

PEACE PAPER

***of the Basisgemeinde in Wulfshagenerhütten und
Prenzlauer Berg***

DISCIPLESHIP – JUSTICE – PEACE
THE CHRISTIAN MISSION OF PEACE =
DISCIPLESHIP OF JESUS

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DISCIPLESHIP – JUSTICE – PEACE
THE CHRISTIAN MISSION OF PEACE = DISCIPLESHIP OF JESUS

Do we Christians talk about „peace“ because everyone is now talking about it? Do we take up this theme because through the stockpiling of arms „peace“ has been put on the world agenda?

One can indeed get the impression by talking with Christians at this time that peace and the threat to peace is only an item on the agenda, which has been added to their usual agenda of liturgy, service, pastoral care and mission – and which they will sometime take off the agenda again.

Yet peace belongs in the centre of the witness of the church of Jesus Christ. Indeed peace ***is the centre*** of this witness. („Witness“ in the New Testament means: that for which we stand with our lives, and what we make visible with our bodies). The Church of Jesus can and should illustrate, through our bodies and our lives, the peace which God wishes for the whole world. „Peace“ (Shalom) in the Bible is that new order of life in which people live in a right and healing relationship with God, with their fellow human beings and with God´s creation. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is the foundation of this new culture of life and peace (German: *Lebenskultur des Friedens*). Based on this foundation the Church of Jesus should start to live in such an inviting way, that the peoples of the world listen and look up as to this new culture as to a city on a hilltop, and they should be so attracted by it, that they willingly beat their swords into ploughshares and have no desire to train for war anymore (Isaiah 2:4). Peace today is probably so threatened because we Christians have deleted peace, or interpreted it away, from the centre of our life-witness, and allowed it to become a special theme: a theme for exceptional words – appeals, speeches and resolutions; or a theme for exceptional actions – for demonstrations, sit-ins and hunger-strikes.

When peace is not the centre of the new order of God, when it is merely a special word or a special action, it is weak and lacks salt (Mark 9:50; Matthew 5:13). We Christians with our resolutions and actions are not too political. On the contrary, we are too unpolitical, too little directed towards the living together of people, too harmless. The politics of Jesus

is much more radical. It goes to the roots. Jesus does not react to the politics of the mighty. He does not gaze at the inherent order of evil, which manifests itself in security-thinking and arms-buildup. Jesus knows that as long as we only react to evil, we have already lost the battle, have already been determined by evil, and despite all our good-will are actually dangerous reactionaries. Jesus looks to God's position: the kingdom of God, whose approach he proclaimed. He invites his disciples to live in anticipation of this kingdom for the whole world: in that they with their radical conversion from the system of security, allow with their whole person the new culture of life and peace to be built.

The first characteristic of this new culture of life and peace is *discipleship*. For the culture of life and peace is not a program with fixed core-values which we Christians can implement one after the other. Jesus himself is the way. He is the method. People who want to convert, start off in community with other people prepared to convert to an open way with Jesus. They live in discipleship. They abandon the security of money and financial security. They give up their positions, their occupations and their fixed life-plans, in order to really go openly the way of Jesus. We know the objections: couldn't it somehow be easier? Does Jesus want us to remain permanently immature, in that he leaves the way, which he goes ahead of us, open? Can I not be a good Christian and keep my position? The way of discipleship belongs essentially to the culture of life and peace, for security of every kind, not only war, is most threatening to peace among people. That is why Jesus reminds us of the birds of the sky and the lilies of the field (Matt 6:25-34).

Another intrinsically connected characteristic of the new culture of life and peace is that *we share with one another*. We convert from our system of theft, of private ownership („private“ means literally translated „stolen from others“) to a culture of sharing with one another, to giving, and self-giving. For the first Christians, who „shared what they had in common“ (Acts 2:44; 4:32), this was not a fringe experiment, but central to their culture of life. We have to step out of the system of ownership and the inherent order of money – which Jesus named „Mammon“ – to whose end the arms and the arms buildup and war necessarily stand. Which injustice, which theft must be defended with more and more weapons? The Catholic Bishops of Germany in their position paper and the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Vancouver, 1983), were right when they said that the root of the deadly threat to peace is injustice. We

Christians have to step out of this system of injustice and step into the new life-order of God (that is God's justice), whose main characteristic is sharing with one another.

Another characteristic of this new culture of life and peace is that we Christians *live in community, that we live as church.* „See how they love each other!“ So said the people in astonishment about the first Christians, meaning the new social fabric in which they lived with one another. We have to step out of the system of the individual and of isolation into the new culture of peace, of committed community, in which one stands by the other with his whole life. My personal freedom, then, is not any more that I keep all my possibilities open. Rather, freedom means that I promise to God and my neighbour and commit myself to them, that I will stay. In this regard we Christians clash directly with the culture of our surroundings and with the notion of „freedom“ which this culture holds to be worth defending. To be a Christian means to live in relationship, in the relationship of love, in a new social order, as church. For this reason can I, as an individual, not pass on to others what Jesus brought to the world.

If we Christians really want to engage ourselves for peace, then we must convert from our system of security and Mammon and individualism to the new culture of life and peace: to convert to discipleship on an open way with Jesus; to convert to a life of sharing with each other; to convert to a life in committed community; to convert to church in the original sense of the word. As long as we only want to contribute our ideas, our spare time, our great words and a couple of actions, we remain caught in the old system of security and in the old politics. The politics of Jesus was the way of the cross. Jesus brought not only new ideas, he taught no new methods or actions against the old and violent politics of security, including not the method of non-violence. In fact, Jesus brought or taught no „thing“. Rather he brought *himself*; he gave *himself*. *In this way* was he the peace of God. This new culture of life and peace, which can change the world from its roots, can not come into being cheaper as through the commitment of our bodies. This culture *can* start today. Together with other Christians, who also walk the way of discipleship in committed community, we can witness that this culture of life and peace is a reality, and that the biblical promises to this end are true, experienceable and literally tangible. God does not need extraordinary people with extraordinary courage and extraordinary talents for this. We are average people with many weaknesses who are dependent on forgiveness and the

need to start anew every day. God needs people who are prepared to allow themselves to be built, as living stones, into the new city of peace – which is very concrete: in a concrete church in a concrete place, after being concretely called and after a concrete conversion out of the until now secure, self-determined, and isolated life.

Obviously we Christians must name, in public, the injustice which leads to weaponry and war by name. But do we have the authority to do this when our lives do not make visible and tangible what we mean when we talk about peace and justice? Obviously it is sometimes imperative that Christians, with our bodies and in spite of the danger to our lives, confront a harm that threatens everyone or an individual – without violence or threatening the life of another. But are we believable in our NO-saying to this harm (which often many will look upon as a good) when we do not make visible with our bodies and our whole commitment the good we are for and therefore the harm that we are against?

That is why we must convert in discipleship to Jesus to the new justice of God. Jesus says to us that as we walk his way we will also have all that we personally need. But Jesus wants more than our own personal fulfillment. He wants the whole creation and all people to live in his peace.

For the sake of the world – loved by God and threatened by human beings – CONVERT!