



Newsletter

Conference 2021
'Re-Membering'
Radical Equality

Climate
Catastrophe
Eco-Pacifism in Italy

Image of God
Who Is at Our Table?



Photo: Kallh on Pixabay

Conference 2021

Grappling with Images of God and (Non)Violence

The close connection between authoritarian theology and patriarchal images of God, liturgies, and language patterns on the one hand, and violence in churches, communities, families, and politics on the other, is a challenge for churches and congregations worldwide seeking to be credible peacemakers, concluded the more than 100 participants of this year's Church and Peace international conference.

'We decided to explore the topic "Images of God and (Non)Violence" in spite of – even *because of* – various crises today such as the advanced climate crisis, alarming political shifts to the right in many countries, and human rights violations along European (and other) borders', chair Antje Heider-Rottwilm affirmed during the opening

plenary of the 3–5 September virtual event.

She said Christians had a responsibility 'to look at what underpins our problems and behaviours, and to account for that which sustains, inspires, encourages us – and, where applicable, unconsciously reinforces destructive structures even if that is not our intention'.

The participants, taking part from across Europe and beyond, explored manifestations of hierarchy, dominance, oppression, and violence – whether structural, spiritual, or personal. Heider-Rottwilm set a compass heading during the opening plenary: 'We want to determine the extent to which religious traditions and attitudes are linked to violence, racism, and sexism; how images

of God and language are connected; and how language opens up or dictates how we think'.

Heider-Rottwilm and fellow Board member Maria Biedrawa invited participants to a dialogue about the origins and development of their own images of God. 'How do you imagine God? How did that come about? How has your image of God changed over the years? Has anyone ever told you about an image of God that shocked you?', Biedrawa asked.

Striking was Biedrawa's idea of God as a giant eraser, 'which rubs around at the edges of our images [of God]'. She needed these different images to be reminded that each was only a snapshot,

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Church and Peace

The European ecumenical network of peace churches, and peace church-oriented congregations, communities and service agencies

Editorial team:

Lydia Funck, General Secretary, and Terri Miller, Individual Member

Church and Peace International Office

Mittelstraße 4, D-34474 Diemelstadt-Wethen
Tel: +49 5694 9905506, Fax: +49 5694 1532
intloffice@church-and-peace.org
www.church-and-peace.org

Translation and proofreading:

Gordon Matthews, Terri Miller

Layout:

Benji Wiebe, mennox.de

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Credit: David Hayward, www.nakedpastor.com

Erasing Borders

Dear Readers,

When Maria Biedrawa spoke of God as an eraser at the conference on Images of God and (Non)Violence, I was reminded of a work of art by David Hayward (NakedPastor). It depicts Jesus erasing pencil lines being drawn by grim-looking people. While the people are trying to outline boundaries and thereby divide people, there is Jesus removing the boundaries.

In this issue of the newsletter, you'll find food for thought from this year's international conference: Where do we consciously or unconsciously resist change? Do we embrace more far-reaching questions and issues as we work to overcome divisions and thus promote peace?

We are invited to take a stand against gender-based violence, to become active in the 'Thursdays in Black' campaign, and also to reconsider the boundaries of

our own church structures and traditions.

A collaboration between members from Germany and Switzerland brought together over 200 people online who are allowing themselves to be challenged by God's vision of a just world.

An eco-pacifist project in Italy encourages us to preserve the world in which we live together and to call into question the lines of consumeristic logic. And in 'The Last Word', Ruben Sečen shares with us his thoughts about being invited to erase our borders and set a table for all.

Happy reading! As always, comments and feedback are welcome.

Best wishes,

Lydia Funck

Grappling with Images of God and (Non)Violence

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she said, but these snapshots were also signs of love from God, who wanted to walk with her in that moment, in that particular experience. And around the next bend was always something new, God the Other. 'And this helps me – or challenges me – to be always evolving, always becoming new, becoming Other'.

In the closing worship service, Nicole Ashwood, World Council of Churches programme executive for a Just Community of Women and Men, made a passionate plea to take seriously the radicality of the biblical statement that God created human beings in his/her image and commissioned them to take care of the whole of creation. God is 'an equaliser of all inequalities', the theologian from Jamaica said. She stressed that all the differences

between people are secondary, and the dignity of every human being and of all creation must be protected from destruction.

Ashwood invited Church and Peace to become part of 'Thursdays in Black', the global ecumenical campaign to end sexual- and gender-based violence, and thereby to take a stand week by week for a world free of violence.

'There can be no discriminating hierarchy in a theology that places at the centre of its faith the conviction that all human beings are images of God. All such hierarchies and forms of discrimination are a challenge to be overcome by the theology, spirituality, and practice of nonviolence – and therefore also a challenge for Church and Peace'

Heider-Rottwilm stated at the end of the conference.

The conference served as a contribution to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and other resolutions concerned with the protection of women, the prevention of violence, and the establishment of gender issues in all areas related to peace and security.

Conference 2021 Workshops

Blessed in God's Image: Radical Equality of Men and Women in Genesis 1–2 | Images of God – Nonviolence – Language | Patriarchy, Sexism, and the Churches | Anti-Racism: From Awareness to Action | Thursdays in Black – International Campaign against Gender-Based Violence | Sexualised Violence in Christian Communities | Violence against Women and Feminist Theology | Identity and Peace Building

Find conference and workshop presentations on the Church and Peace website: <https://www.church-and-peace.org/en/documents/international-conference-2021>.



Photo: Thirdman on Pexels

Conference 2021

Liberating the Biblical Message as One of Radical Equality

The Church and Ending Violence against Women

When you're in church on Sunday, do you ever wonder how many of the women worshipping with you are experiencing intimate partner or other forms of domestic violence?

The answer, sadly, is that at least one abuse survivor is likely sitting in the pew – virtual or otherwise – next to you, Lana Bobić said during a workshop on Violence Against Women and Feminist Theology she facilitated at the Church and Peace international conference in September.

The feminist theologian has been supporting survivors of violence against women in Croatia for a decade and notes that the problem is everywhere, including in faith communities. In fact, churches are too often a part of the problem rather than the solution due to gender roles which see women as subordinate to men and a

theological misinterpretation of the Cross which equates a woman's suffering with salvation.

Bobić stressed that for change to happen, 'it is crucial to understand violence as gender-based and to understand the dynamics of abuse'. She emphasized that gender-based violence is a social, not a private, issue and that it is about exerting power *over*; gender-based violence functions as a 'crucial social mechanism by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared to men'.

The structural nature of violence against women means it is woven into the fabric of society, including its religious communities, according to Bobić. She underlined that, though it may exist at a subconscious level, the predominant gender model in most churches today still is a patriarchal one which sees a woman's main

calling as wife and mother, and her role as submissive to men's role.

'We are so rooted in [these] cultural, religious, [and] social patterns that we don't even see it as violence. But it is violence', Bobić stated. To end this violence, the theologian is convinced that churches must challenge patriarchal traditions and change attitudes. If churches only give support to victims of gender-based violence – crucial as that is – they are just bandaging wounds.

The good news is that the Gospel holds the necessary theological keys to move to an egalitarian gender model. Bobić pointed to the radical equality of Galatians 3:28: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'.

Feminist theology is about 'remembering' this equal fellowship of the first Christian community (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza). To eradicate violence against women, the Church must liberate the biblical message as a message of radical equality.



Conference 2021

Towards a World without Violence and Rape

At this year's international conference, the Church and Peace network was invited to participate in 'Thursdays in Black'. Antje Heider-Rottwilm explains why she has already been taking part for many years.

I was very pleased that Nicole Ashwood led a workshop on the global campaign 'Thursdays in Black' during our international conference. As World Council of Churches (WCC) programme executive for a Just Community of Women and Men, Ashwood leads the campaign. Ever since 1992, I have regarded the campaign as a weekly invitation to connect with women who are affected by violence, and women and men who are seeking to overcome violence.

This kind of nonviolent action began in 1977 with the protests of the 'Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo' against the military dictatorship in Argentina. This was followed by the 'Women in Black' in Israel, who, since the Intifada in 1987, have been opposing hatred and occupation, and mourning the victims on both sides, and the 'Women in Black against the War' who first drew attention in 1991 in various places in the former Yugoslavia to the suffering and exploitation of women.

During the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988–1998) and subsequently at the 10th Assembly in South Korea in 2013, the WCC invited women and men around the world to become part of the 'Thursdays in Black' campaign. As a result, the campaign broadened to include groups,

congregations, and churches in Europe and across the globe.

The campaign is simple: On Thursdays I wear black – as the colour of resistance and resilience. I wear a campaign badge to show that I'm part of a global movement which opposes attitudes and practices which tolerate rape and violence. And I know that many people in many parts of the world are wearing black on that day, either individually or together with others at conferences and events.

During her workshop, Ashwood gave an impressive account of her personal experiences and the theological roots of the campaign. She invited us in the Church and Peace network to join in pausing every Thursday and making visible those affected by gender-based violence, to pray – and to take action.

For, as the WCC says, 'Thursdays in Black' means that we are connected

- 'in solidarity with the one in three women in the world who face violence in their lives,
- in protest against systems and societies that encourage violence in any form,
- in mourning for men, women, and children who are harmed and killed in sexual violence,
- [in] awareness and knowledge



about the challenges of sexual- and gender-based violence,

- in the hope that a different reality is possible.'

Antje Heider-Rottwilm
is the chair of Church and Peace.

Join the campaign at www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/thursdays-in-black#get-involved.

Learn More

- Workshop presentation (PDF and video): www.church-and-peace.org/en/documents/international-conference-2021
- Women in Black: www.womeninblack.org
- WCC HerStory – Churches in Solidarity with Women, the First 10 Years: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6XdWSu5nao

To Safeguard Life on Earth

MIR Italia Launches Eco-Pacifism Project

'Safeguard life on Earth.' This is the imperative we have before us as members of MIR Italia, the Italian branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, and in particular as inhabitants of an energy-intensive region of the planet – to end involvement in violence against living things and to work for reconciliation between people, between nations, and between humanity and 'our Sister Mother Earth who sustains and governs us' (St. Francis).

Since its foundation, MIR Italia has advocated nonviolence as the path to achieving a better world. It is increasingly clear for

us that nonviolence and ecology must be brought together if we want to safeguard life on Earth. With the book *The Dove and the Olive Branch*, we have launched an 'eco-pacifism' project with the aim of continuing to teach people about peace and strengthening the relationship between the peace and environmental movements.

As eco-pacifists we oppose wars and their preparation, always destructive to humans and the environment. We oppose violence against people – arrogance, dictatorships, the violation of rights, the logic of terror and hatred, exploitation of people, the unjust distribution of goods. And we oppose the waste of natural resources. Instead, we propose a simple lifestyle and respect for the environment which counter the logic of consumerism, and accompanying young people in their struggles for climate justice.

MIR Italia's eco-pacifism project draws orientation from the work of past guides such as Gandhi, Lanza del Vasto (founder of the Community of the Ark), and sociologist Alberto L'Abate, who articulated the compass points for the initiative. We are called to this spiritual perspective by writings and prophetic voices of all world religions, including the document 'Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together', signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in February 2019.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the impact of a nefarious world system which not only destroys the planet and leaves billions of people in misery but also threatens the health of all humanity. We must change societal systems, values and aims, lifestyles, politics and economics, ways of understanding security and defence. We must begin by looking at others as brothers and sisters who have the same rights as we do.

Pierangelo Monti

is president of MIR Italia, a Church and Peace member.

Read more about the project and order a copy of The Dove and the Olive Branch (in Italian):
<https://t1p.de/9jte6>.

'[B]elievers are called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need ... to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace ... and bring an end to wars, conflicts, environmental decay.'

'Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together'



Global Love of Neighbour: A Journey of Discovery

Micha Germany, StopArmut, and Bienenberg have come together to offer a 'Just People' introductory course.

In the spring of 2021, more than 200 people from throughout Germany and Switzerland took part in a journey of discovery about global love of neighbour thanks to an exciting new collaboration between Church and Peace members in the two countries.

At the end of 2020, Micha Germany, a Church and Peace member, and StopArmut (StopPoverty), Micha's sister organisation in Switzerland, released a newly revised manual for the 'Just People' course. Linking the UN Sustainable Development Goals' vision of 'leaving no one behind' with Christian discipleship, the course invites Christians to let themselves be challenged by God and God's idea of a just world.

Micha Germany and StopArmut wanted to use the revised course in Germany and Switzerland to sensitize congregations and small groups to justice issues, show how the Bible is relevant to these issues, and offer practical suggestions for living justly in everyday life. But, at the time, the 'Just People' course was not yet well known in Switzerland.

StopArmut decided to ask one of its long-time supporting organizations to join forces to offer a 'Just People' introductory webinar. The organisation they approached was the Study and Conference Centre Bienenberg, a

Church and Peace member. When Micha Deutschland learned about the initiative, they came on board as well, and an exciting partnership was born.

The seven modules of the 'Just People' course centre on the question, 'Are we *just* people, "mere people", whose actions don't change anything anyway? Or are we *just people*, people who do justice, whose whole lives serve to create the kind of world that God desires?'

The three organizations set about creating an online, introductory course to explore this question. The webinar featured 20-minute presentations by course authors and other speakers from free and mainline churches, with time for questions from participants and in-depth discussion in small groups. Over 200 participants met via Zoom on five Tuesday evenings in the spring as part of a community seeking together the justice of the Kingdom of God.

'We are amazed and delighted by the surprisingly positive response throughout the churches,' says Riki Neufeld, who organises opportunities for learning and encounter for young people at Bienenberg. As a result, there are now plans to run the introductory course again in January 2022. 'We would be pleased to welcome friends from Church and Peace



circles to the four evenings on Zoom', Neufeld says.

Further information about the German-language 'Just People' course manual is available at www.micha-initiative.de/justpeoplekurs.

Registration for the introductory course, also in German, will open in December at www.bienenberg.ch.

AGM 2021

Meet the Members

At its Annual General Meeting on 3 September 2021, Church and Peace welcomed three individuals as new members.



All photos: Courtesy photo



Sue Glover Frykman
Quaker,
lives in Nassjö, Sweden

In the early 1990s I was Church and Peace's Britain and Northern Ireland coordinator. I have attended annual events in the Netherlands, France, and Hungary. I was clerk of the Europe and Middle East Section (EMES) of the Friends World Committee for Consultation for five years and during that time kept up to date with Church and Peace activities (EMES being a member of Church and Peace). As a Quaker I am committed to the way of peace.

Merita Meko
Lutheran Moravian,
lives in Tirana, Albania

I work for peace in family, society, and church, and want to support people in Albania in finding ways to live in peace with each other. I am working with marginalised groups, people who are being discriminated against, and am active for women's rights in society and the workplace. I met Church and Peace years ago through friends of mine and have since attended its conferences. I would like to become more involved and active in the network, gain more experience about peace and conflict resolution, and be in exchange with colleagues from different European contexts. In this way, I can contribute to peace and reconciliation in my home country, Albania.

Salomé Haldemann
Mennonite,
lives in Neuf-Brisach, France

I first came to Church and Peace with my 'interpreter hat' on – I have been interpreting at events since 2015 – and decided now it was time to join the network more formally. I studied peace and theology at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana (USA). There I came to the conclusion that I am called to work for peace from within the Church, which is why I am becoming a pastor. I believe that the Church is both in need of peace within and a great way to work for peace locally – outside of the church walls. This bidirectional peace is what I hope to work towards.

Diary

26–28 November 2021

Church and Peace Board meeting

Berlin, Germany

5 March 2022

Britain and Ireland regional day

'The Work of our Hands? Reconciliation in Turbulent Times'

Bull Street Quaker Meeting House,
Birmingham, UK

11 June 2022

Francophone day conference

'Rethinking Security in Europe'

Maison Anne-Marie Javouhey, Paris,
France

20–23 October 2022

Annual General Meeting and international conference

Life Center, Crikvenica, Croatia



Web Resources

'Church and Peace Grapples with the
Topic of Images of God and (Non)
Violence'

Church and Peace press release,
7 September 2021

"War is Contrary to the Will of God"
– An Appeal for Peace for the 11th
Assembly of the World Council of
Churches'

Church and Peace press release,
11 October 2021

Presentations, workshop contributions,
and ecumenical worship service from
the 2021 international conference

More Church and Peace press releases

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church-and-peace.org/en/documents

Church and Peace YouTube Channel
www.bit.ly/ChurchandPeaceonYoutube

Church and Peace Welcomes New Board

On 3 September 2021, the Church and Peace Annual General Meeting (AGM) elected a new Board to guide the network during the next three years. Three new members from Belgium, Croatia, and France are joining five members who were re-elected.

Board members reappointed include:

- **Antje Heider-Rottwilm**, Protestant from Germany representing the Laurentiuskonvent, as chair
- **Kees Nieuwerth**, Quaker from the Netherlands representing Kerk en Vrede, in a new function as vice chair
- **Elisabeth Freise**, Roman Catholic from Germany representing Eirene, as treasurer
- **Maria Biedrawa**, Roman Catholic from France, individual member
- **Barbara Forbes**, Quaker from the United Kingdom representing the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network

Appointed to the Board for the first time were:

- **Étienne Chomé**, Roman Catholic from Belgium, individual member

- **Salomé Haldemann**, Mennonite from France, individual member

- **Ruben Sečen**, Baptist from Croatia representing Youth for Christ Croatia

Those elected as new Board members shared their thoughts about serving the network in this new function. Ruben said he is looking forward to connecting Church and Peace with the work he is doing to give hope to young people from the Balkan region, while Salomé is excited about enlarging the presence of Church and Peace in France and the rest of the francophone region, particularly in Mennonite circles. Étienne's wish is to experience a European *ubuntu* with Church and Peace – a common humanity that enables the weaving of bonds of solidarity.

The AGM warmly thanked departing Board members Bruno Sägesser, Swiss Mennonite, who served for 20 years, and Vjollca Racaj from Kosovo, who served for five years.



Ukraine/Europe

New MCC Peacebuilding Coordinator for Europe

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) welcomed Andrea Shalay as Peace Engagement Coordinator for Europe in August 2021. Based in Ukraine, Shalay is networking with MCC's peacebuilding partners across Europe and connecting them with resources to support holistic work for peace.



Germany

Festival Explores Sustainable Digitalisation

A festival in June co-organised by the Ecumenical Information Centre Dresden took a closer look at how digitalisation can and must be shaped by society as well as tech corporations to be sustainable. Participants at the five-event series concluded that digital transformation and sustainability must be linked at a political level to protect the environment and promote integral human development.

www.infozentrum-dresden.de/digital-und-nachhaltig



France

Francophone Peace and Justice Formation Goes Live

The Paris Mennonite Center has launched the Peace and Justice Training Center (CFJP) together with partner organizations in Europe, Africa, and North America. The initiative offers online, French-language formation rooted in the Anabaptist tradition. Recent webinars focused on the development of a theology of peace, and restorative justice in African contexts.

<https://formation-justice-et-paix.com>



France

French Churches Called to Resist Fear

In a letter in June, Church and Peace members in the francophone region called churches in France to dialogue about the role of the police. The invitation came in response to the move of French political leaders to link policing to military training and functions, which could easily imply that a state of war exists in the country. The letter rejects a rhetoric of fear and stresses that the police must remain 'guardians of peace'. Read the letter (in French):

<https://t1p.de/ymp1>.

the Network

United Kingdom***Spotlight on Racism, Militarism, and Climate Change***

The Network of Christian Peace Organisations (NCPO) in the UK held an online conference series in May to explore how Christian peacemakers can respond to three key issues today: racism, militarism, and climate change. Church and Peace is an NCPO member. Watch the webinars at <http://ncpo.org.uk/ncpo-webinar-may-2021-video>.

**Netherlands*****2021 Peace Hero Calls for New Security Approach***

As part of the Coalition Peace Missions Without Weapons and the Inclusive Security Working Group in the Netherlands, Kerk en Vrede honoured Edy Korthals Altes as the 2021 Peace Hero. A long-time advocate for nuclear disarmament, the former Dutch diplomat called for a new approach to peace and security. The annual award recognises nonviolent engagement for peace. <https://youtu.be/jQ-f7B6SzCE>

**Germany*****Marking 25 Years of Hospitality***

Bread and Roses marked its 25th anniversary with a celebration at its 'House of Hospitality' in Hamburg, Germany, on 21 August and a festive worship service on 2 October. Inspired by the Catholic Worker movement in the USA, the community members have been living together with refugees since 1996. www.brot-und-rosen.de

**France*****Exhibition Promotes Unarmed Security***

Stop Fuelling War staged the event 'Unarmed Citizens – What Keeps Us Safe?' in October in Paris. The exposition used art, video, and photography to invite reflection on the effect of the arms industry on citizens' daily lives, and ways to build sustainable peace. www.stopfuellingwar.org

**Spain/Global*****IFOR Urges Churches to Address Colonial Past***

The International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) contributed to the workshop offerings at the 2021 World Peace Congress which gathered 2,500 peacemakers to '(Re)Imagine our World'. In a workshop on religion, peace, and sanctuary, IFOR called the churches to address their colonial past to overcome racism and violence. Speakers from different religious traditions stressed the need to reclaim core teachings of love and provide sanctuary for uprooted people. www.ipb2021.barcelona



The Last Word

A Table for Everyone

The Trinity – also called *The Hospitality of Abraham* – is an icon created by Russian painter Andrei Rublev in the 15th century. It depicts the three angels who visited Abraham (Gen. 18:1–8). Full of symbolism, it is interpreted as an icon of the Holy Trinity, viewed in Rublev’s time as embodying

people. ... Wroe’s challenge to the Church is to recover its own theology and let it shine out in every depiction of the Church. ... For all its failures and active faults, the Church has still, miraculously, almost in spite of itself, spread the good news that God has come to make a home in every nation

Consider the faces in the icons and think about your own church and community. What do the people at your table look like? Which faces do you normally imagine seeing in the Church, in your house? Who is around our table – only people we like, who like us, who are comfortable for us to be around?



When I look at these icons, I see the people sitting around the table in invitation. There is empty space for people we want to invite. Look around you, who wants to gather at the table? Those in the icons are not closing the circle but are leaving it open for us and others to join. Let us be Christlike, let our table more and more fully represent the image of God, a table for everyone.

Ruben Sečen is a Church and Peace Board member and the director of network member Youth for Christ Croatia. This reflection is adapted from a mid-day prayer he led during the Church and Peace international conference 2021.

spiritual unity, peace, harmony, mutual love, and humility.

In *The Art of Advent*, Jane Williams reflects on how artist Meg Wroe has reimagined Rublev’s famous icon:

‘[T]he three angels have real faces because the people whom God invites are not just “humanity” in a generic sense, but real, individual

under the sun, and belongs equally in every place and in every heart.

... There is no “typical” Christian, no favoured race or class or gender, all are invited to the table. When we make our sense of Church too small, so that it is more like a club for people like ourselves, then we have lost the vital heart of our calling, to proclaim that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.’

Sources

The Art of Advent: A Painting a Day from Advent to Epiphany by Jane Williams, copyright 2018 by SPCK Publishing | The Trinity, Andrei Rublev, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons | St Lukes, Trinity - After Rublev, Meg Wroe, 2016, www.megwroe.com. Used by permission.