

Worldwide process – statements of churches concerning neoliberalism

Do you know TINA? That is no fair maiden, it's the abbreviation of There is no alternative.

Margaret Thatcher spoke this magic formula against critics of the neoliberal economy in the eighties of the 20th century. Here at the latest Christians should have stood up and protested, because the Bible tells us that in our history with God there are TATA – thousands of Alternatives – as one critic of globalization Susan George brought up first.

So TINA is a sentence spoken without God – a sinful sentence.

Churches generally speak in favour of an active welfare state. They advocate guaranteed access for all basic utilities as water, energy supplies, public transportation, education and health care.

Christian churches see themselves as part of a spiritual globalisation. But it was not until the end of the 19th century, that the narrowness of nationalism and confessionality was recognised and answered. The self-conception of the Roman-Catholic Church had in any case always been that of a world church. Gradual approaches were made by the churches of Orthodox and Protestant orientations to enter a discourse between the different denominations – a process which led to the foundation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Amsterdam in 1948. Its headquarters are in Geneva.

Nowadays, most of the churches of the South and those of Eastern Europe join the churches of the North with more and more insistence to share their point of view and experience and to recognise their entanglement in behaviour, economics and ways of life, contrary to God's will.

In numerous statements and papers the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the WCC called their members to join the process: Trondheim, Winnipeg in 2003, Accra in 2004 and Porto Alegre in 2006 all were critical discussion forums for the international alliances.

In Accra the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 2004 went so far as to declare the problem of neoliberal economic policy an **issue of faith**. This means, it is a matter of a belief held by the entire church, not an individual concern. In Germany during the National Socialism the so-called Confessing Church adopted their confession of faith – the Declaration of Barmen – as a response to the situation. With this declaration the church told Christians quite clearly that those not following it could not be members of the church anymore. The same happened in South Africa during the Apartheid system in the so-called Confession of Belhar 1986 and led to the exclusion of the South African Reformed Church from the World Alliance. It contributed to overcoming the Apartheid system.

„We recommit ourselves to reflect on the question of **power and empire** from a biblical and theological perspective...“ these were the rather unsatisfactory closing words of the „call to love and action“ adopted by the representatives of churches gathered at the 9th assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre in 2006. There the foundational position paper was the comprehensive AGAPE document (Alternative Globalisation Addressing People and Earth) adopted in Geneva 2005. It became very popular and was much discussed by grass-roots church groups. But the argumentation around the term „Empire“ f.i. cost the WCC the sympathy of the powerful Lutheran Church of Germany EKD. Even the first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI uses the term of „Agape“ to convey the required reaction to the scandal of exclusion of the largest part of the world population from a good life. Another encyclical from 2009 focused on the term „Caritas“. We can look forward to the statements of Pope Francis, he raises good hopes and may God bless him.

Again and again it becomes obvious that the institutionalised churches, tied down by relative wealth and arrangements with political leaderships, are not able to develop decisive solidarity with sister churches whose resources and influence are limited. In the end: analyses, appeals and above all the inflationary use of the word „love“ is all that remains. Nowhere was an unanimous decision or unanimous attempt made to find a way to change the scandalous division of the world, though there are many groups of Christians who share the vision of the Social Forum in Porto Alegre :

Another world is possible.

Barbara Rauchwarter

The joint Social Mission Statement of the Council of Churches in Austria

The consideration of the biblical concepts of righteousness/justice and shalom/peace within the climate of neoliberalism prompted the members of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria to publish a joint **Social Mission Statement**. The Council of Churches unites 14 Christian churches, the Roman Catholic is member too. The approach used in the preparation of the final statement followed the three steps of the Liberation Theology which are: seeing, judging, acting. To begin with, the perception and social practice of active groups and organisations in parishes and institutions of the churches like Caritas and Diakonie were surveyed and published. More than 500 equally weighted statements were handed over to the parties, the members of parliament, universities and the media in 2001. The feedback and resulting discussion clarified which topics should be published in the actual Social Mission Statement released in 2003.

In the first place the Statement is meant as an analytical positioning and self commitment of the churches, but also specifies tasks and responsibilities for society and politics. The list of topics comprises areas of the life which fundamentally influence and form human biographies: education, the media, relationships, living environment, work, economy and social security, peace with justice, justice worldwide and future sustainability- responsibility for Creation. The Social Mission Statement allows Christians in Austria to refer to it and to seek support for their convictions.

Work, economy and social security ought to be in the service of life. Paid labour is evaluated in a differential way with women still earning up to 30 % less than men for the same work in many areas. The concept of work being reduced to paid labour is questioned and challenged. Forms of precarious work mentioned are flexible part-time and trivial jobs, temporary agency work, contracts for work and services and pseudo- independent work – all of them subsumed under the term of atypical employment relations and disproportionately affecting women and migrants. **Maternity leave** rarely permits women to return to their former **workplace**. Single mothers are drawn into a kind of downward spiral despite or because of childcare allowance. Almost all people concerned belong to the category of „working poor“.

It becomes obvious: poverty is female and poverty makes you ill.

Now, ten years after publishing the Social Mission Statement the number of persons forced to live below or at the poverty line is much higher than the number cited in the Social Mission Statement. The current data presented in the social report are an inducement to energetically implement the watchword: „from Social Mission Statement to social action.“

I hope that this will be the main topic, when we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Social Mission Statement in December.

Economy has to mean more than the market and political decisions have to be aimed at the common good as well as counteract the unequal distribution of income, property and participatory opportunities.

Barbara Rauchwarter