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## We all are guests on earth! : a global Christian vision for climate justice

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# WE ALL ARE GUESTS ON EARTH!

A Global Christian Vision for Climate Justice



Christoph Stueckelberger

**WE ALL ARE GUESTS ON EARTH!**  
A Global Christian Vision for Climate Justice



**Paul Wiegelmann Lectures on  
Environmental Studies: 1**

**WE ALL ARE GUESTS ON EARTH!**

A Global Christian Vision for Climate Justice

**Prof. Dr. Christoph Stueckelberger**

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**We Are All Guests on Earth!**  
**A Global Christian Vision for Climate Justice**

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## **Introduction**

Worldwide, we are confronted with air pollution causing serious health risks, devastating storms as a result of climate change, water pollution and dead rivers, mega-waste in megacities, deforestation and growing deserts, peak oil as a sign for limited non-renewable fossil energy sources and never seen disastrous floods. The list of such environmental catastrophes in all parts of the world is huge.

But also the list of decisive activities in favour of environmental protection is very impressive: global programs to mitigate global warming, huge technological and economic efforts for energy efficiency, reforestation, solar energy, waste management, reduction of air pollution, environmental education, sustainable investments, and celebrating God the Creator in worships.

India shows a most impressive development in economy, education, technology, culture and many other fields. The country with its exceptional cultural and religious history is becoming one of the leading global players among the world powers. But this increases also its responsibility to help solving global problems. India has become one of the big polluters, thus contributing to climate warming. The waste management is far from being solved. The energy efficiency has to be improved as in all countries; pollution, deforestation, and environmental damages caused by corruption have to be decisively addressed.

## **2** We All Are Guests on Earth!

What can Christian faith contribute to meet these manifold environmental challenges, especially the global climate change?

# Chapter 1

## Welcome as Guests on Earth! Eco-Theology, Eco-Spirituality, and Eco-Ethics

What is the position and task of human beings in the whole of creation? The answer to this basic anthropological question is the key to Christian and interreligious environmental ethics.

### 1.1. Major Concepts for Man's Role on Earth

Four major types of relationship between human and non-human beings are described in environmental ethics: (1) *Anthropo-centric Concept*: human being is the ethical reference point; (2) *Bio-centric Concept*: all life (non-human and human) is the ethical reference point; (3) *Patho-centric Concept*: the suffering of beings is the ethical reference point; and (4) *Theo-centric Concept*: the perspective and will of God (*theos*) is the ethical reference point.

In the history of humankind and in the different cultures, different anthropologies dominated and competed with each other. What is the position of a human being in the whole of creation? Some of the alternatives may be listed as follows: (1) *A king?* As an arbitrary dictator, free to treat nature as

property or as a good king to serve and conserve? (2) *A worm?* Is a human being not more than any other being? (3) *A steward?* Called to care for creation? (4) *A manager?* Managing the Earth in a technocratic way? (5) *A Killer?* Struggle for the survival of the fittest (Darwin)?

## 1.2. Welcome as Guests on Earth

My proposal for the anthropological foundation of environmental ethics is the image that human beings are guests on earth. Indeed, they are welcome as such! “I am a guest on earth, we all together are guests on earth” means that, as Indians, Asians and Europeans, as Americans and Africans, as rich and poor, as socialists and capitalists, as Hindu, Christians, Buddhists and Muslim, we all are guests on earth. The wonderful natural resources are not our personal possession. They do not belong to us, but they are the common good of humanity, given by the creator to us as His guests for careful use and for future generations. This anthropology is common to all Christian confessions. Pope Benedict XVI, in his latest Encyclical “*Caritas in Veritate*,” expresses it as follows: “Nature expresses a design of love and truth. It is prior to us and it has been given to us by God as the setting for our life.”<sup>1</sup> The same is said in many ecumenical statements of Churches, e.g., on climate justice.

“To be a guest on earth” is an anthropology which is deeply rooted in many religious traditions and many cultures. In the biblical books, it is linked to God the creator and human beings as his creation with a specific offer and

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<sup>1</sup> Encyclical Letter “*Caritas in veritate*” of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI, 2009, §48.

responsibility. “To be a guest” is a paradigm from the creation story up to Christology and Eschatology.

The message “Bring the earth under your control” (Gen 1:28) in the younger of the two biblical histories of creation, written in the Babylonian exile 2500 years ago, is well known and often misunderstood as an oppressive position of power of man over nature and is thus rejected. However, this “*dominium terrae*” is by no means an invitation to the unlimited exploitation of nature. On the contrary, it means that we have responsibility for our environment in the same way as a good king should feel responsible towards his people or as a good steward who takes care of the goods that he has been entrusted with. The older biblical history of creation shows God’s generosity of allowing humanity to live on earth like in a fertile garden but combines it with the command “to cultivate and to guard it”<sup>2</sup> and “to work on it and to take care of it”<sup>3</sup> (Gen 2:15). God’s invitation and limitation “to cultivate and to conserve” is the shortest and oldest definition of sustainability I found!

God’s message to the humankind – to be respectful to creation – is not only understood from the biblical creation stories. The position of the humans is defined by the eschatological goal of creation: At the end of time and already in these times, God invites to the great banquet. He offers the abundant creation to his guests and lets them partake in the completion of creation. The humankind can only respond to this promise and this offer in the most

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<sup>2</sup> English Bible, Good News Bible, Bible Society of India, Bangalore.

<sup>3</sup> English Bible, New International Version.

appropriate way by showing joy, praise, and thanks. At the same time, this offer represents the foundations of the ethical re-orientation: Because humanity has experienced God's promise it is possible to live on earth like a respectful guest. God himself is host. It is he who prepares the banquet (Is 25:6-8). The laid table is creation in perfection. And it is not up to the guest to choose his or her host, but the host invites his guests as his friends (Jn 15:16).

In the eschatological reconciliation, the mutual hospitality of all creatures becomes perfect: "Wolves will be the guests of sheep" (Is 11:6)! This means that to be God's guest and host of fellow-humans and fellow-creatures is a basic attitude including even the world of non-humans!

The eschatological orientation has to be closely linked to liberation story of the exodus: Guests and hospitality play an essential role in the biblical tradition as well as in many other cultures. In the Old Testament, the respect of foreigners and guests is based upon the memory of the people of Israel in Egypt. "My people went to live in Egypt as foreigners" (Is 52:4). Yet, "do not despise the Egyptians; you once lived in their land" (Deut 23:7; similar, Ex 22:21; Lev 19:34; Deut 24:18). After exodus from Egypt, the people of Israel experienced in the Babylonian exile for the second time what it meant to be foreigners. The attitude – that one's own life as well as the earth and its resources are not our property but only a loan – is closely connected to this (1 Chr 29:1). In ecological terms, psalm 24 is also significant: "The world and all that is in it belong to the Lord; the earth and all who live on it are his" (Ps 24:1). Thus, humans have no right of disposal, but a right of use

upon the resources of this earth. Liberation from slavery and oppression and living as a guest belong together. In biblical perspectives, *eco-theology and liberation theology* are two sides of the same coin.<sup>4</sup>

“I am a guest on earth for just a little while” (Ps 119:19) does not mean to long for the beyond while withdrawing from this world, but to enter the pilgrimage on earth in joyful expectation of God’s kingdom to come and in deep respect towards creation knowing that we cannot possess it. He who behaves like a true guest leaves the guesthouse behind in good order for the next guests that will arrive after him/her.

In the gospel books, hospitality plays an eminent role. In particular, in the gospel according to Luke, one can truly speak about a theology of being guests.

The table community with guests is the embodiment of hospitality and the anticipation of the eschatological reconciliation – again in particular in the gospel books and with Jesus. The Eucharistic community is an expression of God’s hospitality and, thus, the visible banquet community of the guests that have been invited by God himself (1 Cor 10:16-18); Mk 14:22). The most important feature of the guests that are partaking in the banquet community is the sharing. Thus, the Eucharist turns into the starting point of the worldwide sharing among guests including fellow-

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George Mathew Nalunnakkal, *Green Liberation: Towards an Integral Ecotheology*, New Delhi: ISPCK/NCCI, 1999; Leonardo Boff, *Zärtlichkeit und Kraft: Franz von Assisi mit den Augen der Armen gesehen*, Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1983.

beings and the environment. Christian eco-spirituality starts at the table of the Lord! It starts with God's invitation to all – independent from confession – to become his guest. Finally, the Judeo-Christian image of the humankind describes man to be God's guest and as such at the same time also the host of his fellow-beings and the world around him.

Everything that has been created is placed at the guest's disposal, although none of that can be possessed by the guest. Hence, it follows that things which are on loan are treated with care and respect and a sense of sustainability. Every intervention into the 'goods on loan' has to be done with greatest caution and only on consultation with the host, which results in a 'guest-politics' and a 'guest-economy'.

To be guest means to be protected by the host and feel secure with him. At the same time, it means to see the life span on this earth not as the ultimate but as the penultimate goal. The expectation of the coming kingdom of God thoroughly marks life in this world. The hope for another, eternal home leads to calmness and composure, overcoming greed, as it is no longer necessary to get hold of the fortunes of this world.

In the same way as God is not only host but also guest himself (and a foreigner! Jn 1:11; Mt 8:20), man is not only guest but commissioned by God to take over the tasks of a host. At least from the eschatological perspective not only all fellow-humans but also all fellow-creatures have to be considered as guests. Hence, from our ethics of being guests follows the respect of the value and dignity of all creatures. To be host, thus, also corresponds to the '*diakonos*' of the

New Testament, who serves the guests unselfishly for example at the banquet community. In management terms, it is called servant leadership and good, accountable stewardship. Being host leads to charitable service, to careful use of resources, to diaconal service for human and non-human beings. There is a close connection between the duties of the host towards his guests and the poor, in Hebrew the *anawim*, in India people like the Dalits and all those without power and rights, who may claim particular respect and protection.

From this starting point of being guest on earth, the double mission of human beings in the two biblical creation stories appears in a new light. “Bring the earth under your control” (Gen 1:28) means to behave even as a king like a guest! What should be brought under control in the dominium are not living creatures but the earth; consequently, it means the cultivation of the soil. Christian supports technology and science as far as they are means to cultivate, which means to feed people and improve life in dignity for all. The ‘*dominium terrae*’ is replaced by the ‘*servicium terrae*’, i.e., serving the earth.

This *Eco-Theology of Being Guest* can be summarized with the following key elements.

### **1.2.1. *Eco-Theology: God as Owner of the Guesthouse and Host***

- God the creator is the owner of the earth: “The world and all that is in it belong to the Lord; the earth (*oikumene*) and all who live on it are his” (Ps 24:1). God offers the Earth as his guesthouse. He himself is

the host.

- Human beings together with all non-human creatures (!) are no longer enemies on earth, but invited and welcomed as guests.
- God through Jesus Christ invites all people to be his guests and friends, to sit at his table and to build one community (humankind).

### **1.2.2. *Eco-Anthropology: Human Beings Are Invited Guests***

- The earth is the common guesthouse, given to all living beings in order to live with dignity.
- Guests are invited to enjoy the gifts in the guesthouse and to use them carefully.
- Guests are asked to respect the rules and obligations in the guesthouse.
- Guests should leave the guesthouse in a way that the next guests (future generations) can enjoy the same or similar gifts.
- The guests borrow (rent) the guesthouse, they are not the proprietors!
- One can only be guest in relation to a host or a hostess. Therefore, man cannot determine his being a guest out of himself, but it has been given to him by God's covenant with the people.

### **1.2.3. *Eco-Spirituality: Celebrating the Caring and Just God***

- Being grateful for the abundant life that God offers to all beings leads to a lifelong act of celebrating God for His justice and His care.
- Celebrating the beauty of creation as the image of the beauty of the triune God.
- Celebrating God's (eco-) justice in the midst of injustice, praising the Cosmic Christ as the ever-present healing, reconciling and caring energy which enables and empowers human beings to care for God's creation.
- "Conversion from callous tearing of whatever we want from the earth to a mutual partnership and sharing"<sup>5</sup> of its fruits.

### **1.2.4. *Eco-Ethics: Acting as Responsible Guests and 'Careholders'***

- The Earth is not the possession of individuals, communities, or nations. The earth is the common house of humankind ('eco' comes from the Greek word *oikos*, meaning 'house'). Human responsibility in this common house has the following three dimensions.

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<sup>5</sup> Koshy Punnackadu, Mathew, *Eco-Spirituality*, CSI Life, Magazine of the Church of South India, (9), 08, Aug 2010, 14-17 (14). The author is environmental scientist and Convener of the CSI Synod Ecological Concerns Committee.

- *Economy* (from *oikos* and *nomos*, meaning the rules in the household): responsible production of goods and services. ‘Guest-politics’ and ‘guest-economy’ are based on an attitude which uses everything as an entrusted loan and not as a possession.
- *Ecology* (from *oikos* and *logia*, meaning the study of the living in the household): responsible use of natural resources and a cohabitation of all beings in their ecosystems so that future guests can use them as well.
- *Ecumenism* (from *oikumene*, meaning the whole inhabited earth): responsible community of different religions and worldviews as interreligious community cares for creation.

All these three dimensions belong together and are *interdependent*. Economy can be sustainable only on a long term protection of the environment. The economy and the ecology will be sustainable only if people with different religious convictions learn to live together in mutual respect and peace, recognizing that all are invited as guests on earth with the same rights and obligations in this wonderful guesthouse called earth.

### **1.3. From Shareholder to ‘Careholder’**

Within the family of guests, there are different roles and tasks. A special responsibility<sup>6</sup> is entrusted with the manager

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<sup>6</sup> See more in Stückelberger, Christoph/ Mugambi, J.N.K (eds.): *Responsible Leadership. Global and Contextual Perspectives*, Globethics.net

who manages the guesthouse on behalf of the owner. In biblical terms, it is the good steward who is described as the good manager. Its clearest expression is found in Luke 12:42-48:

42 Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? 43 Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. 44 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 45 But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming’ and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, 46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful... 48 Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more.

The *oikonomos* is housekeeper who keeps the house in order. It is the one who is the administrator and manager who has to care for the economy of the household and for all people living and working in this community. It is the first servant. There are four characteristics in the text which distinguish the responsible and the irresponsible manager.

Firstly, the good manager recognizes that he is not the proprietor of the house or the shareholder of the company but responsible to maintain and develop it in the name of the owner. The bad manager behaves as if he is the owner and

sees the house, the earth and its resources or the company as his/her own property.

Secondly, the faithful steward cares for the people under his/her responsibility! He/she gives food, salary and social security at the proper time (v. 42). But the bad leader violates and exploits the people he should be responsible for (v. 45).

Thirdly, the good leader represents a solid work ethic. He/she works hard for the wellbeing of the collaborators and, therefore, serves as a good example. The irresponsible leader does not work, is corrupt, drunken (that means he is greedy and hooked on all kind of things). His exploitation and slavery are the expressions that he regards not only the household but also human beings as his personal property.

Finally, the wise servant acts in a responsible and accountable way at every moment of his/her life because he/she knows that the ‘master’ could come and control every time. Business ethics and response to God are fully integrated in the daily life. But the stupid manager believes that no control will happen, that he can win every court case by bribing the judges, and that it is enough to go to church and begin to pray just at the end of life in order to be saved.<sup>7</sup>

The story shows in a very simple and convincing way the meaning of responsibility: it means to respond to somebody

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<sup>7</sup> For responsible, corruption-free management of resources, see Christoph Stückelberger, *Corruption-Free Churches Are Possible: Experiences, Values, Solutions*, Globethics.net Series No. 3, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2010. Download for free from October 2010 from [www.globethics.net/web/guest/library](http://www.globethics.net/web/guest/library).

(the word ‘responsibility’ comes from ‘response’): the manager to the owner, the Christian to God. A bad leader wants to be autonomous, that means ‘independent’ from all responsibility towards others except oneself. And by that, as a drunken person, the manager loses control over himself/herself. He is controlled by his greed for mammon and power. The good steward is *theonomous*, which means that he gets his responsibility, respect, and dignity from his dependency on God. The more responsible he acts the more responsibilities he gets and can manage (v. 48).

This responsible behaviour is a vision for everybody, but especially the leaders. This model is convincing because it is not only a theory but a model practised by Jesus himself in his life as a ‘serving king’, offering his own life for the benefit and salvation of the whole community. He preached, healed, danced and laughed, constantly responding to the needs of his ‘clients’ as his ‘work ethics’. He served as a servant washing the feet of his disciples, he gave orientation and guidelines by his challenging parables, and he shared his food with many. He remained faithful to God whom he called father, even on the cross. The disciples of the resurrected Christ are invited to become such good stewards of God’s gifts.

Acting as a careholder includes non-violent caring for human and non-human beings. St. Paul’s vision of the *Cosmic Christ* (Col 1:15-20; 1 Cor 15:20-28; Eph 1:3-10) means that violence against nature leads to the “Wounded Cosmic Christ.”<sup>8</sup> Christians do not respect the Cosmic Christ

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Benny Nalkara, “Pauline Cosmic Christology and Indian Eco-

if they violate his body with environmental destruction.

The two models of the faithful steward and the thankful guest can also be summarized in the word ‘careholder’. The shareholder holds shares and, therefore, possesses a part of a company in order to make profit out of his invested money. The responsible shareholder, in addition, cares for the wellbeing of the company and its resources, including the workers. The responsible leader as a ‘careholder’ holds responsibility and cares for values, goods, and for people who are entrusted to him or her. Responsible behaviour and its virtues are first of all valid for all human beings. Leaders ‘only’ have a higher degree of responsibility to care than the ‘ordinary’ people. The stronger has more responsibilities than the weaker because he has more power, competences, and means to decide and to act.

The steward and ‘careholder’ can be characterized by six virtues.

1. *To care*: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Gen 2:15). The shareholder cultivates and conserves, transforms, and protects and finds the right balance between the two. To care for others as for oneself is a direct expression of the commandment to love the other as oneself. To care does not primarily mean charity, but to care for a life in dignity of all, to strengthen justice, and to develop technological skills and political

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Spirituality” in *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living*, ed. Saju Chackalackal, 253-270, Bengaluru: Vidyavanam Publications, 2009, 264-266. The author shows that the Pauline Christology of the Cosmic Christ is central to Christian eco-spirituality and ethics.

mechanisms for the wellbeing of the individuals as well as the community. To care includes being attentive, present, near to those for whom the leader has to care. The primary obligation is to care for food and water as the first human right and as the pre-condition for all other rights.

2. *To protect*: The steward is among others the watchman who recognizes coming dangers, who takes protecting measures in advance, who intervenes in order to avoid damage and who – if a problem or a catastrophe could not be avoided – helps to restore and to heal the wounds. The good leader has an obligation to protect. That is valid for the leader as an individual as for institutional leaders such as a governments or a multilateral institution like the UN.<sup>9</sup>
3. *To guide*: The steward is the pathfinder and shows the direction. He reminds the subordinate that altogether they are not owners and to respond in their behaviour to the owner's – the Creator's – expectations. His or her guidance is based on values, filled with knowledge and knowhow. She/he has the skill to think ahead and to be in planning and vision always a step ahead of the others.
4. *To order*: To guide means also to bring an order and structure into unclear situations and confusing structures, to restructure where necessary in order to strengthen the strategy, the community, the efficiency and sustainability

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<sup>9</sup> ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty*, Ottawa, Canada: ICISS, 2001.

of the work and the orientation of the people entrusted.

5. *To serve*: The responsible leader as steward sees himself or herself not as opposed to the subordinate, but as *primus inter pares*, as the first among equals, as the first servant. This anthropological unity and equality of the leader with his or her employees is fundamental even if the task and responsibilities are very different.
6. *To share*: The ‘careholder’-steward shares the entrusted natural, material, human, and spiritual resources with the subordinate according to needs and performance. Since the manager is not owner, s/he cares for a just distribution of goods and fair access to services.

#### **1.4. Caring for the Five Protecting ‘Skins’**

Human as well as non-human life is vulnerable and is threatened in manifold ways. Life needs protection. Five levels of ‘skin’ to protect human life can be distinguished. They correspond to five basic needs: (1) First ‘skin’: the biological skin of the body, (2) Second ‘skin’: the clothes as protection of the body, (3) Third ‘skin’: the housing as protection from weather changes, (4) Fourth ‘skin’: the community as protection of the individuals, and (5) Fifth ‘skin’: the atmosphere as the overall ‘coat’ around the globe enabling life on earth. To care for the fifth skin means to be responsible for climate change prevention, mitigation, and adaptation, which will be taken up later in the second chapter.

## Chapter 2

# Contextual and Global Environmental Ethics: Interreligious Perspectives

### 2.1. Interreligious Perspectives of Caring for the Earth

Caring for oneself, for other human beings, and for non-human life is deeply rooted in all world religions. Even though the theological frame may be very different, the ethical conclusions have much in common.

The *Christian-Jewish* view of being a guest on earth is not the only one which calls for caring and carefulness. The contrary is true. Most religions and philosophies include in one way or the other the notion of carefulness, but they do it in different ways and with remarkable differences in practical consequences.

In *Hinduism*, “There is a spiritual consciousness of the universal harmony and a sense of responsibility towards the wellbeing of all in the Indian psyche. Protection of environment, thus, becomes an ethical imperative.”<sup>1</sup> The *Bhagavad Gita* calls human beings for a “passionate concern to bring about the welfare of all beings” (12:4; 3:9-13). Ahimsa as the “art of Dharma” is non-violence and caring,

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<sup>1</sup> Nalkara, “Pauline Cosmic Christology and Indian Eco-Spirituality,” 266.

doing no harm to any living entity which is the way towards Brahman. But as in all religions, this way is difficult to go and many Hindus violate the “Earthly Body of God”<sup>2</sup> as many Christians do not respect the Cosmic Christ and violate his Body. “The Difficulty of Being Good”<sup>3</sup> is evident.

As it is in Hinduism, the wonderful concept of ahimsa (*carefulness*, mindfulness, non-violence) is a core value and attitude in Buddhist environmental ethics. *Karuna* (sympathy, empathy) with all creatures is the most important virtue in Buddhism, because it is the virtue of Buddha. Buddhists have always been strong in caring for creation.<sup>4</sup> But they often did it in an individualistic way, not taking into account the structural, economic and political reasons for environmental destruction.

In *Confucianism*, which is more a philosophy than a religion, the virtues of *respect*, *benevolence* (*Ren*) and *mutual benefit* (*Pingdeng Huli?*) are deeply rooted and influence the Chinese society. They offer the firm

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<sup>2</sup> Lance E. Nelson, *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> The Indian former manager and philosopher Gurcharan Das analyzes, in his bestseller, the famous Hindu Epic Mahabharata in order to find orientation for modern ethical business practices. Gurcharan Das, *The Difficulty of Being Good: On the Subtle Art of Dharma*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2009. See the discussion on Ahimsa in pages 249-255.

<sup>4</sup> Otto Bischofberger, “Mensch und Natur: Die Sicht der Religionen des Ostens” in Otto Bischofberger, Christoph Stückelberger, et al, *Umweltverantwortung aus religiöser Sicht*, 33-62, Freiburg/Zürich: Paulusverlag/Theologischer Verlag, 1988.

foundation for harmonious relations between human beings, in family, business, and nation, with fairness as reciprocity, with coexistence and respecting the middle way of harmony. This wonderful teaching has only to be enlarged from human relations to relations with the whole creation. If fairness, respect, and harmony become the fundamental values in the relation to soil, natural resources, air, forests, and water, then environmental ethics becomes a Confucian face.

The view of human beings being guests on earth is similar in Islamic faith as in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Allah as the owner of the earth and humankind as stewards, the critic of greed and the virtue of modesty are common to all three monotheistic religions.<sup>5</sup>

In all religions, *Eco-Feminism* is a growing perspective. The feminist thrust on care and household economy is part of it as the feminist emphasis of caring for the body.<sup>6</sup>

The problem of all world religions and of philosophies is that they often deny and neglect environmental concerns, blinded by the industrial and technical progress of the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibrahim Özdemir, "An Islamic Perspective on Environmental Ethics," 2007 [online]: [http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/An\\_Islamic\\_Perspective\\_of\\_Environmental\\_Ethics\\_469](http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/An_Islamic_Perspective_of_Environmental_Ethics_469).

<sup>6</sup> For example, see "Sacred Immanence: Reflections of Ecofeminism in Hindu Tantra" in *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India*, ed. Lance E. Nelson, 89-132, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998; Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity*, Turnbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1991; Naval Ammar, "Are Islamic Thinking and Ecofeminism Possible?" *Ocak* 3, 2010 [online]: <http://ecologyandislam.wordpress.com>.

and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They all must not deny their core message and values – be it respect, non-violence, justice, or carefulness; they all, however, have to enlarge these values from the human sphere to the whole creation.

As a sign of hope, all of them – not at all in the same speed, clarity, and decisiveness! – rediscovered and still have to rediscover the broader community of creatures which includes not only human beings, but the whole creation. Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Jain, and Confucian environmental ethics have been more systematically developed during the last thirty years. They all are needed and have to join hands in order to overcome the huge environmental challenges such as climate change, which threaten humanity and the earth as our common house.

## **2.2. Global and Contextual Perspectives**

Today's globalized and interdependent world needs common values for interaction and joint action. At the same time, it needs the respect for diversity as a gift, beauty and richness of this humanity. Environmental ethics has to be global and contextual. Therefore, contextual environmental ethics exists in almost all countries and all continents.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In addition to the works cited, for Africa see, for example, Samson K. Gitau, *The Environmental Crisis: A Challenge for African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2000; J.N.K. Mugambi and Vähäkangas, eds., *Christian Theology and Environmental Responsibility*, Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2001; Joseph O.Y. Mante, *Theological and Philosophical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, Accra 2004; Aidan G. Msafiri, *Towards a Credible Environmental Ethics for Africa: A Tanzanian Perspective*, Nairobi, 2007. For Latin America: Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and*

However, what is the relation between the two?<sup>8</sup> “*Global ethics* is an inclusive approach towards common binding values, guiding principles, personal attitudes, and common action across cultures, religions, political, and economic systems and ideologies. Global ethics is grounded in the ethical recognition of inalienable human dignity, freedom, decision, personal and social responsibility, and justice. Global ethics acknowledges the interdependence of all human and non-human beings and extends the basic moral attitudes of care and compassion to our world. Global ethics identifies trans-boundary problems and contributes to their solution.

Global ethics fosters public awareness of those fundamental values and principles. They are the foundation on which the universal consensus on human rights is built. Human rights are the most tangible and legally binding expression of this ethical vision. Global ethics fosters trust among human beings and strengthens caring and action for global

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*Liberation*, Minneapolis, 1999; René Krüger, et al, *Vida plena para toda la creación: Iglesia, globalización neoliberal y justicia económica*, Buenos Aires, 2006; For Asia: Purna Chandra Jena, *Masters or Stewards: A Theological Reflection on Ecology and Environment*, Delhi/Nagpur, 2003; Karel Philemon Erari, *Our Land, Our Life: The Relation of People and Land in Ecology: Irian Jaya as a Theological Problem (A Study in Eco-Theology in Connection with the Malanesian Perspective)*, Indonesia, 1997; David M. Kummer, *Deforestation in the Postwar Philippines*, Manila, 1992; For global collections: David Hallmann, ed., *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, Geneva/New York, 1994; King-Tak Ip, *Environmental Ethics: Intercultural Perspectives*, New York: Rodopi, 2009.

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The following discussion, mainly written by the author, is quoted from *Globethics.net Principles on Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions*, published by Globethics.net, Geneva, 2009. www.globethics.net.

environmental protection.

*Contextual ethics* takes seriously the identity of persons and institutions in their local, cultural, religious, economic, and political contexts. Global ethics needs to be local and contextual in order to have an impact on individual action and societal structures. On the other hand, contextual ethics becomes isolationist if it remains local and is not linked to global ethics.

Contextual ethics appreciates and respects diversity in its different forms as social, political, cultural, religious, and bio-diversity. There is an enormous richness in diversity. It may decrease vulnerability and be a source of sustainability.

Contextual ethics contributes to global ethics. Together they can lead to unity in diversity. All cultures and religions can contribute to global values. For example, the contribution of African values to global values includes that all of reality is a continuum, from the spiritual to the human, to fauna, flora, and the inanimate world. Therefore, according to this vision, injuring nature is unethical. This implies responsibilities towards non-human living beings and the inanimate universe as well as the continuum between generations that have gone before and that come after us.

Global and contextual ethics are two poles which challenge each other and inseparably belong together. Global and contextual ethics have to consider power structures. Global ethics can be abused for domination over other cultures, religions, and values. Contextual ethics can be abused to defend traditional privileges or power. On global as well as on local level, 'power over others' tends to be oppressive,

‘power with and for others’ tends to be empowering and nurturing. Power as ‘power from’ (e.g., power from God, from the people through election) can be abused to justify oppressive structures and practices. It can also be used responsibly as an empowering power, serving the needy and, thus, responding to the origin of power.

## Chapter 3

### Climate Justice

#### 3.1. Painful Ethical Questions

Who dies first as a result of climate change? This question is no more theoretical as it seemed to be twenty years ago. It is a reality of life and death every day for millions of victims of droughts or storms. It is a painful question for thousands of decision makers about social priorities to mitigate climate change with limited resources. Since death as a result of climate warming is not a natural disaster, but a human-made catastrophe – in this aspect, the world community has reached a common view – the question becomes even more painful: Not “Who dies first?” as a fate, but “Whom do we sacrifice first?” as a result of human activity or non-activity: The population of the small islands in the Pacific, whose land disappears and where the president of the Maldives already looks for another land for his people? The children in the slums of the megacities suffering from hunger because of high food prices? The older people in industrialized countries, infected by new kinds of diseases due to climate warming? The victims of storms or broken dams?

Humanity on this globe became one global village. It is a rather romantic description of life on earth. More drastic is the image that humanity lives on the same boat and starts to

push weaker participants over the railing of the boat in the sea. This picture related to global warming is probably more adequate. Human beings with some sense of morality – as we all claim to be – do not want that other human beings die, but it nevertheless happens every day. The boat is not full and has enough space for other human beings. But where are the resources to feed them, to cure them, to protect them? Who has the will and the power to decide the fair distribution of existing resources or about the development of new natural, financial, technical, structural, and spiritual resources to deal with climate change and minimize the number of victims? Who has to pay and how much should be paid for the damages caused by climate warming? Is the polluters' pay principle appropriate?

The questions around climate justice are similar to those in health policy: How much should be invested in HIV-AIDS medicine? What shall be the proportions: More in healing or in prevention? Why so much in this disease and so little in fighting malaria? Is it just and justified to spend 1000 Swiss Francs per day for an eighty-five year old patient in a hospital in Switzerland, while for the same amount 100 children in Africa could be prevented from eye diseases? Does the encouraging increase of global funds against HIV-AIDS from one to 10 billion US dollars per year within the last ten years, show the direction we have to go with climate related funds? These are but painful questions related to health, basic needs, emergencies as well as climate change.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>ACT Alliance, the international emergency organization of Churches, emphasized the effects of climate change on emergencies and development. See, <http://www.actalliance.org>.

### 3.2. From Climate Change to Climate Justice

The questions that we have posed above show that the central question is no more, *if* climate change will happen and if it is a human-made disaster, what possible effects on health, environment, migration, politics, economy, and culture will come up. The answers became quite clear after over twenty years of studies, experiences, and conferences (even if further studies especially to foresee coming disasters will be welcome and necessary). Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General, during the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Panel on Climate Change IPCC on 31 August 2008, emphasized that climate change is a great threat for the UN Millennium Development Goals.<sup>2</sup> *The basic ethical question today is how to invest and distribute limited resources for the threefold duty of prevention, mitigation, and adaptation related to climate change in order to minimize the number of victims.* For, climate change becomes a question of global climate justice.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.3. Basic Value: Justice

The raised questions “Who dies first?” and “Who pays how much?” are basically questions about justice. Of course, other values such as responsibility and solidarity play an important role in ethical reflections about climate change. In this contribution on Climate Justice, I, however, concentrate

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<sup>2</sup> More information on the website of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change IPCC [online]: <http://www.ipcc.ch>.

<sup>3</sup> See also *Wege aus der Klima und Entwicklungskrise? Welt-Sichten*, Dossier 10/2008, ed. Brot für Alle / Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst, download: [http://www.diakonie-katastrophenhilfe.de/downloads/ws\\_Dossier\\_10-2008\\_web2.pdf](http://www.diakonie-katastrophenhilfe.de/downloads/ws_Dossier_10-2008_web2.pdf).

on the value justice/equity.<sup>4</sup>

Justice as the just and fair distribution of chances, burdens, and responsibilities is a key value in all ethical systems and all societies throughout history. But its interpretation and weight compared to other values differ a lot. Let us mention a variety of *dimensions of justice* in its meaning for climate justice. *Climate Justice means just and fair instruments, decisions, actions, burden sharing, and accountability for the prevention, mitigation, and adaptation related to climate change.*

### **3.3.1. Capability-Related Justice**

Capability-related justice means that every person and institution has the duty to contribute towards solving problems on the basis of their capability. That is, in relation to climate justice, everybody can and should contribute according to his/her physical, economical, political, intellectual, and spiritual capabilities. An economically strong person, institution, company, or state has to contribute more than an economically weak person, institution, company, or state to resolve the climate challenges.

### **3.3.2. Performance-Related Justice**

Performance-related justice means that every person or institution involved in human activities (such as the

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Climate Justice became worldwide the major ethical term in preparing for the Copenhagen Conference in 2009. See Mascia, Matteo/Mariani, Lucia (eds.), *Ethics and Climate Change. Scenarios for Justice and Sustainability*, Padova: Fondazione Lanza, 2010.

production, trade, sale or disposal of a product or service) must be given his/its due (e.g., salary) on the basis of performance. That is, related to climate justice, an activity which reduces greenhouse gas emissions is a good performance and should be rewarded respectively.

### **3.3.3. Needs-Related Justice**

Needs-related justice means that basic human needs and rights (i.e., the subsistence minimum, a life in dignity, and the right to food and water) should be taken into consideration for every person and institution. That is, related to climate justice, every person has the right to survive and to be supported in managing adaptation to climate change independent of his/her capability and performance.

### **3.3.4. Distributive Justice**

Distributive justice ensures that access to resources, such as goods and services, is distributed fairly, taking into account the balance of capability, performance, and needs. That is, related to climate justice, financial or other resources that decrease negative effects of climate warming on human life should be distributed first according to needs, but also taking into account performance and capabilities so that the overall disparity between people becomes smaller and not larger.

### **3.3.5. Justice as Equal Treatment**

Justice as equal treatment means that all human beings have the same human rights and the right to equal treatment independent of capabilities, performance, needs, origin, and characteristics (such as gender, colour, race, religion). That is, related to climate justice, measures related to prevention,

mitigation, and adaptation of climate have to respect equal treatment of all people affected.

### **3.3.6. Intergenerational Justice**

Intergenerational justice means a sustainable use and a fair distribution of resources, as well as a reduction in and a fair distribution of ecological burdens among generations living today and future generations. That is, related to climate justice, decisions have to respect the needs for a life in dignity of future generations which have the same right of equal treatment as generations living today.

### **3.3.7. Participatory Justice**

Participatory justice means the fair and appropriate participation in decision-making of all those affected by a problem and the ensuing decisions. That is, related to climate justice, decisions on climate related policies should be taken by democratic participation of the population and its representatives on the different levels, from local to global.

### **3.3.8. Procedural Justice**

Procedural justice means calculable, constitutionally (publicly and privately) regulated, transparent, corruption-free and, thus, fair procedures in all interactions. That is, related to climate justice, the decisions related to climate warming and their implementation (such as access to financial resources, climate related taxes or incentives, media information) have to follow the mentioned criteria of procedural justice.

### **3.3.9. Functional Justice**

Functional justice means a fair and optimal relation among needs of persons and structural necessities of institutions, processes, and resources. It is a question of functional justice, where, when, and to whom to allocate how much and which kind of resources. That is, related to climate justice, functional and organisational aspects of allocation and distribution of limited resources are keys for a fair solution of climate challenges.

### **3.3.10. Punitive Justice**

Punitive Justice means the punishment of actions that violate justice. The goal is retaliation, deterrence, or overcoming of existing injustice. That is, related to climate justice, wherever climate justice is violated – and this violation is ethically as severe as other injustices – measures of punitive justice have to be taken into account as for other injustices.

### **3.3.11. Transitional Justice**

Transitional justice means a provisional justice in transforming societies where ordinary or regular institutions and procedures may be absent or in reconstruction (e.g., in post-war situations or after a revolutionary change of the structures of a society). That is, related to climate justice, in exceptional situations such as after emergencies, accelerated procedures for decisions and aid and exceptional instruments such as amnesty (which is not impunity) may be required and ethically justified.

### **3.3.12. Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice means a common solution of the perpetrator/s and the victim/s in order to restore justice from

occurred injustice by compensation, reparation, and/or reconciliation. That is, related to climate justice, climate injustice takes place daily because those who suffer most from the negative effects of climate change are not those who cause it. Decisive and courageous measures of the polluters, especially the industrialised countries, would be measures of restorative justice.

### **3.3.13. Transformative Justice**

Transformative justice means a process of transformation and renewal of reality towards justice, especially to overcome situations of injustice. It is a creative and ongoing process which goes beyond punitive or restorative justice. That is, climate justice is not a single decision or act, but an ongoing process which leads to a fundamental transformation of societies in their relations, use of natural resources, distribution of goods and services, and sustainable policies. Climate justice is not the result of one or the other isolated action but a holistic process of transformation.

### **3.3.14. On Time Justice**

‘On Time’ justice means that justice is bound to the right time of decision and action (in German: *zeitgerechte Entscheide*, *Zeit-Gerechtigkeit*, in Greek: *kairos*, meaning “the right moment”). If a measure is taken too late and the patient or victim dies, injustice has happened and, then, it is difficult to restore justice. This means that, in relation to climate justice, in order to prevent and mitigate further climate victims, measures have to be taken on time. The fast climate warming needs steps on time: it implies the

necessity to act *now*. The time factor is one of the most important to implement climate justice.

Some of these fourteen aspects of climate justice are in tension to others and it is difficult to implement all of them at the same time. The goal of the list is to be aware that climate justice is not an empty or arbitrary new slogan, but a fundamental value with concrete and challenging content.

### **3.4. Some Ethical Guidelines for Climate Justice**

How can these aspects of climate justice help to find ethical guidelines for the crucial, above mentioned question, “*How to invest and distribute limited resources for the threefold duty of prevention, mitigation, and adaptation related to climate change in order to minimize the number of victims?*”

First of all, guidelines can only indicate a general direction. For concrete decisions, the respective situation has to be analyzed and the guidelines have to be interpreted and adapted according to the concrete situation. In many situations, conflicts between values exist and need a prioritization, which can ethically be solved by preferential rules (if case A, then priority X, if case B, then priority Y, etc.). The following guidelines should help us to prioritize and to solve conflicts between different values. Such conflicts are the criteria for benefit sharing, burden sharing, power sharing, or space sharing.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Christoph Stückelberger, *Umwelt und Entwicklung: Eine sozialetische Orientierung*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1997, 30-33 (case study on the UNCED climate convention).

### **3.4.1. Volume of Resources**

Before looking for preferential rules for the operation of limited resources for climate justice, the first effort must be to increase the overall amount of resources available. Resources available to solve a problem reflect the priority given to the problem and the ethical values behind this prioritization. Since climate change affects the whole humankind, including future generations and non-human beings, high priority has to be given to this challenge. The volume of resources is composed of financial resources from governments, private donations, profitable business activities, but also non-financial resources such as human, organizational, intellectual, and religious resources. In order to substantially increase financial resources, a global climate fund, as proposed by the Swiss Government and others, is one important instrument. The taxation of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduces the emission and generates funds for mitigation and adaptation.

### **3.4.2. Prevention**

Prevention aims at avoiding climate victims by early actions. Prevention respects the goal of minimizing the number of victims and supports intergenerational justice, i.e., to avoid future victims. It has – like mitigation – ethically speaking, a higher priority than adaptation because it avoids instead of curing victims or minimizing its number. The measures are more efficient because the costs are lower than for adaptation.

### **3.4.3. Mitigation**

Mitigation aims at reducing already existing negative effects and at slowing down the development of such effects and the number of victims of climate change. There is no doubt that mitigation becomes more and more important since climate change already happens.

### **3.4.4. Adaptation**

Adaptation aims at accepting new climate conditions and adapt the own living place (including eventual need to emigrate or accept immigration), lifestyle, production, technologies, spiritual roots, nonviolent ways of conflict management, etc.). Justice related to capability, performance, and needs will be re-interpreted: Capability will more and more have to include the capability to adapt to the new challenges. The capability to adapt will be rated as a better performance. The needs will include as of now the basic human needs, but will in addition include the need of adaptability.

### **3.4.5. Interlinked Instruments**

Instruments for prevention, mitigation, and adaption are often *interlinked*. To plant trees, to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by reducing fossil energy consumption, etc., are preventive measures and help at the same time for mitigation and adaption. The danger is that the international community invests more and more in curative measures such as emergency aid and has less and less resources for preventive measures such as long-term developmental cooperation and technological innovation in the service of climate prevention.

### **3.4.6. The Polluters-Pay-Principle**

The Polluters-Pay-Principle means that the polluter has to pay the costs of the damage caused by his behaviour or action. The principle is broadly accepted in environmental ethics and it is put into practice in many countries in specific areas such as waste management, but in climate responsibilities it is not yet implemented, for the obvious reason that the polluters who emit CO<sub>2</sub> and other climate relevant emissions, fear heavy financial burdens. The (climate related) taxes on fossil energy have to be multiplied if the principle is taken seriously.

### **3.4.7. The Capability-to-Contribute-Principle**

The Capability-to-Contribute-Principle means that responsibility is not only related to the causer of pollution but also to the economic and structural capability to contribute to a solution. This capability includes not only financial payments, but also the contribution by scientific research, structural and political support, spiritual orientation and encouragement, etc. Responsibility is not only related to direct causes of one's action, but also one's capability to solve a problem. A medical doctor in an airplane is obliged and responsible to help a patient independent of his/her relationship to him/her.**3.4.8.**

## **Responsibility and Capability Index**

The Responsibility and Capability Index (RCI)<sup>6</sup> is a very helpful measuring instrument, which corresponds to the Polluters-Pay-Principle as well as the Capability-to-Contribute-Principle. The RCI combines the cumulated CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of a country and its purchasing power parity and the distribution of wealth. The industrialized countries, therefore, have the biggest share to pay, but developing and transition countries with purchasing power and wealthy elite are called to contribute accordingly. This country index shows a way of climate burden sharing. It is an ethically serious effort to make climate justice measurable and politically operational.

### **3.4.9. Positive and Negative Sanctions**

Justice, in general, as well as climate justice, in particular, can be strengthened by positive sanctions (such as incentives, repayments, awards, facilitated access to services, etc.) and negative sanctions (taxes and other burdens, punitive measures, court). Positive sanctions are

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<sup>6</sup> It is developed as part of the Greenhouse Development Rights (GDR), mainly developed in Great Britain by Development Agencies such as Christian Aid, supported by others like Bread for all/Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund in Switzerland. See [www.ecoequity.org/GDRs](http://www.ecoequity.org/GDRs).

ethically preferable, because they encourage the right behaviour. But negative sanctions to establish punitive justice are often also necessary, especially to change the behaviour of those “black sheep” who do not respond to positive sanctions. Both mechanisms presuppose that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are seen as a severe, unethical misbehaviour.

### **3.4.10. Efficiency and Transparency**

Efficiency and transparency are key factors of good stewardship using limited resources. The efficient use of resources (energy, capital, organizational structures, intellectual creativity, etc.) allows reducing costs, helping more people and saving more lives. It is an expression of responsibility and sustainability for future generations. Transparency supports the efficient use of limited resources by reducing corruption, abuse, and wrong investments. Transparency and efficiency are important aspects of procedural justice.

### **3.4.11. Market-Related Instruments**

The international free market mechanism substantially contributes to general economic growth and to global interaction and peace. Programs like “Financing for Climate: Innovative Solutions and New Markets”<sup>7</sup> try to win the private sector to take climate change as a business opportunity. Without private investments, climate-related funding will never be enough. But market-related instruments alone could not and cannot solve three such

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<sup>7</sup>

It is the title of a Conference of the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs of the Swiss Government, the International Finance Corporation IFC and Swiss Re, 11-12 September 2008, held in Zurich.

major problems, making them even more severe: poverty eradication, fair distribution, and climate stabilization. Climate change today can be seen as the biggest market failure in human history.<sup>8</sup> Can the market then take a chance to solve it? From an ethical point of view, the answer can be found in the criteria for climate justice: if and wherever the market mechanism strengthens the different above mentioned forms of climate justice, it has to be supported. If and wherever it weakens or violates the different forms of climate justice, the free market has to be replaced or accompanied by binding corrective instruments such as social and environmental laws regulating the markets. Many encouraging examples show that companies gain profit and reputation from activities to reduce climate relevant emissions.<sup>9</sup> In this ethical perspective, the trading of CO<sub>2</sub> certificates is one specific form of positive and negative sanctions, based on the market mechanism. As long as it really contributes to worldwide CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and climate justice, it is ethically positive. But if it is abused to circumvent legal restrictions in a country, to avoid reorientation of activities towards climate justice and only to get moral “purification” and indulgence, it has ethically to be refused.

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<sup>8</sup> This is the view of the Stern Report, “Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change,” HM Treasury, UK 2006. [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent\\_reviews](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews).

<sup>9</sup> Swiss Re, *Pioneering Climate Solutions*, Zurich: Swiss Re, 2008.

### **3.4.12. Care for the Weakest**

“Solidarity with the Victims of Climate Change” was the programmatic title of an important statement of the World Council of Churches in 2002.<sup>10</sup> To care for the most vulnerable groups of people in cases of emergency corresponds to the human ethos in many cultures and especially in the Judeo-Christian value system. “The option for the poor” as formulated in the liberation theology is an expression of it. To care for the victims and the weakest among them offers a guideline for decision making also related to climate justice. But, in concrete, it opens, at the same time, a lot of questions: Who are the victims? Who are the weakest among them? The children, women on Fiji Island who lose their agricultural land or the elderly people in a suburb of Paris dying from heat? Moreover, does justice as equal treatment not require that all people in danger get the same treatment? Since there are many more people who need support for mitigation and adaptation than actual resources are available, what are the additional selection criteria: political preferences and calculations which, in fact, are often the case? Or, economic conditionality? Or, where there is the greatest chance, empowerment of weak groups of people leads to efficient solutions and use of scarce means?

The first step is to honestly recognize that support is often not given to the weakest even if one accepts it as an ethical criterion. A second step is to look for preferential rules in case that some of the above mentioned aspects of justice

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[www.oikoumene.org](http://www.oikoumene.org).

compete with each other. It may sound provocative: To give priority to the weakest may meet the needs-related justice, but is not in each case the most ethical decision because it may not recognize other aspects of justice. In some cases, it may save more lives if priority is given to people with an efficient, well performing way to use the limited resources and, therefore, can then support others to survive. Hence, *an ethical preferential rule* may say: In general, priority is given to the weakest. In case where somebody or a group of people who do not belong to the weakest, but to those who better perform and are better capable using limited resources to save more people, priority may be given to them. The justification of this preferential rule is the number of lives to be finally saved.

### **3.4.13. Institutionalized Solidarity**

Solidarity needs voluntary care and charity activities. Solidarity has at the same time to be implemented by binding institutionalized instruments. New forms of climate related insurances are forms of institutionalized solidarity. Drought or flood insurances for small farmers in poor countries, similar to and combined with microcredit, provide an example.<sup>11</sup>

### **3.4.14. Urgent Legislation**

The speed of climate change shows that binding measures for prevention, mitigation, and adaptation have to be taken much faster than in the last twenty years. The reasons for the

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<sup>11</sup>

See the recommendations of the Round Table on “Are the Right Risks Insured?” at the Global Humanitarian Forum Geneva, 24 June 2008, [online]: [www.ghf-ge.org](http://www.ghf-ge.org).

too slow process in the past have been the lack of political will, but also slow democratic decision making processes. In Switzerland, the parliament seeks since more than ten years a compromise for a CO<sub>2</sub>-legislation. On-Time-Justice is crucial in order to reduce the number of victims. Urgency legislation by governments on CO<sub>2</sub>-reduction measures may be necessary and ethically justified even if it can limit the participatory justice. In emergency situations, the rights to food, water, and survival have priority over the right to participation in decision making (and participating in avoiding timely decisions).

### **3.5. Threats or Opportunities?**

An advertisement of Allianz Insurance reads: “Climate Change is a business (a) threat, (b) opportunity.” The private sector starts to speak about climate change not only as a threat, but also as an opportunity, based on human experiences that a crisis can also lead to renewal. It can motivate people, institutions, and companies to do something to solve or at least reduce the problem. Companies interpret opportunities as business opportunities for new products and services. The global “Carbon Disclosure Project” (CDP), a network of 315 institutional investors representing 41,000 Billion US dollars of assets, looks for climate related risks and chances of companies they invest in. This project is very important because it again uses economic mechanisms to redirect investments and activities in a climate-friendly direction. 77% of the 50 large Swiss companies, involved in the Survey, see climate change as a risk for their business (due to new regulations, reputation risks, etc.), 72% also as an opportunity for new products and services of the company,

for comparative advantages in the market and for a way of differentiating themselves.<sup>12</sup> A global news service, specialized on climate change information for business opportunities, has begun operation in 2008.<sup>13</sup> The limitation of this view is that it sees opportunities only from the perspectives of companies. But it is worth to reflect how climate change can be an opportunity for other sectors of society and the humankind as a whole. I propose at least five more responses in addition to the business opportunities:

1. Climate change shows, as never in the past, how much all human beings depend on each other. It is more than the global village metaphor; it is the concrete experience of global *interdependence* and interconnectedness which is an opportunity for increased *solidarity* and mutual responsibility. The ethical golden rule (do to others what you want them to do for you) becomes even more evident.
2. Climate change shows that isolated actions are not enough, but that multilateral coordinating *global structures* and mechanisms are needed to solve the problem. Unilateral, bilateral or autonomous actions alone cannot bring mitigation and adaptation.

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<sup>12</sup> Carbon Disclosure Project 2007. Erste Umfrage in der Schweiz unter 50 Unternehmen des SMI Expanded, hg. Von Pictet and Ethos Foundation, Geneva 2007, 13, 49-51.

<sup>13</sup> [www.climatechangecorp.com](http://www.climatechangecorp.com). To order the newsletter: [newsletters@climatechangecorp.com](mailto:newsletters@climatechangecorp.com).

3. A *new lifestyle and society*<sup>14</sup> which is not based on fossil energy and carbon emission is possible. It needs a lot of adaptation but opens new opportunities for new lifestyles. To leave existing lifestyles and look for new ones is an inner journey which needs processes of departure, mourning, and re-orientation as psychological and spiritual processes.
4. The crisis of climate change is a chance for increased *inter-religious cooperation*. Not only all sectors of societies, but also all religions are challenged. They have to find answers to burning spiritual questions related to climate change and to find ways of intensified cooperation in common actions and of raising awareness.
5. Climate change may hopefully be taken as opportunity for *deepening and renewing faith*, giving space for mourning and power for hope, expressed in new and renewed confessions of faith.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Schweizerischer Evangelischer Kirchenbund (2008): *Energieethik*, SEK Position 10, Bern.

<sup>15</sup> Churches formulated confessions related to globalization and economic injustice, e.g., the World Alliance of Reformed Churches with the "Accra Confession" 2004. Others ask, if Climate change will be part of new confessions: "*Gehört auch der Klimawandel in ein neues Bekenntnis?*" *Reformierte Presse* Nr. 30/31 25. Juli 008, 6-7.

## Chapter 4

### Is It Too Late or Is There Hope?

#### 4.1. God's Offer and Promise of the Alliance

The huge challenges of climate change and the disastrous prognoses can lead to resignation: “It is too late!” Believers struggle with God’s promise to Noah that “never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gen 9:11). More and more theological reflections are made at different levels. “Signs of Peril, Test of Faith” was the subtitle of a study paper on climate change of the World Council of Churches<sup>1</sup> in 1994. Regional responses, e.g., from Africa<sup>2</sup> or Asia<sup>3</sup> and global collection of contextual responses as in a new process 2008 of the Lutheran World Federation are done.<sup>4</sup> Some of the crucial religious questions on climate change are:

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<sup>1</sup> “Accelerated Climate Change: Sign of Peril, Test of Faith,” approved by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, January 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, *The Church and Climate Change* (Manuscript, South Africa); Mugambi, Jesse 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Calos B. Mendoza, ed., *Search for Better Tomorrow: A Consultation on Earth Is Our Home – A Religious Response to Climate Change in Asia*, Bangalore, July 2000.

<sup>4</sup> “What Do You See, Feel, Believe in the Face of Climate Change? An LWF Survey (2008),” in *God Creation and Climate Change: Spiritual and*

- Is it too late or is there hope?
- How is God's promise, not to destroy the earth a second time, to be understood?
- And God's providence to save lives?
- Where is God, or the Cosmic Christ (Col 3)? Where is God's spirit in climate change? What is God's action?
- What is the role of human re-action to God's action? Can we and must we as human beings save the world?
- Who is guilty and how do we deal with it? What is the meaning of forgiveness and reconciliation in this context?
- How and who bears responsibility?

These questions seem to be very heavy. They rather seem to discourage than to empower and encourage. The answers are important for the motivation or de-motivation of actions in favour of climate stabilization. Three types of answers are ethically not allowed: Cynicism and fatalism violates the dignity of victims and does not take them seriously in their suffering. Fundamentalism tries to find fixed answers in the past without adapting them to the complex reality of today's climate change. But differentiated answers from a Christian perspective can empower and encourage for decisive action.

We first have to recognize that the fast Climate Change is, in fact, a huge and global challenge never seen in history of the humankind. But on an individual level, catastrophes such as wars, droughts, floods, accidents, or sickness have always

been experiences of total disaster which provoked the same questions of faith. The questions that we have posed above may be answered in the following fashion.

Indeed, it is very late, but not too late!<sup>5</sup> Analyzing the figures, the pessimists are right: it is too late and temperature will rise more than the two grades which are seen as limit to avoid great catastrophes. Seeing the actions undertaken the optimists are right: with all efforts we will make it. But faith has a different perspective: hope is neither orientated at a pessimistic nor at an optimistic interpretation of what we see, but it is oriented at what is promised and not seen. I, therefore, call myself a pessimist full of hope: a pessimist, when I look at the world; full of hope, when I look at God's promise.

God promised to put all his/her energy in supporting a life in dignity on earth for all beings, including human and non-human beings. But he/she did not promise a certain lifestyle. Adaptation is part of life. God promises to accompany us in this journey but he/she never promised to maintain the world and nature in its original form. Creation is an ongoing process of transformation. Humankind is called to continue this journey of nature and culture and constant change, always seeking orientation in the constant dialogue with God. There was not one alliance with Noah forever. God's history with humankind shows that the alliance was broken again and again by human beings and again and again

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<sup>5</sup>

Wolfgang Huber, *Es ist nicht zu spät für eine Antwort auf den Klimawandel: Ein Appell des Ratsvorsitzenden der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland*, Manuscript, Berlin 2007.

renewed by God: with Abraham (Gen 17:2), with Jeremiah (Jer 31:31) until the new covenant in Jesus Christ (Mt 26:28). Therefore, the promise with the covenant was not given once for all but has to be renewed with each person and each generation looking for this promise in faith and asking God for this covenant. The renewal of the promise is the result of the relationship between God and the believers. The content of God's promise is that he/she is willing to renew the covenant again and again – if we are ready to do it. That is the source of Christian hope. Human engagement for mitigation and adaptation to climate change is the test of this hope.<sup>6</sup>

God's promise, just as his action, is empty without this relationship to humankind. God – because he/she is love – cannot and does not want to do it without the support of human beings and all living creatures. God incarnated in this world in a way that he/she has bound himself/herself to this creation and human beings.

God's providence means that he/she cares for and suffers with all living beings. But it is not an automatic or “natural” mechanism or guarantee of saving lives. Providence as creation and history is an ongoing, living process. God is the living “motor,” “driver,” “communicator,” and “partner” of human beings in it. He/she, in its Trinitarian presence, acts

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<sup>6</sup> See the same view as also expressed by the German Catholic Bishops Conference in its statement on climate justice: Kommission für gesellschaftliche und soziale Fragen, Die deutschen Bischöfe, “Der Klimawandel: Brennpunkt globaler, intergenerationeller und ökologischer Gerechtigkeit. Ein Expertentext zur Herausforderung des globalen Klimawandels,” *Kommission Weltkirche*, No. 29 (2006), 70.

as constant creator, redeemer, and renewer.

We asked “Whom do we sacrifice first?” It is not a cynical question, but unfortunately a daily reality. Christian faith loudly protests against letting people die and “sacrifice” them. Human beings from a faith perspective are called to do all they can to avoid it. The reason lies in the very heart of Christian faith: Jesus Christ resisted all evil and answered it with love to a point where he gave his life as a sacrifice “once for all”. No human life has to be and shall be sacrificed after this last sacrifice of Jesus Christ!

The prophets in the Old and New Testaments are a rich source to learn how to deal drastic individual and collective threats at a given time. They – especially the prophets of doom – interpret the “signs of the time” (such as war, natural or human made disasters, collapses of human power structures) as an expression that human beings did not listen to the wisdom and will of God and, therefore, had broken the covenant with Him. For an example, according to the Prophet Ezekiel (Ez 26-28), the ancient global trading system and immense wealth of the Trade Town Tyre with its two world harbours at the Mediterranean Sea close to Jerusalem broke down around 500 years before Christ because the King of Tyre exploited and exported the population of whole villages as slaves, provoked an environmental disaster cutting and exporting trees from North Africa where there is the Sahara desert today and put himself at the place of God (Ez 28.1). The prophet interpreted the collapse as a result of human arrogance and superciliousness. He called for *metanoia*, a fundamental change in orientation and lifestyle, in order to overcome this

catastrophe. The prophet of doom becomes a prophet of hope because he offers a sharp analysis of the reasons for the disaster and shows a way out of it. The crisis was a threat and became an opportunity for re-orientation and a more humane behaviour! To encourage people to undertake this re-orientation is the prophetic role of the Churches and other religions. It is their spiritual contribution to collect all human efforts to solve the climate challenge and to reach climate justice.

Human responsibility, therefore, is large in order to solve such human made challenges by re-orientation. But Christian faith at the same time underlines that nobody has to save the world and bear the world on his/her shoulder alone, until one collapses under the burden of responsibility. Capability-related justice and responsibility means to carry what one can carry, knowing that God supports, accompanies, and asks not more than one can carry and that only sharing the burden leads to justice including climate justice.

#### **4.2. Good Management of Entrusted Resources**

God's action needs the adequate re-action of human beings. God's commitment of the alliance needs our commitment in it. Acting as responsible stewards is our answer to God's alliance. Responsible stewardship is the basis for the responsible management of resources and this management is the key for caring for creation and sustainability.<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Stueckelberger, Christoph, *Good Management is Good Stewardship*, in: Management: Remembering a responsibility, National Council of Churches in India NCCI Review Vol. 129 (9), Sept 2009, 401-409.

reformer John Calvin, whose 500<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary was celebrated in 2009, wrote about the responsible use of resources in his Commentary on the books of Moses: *“Everybody should remember that he is the treasurer of God in all what he possesses.”* Not only private companies or states, but also religious organizations such as churches, being wealthy or poor, normally have much more resources on hand than one is aware of.

There are not only financial resources. Before complaining about poverty and lack of resources and before begging, one can discover and properly manage what an individual or organization already has. The first step is to discover the manifold resources that exist and not only the missing financial resources.

We can discover 13 different types of resources usually available in an institution. They all can and have to be managed in a wise, professional, and responsible way. They are (1) human resources (staff, boards, volunteers, physical, mental, emotional capabilities), (2) financial resources, (3) offered services (worship, education), (4) knowledge and information resources, (5) networking resources, (6) communication resources, (7) innovation resources (innovative ideas), (8) natural resources (land, water, forests, air, energy), (9) spiritual resources (prayer, preaching), (10) material resources (real estate, infrastructure), (11) organizational resources (decision making structures, leading and controlling bodies, volunteers legal basis), (12) time resources (effective management of time, efficiency, punctuality), and (13) reputation resources (credibility, one of the most important and precious resources).

There are many forms and reasons of mismanagement of resources as well. Some of them, for example, are the following: (1) lack of capacity to manage resources, (2) lack of capability (knowledge, information, and experience), (3) lack of performance and efficiency, (4) lack of accountability and control, (5) lack of power of the leaders to implement responsible management of resources, (6) too fast growth of the organization and the available resources, (7) lack of sanction mechanisms within the organization or by the legal system, (8) criminal activities such as fraud and corruption, (9) nepotism, favouritism, and collusion, and (10) the economic, political, and social (corrupt) environment of the whole society.

Churches are very specially called to strongly increase their efforts to overcome corruption within their organization. They cannot credibly call for environmental protection if they practise corruption within their structures. Corruption is a major expression of irresponsible action and a major cause for environmental destruction.<sup>8</sup>

It is an important and *non-negotiable task of responsible stewardship*, especially of managers, to develop strategies and to prevent and *detect mismanagement of resources*, especially through fraud and corruption. The Guidelines given in the “Anti-Corruption Capacity Requirements” of the Government of South Africa make it very clear under the title “The Role of Managers in Preventing Corruption.”

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<sup>8</sup> See Christoph Stueckelberger, *Corruption-Free Churches are Possible. Experiences, Values, Solutions*. Globethics.net Series no. 3, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2010 (download from Oct 2010 from [www.globethics.net/web/guest/library](http://www.globethics.net/web/guest/library)).

It reads as follows: “The prevention, detection, investigation, and resolving of fraud and corruption cases is part of the management function of every line manager. None of the suggested strategies limits or lessens this responsibility and line managers must be made fully aware that it is the *non-negotiable* responsibility of line managers to: Establish and maintain an ethical culture in their management unit; Assess the risk for fraud and corruption in their area of work; Put in place policies, strategies, processes, and procedures to prevent possible fraud and corruption; Put the necessary controls in place to ensure compliance with these policies, strategies, processes, and procedures; Prevent and detect fraud and corruption. The final responsibility and accountability for dealing with corruption can never be delegated – but line managers can make use of expert advice and help from others (such as internal auditors, HR specialists, professional risk managers and legal advisers).”<sup>9</sup> This is a concrete expression of carefully planned behaviour of a guest on this earth and as a responsible steward.

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<sup>9</sup>“Anti-Corruption Capacity Requirements: Guidelines for Implementing the Minimum Anti-Corruption Capacity Requirements in Departments and Organisational Components in the Public Service,” [online]: [www.dpsa.gov.za/macc](http://www.dpsa.gov.za/macc), 62f.

## Conclusion

God as creator and host offers his household earth to the humankind. But exploitation, overconsumption, violation, and oppression by us, human beings, threaten life in this wonderful guesthouse. We as guests are invited and are called to use it and to care for it as good stewards and ‘careholders’.

The triune God as host keeps his promise to support us with his abundant love in these efforts. The Cosmic Christ himself is the reason for the never ending hope of Christians. Christians are called “to be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you” (1 Peter 3:15). The hope is the Cosmic Christ. We should express this accountability “with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:16). It calls for modesty in celebrating God and in responsible decisive environmental action together with believers of all religions and non-believers.

These actions of churches with other religious communities have to become stronger in future. Millions of people are victims of climate change already now, not only in future. Churches in many countries have developed profound theological and ethical material during the past three decades. They also launched here and there impressive actions in environmental education, public statements, waste management, biogas projects, solar panels on church buildings, etc. But it is now time to do more and to do it in a

more sustainable way. We need institutionalized ways for sustainable lifestyle – also in the new middle class in India – with environmentally sound consumer behaviour. We need political pressure to implement strong climate policies. We need economic incentives such as lower prices for renewable energy such as solar energy and higher prices for non-renewable energy. We need legal instruments to punish environmental damage. We need scientific reflection and structures such as this Centre for Environmental Studies of the Faculty of Philosophy at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore.

Can we do it? Yes, we can! We can do it with the energy which derives from the joy and thankfulness while hearing God's lovely song: "Every single human being is welcome as my guest on earth!" We all are welcome as Guests on Earth!

## WE ALL ARE GUESTS ON EARTH! A Global Christian Vision for Climate Justice

Worldwide, we are confronted with air pollution causing serious health risks, devastating storms as a result of climate change, water pollution and dead rivers, mega-waste in megacities, deforestation and growing deserts, peak oil as a sign for limited non-renewable fossil energy sources and never seen disastrous floods. The list of such environmental catastrophes in all parts of the world is huge.

What can Christian faith contribute to meet these manifold environmental challenges, especially the global climate change?

By exploring the position and task of human beings in the whole of creation, Prof. Dr. Christoph Stueckelberger presents the answer to this basic anthropological question by identifying the key in Christian and interreligious environmental ethics. Although exploitation, overconsumption, violation, and oppression by human beings threaten life in this wonderful guesthouse, we as guests are invited and are called to use it and to care for it as good stewards and 'careholders'.

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