

Development Needs a New International Financial Order

SHORT AND TO THE POINT

The Economy and Finances as a Question of Faith

Information material for congregations and
grassroots groups



Who? - Where? - What?

This booklet has been conceived as part of a Kairos Europa series dealing with the topic, **Development Needs a New International Financial Order**. In the series, the following works are also to appear:

- ▲ Short and to the point: The International Financial System
- ▲ Short and to the point: Economy and Finances as Questions of Faith
- ▲ Short and to the point: International Currency Transactions Tax (Tobin Tax)
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SHORT and to the POINT:

The Economy and Finances as a Question of Faith

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The Economy and Finances as a Question of Faith

Theological Impulses for Congregations and Groups in the "Processus Confessionis"

Globalization is not a new phenomenon. For countries of the South, particularly for Africa, the present phase of globalization, starting in the Eighties and being reinforced since the end of the Cold War, is but the fourth stage of their integration into world trade over a period of 500 years: after slavery, colonial conquest and neo-colonialism. The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolized a fourth qualitative shift of increasing integration of nation states through an ever more advanced communication technology and the accelerated trading of capital, goods and services around the globe. This present neo-liberal phase of globalization is characterized by the so-called "Washington Consensus" driven by multilateral institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO, and advocated by the key global players and the leading industrial nations. It aims at the integration of all economic activity within a single model of development, based on privatisation, deregulation and free trade, and giving primary importance to ever more rapid corporate economic growth dominated by capital accumulation.

The challenge of neo-liberal globalization

The main beneficiaries of this model are the global players; the principal losers are the developing countries in the South suffering from the dramatic impact of structural adjustment programs imposed according to the tenets of the "Washington Consensus." The UN Human Development Reports since 1999 provide evidence of the increasing gap between wealthy and poor countries, and they identify the inequities in the global trade system as being among its main causes. But in the industrialized countries, the gap between rich and poor is also widening at an alarming rate; unemployment, precarious job tenure and the dismantling of social benefits are on the increase everywhere.

Africa, the poorest continent with the greatest number of least-developed countries, is the main loser at the hands of neo-liberal globalization. The recent UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report on Africa reveals that the average income of Africans today is 10%

lower than in 1980, and that the income of the poorest fifth of the African population has dropped by an annual 2% since 1980. Whereas Africa's share in world trade was 5% in 1980, today it is less than 1%. The UNCTAD report estimates that for every 100 US-dollars that enter the African continent in the form of development aid, loans and investments, 106 dollars are transferred back to the countries of origin; 51 dollars on account of falling terms of trade, 25 dollars for debt-servicing and 30 dollars in the form of capital flight or securities.

From Seattle to Porto Alegre: from protest to alternatives

The protest in Seattle during the so-called "Millennium-Round" of the WTO at the end of 1999 signalled the formation of a global social movement of resistance against the dramatic impact of neo-liberal globalization. At the G-8 summit in Genoa in June 2001, the 50,000 protesters of Seattle grew to a massive demonstration of 300,000 people. More important than protest, however, is the development of sustainable alternatives. The World Social Forum of Porto Alegre in the South of Brazil stands as a symbol for that quest. The 60,000 participants at the second Social Forum in Porto Alegre from January 31 to February 5, 2002, demonstrate the vigorous growth of social movements in the South and North for viable alternatives to the "terror of an economy" that puts profit before people: "The world is not for sale" - "another world is possible".

The "Processus Confessionis" Gets Underway

The traditional explanations put forward by the majority of economic leaders, politicians and economists are found convincing by fewer and fewer people. Thus, it is even more incumbent on the churches to face up to the challenges in a world in which globalization is becoming more and more pronounced.

In this situation, a hopeful sign is that a large-scale worldwide ecumenical process is underway: this aims to initiate the analyzing of the causes and consequences of



a deregulated and liberalized world economy; the mobilization of opposition in all continents against the exclusive orientation of the economy toward the increase of wealth of the few at the expense of people and the earth; and the common search for alternative approaches and solutions.

In 1995, Kitwe in Zambia was the venue of an all-Africa consultation dealing with the subject of 'Reformed Faith and Economic Justice.' On this occasion, the participants noted: 'we have come to the painful conclusion that the reality of African poverty, which is caused by an unjust world economic system, is not only an ethical problem, but a theological one, too. We are faced with a status confessionis. In the mechanisms of the current world economy, the gospel for the poor is itself at stake.' This means no more and no less that the Africans here compare the present globalized economic system with the situation under National Socialism and apartheid, both of which brought about a conflict in the churches not just touching their socio-political witness but their very being of the church.

For people in Zambia as in the other heavily indebted poorest countries, of which most are to be found in sub-Saharan Africa, there can be no doubt that they are increasingly marginalized in the process of globalization; that the rules by which international trade is conducted are responsible for this; that they are excluded from enjoying fundamental human rights. Such global apartheid violates the God-given dignity of hundreds of millions of people. The churches cannot be silent in this matter. Confession of one's position, opposition and the struggle for alternatives are what are required at this time.

In 1997, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) responded with the call to the process of confessionis on economic injustice and destruction of life on earth, a process of recognition, education, confession and action in the context of globalization. The following year, the general assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) appealed to all of its member churches to join in this process. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has also begun a program aimed at challenging neo-liberal globalization.

In June 2002, an ecumenical assembly will meet in The Netherlands to gather together the first results of this

process in the west European churches and to present them during the general assemblies of the LWF, WARC and WCC in 2003, 2004 and 2006, respectively.

This booklet is intended to help people in the congregations to participate in this worldwide process, and indeed, in such a way that it is clear that: yes, here it is a matter of whether we as a church are faithful to the gospel or not.

"Christians cannot share the bread at the Lord's table without sharing their daily bread.

An unworldly holiness would only create an unholy world. Working for human dignity and human rights, for justice and solidarity, is constitutive for the church."

(For a future founded on solidarity and justice (101), p. 37).

God or mammon? Are we church in the biblical sense?

The history of Israel after the Hebrews were liberated from the slavery of Egypt, the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the history of the early Jesus movement are characterized by a permanent confrontation with economic, political and ideological-religious power.

In these conflicts which we encounter in various passages of the Old and New Testament, the point of reference is the message of the prophets and the social and economic Torah of the people of Israel, whose verbal form and expression emerges in various stages in the Pentateuch. As a devout Jew, Jesus of Nazareth upheld this standard of behavior, while the early community in Jerusalem tried to act in accordance with it, too. Even today, this biblical economic Torah provides an authoritative standard for each Christian congregation.

In this respect, the Bible offers a number of approaches. The approach that we have decided on is to follow the various stations of the liturgical year, thereby drawing the attention of present-day congregations to the social and economic impulses provided by the Bible.

Christmas

"The people of God live from the memory of the history of God's mercy; they repeatedly tell the stories of divine mercy, which is celebrated on festive occasions. This is the source of our strength and confidence, giving us the motivation to attend to the poor, weak and disadvantaged in mercy and solidarity. Mercy acknowledges that each and every person, even if weak and guilt-laden, has inalienable dignity. This treasure trove of historical memory helps us to meet the new challenges."

(For a future founded on solidarity and justice (96), p. 35).

1. Christmas: God's descent and self-abasement

One can be sure that no Christmas sermon fails to mention that Jesus was born in a stable rather than in a four-star hotel, and that it was the shepherds who were the first to receive the good news about the birth of the Messiah, the 'Savior.' At the time of Jesus, shepherds were regarded by Orthodox Jews as second-class Jews who, because of their profession, were able to fulfill only a part of their religious duties. In the message to the shepherds, the Messianic message of the liberation of his people is linked with the 'sign' of a weak child: "in a manger you will find an infant." This is at the same time a counter-story to the birth of the Roman emperor who carried the title "Savior" (Sotér).

Christmas is the celebration of the descent of the almighty God of the religions and of Greek metaphysics to the poor and weak, the 'lowliest.' That is where he is to be found, with the shepherds, with children, with the vulnerable and the outcast; he allows himself to be sought out by oriental astrologers from beyond the borders of God's chosen people.

Here, the Bible is as clear as daylight: God reveals the name of God (Jahwe means: I am there - for you) for the first time in the context of the liberation from slavery (Exodus 3), the message of the prophets and instructions concerning the law are directed toward justice for the

poor and oppressed; Mary greets the coming of the Messiah with the words, "He has deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places" (Luke 1.52). God comes in Jesus not to abstract individuals in order to save them and, subsequently, to expect them to do good works for the poor. The message of justification of St. Paul is also not directed at individuals but shows how Jews and other peoples can live together as a new people in Christ in love, and thus can, by faith, overcome sin and death in an exemplary manner.

However, how clear is this message when we consider the way that Christmas is marketed?

In his book, „The cry of the subject“, Franz Hinkelammert reports that „in 1980, Ernesto Cardenal, the Minister of Culture of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, spoke in favor of forbidding the use of the Christian Christmas mysteries in commercial advertising. The Chamber of Commerce protested in the name of freedom of opinion. The Cardinal and Archbishop of Managua condemned this action of the government as ‚atheistic.‘ In his language, this means that it was an act of blasphemy.“ Hinkelammert compares this incident with the accusation of blasphemy made against Jesus when he cleansed the temple on the grounds that people should „stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace“ (John 2.16).

How can Christmas as we celebrate it give voice to what it truly is?

According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the most important thing for the church is not what it says in words but the place where it stands. Matthew 25.31 tells of the place where the Messiah is to be found: within and among those whose lives are such that their basic needs remain unsatisfied and whose basic rights are constantly violated. This is the case for the majority of the world population who endure hunger and thirst, those who are without shelter and who have been deprived of freedom. What do we say at Christmas? Your Savior is born (in general for you), please give a donation for the poor as a

Lent and Passion-tide

sign of gratitude? Or, at Christmas, do we practice a change of place: together as a Christian congregation, do we desire to find the Savior by joining company with the poor at a definite place and thus participating in God's redemption?

If one rediscovers God's solidarity at Christmas, then this solidarity that creates community may represent the starting point of overcoming the present destructive economic system. This is to get to the root of the problem; the isolation of people to the point that they are unrelated/relation-less individuals, who know only competition among themselves in the grab for wealth and power. A congregation that begins to turn away from an individualistic understanding of Christian faith and, as one, visibly changes its place to where the Messiah is to be found will truly be the 'salt of the earth' in an age when the economy is ever more directed toward increasing the wealth of a few successful individuals.

In all probability, this cannot take place merely by radical changes in the church services at Christmas. But how would it be during the time before Christmas to extend invitations not to Christmas celebrations but rather to a 'change of place' with accompanying information events, for example, in homes for those seeking political asylum or to a dinner with homeless people?

2. Lent and Passion-tide From the cradle to the cross

When following the stations of the public ministry and works of Jesus of Nazareth, Lent and Passion-tide are particularly suitable for taking up the most important impulses to be found in the Gospels concerning social and economic ethics, and for bringing these into the churches' 'processus confessionis' with respect to alternative economics based on the needs and well-being of people.

In this, the main results yielded by critical social-historical examination of the biblical traditions and particularly of the life of Jesus of Nazareth provide our point of orientation. An important distinguishing feature of the authors who one would assign to the so called "third quest" for the historical figure of Jesus (E. P. Sanders, G. Vermes,

Christians and Heathens

*People turn to God in their need,
Beg for help, ask for happiness and bread,
For deliverance from sickness, guilt and death.
Thus do all, all, Christians and heathens.*

*People turn to God in His need,
They find him poor, reviled, without roof or bread,
See him entangled with sin, weakness and death.
Christians stand by God in His suffering.*

*God turns to people in their need,
Fills the body and the soul with His bread,
Dies for Christians and heathens a death on the Cross,
And forgives them both.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

P. Worseley, G. Theissen, L. Schottroff, W. Stegemann, and others) is their placement in the context of an intra-Jewish movement of renewal, with a new evaluation of the Jewish Torah serving as a fundamental frame of reference. 'Historical' is taken to mean what is plausible within the Jewish context and what makes the genesis of the early Jesus movement comprehensible. As a rule, this results in a greater continuity between the historical Jesus and early theological statements in the Jerusalem and early Judeo-Christian communities than has previously been claimed in scholarly scientific exegesis.

In the framework of our inquiry about biblical impulses relevant to a present-day form of social and economic ethics and practise in the churches, it is of central importance which social laws and economic regulations the Jewish Torah provided for Jesus as a Jewish person and prophet. As a devout Jew, he kept these laws; as a Messianic prophet, he intensified them and made them more radical. With respect to the elements of economic law, these were laws directed against pauperization and impoverishment (here, in particular, the prohibition of lending at interest and regulations concerning the seizure of property); laws for the protection of the socially weak (especially the keeping of the Sabbath and the regulation of almsgiving); and, finally, systemic

regulations (periodic cancellation of debts, the jubilee year, the law of redemption) see F. Crüsemann, R. Kessler, and others.

Who is Jesus Christ for you?

The same as he also was for the authors of the Gospels: a wandering radical, whose way-of-life was almost one-hundred per cent different to, for example, mine; a Jew, who spoke inspired and unique sayings; a Jew, who working from the Old Testament tradition, came to surprising and universally applicable conclusions; a healer of physical suffering; a free man, proud in the face of the powerful, loving toward the powerless and despised; a man who was masculine enough not to have to suppress the feminine in himself; an emancipator of women; someone to lead us - even to seduce us - to life, for that reason executed, for that reason resurrected.

Kurt Marti

a) The beginning: The baptism and temptation of Jesus

Jesus was a follower of John the Baptist. By being baptized by John, Jesus identified himself with John's message of the judgment to come and the imminent deliverance by the God of Israel. For the ruler, Herod Antipas, this message of impending dramatic upheavals was dangerous, as it further incited his fear of a rising against the Roman ascendancy; therefore, he had John executed. For Jesus of Nazareth, the murder of John served as the trigger for the commencement of his public ministry in the villages of Galilee.

Even though, in the mouth of Jesus, the message of the imminent onset of God's rule lost its threatening quality in favor of a joyful message for the poor, it was from the very beginning just as politically explosive as that of John. „The time has been fulfilled. The reign of God is at hand! Repent and believe in the good news“ (Mark 1.15).

In spite of the complex and varied expectations awakened in Jesus' contemporaries by the central concept of his preaching, the coming „kingdom of God“, it did nonetheless amount to a radical alternative to the rule of the Roman Empire euphemistically called „The Peace of Rome“, „Pax Romana.“ Jesus proclaimed the imminent overthrow of the prevailing world order by the God of Israel, in order that he might establish His rule on earth. This wondrous intervention was aimed at the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel and the establishment of a new fundamental ordering of the whole of society in accordance with the model of the "autonomy and equality" of the early days of Israel and based on a renewed acceptance of and full compliance with the Mosaic Torah. Jesus' preferred metaphor for this Messianic kingdom of God was the "feast of all the peoples" within the context of the pilgrimage of all peoples to Mount Zion at the end of time as hoped for and celebrated by the prophets (Luke 13.28f.; Matthew 8.11f.).

This transcendent kingdom of God, which is to begin in the near future via God's mighty intervention on earth, cannot be created by people; it can be wished for and prayed for; one can prepare oneself for its arrival by already anticipating the rules of this new social and economic order of God, living according to them and making them a reality that might serve as an example to others. The preparing of his beloved people of Israel for the advent of this divine reign was the mission of the wandering preacher, charismatic miracle-worker and eschatological prophet, Jesus of Nazareth.

This message extends far beyond any program of social reform and cannot be forced through by an armed struggle against the hated rule of the Romans; however, this does not in any way diminish its political relevance, because the concrete utopia of God's dominion attains clear form in the crystallization of the living regulations of the Jesus movement on the basis of the "house rules of the Torah", which within the expressed range of his Messianic expectations, Jesus in some cases made more strict, while in others, he mildened or extended their application.

Jesus' fasting and temptation in the desert

After his baptism, Jesus went into the desert in order to fast. While there, he was tempted by the Devil (Matthew 4.1-11; Luke 4.1-13; Mark 1.12f.).

The forty days of fasting of Jesus is reminiscent of the 40 years spent in the desert by the tribes of Israel between their liberation from the slavery of Egypt and their entry into the Promised Land. In a mythologized form, Jesus experienced temptations that assailed him during the short span of his public ministry; they represent and stand for the temptations experienced by any successful liberation moment passing through the desert, such as in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Zimbabwe, Namibia or South Africa. Yet they are also a symbol of the temptations presented by power and wealth to which the church, the Messianic people of God, are exposed on their way to the new 'City of God,' 'the Heavenly Jerusalem.'

Matthew and Luke expand the brief report of Mark to include three successive and increasingly far-reaching temptations by the Devil or 'Satan,' 'the adversary.' The whole life of Jesus is a struggle with evil in the form of Satan and evil spirits. This is especially clear in his miraculous healings, in which by 'the finger of God,' the power of evil is broken as a sign of the coming kingdom of God (Matthew 12.28). This is also indicated by Jesus' words relating to the success stories of the seventy disciples whom he had sent forth: "I watched Satan fall from the sky like lightning" (Luke 10.17). It may be that this surely authentic saying of Jesus refers to the vision he experienced at the moment of his vocation, which gave Jesus the certainty that God was at the point of achieving the final victory over the forces of evil. That this certainty was constantly under attack is revealed by the last petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6.13).

The three temptations of Satan are temptations to misuse Messianic and spiritual power, as they are so dramatically portrayed in the story of the Grand Inquisitor in F. Dostoyevsky's novel, 'The Brothers Karamazov.' Ever since the conversion of Constantine, the church in its historic manifestations has again and again succumbed to the temptation of secular power. Such a church no longer

believes in a living God; it relies entirely on its own political and financial power. Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor no longer believes in God; behind the ecclesiastical facade, one finds the Devil himself.

The third temptation of Jesus - when the Devil offers Jesus dominion over the whole world if only he will bow down and worship him - represents the crux of the story of the temptation. Here, Jesus is concerned with the central question of the nature of the coming 'kingdom of God' that he is proclaiming; is it to be a kingdom according to the standards of Roman world dominion, based on power, coercion, violence and wealth; or is it to be the rule of justice and mercy of the 'God of the poor?' This is the central question of faith, the question about the nature of God. This is why Jesus answers the question with a saying from the Hebraic Sch'ema, which devout Jews pray twice daily: "The Lord, your God, shall you fear; him shall you serve, and by his name shall you swear" (Deut. 6.13).

Economics as a central question of faith

God is the reality to which, de facto, a person, a Christian, a church 'gives his or her heart' and which assumes the most important social position in life or in society. "You cannot serve God and money" (Matthew 6.24). In the synoptic tradition, particularly in Luke, wealth and power represent a sphere in opposition to God, as they hinder people opening their hearts to Jesus' message of the drawing near of a kingdom of God for the poor and thus are obstacles to following him. De facto, then, money and political power are their 'God' who is, in the final analysis, the determining reality of society demanding absolute obedience.

In the Bible, the decisive question is not whether God exists but who is this God: what social function does he assume in the life of a person or in a particular form of society? God is "easily mistaken;" is God a code-word for authority or is he the unmistakable One, who from the time of the exodus, defined himself for good and all: "I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery" (Exodus 20.2ff.). The God of Israel, from being 'the King-God became the God of the deprived this process can be called the descent

of God, the descent from the peaks of power into the depths of the helplessness of the tortured and murdered' (Ton Veerkamp, *Die Vernichtung des Baal*, p. 323).

This God of Israel continued his descent in Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified rebel, right down to the darkest night of the state of being forsaken by God. Following this Jesus means turning away from all attempts to instrumentalize God as a means of justifying the rule of human beings over others: it must be either one or the other. Yahweh or Baal; on the one hand, the liberating God of the exodus who, in the lordless zone of the desert, creates His people on the holy Mount Sinai, or on the other, the golden calf (Exodus 32), a man-made symbol of authority, an enslaving idol living off the offerings of the poor; either "God or money."

b) The Jesus movement as an intra-Jewish movement of renewal

After the time of fasting in the desert, Jesus returned to Galilee and began his public ministry. He gathered a group of followers around himself, whose symbolic number, 12, places Jesus' teaching within the context of the history of the redemption of the Jewish people: his mission is directed toward "the lost sheep of Israel" and the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel in the kingdom to come. There, the twelve will take their "places on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19.28).

The Messianic message of the approaching kingdom of God also deeply influenced the way of life of the circle of disciples around Jesus: just as, when eating the Passover meal, families are in a hurry to move out of the "house of slavery," the Jesus movement carries with it a walking stick but no traveling bag or a second tunic (Mark 6.6-13): contrary to the view that this indicates a way of life influenced by Cynic philosophers (Crossan) or of a radical wandering charismatic preacher (G. Theissen), it seems more probable that the Jesus movement represented an intra-Jewish movement of renewal that was principally directed toward the Galilean rural population, among whom it found a receptive audience owing to social tensions between rich and poor, landowners and

the landless, towns and countryside, the oppressed and the Roman rulers with their Herodian puppet-princes. In spite of the long period of peace under the tetrarch, Herod Antipas (4 BC to 39 AD), Galilee was in a constant state of unrest and a center of anti-Roman resistance movements that openly broke out after the death of Antipas.

Most of the followers of Jesus were impoverished small farmers, tenants dependent on large landowners living in towns, or unpropertied laborers; or else they were modest artisans and fishermen in small villages inhabited by people whose purchasing power was slight. The intra-Jewish movement linked with the name of Jesus was a movement of the poor for the poor. Blessed are the poor; to them the gospel will be proclaimed; in the imminent kingly rule of God, the present unjust social order will be turned upside-down; the powerful will be overthrown, the hungry will be filled, the last will be first.

Although this Messianism of the poor propagated by Jesus initially focused on the rural population of Galilee, its goal was the conversion of the whole of Israel. In accordance with its surroundings, the Jesus movement is marked by a pronounced temple piety; in Galilean villages, the annual temple tax was collected reliably and voluntarily, the tithe was paid, and the three annual pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem were regularly undertaken. Jesus and his followers unconditionally avowed the Mosaic Torah, "not the smallest letter of the law" should be dispensed with (Matthew 5.18). This means that one can take for granted that they also upheld the rulings of the economic statutes of the Torah, such as the cancellation of debts, the prohibition of taking interest and the observance of the Sabbath.

Jesus' inaugural sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4.16-50)

The message of the 'kingdom of God' was given programmatic expression in Jesus' 'inaugural sermon' in the synagogue of Nazareth: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord." The



reference that the "year of favor from the Lord" has begun with the coming forth of Jesus makes evident that the kingdom-of-God message is to be understood as the effective putting into practice of the Mosaic Torah; the "year of favor" means not only a comprehensive cancellation of debt every seventh year (Deut. 15.1f.) but also that after every seventimes seven year - the jubilee year - the debt-slaves, are allowed to return to their kindred and their ancestral landed property. In Jesus' preaching, the 'year of favor' here stands for the fulfillment of the Mosaic Torah and, at the same time, the start of an all-embracing time of redemption.

The message of the impending onset of God's rule in this time and in this world, of the annulment of debts and the return to the rightful land possessions of one's forefathers is good news for the 'poor,' those whose debts have brought them into servitude and those forced to the outer margins of existence; it is also an invitation to the wealthy to contribute to the shaping of God's new beginning by remitting debts, by returning landed property, by giving up possessions in favor of the poor, or by selling all of one's property and possessions for the benefit of the Messianic community and repaying fraudulent profit many times over. In the writings of Luke, the conversion of the tax collector, Zacchaeus (Luke 19.1-10) serves as a paradigm for the conversion of one of the wealthy.

Only by making a contribution toward social equality and by adopting a way of life manifesting solidarity with the poor - i.e., those who enjoy precedence with respect to receiving redemption - is there any hope for the wealthy of participating in the kingdom of God. To any rich person who rejects the good news of God's liberation of the poor, the good news of Jesus will be as a judgment. Alongside the beatifications of the poor, the lamentations of the fate of the rich are presented in stark contrast (Luke 6.20-26). Wealth is a major obstacle for Jesus' successors: "It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10.25).

The property-owner who is able to acquiesce to the ugly gulf of the co-existence of obscene wealth alongside inhuman poverty will find himself, according to the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16.19-31), on the

wrong side, excluded from the community of the kingdom of God. Jesus' reply - "They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them" (Luke 16.29) - again emphasizes the importance of the Mosaic 'house rules' for the followers of Jesus.

Criticism of exploitative capitalist practise

A parable that is a constant source of irritation, because it is forced to serve as a justification of capitalist monetary practice, is the one to be found in Luke dealing with the king who left his servants or court officials to administer various sums of money and, on his return, demanded that account be given of the profits achieved (Luke 19.12-27). The successful officials are rewarded; however, the one who had made no profit because he hid the money to keep it safe is brutally executed. For Jews following the Torah, though, it is this servant who appears in a positive light, because he refused to act against God's Torah by doing what his brutal lord set forth as his minimum requirement: "Why then did you not put my money out on loan, so that on my return I could get it back with interest?" (Luke 19.23).

The royal candidate, who returns as a king in office, completely discredits himself in the eyes of devout Jews when he takes the money from the unsuccessful servant and gives it to the most successful with the classic words: "Whoever has will be given more, but the one who has not will lose the little he has" (Luke 19.26), which not only scandalized Bertolt Brecht in his *Threepenny Opera*. In the long history of how this parable has been received by Christians, it has, unfortunately, often been interpreted as being analogous to the parable of the talents recorded in Matthew within the context of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25.14-30). Within the context of the prohibition of usury in the Bible and Jesus' devotion to the Torah, this text only makes any sense when considered in the setting of the imminent departure of Jesus and his disciples for Jerusalem. The preceding conversion of the tax collector Zacchaeus and the resulting euphoria of his disciples who thought that "the reign of God was about to appear" (Luke 19.11) led Jesus to narrate this parable that, historically, makes reference to the journey

of the oldest son of Herod the Great, Archelaos, to Rome, where he was confirmed as Herod's successor; its aim was thus to bring his followers back down to earth by reminding them how the present world order operates.

On the way to Jerusalem, where the story of Jesus would come to a dramatic head, Jesus helps his followers to arrive at a realistic assessment of this risk that they are taking. The historic example of the brutal and tyrannical King Archelaos, of whom the Jewish historian, Josephus, gives a full account, is meant to reveal to them that, instead of the advent of the kingdom of God, a violent death might be awaiting them in Jerusalem; he was thus well aware what a threat the message of the kingdom of God represented to the established political, economic and spiritual power whose focus was the Temple of Jerusalem.

In conversation with Jesus, it has slowly become clear to me that his call to change ourselves today bids us to move away from a capitalism that is increasing the yawning gap between rich and poor throughout the world to an ever-more catastrophic degree (with thousands dying of hunger each day!). Admittedly, this is exactly the point at which I have no idea what to do. With such an opinion, how can I live and have dealings in a country in which capitalism can point to astonishing successes within its borders? Only too well can I understand my church that snuggles up contentedly on the lap of this capitalism and closes its eyes to its fateful effects throughout the world. (...)

What then? That Jesus leaves me alone with this question makes me angry with Him. Not that I would expect a political program from Him. I would merely like to be shown more clear-cut political perspectives. Or does He leave us alone with this question so that we can develop these perspectives ourselves? Have we white Christians in the industrialized countries perhaps neglected this task to a reprehensible degree?

Kurt Marti

c) Jesus and the question of taxes (Mark 12.13-17)

The political murder of Jesus was principally instigated from two centers of power: from Rome and from the

ruling élite of Jerusalem who were collaborators with Rome. Against this background, two stories in particular of the Second Testament need to be considered in a different light.

Mark 12.13-17 is still interpreted in the sense of a neo-Lutheran 'teaching of the two kingdoms': politics and the economy are 'areas' in which one has to obey appropriate specialized legal mechanisms and authorities. Jewish and social-historical exegesis clearly demonstrates that precisely the opposite is the case. In the situation of the Jewish revolt (66-70 AD), Mark the Evangelist gives the story the following point: whoever refuses to pay tribute to the Roman occupying power is a rebellious zealot (member of an anti-Roman Jewish party at the time of Christ). Whoever pays, distances himself from suchlike.

This is the catch-question that is posed to Jesus. What does he say?

1. *I have absolutely nothing to do with this Roman money ("bring me a coin and let me see it").*
2. *It bears the image of the emperor, who allows himself to be venerated as a god on it - that is idolatry.*
3. *Therefore, give the emperor this idolatrous money back, i.e., have nothing to do with it.*
4. *You, though, that bear the image of God, give yourselves back to God completely.*

This story is thus a story of resistance like Daniel 3. The situation is similar with respect to "my kingdom does not belong to this world" (John 18.36).

This saying of Christ is still given a purely spiritual meaning and is taken to refer to a future world in the realms of the beyond. However, in John, the word 'cosmos' does not only mean the universe or this earthly era as a whole, but the 'world system' characterized by sin (T. Veerkamp), which at this time was embodied by the Roman Empire: the system whose law was enforced by the military and was hammered into people's heads by propaganda lies in order, in the final analysis, to be used to kill (F. Hinkelammert). This means that Jesus is saying: my kingdom is not of the same nature as an empire like that of Rome. I do not fight with soldiers, and I am a witness to the life-giving and -preserving truth of God.

This is also the meaning of the provocative gesture of Jesus' instruction: "When a person strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other" (Matthew 5.39). This is not the expression of passive non-violence, but active opposition against injustice. Jesus counsels not to hit back with the weapons of violence; such a response only intensifies the spiral of violence.

The unjust power of the empire will not be broken by striking back with the weapons of the empire, but rather by challenging this power by being disarmed and exposing oneself to violence: this will either lead to the prevailing power allowing itself to be disarmed and not striking, or it will strike and thereby openly reveal itself for what it really is: brutal, murderous injustice; by doing so, it deprives itself of legitimation in full public view and loses public support. The effectiveness of this strategy is symbolized by names like Mahatma Gandhi, M.L. King, Albert Luthuli and many others.

d) The last week in the life of Jesus

Three prophetic events of exemplary character characterize the last week in the life of Jesus of Nazareth as the dramatic culmination of his mission when he went forth with his disciples to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover in about the year 30 AD. He entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey – an anti-king who does not come on a horse – and was hailed by the crowd as the 'Son of David' and Messiah-king; he went into the temple and overturned the tables of the money-changers and the stools of those selling doves; with his disciples, he ate a Last Supper in hope of the day when he can drink of the fruit of the vine new in the reign of God (Mark 14.22-25).

The 'cleansing of the temple' is the hermeneutic key to the understanding of the Messianic mission of Jesus and the reason for his violent death as a crucified rebel under Roman law with the collaboration of the high priests and temple ministers. If this deed meant no more than literally a 'cleansing' of the temple, it is unclear why this meant the death sentence for Jesus.

Jesus' treatment of the money-changers in the temple must have posed a deadly threat to the temple itself,

which for devout Jews, was not only the place of God's presence and the venue for religious services, but was also the hub of the political, economic and financial power of Israel. The temple was the central bank of Israel, which decided about financial policies, set exchange rates and housed such enormous deposits of wealthy private persons that, according to Josephus, the destruction and plundering of the temple in 70 AD caused the price of gold to fall by 50 per cent.

The cleansing of the temple: The marketplace and den of thieves (Mark 11.15-19)

According to Mark (11.15ff.), Jesus' doings in the temple led the high priests and the scribes to take the decision to kill him. Why was their reaction so extreme? It is incomprehensible if one assumes that Jesus only put an end to the materialistic hurly-burly, in order that those pious people wishing to pray could concentrate on their spiritual devotions without disturbance. Far more important, this incident involves Jesus' confrontation with the economic center of power in Jerusalem and the whole of Judea, which played a central role in the impoverishment of the poor. The scene related in Mark 12.41ff. shows a poor widow who gives her last couple of coins to fulfill the requirements of the temple.

The money-changers made profit at the expense of the poor via currency transactions. It was not permitted for Roman coins to defile the temple, and so pilgrims had to exchange them. Who profits from present-day exchange-rate dealings, and who loses out? This question would also be of central importance to Jesus today. It is encouraging that it is, at last, being taken up by the churches. The men selling doves profited at the expense of the poor: because the only sacrificial creature that they could afford was the dove. The third point that Jesus took into hand – "he would not permit anyone to carry things through the temple area" – was directed at the heart of the problem: the matter of sacrificing as such. The notion that God demanded sacrifice in payment of debts was unequivocally rejected by Jesus. Because this resulted in financial gains for the priestly class that earned on all of these transactions – not because a few of them took money for immoral reasons, but because the sacrifice system as such was rapacious.

Good Friday

This is made even more clear by John the Evangelist (John 2.13ff.). Here, Jesus calls the temple not a "den of thieves" - which one could misunderstand in a moral sense - but a "marketplace." Because here the law of value, i.e., that every investment must bring a return without the slightest regard for the realities of life - like the poor widow - is declared to be sanctioned by God, indeed to be God Himself. The diametrically opposite image is presented by Jesus at the Last Supper (Mark 14.22): During the meal he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. "Take this," he said, "this is my body." He (i.e., and God, too) demands no sacrifice but gives his life in faithfulness to his mission. Thus, the law demanding sacrifices from the poor is superseded. As a consequence of Jesus' attack directed against the political and economic powers of his time, Good Friday has an unexpectedly contemporary meaning that is completely obscured when, as is usually the case, this day is reduced to a matter of the forgiveness of an individual's sins.

This other meaning strikes at the very heart of the capitalist system of today. Because the effect of deregulation is such that speculative exchange-rate transactions as well as capital investments are targeted at bringing high returns for the capital-holder regardless of the consequences for other people and nature. Ever-greater sacrifices are demanded from those receiving social aid, the jobless and many dependent workers, while large accumulations of financial assets continue to grow to an unlimited degree.

Jesus' radical confrontation with the temple

Jesus' prophetic critique of the sacrificial system of the temple culminates in his threat of the destruction of the temple. According to the reports - as revised and edited by the Evangelists - of the interrogation of Jesus after his arrest, the accusation was raised again and again: "We heard him declare, 'I will destroy this temple made by human hands,' and 'In three days I will construct another not made by human hands'" (Mark 14.58-59). In actual fact, Mark 13.1 reports Jesus' prophecy of the total destruction of the temple using words that did not

attain complete fulfillment as a result of the destruction in 70 AD; this would seem to point to an authentic saying of Jesus. If his actions against the money-changers were accompanied by Jesus' threat concerning the impending destruction of the old temple, his arrest and condemnation would seem utterly plausible. Jesus linked this gesture and the threatening words that accompanied it with an urgent appeal to the religious leaders of Israel to give credence to the message of the kingdom of God being close at hand. 'For this new era in which the twelve tribes of Israel would again be gathered together, Jesus probably conceived of a new and perfect temple that God would build himself' (E.P. Sanders).

According to the prophet Zechariah, in the days of the Messiah, the sanctity of the temple will be replaced via the restored purity of God's creation by a new order without rites, without sacrifices. Then the bells of the horses and the pots shall be holy; and "there shall no longer be any merchant in the house of the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 14.20-21).

It has often been demonstrated that, with such Messianic expectations, Jesus shared the overall mood and imagery of other Jewish Messianic movements. It is plausible that such threatening of the temple and the radical calling its very existence in question was regarded by the high priest as agitation and a possible trigger for rioting and bloodshed, with the result that he handed over Jesus to Pilate to be arrested and sentenced. Pilate's ordering of the execution of Jesus as a political leader and his assigning him the appropriate punishment for this offense - crucifixion - fits well into the historical picture that Philo, a contemporary of Pilate, has drawn of him. Pilate was corrupt, brutal, unpredictable; it was because of his ordering numerous and ill-considered executions that he was eventually removed from office.

In the early morning of Friday, the 15th of Nisan, Jesus was nailed to the Cross and left to die. According to the oldest record, Jesus died uttering a loud cry of despair, after he had called in vain to Elijah the prophet, who was supposed to return in the last days, and had cried out that God had forsaken him. Did he hope to the very last that the kingdom of God would arrive without his having to die?

Easter

Soon enough and always, the exercise of love comes into collision with the machinations of the powers that be, it comes into conflict with them and becomes a Passion. The fate of Jesus shows this in all clarity. To be a follower of Christ, therefore, always means to shoulder the Cross. This Passion is the suffering under rulership without wishing to be a ruler oneself. This Passion is the enduring of acts of violence without becoming violent oneself. To that extent, this Passion is the most emphatic evidence that the kingdom of God spells the end of any rulership and violence of human beings over other human beings.

Kurt Marti

Jesus had staked everything on one card. His hope was not fulfilled. He died a failure. A victim of religious justice and the might of the occupying power.

3. Easter: God's rising against death

Easter is the starting point and crux of Christian faith. It is God's 'nevertheless' contrary to all human expectations. Without Easter Jesus would have remained one of many murdered and forgotten messianic pretenders in the history of Israel. Easter is the belief that, by God's mighty intervention, death does not have the last word; not in the sense of the continuing existence of an immortal soul in a cyclical 'dying and becoming,' but as a creative intervention that provides new life at a point where there is only despair and hopeless grief. "We were hoping that he was the one who would set Israel free" (Luke 24.21).

Jesus' being raised from the dead is the confirmation of his life and his mission by the God who liberates slaves; the hope of justification by the God of those who follow his way in the expectation that the resurrection of Jesus will find its final confirmation and fulfillment in the resurrection of the dead (Luke 24. 1-9).

For the new world of God's rule, which will commence with the resurrection of the dead, the stories of Christ's appearances after Easter provide a clear sign and model in that the corporeality of the resurrected one is made plain. The resurrected Jesus is no longer bound by the limits of space and time, but he is not of a purely spiritual nature; either he is the same Jesus with the face known

to all and the open wounds, yet he is different, so that the disciples do not recognize him at once or are afraid of him. The risen Lord remains the crucified Jesus; the new world is not a spiritualized 'beyond' of immortal souls that have, at last, cast off the burden of their corporeality and temporality, but rather a transformed creation and history, a new earth, a perfected humanity: a life of plenty for all. This is why, in the middle of the new Jerusalem, there issues forth "life-giving water, clear as crystal" (Rev. 22.1).

In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul sees the raising of Jesus above the power of death as God's guarantee that God's rule, which Jesus had proclaimed to be close at hand, would soon definitively come into being: "Christ the first fruits and then, at his coming, all those who belong to him. After that will come the end, when, after having destroyed every sovereignty, authority, and power, he will hand over the kingdom to God the Father. Christ must reign until God has put all enemies under his feet, and the last enemy to be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15.23-26).

Via the events of Easter, Jesus the Messianic prophet whose message proved to be a failure becomes the awaited Christ, the returning Lord. Out of the Jesus movement, the early church emerges as the eschatological people of God, which is to prepare first the whole of

*It might well be convenient for the rulers of the world
If justice were only to come into being after death;
Only then would the lordship of the lords,
only then would
The servitude of the servants be forgotten forever,
would be forgotten forever.*

*It might well be convenient for the rulers of the world
If everything on earth were to stay the way it is;
If here the lordship of the lords, if here
The servitude of the servants carried on as always,
Carried on as always.*

*But the liberator from death has arisen
Has already arisen and calls to us all now
To arise on earth, to rise up against the lords
Who rule us with death, who rule us with death.*

Kurt Marti

Pentecost

Israel and then, reluctantly, the new Israel made up of Jews and Gentiles for the final and irreversible setting up of God's rule.

4. Pentecost: The church as a counter-society - The economics of life

Pentecost (Whitsun) in the liturgical year marks the birth of the church through the spiritual power of the risen Jesus, the Christ.

In the Lukan double-conception of Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.1-13) corresponds to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. Just as the heavens open above the baptized Jesus and give legitimation to his Messianic message, Pentecost sees the heavens open above the troubled disciples who have gathered together: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, yes, even to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1.8).

At Pentecost, the disciples filled with the spirit of the resurrected Jesus form themselves into the Messianic people of God made up of Jews and Gentiles, and are prepared for their mission of gathering together this people of God of the end-time. The miracle of the speaking in tongues at Pentecost reverses the confusion of languages that arose as a consequence of the megalomaniac construction of the Tower of Babel. At the end of the Acts of the Apostles when Paul is able to preach without hindrance in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, when the word of God has thus reached the "ends of the earth," Luke considers the original mission of Jesus to restore God's people to have been essentially realized in outline, so that nothing could prevent the final bringing into being of God's reign.

The spirit of the Risen One enables the church not only to proclaim God's forthcoming reign but also to anticipate this by "signs and wonders". It is the duty of the church to follow the Messianic way of the life of Jesus and therefore its statutes fully incorporate the economic Torah, which Christ considered binding; the church is to be a contrast-society that bears witness to God's great alternative in a concrete and believable manner. After the

Pentecost experience, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Acts of the Apostles immediately tell of the economic consequences for the people of God (Acts 2.44f.). A more detailed account is then given in Acts 4.32ff.: "The community of believers were of one heart and one mind. None of them ever claimed anything as his own; rather, everything was held in common. With power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great respect was paid to them all; nor was there anyone needy among them, for all who owned property or houses sold them and donated the proceeds. They used to lay them at the feet of the apostles to be distributed to everyone according to his need."

When one considers the typical individual-oriented preaching of Easter, how remarkable it is to see that the resurrection is supposed to have something to do with a new way of dealing with possessions as well as with the abolition of poverty! By no means so remarkable when one is acquainted with the Hebrew Bible. All of the prophetic writings from Amos onward and all reforms of the law in Israel reflect a critical stance with respect to the negative consequences of a new economic form stemming from Greece and based on absolute ownership (cf. U. Duchrow, F. Hinkelammert). This assigned such value to property that, if one loaned it, one could demand interest on it. The debtor either had to pay this or work it off in bondage for his debts. As security for the loan, he had to mortgage his land. In the event of his not being able to repay his debts, e.g., because of a poor harvest, his family lost its land, in other words, the basis of its economic existence, and had to, as a unit, enter into debt-slavery.

The prophets protested against this process of pauperization and enrichment (cf., for example, Isaiah 5.8: Woe to you who join house to house, who connect field with field, Till no room remains, and you are left to dwell alone in the midst of the land!). Legal reform led to the development of laws in Judea enabling such mechanisms to be prevented or their effects at least to be mildened. The central theological message is: there is no such thing as absolute property for humankind, God alone is the owner of the land and humankind. For this reason, one may not make either of them into commodities (Leviticus 25.23 and 42). One is not allowed to exact interest (Lev. 25.36, 37). However, if debt-slavery does arise, this must be

Trinity

periodically rectified. Every seven years in the Sabbath year, such slaves are to be freed and their debts remitted (Deuteronomy 15.2 and 12ff.).

In each generation in the jubilee year, the mortgaged and lost land - that is to say the means of production - shall be given back to each family: This is the sign that all of its inhabitants have been restored to their original rights. The 50th year must be for you as a year that belongs to Me. It is the jubilee year, in which a general restoration takes place. Every Israelite, who has mortgaged his ancestral land possessions will receive them back, and whoever has sold himself into slavery to another may return to his kindred (Leviticus 25.10).

The Deuteronomic law even embraces the first known social tax in the history of the world (Deut. 14.28: At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithes of your produce for that year and deposit them in the community stores). Every third year, the Israelites should hand over one-tenth their harvest, so that the widows, orphans, aliens and Levites - all of whom have no means of production - can live. When all of these good laws of the biblical God are upheld, there actually should be no one of you in need. "If you but heed the voice of the Lord, your God, and carefully observe all these commandments which I enjoin on you today, there should be no one of you in need" (Deut. 15.4). "Because the aim of these laws is that all people can live. Take my commandments to heart and take care that your brother may live beside you" (Lev. 25.36). Whoever throws in his lot with idolatrous wealth is in league with death. God gives to everyone plentifully and sufficiently (Deut. 8). This is the manna-economy of the Bible (Exodus 16) to which Jesus is referring in his answer to the devil (Matthew 4).

Thus we can understand the keywords of the Acts of the Apostles. The church established at Pentecost is the restored Israel that enacts the regulations of the mosaic Torah. In his community, Jesus' life after the resurrection reveals itself to be a management of economic affairs for living. In it, everyone has enough to live, because no-one wishes to augment their possessions via interest or financial transactions. Everything is divided up, so that there are no poor. With his collections, the apostle Paul extended this approach of the manna-economy throughout

the whole church (II Cor. 8.6ff. and 9.6ff.), in contrast to the oppressive and exploitative Roman Empire, in whose laws the absolute nature of ownership (dominium) was firmly anchored. Thus, the communal prayer became reality: "Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors."

5. Trinity Sunday

"The rule of many is not good; let one be ruler!" This sentence from Homer's Iliad is quoted by Aristotle at the end of his Metaphysics and thus provides theological legitimation for the absolute rule of his student, Alexander the Great. He it was who established the Hellenistic world empire from which the Roman Empire arose. His absolutism - involving military subjugation, exploitation and the enslavement of peoples - culminated in the idea of the divinity of the emperor.

In 312 AD, when the Roman Emperor Constantine halted the persecution of the Christian church and made Christianity the state religion, his court theologians took over the Hellenistic-Roman concept of God of the imperial ruler. God is the one monarchical head represented by the emperor. But didn't the Bible say: God is one, 'no other gods but me?' They overlooked the fact that this meant precisely the following: in the Israel of God, no Egyptian state of affairs is to be allowed - no absolute Pharaoh, no slavery and oppression - no Babel with its arrogant tower.

In this sense, independent theologians of that time developed the notion of the triune nature of God. This complicated expression says nothing more than that God is love, i.e., the community of mutual help and solidarity, not of absolute rule. The well-known wonderful icon of the Holy Trinity by the Russian, Andrei Rublow, expresses this most impressively. In particular, it was the theologians of the early church from Asia Minor (Cappadocia) like Gregory of Nazianzus and St. John Chrysostom who worked out this Trinitarian theology of the community of love. Because this God is not the 'unmoving Mover' as a solitary head but rather is love, God can also suffer with his creatures when they suffer poverty and sickness. The followers of God and Jesus, who participate via the Eucharist in the divine being, share what they have with the poor and take part in the healing of the sick.

Thus, in the time between Trinity Sunday and the end of the liturgical year, church congregations can utilize the many stories of the prophets and the Torah as well as the stories of Jesus of Nazareth and the letters of the apostles to spell out for themselves the meaning of community and solidarity, and to adapt a corresponding social-political practise. Let us look at a few examples

The Sabbath, the cancellation of debts and the prohibition of exacting interest

Insofar as they are not associated with tensions between early Christian congregations and the pharisaic movement after the destruction of Jerusalem, the disputes about Sabbath observance with the group of Pharisees - similar to the Jesus movement, these were drawn from among the social groups comprising 'small people' - were normal contentious arguments between Jewish groupings. Being contrary to the obligation of Jews not to reap or prepare a meal on the Sabbath - in order that housewives as well as slaves and beasts of burden might enjoy the Messianic Sabbath rest on the seventh day - the prophetic action of Jesus' disciples of pulling off the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands and eating the grain (Mark 2.23-28) must have been intended as a provocation. It points to the humiliating poverty of those who, on the Sabbath, had nothing with which they might make a festive meal and thereby celebrate the Sabbath in the proper fashion: "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath" (Mark 2.27).

The comparison with David who, in his hunger, entered the temple in order to eat the bread reserved for the priests which was kept there is, at the same time, a sign for the forthcoming Messianic time, which will suspend the laws relating to the Sabbath and what is to be considered holy, because these laws will be brought to fulfillment by the arrival of the divine time of the Sabbath. "That is why the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." Jesus restores the Sabbath to its original purpose as the Messianic seventh day on which God completes His work, so that He can then celebrate and enjoy His completed creation.

For Jesus, the social and economic order of the Torah is a matter that can be taken for granted, as is also the case

with respect to the cancellation of debts every seventh year and the prohibition of exacting interest. In the request of the Lord's Prayer in its original form in Matthew - "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven those who are our debtors" (Matthew 6.12) - the matter in question is surely the material debts to be remitted in the Sabbath year as the periodical restoration of that 'equality and autonomy' which marked out the society of the alliance of the twelve tribes; for Jesus, this is a sign of the Messianic restoration according to the measure of God's mercy and justice in the impending kingdom of God.

The cancellation of debts should not, however, be a reason not to provide those in need with an interest-free loan: "Give to the man who begs from you. Do not turn your back on the borrower" (Matthew 5.42). In Luke, the call to provide loans without interest to the poorest who cannot repay them is even more intense: "Lend without expecting repayment" (Luke 6.35).

The rehabilitation of a manager

Alongside the commandment to observe the Sabbath, the prohibition of lending at interest is the most important economic statute in the Bible. In the context of the extortionate rates of interest that were common in ancient times, the prohibition of exacting interest represented the most effective law directed against impoverishment and pauperization: "You may demand interest from a foreigner, but not from your countryman" (Deut. 23.21). In this case, 'foreigner' means a commercial trader, not a 'stranger' who had fallen into need, as it was not permitted to exact interest from such people.

The parable of the so-called 'unjust manager' (Luke 16.1-7) provides eloquent proof of how Jesus upheld the prohibition of exacting interest (which contemporary Pharisees and scribes also took for granted) and, at the same time, attacked tricks aimed at getting round this prohibition. Contrary to the usual interpretation, the remission of debts effected in Luke's parable is not a sly and illegal method of securing his financial position during retirement by a manager who is about to be dismissed for failing to obtain enough profit for his



employer; rather, it involves the paying back of the interest that would have been exacted on the hundred jars of oil and the hundred measures of wheat. Before being dismissed, the thoughtful manager put his accounts in order by remitting the interest on the debt that he had unjustly exacted, thereby allowing God's Torah to prevail once more. This is why he is praised at the end of the parable: via his paying back of the interest to the debtors; a swindler has been brought back into the fold of God's Torah. Thus, it is not about an 'unjust manager' - as 'oikonomos tes adikias' (Matthew 16.8) is usually incorrectly rendered - but rather about a manager who holds his position in a system that, by exacting interest, serves the 'mammon of injustice and inequality,' but who then takes the opposite course and brings the situation back into accordance with the 'house rules' of the Mosaic Torah.

Between Moses and the market: Two economies in conflict

The Lucan conception given in Luke 12.16-32 brings together two economic systems and presents them in contrast to each other. The parable of the wealthy grain farmer (Luke 12.16-21) represents a criticism of the mechanisms of acquiring wealth in the prevailing market economy in the light of the Mosaic economic order; in the second section (Luke 12.22-32), this is replaced by Jesus' description of an 'economy of justice' that bursts through the logic of the market and brings to fulfillment the Mosaic economic 'house rules' within the horizon of the coming rule of God.

The wealthy grain farmer who extends his storage capacity in order to stockpile his copious harvest rather than selling it breaks the economic laws of the Torah as interpreted by the rabbis. Because, according to the Torah, the market for basic foodstuffs like grain was regulated. One was not allowed to hoard grain above all, but also oil and wine, in order to prevent artificial shortages being used to push up the prices of the necessities of life and to ensure that these foodstuffs remained available for everyone, especially the poor people. The regulatory laws of the 'Talmudic economy' (A. Ben-David) also affected the trade in basic foodstuffs. Trading on commission was

forbidden: only direct selling was permitted. This was another way of keeping prices down.

The sudden death of the wealthy grain farmer symbolizes the death-bringing power of the mechanisms of getting rich in a pure market economy which, although it may secure supply and demand, cannot take into account the damage it may do to society and the environment.

The grain farmer is condemned by Jesus not because he is covetous but because he uses that which is essential for the poor as an object of speculation. His provision for the future concerns only his own life with its superabundance, the consequence being that, by holding back his harvest, some of his fellow men will be unable to survive. This is a criminal act - in the view of the Torah, a deadly economic crime.

An alternative to a market economy is presented by Jesus in the form of an 'economy of justice.' At the heart of this is the sentence: "Seek out instead the kingdom of God, and the rest will follow in turn" (Luke 12.31).

In the kingdom of God, it is God's comprehensive solicitude for everyone that determines the way justice is ordered. The ravens that "have neither cellar nor barn - yet God feeds them" (Luke 12.24) are an example of the solicitude of God, who as the 'divine steward,' ensures an existence appropriate to their human status for all of the people in his 'household' via the abundant gifts of his Creation; this is not an economy of hoarding and speculation but of sharing and distributing, so that everyone has 'sufficient.'

This economy of justice in the kingdom of God is guaranteed by the economic laws of the Torah: "You have Moses and the prophets." This Mosaic economic order of 'sufficient for all' is realized in an exemplary way by the gift of the feeding of Israel with manna. As the new Moses, Jesus effects this biblical economy of sufficiency in the miraculous feeding of the five-thousand at "a deserted place." Jesus did not send his disciples to the markets of the surrounding villages, but rather had the people gathered together in groups of fifty and ordered the distribution of the five loaves and two fishes, which so miraculously increased while being passed around that not only was everyone filled but twelve baskets were

All Hallows

required to hold all that was left over (Matthew 14.13-21). Just as the 'five loaves' represent the five books of Moses (Pentateuch) and his social and economic laws, the twelve baskets stand for the full restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel in the imminent Messianic fulfillment. The 'miraculous increase of bread' and the feeding of the thousands of millions of people on this planet is still possible today as well on this basis. There is enough for everyone; the scarce resources only need to be distributed according to the measure of the 'justice of the kingdom of God.'

All Hallows (All Saints)

This typical Catholic liturgical feast provides plenty of material for controversial theological argument. In actual fact, the historically late procedure of canonization as practiced by the Catholic church is highly debatable. Nonetheless, a festival commemorating "All Saints" and "All Souls" has a more profound meaning when one looks more closely at the biblical texts referred to during this feast. According to the pertinent passages for readings on this day, the saints are those who "have survived the great period of trial; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7.14).

Accordingly, the saints are not great moral heroes or miracle-workers, but rather the defeated, the killed, victims. The prototypes of the saints are the martyrs, those resistance fighters who were tortured, beheaded or hung because they fought against corrupt rulers, exposed dubious and dishonest structures in the economic and financial spheres in the Roman Empire, and put their own lives at risk in order that the oppressed might be freed and the humiliated might learn to walk upright again. The saints are those who did not 'bend their knee before the image of the beast'; in brief, the saints are those to whom Jesus addressed the words, "blessed are they": the sorrowing, those who are unconsolated, the hungry and the homeless, the persecuted, those who "hunger and thirst for justice." (Matthew 5)

Their number: "one hundred and forty-four thousand from every tribey of Israel" (Rev. 7.4), twelve times twelve-thousand; the anticipated perfect completeness of God's

people in the end time, the gathering of whom was Jesus' mission and the mission that he entrusted to his followers. Placing the saints on the same level as the martyrs in no way romanticizes or glorifies the suffering that they had to endure. Indeed, the opposite is the case: their blood, as once the slavery in Egypt turns into a cry to Yahweh, the God of the poor, that he should come down again in order at last to make an end of the degrading sufferings that are incompatible with human dignity: "They cried out at the top of their voices: 'How long will it be, O Master, holy and true, before you judge our cause and avenge our blood among the inhabitants of the earth'" (Rev. 6.10).

Only a person who has experienced unjust suffering or who is able to feel genuine compassion for the unjust and senseless suffering of others can join in the cry for Gods' justice, "Will not God then do justice to his chosen who call out to him day and night? Will he delay long over them, do you suppose? I tell you, he will give them swift justice. But when the Human One comes, will he find any faith on the earth?" (Luke 18.7-8).

Faith like this is a rarity. For M. Horkheimer, though, this is the very thing that is specific to religion: 'the hope that the murderers will not be able to exalt over the victims for all time.' As Hegel was not correct in thinking that world history is also the Final Judgement, there needs to be an end of history, God's judgement as the revolutionary breaking off of this history of calamity, in accordance with the measure of his gentle mercy toward the poor and, at the same time, his righteous anger toward injustice, toward evil: "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6.13).

It would appear that, in some mysterious way, it is in the hands of the saints, who impatiently desire and call for the arrival of God's final reign, to determine when 'the time is fulfilled.' "They were told to be patient a little while longer until the quota was filled of their fellow servants and brothers to be slain, as they had been (Rev. 6.11). Is the cup not now full to overflowing after two-thousand years of disasters, after colonial genocide, after the Shoah, the gulags and Hiroshima?

'It is time that it was time. It is time' (Paul Celan).



Advent

6. Advent

With Advent, we come to the end of our sojourn through the liturgical year. Advent is not, principally, a time of preparation for Christmas, but rather the end of the church year, a view toward the end of history; the expression of the desire of the 'people traveling in the darkness' for God's mercy and God's justice at the end of history, when the resurrection of the dead heralds the irrevocable arrival of God's kingdom in this world.

Even though the recent turn of the millennium did not cause actual panic about an impending apocalypse, it is possible to discern a widespread apocalyptic mood in these post-modern times, this being particularly manifest in films like Independence Day, Deep Impact and Armageddon, but also in the Earth Song by Michael Jackson, 'The Heavens Are Falling Down.'

Apocalyptic images of the destruction and end of the world can have a spiritually damaging effect - by arousing fears or giving one the sense of belonging to an élite - which may contain an enormous potential for aggression: all that is strange, different or hostile must and may be destroyed. However, such images, like those of the sinking of the Titanic, are metaphors for the current sense of there being a deep-seated crisis, in which the high-tech protective shell of the modern world is experienced as being extremely fragile; the cosmic 'Endgame' reflects the end of the national state with its own currency, the end of the social state and the power of trade unions, the end of being able to plan one's life with some sense of certainty, the end of lasting relationships, but also the longing for new certainties.

Thus, on the margins of modern life, a new need for religion is also awakening; this reveals itself in a new interest in the texts and images of the Christian Apocalypse as they are recorded in a great concentration in the last book of the Second Testament, the Revelation of St. John. In contrast to a biblical fundamentalist exegesis, it is evident that the biblical texts do not present a timetable of foreseeable events of the end-time, but represent a book of comfort for persecuted and troubled Christian congregations, in order to help them through the present time of suffering and to help them acquire the courage to act correctly. The hope given by Christ of the coming kingdom of God deprives the present constraints and miseries of their deadly seriousness; they are of a penultimate nature, and they can be altered; there are

alternatives; the last word belongs to a merciful God, who we can trust and who will ensure at the Last Judgment that the 'murderers will not be able to exalt over the victims for all time.'

Chapter 18, verses 1-24, of the Apocalypse presents the judgment of the 'whore of Babylon' in the form of parodistic dirges. Babylon is the biblical cipher for Rome, the political, financial and economic capital of the oppressive, exploitative Roman Empire. Rome is accused of 'lewdness,' which is equivalent to 'idolatry.' Rome's intoxicated godlessness mainly expresses itself in the unbridled striving for profit of its merchants, who have made gains from the luxury of Rome. In accordance with the prophetic tradition, commercial activity is likened to idolatry, and the profits of trade to the 'wages of a whore.'

In the list of commodities presented in verses 12-13, the valuable textiles and fragrant woods from North Africa are followed by "slaves and human lives." By treating people as commodities for its own profit, Rome has blood on its hands, and its guilt is further exacerbated by its murder of troublesome prophets. In the background of this condemnation of Rome, judgment is being passed on the most important trading center of the Near East at that time, the city of Tyre.

The Last Judgment means the final and irreversible revelation of the truth in the form of a 'standing on its head' of that generally accepted truth as glorified by the victors and mighty personages of world history. God's justice will be established - in the form of a judging of inhumane injustice, but also in the form of the healing comfort for the 'anawim of Jahwe,' for the 'poor of God.' That day will also be the day of the justification of God, though: only when that day comes will we say: "He/She is a God who saves." As to what the final form of this salvation, of God's reconciliation and God's peace in the new Creation might be, we can only wait and see. However, one thing has been irrevocably determined: the last will be first.

This is the God of Jesus of Nazareth, who according to Matthew, identifies Himself with the very lowest on the day of the Last Judgment: "Whatever you have done for the least of my brothers and sisters, the same you have done for me." This is, perhaps, the most profound reason why God identifies Himself with the very lowest: He/She is Him-/Herself small, weak and humiliated. Is this the

Epilogue

reason why Luke the Evangelist replaces Matthew's "you must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5.48) with "be compassionate, as your Father is compassionate" (Luke 6.36)? The perfection of God is his compassion. This is why the last and most important gesture of this God at the day of the Last Judgment is the comforting gesture of a mother who consoles her crying child: "He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 21.4).

Resurrection of the flesh?

*Does the 'resurrection of the flesh'
at the end perhaps indicate
the holy anger of the betrayed Creator,
the triumph of the executed Son,
the longing of the exiled Spirit
for a dwelling place in the flesh?*

Kurt Marti

7. Epilogue

After September 11, 2001:

The chance for a new KAIROS?

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon mark an important historical break. Since these events, the global political constellation has shifted, the world seems to be different than it was before; the response of the USA in the shape of a 'war against terrorism' has opened Pandora's box.

That the apocalyptic scenes of the two aircraft serving as bombs full of living people flying full speed into the Twin Towers of the WTC were not a sequence from 'Independence Day' or 'Armageddon' but terrible reality watched live by millions of television viewers all round the world was only detectable from the arms desperately waving out of the windows and from those people driven by panic to jump out of the windows.

Looking at the devastation of 'Ground Zero,' a scene from the life of Jesus comes to mind (Luke 13.1-5): "At that time, some were present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. He said in reply: 'Do you think that these Galileans

were the greatest sinners in Galilee just because they suffered this? By no means! But I tell you, unless you repent you will all perish the same way they did. Or take those eighteen who were killed by a falling tower in Siloam. Do you think they were more guilty than anyone else who lived in Jerusalem? Certainly not! But I tell you, you will perish the same way they did unless you repent.'

Jesus' response to the catastrophe of the political murder of Galilean pilgrims by Pilate and the collapse of the Tower of Siloam, one of the corner towers of the city wall of Jerusalem, that buried eighteen workers falls into two statements. First, Jesus rejects the fundamentalist viewpoint of placing the blame on the victims themselves and thereby making them victims in a double sense. Jesus' second point is of greater importance: "you will perish the same way they did unless you repent." Thus, he makes the two tragic incidents into a prophetic-Messianic sign that can only be correctly interpreted in the framework of the message of the kingdom of God.

What meaning is to be given to the collapse of the Twin Towers of the WTC nearly 2000 years later?

With the collision of two symbols of the modern world, the myth of modernity collapses like the Twin Towers of the WTC. A high-tech aircraft becomes a living bomb and a fiery coffin. The World Trade Center, a center of economic, financial, political and cultural power becomes a deadly trap because its one escape route to freedom is blocked.

Not only did the attack on the WTC strike an economic nerve of the strongest economy of the world, bringing with it serious consequences for the stock exchange and for economic prospects throughout the world, but the successful attack on the apparently impregnable Pentagon, the nerve center of the leading military power, revealed for all to see just how fragile and easily endangered the American Dream is and rocked to its very foundations the military dominance of the hegemonial power of the USA.

These events also severely shook belief in the myth of the superiority of western civilization and its sustainability. September 11, 2001, left a void in its wake, a sort of Messianic vacuum. How are things to go on when it is becoming increasingly clear that western science and the

technology it gives rise to, whose potential consequences are becoming more and more difficult to keep under control, only lead to a dead end; and when the built-in repressive competition and compulsion to grow of the western world economy leave countless dead in their wake, as well as more and more ravaged tracts of land and the consumption of irreplaceable resources? Have not the terrorists done what the dominating system has is doing: destroy in order to be destroyed?

Every day in the countries of the South, several 'twin towers' collapse and bury more than ten-times the number of victims beneath them: living people like you and I are stripped of their right to live by our squandering of resources, by the transfer of payments of interest and interest-on-interest that we in the North insist on, by our customs duties and export loans, by our deliberate engineering of the fall in the prices of raw materials and exports from the South, by our patent laws and exporting of weapons – in short by turning everything and all life into capital accumulation for the owners. This is the true catastrophe. It happens every day, directly before our front-doors, but usually passed over in silence by the media. These victims are no further away from us than the 3000 victims in New York.

How are things to go on at this 'edge of time' caused by the collapse of the towers of the WTC? If we wish to seize the opportunity of an approaching historical KAIROS that may have been opened up by the catastrophe, four things need to be done:

1. Because of its murderous consequences, particularly in the South, the legitimacy of the present world economic system must be denied; it is truly a 'dead end.'
2. Any "new deal" that benefits the winners and leaves the victims mere crumbs should be subjected to careful analysis based on mistrustful skepticism.
3. Alternative solutions that allow all to live in a decent fashion must be sought in solidarity with the victims and social movements from the South. The path leads from New York to Porto Alegre and everywhere where alternative new economic and financial systems based on justice are under consideration, where new creative beginnings are being brought about and tried out: 'A different world is possible.'

4. If we as followers of the three great Messianic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam wish to contribute to these 'new beginnings,' a threefold path commends itself that is analogous to the path of the three wise astrologers from the East: the path back to our common roots in Abraham and the Mosaic Torah; the path to the 'child in the manger' and the weak and susceptible represented by this; then we will find realistic and feasible paths that do not lead back to Herod's palace: "they went back to their own country by another route" (Matthew 2.12).

Thy kingdom come

*Thy kingdom come
Because wealth wishes to burst into bright flower
In the justice for all
In sincere sisterhood, fraternity,
In discoveries bringing blessings,
In our friendship with nature,
(Around us, in us),
In worship of every kind,
In the opening up of the spirit,
In the illumination of the senses,
(Mystic, tantric, whatever),
In the omnipresence and omnipotence of love
- so that YOU, always infinitely wealthy before,
Finally, among us, will also be
All in all.*

Kurt Marti



PUBLICATIONS:

More information about the subject can be found in

- ▲ Timothy J. Gorrige, *Capital and the Kingdom, Theological Ethics and Economic Order*, 1994
- ▲ Bas Wielenga, *Towards an Eco-Just Society*, 1999
- ▲ Ross Kinsler/ Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life*, 1999
- ▲ Joerg Riegler, *Remember the Poor*, 1998
- ▲ Wes Howard-Brook/ Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 1999
- ▲ Pablo Richard, *Apocalypse, A People's Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 1995
- ▲ For a future founded on solidarity and justice, EKD
- ▲ Colloquium 2000, *Faith, Theology, Economy*, 2000
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- ▲ Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, London 1973
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- ▲ Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, 1995

Editorial Note

This booklet is the product of a lengthy process. We published a first special issue on the occasion of the German Evangelische Kirchentag in Frankfurt in June 2001. We would like to express our thanks to all of those who subsequently passed on to us their comments and criticisms.

We would like this process to continue as before and therefore welcome any comments and suggestions you may have, please let us know via info@kairoseuropa.de or by writing to us at Kairos Europa, Hegenichstr. 22, 69124 Heidelberg, Germany, or by Fax at 062 21-78 11 83.

We thank our partners in the South who have inspired us with their insights from "the underside of history". With few exceptions the quotations from the Bible are taken from the ecumenical translation of the New American Bible.

Kairos Europa

The Greek word, ΚΑΙΡΟΣ (*Kairos*) means: the time is ripe for a necessary decision.

KAIROS indicates, in the event of crisis, the right moment for a change of direction and a new beginning. The KAIROS thus experienced opens up new avenues for solidarity and struggle.

Kairos Europa is a European network of ecumenical initiatives and groups, working for a Europe for justice. The point of departure of the Kairos movement was resistance in South Africa against apartheid, as expressed in the famous "KAIROS DOCUMENT" of September 1985.

The European network was founded in 1990 and today has more than 500 members throughout numerous European countries, e.g., Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Italy, Poland, Spain and Hungary.

Kairos Europa works in several Kairos Centers and "program lines" dealing with various subjects:

- ▲ A just world financial system
- ▲ Local alternatives to globalization
- ▲ Living together in plural societies
- ▲ The identity of ethnic minorities
- ▲ The exchange of exiled young persons in Europe
- ▲ Spirituality and solidarity

The individual "program lines" work autonomously and independently, although they do develop joint activities like, for example, the Strasbourg 'People's Parliament' (1992), the Action Days in Brussels (1994, 1999), etc.

There is a close exchange with social movements in the South, particularly in southern Africa. The representatives of the various Kairos Centers and 'program lines' comprise the membership of the executive committee that is responsible for the coordination and administration of the movement.

Towards a just financial System-Jubilee demands for a New Millennium

Millions of Christians and many churches throughout the world took part in the campaign 'Jubilee 2000,' with the aim of achieving a far-reaching cancellation of debts for the poorest countries at the turn of the new millennium. This awakening in our churches and congregations must not lose momentum after the year 2000.

The opposite should be the case - a genuine and comprehensive jubilee year entails further demands, as they have, in particular, been expressed by social movements from the South:

- ▲ The cancellation of illegitimate debts that should be cancelled out right.
- ▲ The ending of unfair terms of trade and protectionist practices of the North against products from the South.
- ▲ Direct access of the poor to the sources of wealth, land, and capital.
- ▲ The Ending of Structural-Adjustment Programs and their conditionalities imposed on countries in the South by the IMF and World Bank in the interests of the North.
- ▲ Fair trade instead of Free trade according to the rules of compatibility with the WTO at the disadvantage of uncompetitive markets.
- ▲ Stopping Ecological destruction caused by economic growth driven by profit maximization.

In these matters, one of the main underlying problems is the role of deregulated trans-national financial markets and their dominance of the economies and societies in the South and the North.

In view of the increasing gap between rich and poor, North and South, in a rapidly globalizing world, Christians and the churches are called upon to turn to the message of Jesus of Nazareth and the word of God in the whole Bible.

We are challenged not to give up now but to increase and deepen our efforts beyond technical questions

relating to debt relief and debt sustainability - to spread the 'good news' of the Gospel to the poor and to re-establish just relations among peoples and with our planet earth.

Taking up and dealing with this challenge is exactly what the churches and the initiatives involved in the Jubilee campaign demand from us. This is also precisely what the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) decided in their general assemblies in 1997 and 1998.

They called upon their member churches to work on alternatives to neo-liberal globalization, in order to overcome violence inherent in the very structures of the present world economy and, in particular, the trans-national financial markets. They appealed to us to join the "processus confessionis" on economic injustice and destruction of life on earth, a process of recognition, education, confession and action in the context of globalization. Regional conciliar meetings should give further contour and focus to the 'confession' and activities of the churches in all continents, so that the next general assemblies of the WARC (2004) and the WCC can arrive at clearly formulated and mutual decisions. In a letter of May 2001, the WCC, WARC, and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) appealed to the churches of western Europe to give concentrated attention to questions concerning the financial markets and the financial system.

In June 2002, there is to be a meeting of Western European Churches in Holland aimed at helping the churches to come to mutual standpoints, possible modes of activity, and political demands.

In October 2002, Kairos Europa is planning a hearing in Brussels, where these and other political demands will be presented to and given a hearing by the European Commission and the European Parliament in Brussels.

This will only be a success, though, when congregations, synods, and ecumenical groups accompany the movement 'from below' and press ahead. For this reason, Kairos Europa is producing a series of educational materials concerning this process for congregations and interested groups.