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MANIFESTO ON ECOLOGICAL REFORMATION OF CHRISTIANITY - THE VOLOS CALL

Ernst Conradi, Ekaterini Tsalampouni, Dietrich Werner

Veni, Creator Spiritus! Come, Holy Spirit, renew your whole creation!

There have been numerous reform movements throughout the history of Christianity. Such reform movements are best understood as responses to a discernment of the movement of the Holy Spirit. This is expressed in the ancient prayer for the transformative work of God's Spirit: *Veni, Creator Spiritus!*

In different periods in history and in particular places such reform movements have been prompted by distinct challenges, concerns and needs. This is illustrated by the various 16th century reformations but also by the Benedictine and Franciscan reformations, alongside many others. The 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation which is expected to be celebrated with thousands of international guests as a world ecumenical event in 2017 is an occasion to think about what is demanded from *an "ecclesia semper reformanda"* in giving witness to what the triune God is doing in the world today.

To address this question requires ecumenical fellowship and dialogue as there are diverging views on the hand of God in human and evolutionary history. At the beginning of the 21st century, it is nevertheless clear that many Christian communities all over the world have discerned the need for an ecological reformation of each Christian tradition in every geographical context. This is expressed in the ecumenical prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, renew your whole creation!

The need for an ecological reformation of all Christian traditions is of course manifested in different ways in various parts of the world. The pain impulses associated with ecological destruction have been registered especially in those areas that lie on the periphery of current constellations of economic power. The call for an ecological reformation of Christianity has come with particular urgency from Christians in such areas (the Pacific, Africa, Asia, Latin-America) as they are more exposed and vulnerable. This call is echoed by churches which belong to (mainly protestant) countries in the global North which have contributed heavily to the exploitation of natural resources, industrial production and a style of consumption that causes environmental degradation.

It is vital that these calls be heard when churches meet for the Reformation Jubilee in 2017. An ecological reformation of Christianity is a matter of repentance, conversion and renewal for all Christian traditions. It necessarily has to be ecumenical in scope and has to extend throughout the whole inhabited world. The call for ecological reformation, therefore, comes as a gift to those countries in which the 16th century reformations have started and from where it has spread elsewhere. The call for an ecological reformation of Christianity has been expressed in statements by church leaders such as Patriarch

Bartholomew[7] and Pope Francis[8] and by ecumenical bodies such as the World Council of Churches and by regional fellowships of churches alike. It is indeed encouraging and illuminating to observe that processes pointing and contributing to an ecological reformation are already underway in each of the main branches of Christianity and in all corners of the globe 500 years after the Reformation.

What does such an ecological reformation of Christianity entail? It implies a twofold critique, namely both a deeper Christian critique of the root causes of ecological destruction and an ecological critique of forms of Christianity which have not recognised the ecological dimensions of the gospel. The latter critique comes from outside and inside Christian churches and is expressed by secular critics, representatives of other living faiths, church leaders, theologians and lay leaders alike.

Such an ecological reformation can only be authentic if it is based on an emerging vision of God's identity and character and a deeper discernment of God's work. This may be explained with different symbols in particular Christian traditions. At the core of this vision is the widely recognised insight that God's love extends to all God's creatures, that the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit is a message for the whole earth and that the life of the church is situated in God's encompassing mission. This vision allows for an integrated understanding of God's work of creation, salvation and the consummation of all things. Ancient liturgies, and especially the Eucharistic praxis of Eastern Orthodox tradition, demonstrate that nature elements are involved in the sanctifying acts of the Church not as

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[7] Bartholomew I. Ecumenical Patriarch, *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew I*, John Chryssavgis (ed.), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

[8] Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Laudato Si*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf.

instruments for the achievement of human success and progress but also as co-participants in the foretaste of this vision.

A reform movement often commences with highly particular actions, as is illustrated by the 95 statements that Martin Luther knocked to the door of the church in Wittenberg in which he addressed malpractices around indulgences. From the energies unleashed by such an event a reform movement typically spreads to address a wide range of related issues and soon becomes comprehensive in scope. This applies to many other contemporary reform movements addressing issues of gendered relationships, health, economic justice, peace and the integrity of creation. It therefore applies to an ecological reformation of Christianity as well.

Such an ecological reformation cannot be restricted to a recovery of a theology of creation or a call for responsible stewardship. It calls for reflection, discernment, prayer and a transformation of Christian practices that may be harmful to others, to all God's creatures. It also calls for a rereading of the canonical biblical texts, a critique of the environmental impact of specific Christian traditions and practices, a retrieval of historical insights, figures and practices, a reinvestigation of the content and significance of the Christian faith, a reconsideration of influential symbols, a renewal of Christian communities and a transformation of the ministries and missions of the church. The ecological reformation of Christianity therefore is comprehensive in its scope and needs to extend to Bible study, catechism, teaching, liturgies, hymns, Christian art, pastoral care, ministry and mission alike. Examples of "eco-congregations" or "green churches" have become widespread; numerous earthkeeping projects have originated from within a Christian context, while several institutions, para-church organisations and multi-faith organisations have been established to address a wide range of environmental concerns. These are best

understood as examples of a wider ecological reformation of Christianity. They function as dynamos for transformation by eliciting and channelling available energies to test and develop best practice.

Any reformation is situated in a polemical context. It seeks to transform the status quo and is therefore contested by those that wish to maintain current practices. At the same time a reform movement has to articulate its emerging vision and offer constructive proposals for transformation. Such proposals will have to best tested by others to see whether these are indeed fruitful ways to extend what is valuable and therefore treasured in particular traditions. It is therefore not surprising that an ecological reformation of Christianity has invited ongoing theological reflection. This is expressed an expanding corpus of popular and scholarly literature that is found in many particular Christian traditions, written in various languages and published in various contexts. Such literature naturally mirrors the ongoing ecological reformation, but also offers some internal critique and seeks to sustain and deepen particular reform movements.

A reformation cannot be organised or managed by any individual, institution or lobbying group alone, it the result of networking, mutual inspiration and learning. Any authentic reformation is best understood as a response to the discernment of the movement of God's Spirit. Such a response brings challenges that are often hard to bear for its witnesses, perhaps because it involves speaking truth to power. Such a reformation is therefore not always welcome, not even by its own proponents. This clearly applies to an ecological transformation of Christian traditions as well. Such powers may include various constellations of political and economic power and does not exclude ecclesial authorities. It is remarkable that prophetic concerns about environmental issues are often expressed by scientists, novelists and artists. Apocalyptic images about impending doom have become popular in the media. Yet such voices do

not yet discern the movement of the Holy Spirit. That requires analysis and mediation but also discipline and sacrifice. These are best sustained by receiving the gifts of the Spirit that comes along with that.

Such spiritual discernment will be meaningless if this does not lead to renewal and transformation. This requires collaboration with government and civil society since ecological concerns about the common good are by definition shared with others.

The UN conference on climate change in Paris in December 2015 (COP21) has provided an unprecedented point of rallying and networking between a growing number of institutions in civil society, including faith-based organizations (FBOs).These organisations provide a moral and spiritual grounding for the ecological transformation of society that is required.

The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 which was agreed by the UN in New York 2015 provides a binding commitment for a substantial transformation of the current development paradigm and refers to key issues that are widely discussed in Christian churches (SDG 7: affordable and clean energy; SDG 15: live on land; SDG 14: Life below water etc.). As almost never before churches from all denominational traditions worldwide are called to spell out their contributions towards the big five P's (people, planet, peace, prosperity, participation, partnership), as well as an ecological ethics of life which can provide moral and spiritual grounding and critical values for reaching the targets of the SDG Agenda - which are compulsory for each national government to address and essential for the survival of this planet.

We therefore call on all participants in the Reformation Jubilee 2017 and their representing churches

- To be open to listen to the cries of suffering creation at the peripheries as well as in the centres of our planet (Rom 8.20);

- To recommit to mutual learning and ecumenical partnerships for empowering a younger generation of leaders in the area of eco-theology, climate justice and food security and for promoting ecologically aware education for all in order to learn what it means "not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind"(Rom 12,2);
- To encourage an international network of green churches to serve as learning hubs for new live-styles which follow principles of fair trade, an economy of enough and reconciliation in the human family, so that "we offer every part of yourself to him (God) as an instrument of righteousness"(Rom 6,13)
- To spread and promote the celebration of a week for creation after 1st of September as a period of fasting, meditation and spiritual renewal concerning our human responsibility to care for God's creation (often expressed in terms of theology of stewardship, priesthood or earth-keeping based on Gen 2,15) according to the proposals made by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew;
- To allow for new and courageous forms of unity of all church traditions in joint service to all humankind and all of creation as the ecological dimension of the gospel is being recognised in each Christian tradition. As the letter to the Ephesians states:

> *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.[3] Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.[4] There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism;[6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph 4,2-6)*

Gathering at the Academy of Volos, Demetriades Diocese of Church of Greece, as church representatives from different traditions and all continents during the international conference on Eco-Theology, Climate Justice and Food Security (10-13 March 2016)[9], we are convinced that an ecological reformation of Christianity (in all its traditions) is possible, but can remain authentic only if it stays in the spirit and is expressed in the form of a humble prayer: *Veni, Creator Spiritus!* Come, Holy Spirit, renew your whole creation!

Participants of Volos Academy Consultation on Eco-Theology, Climate Justice and Food Security, March 2016

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[9] http://www.globethics.net/web/gtl/ecotheology