

Witnessing to Christ in the twenty-first century

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Introduction

Dr Dietrich Werner, of Ecumenical Theological Education and the World Council of Churches, surveys the ongoing shifts in the composition of world Christianity, and asks: How are we to train Christian leaders for the twenty-first century who can relate to the enormous challenges of the changing landscape of Christianity?

This paper was prepared for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) for Theological Education in World Christianity, to take place in Jamaica in May 2011, organised by the World Council of Churches.

Changing landscape of global Christianity

The beginning of the twenty-first century has made us even more aware of fundamental shifts in the composition and centre of gravity of world Christianity, which will gradually influence every sector of church life, both within and outside Europe.

While 66 per cent of all Christians lived in Europe in 1910, by 2010 only 25.6 per cent Christians are living in Europe. By contrast, less than 2 per cent of all Christians lived in Africa in 1910 skyrocketing to almost 22 per cent by 2010. While Africa was less than 10 per cent Christian in 1910, its population was nearly 50 per cent Christian in 2010, with sub-Saharan Africa well over 70 per cent Christian. It is well-known that the general projection concerning the developments until 2050 is that Christianity will still grow in the Global South, but will also sharply contract in the Global North (particularly in Europe). While Christians in the Southern hemisphere represent 60 per cent of world Christianity today they receive only about 17 per cent of all Christian income estimated at world level. Despite the dramatic shift in the centre of gravity of world Christianity, the majority of the resources for theological education are still located in the North.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), which represents a fellowship of some 349 Christian member churches in the world, is the privileged instrument and service to work for Christian unity and common service in the midst of growing tensions, conflicts and contradictions which mark our era of simultaneously increasing globalisation and exclusion. It asks its member churches: How are we to train Christian leaders for the twenty-first century who can relate to the enormous challenges of the changing landscape of Christianity by being equipped both by an *improved self-confidence of Christian faith*, which is needed in minority situations, as well as an increased *sense of ecumenicity* of one part of the body of Christ belonging together with all other parts, and a *strengthened dialogical profile of theological identity*, which is able to relate to other world religions in order to contribute to a common culture of peace?

Migration as single most important factor for the search of identity and belonging

A purely geographical parameter to define the emerging majority Christianity of the so-called 'global South' is not sufficient any more to describe complex realities: Migration will be one of the most important features to describe shifting realities in world Christianity. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), migration is considered one of the defining global issues of the early twenty-first century, as more and more people are on the move today than at any other point in human history. There are now about 192 million people living outside their place of birth, which is about three per cent of the world's population. This means that roughly one of every thirty-five persons in the world is a migrant. Between 1965 and 1990, the number of international migrants increased by 45 million – an annual growth rate of about 2.1 per cent. The current annual growth rate is about 2.9 per cent. In 2005, woman accounted for 49.6 per cent of global migrants. According to

the report 'Mapping Migration in Europe' (2008) there is a remarkable emergence of newly formed churches with migration background in Europe which can serve as new centres of evangelization thereby enriching the diversity of Europe's indigenous Churches in the languages which offer the Gospel of life with colour and vibrancy to contemporary Europeans (p22). Thus 'Non-European migrants to Europe represent not the de-Christianisation of European Society but the de-Europeanisation of the European Christianity.' (p24). The Mapping Migration in Europe study also explains that among the estimated 24 million migrants that were in the EU at the end of 2003, around 48.5 per cent belonged to Christian Churches. A further 30.9 per cent were Muslims, and about 20.5 per cent belonged to other religions (p. 29). With the realities of global migration the challenges for peace in societies are multiplied, as any conflict in any ethnic community both due to migration and mass communication is transferred and has repercussions in almost every other part of the world. The crucial questions whether the peoples and religions of this earth can live together peacefully is repeated and intensified in each local or regional context. Therefore it will provide a major test case for historical European churches how to relate to newly emerging churches within the European continent and how to cope with the realities of multi-faith settings in modern societies for which Birmingham is a preeminent example.

Denominational fragmentation and the search for a wider frame of reference for ecumenism

The Edinburgh 2010 centenary celebrations half a year ago presented both the promising longing of many parts of worldwide Christianity to join for common witness, mission and service for justice and peace (around 20 international Christian organizations joined) as well as the fragility of the wider ecumenical fellowship and the open questions on how to tackle the heritage of different institutionalizations of forms of Christianity which all claim to some extent to be legitimate heirs of the one ecumenical movement which had its historical beginning in 1910. Hundred years after Edinburgh 1910 the denominational fragmentation of world Christianity has not become less, but has reached unprecedented levels of plurality and differentiation or of splits and parochialism. It has been estimated that we have some 41000 Christian denominations today, many more than hundred years ago. Some 27 per cent of Christianity on world level belong to the group of so-called Renewalists, namely Pentecostals, Charismatic Movements and Neopentecostal Churches. How can fragmented Christianity speak with one voice to the powers of this world? How can Christian churches separated by different tradition, ecclesial accountabilities and authority structures as well as sometimes divergent cultural practices join in one common witness for peace and justice which is more urgent than ever before? The manner by which different churches on local, regional or international level present and articulate their common voice and witness sets an important example for how to deal with conflict and diversity in today's world. The ecumenical movement as a whole, regional ecumenical projects or inter-church co-operations are a test-case for the ability of Christianity to contribute to world peace. New instruments are developed for a new quality of ecumenism which transcends the historical lines of separation and isolation (Global Christian Forum) while trying to keep the inner core of ecumenical self-understanding which has been reached within the historical ecumenical movement.

Promoting spiritual leadership by churches in times of terror and increased conflict

The devastating acts of terror in front of the Coptic Church in Alexandria, Egypt just at the Christmas Eve a few weeks ago have underlined a new urgency of common Christian witness for peace and justice to become or remain the central key task of Christianity at the beginning of this new century. Never before in history – except probably the historic period of the Christian Crusades in the eleventh to thirteenth century (for some 200 years) – have Christian-Muslim relations been so threatened, so precarious and at the same time so absolutely essential for maintaining world peace then in this decade which has seen the 9/11 events, the war against terror with all its devastating imagery of enemy and all the subsequent rhetoric about clash of civilizations and increasingly violent rhetoric

from all kinds of religious and political extremist groups. Confirming the message of Christmas – Glory to God in the highest and Peace on Earth – in the midst of terror, rhetoric of violence, war and revenge is the most prestigious and demanding task of Christian churches at present. That Pope Shenouda in collaboration with leading Muslim figures has renounced the spirit of revenge and curbed further violence to spread probably has not only saved Egypt, it points to the direction which is a common task of world Christianity today: In time of increased tensions and conflicts which inevitably will mark the twenty-first century it is the key task of Christian churches to exercise spiritual and prophetic leadership in societies by denouncing violence and by showing the world creative ways of non-violent conflict solutions and conflict prevention. To be good neighbors to all other religions and to seek the common good of the cities in contemporary societies is part and parcel of a joint Christian witness for peace.

Persistency in faith over against the unholy trinity of possible self-annihilation on earth

Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, one of the key theologians behind plans for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC), has argued that we live in an age of unprecedented threats to the very survival of humanity: There is a most unholy trinity that keeps the earth in its grip: 1. The persisting danger of nuclear self-annihilation, 2. the deepening gap between relatively small groups of peoples living in extreme affluence and extended regions of the earth suffering from equally extreme misery, and, 3. the sharply increasing process of climate change. By reinforcing each other these three factors together constitute what he calls the 'earth crisis'. It presents a host of complicated challenges for all human beings, especially to persons in leadership positions. To arrive at sustainable solutions will be the vital task of the twenty-first century. What has been achieved thus far is frightfully inadequate. What is referred to as this 'earth crisis' has no precedent in the history of humankind. It surpasses our accustomed sense of how to deal with critical developments. Never have human beings been able to accumulate so much (self)-destructive power. And never have they been so unable to handle this power responsibly. In the centre of the Christian faith stands the most holy Trinity. God is seen in constant compassionate tension, embracing creation as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, always opening up new ways of thinking and acting, forever ready to forgive and inspiring God's people with hope and trust.

Based on this holy Trinity and faced with the unholy trinity of self-annihilation – which in fact is realized nihilism! - churches and their future leaders are called to glorify God and to serve God's peace as manifested in the Trinity and incarnated in Christ Jesus, the great alternative to the vicious circles of violence, greed and wastefulness.

Living the journey for a just peace: the role, methodology and understanding of IEPC

In concluding the 'Decade to Overcome Violence, 2001-2010: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace' which was started in Porto Alegre the WCC has called to come together for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Jamaica in May 2011 (see: <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/peace-convocation.html>). Glory to God and Peace on Earth, the key message of Christmas is at its heart and centre. Around 1000 delegates are expected to share and to reflect on a theology of just peace. Dietrich Bonhoeffer had once dreamt of a General Christian Peace Council which would dare to take the weapons out of the hands of the powerful and mightily declare peace on earth. Although IEPC might not have that capacity, it can be seen as one important step to give a contextual witness of peace at this moment of history and to join hands again for continuing the journey to stand up for peace in the world. To overcome violence, this task is not over yet with the formal end of the Decade, it is as burning as in earlier years. How do we overcome mentalities and strategies which are based on hostility and animosity, of distorted pictures of others instead of share common concerns and joint commitment for justice and peace? The key document 'An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace: Guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:79)' will be made available publicly during the CC session in February 2011 and should be studied in all theological

seminaries around the world. The document is not a proud declaration presented in an attitude of 'we have all answers for this world – let just the others follow', but is a humble call for ourselves to join in a new journey of peace. Just to quote one section: 'As members of the community that proclaims Christ the embodiment of peace, we respond to the call to bring the divine gift of peace into contemporary contexts of violence and conflict. So we join the Way of Just Peace, which requires both movement towards the goal and commitment to the journey. We invite people of all worldviews and religious traditions to consider the goal and to share of their journeys. Just Peace invites all of us to testify with our lives. To pursue peace we must prevent and eliminate personal, structural and media violence, including violence against people because of race, caste, gender, sexual orientation, culture or religion. We must be responsible to those who have gone before us, living in ways that honor the wisdom of our ancestors and the witness of the saints in Christ. We also have a responsibility to those who are the future: our children, "tomorrow people". Our children deserve to inherit a more just and peaceful world.' The Call for Peace denounces the use of the traditional just war theory in stating: 'On the Way of Just Peace the justifications of armed conflict and war become increasingly implausible and unacceptable. The churches have struggled with their disagreement on this matter for decades; however, the Way of Just Peace now compels us to move forward. Yet, to condemn war is not enough; we must do everything in our power to promote justice and peaceful cooperation among peoples and nations. The Way of Just Peace is fundamentally different from the concept of "just war" and much more than criteria for protecting people from the unjust use of force; in addition to silencing weapons it embraces social justice, the rule of law, respect for human rights and shared human security.'

There is a lot of material available on the website and also in an accompanying resource book for the conference for the work of local groups, seminaries and study centres in the four key sub-themes of the conference: For Peace in the community, For Peace with the Earth, for Peace in the Market Place, for Peace among the Peoples.

A reorientation for theological education to prepare leaders for new cultures of peace

Who is preparing the Christian leaders, responsible ministers, theological educators for the future of world Christianity in the twenty-first century? It is theological education in its multifaceted forms and programmes, both in residential and non-residential, part-time and full-time programmes, TEE programmes and theological colleges, Christian universities as well as Bible schools in all parts of the world. The Edinburgh 2010 process had called for a massive increase of joint commitment for theological education in churches both on North and South, East and West. It was lack of critical, intercultural and ecumenically oriented education which was one of the historical key factors which lead to the failure of Protestant Christianity in Germany to properly counteract and withstand the trends towards National Socialism, fascism and narrow-minded political and ideological fundamentalism in the 30s of the last century. It is lack of proper holistic education, comprehensive training, character formation as well as ethical and spiritual formation which is a key contributing factor for several churches in the South as well as in other regions to fall prey to corruption, lack of credibility, lack of vision and prophetic quality, lack of proper leadership and increased mediocrity and decay or religious fundamentalism in today's world. The alleged fact that – as some experts claim – 'religion is in again' or that there is a 'renaissance of religiosity' even in secular societies is by no means an easy comfort, on the contrary is it a fairly ambivalent and partly also questionable phenomenon. What is demanded for in the future is not vague religiosity and some religious sentiments and enthusiastic feelings from whatever side. What is demanded for and needed for the integrity and credibility of the churches witness for peace in the twenty-first century is sound and proper, is biblical and critical theological education in an interdisciplinary and dialogical perspective: Formation for peace ethics in a globalized world.

Methodological implications for the future of theological education in a cosmic perspective for ecological peace

The methodological consequences for theological education which can be seen as implicit in the IEPC process are far from being spelled out. There is a paragraph in the final version of the cal which points in the right direction: 'Education inspired by the vision of peace is more than instruction in the strategies of peace work. It is a profoundly spiritual formation of character that involves family, church, and society. Peace education teaches us to nurture the spirit of peace, instil respect for human rights, and imagine and adopt alternatives to violence. Peace education promotes active nonviolence as an unequalled power for change that is practiced and valued in different traditions and cultures. Education of character and conscience equips people to seek peace and pursue it.' Thus peace education in theological education might entail offering a sound additional course and curriculum, but it much more than adding a course, it is about some fundamental reorientation in theological education as all disciplines within theology have a potential to contribute to the development of a new culture of peace. It is important to be reminded that the Angel in the Christmas story doesn't speak of Peace among human beings only, but from Peace on Earth, thus indicating a more comprehensive and ecological perspective which transcends the tradition an anthropocentrism both in the understanding of theology as well as in the understanding of church ministries. It might be promising that theological education has to move away from a purely anthropocentric understanding of ministry to the concept of 'earth ministries' as Seong-Won Park, former Theological Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and now teaching at Young Nam Theological University in South Korea, has demanded for: 'If we put ministry in the framework of "Creation Theology" or "Theology of Life", it makes no longer sense for it to be concerned with human beings only. Therefore... pastors... are installed for the whole creation, and therefore, their ministry should be cosmic rather than anthropocentric.'

A WCC initiative for collecting resources for an ecumenical curriculum on peace studies

The current website for the IEPC event has a major section already with excellent resources (<http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources-dov.html>). The WCC has also started the initiative to collect major examples of how peace studies or materials relevant for a curriculum on just peace in theological education (essays, theological course outlines, textbooks, curriculum drafts) can be made available during the IEPC gathering and beyond. If institutions like Queens Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education in Birmingham and representatives of different churches from the South as represented here could contribute to this project with their own gifts and knowledge this could be enriching for the whole process.