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We believe in the God of Peace

Basic Elements for a Catechism

Jochen Vollmer



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Foreword

To talk about hope in the midst of lacking a future sustainability of our present world, in the midst of Pharaonic unjust conditions in which a fifth of the world population claims four fifth of the earth's resources for themselves, to strive for a sufficient life for all, in the midst of attacks and wars, to trust and walk on ways to peace – wouldn't this be the mandate of Christians?

When the distribution of new weapons of mass destruction, which makes their use more likely and threatens even to completely eradicate life in an unprecedented way in the history of humanity, - what is then there for the followers of Jesus Christ to pass on about their hope and their faith?

To express the faith in an understandable way and to pass it on to others is a constantly new task in ever changing times.

Working on a catechism can bring a lot of joy. This is reported, for example, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who presented a catechism

together with pastor Franz Hildebrandt 1931 in the journal of Pastoral Psychology. The Wurttemberg pastor Rudolf Daur authored in 1953 a peace Catechism in the way of questions and answers ("Why, actually?" ["„Warum eigentlich?“"] Stuttgart, Ehrenfried Klotz-Verlag). There are many other attempts.

Each of these texts is of course characterized by its own contextuality which influences the form and manner of expression.

The Christian faith perceives itself as encompassing the world and the cosmos. A catechism must therefore express now more than ever global issues. It will be ecumenical in every meaning of the word. The agreements of the representative ecumenical assemblies on matters of faith, of church, peace, justice and integrity of creation contribute in the background. Alongside the direct and necessary particularistic context stands the universal.

Today's context is different from that of previous times due to a global economic system with devastating effects on the creation and with regard to the possib-





le use of nuclear weapons and all almost equally destructive equivalents. This must not be forgotten.

The World Council of Churches has tried in 1948 to formulate a first common response of Christians. During the common pilgrimage of Christian churches to justice, peace and integrity of creation, the so-called conciliar process, the continental ecumenical assemblies of Basel, Graz and Sibiu, and the Ecumenical World Convocation of Seoul in 1990 at the global level, have given expression to this. In its Affirmation VI of the Ecumenical World Assembly on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, the worldwide Christian churches agreed:

“We affirm the peace of Jesus Christ” “Jesus said: „Blessed are the peacemakers“ and „love your enemies“. The church as the community of the crucified and risen Christ is called to perform a reconciling role in the world. We have to discern what it entails to be makers of peace: the conscious acceptance of vulnerability. “

....“In Jesus Christ, God has broken through the bonds of hostility between nations and

peoples, and even now offers us the gift of peace with justice.“

....For biblical faith, true peace means every human being dwells in secure relatedness to God, neighbour, nature and self. God’s justice is to protect „the least“ (Matthew 25:31-46), those who are the most vulnerable (Deuteronomy 24). God is the defender of the poor (Amos 5).”

....“We affirm the full meaning of God’s peace. We are called to seek every possible means of establishing justice, achieving peace and solving conflicts by active non-violence.“

....“We commit ourselves to practice non-violence in our personal relationships, to work for the banning of war as a legally recognized means of resolving conflicts”. (Ecumenical World Convocation for JPIC; Geneva 1990, Workbook for Peace and the Integrity of Creation, Essen)

The World Council of Churches has led to a continuation of these themes in declaring the Decade to Overcome Violence.

The pastors in Wurttemberg assisting conscientious objectors - one in each superintendent’s district of the Evangelical



We believe in the God of Peace

Church in Wurttemberg - began in 2001 to formulate short statements about our faith in the God of Peace in the style of a catechism. The author of this preface has submitted an initial draft.

In this way a process of discussion began, continuing for several years. Important external stimuli were provided by contributions of Bishop em. Dr. Christoph Demke, Rev. Dr. Matthias Engelke and Rev. Dr. Götz Planer-Friedrich.

The intention of this recently revised draft of Rev. Dr. Jochen Vollmer is a modest one: it is about components for a catechism which understand the Christian faith as believing in the God of peace. These components have been formulated in the context of the regional existence of church and want to lead towards a workbook of faith. They highlight the peace traditions of the Bible as the goal of the biblical tradition process. It aims to keep in mind an otherwise neglected dimension of faith in meeting today's challenges. The essential point of reference provides the Sermon on the Mount of Jesus, as an order of life for the kingdom of God.

The specific conclusions and formulations have come from Dr. Jochen Vollmer. They are made very distinctive and will not always meet with approval. But in this way they stimulate conversation about our faith, the continuing work on a catechism, and a theological discourse.

Following the German ecumenicist Ernst Lange it may be concluded: our faith enables us to further participate in God's ongoing creation despite our shortcomings. We orient ourselves in that on Jesus Christ as the truly human being. Our world should be interwoven with this way of being human. That is the meaning of history. We are to take part in it. To this end serves our commitment to peace with justice and the integrity of creation.

Ulrich Schmitthenner





Introduction

The Christian faith in God is expected to account for itself in front of the forum of the world (1 Peter 3:15). That is because God's ruling over the world is its hope. Faith cannot do otherwise, it must speak about its hope and confess its hope. In the church today, we have an abandonment of and speechlessness to complain about, an inability to talk about faith. That is why a catechism as a linguistic tool of the faith is necessary; to promote internal identity, and external accountability.

The language of a catechism must be understandable, and should be applicable to the situation that the faith will be articulated in. **Where the situation still misses the point, faith cant be expressed in language properly.**

I see our situation as defined in four ways: (1) we live "after Auschwitz". (2) we live "after Hiroshima". (3) We live in "capitalistic economies" in the process of globalization with ever increasing inequalities and injustices among the people, as well as irreversible destruction of the earth. (4) we experience the swift grasp of humans to control the genes, the building blocks of life.

The Christian faith in God is expected to account for itself in front of the forum of the world (1 Peter 3:15)



(1) The definition of the time "after Auschwitz" must recognizably influence our theology and the accountability of our faith. Auschwitz was an act of many baptized Christians, and many baptized Christians did not prevent it. A Christian theology hostile towards Jews made Auschwitz possible. **Christian enmity towards Jewish people and the oblivion towards Israel have been factors leading up to Auschwitz,** and were a path that lead to Auschwitz.

(2) The definition of the time "after Hiroshima" signalizes that humanity now has capacities of mass destruction at its disposal which exceed every human imagination and every human measurement. The nuclear threat after the East-West conflict is in no way finished. Increasingly more nations, and possibly terrorists, have NBC weapons at their disposal. Worldwide, more than one billion dollars are spent for arms and military purposes, where as over one billion humans beings are starving and almost 2 billion people do not have access to clean drinking water.

The economic utilization of atomic energy also challenges the faith. It is not able to be controlled by faulty human beings. The disposal of atomic waste, which must be kept absolutely secure and separated from the biosphere, is impossible due to the constant movement of the earth's crust. The economic nuclear path is a deadly wrong path.

(3) The capitalistic economic system, or totalized market is the power which places its self in the place of God. The God of „Capital“ promises life and prosperity for increasingly more people, and in reality it excludes more and more people form a modest life in dignity and employment. It creates more and more inequality and injustices. The capitalistic economy reverses the natural order, which is there for the benefit of society and satisfies the needs of all people; to an order which has to be served by the people. Its goal is not satisfying the needs of people, but rather the constant accumulation of capital. The person becomes a minor matter, marginalized, and rejected.

Capitalism is invested in limitless growth. It does not see the economy as a system that is part of nature, in which there is no limitless growth. As an endlessly gluttonous Moloch, it creates people in its own image who constantly have new needs, and one-dimensionally trains them to be addicted and greedy consuming beings, that consume goods and services in ever shorter intervals, and throw out the old and outdated. The constantly increasing transformation process of goods and energy in the capitalistic economy, over-use the earth and plunder its resources, and burden nature with ever more pollutants that it no longer is capable of neutralizing.

*In principle,
capitalistic economies
damage the worth of
more and more
people and destroy the
life foundations
of the earth*

Capitalistic economies are un-ecological because they deal with ever narrowing resources in an un-economical way. In principle, capitalistic economies damage the worth of more and more people and destroy the life foundations of the earth. The god of Capital destroys what belongs to God, the people who are holy in God's eyes, as well as the earth which belongs to God. **In Capitalism, the church is given the “status confessionis” which challenges it to a special confession.**

(4) We humans are currently in the process of grasping at genes, the building blocks of life, with out being able to use removed discretion on how this intervention/change will effect the evolution of life. Scientists dream of being able to change the genetic substance of humans to be able to clone people and create them in their own images. The human being is putting itself in the place of God the creator.

Our situation is peaceless in many regards- in the global horizon. This is what the faith must answer to. The existing basic elements for a catechism emphasize faith in the God of peace, and place the peace traditions of the Bible as the goal of the biblical tradition. This draft of a catechism is not about a comprehensive display of the Christian faith, but rather about a neglected dimension of faith in light of today's challenges.

The following building blocks (basic elements) will be presented in this draft:

- A confession of faith in the God of peace
- The command of God as the Commandment of peace
- The prayer for peace
- The church- God's contingent for peace
- The Bible- the document of faith and the church

The confession of faith- contrary to Luther is to have precedence over the commandment. God's act of liberation through the exodus of Israel out of the tyranny of Egypt precedes God's law. Luther's understanding of the Torah as "law" and his anti-Jewish interpretation of the justifica-

tion against Jewish "works-based-justice", have their basis in that in the preamble to the Decalogue, he blended out God's act of liberation, the exodus of Israel and the escape out of Egypt which was a house of bondage. **A theology "after Auschwitz" must take note of**

the precedence of the gospel over the commandments of Israel. It should also no longer give false testimony against Israel.

The Apostle's Creed is inadequate in many regards. Priests and theologians have already complained about this during the apostles conflict of the 19th and 20th centuries and refused to apply the Apostle's Creed into service for God (in Württemberg Christoph Schrempf). It is not enough to re-interpret this confession over and over.



The confession of faith should be newly weighted. The apostle's creed is hard to understand, declares faith in a highly deficient manner, and is above all else, an inapplicable account of Christian faith today. I am myself, aware of the ecumenical meaning of the Apostle's Creed, but which function, in light of church unity, can mutual foundational-texts have, which present faith deficiently and in a hard to understand manner?

The apostle's creed is hard to understand, an inapplicable account of Christian faith today

The fixation on **one** confession of faith will not do the faith justice. The oldest witnesses of Christianity document that the faith was expressed and made known in many ways from the beginning on. Just like the church, a confession of faith existed, and exists only in the plural sense.

Faith in the God of peace equates that the commandment be laid out as peace, and prayer being aimed at the implementation of peace. As a fellowship of believers, the church is God's delegation of peace. A Catechism as a linguistic aide for faith today, should give an account of the correct reading of the Bible and its peace tradition.

A confession of faith

*We believe in God,
who created the world
and at every moment is at work in it,
the earth as a costly space for everything that lives,
us humans as women and men,
in God's image bequeathed with equal dignity
and destined for freedom,*

*We believe in God,
to whom alone the earth belongs,
who, out of benevolence, daily provides everything we need
for a successful life signifying sufficiency
beyond poverty and over-abundance.
We believe that God commissions us
to care for the earth and not to exploit it
in that we manage it with a lasting perspective,
respecting our fellow creatures,
share work and its proceeds
and live in justice and peace
with them and the following generations.*

*We believe in God through Jesus Christ,
who commenced God's kingdom in his proclamation,
his healing and table fellowship
and guaranteed through his life and death
God's unconditional and unlimited love
even for those who violated his Torah
as well as his enemies.*

*We believe that God claims Jesus,
raised him from the dead
and thus confirmed his message.
We believe that through the cross of Jesus
God's love for his enemies and his victory
over all evil and violence
has been revealed.*



*We believe in God,
who in his unbroken loyalty
has permanently chosen Israel
and called it as a light to the nations.
We believe that Jesus is our peace
and we from other nations through him
will be united with Israel in his
kingdom of justice and peace*

*We believe in God
who through his Spirit
has called the church
out of the nations to be his people
and be witnesses to his truth, his justice,
and his peace,
on the way to the completion of his kingdom.
We believe that God calls women and men
to faith and to be co-workers in his kingdom
in all avenues of service and duties (functions)*

*We believe, that no one is excluded
from God's love and goodness,
and that no one is lost,
that God in love
is not dependent on our faith
or lack of faith,
that even those who have
closed their minds to God's love
will be safe and secure within the love of God.*

*We believe in God,
who is not finished yet with the world and us human beings,
who will overcome all restrictions and injustice,
all malice and hate,
all enmity and lack of peace,
violence and death
and will set right and unite
all people in God's peace.
We believe that God wants to use us,
so that we work together with God
in the kingdom of justice and peace.*

Amen

Commentary on the confession of faith

Whoever believes in God says to whom they owe everything that they are and have. No one has given themselves life on their own, and no one is asked to do so. We cannot create, we can only receive our life and our time every day with every breath. Every Christian vows for their self and their faith: “I believe”. But no one believes alone. We owe our faith to the church and stand in the believing fellowship of the church. For that reason, the formulation “we believe” is given precedence here.

*The confession
that the earth belongs
to God (Ps. 24) is
essential in this day
and age*

A confession to the creator God includes our responsibility to the earth that was entrusted to us, that is greatly in danger today through we human beings and our greed, the capitalistic economic systems and globalization, through the arms build-up, use of nuclear energy and genetic engineering.

The confession that the earth belongs to God (Ps. 24) is essential in this day and age. The earth belongs neither to the government nor to multi-national corporations, not to financial capital nor to the financial markets, not to economic constraints nor to human research. God has entrusted to us the earth, with everything that we need to live upon, as a place of residence (Gen. 1f). The earth's goods and resources are enough for the 6.8 Million people today, and enough for even more people, as long as we are willing to undertake a modest livelihood beyond poverty and overabundance.

The confession of the equality of women (Gen. 1; Joel 3; Gal. 3:28) should be articulated today in contrast to the unholy and still lingering patriarchal history of Christianity. The predominate majority of Christianity still denies ordination of women.

We Christians believe in the God of Israel through the Jew Jesus Christ (as did Paul in countless phrases). The belief in God and Jesus, who throughout the course of the development of Christian teachings became God, is deeply problematic. Jesus had understood himself as God's witness, answer, and delegate. He underwent baptism from John the Baptist for the for-

giveness of sins and refused the title of “good master” with the comment that no one is good except God alone (Mk. 10:17f). The process of the deification of Jesus is contradictory to Christ's creed. Jesus should remain distinct from God. As Christ, Jesus is the delegate of God, but not God. The formula from Chalcedon 451 (Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt) “full humanity, full divinity” is a surrender of thinking and can no longer be conveyed today in an account of the faith.

The teachings of Jesus soared to dizzying heights through the language of Greek ontology (the philosophical study of existence) in the 4th and 5th centuries. Greek ontology is no longer our reference point. **Jesus was, because of his baptism (Mk. 1:9-11), gifted in a very special way with God's spirit, yet fully human.** In him, humanity came to fulfillment as God had wanted and thought it to be. Jesus' full humanity does not shut out the ability to sin.



Even Jesus remained in debt to the love of God, because through his human limitations he could not do justly to every person. Jesus is the powerful witness and representative of God, who vouched for God's kingdom, God's limitless love and love of enemies. **Jesus** attested to and made true, the nearness of the holy God. He **made God more visible. Through this, he is the standard against which all things are measured in the Christian faith.**

Jesus' message and guarantee of God's kingdom are indispensable in the Christian faith, which admits to relying upon Jesus and having him to thank. The confession of the resurrection of Jesus through God is the confession that confirms that Jesus' message and guarantee of the Kingdom of God were affirmed by God.

The belief, that God's kingdom is breaking forth, that God is coming into power, is central to both testaments. The vindication of the ungodly through grace alone through belief in Jesus Christ's will in the Lutheran tradition, is anti-Semitic, and laid out against the Jewish system of "religious law" and "just war", and was resolved from their view of the kingdom of God.

The deification of Jesus and anti-Semitic interpretation of justification have suppressed the remaining election and commission of Israel. Through the Jewish Jesus we peoples of the world are called to faith in the God of Israel, and to take part in God's shalom that encompasses Israel and all other peoples.

A calamitous set of points followed the Apostle's Creed, which is by no means "apostolic" because it was first finished in the 5th century. That **Israel is forgotten** in the Apostle's Creed is deplorable, originating in a time period when the church understood itself as the "true Israel", that had disposed of and succeeded Israel. The confession of Jesus Christ has faded into a proper noun and isn't seen in continuity with the tradition of Israel.

Had the church professed God's loyalty to Israel, it never would have come to the anti-Semitism of the old church, the genocide of the middle ages, or to Auschwitz. The oblivion of the Apostle's Creed to **Jesus is also deplorable.**

The Apostle's Creed is a confession which denies Jesus' life, in a way comparable to the words of Peter "I do not know this man" (Mk. 14:71): in between "born of the virgin Mary" and "suffered under Pontius Pilate" there is nothing worth mentioning, according to the Creed. **The oblivion to the Kingdom of God in the Apostle's Creed is also deplorable.** It confesses the church, but not the kingdom of God. These deficits have had calamitous affects in the faith history of the church.

The belief, that God's kingdom is breaking forth is central to both testaments

The confession to the God of peace is grounded in the biblical tradition of liberation and rescue, of healing and blessing, of reconciliation and of peace. God blessed Abraham/Israel and in and through Abraham/Israel, God blessed all nations of the earth (Gen. 12: 1-3). The people receive a portion of Israel's blessing. Blessing is the depth of life in all its dimensions, from fertility of the fields and animals and own offspring, health of body and soul, and the success of human work, to Shalom and the presence of God in human history, individually and globally. The artistically structured, 6 member Priestly Blessing explains the blessing and comes to a peak in the word Shalom, although the words "blessing" and "shalom" form the blessing an inclusio frame (Num. 6: 24-26).

In Israel, from exile on specifically, God is acknowledged as the God of peace who is no longer there for Israel only, at the expense of other peoples. God is shown as the God whose universal Shalom encompasses Israel and the rest of the population. The hope in a non-violent future, in justice and peace, that God will destroy all weapons of war and bring all wars to an end, is the legacy of the church of Zion, who has already turned her swords into plowshares and wants to encourage the people towards a non-violent society, and likewise carry out its conflicts non-violently through obedience to the Torah. (Isaiah 2:2-5, Mi. 4:1-5; Isaiah 11:6-8: 32, 17; Hos. 2:20; Zech. 4:6; 9:9f; Ps. 20:8; 33:16-18; 46:9-12; 93; 96-99 and others).

The nativity story in Luke indicates peace on earth as God's point of honor (Lk. 2:14)

In the greetings of the letters, one encounters almost consistently the desire for peace as an indirect plea to God, the creator, and giver of peace. The blessings at the end of the letters, and respectively the letter portions with the repeating term "the God of peace" (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb. 13:20) believe in and confess to God as the God of peace. This complies with Jesus living out God's love for enemies (Lk. 9:51-57; 23:34) and the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:43-48), as well as Paul's God, who named reconciliatory action as love for one's enemies. Paul indicates the salvation of justification as peace with God, or rather, reconciliation. The nativity story in Luke indicates peace on earth as God's point of honor (Lk. 2:14).

God's love of enemies means that in the end, God will also unify all people, even evil persons, including God's enemies, into the Kingdom - all things will be considered. God will conquer all evil and no person will be kept away from God and the peace of God (1 Cor. 15:24-28). "God is love" is what it means succinctly in 1 John 4:8-16. Then the necessary speech about the wrath of God as a form of God's love must be noted. God's wrath is God's opposition against the powers of evil, against the irreverence of God's will, against the wrong paths that we choose, and against the misconduct of our lives. However **God's wrath cannot, for the sake of God's love for the enemy, disown and destroy for good.**

The idea of Godly judgment with two options - eternal salvation for the believing



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and eternal damnation and foresakenness in eternal hellfire for the non-believing - is a projection of human inability to reconcile and lack of peace, onto God. The essential image of God as judge is to be reconciled with God's mercy and love of enemies, which has the last word. For the sake of God's justice and our salvation, God is not the judging God, that makes everything right in the end and enforces God's will for salvation. The judging God distinguishes between the actual person and their actions. The evil acts of those, whose lives fall short, will be judged by God, the person remains loved.

Even the confession to God's omnipotence must be reconciled with the confession of God's love, which allows freedom and doesn't coerce. God's omnipotence is then on target, when God's Kingdom is accomplished.

A confession of faith can always only be fragmented, putting the truth of God into words broken and partially. The human testimony to God is always limited. The Christian faith, which has always succumbed to the illusion in its history that it bore witness to the truth of God exclusively, has proved itself all too often to be peace-lacking and violent. The claim of exclusivity makes the one and universal God into a God only for particular people, in which I confuse my image of God, with God. All religions are on the path, no religion has already reached the goal. Even the Christian faith cannot claim a monopoly on the interpretation of God, humanity, and the world. This insight enables inter-religious dialogue. **As long as the sacredness of all human beings is violated, the truth of God, who has created all people in God's own image, will also be missing.**

The Commandment of God - to Make Room for the Peace of God and Work to Achieve it

God's will and commandment is
that we fulfil his peace
in our thoughts, speech and actions,
in our behaviour and living, that we
trust in this peace and work to achieve it.

*I You should (shall) make room for God's peace
and work to achieve it,
in that you never equate
anything earthly or worldly,
nor that of human nature
as being the same as God, setting it as an absolute.
Everything that God created,
everything that humans think and speak, do and achieve,
political ideologies and constitutions,
government orders and institutions,
laws and moral philosophies,
political concepts and programs,
yes, even theologians and confessions of faith,
shall be put to the test, questioned,
and amended or changed as needed.*

*II You should (shall) make room for God's peace
and work to achieve it,
in that you are aware
that all our human thinking and speaking,
our images and pictures of God
are insufficient.
God is always larger
than our thinking and speaking,
our faith and our theology.
Even so you should not draw up a final picture
of your fellow human beings nor of yourself,
all having been created in the image of God.*



- III You should (shall) make room for God's peace
and work to achieve it
in that you do not bring the name of God
in connection with human interests and claims to power,
laws and institutions,
human programs and ideologies.
You honour God's name,
in that you know that
you may subject everything that is not God,
to your critique,
but you also hold every person in the same holy regard as God.*
- IV You should (shall) make room for God's peace
and work to achieve it.
in that you know
that you do not live only from your work.
God in his creative care and goodness
is always ahead of your plans and actions
On one day of the week you may rest
and allow all the people and animals
entrusted to you to rest
in joyful anticipation of the fulfilment of God's kingdom.*
- V You should (shall) make room for God's peace
and work to achieve it
in that you take care of your ageing parents
and make possible a life in dignity
for those people who are weak
God's love is especially valid for those who are weak
and poor.*
- VI You should (shall) make room for God's peace
and work to achieve it
in that you are an advocate for life, protecting the lives of people
where ever they are threatened and endangered,
in that you critically evaluate images of the enemy (hostile images)
and renounce violence
and out of reverence for life
respect animals and plants as a part of God's same creation
as yourself.*

The Commandment of God

*VII You should (shall) make room for God's peace
and work to achieve it
in that you respect women in the same manner as men
and protect the friendship and love,
partnership and marriage
of your fellow human beings.
God wants our relationships to succeed
And that we are a help and a joy to each other.*

*VIII You should (shall) make room for God's peace
and work to achieve it
in that you defend the dignity and freedom
of your fellow human beings
advocate and care for their humane livelihood,
and do not use anyone as a means
to your purposes.
God has chosen us for freedom and a life of dignity
in our conscience, and faith,
our thoughts and our own opinions,
as well as in our physical and social beings.*

*IX You should (shall) make room for God's peace
and work to achieve it
when you remain truthful
even when it brings you disadvantages,
when you create trust and don't give up on anyone.
Even the most wicked person remains an image of God
loved by God.*





X *You should (shall) make room for God's peace
and work to achieve it
in that you do not take for yourself
what belongs to your fellow human beings,
or attempt to bring it to yourself through unjust schemes,
but that you rather stand up for the goal that
every human being gets what is needed to live,
that God's good creation is preserved,
that the riches of the earth and its resources,
human labour and its proceeds
are shared in a fair way,
and that you seek to enable
that unborn generations can live in dignity
on God's earth that is not used up.*

The sum of God's will and commands is justice,
a dignified life for all human beings
and peace as a fruit of justice.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus interpreted God's Torah
newly as life standards of the Kingdom of God.
We, as the church, should live
by following the example of Jesus' Godly justice,
work to achieve his kindness and mercy,
conform to his peace and love for his enemies
and in the hope of God's kingdom, do
what helps life and endures before God.



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Commentary on the Commandments

The commandments follow the structure of the 10 commandments and are an attempt to formulate God's commandments as an analogy for faith in the God of Peace. Faith in God and the doing of God's Torah are one unit. Faith is active through the doing of God's will. (Mt. 7:21; Gal. 5:6).

In that God created people in God's own image and gave them the Torah as good instructions for life, God believes in the people and trusts them to follow God's commands. With the gift of the Torah, God does not make a fool of us, as if the Torah only were there only to convey our ability to sin and our inability to do the will of God (Rom. 3:20; Luther). Of course we can never do God's will completely, rather only emblematic and partially. We always fall short of the expectations of God's commands. However, the concept that all of our deeds are for nothing and that nothing is achieved through our efforts (EG 299:2; 362:2), are concepts of Luther, that are neither fair to the Jewish understanding of the Torah nor to Jesus. Even Paul, at the time of his biography, out of his zeal for God's Torah, how he understood it, and his faith; from the reference point of his understanding of the Torah in the Hellenistic context as "law" (nomos) and its interpretation of the death of Jesus, perceived the Torah in a biased manner, and over-emphasized the principle of failure in the Torah.

*God believes in
the people and
trusts them
to follow
God's commands*

The ten commandments have their place in the history of Israel. They **are not relevant through out all time**. They are addressed to the man who is freed, well-off and capable of holding rights, in an agricultural and patriarchal society. The woman was seen as property of the man. The protection of property as livelihood had a high significance. **An up-dating of the 10 commandments is necessary.**

All single commandments are concretions of the first commandment. They lay out faith and the commands of God in the different life areas. Faith in God named and exposed the false idols that oppress and enslave, that devalue life and kill, that create strife and demand unspeakable sacrifices. God frees, grants peace and gives full life. The false idols enslave and demand death as an extreme measure of their lack of peace.

The first commandment requires a special adaptation for any time, where the powers are to be named and exposed that put themselves in God's place and utilize God's authority. That is why it is indispensable to notice and name the situations in which the faith is articulated (Introduction).

In Martin Luther's interpretation of the first commandment in his Large Catechism, he surpassingly expressed that the human being always has either God or an idol, and that the godless person is an illusion (300 years before Ludwig Feuerbach!). **What especially concerns me, is that that, from which I hope for the best, what on which I place my heart, and that which engrosses me, that is my God.**



The second commandment will be contrary to the Catechism of Luther- left as essential, the 10th commandment preserved as inseparable unit. The second commandment should be used as a warning against every theological conclusion and teaching. We can make no definitive conclusions about God. This is true for the Christological and Trinitarian disagreements of the 4th and 5th centuries, this is true for any exclusive claim of orthodoxy, in all three mono-theistic religions as long as they see themselves as exclusive, it is true for Judeo-Christian dialogue as well as for inter-religious dialogue. Luther's harsh versions that advocate for the rightness of his teachings

in the different constellations (against the old Catholic faith, the farmers, Anabaptists, Jews), his mania and rampant dispute with the papacy and Erasmus, and also against the Jews, are connected with his disregard for the second commandment. The ban on graven images warns about making

a definitive image of any person who has molded God after their own image. I should also not once count myself as definitive. God's image of me is always different than my own self-awareness.

Misuse of the name of God is to be deplored where, for example, politics are embellished as "christian", where capital is legitimated by God (inscription on the dollar bill: "In God we Trust"), where war and the fight against evil are carried out in the name of God (in the name of an image of God!), where human attachments, for example- the government, are raised up religiously. **According to Jesus, the government has claim to**

money and things which carry its image upon them, but it has no claim to people, whom God has created in his image (Mk. 12:13-17).

The tenth commandment, that holds the protection of the well-being and estate of ones fellow human beings in view, is aimed at a fair distribution of the goods of the earth, of human labor and its proceeds, at a simple lifestyle in contrast to the depletion of the earth and the culture of wastefulness in capitalistic economies. It is aimed at preserving a humane life now and for the generations to come.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus re-interpreted God's will in light of the coming Kingdom of God

The sum of God's will and commands is justice, and peace is the fruit of that justice (Isaiah 32:17; Ps. 85;11). The commandment to love (the Golden Rule) as the sum of the Torah, is capable of being misunderstood. The commandment to love (Lev. 19:18) is not directed at our

emotional love, rather at selective acts of loving kindness, that give to my neighbor, and even to my enemies, what they need for life when they are in a particular situation of need (Pr. 25:21; Lk. 10:27-35; Mt. 5:43-48).

The commandments are correspondingly formulated to the freedom of the gospel. As verbal sons and daughters of God, we should always be newly asking what God's will for peace is, that can never be terminally declared.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus re-interpreted God's will in light of the coming Kingdom of God. God's Torah in Jesus' interpretation, is the life standards of the Kingdom of God. A keyword in the Torah and in the sermon on the mount is "justness" (Mt. 5:6,10,20; &:33) as the sum of what serves life. Even the command to love ones enemies is not to be understood emotionally, it was rather meant that we should allow to enemy to receive what they need to live. The Torah of the kingdom of God is the realization of the justness of God to the point of the implementation of God's love of God's enemies. The closing parable assumes the ability to fulfil the commands of God (Mt. 7:24-29). The sermon on the mount is addressed to- in contrast to Luther's assumption- not the individual, but rather the fellowship of Jesus. That is why what the church is, and the mission of the church, must be a part of faith education today.

Participation in the Kingdom of God is very central to Jesus, as seen in his parables. The aspect of turning from one's old ways, and human participation along with that, are not absent from any of Jesus' parables. The treasure that was buried in the field then found, should be used by the finder (Mt. 13:44). The seed which grows and ripens on its own is ready to be harvested (Mk. 4:26-29). Jesus wants to win the approval of his opponents. Those who worked the whole day should agree with the goodness of the vineyard owner, that even those who come last should get a Denar, a daily wage, so that they are able to live on their wages (Mt. 20). The father pleases

with the older son who stayed at home to still rejoice over and celebrate the return of his younger brother (Lk. 15). The celebration of the kingdom of God is underway, the harvest is ripe, but the festival must be accepted and celebrated, and the harvest brought in (Mt. 9:37f). For that God needs fellow workers.

The first three pleas of the Lord's Prayer reciprocate each other. We honor God's name, in that we open ourselves to God's coming kingdom and do the will of God.

We do not honor God when we, out of fear, make ourselves guilty of the sin of "justification by works", and celebrate our permanent sinfulness before God (Luther: "the good and the sinner are the same") in a cult-like manner, and therefore fall short of doing God's will and participation in God's

kingdom. The following of God's commands in the Lutheran tradition is under-exposed.

God is not interested in our continual reflection upon ourselves as sinners, God is interested in whether or not we do God's will.

God's command is aimed at our life. We fall short of life when we block ourselves from the kingdom of God and its life standards, when we live under the illusion that we are able to rise up on our own. The Bible understands separating ourselves from God and God's commands as sins. The command of God is the offer of life. When we pass up this offer, we decide against life. Through the avoidance of God and God's direction in life, we experience alienation, the destruction of sins, and must bear the results of our decision to turn down the

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offer of life. That is what Paul meant with “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). The command of peace appears in the Bible in numerous reminders and statements: “seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34:15; 1 Pt. 3:11), “seek the peace and prosperity of the city” (Luther: “seek the city’s best” Jer. 29:7), “make peace at your gate” (Zec. 8:16), “love in truth and in peace” (Zec. 8:19), “the spiritual mind is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6), “live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:18), “make every effort to do what leads to peace” (Rom. 14:19),

“God has called you to peace” (1 Cor. 7:15), “be of one mind, live in peace” (2 Cor. 13:11), “the fruit of the spirit is... peace” (Gal. 5:22), “make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bonds of peace” (Eph. 4:3), and others.

Justice, mercy, truth, love, life and peace converge in the biblical commandments and reminders, and the clear precedent for correct action comes into expression. God’s command as a command of peace desires that our life is successful.



Prayer - the Request for God's Peace and trusting in and being available to that Peace

*In prayer we talk with God
In lament and praise,
with requests and intercession,
thanksgiving and adoration.*

*Faith is expressed in prayer and in doing what which is right.
In prayer we bring ourselves before God,
pour out our hearts to God,
become aware of God's nearness,
experience who we are
and to whom we belong
in trust in God.*

*We lift up the world to God,
perceiving it in God's presence
in gratitude for God's good gifts
but shocked over the need and misery
under which many people suffer,
and the evil that we human beings cause each other.*

*We bring the world in prayer,
perceiving it through God's kingdom,
asking to discern God's willingness
and how God wants to use us.
We put ourselves at God's disposal
as co-workers in the God's kingdom.*

*We pray for God's spirit,
for insight, courage and strength
to recognize God's will
and do that which brings about justice
and serves peace.*



*We orient ourselves on the prayer of Jesus and ask,
that God's name might be made holy also through us,
that the kingdom of God might also come through us,
that God's will might be done by us,
that we receive, eat, and share our daily bread as a gift of God,
so that we become capable of
living on the basis of forgiveness
and able to forgive debt,
so that we are not overcome by temptation,
but rather overcome evil with goodness.*

*We ask the God of peace,
that we may testify to God's truth,
live God's justice,
reflect God's mercy
and dare to live and do God's peace.*

*And where we only experience
more our weakness and helplessness
then we ask God
that we will not lose our sanity
and lose our faith in the kingdom and its power,
but bring it to full completion.*



Commentary on prayer

„That is why the words of earlier times need to become powerless and be silenced, and our Christianity today will only be two fold: prayer and doing justly to others” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer). Christian prayer orients itself on the prayer instructions of Jesus (The Lords Prayer), his word “seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and everything else will be given to you” (Mt. 6:33), as well as the invitation to pray that the Lord of the harvest will send workers for the harvest of the kingdom of God. (Mt. 9:37f). **All prayer is aimed at compliance to and the doing of God’s will-“your will be done”.**

Whoever prays, approaches the personal God in trust. The language of the Psalms is a practice of prayer. By being conscious that God is also not to be understood in the same category of a person, the personal term used for God is the nearness of God, who is aware of the person praying and will show them new ways. The near, loving, and awe-inspiring God, who created us in God’s own image as people capable of loving, approaches us personally in prayer.

The one-sided male titles of God, that are rightly questioned by feminist theologians, are to be filled out and completed by female images and metaphors. God, you who are father and mother to us, should be our prayer salutation. Every reduction of the language used about God into male, or also female, images and metaphors makes God particular.

Prayers of intercession during church services are often almost unbearable because they are infantile instructions of action directed at God, and not an oral conversation of sons and daughters, who are making themselves available to God, with God. Whoever believes and prays, trusts in the power of God (“for yours is the power”) that God empowers people including myself, those praying, through God’s spirit, to recognize and do God’s will, and that God will lead everything to work together for good, and accomplish the kingdom of justice and peace.

Prayer is aimed at the kingdom of God and the doing of God’s will, at our participation in God’s kingdom, at our implementation of God’s peace, at the strength to withstand the false gods and the powers of evil, falsehood, and oppression, of violence and of death. And where our hands are tied, and we only experience our weakness and powerlessness, there we are allowed to trust in the power of God, hope in God’s peace, and devote ourselves to God’s will.



About the Church - God's agent of Peace

*The church is the community of believers,
God's contingent for peace,
God's people in the discipleship following Jesus,
the body of Jesus Christ with many members
in many local congregations within the world wide ecumenical body.*

*The one church of Jesus Christ is present
in many locations
in various churches and confessions.
The many churches represent the one gospel
of the God of peace and his kingdom
through Jesus Christ,
in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
in varied traditions,
perspectives and life contexts.*

*God has created the church
through God's spirit and word,
and recreates it daily,
in that God calls people to faith
and participation in building God's kingdom
and enables them to
contribute to God's peace in the world.*

*The church is the wandering people of God
From the beginning on to the fulfilment of God's kingdom.*

*The church is the wandering people of God
from the beginning of God's kingdom
with Jesus' first coming, up to
the fulfilment of God's kingdom
with the second coming of Jesus.
The church gives witness to and
lives the truth of God's kingdom
in the world as a sign in broken fragments.
She reaches out to the consummation
of God's kingdom.
She participates in the errors and the sins of the old world
and still is a sign of God's new world.*

About the Church- God's agent of Peace

*Anything which has no lasting duration in God's kingdom
can not be justified within the church,
but is present within her in the form of sin and error
lies and lack of faith
striving for power and lack of peace,
disobedience of God's commandments
and refusing to follow Jesus.*

*The distinguishing marks of the church
are the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount*

*The distinguishing mark of the church are
the calling in and through Jesus
in the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount.
Church are those who are poor in spirit
who are aware of their poverty before God,
that they cannot command God's spirit and his truth,
that they only partially participate in God's truth
and in their words, confessions and teachings,
as in their actions, behaviour and life
they lag behind God's truth and
the witness for peace.*

*Church are those who mourn,
who do not repress their guilt
but admit it before God and other people,
who are open to the suffering of others
and bring it in their lament before God,
who are in solidarity with the poor and sufferers
in the hope for God's kingdom
and his justice*

*Church are those who refuse violence,
who themselves having experienced liberation can grant freedom,
never forcing people to believe,
who abstain from deadly violence
and do not practice avoidable destruction to God's creation.*

*Church are those who hunger for justice,
who stand up for a life in dignity,
free from oppression, want or terror
for all people.*



*Church are the merciful,
who conscious of their own need,
guilt and weakness
help to alleviate need
and forgive guilt and debts.*

*Church are those who are honest,
who do not fool themselves or others,
who are advocates of truth,
where ever it is turned into lies
and suppressed by those in power,
who stand up for the truth
that every person is scared to God.*

*Church are those who are peacemaker,
who can see the perspective of others
during conflict
and see the suffering of the opponents
who critically question their side's images of the enemy
and have courage to take the first steps
on the difficult road to peace,
who are willing for the sake of justice and peace
to take upon themselves persecution and suffering.*

*The church is, as the congregation of Jesus Christ
on the way to the kingdom of God,
already visible in her social form
differing from the societies of the world.
Her regulations and structures reflect,
Even when symbolically and brokenly,
the beloved community in the spirit of Jesus.*

Worship

*The church gathers together in worship
in many places,
in order to be strengthened in faith
through God's word and spirit,
and enabled to live peace in the everyday world.
Because faith in its essence
is trust in God's power of peace
and boldness to live peace,
faith will never become a possession,*

About the Church- God's agent of Peace

*but remains constantly dependent on encouragement
through hearing God's word,
in singing and praying
in the fellowship of believers.*

Baptism

*Through baptism those who are called to faith experience
Acceptance in the fellowship of the body of Christ
And with that God's summons to peace
In the following of Jesus.
In baptism, God pledges aid
As the God of peace to the one being baptised
And calls her and him
For God's work of peace,
requesting the one who is baptised
to work together in building God's kingdom.
Baptism is God's calling to peace
And the answer of faith
In being willing to enact peace,
God's profession of loyalty to this unique person
And the profession of loyalty of this unique person
To the God of peace.*

Communion

*In Holy Communion the church celebrates
on the way to God's kingdom
the banquet of peace as reflection and rest
in remembrance of Jesus' reconciliation-giving table fellowship,
in the already present experienced fellowship of peace
and in anticipation of the completion of God's kingdom,
Jesus invites to the meal
and is as host present.
He excludes no one from God's salvation.
Whoever has tasted the peace of God in Jesus' table fellowship
is certain that God's peace
wants to include everybody,
and can not use violence against brothers and sisters seated at Jesus' table
or against anyone else,
an image of God and God's child.
Who ever has eaten from the bread of life
will share their bread.*



Commentary on the Church

The Apostle's Creed acknowledges only the church, not the kingdom of God. Church receives its mission and being from the kingdom of God. Church is the fellowship of believers between the times, between Jesus' first coming and Jesus' second coming, between the beginning of the kingdom of God and its completion. **Church is also the fellowship of believers between places, the place of this world and the place of the kingdom of God.** When the kingdom of God is brought into completion, there will be no more church ("I saw no temple inside" Rev. 21:22).

There are just as many churches and confessions, as there are different confessions of faith. Jesus' guarantee of the kingdom of God, as well as the message of Jesus Christ, is already encountered in the second testament in different fractions, perspectives, and interpretations depending on the audience, place, and author.

The church is not yet the kingdom of god. That is why talking about the "true church" is misleading. (This declaration is aimed at the Roman church as well as the groups of the left wing of the reformation, parts of the Anabaptist movement, but also against fundamentalist streams in Protestantism). Every church and confession still represents the world, its norms and standards, its mistakes, power structures and interests, its lies and inequality, its self-assertion and lack of love.

*The power of the
holy spirit of God
raises up the church
of the new creation
(2 Cor. 5:17)*

If the word of Jesus "not so with you, whoever wants to become great should become a servant" (Mk. 10:43), as well as the beatitudes, are indications of the church (notae ecclesiae), then every church is still only partially there, as the conflict surrounding orthodoxy (right thinking) and orthopraxy (right practice) in every church remains on-going.

The church is, however, the space in which Jesus Christ is believed in as the standard, and his spirit and God's omnipotence are experienced as present. The power of the holy spirit of God raises up the church of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), who shows itself as a counterpart and child of God, and its actions and life correspond to God.

Martin Luther does not see the Christian as member of the church and the body of Christ enough, rather in extreme separation, "because all the world is evil, and among thousands, no true Christian can be found" (On Secular Authority). He does not see the church as a social form in contrast to the societies of the world. Church is, in its social form, visible through its works like "a city on a hill" (Mt. 5:13-16). Even the understanding of church in Lutheran tradition today from the formative assertion of the church in the Augsburg Confession, article 8 "as one gathering of believers", "wherever the gospel is preached in its truth and purity and the sacraments are administered according to the gospel" (congregatio sanctorum, in qua evangelium pure docetur et recte administrantur sacramenta)

is inadequate, because gospel-appropriate actions of faith in the discipleship of Jesus, and the social forms of the church as the body of Christ, are not taken into account.

Since Luther and the traditions that followed him recognised exclusively the faith of single believers but not the church as a social entity, they saw, and still see the individual's doing of God's will hopelessly out of reach, according to how it is laid out in the Sermon on the Mount. That the fellowship of Jesus- even through setbacks and failures- can take mutual encouragement in the advice of the Beatitudes as well as in the doing of the life standards of God's kingdom, will be unrecognised.

The budding and hopeful appendages in the Anabaptist movement, of a church as social entity in discipleship of Jesus, was brutally struck down by the authorities with extensive approval of the reformers.

When the Christian faith believes in the God of peace in the basis of the message of Jesus Christ of peace, then the church is the peace representative of God. The church must be recognised by this is all of its dimensions, functions, and actions: in proclamations and instruction, in personal and societal diakonie (social work), in its laws and structures, in its social entity as non-hierarchical fellowship of brothers and sisters (Barmen III and IV). Church services

and activities, entire catechism, spiritual guidance and social work, organisation and administration are peace services, witness to God's Shalom in its multi-faceted aspects and references.

That the gift of God's Shalom and the assignment to achieve the Shalom of God is most often absent from our baptisms and our communion services, is a heavy weighing problem. **In our practice of baptism (non-verbal baptism), God's call to**

peace in the fellowship of the body of Christ and following after Jesus, can not, in principle, be mentioned at all. Our baptismal practice disrupts the irresolvable unity of Grace and assignment (works) through the grace and power of mercy, into cheap grace (Dietrich Bon-

hoeffer). God's grace, even God's baptismal grace is never with out assignment.

The host of communion is Jesus Christ alone. It is unbearable when churches mutually fall short of the Eucharist hospitality and refuse it, and therefore renounce Jesus, who qualified everyone, with out reserve and without requiring credentials, to live in his fellowship meal of Gods hospitality.

*The host of
communion is
Jesus Christ
alone*



The Bible - the authoritative Foundation of Faith of the Church

With the building blocks for a catechism for this age, advice about reading and understanding the Bible should not be missing. The Church language referring to the Bible as "the Holy Book," and "the Word of God" can cause contemporaries without any experience, making an attempt to read the Bible to become confused. A shocking amount of passages can be found in the Bible about violence, from violence of people, but also from God's unforgiveness and violence.

A catechism is a linguistic aid to a mature faith and an understanding of what it means to be a Christian. The subject of a right understanding of the Bible is a mature Christian, as a member of the fellowship of the church, not as a teaching position carried out by one single person (pope, bishop, pastor) or one organ of the church (synod, church headquarters, church board, Presbyterium). According to the understanding reached in the reformation about the priesthood of all believers, the Bible can only be correctly interpreted in a discourse among the community of faith. The priesthood of all believers corresponds to the expertise of all lay people in an appropriate interpretation (exegesis) of the Bible.

The Bible is the foundational document of the faith and the church. In it, the witness to the God of peace is encountered, libe-

rating to faith and life. The answer of the reformation to the question "what is valid in the church?" is "only the scriptures" (sola scriptura) in opposition to the catholic position of "scripture and tradition." The principle from the reformation of scripture alone disputes the normative tradition in interpreting the scriptures. But scripture itself is tradition, the results of a long process tradition. Scripture is a decision of the ancient church which determined which texts belong to the canon of the Bible as the definitive document of faith and of the church, and which do not belong. The church as a creation of the Word of God determined the size of the biblical canon.

Practising fairness to the Bible

The Bible is a collection of texts that came into being in the time between circa 1000 BC and 150 AD. It is not one book, rather a collection of books. The single books came into being in worlds and societies that are foreign to us, that were not influenced by our scientific and enlightenment influenced view of reality, that did not know human rights in which women, children, and slaves had minority status and violence had not yet expounded the problems

that it has today. Not only the Bible, is a multi-faceted tradition process, but also the single biblical books came about through a long growth phase and have experienced multiple revisions and completions.

A shocking amount of passages can be found in the Bible about violence

The faith communities as carriers of the biblical traditions, the people of Israel in its history full of changes, Judaism, early Christianity and the coming church, all lived in tension filled conflicts with the mighty powers of Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia and the Persian kingdom, the Hellenistic kingdom and the Roman Empire. **Faith in God, how it is attested to in the Bible with its multifaceted, influenced images and interpretations, is a long process of conflict with the religions of the surrounding environment.** The explanation of the Egyptian plagues (Ex. 7-11) for example, is not a historical report, but rather from the perspective of the exile, an encouraging faith explanation: just as God “then” used God’s power against Pharaoh, so will God also show God’s self as powerful against the Babylonian powers now, and work for the deliverance and home-coming of banished. The taking of land has for a long time, not happened so violently and blood-thirsty as in Jos. 1-12, rather as gradual and mostly peaceful invasions of different groups in the cultural land like the exile and capture in the land of already resident oppressed groups.

Historical situations of upheaval, like the conquering of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 BC, the conquest of the southern kingdom of Judah with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple through the Babylonians and the beginning of the Babylonian Exile 587 BC, the edict of the Persian King Kyros with the permission of home-coming 539 BC and the destruction of Jerusalem and the second temple by

the Romans in 70 AD, lead to a new interpretation of the faith, through discovery of the self-identity.

The biblical transmission should be understood through the historical places of that time, the societal carrier groups which brought it forth, the cultural and political circumstances, and the historically religious influences of that time. We are not co-existent with the biblical witnesses and live in another context and time period.

The Bible is only accessible to most people through interpretations, which express the original texts only approximately, and therefore differ from one another. That and much more, are reason

enough to take into account today if we want read the Bible and its multifaceted transmissions with fairness to all parties.

The Bible - a collection of documents of a process

The Bible is a choir made up of many voices, whose voices have been held fast in writing for us and appear simultaneously side by side, although actually in truth they mostly individually became loud one after the other, in that the younger voices heard those of the older ones and answered them, they interpreted and updated them, they complemented them, contradicted them and consciously corrected them.

The biblical tradition has been passed on through being constantly newly interpreted

Historical situations of upheaval lead to a new interpretation of the faith



and updated, continually re-written, redirected, and corrected.

Even more fitting than the picture of the choir seems to me to be the image of a process. The Bible is the collection of the documents of a process, which deals with the truth, and the knowledge of God. In this process in a time span from over one thousand years, from about 1000 years before Christ up to the middle of the second century after Christ many diverse witnesses appeared, who on the basis of their experiences and testimonies of God in Israel in the Jewish community after exile, through and in Jesus of Nazareth, and in the original Christianity, each in their own way have given witness to the truth of God, as they have understood and interpreted it. The testimonies of God, which are found written down in the Bible, have taken place in the most varied situations, historical, social, and cultural constellations and contexts; they represent very differing social support groups and have been formed through attempting to come to terms with neighbouring religions.

From that point of view, the Bible is also a document of the history of religions.

The prologue of the gospel of Luke (1:1-4) makes clear that Luke has drawn from several precedents, but claims to do it better than they have done. Matthew and Luke have repeatedly revised the preceding version of the gospel of Mark, because for them the Mark Gospel was not “holy scripture”, but a text which could be criticised and was worthy of it. **No statement of witness in this process about the truth**

The Bible is the collection of the documents of a process, which deals with the truth, and the knowledge of God

of God is therefore true, because it was taken on during the collection of the biblical documents. In the teaching tradition of the church, the name “Holy Scriptures” and “Word of God” has actually oppressed a critical understanding of the Bible

The Bible contains many misunderstandings of God, false witnesses against God and many “unholy” traditions. People have experienced, and given witness to, their understandings of God appropriate to their context and constellation, but they also projected their own ideas and wishes, their mental state and fantasies, their hostilities and thoughts of revenge, their aggressions and potential for violence onto their picture of God. The religions analysis of Ludwig Feuerbach should also be applied to biblical language about God.

The picture of the Bible as a collection of documents of a process, when addressing the truth and knowledge of God, must take into consideration that we only have a gathering of testimonies without a final judgement.

That means this process is open, and the church, which acknowledges this collection of documents of the process as its original document must, on the basis of the written materials of the process, be in an ongoing discourse, constantly being renewed by God’s truth.

The Bible talks inconsistently about God

The Bible speaks about God from the first to the last page, in a highly captivating, yet inconsistent way, so that the question forces itself, which texts about God, humans and the world are binding and agree with the Christian witness about God. Is the command to genocide (Num. 31:13-20; Deut 20:16-18; 1 Sam 15); God's commands? Were the wars that Israel carried on in its' early history "holy" and thus God's wars? Is the promised land God's irrevocable command, to which the native inhabitants must be offered? Was God with David, in everything that he did, David, to whom a human life meant nothing? (1 Sam:16:18; 18:14, 28; 1 Sam 25; 1 Sam 27: 8-12; 2 Sam 8: 2)? Is woman in her "made in God's image" unconditionally of equal worth with man or subordinate to him (Gen 1:26-28; 2: 18-25; the Tora of Israel in the perspective of a man as the life rules of the patriarchy; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 14: 33b-36; Gal 3:28; Romans 16, Eph 5:21-33; 1 Tim 2: 8-15; 1 Pet 3:1)? Do the traditions hostile to the Jewish people like Mt 27:25; Joh 8:44; I Thess 2:15; Rev. 2:9; 3:9 and so on reflect God's thoughts about his people? Are the traditions which support the government in 2 Sam 7; Ps, 2; Joh 18f; Acts 25; Rom13:1-7 in the same way God's Word as those critical of it? Judg 8:23; 9; 1 Sam 8; Mk10: 42f; 12: 13-17; Rev 13 ? Are all humans who do not believe in Jesus Christ eternally to God in the end, or will God be everything in everything (1 Cor 15:28) ?

The Bible speaks about God from the first to the last page, in a highly captivating, yet inconsistent way

About the Principles of Martin Luther regarding the Word

Luther saw this tension-filled and inconsistent polyphony of the biblical witness, and his formal principle "the Word alone" (sola scriptura) was complemented and made more precise through the principle "Christ alone": **Scripture that is valid is that which transports (helps to understand) Christ** (Luther, The Whole Holy Word German, Wittenberg 1545, Preliminary to the Epistles of Jakob and Jude Speech 2454) **his behaviour and fate, what corresponds to Jesus Christ, his message about God's kingdom, and the witness of the apostles about him, what is according to the good news of Jesus Christ.**

Luther and the Lutheran tradition have seen the tradition of justification of the sinner by grace alone, through belief in the will of Jesus Christ as the center of

the text, on which the church depends. In doing so, the justification of anti-Judaism against the negative backdrop of Jewish "religious laws" and "just war" was, and still is today, construed from Luther. In this way, false references towards Judaism would be, and will be, spoken. The Torah is not "law" that has the function of leading to the awareness of sin (Rom. 3:20), rather God's Torah is more so God's good instruction for good life. The Torah would be interpreted as "Law" from one of the specific instances in Christian history, above all the death of Jesus, but also from its transformation in the Greek world as nomos. This transformation no longer corresponds to the Jewish roots of the Gospel, it no longer



corresponds to the message of Jesus. **Jesus did not idealise the people, but he also did not see the from the perspective of original sin, rather, he considered repentance, doing God's will, and resistance towards sins as enough.**

The interpretation of the death of Jesus as substitutionary atonement required the teaching of original sin, as well as the teachings of the divinity and sinlessness of Jesus as its constitutive prerequisites and elements. Jesus, however, supported neither the notion of original

sin, nor had he understood himself to be sinless. He took on the baptism of John for forgiveness of sins and declined the title of "good master" by saying "no one is good-except God alone" (Mark 10:17f).

Jesus made God more clear, and drew upon God's unconditional and limitless kindness towards the sinner

Jesus reinterpreted the Torah's life standards as applicable for the beginning of God's Kingdom. He assumed that the person, on the horizon of the coming kingdom of God can follow the Torah of God, even if he continually fails according to it. The mercy of God is effective, not only because

of Jesus' atoning death. That God is merciful and gracious, patient and kind, is a foundational creed in Israel (Ex. 34:6; Ps. 103:8; Jonah 4:2). Jesus made God more clear, and drew upon God's unconditional and limitless kindness towards the sinner.

The death of Jesus is not the cause of God's forgiving love, rather the result of Jesus' message of the unconditional love of God.

For this reason, justification/vindication as hermeneutic keys of the text should not be fundamentally contested. However, the following relativisations appear to be necessary to me: (1) Justification should not be understood as anti-Semitism. (2) **Justification is to be placed against the tendency of the Lutheran tradition to disregard the kingdom of God, in the light of the broader horizon of the kingdom of God.**

(3) The Justification has to be separated from the concept of original sin, the atoning death and the sinlessness of Jesus.

The forgiveness of sins shouldn't be works-oriented and therefore reduced to individual salvation. (4) **The Justification finds its expression in the succinct statement from Paul "What do you have that you did not receive?"**

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Central to the Text is the universal Kingdom of God

The Lutheran teaching of justification by faith as central to the text, combined with their anti-Semitic position, proved itself to be immensely peace-lacking. It gives false testimony towards Judaism, which believes very well in God's mercy, and it obtained from Luther significant Christian anti-Semitism, and contributed to the persecution of the Jews in the reformation tradition. Central

to the text is not the anti-Semitic understanding of justification of sins sola gratia sola fide in Lutheran development, rather, **central to the text of both testaments is the kingdom of God of justness (fairness) and peace, as witnessed to**

by the universal tradition of the Hebrew Bible and the message of Jesus.

The Bible deals with God's kingdom and dominion, that God comes to reign against the powers of sin and evil. God comes into authority where, according to the first line of the Lord's Prayer, God's name is glorified (hallowed), God's will is done, where God's limitless and unconditional love is believed in, attested to, and lived out, where the universal Shalom of God and God's justness expand, and the sacredness of every person as made in God's image is honoured. The sacredness of God in the perspective of Jesus is not that of the exclusion of sinners as in many Biblical traditions, but rather that of searching out sinners and unconditional loving kindness.



In contrast to the understanding of the Lutheran tradition which has neglected the kingdom of God, the point of Jesus is that we engage ourselves and collaborate in the kingdom of God. The older son will be welcomed by the father, and even allowed to take part in the festival (Lk. 15), those who worked the whole day will receive the same pay as those who worked only an hour (Mt. 20), practised forgiveness is ineffective, if it is not lived out (Mt. 18). **Jesus understands the kingdom of God as a harvest that is already in process and needs many workers (Mt. 9:37f).**

Justification means new creation of the person. The person has the kingdom of God as the goal in order to empower them to work for the kingdom of God. The person justified according to God makes themselves available for the kingdom of God and spreads life-creating fairness, and the limitless, non-violent, peace of the kingdom of God. Central to the text is the image of the kingdom of God as an ellipsis, whose one focal point is justification, and whose other focal point is working in the kingdom of God.

Central to the biblical text is the image of the kingdom of God as an ellipsis, whose one focal point is justification, and whose other focal point is working in the kingdom of God

Testimonies on the path towards the truth of the universal God and God's universal Shalom

The Bible is to be read from the perspective of the kingdom of God and its universal peace-tradition, where every human being is sacred, and no one is kept out of God's shalom. **The Bible is holy scripture in so far as it bears witness to the sanctity of every human being.** The documents of a process in the Bible also contain many unholy traditions and witnesses that do not attest to

the sacredness of human beings as universal and limitless, and that make the universal God only for particular people.

The unholy traditions of the Bible make God particular and deny the sanctity of human beings. These traditions have made many people into victims. To these belong the traditions that legitimate violence in the name of

God, violence towards enemies of Israel and enemies of the faith, violence of the Torah towards its trespassers, state violence, the structural violence of patriarchy towards women and children, violence that oppresses sexuality and shuts out homosexually-oriented persons, violence towards Jews, God's punitive violence and God's two option judgement.

Traditions that have legitimated violence from God, that make God particular, exclude people and make them into victims, are multi-faceted projections of human violence

and irreconcilability placed onto God. They are to be read as witnesses on the way to awareness of God, on the way to the truth of God's universal Shalom and God's limitless love. God is not only the God of Israel rather, the God of Israel and of all people, who desires salvation and Shalom for all people, yes, for all of creation.

The records of Gods wrath and judgement are also to be read from the perspective of God's universal Shalom and God's kingdom of justness and peace as the goal of God's creation. God's wrath

is God's opposition towards evil and unkindness, against the un-sanctification of God's name and the disregard for God's will. **God's wrath is a form of God's love that wants our salvation.** God's wrath, like his justice, do not want to irreversible destroy, rather

make things right. They that do not believe in the love of God and they that do not accept Jesus' invitation to the kingdom of heaven, exclude themselves. That is justice. However, even those that do not believe in God's love, remain loved by God still. God's love differentiates itself from human love on this point: God is not dependant on us. God remains true to God's unconditional and limitless love. Even if we say no to God, God still says yes.

The Bible is, at the core, a human book. The problem with the Bible is not its humanness, rather the falsely understood aura of sacredness that people have surrounded it with. **The biblical transmissions make accessible through their combined and consecutive dialogue, the fullness of**

the knowledge of God in Jesus as the full realisation of God away from the clan and tribal God of early Israel, to an ethnic and state God, and then to God of the entire earthly population and creator of heaven and earth, into the universal kingdom of God by citizenship through Jesus Christ.

The singleness of God (monotheism) was appropriately shown from the perspective of Jesus as the gospel for the whole world. The universalness of God's kingdom as the kingdom of justice and peace encompasses

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Israel and all peoples. Israel is God's way to the people (Gen. 12:2, Isaiah 42:1-4,6; 49:6; Mi. 4:1-5). Jesus Christ is the guarantee of the universal kingdom of God and limitless love for God's enemies, in the sense that Jesus also petitioned God on behalf of God's enemies and

on behalf of sinners. By the loving of enemies, God shows God's self as the God of peace, in whom there is no violence (Mt. 5:43-48).

Reading the Bible through the discernment of the spirits

God is still absent where God's salvation, justice and shalom are not testified to as being universal but rather particular and exclusive, not liberating but oppressive, not based on trust in God alone but in human accomplishments. **We need to use the discernment of the spirits, which Paul praises as a gift of grace (1 Cor 12:10) especially in regard to biblical discourse about God as differentiating between God's universal will of salvation and the many individual fractions of biblical witnesses.**



The collection of documents of a process, that we have received, is the documentation of an unfinished controversy about the right knowledge of God. This documentation of unfinished controversy around the truth of God is at the foundation of the Christian faith. The Bible is not itself an artefact of the faith. The creed does not contain a fourth article titled “I believe in the Bible...”.

The Bible came to us as historical, but indeed closed (the churches had - freely, in different ways - decided which texts belong to the biblical cannon and which don't), factually but not ended dialogical process about the right awareness of God. We are not conversational partners in this process and can no longer intervene. We are not the addressees of even a single testimony and can no longer talk with the witnesses. In a limited sense we can ask our questions and develop answers, but the witnesses continue to remain silent, particularly the end-state of the individual texts in their complex development and transmission processes with many revisions. Never the less, we should draw upon the freedom of the faith position in this dialogical process and judge, which witnesses of the bible correspond to God, and which still miss God.

All the witnesses of the Bible, naturally also the witnesses that correspond to God and are not misguided, **need to be translated and redirected out of the former frame of reference and brought into the current frame of reference, so that they reach us today.** We need to basically differentiate between actual statements of the biblical witness and the intention to make a statement, and to resist the fundamentalist misunderstanding that we have to simply repeat and believe in the biblical texts regardless of their language, cultural orientation and form. Biblical concepts, which in view of their original audience, were intended to be an aid to understanding, are actually an obstruction to understanding today (for example the virgin birth, atonement of sins by death). Along with this, we should make sure that, in general, all language condemning the use of graven images be seen in its context and not taken literally.

Theses for an appropriate reading of the Bible

In a second argumentation, the perspective on an appropriate reading of the Bible will be clarified in a thesis-like manner, taking into account historical bench-marks:

1. God led the people of Israel out of tyranny in Egypt, chose them out of the peoples of this earth to be God's people, and gifted and commissioned them with the Torah. God takes sides with the oppressed and those in misery, and wants to create a just society in Israel with the Torah.
2. During the time of exile, Israel became aware of the uniqueness and the universal horizon of the God of Israel. God is not only the God of Israel but the God of the whole family of nations, yes, of the entire creation. Israel's new understanding of what it meant to be chosen, was that of being chosen to represent God to the nations and be a blessing and light to the peoples of the world (Gen. 12:2f; Isaiah 42:6;49:6). Israel saw itself as the suffering servant of God, which non-violently carries forth Gods truth and justice to the ends of the world. Israel is God's path to the nations.
3. During exile Israel did not turn to the Gods of their captors, but rather in defeat held loyalty to the God of Israel and began to understand God with universal relevance: The mystical Babylonian

During the time of exile, Israel became aware of the uniqueness and the universal horizon of the God of Israel

deities are creations of the one and universal creator God that Israel professes (Gen. 1). **God is with those who suffer and promises them God's shalom, which is not based on state authority and military might, but actually on the renunciation of violence and disarmament.**

4. Israel understood in exile that its trust in state authority in the name of God is a misunderstanding of God and the wrong path. Sure enough, the circles of those loyal to the king make themselves heard in exile, with their hope in an offshoot of David's lineage, and the Deuteronomists with their theology of the chosen nation. However, that only confirms the unfinished dispute about the right understanding of God in the Bible.
5. The Bible speaks about God as only being for particular people, and also universally. Where God is spoken about as being for particular people without the universal horizon in view, God is missing. God acts in, and through Israel particularly and universally, because through Israel God wants to reach the nations and straighten them out. The goal of God's action is Shalom. The blessings standard in Num. 6:24-26 comes to a peak in the word shalom as the total and epitome of God's blessing. If God is to be understood universally, shalom must also be understood universally as inclusive, not exclusive.



6. The conflict in the Middle East today is fundamentally based upon the fact that the Jewish powers claim the promise land of the Bible, and understand their fight over the land promised to them, as an irrevocable commandment from God. They live under the illusion, that it is out of obedience to God that they must deny the rights of the Palestinian people in the land. They hold the state of Israel hostage, and compel the state to permanently break the human rights law and international law. The Jewish law therefore makes God particular and disowns the universal traditions of the Hebrew Bible, that testify to a universal God, to whom every single human life is sacred and who want Shalom for all humans.
7. With the foundational new interpretation of the Israeli faith in God in exile, the belief that the God of Israel is the one and only God of the whole world and creation (monotheism), as well as the experience, that the one God believed in the world wide Diaspora of the Torah, can be venerated and attested to; the understanding of the people of Israel in an ethnic regard, as well as the attachment to the land is then questionable.
8. No gift of God, not the Torah and not the Land, stands above the sacredness of a human life. Our testimony for Israel and its remaining election and commission can not consist of us standing up for the particular traditions of the Bible in favour of Israel against the Palestinian people; rather that we advocate for, according to the universal traditions of the bible, a peace that includes Israel and the Palestinians.
9. If we confess with Paul Israel's permanent election and commission, then we cant simply repeat after Paul (Rom. 9-11) the hard to understand trains of thought in his circles around the remaining/permanent election of Israel, rather we must ask today, what the elected commission of Israel consists of. In Israel saying no to Jesus as God's Messiah, it recognises its task towards Christianity, to be reminding us that we live out the messianic Jesus and the messianic Torah very insufficiently.
10. The kingdom of God in Jesus' message and assurance applies to those whom, up to this point, have been shut out and lost. Everyone, with out exception, all are invited into the Kingdom of God. Jesus interprets God as Abba, whose love and forgiveness is given to sinners with out exception. **God's unconditional loving forgiveness and God's love towards enemies are constitutive for the God image of Jesus, in which there is no violence.**

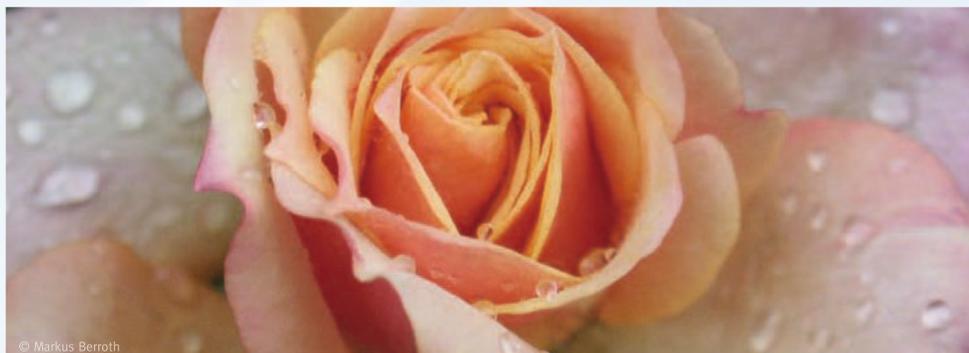
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11. Jesus calls us to decision with his Kingdom-of-God-message. What happens to those who do not accept the invitation into the Kingdom of God, to those that are resistant to change? In the parable, the father does not meet his oldest son with an ultimatum (Lk. 15). The parable is open-ended. They that choose not to participate the festival of the Kingdom of God, exclude themselves. If the father then, unconditionally receives his younger son, who had fallen to the level of pig keeper, and prepares an abundant banquet for him, he himself will not exclude his older son, who refused to join the festivities.
12. Jesus and his message were rejected. People did not believe in his God. The authorities of his people turned him in to the Roman state officials to be crucified. **The cross of Jesus is not an act of God, rather an act of people who did not believe in Jesus and his God. In the resurrection of Jesus, God stood by Jesus and his message, accredited Jesus, and confirmed him. God says: "this is the one who has really understood me in my unconditional forgiving love and love for my enemies; believe him."**
13. The witnesses of Jesus Christ have bound redemption to faith in Jesus Christ. Whoever does not believe on Jesus Christ is lost, experiences God's eternal wrath and must, as sinner, accomplish atonement in the eternal death of judgement. Most of the witnesses of the Second Testament understood God's anger as God's reaction to the people's unbelief. God's love, when it is not received in faith, turns into destructive anger. When anger is understood in this way, coupled together with God's two options of judgement and eternal torment in hell, it misunderstands God's unconditional love (Hos. 11; Jesus' image of God; 1 Joh. 4) and is a projection of human retaliation, lack of peace, and lack of reconciliation on to God.
14. God remains steadfast in God's love, and therefore true to God's self, in spite of the human lack of faith and lack of love. God's shalom is all-encompassing. It surrounds even those who say no to God. God is not satisfied at the end of history with the salvation of only a few people and the damnation, loss and destruction of very many people. (Of course, church fathers like Tertullian, and Augustine, among others, entrusted God to do just that, and thus strengthened this peace-lacking image of God and peace-lacking actions in the history of the church).



15. **Complete reconciliation, and the reconciliation and peace of all people, is the goal of God's way**, which is heard in the Second Testament here and there in spite of the superior strength of the tradition of the anger and judgement of God (Acts 3:21; 1 Cor. 15: 24-28; Col. 1:20). In the end, most traditions, even those of the Second Testament, think of God as being only for particular people and peaceless.
16. The ambassadors of God's unconditional, universal, Shalom and complete reconciliation would be accused of not taking God and God's sacredness and infathomability, sovereignty and divinity seriously, and making God into a harmless "nice" God. That is not so; because God - anything but harmless - expects those that believe in him to follow in the path of Jesus' unconditional willingness to forgive, his limitless love of his enemies, and his radical non-violence.
17. We have no choice. We must use the discernment of the spirits. **Where biblical traditions have made God only for particular people and demanded victims, these human words are not binding for mature Christian women and men.** Just as Jesus differentiated in the Torah between God's commandments and human statutes, so we should also differentiate between human witnesses that correspond to God, and those human witnesses that are still on the path towards God's truth and fall short of God.

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The basic elements for a catechism presented here emphasize the faith in the God of peace, and place the peace traditions of the Bible as the goal of the biblical tradition.

This draft of a catechism is not about a comprehensive display of the Christian faith, but rather about a neglected dimension of faith in the light of today's challenges.

The following basic elements for a catechism will be presented in this draft:

- A confession of faith in the God of peace
- The command of God as the commandment of peace
- The prayer for peace
- The church - God's contingent for peace
- The bible - the document of faith and the church

These basic elements are useful for confirmation classes, bible study and adult education.

We believe in the God of Peace

Basic Elements for a Catechism

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