

Kairos for Creation – Kairos for Humanity

The Corona-Crisis as Expression and Acceleration of the Ecological Crisis: How to mend Disturbed Balances between Humanity, Nature and Wildlife?

Some Theses for discussion

1. Let not your heart be overcome by fear

John 16:33: In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

The unprecedented global corona crisis is accompanied by many fears and anxieties which are an indication for how intensely this infectious disease challenges all economic, political, social and health related systems in each society. It is part of life that us humans feel fear when facing danger which threaten the health and integrity of our life. The biblical tradition speaks of periods of tribulation but the Christian faith does not encourage fatalism neither any attitudes which lead to disempowerment and paralysation of human beings. The word from Jesus “Fear not; I have overcome the world” liberates us to strengthen sober and careful minds to develop integrated and responsible ways for dealing with the pandemic. What holds true to Christian life in general also applies in this emergency particularly: “Pray as if everything depends on God, act as if everything depends on us” (St. Augustine). The role of the church in this situation is to proclaim the message of hope and God’s love for the world.

2. The virus is not a punishment from God, but God is suffering with those who encounter illness

Ex 23:25: So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you.

God is not a cruel “master of the universe” sending waves of punishments to his beloved people. This kind of thinking leads to attitudes which express condemnation and bring additional religious stigmatization for those who have to struggle with the disease. God on the contrary wants to take away sickness from the people. Churches need to withstand false prophets which spread teachings that are not theologically sound or based on a fundamentalist reading of the Bible. The core of the Gospel is not condemnation or punishment, but salvation and healing of all: “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save/heal the world through him”(John 3:17). The early church did not condemn the sick but rather developed rituals of accompaniment by which the closeness of God to these people could be assured: “Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.”(James 5:14)

3. Be aware of God’s own suffering with the unfinished creation

Rom 8:22: We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

The whole of creation is in an unfinished stage, God is suffering with his suffering creation. The church should give witness both to the beauty as well as to the groaning of creation. What human civilization has done to the eco-system destabilizes some of the inner balances and complex regulatory frameworks imbedded in nature. As human civilization has transgressed planetary boundaries in several dimensions this affects also carefully maintained balances of micro-biotic milieus and the relationship between humankind and the world of animals and bio-organisms. The rigorous deforestation and expansion of industrialized zones of agriculture have pushed back the areas in which wild life can unfold without too close interaction with the milieus in which humankind can grow and survive. The phenomenon of zoonosis, the springing over of viruses from the animal realm to the human realm is also a result of the protracted human violation of creation, the destruction of natural habitats and the excessive overuse of animals for human consumption and industrialized exploitation. Protecting the biodiversity and a sufficient number of zones for wildlife which are not used by humans is one of the essential consequences of this global pandemic. We will have to rethink our model of relating to natural resources and to animal life. We see the churches challenged to voice new avenues of imaging such relationship on the basis of the rich biblical tradition and the wisdom indigenous peoples bring to the table.

4. Humanity can only survive together – the defeat of “my nations first” populisms and nationalist ideologies

John 10:16: And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Viruses do not stop at any national borders, neither do they make a distinction between races, cultures, religions. The learning lessons which we currently take again on the vulnerability of humankind, is also a learning lesson on the essential need for transnational collaboration and utmost necessity of unity within the community of nations on this earth. Regional wars, the pursuit of narrow minded national or ethnic interests and pride or expansionist ideas appear so utterly futile and ridiculous in an era where the survival of many is threatened in a much more serious way. As Christians we need to reject all “my nations first ideologies” and should return to a common and planetary policy and multilateralism which is highly needed to win the battle not against the virus but also against poverty, inequality and ecological degradation.

5. See the Pandemic as a Wake-Up Call for Humanity to Respect the Ecological Balances and just and sustainable conditions for Life on this Planet

Jes 24:5: “The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant.” But also Gen 8,21f: “never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall never cease.”

The pandemic underlines both the positive and negative side of our current models of globalization, showing our immense vulnerability through interconnectivity, but also indicating possibilities for rapid response mechanisms and nurturing a new political determination to collaborate together as a global community of nations. Globalization has opened the paths on which the virus could spread around the globe with an unprecedented

speed. Its spread traces the interconnectedness and distribution of goods along lines which meet in the political and economic centers of the world. It can be understood as an indicator to greed as one major driving force for ecological degradation and to unjust conditions of life among countries and societies which affect the chances of fighting the impact of the pandemic. The current pandemic is a wake up call to reconsider the underlying logic of globalization while enhancing interconnectedness, transnational solidarity and just and sustainable conditions for life for all. The ecumenical fellowship of churches around the globe should be developed further as an icon of unity and reconciliation.

6. Standing up for the implementation of essential goals of the SDG Agenda is an imperative for survival for all

Proverbs 21:21: Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honour.

The past weeks have made sufficiently clear that societies which are more sustainable and are pursuing the essential goals of the SDG Agenda are also more resilient to the pandemic. There are key goals within the SG Agenda from 2015 which now prove even more fundamental for securing a proper response both to the health related as well as to the social threats of both the Pandemic and the Ecological Crisis. Overcoming Poverty and Inequality (SDG 1 and 2), the access to affordable health services (SDG 4), the access to Water and proper Hygiene Sanitation (SDG 6) as well as protection of human rights and good and democratic governance (SDG 16) and particularly the protection of biodiversity (SDG 15) are proving to play a decisive role in developing resilience to the Pandemic. Huge financial amounts have been made available by some governments (those who can afford) on preventing economic collapse due to the consequences of Pandemic. Decisions have been made possible which nobody could dream of in earlier periods when financing international development collaboration was on the agenda. Financial means which are given to the fight against the Pandemic have never been made available for achieving the goals of the SDG agenda. Financing the SDG Agenda and financing the fight against global diseases should not be played off against each other. But it would be short-sighted and ill-balanced if the financing of international development cooperation and the implementation of the SDG Agenda would receive not a paramount support like the fights against the Pandemic. The churches and their development agencies are and need to continue to enhance international cooperation towards the implementation of the SDGs.

7. Human Health, Ecological Integrity and Sustainability of Biodiversity are inseparably related

Revelations 21:4: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Another learning lesson again is about the importance of the relation between human health, spirituality and issues of ecological integrity of our life-styles. There is a strong tradition in Asian and African countries to emphasize the relevance of faith traditions for human health. Health is seen as a gift of God, which has to be protected by the right balances of spiritual powers, the interaction between faith and modern medicine and good standards of nutrition and public health systems. The neglect of public health standards and the destruction of functioning health clinics and hospitals by war factions, super powers in

regional conflicts or the commercialising of health services are a scandal. Such scenarios cry loudly of injustice today as those who have suffered under wars are now paying an even higher price for having lack of resources in their destroyed health systems. A massive reorientation and shifting of funding priorities needs to be considered for the future: If governments would invest 30% of all their military expenditures and costs for weapons into a solid and high-quality service structure of their national health systems the situation would look much different in the current pandemic. Churches can revitalize the long tradition of not only proclaiming the Gospel but also serving people in spiritual and health care.

8. Be ready to accept a major change in your lifestyle and a true metanoia/socio-medical-ecological transformation – this equally applies to the ecological crisis and the Corona Crisis

Mathew 4:17: From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

The ecological crisis has had major consequences, but not for all in a similar manner, as mostly countries in the global South were affected by rising sea levels, environmental degradation, droughts and hurricanes. The ecological crisis is unfolding slow and with unequal outreach and impact to people living in different contexts. The Corona Crisis is affecting with fast speed and is threatening dramatically also populations in the global North. However even now poor and vulnerable populations are affected more gravely and are less protected than people having proper housing, accommodation and water supply. While populations were reluctant to accept dramatic changes in their life styles, their mobility and their consumption patterns with the growing signs of the ecological crisis, a majority of countries seem to have been surprisingly accepting draconic changes imposed on their life styles, mobility and freedom in the case of the Corona Crisis. This tells us: A dramatic and fundamental change in attitudes, behavioural and consumption patterns and life-styles still is possible if the need is well explained and touches on essential aspects of the wellbeing of all the people. The churches can be spaces of reflection and spiritual accompaniment of such changes in attitude and for models of a simple life style overcoming greed.

9. Provide support to all who work in front-line ministries of medical assistance, psycho-social care and direct social or material help

Rom 12:1-2 I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The corona crisis is a huge challenge to the medical and care giving systems and staff in our societies. To provide our lives as living sacrifice for the service of the most vulnerable is a deep obligation and ancient virtue of Christian faith. Mobilize support in ways possible for you to support those who stand in the front-line ministry of the medical and care-giving professions! Keep them in your daily prayers! Try to do your own best in following the biblical advice: "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfil the law of Christ". (Gal 6,2:). This includes providing support for those who can become easy victims of high levels of

domestic violence in a context where people are forced to stay together in limited spaces although they have difficulties in living with tensions. A policy of zero-tolerance should be applied to those who exploit the situation of vulnerable people, women and children and the elderly in current home isolation situations, while not being able to control their potential for violence and aggression. We appreciate

10. Do not lose hope! - We need visionary thinking and ecclesial and political leadership for a new ecological life-style for a period even beyond the Corona-Crisis

Isaiah 41:10: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

In view of the pandemic we will have to ask some profound questions on the way we have organized life, economies and medical systems until now. We will need to modify the way of globalization and to strengthen resilience of those who are suffering most. It is a scandal that some nations have refused to provide appropriate financial support for WHO and health related systems in the global South which now is now having dramatic and visible consequences. We need visionary political leadership and we need proper ethical leadership of churches as well as scientists to prepare visions of how to re-organize our life in order to strengthen the ability of humanity to act together, to overcoming narrowminded nationalism as well as ethnocentrism and to face together the huge tasks which we have in front of us to curb the destruction of our planetary systems as otherwise humanity cannot survive. Christians and churches around the globe are encouraged and should proclaim that this new common ethical thinking and envisioning of an alternative model of globalization and strengthening of an ecological and responsible civilization in living within the given planetary boundaries is inspired by biblical faith which tells us that God wants us not to sink in fatalism and fear, but to be inspired by his love to the whole of his beautiful earth.