

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10,10

How much is enough?

This simple question has sparked a lively debate in recent years. Born out of the international bank crisis, but even more out of the growing awareness of the limited planetary boundaries the question is raised, not only by Christians, but by all people of God.

Today, we face the greatest scandal of all: it is not wars and natural disasters, mind you. It is poverty-driven hunger. According to the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations), 842 million people across the globe are classified as hungry today. If we add to this figure those who are chronically malnourished for reasons of poverty, we are dealing with more than two billion people. The right to food is the human right which is most frequently violated. Each day, hunger and malnutrition claim the lives of around 24,000 people.

We cannot accept this, because the suffering and death of these people is avoidable. The amount of food produced in the world today can easily and adequately feed all 7.2 billion people on this planet. It is a fact that there is enough for everyone. However, too much food ends up in the trough for animals, the fuel tank and the garbage bin. In developing countries, about 40 % of harvests are spoilt owing to inadequate storage facilities and infrastructure. In addition, the food waste in wealthy states is scandalous. In Germany, on average, 82 kg of food per year per head ends up in the garbage bin, including the biological waste from supermarket chains.

Hunger is one of the oldest scourges of human kind. In the book of Exodus, the people of Israel cry out to God in the desert. Their prayer is answered by God with the daily gift of manna. It falls from heaven as a fine flaky substance and covers the ground like frost. The Jews are told to gather what they need but no more. They are also given a warning: those who gather too much will find that it turns to worms by the morning. In Egypt, the land from which the Jews had escaped, grain was piled up into huge barns. Here wealth was stored for the pharaohs. But in the new circumstances of the desert, God offers a very different model of economics: there is such a thing as enough.

In the story of the feeding of the 5,000 in Mark 6, a similar story is told: people follow Jesus' invitation and share with one another what they have at hand - and the amazing occurs - there is enough for everyone. Yet the turning point of the story is not the Jesus' appeal to the disciples: "You give them to eat!" (Just look at the pittance of gifts offered in response - 5 loaves and two fish!) The turning point occurs when Jesus lifts up these gifts to God in prayer and then shares them with the crowd. He literally rips the small offerings out of the cycle of human want, fear and their greed, and offers them to God. By lifting them up in thanksgiving to the Father of all good things, Jesus breaks the cycle of egoism and reminds people whom they owe it all to - the gift of food and actually of life itself. And the result is overwhelming - not only do people share freely with one another; but in doing so they discover that they have even more that they can eat.

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full!" - These words of Jesus in John 10,10 sum it up in a nutshell. He indeed is the good shepherd of our souls who gives himself in full in order that we may live; not just exist on the level of sheer survival, but live a life worthy to be called that - to share in the fullness of God. Thus Jesus stands in clear opposition to the thieves or wolves who come only to steal, loot and devour; forces that we know all too well today when we see how much money is made in land grabbing and food speculation. Yet it doesn't have to be this way. Through

Jesus death and his resurrection we have become part of another community that shares a different vision of life. Every time that we share the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we are reminded of this. As God's gifts to us, bread and wine signify everything that is necessary and sufficient for us. In communion with God and with each other, we experience the overflowing joy of life. Sharing communion makes us mindful and truly thankful for all that we have received from God. As part of creation, we can live in respect of our fellow creatures. We are invited to become part of Jesus transforming power and sharing community.

Therefore the question "How much is enough?" needs to be turned around into: "**What is a decent and sustainable life for all?**" Right now many Christians around the globe raise exactly that question. A "theology of life" is evolving in mission and ecumenical circles, such as the WCC's 10th assembly in Busan and the last EKD synod on world nutrition and sustainable agriculture. In fact, in the EKD we are working right now on a study which digs deeply into the biblical accounts of the "decent life" and relate them to today's challenges of hunger, climate change and sustainability.

In doing so, we are in good company! For quite a few of today's economists and philosophers share our concern. They, too, question our inability to say "enough is enough", and the desire for more and more money and goods. They demand that progress should be measured not by the traditional yardsticks of growth or per capita incomes, but by other values. The well-known British father-son team of economist Robert Skidelsky and his philosopher son Edward spells out seven elements of the decent life: health; security; respect; personality; harmony with nature; friendship; and leisure. Other scholars, such as the sociologists Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum point out that the current Human Development Index needs to be broadened to cover all human rights including freedom from fear and want, the right to cultural diversity and the pursuit of happiness. Such efforts of defining the "decent life" or "buen vivir" are already enshrined in the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador. In Germany, the post-growth movement is gaining support from many sides; books of Harald Welzer "Selber denken" and Nico Paech "Grundzüge einer Post-Wachstumsökonomie" are found on the best-seller list.

But what can we do as individuals, besides giving donations to important agencies like Bread for the World or Oxfam or other organizations? Quite a lot. We all can choose every day where and how we consume, at markets and supermarkets, shops and retailers. Three little words are enough to remember in order to use our power as consumers: „different“, „less“, and „better“.

“Different” means choosing food not merely on the preference of price, but of sustainability. It means buying regionally produced food products that need only short transport routes. It means eating food according to seasons and from fair product lines. The encouraging thing is that the soft revolution of fair trade foods is gaining ground – ever supermarket chains now offer quite a range of such products.

„Less“ means reducing the use of natural resources. It means cutting waste in private households, but also institutions and supermarkets. It means a reduction of meat consumption, as fewer animals need to be raised for meat production, thereby reducing the land usage needed for grain production as animal feed. “Less” can also mean reduction of energy used in packing, transporting and storing food before it arrives on our plates.

„Better“ means added enjoyment and health when choosing quality of food and other products. The slow food movement has gained quite a following. Diversification of food and rediscovery of local

cuisine can powerful tools in establishing a quality food culture and countering the current fast food age.

Yes, God's people can do something against poverty induced hunger. We do not have to wait for politicians or movements to start with it – we can do something ourselves to break the cycle of hunger, malnourishment, unjust distribution and waste. At the last synod, a very short but helpful statement was issued that you might want to take along at the end of the service in order to give you some hints. It is both published in German and English and can also be downloaded on the web page of EKD and Bread for the World.

The question beyond all calls and statement however remains: **will we do it?** I believe that the only way out of the crisis of hunger and the way towards equitable participation for all is both a **spiritual and a political pathway** - an inner and a political transformation. It is a pathway with God. It is a pathway with each other. It is the pathway of a pilgrim.

What we need is a spiritual and political "**ethics of sufficiency**" / "**ethics of enough**". It is not primarily an ethics of sacrifice, but an ethics of knowing that the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ has already provided us with more than we need and looks after us every day. The vision of the "decent life" advocates liberates from waste and materialism. It leads us towards an ethics of right measure. It is rooted in the abundance that we celebrate and experience in Christ. It is inspired by the biblical hope for God's kingdom, in which all people are promised freedom, justice and reconciliation. With this promise in sight, we step out onto the path of repentance and change today. Then there will be enough for everyone! Amen.

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