Overcoming violence - a basic task of Christian churches

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In this article – based on the second of two keynote lectures at a conference on violence – the view is developed that the task of the church with respect to violence consists mainly in overcoming violence. In the first part of the article dealing with the basic tasks of the church it is argued that the task to overcome violence is close to the essence of the church. The point of departure is taken in Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession, which understands the church as the 'communion of saints' and names the pure proclamation of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments as the two characteristics of the church. The Christian message that the church has to proclaim the gospel entails a preferential option for non-violence that includes the responsibility to put an end to existing violence. In the second part of the article attention is given to the implications the basic task of the church in overcoming violence holds for the practice of the church. It is argued that the starting point is that the church has to proclaim the gospel of peace and as a community of faith become a community of peace herself. Some of the most important practical consequences the proclamation of the gospel of peace has for the church as a community of action, for her work in education, for her promotion of justice and for her solidarity with those in need, are discussed.

Introduction

In the following article I want to address the task of the churches with respect to violence. I propose to see this task mainly in overcoming violence. But what do we mean, when we speak about the 'task of the church'; and what do we mean by 'overcoming violence'? At the end I will summarise some concrete proposals.

What do we mean by basic tasks of the church?

What do we mean, when we speak about a 'basic task' of the church? A basic task is closely related to the understanding of the essence of the church. The fulfilment of that task demonstrates what the church is all about. The task to overcome violence is close to the essence of the church. To fulfil this task gives orientation about the mission of the church as such. My church, the Evangelical Church in Germany, explained this relation in 2007 in a Memorandum as follows:

> Christians' freedom of conscience is proved in their active love of their neighbour and their service to their fellow human beings. A commitment to and sense of responsibility for peace in this world are among the most important consequences of this dedicated service to the common life of the community. Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount calling the peacemakers – the pacifici – blessed (Matt 5:9), place a duty on all Christians to promote and propagate peace as much as they are able, whatever their role and wherever in the state and in society they are active. Christian ethics are fundamentally shaped by a willingness for non-aggression (Matt 5:38–end) and a preferential option for non-violence. However, in a world that is as unquiet and unredeemed as ever, serving our neighbours may mean protecting life and law through forcible resistance (cf. Rom 13:1–7). Both options – refusal to bear arms and agreement to perform military service – must result from responsible decisions made in good conscience and with respect for the opposing view.
>
> (EKD 2007:60)

As clear as this statement sounds, it is however to some extent provoking to speak in this context about a basic task of the church. The tradition of the Reformation seems to oppose such a high esteem for an obviously ethical task of the church. The Reformers had a very clear understanding of the basic tasks of the church that at the same time make the church recognisable from the outside (*notae ecclesiae externae*). The concept of the Reformation is most clearly formulated by the Augsburg Confession of 1530, a confessional document from the Reformation era of outstanding importance. The Augsburg Confession was - irrespective of its Lutheran background - in its altered variant of 1540 also signed by John Calvin; and in 1976 the later Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, proposed even a recognition of the Augsburg Confession by the Roman-Catholic Church (cf. Dulles 1983:337). This remarkable proposal has not been implemented, but it indicates the remarkable role of the Augsburg Confession as an instrument

of mutual understanding and reconciliation. As far as a closer relationship between Lutheran and Reformed churches nowadays is concerned, the Augsburg Confession often forms a starting point of reflection leading to newer confessional documents like the Barmen Declaration of 1934, the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973 or the Belhar Confession of 1982. Amongst these documents the Augsburg Confession is especially outspoken in the way it addresses the question of the 'basic tasks' of the church.

Taking into account the ecumenical reputation of the Augsburg Confession and the way in which it explicitly addresses our question, we begin with this document in order to clarify what we mean by the 'basic tasks' of the church. Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession understands the church as the 'communion of saints' and names the pure proclamation of the Gospel and the right administration (that means the administration in accordance with the Gospel) of the sacraments as the two characteristics of the church. Moral or ethical standards are evidently not seen as comparably essential characteristics of the church - neither sexual orientation and behaviour, nor social justice and the integrity of creation, nor peace and non-violence are taken into consideration. The Augsburg Confession does not treat them on the same level as the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Therefore, in this context there is no mention of the ethical characteristics of the church at all. All emphasis is put on the two aforementioned characteristics, because they are sufficient (*satis est*) to make the church known and to confirm her existence.

From this we can draw the conclusion: non-violence may be a remarkable trait of a given social system and should not be disregarded. But this trait does not ensure that you are really confronted with the church of Jesus Christ. There are also groups outside the church that propagate and live according to the principle of non-violence. It is not an exclusive criterion related only to the church. No church can think to find its identity simply by opposing violence and acting in a non-violent manner. In this sense you cannot replace 'creeds' with 'deeds'.

After using Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession as basis for this insight, we have to ask, whether the description of the church according to Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession is sufficient. Is it really enough to concentrate on the gospel purely proclaimed and the sacraments rightly administered? I will briefly mention five critical observations (see Huber 1991:51–69).

The first criticism says that a basic description of the church should start with the characterisation of the church as a community - a community of believers, a *congregatio sanctorum.* Indeed the Augsburg Confession itself starts this way: 'The Church is the congregation of the saints, in which the Gospel properly is proclaimed and the sacraments rightly are administered'. These two criteria are formulated in order to clarify under which conditions one can be sure to find, in a given community really, the church of Jesus Christ and

therefore a congregation of saints, because Christ himself is present in the Word proclaimed and the sacraments administered.

A second criticism refers to the creeds of ancient Christianity, especially to the four attributes of the church that can be found in the Creed of Nicaea and Constantinople: the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. But these are attributes of the church we confess, not simply characteristics of the empirical church. For the fact that the empirical church is indeed not one, holy, catholic and apostolic, we find much evidence in the past as well as in the present state of the church. These attributes therefore obtain a certain critical thrust. If we, however, ask how this thrust is experienced in the empirical church, we come back to the proclamation of the gospel and the sacraments of renewal, forgiveness and reconciliation, namely baptism and the Eucharist.

A third criticism says that the two external characteristics are incomplete when scrutinised under a systematic perspective. The proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments have to be completed by the ministry of the church that guarantees the proper proclamation of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. This proposition leads immediately to the inner tension between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, as the two major strands of Western Christianity. In the Protestant understanding it is the task of the church as such, of the community of believers itself, to take responsibility for the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. For that purpose the church develops an organisation for herself that includes specific ministries for specific tasks. So, according to Article 14 of the Augsburg confession, the ordained ministry has its specific task in the public proclamation of the gospel. But that is only a functional consequence stemming from the mandate of the church as such to proclaim the gospel and to administer the sacraments. These ecclesial ministries fulfil God's call but they serve the church. They do not have to intercede between Christ and the church but to stay in the service of the church following Christ as her master.

A fourth criticism says that the reformers did not restrict themselves to the two aforementioned criteria mentioned above. Luther (1539:628ff, 1541:478ff) names at some places seven or even eleven criteria for the church – for instance the ministry of the keys, that means the authority to bind and to absolve the sinners, or the preparedness to take Christ's cross and to suffer. Calvin and his followers have in mind that the ecclesial discipline is an indispensable characteristic of the church (see Haas 2008). But all the reformers would admit that these additional characteristics are not located exactly on the same level as the two characteristics already mentioned. They are – so to speak – secondary characteristics related to the witness of the church in the world, but not primary and constitutive characteristics. This reflection on possible secondary characteristics indicates that the two characteristics of the Augsburg Confession are not in all respects really sufficient.

That leads to the final criticism, namely that the relationship between these primary and secondary characteristics needs to be explained. It was the Barmen declaration, followed by the Belhar Confession, which made clear the inner dependency between faith and obedience, witness and service, proclamation and existence of the church (Smit 2009:325–336; Naudé 2010). It is the proclamation of the Gospel itself that has to explain the criteria not only for faith and confession, but also for existence and practice of the individual believers as well as for the community of the church. How the church deals with the problems of violence and non-violence belongs on the side of obedience, service, and form of existence.

One will not find detailed guidelines in the Biblical Scriptures on how to deal with those questions under present circumstances, but there is clearly a certain tendency and direction. The Christian message includes a preferential option for non-violence and an identification of God with the victims of violence. But that is not a purely passive concept. It includes the necessity to put an end to existing violence and to put into practice the rule of law against those who violate the integrity of others.

Therefore the Augsburg Confession states in its Article 16 that it is allowed for Christians to serve in the police or as soldiers and to go to war 'according to the law'. It formally excludes formally a position that generally forbids for all Christians such services in the police or as soldiers. This statement does not exclude the preferential option for non-violence. It accepts the personal decision for a general non-violent behaviour and for conscientious objection. And even more, the Augsburg Confession clearly states that violence is generally excluded as an instrument for the church. Further, all kinds of force are incompatible with a faith that is grounded according to its essence in a free conscience. All activities of the church therefore have to follow the rule: *sine vi humana, sed verbo* [not by human force, but by the word] (Article 28). This formula originally was originally used to regulate the behaviour of bishops but was then expanded to encompass all kinds of witness, service and order of the church. The church is never allowed to use violence in spreading the gospel. If she would do so she would contravene her own mandate. So a reflection on the two primary characteristics of the church also leads to impulses regarding its ethical intentions and its institutional or legal form; and that is theologically consistent. A full theological concept of the church does not only include a dogmatic but also an ethical and an institutional dimension. The church is at the same time a community of faith (*congregatio fidelium*), a community of action (*communio sanctorum*) and an institutionalised community (*ecclesia particularis*)[1]. Amongst these three dimensions of the church the dogmatic dimension plays the fundamental role. The constitution of the church as a community of faith by the proclaimed word and the celebrated sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist has immediate implications for the church as a community of action and as an institutionalised community.

1.These three dimensions of the concept of the church are developed, following an idea of Albrecht Ritschl by Reuter 2009; see Ludwig 2010:351ff.

As far as the ethical understanding of the church is concerned (the church as a community of action), we can distinguish three basic elements of her activities. In following the three aspects of the dogmatic understanding of the church (proclamation of the Word, baptism and the Eucharist) we may distinguish them in the following way: the proclaimed word includes the process of formation of the Christian person through the encounter with the witness of truth; therefore, the church is a community of formation or a pedagogical community. The sacrament of baptism includes the equal dignity and the equal access to freedom for everybody; therefore, the church is a community of justice or a transforming community. Justice in this sense includes the rights of future generations and peace as the fruit of justice. The Eucharist finally creates, in the light of God's redemptive and reconciling work, a community of solidarity; therefore, the church is a helping community.

To summarise: the understanding of the church includes a dogmatic dimension (church as community of faith), an ethical dimension (church as community of action) and an institutional dimension (church as institutionalised community, as organisation). Following the characteristics of the church (*notae ecclesiae*) in the Augsburg Confession we record that the church as community of faith (dogmatic dimension) is based on proclamation, baptism and the Eucharist. It follows that the church as a community of action (ethical dimension) is constituted by the respect for the person and her dignity, by justice, and by solidarity. Therefore the church as an institutionalised community (institutional dimension) can be characterised as a pedagogical, a transforming, and a helping community. We have seen that, for good reasons, the Reformers concentrated the basic characteristics of the church as a community of faith in the pure proclamation of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. As far as the dogmatic dimension of the church is concerned, there is no reason to add ethical characteristics to these two basic characteristics. The concept of the church does not only relate to the community of faith, but also to the community of action and to the institutionalised community. With regard to those two dimensions it is necessary to reflect on the secondary, ethical characteristics of the church as well as on indispensable consequences for its institutional or organisational character. In this context the principle of non-violence is one of the basic principles for the organisation of the church.

What do we mean by overcoming violence?

We now have to apply the distinction between the dogmatic, the ethical and the institutional dimensions of the church to the task to overcome violence. Following this distinction the starting point is very clear: the church has, first of all, to proclaim the gospel of peace. As a community of faith she has to become a community of peace herself. Therefore we have to begin with the presence of peace and reconciliation in the spiritual life of the church.

A church listening to the gospel of peace lives what she is: a community constituted by the proclamation of God's grace in Jesus Christ, a community of reconciliation between God and humans, a community of solidarity between human beings, a sign of peace in the midst of ongoing enmities. Peace is primarily not an ethical obligation of the church, but God's gift – a reality given by Christ that constitutes the church as such. This proclamation needs theological reflection – especially with respect to the question, how peace as a gift relates to peace as a task. The best insights of theology are needed to explain the preferential option for non-violence against the background of the violence reported in biblical texts.

The relevance of violence and non-violence also has to be reflected in its relevance for the scope and relevancy of Christian worship. The liturgy of Christian worship always and everywhere includes intercession – in our context especially the intercession for the victims of violence, the openness to name them and to bring their suffering before God. To mourn for the victims and to lament their suffering is not passivity instead of activity. It is much more the spiritual basis for an attitude of compassion that sees war and hatred, crime and bloodshed, assault in families and on the streets with the 'view from below', to quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1942:52). The vividness of prayers for the victims as well as for the perpetrators of violence, of lament and commitment is in this context of central importance.

Too often churches as well as individual Christians betrayed the ministry for peace that follows from the gospel of peace. Its proclamation therefore also has to be understood as a source of self-criticism and self-correction. Christian involvement in the questions of violence becomes convincing if it is grounded in the spirit of self-criticism and repentance, of self-correction and renewal. Therefore taking sides for non-violence has an additional spiritual and liturgical aspect, namely the aspect of a collective confession of guilt and a collective acceptance of forgiveness.

As relevant as the proclamation of the gospel of peace is the way the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist are celebrated. The acceptance of every human person by God as symbolised in baptism is constitutive for the inclusiveness of the church as a community. The way in which the 'otherness' of the other is respected at the Lord's Table is central for the witness of the church in a world full of violence.

The dogmatic dimension of the church is of central importance for its self-understanding. But its ethical dimension is also a well of specific relevance. The proclamation of the gospel of peace has consequences for the church as a community of action.

The biblical texts are full of examples of God's identification with those who suffer under violence. Jesus' benediction of the peacemakers and the meek has such a clear place in the message of the gospel that this line and tendency is imperative for the personal life of Christians as well as for

the collective practice of the church. The church becomes efficient in the world through the Word not through force. That has implications for her public witness and her political involvement. As Martin Luther (1530) says:

> To speak the truth, temporal peace, that is the highest good on earth and includes all other temporal goods, is properly speaking a fruit of the rightly executed ministry of proclamation. Because where this ministry goes on, war, strife and bloodshed stay behind.
>
> (Luther 1530:528)

Also according to John Calvin (1559:IV, 20, 9) political authority has its mandate from God only for one purpose – namely 'to care for the common wellbeing and the common peace'; it is the task of the church to remind those in power of their responsibility to promote peace and the common good. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1935:285) formulates in a letter from 1935: 'Things do exist that are worth standing up for without compromise. To me it seems that peace and social justice are such things, as is Christ himself'.

The character of the church as a community of action has consequences primarily in her work in education, in her promotion of justice, in her solidarity with those in need. Let me exemplify those consequences first in the field of education by looking into the daily reality of the life of our churches. I take an example from religious education, well known in your context as well as in mine. A group of children at the age of eight years hears the story of Jacob and Esau, the twin sons of Israel struggling about their father's blessing. The group concentrates on the theme of 'blessing'. The children are asked to draw pictures on 'Blessing in my life'. One boy shows his picture to the teacher, a picture that he has devoted to war: tanks, planes with bombs and so on. The teacher is astonished and asks: 'What has all of that to do with blessing?' The boy answers: 'Well, to draw war is much more fun. At the end I will cross out all things with red - so it will be a picture of peace' (the example is taken from Naurath 2007:30). It will not be an easy task for the teacher to clarify that the blessing of peace is more than simply to cross out the instruments of war with red. It needs a courage that not only crosses out, but that rather creates something new.

For that creativity I take an example from the streets of my own city Berlin. A woman is lying on the street, brutally thrown down to the ground by somebody. Three youngsters, 16 or 17 years old, observe this from a bus driving past. They become aware of the dangerous situation, leave the bus at the next station and run back to liberate the woman from her tormentor. Khalil, Mohammed and Walid are the names of the three youngsters. They come from migrant families with a Muslim background. They are students at a high school that is known as ungovernable because of violent conflicts amongst the students and unrest against the teachers. But in the midst of such a context compassion emerges. The three youngsters demonstrate courage. With compassion they oppose violence. They save the woman.

Murder and other forms of homicidal crime and serious assault express a deep and basic lack of respect for the

integrity of the other. Empirical evidence in South Africa shows that these kinds of violence are most often executed in arguments and disputes in families and neighbourhoods. This shows that people, to a large extent, lack a sufficient socialisation in dealing with conflicts, in respecting the other in dispute. Even the instinct to stop before killing the other with a knife, a hammer, or a rifle seems not to be alert. These are horrible experiences.

At the same time there are indications that the numbers of those violent crimes are decreasing in South Africa. Efforts to limit and reduce these incidents of homicidal crimes are not futile. It is difficult, but it can be attempted to reach out to families and individuals, to assist them in accessing values and elementary moral rules of living together, to offer them role models of a responsible life that respects the integrity of the other. Here, an important part of the churches' task can be observed. Assistance to families and single parents, homes for children in early childhood, street-work and youth groups are amongst the examples of the churches' task. The churches should not expect easy solutions, but should be involved in the hard task to overcome anomic constellations as much as possible. The educational task of the church includes not only the aspects of formal, but even more so of informal education.

Especially young people find violence interesting. Such an acceptance of violence is the one position. The other says: violence has, whenever possible, to be overcome without violence. Regarding these two positions the Christian faith is not neutral, but takes sides.

Therefore the church has to educate her members to oppose violence. She has to realise that egoism without compassion, xenophobia without respect for the dignity of the stranger and hatred as a form of human aggression are at the core of such violence. Against such kinds of violence the church has to demand from those in power the rule of law and appropriate measures for the security of everybody, and that not only in times of a Soccer World Cup. But just as much she has to work for reconciliation and for non-violent ways of conflict resolution. She is on the side of those who fall victim to violence. However, wherever it is possible she has to also reach out to those who tend to exercise violence or already are in training to do so. To overcome violence is a difficult task of everyday life, in families and schools, on the streets and in public transport, at the workplace, in sports et cetera. The media uses violence for entertainment and too often justifies it for this reason. Violence is ubiquitous; therefore the task for the church to testify against it is comparably omnipresent.

The church has to give ethical guidance. That includes the question: which political ways are appropriate to overcome violence? Christians may; however, favour different ways in this regard. Non-violence by principle is one of them. Responsible participation in the task of the state to enforce the rule of law is another. Therefore the tradition of the Reformation has not accepted the position that, by reasons of faith, it is prohibited for all Christians to serve as policemen or soldiers to guarantee the rule of law. The reason for this is that the state has not only the right but also the duty to confine the evil with appropriate means including the threat or the use of violence, if there is no other possibility. Whoever participates as a Christian in this task of the state has the right to do so. But by doing so he or she does not legitimate violence. Violence and counter-violence belong to the not yet redeemed world to which no more can be conceded than what seems inevitable in order to save lives and renew the rule of law. In the direction of the Gospel we see peace, not war; overcoming violence, not its justification; non-violence, not the use of violence. Therefore the teaching of the church has to overcome the idea of a 'just war' and has to stand for 'just peace'. Violence as a last resort has to rely on the decision of a legitimate authority and has to strictly respect the proportionality of means and ends.

Even more important as a teaching about the ethical conditions for the use of violence in order to save lives and to renew the rule of law is an education for social sensitivity and compassion. These are necessary preconditions for a way of life that combines responsibility for oneself with responsibility for others. In a world dominated by the ideas of competition, success and personal advantage, the churches are indispensable advocates for a responsible life in a responsible society. They create a space where responsibility is put into practice and can be experienced. Education for responsibility is a topic for life-long learning. Wherever the churches are involved in the field of education, from little children to senior citizens, responsibility for oneself as for others are the two major dimensions of an education in responsibility. Accountability for one's own deeds and empathy for the vulnerability of others are cornerstones for it.

The concepts for 'Learning through Involvement' ('Service-Learning', '*Lernen durch Engagement*') are amongst the most promising newer developments in social learning. Churches should be involved in these kinds of activities and should utilise such models as much as possible.

One example of this approach is Service-Learning as a part of the school curriculum. Where Service-Learning is established, all students of a certain grade have to do practical work for several weeks in a social institution of their choice, be it a Kindergarten, a community centre, a hospital or a home for senior citizens. They have a period of preparation before and an evaluation after this experience. The most important point is that they have a personal experience of being exposed to social situations that provoke their compassion and their solidarity.[2]

In my view this perspective should also be introduced in professional training and apprenticeship in order to introduce a change of perspective to this field of human development.

2. In Germany this concept was initiated by the Freudenberg-Foundation in 2001. Today there is an independent nationwide network for this initiative - see www.servicelearning.de.

It is worthwhile to mention that some enterprises in Germany have started to introduce a limited time in a social institution as a necessary element in the preparation for leadership positions. The basic idea is: whoever takes responsibility in the field of personnel should develop not only professional skills but also social skills. He or she should know reality 'from the other side'. 'Changing sides' is therefore one of the names of such initiatives. Churches and church organisations can take initiatives in order to facilitate or to evaluate such initiatives.[3]

I choose those examples from my own experience in Germany in order to clarify the importance of education for social sensitivity and a non-violent approach to social conflicts. These examples illustrate the centrality of education. This is not only true for an education in mutual responsibility and non-violent conflict resolution. It is also true regarding those who live in poverty and often are, on account of a feeling of personal uselessness and despair, prepared to use violence for criminal purposes. The emphasis on education indeed is as important for the struggle against violent behaviour as against poverty (see EKD 2006). The biggest challenge therefore is the fact that amongst the youth a far too high percentage of mostly male youth stay without a sufficient education and an appropriate professional training. This is the case in different countries, including South Africa. Many in the young generation live with a lack of clear orientation and inner structure in their daily life, but even more with disorientation and an inner feeling of personal worthlessness. These 'youth at risk' need help from all quarters, including the churches.

It was said earlier in this article, that education and justice are two characteristics of the church as a community of action. Now we can see how closely the two are intertwined. Overcoming injustice demands far more than only charity. It demands structural changes. Overcoming deep injustice therefore demands deep structural changes. During the last 20 years, South Africa has gone through a remarkable political and economic transformation. It has witnessed processes of political democratisation and economic modernisation at the same time. However, the history of social injustice is present in today's social and economic structures. The terms 'spatial justice' and 'spatial injustice', first developed in the field of geography, are very appropriate in the context of South Africa (see Soja 2010 [eds. Brawley *et al.*]). The unequal availability of space for housing, living, or economic activities continues to be evident. At the same time, inequalities in education, employment, and wealth continue to reflect the unequal opportunities of the different ethnic groups, caused by the history of the country.

It could be the specific political approach of churches locally as well as in their global and international ecumenical fellowship to stand for the transformation of society toward more justice. Churches know the difference between history and the kingdom of God. They know that human activity

will never reach complete justice without any restriction. But they know at the same time that more justice is possible. And from the perspective of the marginalised more justice is not only possible but urgently needed. Therefore the churches can and should develop a common approach to the problem of justice - even taking into account differences in their contextual understandings of justice, and also of the root-causes of injustice (see Sen 2009).

For instance, they could mutually ask which concrete political steps and economic measures would improve the capabilities of young people to get an appropriate professional training and to find jobs. Regarding the churches' task to overcome violence, the high degree of unemployment in many countries, but especially in South Africa, is a crucial factor that contributes remarkably to the high degree of violence. Therefore the churches should address this problem again and again. They should provide good examples and encourage the transfer of such examples from one place to the other, from one country to the other.

No doubt, there are strong hindrances in achieving such a goal. Powerful forces look at the social reality not from the perspective of a just participation of the poor, but of the shareholder value for the wealthy. Churches, being a part of the universal body of Christ, look at that conflict not only from a national or regional, but rather from a global perspective. They acknowledge the predominant task to overcome the restricted view on economy solely from the shareholder's perspective. The equal relevance of all stakeholders should be recognised, and the preferential option for a just participation of the poor should be accepted. These guiding principles for the political regulation of economy should gain general recognition. The leading idea is therefore a globally responsible, sustainable and social market economy.

Beside education and justice, solidarity is the third aspect of the church as a community of action. Our historic world is imperfect and not yet redeemed. As long as this 'time between the times' continues there will always be victims of injustice and a lack of peace, victims of direct or structural violence. In Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan we find a role model not only for the individual Christian, but also for the church as a community of action, and even for the society as such. Never in history has justice been realised to such an extent that charity became unnecessary. The protection of the individual and the precautions for social security will never reach a level that makes solidarity in society superfluous. Therefore it will be essential for the humane quality of the common life that churches in society stand for a culture of care and help. The charity of the churches has an immediate political relevance. But, at the same time, it transcends politics. It stands for the equal dignity of every human being. It is this dignity that makes all kinds of violence an obvious scandal, an assault against the integrity of the human person.

Conclusion

It would be a separate and specific task to develop ideas on the third, namely the institutional dimension of the church. For that it would be necessary to draw consequences from

the churches' responsibility for peace and non-violence for its own organisational levels. Instead of doing that let me end with some concrete proposals for practical activities of the churches. In mentioning them I take up many of the reflections and practical suggestions already included in the previous deliberations.

What can the churches do in order to promote peace and to overcome violence? The answer can be brief and to the point: The churches can pray for peace and work for it, according to the old rule of the monastic discipline *ora et labora* transformed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1944:390) into a rule applicable also to a worldly life. The identity of Christians, according to Bonhoeffer, consists in their praying, in their doing justice, and in their waiting for God's own time.

As basic tasks for Christian churches under such a perspective we could mention:

- the proclamation of the gospel of peace and the prayer for peace
- the education of peace-makers
- the sensitive reflection on basic necessities for peace in society and amongst nations
- a critical dialogue with those in power about their duty to work for the rule of law and for justice and to do, what they can, to preserve and to promote peace
- the pastoral care for those who have power and execute it in society and the state, in order to sharpen their conscience and to encourage them to follow its voice
- the development of Christian voluntary services, especially related to non-violent action and peaceful conflict resolution
- the empowerment of the marginalised, the care for those in need and taking the side of the poor
- the development of contacts with other nations and groups through the global network of ecumenical fellowship
- the dialogue with other religions, and a respect for religious and cultural differences
- the clear witness and active intervention in cases of xenophobia and discrimination
- efforts of non-violent mediation and peacemaking in conflicts on local, regional or international level.

History and experience not only testify to failures of Christianity in its responsibility for peace and reconciliation. History and experience also testify that Christian churches and groups contributed to the overcoming of violence. The witness of South African churches in the struggle against Apartheid, the contribution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under the leadership of Desmond Tutu and Alex Boraine to a peaceful development in South Africa, the role of the Community of Sant'Egidio in negotiating peace in Mozambique, and the contribution of the churches to the peaceful revolution in Middle and Eastern Europe in the years 1989, 1990 are examples of that. Therefore Christians and Christian churches should continue to trust in the power of non-violent peacemaking and therefore approach their tasks in a spirit of confidence and hope.

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