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Who dies first? Whom do we sacrifice first? Ethical Aspects of Climate Justice

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Who dies first? Whom do we sacrifice first?

Ethical Aspects of Climate Justice

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1. Painful 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 priorities to mitigate climate change with limited resources. And since death as a result of climate warming is not a natural disaster, but men made – in this aspect the world community 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? The children in the slums of the megacities suffering from hunger because of high food prices? The future older people in industrialized countries infected by new kind 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 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 and 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 how much 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? 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 85 years old patient in a hospital in Switzerland, while for the same amount 100 children in Africa could be pre-

vented from eye diseases? The encouraging increase of global funds against HIV-AIDS from one to 10 Billion USD per year within the last ten years, does it show the direction we have to go with climate related funds? Painful questions related to health, basic needs, emergencies as well as climate change.¹

2. From Climate Change to Climate Justice

These questions show: The central question is no more, *if* climate change will happen and if it is men made and 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, emphasized during the 20th anniversary of the International Panel on Climate Change IPCC on 31 August 2008 that climate change is a great threat for the UN Millenium Development Goals.² *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.* Climate change becomes a question of global climate justice.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. But in this contribution on Climate Justice I concentrate on the value justice/equity.

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.*

1. Capability-related justice means that every person and institution has the duty to contribute solving problems on the basis of their capability. This means related 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 solve the climate challenges.
2. Performance-related justice means that every person and institution involved in human activities (such as the production, trade, sale or disposal of a product or service) must be given their due (e.g. salary) on the basis of their performance. This means related to climate justice: An activity which reduces greenhouse gas emissions is a good performance and should be rewarded respectively.
3. 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. This means related to climate justice: Every person has the right to survive and be supported to manage adaptation to climate change independent from his/her capability and performance.
4. Distributive justice ensures that access to resources, goods and services is distributed fairly, taking into account the balance of capability, performance and needs. This means related to climate justice: Financial or other resources to decrease negative effects of climate warming on human life should be distributed first according to needs, but also taking into account performance and capa-

¹ ACT International, the international emergency organization of Churches, emphasized the effects of climate change on emergencies and development. See http://act-intl.org/news/dt_nr_2008/upsouthernafrica0108.html.

² Media, 31 August 2008.

³ See also Dossier: Klimawandel und Gerechtigkeit, eins Entwicklungspolitik, 17/18, 2007, I-XXIV.

bilities so that the overall disparity between people becomes smaller and not larger.

5. 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). This means related to climate justice: Climate related measures for prevention, mitigation and adaptation have to respect equal treatment of all people affected.
6. Intergenerational justice means a sustainable use and fair distribution of resources, as well as a reduction in and a fair distribution of ecological burdens between generations living today and future generations. This means 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.
7. Participatory justice means the fair, appropriate participation in decision-making of all those affected by a problem and by decisions. This means 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.
8. Procedural justice means calculable, constitutional (publicly and privately) regulated, transparent, corruption-free and thus fair procedures in all interactions. This means related to climate justice: The decisions related to climate warming and its implementations (such as access to financial resources, climate related taxes or incentives, media information) have to follow the mentioned criteria of procedural justice.
9. Functional justice means a fair and optimal relation between 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. This means related to climate justice: Functional and organisational aspects of allocation and distribution of limited resources is key for a fair solution of climate challenges.
10. Punitive Justice means the punishment of actions which violate justice. The goal is retaliation, deterrent or overcoming of existing injustice. This means related to climate justice: Where 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.
11. Transitional justice means a provisional justice in transformation societies where ordinary, regular institutions and procedures may be absent or in reconstruction (e.g. in post war situations or after a revolutionary change of the system in a society). This means 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.
12. 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. This means 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.
13. 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 This means related to climate justice: Climate justice is not a single decision or act, but rather 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.
14. 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, the right moment). If a measure is taken too late and the patient or victim dies, injustice happened and it is difficult to restore justice. This means related to climate justice: to prevent and mitigate further climate victims, measures

have to be taken on time. The fast climate warming needs steps on time, 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.

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). The following guidelines should help to prioritize and to solve conflicts between different values. Such conflicts are the criteria for benefit sharing, for burden sharing, for power sharing or for space sharing.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 CO₂ emissions reduces the emission and generates funds for mitigation and adaptation.
2. *Prevention* aims at avoiding climate victims by early actions. Prevention respects the goal to minimize the number of victims and supports intergenerational justice, i.e. to avoid future victims. It has ethically speaking a higher priority than mitigation and adaptation because it avoids instead of curing victims or minimizing its number. The measures are more efficient because the costs are lower than for mitigation and adaptation.
3. *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.
4. *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 now basic human needs, but will in addition include the need to adaptability.

Instruments for prevention, mitigation and adaption are often *interlinked*. To plant trees or to reduce CO₂ emissions by reducing fossil energy consumption, 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 development cooperation and tech-

⁴ See Stueckelberger, Christoph (1997): Umwelt und Entwicklung. Eine sozialetische Orientierung, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 30-33 (case study on the UNCED climate convention). Chinese Edition: Beijing, October 2008.

nological innovation in the service of climate prevention.

5. *The Polluters-Pay-Principle* means that the polluter has to pay the costs of the damage caused by his behavior/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 CO₂ 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.
6. *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 once action, but also once 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.

The *Responsibility and Capability Index RCI*⁵ 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 CO₂ 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.

7. *The combination of positive and negative sanctions.* Justice in general as well as climate justice 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 ethically preferable, because they encourage the right behavior. But negative sanctions to establish punitive justice are often also necessary, especially to change the behavior of “black sheep” who do not react on positive sanctions. Both mechanisms presuppose that CO₂ emissions are seen as a severe, unethical misbehavior.
8. *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.
9. *Market related instruments.* The international free market mechanism contributes substantially to general economic growth and to global interaction and peace. Programs like “Financing for Climate - Innovative Solutions and New Markets”⁶ tries to win the private sector to take climate change as business opportunity. Without private investments, climate-related funding will never be enough. But market related instruments alone could not and cannot solve three major problems and made 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.⁷ Can the market then be a chance to solve it? From an ethical point of view, the answer can be found in the criteria for climate justice: if and where ever the market mechanism

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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 in Zurich.

⁷ 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.

strengthens the different above mentioned forms of climate justice, it has to be supported. If and where ever it weakens or violates the different forms of climate justice, the free market has to be replaced/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 emissions⁸. In this ethical perspective, the trading of CO₂ certificates is one specific form of positive and negative sanctions, based on the market mechanism. As long as it really contributes to worldwide CO₂ 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.

10. *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 2002.⁹ 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 Fidji Island who lose their agricultural land or the elderly people in a suburb of Paris dying from heat? And does justice as equal treatment not require that all people in danger get the same treatment? And since there are much 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 is in fact often the case? Economic conditionality? Or where there is the greatest chance that empowerment of weak groups of people lead 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 ethical criteria. A second step is to look for preferential rules in case that some of the above mentioned aspects of justice compete with each other. In 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 does 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. Therefore, *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.

11. *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 are an example for it.¹⁰
12. *Emergency 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 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 CO₂-legislation. On-Time-Justice is crucial in order to reduce the number of victims. Emergency legislation by governments on CO₂-reduction measures may be necessary and ethically justified even if it limits the participatory justice. In emergency situa-

⁸ See footnote ...

⁹ See footnote 11.

¹⁰ See the recommendations of the Round Table on „Are the Right Risks Insured?“ at the Global Humanitarian Forum Geneva, 24 June 2008, www.ghf-ge.org.

tions, the rights to food, water and survival have priority over the right to participation.

5. Lessons learnt and not learnt

Let me start with personal lessons learnt during the last twenty years:

The World Climate Conference in Toronto in June 1988 asked for 20% reduction of CO₂-emissions until 2005 and 50% until 2035. During a global conference in Washington in October 1988 a global, multi-stakeholder “International Network against Climate Change” was built, where I participated as the only representative of the Conference of European Churches. The facts have already been on the table in the scientific conference papers, new for me: Prognoses about the rise of the sea level, the changes in food production, the droughts, storms and coming diseases have already been available! On this basis I wrote in an article exactly twenty years ago that rivers will start to become salty because of higher sea level, that drinking water will be threatened, new diseases come up, the food production will be reduced and environmental migration will increase.¹¹ The only thing I did not expect, was, that many of these prognoses will already be reality in 2008! The Swiss Ecumenical Association Church and Environment, where I was Founding President, started in 1989 the first climate campaign in Switzerland, asking for a new life style and politics with an annual reduction of energy consumption by 2% in order to implement the Toronto goals.¹² It was seen by many as an idealistic and not necessary goal. But today, twenty years later, the International Panel on Climate Change IPCC gives even more drastic figures on hunger victims and drought¹³ and many scientists and NGO’s ask for post-Kyoto goals of CO₂ emissions from industrialized countries a reduction by 30% until 2020 and 90% until 2050 related to 1990.¹⁴ Lessons learnt: a) The scientists had to be taken serious and were in general correct in their analysis, the churches and some countries took it up seriously, but often remained isolated prophets. The practical steps undertaken to reduce fossil energy consumption was not sufficient. I personally underestimated the influence of new technologies and of the form of family life on my own life style, in the positive (solar panels, public transport to go for work) and negative way (more use of electricity by electronics and more energy for longer distance to go for work)

Let’s also briefly summarize the development of the climate change positions of four categories of actors:

The scientists have been the early warning and alert system. They were among the first to show prognosis and analysis. The fact that they coordinated their views on a global level since an early stage helped to raise awareness. Nevertheless, there was a majority or warning scientists and a minority of opponents. After 25 years of constant research, a respected global unanimity of views could be achieved. This is shown in the credibility of the UN-related International Panel on Climate Change IPCC.

The politicians have been divided since the beginning, often defending the interests of their countries and economies. Some underlined the urgency of (common, global) action plans and actions, others denied the facts. Developing countries long time have seen the responsibility only in Industrialized countries. During a painful and long process of twenty years, more consensus about the fact of global warming, about the urgency and about the huge economic implications is reached. But the political will for far-reaching actions is still very much behind this progress. Climate change was not seen by the world community of states as the most important common “enemy” of humanity. Much more money was and is still spent for regional and local wars instead of binding measures against global warming.

The Churches/religious communities: The Churches worldwide have been active promoting reflec-

¹¹ Stückelberger, Christoph: Die Treibhauswelt im Jahr 2035. Statt Wintertourismus holländische Flüchtlinge in den Alpen? Kirchenbote für den Kanton Zürich, No. 20, October 1988, 2.

¹² The title of the Campaign was: Die Haut der Erde retten. Lebt Jahr für Jahr mit 2% weniger Energie.” (« Sauvez la peau de la terre. Vivez chaque année avec 2% moins d’énergie”).

¹³ IPCC: Climate Change 2007, Geneva 2007. www.ipcc.ch

¹⁴ Brot für alle/Fastenopfer: Gerechtigkeit im Klimawandel, EinBlick Nr. 1/2008, 29.

tions, worship and actions on climate change since these twenty years. The World Council of Churches alone published between 1990 and 2008 over twenty booklets, study papers, reports and statements for UN-conferences on climate change!¹⁵ The first global statement in 1990 called “to resist globally the causes and to deal with the consequences of atmospheric destruction”.¹⁶ The position papers always combined theological and ethical reflection with practical and political recommendations. The WCC looked at climate change also as a “spiritual challenge”¹⁷ and that a whole “vision of society is implied”¹⁸. The call for changing personal life style was combined with the commitment especially to strengthen common political solutions through the UN system (UNEP and climate conferences). The voice was well heard and had an influence especially in the UN system: The chairman of IPCC, Pachauri, confirmed in his speech to the Round Table of the World Council of Churches on 21 May 2008, how much he was influenced and encouraged by the manifold contacts with WCC since the early 1990ies.¹⁹ But the Churches have often not been heard in the media, the parishes and outside conferences. The decentralized structures and lack of binding decision making structures makes it often difficult for church councils to implement what should be done. The Churches underestimated the influence of technology, marketing of products and development of prices on human behavior. The success of the Stern Report 2007 showing the economic effects of climate change showed that economic arguments still have the greatest influence in changing behavior. The Churches continue the inputs on the global UN- level, but they also have to intensify the dialogue with the private sector on climate change as WWF, Amnesty International and others do systematically. Only then the voice of the Churches will be heard in the private sector.

Other religious communities start to deal with climate change, to my knowledge especially Muslims and Buddhists, but not in the same systematic and long-term way as the WCC does it. Caring for creation is the common ground for interreligious spiritual reflection.²⁰

The private sector is very diverse and cannot be seen as a whole. International Companies especially in the insurance sector took the lead within the private sector. Some developed impressive and far reaching programs and their implementation within the company. Probably the best example is Swiss Re, the Swiss re-insurance company and number one worldwide. Their risk analyses showed in an early stage (since 1989 when they identified climate change as an emerging risk) the threats of climate warming with possible disasters which insurance companies will no more be able to carry. Not theoretical or ethical reflections, but precise analyses and long-term practical implementation and financial commitment make them credible.²¹ Other companies did not follow this positive example but hindered political regulations for the reduction of CO₂-emissions.

All in all: the journey is long and the progress too slow compared to the fast climate change. Compared to historical learning processes, the progress within “only” twenty years of climate change debates is nevertheless impressive.

¹⁵ See Selected bibliography: WCC Programme on Climate Change, to download from: www.wcc-coe.org, especially www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/earthdocs.html.

¹⁶ Now is the Time. Final document and other texts of the World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, Seoul 1990, 31.

¹⁷ Solidarity with the Victims of Climate Change: reflections on the World Council of Churches’ response to climate change, January and November 2002, Geneva, 25f.

¹⁸ Idem, 13-15.

¹⁹ See video of the speech, WCC 21 May 2008.

²⁰ See Candao, Satria: Islamic Wisdom and Response to Climate Change, in Search for Better Tomorrow. A Consultation on Earth is our Home: A Religious Response to Climate Change in Asia, July 2000, Bangalore, India, ed. By Calos B. Mendoza, 44-51. See also the planned Interreligious Conference on Climate Change of the WCC, November 2008.

²¹ Swiss Re (2008a): Pioneering climate solutions, Zurich. Swiss Re (2008b): Corporate Responsibility Report. Committed to sustainable value creation, Zurich.

6. Threats or Opportunities?

An advertisement of Allianz Insurance said: “Climate Change is a business a) threat, b) opportunity”. The private sector starts to speak about climate change not only as threat, but also as 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 USD 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 (new regulations, reputation risks), 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.²² A global news service specialized on climate change information for business opportunities just started in 2008.²³ 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 humankind as a whole. I see at least five 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.
3. *A new lifestyle and society*²⁴ 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 a inner journey which needs processes of departure, mourning and re-orientation as a psychological and spiritual process.
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.²⁵

7. Spiritual Responses: Too late or is there hope?

The huge challenges of climate change and the disastrous prognoses can lead to resignation: “It is too late.” And 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.

²² 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.

²³ www.climatechangecorp.com. To order the newsletter: newsletters@climatechangecorp.com.

²⁴ See Schweizerischer Evangelischer Kirchenbund (2008): Energieethik, SEK Position 10, Bern.

²⁵ 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.

“Signs of Peril, Test of Faith” was the sub-title of a study paper on climate change of the World Council of Churches²⁶ in 1994. Regional responses e.g. from Africa²⁷ or Asia²⁸ and global collection of contextual responses as in a new process 2008 of the Lutheran World Federation are done. *Some of the crucial religious questions* on climate change are:

- 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, where 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 means forgiveness and reconciliation in this context?
- How to bear 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 favor 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 mankind. 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. To the questions:

- Yes, it is very late, but not too late.²⁹ 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 as 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 renewed by God: with Abraham (Gen. 17:2), with Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31) until the new covenant in Jesus Christ (Mt. 26:28). There-

²⁶ Accelerated Climate Change. Sign of Peril, Test of Faith, approved by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, January 1994.

²⁷ Ernst M. Conradie (2008): The Church and Climate Change (Manuscript, South Africa); Mugambi, Jesse (2007):

²⁸ Search for Better Tomorrow. A Consultation on Earth is our Home: A Religious Response to Climate Change in Asia, July 2000, Bangalore, India, ed. By Calos B. Mendoza.

²⁹ Huber, Wolfgang: Es ist nicht zu spät für eine Antwort auf den Klimawandel. Ein Appell des Ratsvorsitzenden der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland. Manuscript, Berlin 2007.

fore, 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.³⁰

- God's promise 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 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, "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 as constant creator, redeemer and renewer.
- We asked at the beginning of this article "Whom do we sacrifice first?" It is not a cynical question, but unfortunately 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 Testament 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 men made disasters, collapses of human power structures) as an expression that men did not listen to the wisdom and will of God and therefore had broken the covenant with God. An example: According to the Prophet Ezechiel (Ez. 26-28), the ancient global trading system and immense wealth of the Trade Town Tyre with its two world harbors 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 behavior! To encourage people to undertake this re-orientation is the prophetic role of the Churches and of 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 great to solve such men 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 burden sharing leads to justice including climate justice.

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³⁰ As also expressed by the German Catholic Bishops Conference in its statement on climate justice: Der Klimawandel: Brennpunkt globaler, intergenerationeller und ökologischer Gerechtigkeit. Ein Expertentext zur Herausforderung des globalen Klimawandels. Die deutschen Bischöfe. Kommission für gesellschaftliche und soziale Fragen, Kommission Weltkirche No. 29, 2006, p. 70.