, human rights, economic justice and good governance. Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) links Quakers around the world and has consultative status with the United Nations' Economic and Social Council as an international non-governmental organisation since 1948. The Quaker United Nations Offices, located in Geneva and New York, are actively engaged in lobbying diplomats of member states of the UN on the concerns mentioned above. Similarly, the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) promotes the values of the Religious Society of Friends in the European context on matters of peace, human rights and economic justice in the European political context.

CHAPTER 3: ON THE WAY TOWARDS JUST PEACE - THE SCOPE OF THE CHURCHES'  
ENGAGEMENT

In answer to your questions, there are many things in this section with which we resonate. With the exception of the use of “just war” categories (cf. §§ 90, 93), the vision of the church as a peace-building community engaged within the world harmonizes well with our understanding and practice as Peace Churches.

We agree that there is now a common pathway between the different traditions of Christian peacemaking that is appropriate for our time (§89), but feel strongly that this pathway should be extended to working together to transcend the “just use” theory. Following the logic of the definition of “just use”, we would expect a stronger denunciation of contemporary militarism. For example, how does the “just use theory” get translated into political and institutional reality? Is it not often the case that it is used to justify unnecessary violence, the militarization of economies and militarism in general (§98)? If, as the statement claims, “God is never glorified by our violence”, would it not be desirable in the present to work together to de-legitimize “violence” in its broadest scope (§99) in the same way that Christians worked together to de-legitimize slavery and racial segregation?

Concrete steps are required. Therefore, we would like the churches to commit themselves to:

- backing strategies aimed at abolishing war and armed intervention,
- protesting against militarism and the dependence on military solutions that dominates global thinking,
- lobbying at all levels for disarmament and banning all kinds of weapon systems as well as the sale of and trade in armaments,

- setting aside funds in their budgets to send church members trained in nonviolent methods to areas of conflict,
- offering their services as negotiators in conflict situations,
- campaigning against the glorification of violence in the media and instead promoting means of nonviolent conflict resolution in film, games and other media,
- advocating at the UN and with member states for an expansion of the mandate of the newly organized Peace Building Commission (PBC) to oversee and coordinate preventive initiatives, peacemaking processes, as well as post-conflict peace-building,
- combating climate change rather than merely “mitigating its effects” (§110),
- promoting a more sustainable, simple and just lifestyle among their members and
- campaigning for the transformation of the international economic and institutional system towards a more equitable, more sustainable and peaceable system.

It has been said that the Peace Convocation in Jamaica will be the opportunity to harvest the fruits at the conclusion of the Decade to Overcome Violence. We hope that the Churches will adopt the practice of good farmers: saving some of the best seed for the next sowing season. The harvest of peace at Kingston, Jamaica should not be the last one. Let it be the start of a new season of peace-building!

### **Mending the Cloth of God**

Our world: the cloth of God,  
woven in seamless perfection,  
finite and yet ceaseless,  
diverse and yet intertwined,  
now ripped and unravelling.

The community of God  
takes up the loose strands  
the ripped edges and  
the threadbare worn-out scraps of life,  
weaving and binding,  
mending crosswise in the manner of Christ.

*- James J. Fehr -*

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