

We Choose Abundant Life

Christen im Nahen Osten: Auf dem Weg zu neuen theologischen, sozialen und politischen Entscheidungen

Christians in the Middle East: Towards Renewed Theological, Social, and Political Choices

This issue of RES examines the recent theological document “We Choose Abundant Life” (WCAL) published in Beirut, September 2021. The always complicated nexus between religion, politics, and national identity has even more layers of complexities in the Middle East. This complexity reflects in this issue in the way that the volume contains both scholarly articles and more personal essays. The essays serve as an introduction of the process and the document WCAL, and the scholarly articles provide an analysis and discussion about themes and significance of the document.

The first contribution is an essay which introduces of the WCAL document and is authored by **Jonas Adelin Jørgensen** and **Peter Lodberg**, University of Århus, Denmark. The article briefly accounts for the political and theological setting of the WCAL, the content, WCAL as a theology of political realities, and WCAL as what we term a “subversive hope” for Middle Eastern Christians.

The second contribution is an essay authored by **Assaad Elias Kattan** from University of Münster and is entitled “We Choose Abundant Life – A

Diese Ausgabe RES befasst sich mit dem theologischen Dokument „We Choose Abundant Life“ (WCAL), das im September 2021 in Beirut veröffentlicht wurde. Die schon immer komplizierte Verflechtung von Religion, Politik und nationaler Identität ist im Nahen Osten noch komplexer. Diese Komplexität spiegelt sich in dieser Ausgabe in der Tatsache wider, dass der Band sowohl wissenschaftliche Aufsätze als auch eher persönliche Essays enthält. Die Essays dienen als Einführung in den Prozess und das Dokument WCAL, während die wissenschaftlichen Aufsätze Themen und Bedeutung des Dokuments analysieren und diskutieren.

Der erste Beitrag von **Jonas Adelin Jørgensen** und **Peter Lodberg** von der Universität Århus, Dänemark bietet eine Einführung in das WCAL-Dokument. Er beschreibt kurz den politischen und theologischen Rahmen, den Inhalt des Dokuments, seinen Charakter als Theologie der politischen Gegebenheiten und als das, was eine „subversive Hoffnung“ für Christen im Nahen Osten genannt wird.

Der zweite Beitrag ist ein Essay von **Assaad Elias Kattan** von der Universität Münster mit dem Titel „Wir wählen das Leben in Fülle - ein Dokument, das durch

Document Prompted by the Arab Spring?“. In his essay, Kattan introduces and contextualizes the document in the recent political and social developments in the Middle East since the start of the Arab Spring in 2011. While many voices have made themselves heard during the Arab spring, the voice of Christian churches in the Middle East has hardly made themselves noticed and no comprehensive vision has been laid out – until now. Because WCAL offers exactly this, Kattan argues, the WCAL’s dismisses the ontology of conspiracy theories and the tendency to ascribe problems of the Arab countries to real or constructed enemies. Rather, it identifies one of the major predicaments of church life in Middle East with corrupt church institutions, lack of sound governance and transparency, and reluctance to engage with modernity and public society.

The essay “New Choices for Christian in the Middle East” is authored by **Ziad El-Sayegh** from Civic Influence Hub in Beirut. He is one of the original authors who conceptualized the idea of WCAL in the first place and offers in his article a condensed version of the original study document. Based on a presentation of challenges for the nexus between religion and politics in the Middle East as pointed out in the original document, the author analyses the critical situation of Christians in the Middle East. The article points out the fears connected with being a minority, the unjustified optimism of liberal theologians, and the fragility of the

den Arabischen Frühling ausgelöst wurde“. In seinem Essay führt Kattan in das Dokument ein und kontextualisiert es vor dem Hintergrund der jüngsten politischen und sozialen Entwicklungen im Nahen Osten seit dem Beginn des Arabischen Frühlings im Jahr 2011. Während sich viele Stimmen während des arabischen Frühlings Gehör verschafft haben, ist die Stimme der christlichen Kirchen im Nahen Osten kaum wahrgenommen worden, und es wurde keine umfassende Vision entworfen – bis jetzt. Indem WCAL genau dies bietet – so argumentiert Kattan – weist das Dokument Verschwörungstheorien ebenso ab wie die Tendenz, die Probleme der arabischen Länder realen oder konstruierten Feinden zuzuschreiben. Die Probleme des kirchlichen Lebens im Nahen Osten haben vielmehr mit korrupten kirchlichen Institutionen zu tun, mit einem Mangel an guter Führung und Transparenz und mit dem Widerwillen, sich auf die Moderne und die Gesellschaft einzulassen.

Für den Essay „New Choices for Christian in the Middle East“ zeichnet **Ziad El-Sayegh** vom Civic Influence Hub in Beirut. Er ist einer der ursprünglichen Autoren, die die Idee von WCAL entwickelt haben, und bietet in seinem Artikel eine komprimierte Version des ursprünglichen Studiendokuments. Ausgehend von dessen Darstellung der Herausforderungen, die mit der Verknüpfung von Religion und Politik im Nahen Osten verbunden sind, analysiert der Autor die kritische Situation der Christen im Nahen

socio-economic justice as factors forming the self-understanding of Middle Eastern Christians. Antidotes to these fears include reflection on the relationship between religion and human fraternity, citizenship, and the relation to other faith communities, first and foremost Jewish communities, but also partnership with Muslims.

The contribution from **Göran Gunner**, Stockholm School of Theology, is an article entitled "Common good, God, and Human Rights". In his article, Gunner adopts a human rights perspective on the WCAL and discusses the "right to life" and the "right to abundant life". The commitment to human solidarity and a dignified life is in WCAL placed in contrast to the rampant culture of death and the logic of violence in conflict solving. More solidarity and dignity is manifest in the WCAL commitment to freedom of conscience and in women's and youth's rights. The choice for a common good based in theology in combination with human rights and democracy is a promising way forward for the Middle Eastern churches, Gunner concludes.

In the article "Threading the Needle: Post/Anti-Supersessionism and Anti-Zionism?", **Joshua Kulak** from Liverpool Hope University and St. Michaels Church analyses how WCAL positions itself in relation to Judaism and Jewish presence in the Middle East. The two sources of inspiration for WCAL in this aspect is the 2009 Kairos Document and the current Palestinian liberation theology.

Osten. Der Beitrag weist auf die Ängste hin, die mit dem Status als Minderheit verbunden sind, auf den ungerechtfertigten Optimismus liberaler Theologen und auf die Fragilität der sozioökonomischen Gerechtigkeit als Faktoren, die das Selbstverständnis der Christen im Nahen Osten prägen. Zu den Gegenmitteln gegen diese Ängste gehört das Nachdenken über die Beziehung zwischen Religion und Geschwisterlichkeit, über Staatsbürgerschaft und über das Verhältnis zu anderen Glaubensgemeinschaften, in erster Linie zu jüdischen Gemeinschaften, aber auch in Partnerschaft mit Muslimen.

Der Beitrag von **Göran Gunner**, Stockholm School of Theology, ist ein Artikel mit dem Titel „Common good, God, and Human Rights“. In seinem Artikel nimmt Gunner eine menschenrechtliche Perspektive auf WCAL ein und erörtert das „Recht auf Leben“ und das „Recht auf Leben in Fülle“. Das Engagement für menschliche Solidarität und ein Leben in Würde wird in WCAL der grassierenden Kultur des Todes und der Logik der Gewalt bei der Lösung von Konflikten gegenübergestellt. Solidarität und Würde manifestieren sich insbesondere im WCAL-Engagement für die Gewissensfreiheit und die Rechte von Frauen und Jugendlichen. Die Entscheidung für ein theologisch begründetes Gemeinwohl in Verbindung mit Menschenrechten und Demokratie sei ein vielversprechender Weg für die

The article explores whether anti-Zionism entails super-sessionism, that is, whether refusal of the Zionist linking between theology and land leads to the theologically problematic idea that the covenant with Israel as witnessed in the Old Testament is now without any theological significance. Kulak argues that it is possible to “thread the needle” and be both post/anti-super-sessionist and anti-Zionist.

Kirchen im Nahen Osten, so Gunner abschließend.

In dem Artikel „Threading the Needle: Post/Anti-Supersessionism and Anti-Zionism?“ analysiert **Joshua Kulak** von der Liverpool Hope University und der St. Michaels Church, wie sich WCAL zum Judentum und zur jüdischen Präsenz im Nahen Osten positioniert. Die beiden Quellen dafür sind das Kairos-Dokument von 2009 und die aktuelle palästinensische Befreiungstheologie. Der Artikel geht der Frage nach, ob Antizionismus eine Substitutionstheologie nach sich zieht, d.h. ob die Ablehnung der zionistischen Verknüpfung von Theologie und Land zu der theologisch problematischen Vorstellung führt, dass der Bund mit Israel, wie er im Alten Testament bezeugt ist, nun ohne theologische Bedeutung ist. Kulak argumentiert, dass es möglich ist, beides zu verbinden und sowohl gegen die Substitutionstheologie als auch antizionistisch zu sein.

Jonas Adelin Jørgensen and
Peter Lodberg

ESSAY

Introduction: Why ‘We Choose Abundant Life’?

JONAS ADELIN JØRGENSEN AND PETER LODBERG*

The reason for focusing on WCAL now is not only the current situation of crises and war in the Middle East which has escalated since October 2023. Neither is the WCAL the only statement from Christians or church leaders in the Middle East, but it has a depth, an ecumenical nature, and a constructive tone which many other statements lack. The contribution of Middle Eastern churches to the democratic transformation of Middle Eastern societies is at the forefront of WCAL, and the document might therefore be viewed as an expression of “public theology,” that is, an attempt by churches to offer a theologically informed perspective on common societal challenges and common good. The public theology quality of the document expresses a broader trend in ecumenical theology toward a theological engagement with society and the societal role of churches. WCAL wants to contribute to the continued discussion of the relationship between democratic societies and national states.

The clear and un-polemic style of WCAL is helpful in unraveling the historical, theological, and political thinking in the Middle East, and therefore, it is timely to engage with the thinking and analysis offered in the WCAL.

Historical Background

The historical situation of churches in the Middle East after the rise of Islam has been characterized by the so-called *dhimmi* status. That is, believers from Jewish and Christian traditions were part of the “peoples of the covenant” and had legal protection and status in Islamic society without being Muslims. Jews and Christians were required to pay a special tax, *jizya*, but not the *zakat*, the obligatory alms paid by Muslims. Jews and Christians were equal under the laws of contract and property, had their independent religiously based family law, but were banned from entering paid military service. According to more detailed obligations and rights for each denomination, different church traditions had different obliga-

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tions towards the various Muslim rulers. This secured Jews and Christians a place in the new Islamic societies but also institutionalized sectarianism in the Middle East by recognizing rights and obligations on the basis of religious and denominational identity rather than by national identity.

The crusades of the Middle Ages, starting from Pope Urban's crusade in 1095, started a new era for Christianity and Christians in the Middle East. While the crusades were a result of the interest of Western Christians in the geographical areas of ancient Christianity in terms of pilgrimage and spiritual intensification, the crusades were also much more than that for Middle Eastern Christians. The presence of lawless crusader troops – young, armed men without families – in Middle Eastern communities increased suspicion against Christians as foreign agents, and the attempts to increase the influence of the Latin Catholic church in the Middle East further increased resistance in Middle Eastern communities. The crusades and the later battles for Constantinople between Christians and Muslims were fertile grounds for animosity between the two groups, including between Muslims and Middle Eastern Christian groups.

With the renewed interest in the Middle East of Western powers during the early modern period and with colonial expansion, beginning with Napoleon Bonaparte's conquering of Egypt and Syria from Ottoman rule in 1798-1801, the relationship to Middle Eastern Christian churches came to the center of attention. According to Edward Said, the western powers and the Napoleonic invasion was seen as civilizing missions in the European 19th century and led to the dominance of Orientalist narratives of the Middle East.¹ Part of the justification for the civilizing mission was the need for protection of Christian communities from Muslim rulers, rhetoric and politics which ultimately contributed to the separation between Christians and Muslims in Middle Eastern societies and a weakening of the Arab Christian identity. Throughout the 19th century, the divisions between Arab-speaking and Greek-speaking Christians deepened, and the Greek-speaking Christian communities were favored by the colonial powers such as Britain in Palestine.

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire after the end of the WWI, several new states were formed across the Middle East. Whereas the idea of a nation state might be said to be a Western one, the Middle Eastern nation states to a high degree continued the mental and social structure of the *dhimmi* system, defining the obligations and rights of citizens on the basis of their religious identities. The development of national identities and

¹ Said, Edward *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 42.

corresponding ideas about civil identities, civil society, and nationhood therefore took a different route from many other new states in the same historical period. During the British protectorate of Egypt, the British ambassador to Cairo agreed with the Sharif and Emir of Mecca, Hussein bin Ali, that the British would support the independence of an Arab kingdom in Hijaz in exchange for an alliance of the Arabs with the British against the Ottomans. At the same time, in 1916, the British and the French secretly agreed on the division of the Middle East along the Sykes-Picot-line after the end of the war and the inevitable fall of the Ottoman Empire, and the British in 1917 issued a public statement in support of a national home for Jewish people in Palestine.

Migration to the Middle East of Jews after WWI and the birth of Israel after the war of independence or from the Palestinian perspective the *nakhba*, “catastrophe,” in 1947 again shifted the political context for Middle Eastern Christians. The British departure from Palestine in 1948, and the unsolved Palestinian problem with a large group of internally displaced persons not only in Israel but also in Jordan and Egypt added a new layer of problems to the Middle Eastern Christianity community, leaving the questions of religious identity, civil society and national states unsolved.

This short-written portrait of Middle Eastern Christianity leaves out most of the historical details. However, it demonstrates how Middle Eastern Christians and Christianity have existed in relation to Islam as well as Western Latin Christianity and later colonial powers, and in the most recent decades also in a tension with the Jewish faith and the Israeli State. Part of the effect was positive seen from the side of Middle Eastern Christians: The need for security, protection and land by Christians was secured but at a cost, namely a separation and alienation between the Christian and Muslim populations. After the end of the colonial protectorates and with the emergence of Israel, and with the rise of political forms of Islam and Islamism, Christianity itself became a dividing factor. Insisting on a vision for a secular civil society and inclusive nation states, WCAL attempts to bridge the divide between Islam and Christianity in the Middle East.

Content of the document “We Choose Abundant Life”

The document “We Choose Abundant Life: Christians in the Middle East: Towards Renewed Theological, Social, and Political Choices” presents an analysis of the situation for Christians in the Middle East and

proposes ways forward. The document employs a contextual theological method, examining reality in light of theological discourse and vice versa, with the aim of creating a foundation for understanding God's will for the Church in the region. It calls for a courageous dialogue and the strengthening of Christian hope. The document consists of three parts:

Chapter 1: Christians in the Middle East, Our Reality and Situation

The chapter describes the geopolitical context, characterized by diversity but also by conflict. The region has experienced aborted modernity and ambiguous globalization, leading to a re-emergence of sectarian fanaticism and a feeling of threatened existence among many Christians. Arab nationalism and attempts at secularization have not delivered the desired results, and "alliances of minorities" are seen as hindering genuine Christian witness. The Arab Renaissance (*nahda*) was an important modernist project where Christians played a leading role in reflecting on the relationship between religion and societal development. However, this project has not fully borne fruit, partly due to the perception of Western inspiration. Globalization has brought both new opportunities and challenges, including a tendency towards polarization and a distancing from traditional values. The Arab Spring revealed deep-seated political, economic, and cultural problems and highlighted the importance of citizenship and the role of youth, but did not yet lead to the establishment of genuine democratic systems. The pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in healthcare systems, economies, and education systems, exacerbated by neoliberal capitalism and environmental exploitation.

The chapter also addresses the ecclesiastical and theological context. Churches in the Middle East trace their origins back to the apostolic era and share a common tradition of faith but express it in different ways. Diversity has characterized the region since the birth of Christianity, with a rich patristic and liturgical heritage. Western missions have significantly influenced the emergence of Eastern Catholic and Evangelical churches, contributing to diversity. Christians played a pioneering role in preserving and developing Arab culture and science after the rise of Islam. Most historical churches are patriarchal or synodal, but synodality – walking together – is often lacking in practice, where lay people, especially women and youth, are marginalized. Ecumenical togetherness is crucial for Christian witness, and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) was established in 1974 to promote this, although it has faced challenges. The relationship with Islam has historically been characterized by both

positive coexistence and periods of conflict. The relationship with Judaism deteriorated after the establishment of the state of Israel. Theological and spiritual formation takes place in various institutions, but there is a need for renewed focus and cooperation. The number of Christians in the region is declining due to wars, economic difficulties, and a lack of democracy. Churches are not immune to societal changes but often struggle to adapt their discourse and practice to contemporary realities, creating a gap, especially with the youth. Sectarian rivalry and growing popular piety and occult beliefs are also challenges. The churches’ relationship with the state is often marked by narrow interests and a lack of prophetic courage. The historical significance of Christians’ role in society can also lead to a failure to shape the present and future constructively.

Chapter 2: Challenges of the Present and Stakes of the Future

The profound changes of the past ten years, related to the Arab Spring, have created theological, cultural, social, and political challenges requiring reflection. There is a tendency among young people to question social structures and religious authority, leading in some cases to religious indifference or atheism. Globalization reinforces the tendency to favor the new over the old, affecting value systems. Christians in the Middle East face a complex reality in their witness and participation in governance, needing to avoid traps such as clinging to authoritarian regimes due to demographic decline or believing that positions of power alone ensure their continued presence. It is crucial to deconstruct a minority complex and focus on activating Christians’ cultural contribution. Freedom of conscience is a fundamental right and a major challenge in the region. Islam’s role as a source of legislation in many countries poses a challenge to the principle of equality, necessitating a joint effort to build civil states based on citizenship without discrimination. The concept of the civil state needs to be developed to be neutral towards religion and ensure coexistence. A cultural challenge lies in reinventing Arabism as an inclusive cultural concept characterized by freedom, human rights, and democracy. Many Christians experience a “role crisis,” where past contributions are overshadowed by present-day theorizing about a “Christian role” instead of focusing on individual contributions to the community. The demographic context of migration and displacement creates further challenges for preserving diversity and harmonizing different population groups. Synodality is essential for the Church’s future, building on communion and walking together, in contrast to sectarianism. Strengthening

the synodal spirit requires participatory leadership and the rejection of clericalism. The positions of youth and women in the Church also challenge the need for synodality and demand radical changes in mentality and practice, based on equality and dignity. A culture of human brotherhood/sisterhood, inspired by biblical principles, is central to Christian life and mission. There is a vital need for a renewed theological discourse that utilizes modern scientific methods for biblical interpretation, distinguishes between the content of faith and its expression, and engages in contextual theology to understand God's will in today's situation. This includes liturgical renewal, moving away from polemics towards dialogue with other religions, and promoting critical thinking and creativity among young people. Christian educational institutions should promote inclusion and value the human sciences. Theological discourses should emphasize the importance of the human community based on the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation, and redemption.

Chapter 3: Choices and Policies

Christians in the Middle East face crucial choices requiring a shift from a focus on survival to active presence and witness. Churches must listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and undergo genuine inner reform, promoting unity and ecumenical engagement, especially through a renewed and strengthened MECC. A contextual theology is needed to address the region's realities and contribute constructively to public affairs. Theological and ecclesiastical discourse must be renewed to be relevant and open to dialogue. Cooperation between theological institutes should be reactivated to ensure the training of future pastors. The dignity and equality of women must be recognized in both church and society, and their participation in all areas should be promoted. Young people must be listened to and given real opportunities for engagement in church and political work. Churches should reach out to emigrated Christians and encourage the preservation of their values and heritage. Robust policies based on respect for diversity, a just economy, and good governance must be implemented. Church-run educational institutions should teach human values and prepare good citizens. Church members should be encouraged to participate in public offices based on their qualifications and without corruption. A new theological and intellectual approach to relations with Jews, based on justice and peace, should be developed, focusing on the Palestinian people and rejecting religious states. Dialogue with Muslims should be honest and lay the groundwork for joint efforts for freedom

of conscience and peace. Christians in the Middle East should refuse to adhere to dictatorial regimes, reject “minority alliances,” and avoid politicizing religion. Churches must be committed to the cause of the region and its peoples, promoting citizenship in civil states based on law and respect for diversity. Serious efforts should be made to ensure the ratification of civil personal status laws based on equality. The prophetic role of Christians requires them to advocate for freedom, justice, human rights, and self-determination, especially for the Palestinian people and the suffering populations of Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Hospitality towards refugees and displaced people is a Christian obligation, combined with work for their right to return and the preservation of their identity. Media and communication should be prioritized to promote Christian and human values and respect for diversity. These choices and policies reflect the commitment of Christians in the Middle East to human solidarity and a dignified life for everyone in the region, rejecting violence and embracing service, love, and forgiveness as the foundation for a more just and humane society where abundant life can be realized.

WCAL as a theology of social realities

Historically, democratic processes are often related to questions of national sovereignty and national identity. In this, theology has often functioned as a “theology of social realities”. That is, the attempt to actively secure public and free dialogue while at the same time offering analyses and points of orientation in the current social, political, and religious climate. This common dialogue and the constitution of churches as a forum for such dialogue is at the heart of the matter for WCAL.

The principles of democratic processes – individual freedom, rule of law, national cohesion, and a well-functioning civil society – are all part of the horizon of the discussion in WCAL. In the Middle East, there is an additional layer of challenges when it comes to the relationship between religion, politics, and national identity, namely the politicization of the Jewish religion in the history of Israel since the independence in 1947 as well as the parallel emergence of political Islam in various forms since the 1920’s. These historical developments raise the core question for WCAL: What is the role of Christian theology in the constitution of religion, politics and national identity.

WCAL is a contextual theological document and thus becomes a local expression of the universal church in its reflection on its mission. More specifically, WCAL is contextual in the sense that it is a public

theology characterized by its ambition of contributing to the construction of society on the basis of values such as democracy, liberty, justice and social stability. As mentioned above, WCAL is not unique in this regard, and historically a number of Middle Eastern study centers have placed themselves in this vein of public theology. The Palestinian interreligious theological center *Al-Liqā' Center for Religious Studies and Heritage in the Holy Land* led by Fr. Rafiq Khory is another example. It was established in the late 1970's in the aftermath of the civil war in Lebanon, the Islamist revolution in Iran 1979, and in view of the increasing tension with Zionist Christianity in Israel. In the 1980's and 1990's, the center played an important role in its contribution to the national processes of transformation in Israel and Palestine. On the basis of eastern orthodox Christianity, catholic theology, and with inspiration from liberation theology, the center helped establish theological thinking on Palestinian identity in dialogue with Muslims and focused on the question of national identity. Other examples would be the ecumenical study center *Sabeel* led by Naim Stifan Ateek, an Anglican priest, and the Lutheran bishop and former LWF president Mounib Younan, who has been a leading figure in countering the use of biblical texts in support of Israeli settlers in occupied Palestinian territories.

Common for these theological analyses, including WCAL, is the question about faith, ethnicity, and society, and their aspirations in terms of formation of a secular civil society. Nation-building and the key to a nation – a well-functioning civil society – is another shared trait of these attempts. In turn, a well-functioning civil society is the basis for a living democracy.

This, however, also leads to one of the unsolved problems of WCAL: how to relate to Islam and Muslims. After the Hamas' terror attack and the following war in Gaza, this problem has become even more prominent. There are several mentions of Islam and Muslims in the document, but the main argument and vision of WCAL – a secular civil society, democracy, respect for human rights and nationhood – remains merely an idea if it is not possible to relate the vision to Islamic and Mosaic theological perspectives on the same themes. In an attempt to give Arab Christians an identity which does not separate them from Muslim co-citizens, the WCAL insists on a secular democratic national identity. However, if such an identity does not appeal to either Muslims or Jews, or if it is seen as in opposition to the Jewish settler-ideology as well as the Islamist rhetoric of an *ummah*, it is difficult to envision a meaningful dialogue.

WCAL as “subversive hope”

In his 2014 book *Idol and Grace*, Catholic liberation theologian Orlando Espin identifies at the core of God’s revelation the claim that God has begun to transform this world according to his will and that God is compassionate towards all, without limits or exceptions.² Espin terms this core of Christianity the “fiercely subversive hope” which has been handed down in Christian tradition. This core is the essence of Christianity. Espin argues that the processes employed for transmission of the subversive hope are not only theological but also social, cultural, historical, philosophical and political. Moreover, as Christians we should be aware of the possible dangers of trying to “doctrinify” the subversive nature of hope. To demonstrate his point, Espin points to Jesus’ own teaching as a radical interpreter of the Torah.

For us, the WCAL seems to represent such a “subversive hope”, that is, a hope that is tied to the essential questions of what it means to stand with the victims, the abused, the poor in lands and nations occupied by force and ruled by political elites without compassion. The stance to be committed to life – abundant life – is to understand God’s compassion to be the ultimate cause for subverting all systems of dominance over the poor and vulnerable, both political, cultural and religious. There are certainly unresolved problems in WCAL – first and foremost the relationship to Muslims – but there is also hope.

² Orlando O Espin, *Idol and Grace* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2024), 3.