

European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN)
Europäisches Christliches Umweltnetzwerk (ECEN)
Réseau écologique chrétien européen (ECEN)



Biblical Meditations and Prayers
for the
Creation Time 2006
from **September 1 to the second Sunday of October**

Biblische Meditationen und Gebete
für die
Schöpfungszeit 2006
vom **1. September bis zum 2. Sonntag in Oktober**

Méditations bibliques et prières
pour le
Temps de la Création 2006
du **1^{er} septembre jusqu'au 2^{ème} dimanche d'octobre**

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Introduction

For some years now the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) has offered liturgical material to churches on themes related to God's Creation for use during the *Creation Time* from September 1 to the first Sunday after October 4. For 2006 ECEN has decided to change the pattern. A small team has prepared a series of meditations on relevant biblical passages. The biblical witness to God the Creator is, in fact, much richer than many assume. Our effort is meant to draw attention to texts whose implications for our perception of Creation are often not fully appreciated or sometimes even overlooked. We are happy that friends from different confessional backgrounds have responded to our invitation and want to thank them for their contribution.

The liturgical materials published annually since 2001 are still available. You can find them on the ECEN website: www.ecen.org. In 2001 we published a collection of prayers, texts and Biblical readings on *Celebrating God's Creation*. In 2002 the texts dealt generally with the *Churches' Responsibility for the Preservation of God's Creation*. In 2003 followed some material on the theme *Our Responsibility to Future Generations*. In 2004 we made available prayers and texts related to the theme *Preserving Land, Water and Air* and in 2005 we offered prayers on *Rhythm of Creation and Rhythm of Life*.

The promotion of a special "Time of Creation" belongs to the priorities of the European Christian Environmental Network. Our proposal is to set apart the period from September 1st to the Sunday after October 4 (which is Saint Francis' Day) as special time for the celebration of the Creator and of the gift of creation. The theme of creation cannot, of course, be isolated from the totality of the Christian message. But, today, it is particularly important to rediscover the intimate relationship between God's creation and the revelation in Jesus Christ. We are glad to note that the idea of the Time of Creation is becoming more and more accepted by the churches.

ECEN will hold its next Assembly from 27 September to 1 October 2006 in Flämslätt near Skara in Sweden. We shall use this occasion to assess the proposal of the "Time of Creation". May we ask you to let us have reports on your experience with the Time of Creation? Suggestions for prayers, texts, songs and special acts of worship are always most welcome.

The Editorial Team

Einleitung

Seit einigen Jahren bietet das Europäische Christliche Umweltnetz (ECEN) den Kirche liturgische Materialien zur Thematik 'Gottes Schöpfung' an zum Gebrauch während der *Schöpfungszeit* in den Monaten September und Oktober. Für dieses Jahr haben wir uns entschlossen, das Angebot zu verändern. Ein kleines Team hat eine Reihe von biblischen Meditationen über relevante biblische Abschnitte ausgearbeitet. Das Zeugnis der Bibel, insbesondere des Alten Testaments, ist in dieser Hinsicht sehr viel reicher als manche denken. Unser Heft möchte auf Texte aufmerksam machen, deren Bedeutung oft übersehen wird. Wir sind froh, dass Freunde aus verschiedenen Konfessionen unserer Einladung Folge geleistet haben und möchten ihnen für ihren Beitrag sehr herzlich danken.

Die liturgischen Hefte früherer Jahre – seit 2001 – sind nach wie vor zugänglich. Sie finden sie auf der website unseres Netzwerks: www.ecen.org. 2001 veröffentlichten wir eine kleine Sammlung von Gebeten, Texten und Bibellesungen über das Thema *Gottes Schöpfung feiern*. 2002 war das Thema *Verantwortung der Kirche für die Bewahrung der Schöpfung*. 2003 folgten Unterlagen über das Thema *Unsere Verantwortung für zukünftige Generationen* und im Jahre darauf über das Thema *Land, Wasser und Luft bewahren*. Letztes Jahr stellten wir Gebete und Texte zum Thema *Rhythmus der Schöpfung - Rhythmus des Lebens* zusammen.

Die Verbreitung des Vorschlags einer besonderen Schöpfungszeit gehört zu den Prioritäten des Europäischen Christlichen Umweltnetzes. Unser Vorschlag geht dahin, die Zeit vom 1. September bis zum ersten Sonntag nach dem 4. Oktober (Franziskustag) zu begehen als eine Zeit, in der insbesondere Gott des Schöpfers und seiner Schöpfung gedacht wird. Das Thema der Schöpfung kann natürlich von der christlichen Botschaft als Ganzes nicht isoliert werden. Angesichts der ökologischen Krise ist es aber heute besonders dringend, das Verhältnis zwischen Gott dem Schöpfer und der Offenbarung in Jesus Christus neu zu entdecken. Wir sind dankbar, dass der Vorschlag der Schöpfungszeit in immer weiteren Kreisen Eingang findet.

Die nächste ECEN-Versammlung wird vom 27. September bis zum 1. Oktober 2006 in Flämslätt bei Skara in Schweden stattfinden. Wir werden diese Gelegenheit benützen, um über den Vorschlag der Schöpfungszeit neu nachzudenken. Ihre Stellungnahme und Ihre Beiträge sind herzlich willkommen.

Das Redaktionsteam

Introduction

Il y a quelques années le Réseau écologique chrétien d'Europe (ECEN) a proposé aux Eglises un matériel liturgique sur les thèmes relatifs à la Création de Dieu, à utiliser durant le *Temps de la Création*, du 1er septembre au premier dimanche après le 4 octobre. Pour 2006 l'ECEN a décidé de changer de schéma. Une petite équipe a préparé une série de méditations sur quelques passages de la Bible traitant de la création. Le témoignage biblique (l'Ancien Testament notamment) sur Dieu le Créateur est bien plus riche que la plupart d'entre nous ne l'imaginent. Notre objectif est d'attirer l'attention sur des textes dont les implications pour notre perception de la Création ne sont pas appréciées à leur juste valeur, voire parfois négligées. Nous sommes heureux que des amis de différents contextes confessionnels aient répondu à notre invitation. Nous tenons à les remercier de leur contribution.

Le matériel liturgique publié chaque année depuis 2001 est toujours disponible. Vous le trouverez sur site Web de l'ECEN: www.ecen.org. En 2001 nous avons publié un recueil de prières, textes et lectures bibliques sur le thème *Célébrer la Création de Dieu*. En 2002 le sujet était la *Responsabilité de Eglises en matière de préservation de la Création de Dieu*. En 2003 le matériel était consacré au thème *Notre responsabilité envers les générations futures*. En 2004 nous avons mis à disposition des prières et des textes sur le thème *Préserver la terre, l'eau et l'air* et en 2005 nous avons proposé des prières traitant du *Rythme de la création, rythme de la vie*.

La promotion d'un "Temps de la Création" fait partie des priorités de l'ECEN. Nous suggérons d'observer la période entre le 1^{er} septembre et le premier dimanche après le 4 octobre (Saint-François) comme temps consacré à la célébration du Créateur et à son don de la création. Il est évident que le thème de la création ne peut être isolé de la totalité du message chrétien. Mais, aujourd'hui, il est particulièrement important de redécouvrir la relation intime qui existe entre la création de Dieu et la révélation en Jésus-Christ. Nous sommes heureux de noter que l'idée d'un Temps de la Création est de mieux en mieux acceptée par les Eglises.

La prochaine Assemblée générale de l'ECEN se tiendra du 27 septembre au 1er octobre 2006 à Flämslätt près de Skara en Suède. Nous en profiterons pour approfondir la proposition d'un Temps de la Création. Auriez-vous la gentillesse de nous faire parvenir des rapports sur votre expérience avec le Temps de la Création? Toute suggestion de prière, de texte, de chant ou d'acte symbolique durant la célébration du culte, sera la bienvenue.

L'équipe éditoriale

I. Wisdom in God's Creation

Lukas Vischer

*The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.
Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth ...
When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command ...
then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.
And now my children, listen to me, happy are those who keep my way ...
Happy are those who listen to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting besides my doors.
For those who find me, find life, and obtain favour from the Lord
But those who miss me, injure themselves; all who hate me love death. (Proverbs 8, 22-36)*

Christ in whom are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2,3)

The Bible contains several accounts of creation. We are, of course, all familiar with the first chapter of the Bible, the majestic account of God creating the world in seven days. God utters the command and light, water, earth, animals and human beings come into existence. The account in Proverbs is different. The emphasis is on God's wisdom in creating the world. Wisdom is personified – it is presented as a woman or perhaps a girl dancing in front of God. She was created before anything else. She was present at all stages of God's creation. Wisdom, *Sophia*, is at God's side as he creates the universe. She dances and takes delight in the world and its inhabitants.

The image is immensely attractive. But, of course, there is also challenge connected with it. For us, human beings, it is essential to recognize the wisdom which is built into this world. The image of *Sophia* dancing before God, leads to an invitation. "And now, my children, she tells us, listen to me; happy are those who keep my ways." Listening to *Sophia* is a matter of life or death.

Let us hear again the concluding statement: "For those who find me, find life, ... but all who hate me, love death." This statement is of almost frightening relevance. Because is it not obvious that the wisdom in God's ordering of the world is being violated on all accounts? Wisdom dances before God, but we don't join her dance but are led by the rhythm of our own will. Wisdom asks us to watch daily at her gates and to wait besides her doors. But we have long ago decided to construct the world according to our own plans.

The past decades have brought an enormous increase in *knowledge*. In all areas of human life the limits of the unknown have been pushed back. Much of what seemed to be for ever an impenetrable mystery, has become explicable, even more: open to the manipulation by human skill. But does this mean that we have become *wiser*? Knowledge and wisdom are not the same, and don't necessarily go hand in hand. Knowledge is the access to new insights. Wisdom is the ability to deal with these insights in ways which serve life. Knowledge, by itself, is not yet a gain. Knowledge without wisdom leads to death.

And this is what we discover in all areas of life. We know that nuclear energy implies incalculable risks but we continue to make use of it. We know that mobility pollutes the air and contributes to global warming, but we continue our motorised style of life. We know that the consumption of industrialized countries plunders the resources of the planet and creates unmanageable mountains of waste but we continue to expect salvation from further economic growth. We know that not only New Orleans, but many cities, located close to the ocean, are vulnerable but we close our eyes to the danger. Why? Why does the voice of wisdom have no chance? Clearly, because we have allowed knowledge to be the ally of profit. Therefore, whenever considerations of profit are at stake, the voice of wisdom cannot be heard.

Referring to Christ, Paul says in his letter to the Colossians: "in whom are hid *all treasures* of wisdom and knowledge". Paul speaks of wisdom and knowledge in one breath, and it seems to be his deep conviction that all wisdom we need to deal with insights provided by knowledge can be obtained by following Christ. Following Christ opens new horizons and leads to alternative yardsticks.

Let me mention three:

- The first step on the way to wisdom is the recognition of God as the creator of all things. Praising God as the source of all life is the absolute priority on the way to wisdom.
 - The second aspect is the recognition that life is more than economic growth. Jesus laughs at the rich who have no other purpose in life than accumulating goods. In his eyes they have no notion of wisdom. “You fool”, he says of the rich farmer. The idea of steady economic growth stands in clear contradiction with Jesus message.
 - And the third aspect is communion – living together in mutual respect. There no higher priority in Christian life than to build a fellowship of solidarity. The goods of the world have been made available to be shared among all.
- Three steps towards wisdom! Ultimately they can be summarized through the double commandment of loving God and our neighbour. The commandment is the key to wisdom and to life.

In the Orthodox tradition Wisdom plays a more significant role than in the West. Holy Wisdom, Hagia Sophia, is venerated in the Orthodox Churches. We all know or have heard of churches dedicated to Wisdom, co-creator of the universe, the most famous in Istanbul. It is no longer used as a church but can be visited as a museum. It sounds strange: wisdom as a museum! But, important as it is, the building is not decisive. We, you are, the Temple of God. We are the living stones of God’s dwelling placed on earth. In our hearts Wisdom must take roots. Every place can be turned into a Hagia Sophia conveying Wisdom’s message to the world.

* * *

The whole world is a living icon of the face of God.

St. John Damascene

O you eternal wisdom – whom we partly know and partly do not know
 O you eternal justice – whom we partly acknowledge and never fully obey
 O you eternal love – whom we love a little but fear to love too much:
 open our minds that we may understand
 work in our wills that we may obey
 kindle our hearts that we may love you.
 Come, Lord Jesus!

T. R. Milford

O Lord our God, the author and giver of all good things,
 we thank you for all your mercies, and for your loving care over all your creatures.
 We bless you for the gift of life, for your protection round about us,
 for your guiding upon us, and the tokens of your love within us.
 We thank you for friendship and duty, for good hopes and precious memories,
 for the joys that cheer us and the trials that teach us to trust in you.
 Most of all we thank you for saving knowledge of your Son our saviour;
 for the living presence of your Spirit, the comforter...
 In all these things, o heavenly Father, make us wise unto a right use of your benefits
 that we may render an acceptable thanksgiving unto you all the days of our life.
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Book of Common Order

We are not alone, we live in God’s world.

We believe in God
 Who has created and is creating,

Who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,

to reconcile and make new,
Who works in us and others
by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the church
to celebrate God's presence
to love and serve others
to seek justice and resist evil
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death and in life beyond death
God is with us.

We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

United Church of Canada

I. Weisheit in Gottes Schöpfung

Lukas Vischer

*Der Herr schuf mich, seines Waltens Erstling, als Anfang seiner Werke, vorlängst.
Von Ewigkeit her bin ich gebildet, von Anbeginn, vor dem Ursprung der Welt ...
Als er den Himmel baute, war ich dabei, als er das Gewölbe absteckte über der Urflut,
als er die Wolken droben befestigte und die Quellen der Urflut stark machte,
als er dem Meer seine Schranke setzte, dass die Wasser seinem Befehle gehorchten ...
da war ich als Liebling ihm zur Seite war lauter Entzücken Tag für Tag und spielte vor ihm allezeit, spielte auf
seinem Erdenrund und hatte mein Ergötzen an den Menschenkindern
So hört denn auf mich meine Kinder ... Wohl den Menschen, die meine Wege einhalten,
an meinen Toren wachen Tag für Tag, und meine Türpfosten hüten.
Denn wer mich findet, der findet das Leben und erlangt Wohlgefallen beim Herrn. Wer mich aber verfehlt, der
schädigt sich selber. Alle die mich hassen, lieben den Tod. (Sprüche 8, 22-36)*

Christus, in dem alle Schätze der Weisheit und des Wissen verborgen sind. (Kolosser 2,3)

In der Bibel finden sich mehrere Berichte über die Erschaffung der Welt. Am vertrautesten ist uns natürlich das erste Kapitel der Bibel, jener majestätische Bericht über die Erschaffung der Welt in sieben Tagen. Gott spricht – und Licht, Wasser, Erde, Pflanzen, Tiere und die Menschen werden lebendig. Das Buch der Sprüche gibt uns ein anderes Bild. Hier liegt das Gewicht auf der Weisheit von Gottes Schöpfung. Die Weisheit tritt als Person auf – sie wird dargestellt als Frau oder eher als Mädchen, das vor Gott tanzt. Sie wurde vor allem andern erschaffen. Sie war in jedem Augenblick der Schöpfung dabei. Die Weisheit, die Sophia, war an Gottes Seite als er das Universum schuf. Sie tanzt and ergötzt sich an der Welt und ihren Bewohnern.

Das Bild ist anziehend. Es ist aber zugleich eine Herausforderung damit verbunden. Für uns Menschen kommt alles darauf an, dass wir die Weisheit erkennen, die Gott in die Welt eingepflanzt hat. Das Bild der Sophia, die vor Gott tanzt, führt zu einer Aufforderung: „Und nun, meine Kinder, hört auf mich; wohl denen, die meine Wege einhalten.“ Auf die Weisheit hören ist eine Angelegenheit von Leben und Tod.

Achten wir auf den abschliessenden Satz: „Wer mich findet, findet Leben; wer mich hasst, liebt den Tod.“ Der Satz ist von fast unheimlicher Aktualität. Denn ist nicht offensichtlich, dass Gottes weise Ordnung heute mit Füßen getreten wird? Die Weisheit tanzt vor Gott, wir aber schliessen uns diesem Tanz nicht an, sondern folgen dem Takt unseres eigenen Willens. Die Weisheit fordert uns auf, „an ihren Toren zu wachen Tag für Tag“. Wir aber haben anderes im Sinn; statt die Harmonie mit Gottes Ordnung zu suchen, richten wir uns Leben nach eigenen Plänen ein.

In den vergangenen Jahrzehnten hat eine eigentliche Explosion des *Wissens* stattgefunden. In fast allen Bereichen hat die Menschheit neue Kenntnisse erworben. Vieles von dem was früher als undurchdringliches Geheimnis galt, hat sich gelüftet und ist menschlichem Zugriff zugänglich geworden. Bedeutet das aber, dass der Mensch *weiser* geworden wäre? Wissen und Weisheit sind nicht dasselbe. Sie gehen nicht notwendig Hand in Hand. Wissen öffnet den Zugang zu neuen Kenntnissen. Weisheit aber ist die Fähigkeit mit diesen Kenntnissen umzugehen. Wissen allein ist noch kein Gewinn. Wissen ohne Weisheit führt zum Tod.

Dieser Widerspruch ist heute allgegenwärtig. Wir wissen, dass die Atomenergie mit unberechenbaren Risiken verbunden ist, machen aber weiter davon Gebrauch. Wir wissen, dass die Mobilität die Luft verpestet und zur Erwärmung der Atmosphäre beiträgt, lassen uns aber in unserem motorisierten Lebensstil nicht beirren. Wir wissen, dass der Konsum der Industrienationen die Ressourcen des Planeten plündert und übermässige Berge von Abfall schafft, erwarten aber weiterhin das Heil von immer grösserem wirtschaftlichem Wachstum. Wir wissen, dass nicht nur New Orleans, sondern zahlreiche Städte in der Nähe des Ozeans gefährdet sind, verschliessen aber unsere Augen vor der Gefahr. Warum? Warum hat die Stimme der Weisheit keine Chance? Ohne Zweifel darum, weil sich das Wissen mit dem Profit verbunden hat. Wenn der Profit in Frage steht, muss die Stimme der Weisheit verhallen.

Paulus sagt im Kolosserbrief von Christus: „in ihm sind alle Schätze der Weisheit und der Erkenntnis verborgen.“ Paulus spricht hier von Weisheit und Erkenntnis in ein und demselben Atemzug. Es ist offensichtlich seine tiefe Überzeugung, dass alle Weisheit, die für den verantwortlichen Umgang mit Erkenntnis nötig ist, in der Nachfolge Christi zu finden ist. Sie eröffnet neue Horizonte und stellt alternative Kriterien auf. Lassen Sie mich drei Aspekte nennen.

In der Nachfolge Christi werden wir zum Lobe Gottes eingeladen. Gott als Quelle alles Lebens preisen ist die absolute Priorität auf dem Weg zur Weisheit.

Ein zweiter Aspekt ist der Umgang mit den Gütern dieser Welt. Jesus lacht über die Menschen, die keinen andern Lebenszweck als die Anhäufung von Gütern haben. Er nennt sie Toren. Der Gedanke eines ständigen wirtschaftlichen Wachstums steht in klarem Widerspruch zu Jesu Botschaft.

Und der dritte Aspekt ist die Gemeinschaft – das Zusammenleben in gegenseitigem Respekt and in Solidarität. Es gibt keine höhere Priorität in der Nachfolge Jesu als der Aufbau einer solidarischen Gemeinschaft. Die Güter der Welt sind uns gegeben worden, damit sie allen zu Gute kommen.

Drei Schritte auf dem Wege zur Weisheit. Letztlich lassen sie sich zusammenfassen in dem Doppelgebot der Liebe zu Gott und dem Nächsten. Dieses Gebot ist der Schlüssel zu Weisheit und Leben..

In der orthodoxen Tradition des Ostens spielt die Weisheit eine grössere Rolle als im Westen. Die Heilige Weisheit, die Hagia Sophia, wird von den orthodoxen Christen verehrt. Wir kennen die Kirchen oder haben von ihnen gehört, die im Osten der Heiligen Weisheit geweiht sind. Die schönste von ihnen steht in Istanbul. Sie wird nicht mehr als Kirche benützt, sondern ist ein Museum geworden. Seltsam! Weisheit als Museum! Aber so wichtig das Gebäude ist, ist es doch nicht entscheidend. Wir sind Gottes Tempel. Wir sind die lebendigen Steine von Gottes Wohnsitz auf Erden. Weisheit muss in unseren Herzen einkehren. Und darum kann jeder Ort auf Erden in eine Hagia Sophia verwandelt werden und Gottes Weisheit in dieser Welt widerspiegeln.

* * *

Die Welt ist eine lebende Ikone des Antlitz Gottes.

Johannes Damaskenus

O du ewige Weisheit – die wir in Stücken kennen, aber nicht erfassen
O du ewige Gerechtigkeit – die wir zum Teil anerkennen, ihr aber nie völlig folgen
O du ewige Liebe – die wir lieben und uns doch davor fürchten zu sehr zu lieben:
 Öffne unseren Verstand, damit wir verstehen.
 Wirke in unserem Willen, damit wir gehorchen.
 Dring in unsere Herzen ein, damit wir dich lieben.
 Komm Herr Jesus!

T. R. Milford

Wir sind nicht allein, wir leben in Gottes Welt.
Wir glauben an Gott,
 der schuf und weiterhin schafft
 der in Jesus, dem fleischgewordenen Wort, gekommen ist,
 zu versöhnen und neu zu machen,
 der in uns und andern wirkt
 durch den Geist.
Wir vertrauen auf Gott.

Wir sind gerufen die Kirche zu sein
 Gottes Gegenwart zu feiern,
 andere zu lieben und ihnen zu dienen.
 Gerechtigkeit zu suchen und dem Bösen zu widerstehen
 Jesus zu verkündigen, den gekreuzigten und auferstandenen,
 unser Richter und unsere Hoffnung.

Im Leben, im Tod, im Leben jenseits des Todes
 ist Gott bei uns.
Wir sind nicht allein. Dank sei Gott.

United Church of Canada

II. The Creation, unfathomable mystery (Job 38-42)

Otto Schäfer

A passionate quest for meaning inhabits the long meditations and arguments of the book of Job. Job is in revolt against a God who has taken away his possessions and his children, his health and his dignity. Job is in torment, and his friends try to comfort him...and to defend God's justice. For Job's friends, everything can be explained: Job's misfortunes are necessarily the consequences of his sin, and his suffering is a painful corrective, but a useful one...

Everything can be explained...No, not at all, says God, for it is God in person who enters on the scene to confound Job's friends. Without even alluding to it, God tosses aside their one-size-fits-all theology. Here we see that God is God, and we ourselves are totally creatures, creatures dumbfounded at the immensity of the Creation. In chapters 38 to 42, a whole panorama of creatures, great and strange, passes in parade before us, some disposed to be intelligent, others wild, incomprehensible and even frightening.

The wonders of the world form a fascinating procession, beginning with the starry sky and going to the depths of the oceans. The coastline protects the solid earth against the raging ocean, and this is reassuring. But why does it rain in the desert? This rain is lost to the cultivated land, which keeps us alive... The horse pawing the ground and leaping with exultation is exciting, but it makes us think of war and battlefields . . . And of the eagle mounting so nobly into the air, verse 39,30 says "where the slain are, there it is". The world is disturbing, chaotic, in particular the animal world with its wild asses and oxen, ungovernable and dangerous, and even the incredible foolishness of the ostrich which, we are told, lays its eggs on the sand and leaves them in places where anyone at all might step on them... Fortunately there is some humour in all this.

But it is scathing humour nevertheless, because a provocation is hurled at us: who do you think you are, man (or woman), who do you think you are to judge your Creator? You know everything, don't you? You have understood everything? You are acquainted with it all, even though your life is so short, pathetic compared to the history of the universe! You watch over all, even though your little world is nothing in the unimaginable reaches of infinite space!

In what way can this naturalist's panorama be an answer to Job's torments? How does it bring comfort to this righteous man who is unhappy and in revolt? Let us say that, as so often in the Bible, this answer is greater than the question and therefore may look as though it misses the question... God may not have shown that God is just, but certainly has shown that God is God. God puts things back in place and puts Job back in his place. Job's place, the place of the human, is alongside the other creatures, somewhere in the varied fabric of the works of God. The human being is a creature, and not the Creator. And a creature is not the judge of its Creator.

The human creature is nowhere near the centre in this picture of the Creation. We find him or her placed discreetly right beside this sort of monstrous hippopotamus called Behemoth: "Look at Behemoth, which I made just as I made you" (40,15). The human being is no better than the animals. Ironically, the hierarchy is even turned upside down: "the first of the great acts of God" is the flattering description, not of the human being, but of Behemoth (40,19), and the "king over all that are proud" is not the human either, but Leviathan (41,26).

No other Bible passage, it seems to me, shows in such a sustained way how disconcerted are human beings face to face with created reality around them, in which they participate. Here we are at the other extreme from the domination which is expressed in Genesis 1 and Psalm 8. Job 38 to 42, out of all the Scriptures, administers a lesson in humility which is clearly applicable today.

Our contemporary concept of scientific progress, for instance, shows undeniable affinity with the message of Job 38-42. More than ever, science is reflecting on the limits of its grasp; it seeks to understand better what it does not know and cannot know. Our knowledge is in no way a perfect imprint of reality; rather, it is a partial approach, a distorting mirror, an incomplete instruction; in the life sciences it may even be the tragic paradox of a biology that destroys the object to which it is consecrated. Fundamentally, the Creation is still a mystery and is accessible to us only through admiration of its creatures and worship of the Creator.

In a much more concrete way, the ecological crisis confronts us with everything we do not know about the normal life cycles of the planet. The greenhouse effect and climate change are a dramatic surprise, showing that universal equilibria of which we had no precise idea have been upset. The disappearance of 50 to 100 living species a day represents an enormous loss of forms, of life strategies, of links in the chains of ecosystems and a considerable potential for all sorts of uses. So many species are becoming extinct, never having been studied or even known!

What consequences should we draw? No such consequences as in our situation today are contained in Job 38-42, of course, but the ones we can draw are legitimately derived from this Bible passage, because they translate the vision of the Creation and the Creator which is the vision of the text. I shall mention three:

- 1) Non-human creatures have an intrinsic value, that is, they are to be preserved and respected quite apart from human interests. This principle has already been largely accepted with regard to animal protection; some jurists are working to formulate wider applications of it to protect species and habitats.
- 2) The mystery of Creation and the limits of our knowledge call for caution. No prospecting without respecting what we encounter! And the principle of taking precautions is fundamental in our relations with the environment.
- 3) The impressive structures of connection, in the last chapters of the book of Job, between the individual and the universe, between the events of a life at the concrete level on one hand and cosmic space-time on the other, can serve as a model for us: today as long ago, one's inward faith should open up to the encounter with the immensity and diversity of the living and cosmic world around us.

* * *

Let us therefore note well that God wanted to humiliate us here, and correct that pride which is in us, the more so because we cannot keep ourselves within measure. Why is that? Because we do not think either of him or of his works. But there is no need for us to mount up as high as God's majesty, to be humiliated; the beasts can teach us, they will be our masters; for we are not worthy of other doctors to instruct us than these.

John Calvin, Commentary on Job

Lu - miè - re de Dieu, in - on - de la ter - re, vi -
 Komm gött - li - ches Licht, er - leuch - te die Er - de, er -
 Come light, light of God, give light to cre - a - tion, en -

si - te nos coeurs et de - meure a - vec nous.
 füll uns - re Her - zen, nimm Woh - nung in uns.
 ligh - ten our hearts and re - main with your world.

music and words: Grandchamp Community, Areuse/NE, Switzerland

**Song: Come, Light of God, give light to creation,
 enlighten our hearts and remain with your world.**

O God, Creator of the universe and of all that lives and breathes,
 from your dwelling place you refresh the mountains and forests.
 The earth is filled with the fruits of your work.
 You make grass grow for the herds,
 plants and fruit trees for people to farm,
 drawing their bread from the earth.
 You entrusted your Creation to us. We beseech you:
 save us from the temptation of power and domination.
 May your Spirit of Wisdom teach us
 how best to care for and safeguard what you entrust to us.
 Blow your Spirit of life on your creation and all humanity.

**Song: Come, Light of God, give light to creation,
 enlighten our hearts and remain with your world.**

We beseech you, bless every effort and every search,
every struggle and every pain that seek to restore the harmony and beauty of your Creation.
Renew the face of the earth, so that every human being
may live in peace and justice, fruits of your Spirit of love.
Blow your Spirit of life on your creation and all humanity.

**Song: Come, Light of God, give light to creation,
 enlighten our hearts and remain with your world.**

We beseech you, Lord, bless the fruits of the earth and the work of our hands
and teach us to share the abundance of your goods.
Send rain to the dry soil, sun and fair weather where harvest is endangered by storms.
Blow your Spirit of life on your creation and all humanity.

**Song: Come, Light of God, give light to creation,
 enlighten our hearts and remain with your world.**

From you, o Lord our God, come all gifts, and we give you thanks.
Hear the sigh raising from your creation, gather the suffering of all people,
Send us your blessing, so that we may live, in its fullness, the new life
Which you offer us through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Community of Grandchamp, Areuse/NE (Switzerland); translated by Elizabeth Stace

II. La Création, mystère insondable (Job 38 – 42)

Otto Schäfer

Une quête de sens acharnée habite les longues méditations et répliques du livre de Job. Job se révolte contre un Dieu qui lui a ôté ses biens et ses enfants, sa santé et sa dignité. Job est dans la tourmente et ses amis cherchent à le consoler et... à défendre la justice de Dieu. Pour les amis de Job tout s'explique : le malheur de Job est nécessairement la conséquence de son péché, sa souffrance est une correction pénible mais utile...

Tout s'explique... Point du tout, dit Dieu lui-même. Il entre sur scène pour confondre les amis de Job. Sans même y faire allusion il écarte leur prêt-à-porter théologique. Et voici que Dieu est Dieu. Et nous-mêmes nous sommes des créatures, résolument, créatures ébahies face à l'immensité de la Création. Dans les chapitres 38 à 42, tout un panorama de créatures grandioses et étranges défile devant nous, intelligemment disposées les unes, sauvages, incompréhensibles et même angoissantes les autres.

Les merveilles du monde forment un cortège fascinant à commencer par le ciel étoilé et jusqu'au fond des océans. La ligne côtière protège la terre ferme contre la mer déchaînée, et c'est rassurant. Mais pourquoi pleut-il sur le désert ? Cette pluie est perdue pour les cultures dont nous vivons... Qu'il est passionnant, le cheval qui piaffe et qui bondit d'ardeur, mais c'est la guerre et les champs de bataille qu'il évoque... Et de l'aigle qui s'élève si noblement dans les airs il est dit : « Là où sont des cadavres, il est là » (39,30). Le monde est troublant, chaotique, et le monde animal en particulier, avec ses onagres et buffles indomptables et nuisibles et même l'incroyable sottise de l'autruche qui, nous dit-on, pond ses œufs sur le sable et les abandonne dans un endroit où n'importe qui pourra les écraser... Il y a de l'humour dans tout cela, heureusement.

Humour grinçant, cependant, car une provocation nette nous est lancée : pour qui te prends-tu, homme (ou femme), pour qui te prends-tu, créature qui juges ton Créateur ? Tu sais tout, n'est-ce pas ? Tu as tout compris ? Tu connais tout, pourtant ta courte vie est si dérisoire en comparaison avec l'histoire de l'univers ! Tu supervises tout alors que ton petit monde à toi n'est qu'un rien dans l'inimaginable des espaces infinis !

En quoi ce panorama naturaliste aura-t-il répondu aux tourments de Job ? En quoi aura-t-il apporté une consolation à l'homme juste et pourtant malheureux et révolté ? Disons qu'il s'agit, comme si souvent dans la Bible, d'une réponse plus grande que la question et qui peut paraître, de ce fait, à côté de la question... Dieu n'aura pas montré qu'il est juste ; mais Dieu aura montré qu'il est Dieu. Il remet les choses en place et il remet Job à sa place. La place de Job, la place de l'humain est du côté des créatures, quelque part dans le tissu varié des œuvres de Dieu. L'humain est créature, il n'est pas lui-même Créateur. Et la créature ne peut juger son Créateur.

L'humain est totalement décentré dans ce tableau de la Création. On le trouve placé avec discrétion juste à côté de cette espèce d'hippopotame monstrueux qui s'appelle Behémoth : « Voici donc Behémoth. Je l'ai fait comme je t'ai fait » (40,15). L'humain n'est pas supérieur aux bêtes. Ironiquement la hiérarchie est même renversée : « chef d'œuvre de Dieu », ce qualificatif flatteur s'applique non à l'humain, mais à Behémoth (40,19), et le « roi sur tous les fauves » n'est pas l'humain, mais Léviathan (41,26).

Nulle part ailleurs dans la Bible, me semble-t-il, la démaîtrise de l'humain face à la réalité créée qui l'entoure et dont il participe n'est mise en relief avec autant d'insistance. On est ici aux antipodes de la domination exprimée en Genèse 1 et dans le Psaume 8. Job 38 à 42 dispense, dans l'ensemble des Ecritures, une leçon d'humilité dont l'actualité est évidente.

Notre conception contemporaine du progrès scientifique, par exemple, présente des affinités indéniables avec le message délivré dans Job 38 à 42. Plus que jamais la science réfléchit aux limites de son emprise, elle cherche à mieux comprendre ce qu'elle ne sait pas et ne peut pas savoir. Nos connaissances ne sont nullement un décalque de la réalité ; elles en sont approche partielle, miroir déformant, instruction partielle, voire même, dans les sciences de la vie, paradoxe tragique d'une biologie détruisant l'objet auquel elle se consacre. Fondamentalement, la Création demeure un mystère et ne nous est accessible que dans l'admiration des créatures et dans l'adoration du Créateur.

Beaucoup plus concrètement, la crise écologique nous confronte à tout ce que nous ne connaissons pas aux cycles de vie de la planète habitée. L'effet de serre et les changements climatiques ? Une surprise dramatique de dérégulation d'équilibres universels dont nous n'avons aucune idée précise. La disparition de 50 ou 100 espèces vivantes par jour ? Une perte immense de formes, de stratégies vitales, de maillons dans les chaînes écosystémiques et d'un potentiel considérable d'usages variés. Tant d'espèces disparaissent sans avoir été étudiées, sans même avoir été connues !

Quelles conséquences faut-il tirer ? Ces conséquences, dans notre situation actuelle, ne sont pas contenues dans le passage Job 38 à 42, bien entendu, mais elles s'en inspirent légitimement ; car elles traduisent la vision de la Création et du Créateur, qui est celle du texte. J'en nommerai trois :

- 1) Les créatures non humaines ont une valeur intrinsèque, c'est-à-dire elles sont à conserver et à respecter indépendamment d'intérêts humains. Dans la protection animale ce principe est déjà largement acquis ; certains juristes essaient d'en formuler des applications plus larges dans la protection des espèces et des milieux.
- 2) Le mystère de la Création et les limites de nos connaissances inspirent la prudence. Il ne faut pas prospecter sans respecter ! Et le principe de précaution est fondamental dans nos rapports à l'environnement.
- 2) L'articulation impressionnante, dans les derniers chapitres du livre de Job, entre l'individu et l'univers, entre les événements d'une vie concrète, d'une part, et l'espace-temps cosmique, d'autre part, peut nous servir de modèle : aujourd'hui comme jadis l'intériorité de la foi doit s'ouvrir à la rencontre avec l'immensité et la diversité du monde vivant et cosmique autour de nous.

* * *

Et ainsi notons bien que Dieu nous a ici voulu humilier, et corriger cet orgueil qui est en nous, d'autant que nous ne pouvons nous tenir de nous priser outre mesure. Pourquoi cela ? Car nous ne pensons ni à lui ni à ses œuvres. Or il ne faut point que nous montions si haut qu'à sa majesté pour nous humilier : mais les bêtes nous peuvent enseigner, et elles seront nos maîtresses : car nous ne sommes pas dignes d'avoir d'autres docteurs que ceux-là.

Jean Calvin, Commentaire sur Job

Lu - miè - re de Dieu, in - on - de la ter - re, vi -
 Komm gött - li - ches Licht, er - leuch - te die Er - de, er -
 Come light, light of God, give light to cre - a - tion, en -

si - te nos coeurs et de - meure a - vec nous.
 füll uns - re Her - zen, nimm Woh - nung in uns.
 ligh - ten our hearts and re - main with your world.

Musique et texte: Communauté de Grandchamp, Areuse/NE, Suisse

**Chant : Lumière de Dieu, inonde la terre,
 visite nos coeurs et demeure avec nous !**

Dieu, Créateur de l'Univers et de tout ce qui vit et respire,
 depuis tes demeures, tu abreuves les montagnes et les forêts ;
 la terre se rassasie du fruit de ton travail;
 tu fais pousser l'herbe pour le bétail,
 les plantes et les fruits que cultive l'humain, tirant son pain de la terre.
 Tu nous as confié cette création.
 Nous t'en supplions, sauve-nous de la tentation du pouvoir et de la domination.
 Que ton Esprit d'intelligence nous apprenne à mieux gérer et sauvegarder ce que tu nous confies.
 Souffle sur la création et toute l'humanité ton Esprit de Vie.

Chant : **Lumière de Dieu, inonde la terre,
visite nos coeurs et demeure avec nous !**

Nous t'en supplions, bénis tout effort et toute recherche,
toute lutte et toute souffrance en vue de rétablir l'harmonie et la beauté de ta création.
Renouvelle la face de la terre, afin que tout être humain puisse vivre dans
la paix et la justice, fruit de ton Esprit d'amour.
Souffle sur la création et toute l'humanité ton Esprit de Vie.

Chant : **Lumière de Dieu, inonde la terre,
visite nos coeurs et demeure avec nous !**

Nous t'en supplions, Seigneur, bénis les fruits de la terre et le travail de nos mains
et apprends-nous à partager l'abondance de tes biens.
Envoie la pluie sur les terres desséchées, le soleil et un temps favorable
là où intempéries risquent de porter préjudice aux récoltes.
Souffle sur la création et toute l'humanité ton Esprit de Vie.

Chant : **Lumière de Dieu, inonde la terre,
visite nos coeurs et demeure avec nous !**

De toi, Seigneur notre Dieu, nous viennent tous les dons, et nous t'en rendons grâce.
Entends le soupir qui monte de la création, recueille la souffrance de toute personne,
envoie ta bénédiction pour qu'advienne dans sa plénitude la vie nouvelle
que tu nous offres en Jésus, le Christ, notre Seigneur. Amen.

Communauté de Grandchamp, Areuse/NE (Suisse)

III. Keeping the Sabbath in a world that never rests

Henrik Grape

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20, 8-11)

Remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy. This is a commandment, among the ten, that a hundred years ago many had to learn by heart especially in the Nordic context. That is not the case anymore. But the contents of the commandments are still important.

But how often do we stress the commandment to rest or to keep the Sabbath holy in our time? Can we put forward the commandment of rest and keep the creation holy without moralising over those who can't keep the commandment because of the structures of their society?

It may be that the commandment has been used to keep people from doing things more than to protect humanity and the earth. But Jesus' words in Mark 2,27: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," are important for the understanding of the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy and to rest. The words of Jesus can be interpreted today as meaning that the Sabbath was made for all of creation.

Today we no longer criticize those who want to be active and work every day of the week. The objection against a Sabbath, a holy day, a day of rest, is for economic reasons: nothing is to restrain the exponential economic growth which is often described by the word "development".

Today no one criticises those who want to be active and work every day of the week. Quite the opposite, they are often admired and looked upon as heroes.

The efficient and effective organisation of the global society today never has time to rest. There is no place for a Sabbath to be kept holy. In the new world of globalisation should everyone be on-line? Those who are on-line never rest. In the new world of globalisation the pursuit of money never ceases. The monetary system works around the clock, always with the focus on increase of growth.

Growth always has to increase, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the measure of success. The GDP has become our security. But the GDP cannot measure our happiness, GDP cannot measure the health of the earth, GDP cannot measure the justice or the distribution of the gifts of the earth.

Who can, in this time, claim the importance of Sabbath and a holy day for rest? Is it meaningful to speak about a holy day for humanity and for the creation? Is there any sense in recognising Gods' creation or keeping the Sabbath as a way to recognise that it is made out of the love of God? It may look odd to do this today.

Maybe we do not want to hear about the Sabbath because it may be an obstacle for our own vain struggles for success. The everlasting strive after more, a strive that deafens the unsatisfied inner self.

But the commandment of Sabbath is about recovery, the rhythm of the creation and the holiness of the creation.

Recovery. All life needs recovery. All human beings need oxygen to breath, water and food to function and last but not least, they need to rest. Without rest a human cannot live. Rest brings physical recovery. If humankind does not rest it will not survive. Rest is a kind of precondition for life.

But in this rest there is also room for reflection. Reflection over what has happened around us, an opportunity to ask the questions; Who am I? Where am I going? Where do I come from?

Many people in Europe live in towns. Large or small towns. In nearly all towns there is a lot of light during night times. Streets and squares are filled with light from street lights and advertising signs. This electronic enlightenment has nothing to do with the spiritual dimension of enlightenment; rather it is the opposite. This "enlightened towns" problem is not only about energy. The biggest problem is that people living in these towns never can see the starry sky. Those who stand under the starry sky and look out into the cosmos are easily able to ask the questions; Who am I? Where do I come from? Where are we going? To stand under the starry sky and reflect upon life is to recover.

Abraham stood under the stars in the dark of the night and was in some way offered recovery and time for reflection over where the promise of God had brought him. In some way we need the time for rest and reflection and recovery just as Abraham. We need the starry sky to wonder over life, we need the starry sky that gives us time for reflection, for recovery.

The rhythm of creation. There is a rhythm in creation. The rhythm is marked by day and night. Every 24 hours we have space for work, rest and reflection. The day is for work and the night is for recovery. But one day is marked as the day for rest, a holy day. The day of rest is for all of creation. The 24-hour cycle has a rhythm and the seven days also have a rhythm.

A rhythm is inherent in each year. Especially in the Nordic perspective, the rhythm of the seasons is important. The spring is the time for creation to awaken and the life of creation is returning. Summer is the time of beauty and the warmth of the sun. The autumn is the time of all the different colours when the creation is preparing for the rest and the cold winter when the life of nature will be damped down awaiting the sun to start warming the ground again.

In the biblical perspective the years also have a given rhythm. In the Old Testament the seventh year was the free-year for the land to rest. There were also a rhythm of reconciliation and justice that meant that every 49 years debts should be cancelled. A state of equilibrium should be made, *shalom*, peace should be restored.

There is a rhythm in the creation that point towards *shalom*, a state of equilibrium. We can also see that in the parable of the grain of wheat. In John 12,24 it says “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”. This is the precondition of life. Creation has a pattern; a rhythm that says that life goes through death to life. It is a rhythm of labour and rest, of growth and decomposition, darkness and light. The mystic of the grain is great.

Holy. In the commandment there is also an explanation or a motivation as to why this commandment is given. To keep the Sabbath holy is to give you recovery. But not only for yourself. For everyone, for the family, for the workers and for the most vulnerable. For everyone recovery is holy.

But this is not only for humans. The animals are included. And if we read Leviticus 3:25,2-4 it is clear that also the lands have their right to rest, to recover. All life is in need of recovery and reconciliation. Rest is holy.

The problem today is that humanity and the land do not rest, do not get the chance to recover.

The creation is wholeness were all life has a rhythm that is based on labour and rest, to give out and to receive, to be awake and to sleep. There is a rhythm in the wheat grain; to grow, to give new grains and to fall into the soil, and wait for its time to give life again. The Sabbath is for the protection of life, to shield the holiness of life.

Can we seriously claim the commandment of the Sabbath today? Can we really talk about the importance of rest when the world is facing so many threats? Climate changes that threaten the most vulnerable in the world today. Climate changes that threaten extinct plants and animals. Can we seriously talk about a holy day when the world is in need of action?

Yes, more then ever we need to claim the Sabbath. Humanity and creation need it. The most vulnerable need to keep a day holy for recovery, and reconciliation.

* * *

This day is for Israel light and rejoicing – a Sabbath of rest.
Thou badest us standing at Sinai
that all the years through we should keep thy behest
to set out a table full-laden to honour. The Sabbath of rest!
Treasure of heart for the broken people
gift of new soul for the soul’s distress
soother of sighs for the imprisoned spirit: the Sabbath of rest!
When the work of the worlds in their wonder was finished
Thou madest this day to be holy and blest
and those heavy-laden found safety and stillness. A Sabbath of rest!

Traditional Sabbath table Hymn

IV. The place of human beings in God's whole Creation

Ilie Moldovan

You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them, so that the land to which I bring you to settle in may not vomit you out. (Leviticus 20:22)

First of all and over all: Love. In the above-cited passage, to which we are referring in both an exegetical and a prophetic sense, we find a relationship to the creation as the work of God, a work in which the creation is revealed as being filled with the Creator's love. The act of creation is, first, an encounter between the great mystery of the glorifying of God and the mystery of creation. Christian thinking, in assessing the act of creation, does not begin with the creature, but rather begins with God, in order to understand the act of creation. The world exists only because God willed it – and loves it. All that exists testifies to the Father who “so loved the world” (John 3,16). Only out of an infinite and eternally loving plan could other beings besides God, and completely independent of God, come into existence. Love is the fundamental action and reality of God, that is, it is bound up with God's eternal existence. This absolute love is in fact the life of the Holy Trinity. Outside the Trinity, it reveals itself only through a benevolent will, which is related first to the original creation and likewise to the divine plan of salvation: the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Lord and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, that is, through the “work” of the Son and its “completion” through the Holy Spirit.

It is true that the text cited above contains a prophetic promise only in relation to the divine plan for salvation, but the promise is completed when, through it, we find ourselves in the place which belongs to humankind in God's entire creation. Appearing on the final day of creation, human beings are the crown of all that exists. Defined as a microcosm, the human being is a recapitulation of the elements and values of the whole universe. Even more, the human is created by God as a person, one who shares in the very life of the Divine, by becoming a recipient of grace and a “worker together with” God in creation. This surely tells us what it means that, through love, God's very self is incorporated in a human being, transfiguring the whole creation.

The meaning of the creation transfigured in Christ and the place of the human being in the salvation's plan of redemption. From the same prophetic viewpoint of the above-cited passage, we must also regard it as fact that to refer to God's “statutes” in the creation cannot mean, under the new law, anything other than the harmony of the oneness of all things, realised through the creative – and redemptive – love of God, revealed in the plan of salvation. This means that two realisations whose value is absolute must be emphasised:

- I. the uniting of humankind with God – and of God with humankind;
- II. the uniting of the whole creation in humankind.

With regard to the first reality, the highest reality of God's presence in humankind, we must see that the whole creation senses this divine work. The second reality completes the first, for when human beings fulfil their calling to be microcosms, they also become mediators, those in whom all created things are uplifted to a godly state. So, through the agency of human beings, the being of everything that exists vibrates with mystery. “Holy, Holy, Holy” is the hymn of an eternal doxology, what the Orthodox Church calls its “Cosmic Liturgy”. This is the sense in which we can say of humankind that we are the priests of all creation.

The requirement for Christians to find themselves anew in the restored – and in Christ, transfigured – Paradise of the cosmic liturgy, and the meaning of their Fall from this Paradise. In our text, the words of the prophet which express the will of God ultimately have the character of a commandment and emphasise a consequence: “Keep my statutes, keep my ordinances!” “You cannot gain the cosmic Paradise which is prepared for you in any other way than by following completely the One who can give it to you!”

This is a call to freedom for human beings. Even after it has been gained, it can always be lost again, as the first Paradise was lost. This warning is inwardly related to the Ten Commandments which Moses received from God on the mountain. The most important of them, in this context, would appear to be “You shall not kill.” (Exodus 20,13)

Sin desecrates the Paradise which Jesus Christ, the Lord, has restored through his death and the resurrection he promised to us (Luke 23,43). The consequences of this desecration are serious, they amount to a new Fall and being driven out of Paradise anew. Can we fail to see the bloodshed on the earth caused by today's wars? Should we claim to know nothing about the generalised killing of children through official, and unofficial, surgical and chemical abortion?

The consequence of these heinous crimes is cosmic entropy, the ecological crisis. The passage we have cited and analysed is therefore, in conclusion, a warning which applies to this crisis. But in this crisis, a solution is also given to us by Christ the Lord. "Stand up, take your mat and walk . . . Do not sin any more." (John 5,8:14)

A conclusion which becomes an appeal. This is the appeal to all Christian peoples who have been deemed worthy to have land entrusted to them, who have acquired the ground given to them from the hand of God – in the sense of this passage quoted from Leviticus 20, 22. It is the call to approach the mysteries, restored by Christ, of the Paradise which every Christian country represents, and to see the miracles of its divine beauty. For every people which is called to genuine self-realisation in Christ, to that life which makes of every human being a microcosm and a mediator, Paradise is the meadow from which we came, the church of a cosmic liturgy, where mystic marriages are celebrated and where the sources of the life of every people arise.

These words can also signify a return to those sources, when we have become alienated from them, especially through the disastrous generalised killing of children, which causes the springs to dry up and makes of the cosmos an ecological ruin. For, in the ecological situation of today, only a divine intervention can save us. This is precisely the warning of Leviticus 20.

* * *

Praise be to the Holy Trinity!
God is sound and life,
Creator of the Universe,
Source of all life,
Whom the angels sing;
Wondrous Light of all mysteries unknown to humankind,
And life that lives in all.

Hildegard of Bingen, 13th Century

Lover of humankind, keep unharmed the environment that clothes the earth, through which, by your will, we who inhabit the earth live and move and have our being, that we, your unworthy suppliants, may be delivered from destruction and ruin.

Response: Lord have mercy.

Fence round the creation, O Christ, Saviour, with the mighty strength of your love for humankind, and deliver the earth we inhabit from the corruption which threatens it; for we, your servants, have set our hopes on you.

Response: Lord, have mercy.

Put an end, O Saviour, to the evil designs which are being devised against us by senseless intent, and turn aside from the earth every destructive action of the works of human hands which contrive corruption leading to perdition.

Response: Lord, have mercy.

O Lord, who holds the circle of the earth and establishes its foundations, as the Prophet says, accept our suppliant entreaties, as our guardian and protector and Saviour; for we are your people and the sheep of your pasture and by your infinite mercy we shall be delivered from expected dangers. Do not then utterly destroy us, Master, but may your goodness conquer the multitude of our offences, that we may glorify the ocean of your acts of pity.

Response: Lord, have mercy.

From an Orthodox Prayer Service for Creation

IV. Der Platz der Menschenwesen in der gesamten Schöpfung Gottes

Ilie Moldovan

So haltet nun alle meine Satzungen und meine Rechte und tut danach, auf dass euch nicht das Land ausspeie, in das ich euch führen will, damit ihr darin wohnet. (3 Mose 20, 22)

Vor allem und über allem: Die Liebe. In dem angeführten Zitat, auf welches wir uns sowohl exegetisch als auch prophetisch beziehen, finden wir einen Bezug zur Schöpfung als Werk Gottes, ein Werk, in welchem sich die Schöpfung als erfüllt von der Liebe des Schöpfers offenbart. In der Schöpfungstat begegnen einander zunächst das grosse Geheimnis der Vergöttlichung und das Geheimnis der Schöpfung. Das christliche Denken hat als Ausgangspunkt in der Einschätzung der Schöpfungstat nicht das Geschöpf, sondern es geht von Gott aus, um die Schöpfungstat zu verstehen. Die Welt existiert nur, weil sie von Gott gewollt – und geliebt ist. Die ganze Existenz zeugt von dem „Vater, der die Welt so sehr geliebt hat.“ (Joh. 3, 10). Nur aus einem unendlichen und ewigen Plan der Liebe heraus konnten neben Gott und in völliger Abhängigkeit von Ihm auch andere Existenzen erscheinen. Die Liebe ist in Gott als grundlegende Tat und Realität, d. h. sie ist verbunden mit seiner ewigen Existenz. Tatsächlich ist diese absolute Liebe das Leben der Heiligen Dreieinigkeit. Ausserhalb der Dreieinigkeit teilt sie sich jedoch nur mit durch ein Wohlwollen, das sich zunächst auf die ursprüngliche Schöpfung bezieht und ebenso auf den göttlichen Heilsplan: Menschwerdung, Tod, Auferstehung des Herrn und die Ausgiessung des Heiligen Geistes, d. h. durch das „Werk“ des Sohnes und die „Vollendung“ durch den Heiligen Geist.

Es stimmt, das in dem angeführten Text nur eine auf den göttlichen Heilsplan bezogene prophetische Verheissung enthalten ist, doch die Verheissung ergänzt ihn, wenn wir uns durch ihn auf den Platz beziehen, welchen der Mensch in der gesamten Schöpfung Gottes einnimmt. Am letzten Schöpfungstag erschienen, krönt der Mensch alles, was besteht. Definiert als Mikrokosmos jedoch rekapituliert er in sich die Elemente und Werte des gesamten Universums. Noch mehr als das: von Gott als Person geschaffen, hat der Mensch am göttlichen Leben selbst teil, in dem er ein Gefäss der Gnade und ein „Mitarbeiter“ Gottes in der Schöpfung wird. Sicher, hier ist die Rede von dem Sinn dessen, das Gott sich aus Liebe im Menschen verkörpert und so die ganze Schöpfung verklärt.

Die Bedeutung der in Christus verkklärten Schöpfung und der Platz des Menschen im Heilsplan der Erlösung.

In derselben prophetischen Sicht des angeführten Zitates müssen wir auch die Tatsache festhalten, dass ein Bezug auf die „Satzungen“ Gottes in der Schöpfung im neuen Gesetz nichts anderes sein kann als eine Harmonie der Einheit aller Dinge, verwirklicht durch die schöpferische – und erlösende Liebe Gottes, enthüllt im göttlichen Heilsplan. In diesem Sinne sollen zwei Realisierungen von absolutem Wert hervorgehoben werden:

- I. die Vereinigung des Menschen mit Gott und – Gottes mit dem Menschen
- II. die Vereinigung der ganzen Schöpfung im Menschen.

Was die erste Realität betrifft, die höchste Realität der Gegenwart Gottes im Menschen, ist festzustellen, dass die ganze Schöpfung diese göttliche Werk spürt. Die zweite Realität ergänzt die erste: dann, wenn der Mensch seine Berufung erfüllt, Mikrokosmos zu sein, wird er zugleich auch Vermittler d. h. der, in welchem alle geschaffenen Dinge zu Gott erhoben sind. So befindet sich das Wesen all dessen, was besteht, durch den Menschen in einem geheimnisvollen Vibrieren. „Heilig, heilig, heilig“ – ist der Hymnus einer ewigen Doxologie die in der Orthodoxen Kirche „Kosmische Liturgie genannt wird“. In diesem Sinne können wir vom Menschen sagen, dass er der Priester der ganzen Schöpfung ist.

Die Bedingung des sich-wieder-Findens des Christen im wieder hergestellten – und in Christus verkklärten Paradies der kosmischen Liturgie und der Sinn seines Falles aus diesem Paradies.

In dem Zitat, auf welches wir uns beziehen, haben die Worte des Propheten, in welchen der Wille Gottes ausgedrückt wird, schliesslich den Charakter eines Gebotes, in welchem eine Konsequenz hervorgehoben wird: „Haltet die Satzungen, haltet die Rechte!“ „Das kosmische Paradies, das euch bereitet ist, könnt ihr nicht anders gewinnen als so, das ihr euch ganz anschliesst an Den, Der es euch schenken kann!“

Es ist ein Aufruf an die Freiheit des Menschen. Auch nachdem es gewonnen ist, kann es wann immer verloren werden, so wie auch das erste Paradies verloren wurde. Diese Warnung steht in einer inneren Beziehung zu den zehn Geboten, die Mose auf dem Berg vor Gott empfing. Das Wichtigste unter ihnen in diesem Zusammenhang scheint das Gebot zu sein : „Du sollst nicht töten!“ (2 Mose 20, 13)

Die Sünde entweicht das von Jesus Christus, dem Herrn, durch seinen Tod und seine gepriesene Auferstehung (Lk. 23, 43) wieder hergestellte Paradies. Die Konsequenzen dieser Entweihung sind schwerwiegend, sie entsprechen einem neuen Fall und einer neuen Vertreibung aus dem Paradies. Können wir hinwegsehen über das Blutvergiessen auf der Erde durch die Kriege von heute? Sollten wir nicht wissen von den Folgen der allgemeinen Kindertötung d.h. von den offiziellen – und nicht offiziellen-, chirurgischen- und hormonellen Abtreibungen?

Die Folge dieser Freveltaten ist die kosmische Entropie, die ökologische Krise.

Das von uns analysierte Zitat ist in der Schlussfolgerung eine Warnung, diese Krise betreffend. Doch eine Lösung in dieser Krise gibt uns ebenfalls Christus der Herr: „Steh auf, nimm dein Bett und geh hin! Sündige hinfort nicht mehr!“ (Joh. 5, 8. 14)

Eine Schlussfolgerung die sich in einen Aufruf verwandelt. Es ist der Aufruf, der sich an alle christlichen Völker wendet, die dessen gewürdigt wurden, dass ihnen ein Land zugeteilt wurde, die den Boden erworben haben, der ihnen durch Gottes Hand gegeben wurde – entsprechend dem Sinn des Zitats aus 3 Mose 20, 22. Es ist der Ruf, sich den Geheimnissen des in Christus wieder hergestellten Paradieses zu nähern, das jedes christliche Land darstellt, die Wunder seiner göttlichen Schönheit zu erschauen. Denn für jedes Volk, das zu einer echten Selbstfindung in Christus gerufen ist zu jenem Leben, das den Menschen zu einem Mikrokosmos und Vermittler macht, ist das Paradies die Aue seiner Herkunft, die Kirche einer kosmischen Liturgie, wo die geheimnisvollen Hochzeiten vollzogen werden und wo die Quellen der Existenz jedes Volkes entspringen.

Diese Worte können auch eine Rückkehr zu jenen Quellen bedeuten, wo es zur Entfremdung von ihnen gekommen ist – besonders durch das Unheil, welches die allgemeine Kindertötung bringt, die die Quellen versiegen lässt und so den Kosmos zur ökologischen Ruine macht. Denn in der heutigen ökologischen Situation kann nur noch ein göttliches Eingreifen retten. Genau das ist die Warnung aus 3 Mose 20.

Übersetzung aus dem Rumänischen: Siegfried Schullerus

* * *

Lob sei der Dreieinigkeit!
Sie ist Klang und Leben, Schöpferin des Alls,
Lebensquell von allem, Lob der Engelscharen,
wunderbarer Glanz all des Geheimen,
das den Menschen unbekannt, und in allem ist sie Leben.

Hildegard von Bingen, 13. Jh.

Freund der Menschen, bewahre die Umwelt vor Schaden, welche die Erde umgibt und durch die wir nach Deinem Willen die Erde bewohnen, in der wir leben, uns bewegen und unser Dasein gestalten, dass wir, Deine unwürdigen Bittsteller, vor Zerstörung und Untergang befreit werden.

Antwort: Herr, erbarme Dich.

Umzäune die ganze Schöpfung, o Christus Erlöser, mit der mächtigen Kraft Deiner Liebe für die Menschheit, und befreie die Erde, die wir bewohnen, vor der Korruptheit, die sie bedroht, denn wir, Deine Diener, haben unsere Hoffnungen in Dich gesetzt.

Antwort: Herr, erbarme Dich.

Bereite, o Heiland, den bösen Plänen ein Ende, die durch sinnlose Absicht gegen uns geschmiedet werden und wende von der Erde alle Akte der Zerstörung ab, die das Werk menschlicher Hände sind, Verderbtheit stiften und zur Verdammnis führen.

Antwort: Herr, erbarme Dich.

O Herr, der Du über dem Erdenrund thronst und ihren Grund legst, wie der Prophet sagt, nimm unser inständiges Flehen an, als unser Hüter und Beschützer und Heiland, denn wir sind Dein Volk und die Schafe Deiner Weide, und durch Deine unendliche Barmherzigkeit werden wir vor unerwarteten Gefahren verschont bleiben. So zerstöre uns nicht völlig, Meister, sondern möge Deine Güte über die grosse Zahl unserer Verfehlungen siegen, damit wir den Ozean Deiner Akte des Erbarmens lobpreisen.

Antwort: Herr, erbarme Dich.

aus einer orthodoxen Gebetsfeier für die Schöpfung

V. The anxiety of hoarding and the anxiety of poverty

Lidia Maggi

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me” Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he said to them “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions”. And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, “what shall I do? I have no place to store my crops” Then he said: “This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my grain and my goods. And I will say to myself “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry” But God said to him “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” This is how it will be with everyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God. (Luke 12,13-21)

Give us today our daily bread (Matthew 6,11)

Miriam keeps on stealing slices of bread from the table and hides them under her pillow. She has been living with us for a few months and yet she has not become accustomed to having three daily meals for certain. She fears that tomorrow she won’t have food enough to feed herself. She still carries the memory of the poverty she suffered.

She is still tormented by it. Who stole her trust?

The parable of the rich man, who built larger barns to store lots of goods, does not apply to her. The two ways of hoarding are not comparable. Miriam is moved by the fear that she will not receive what she deserves, by right, day by day: food, care, love...

She has learnt the hard way that the bread she claims for everyday is often missing. Many a time she asked for bread from people who gave her snakes and stones instead. The rich man of the parable hoards and hoards again because he is a miser. When facing extraordinary harvests, he cannot but worry about where to store it. His greed takes on the guise of wisdom, so that one could believe there may be common sense in his thinking about the future. It reminds us of what Joseph suggested to the pharaoh in order to fight against coming famine.

Yet the rich man is not concerned with the future; rather, he is afraid that he will not have barns huge enough as needed to store extraordinary crops. He fears tomorrow because he fears someone will ransack his barns. “You fool”, God says, “this very night your life will be demanded from you”. You fool! You had plenty of goods and did not need to store anymore. You could leave what was left to other people, as Boaz did with Ruth, when he allowed her to glean in his field. You Fool! You tore down your barns and built bigger ones for nothing. You fool! Your goods will outlive you; but your life is rotting already like amassed and not-shared manna. It is useless and stinks worst.

Two different anxieties face each other: the anxiety of hoarding and the anxiety of poverty. They have different weights in God’s justice.

“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me”. That is Miriam’s prayer. It summons us because we were unable to share and we took possession of what was hers by right of inheritance and it was superfluous to us and answered no need. “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me”. Today churches are tempted to behave along the lines of Jesus’ first objection: “Who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”. Jesus himself seems to understand that behind that question there is not only a quarrel about the inheritance but justice in relationships, with her brother; a fair distribution of resources in our lives in the world.

We, religious people, are tempted to be silent, to shut out the word of judgement that echoes through this disquieting parable. And so the poor who claim their part of denied inheritance hear the churches saying: “Ask who holds the economic and legal power to solve your problem. We are unable to give you your flouted rights back, but we can be charitable and give alms”.

Besides, this story seems to refute the justice of the kingdom and the poor keep on being told: “You fools were not able to hold your bread and had it stolen, so die!”. The poor who need bread ask for justice, not for charity. The miser, the thief of goods, is given a clear statement of judgement by this parable, though also with a precious invitation to freedom. Only he can break the chains that imprison him. The parable urges him to knock down the walls he has built round himself and discover priority in his life. How can humanity recover from the malady of accumulation, that makes us so avaricious about things so that we undervalue life’s true value?

Today we need a subtler insight than the Jews in the desert. They were asked not to accumulate manna. That was easy, for manna could not be stored because it soon rotted. They lived in the desert, where life is precarious, where no pantry is given. What we store does not rot, instead, that's our problem. Our goods outlive our fragile lives, even though we cling to them, as a fetish of immortality.

We, who have plenty of bread, are we allowed to pray "give us today our daily bread"? There is the answer in the plural of the invocation (give *us*), that we call upon *our* Father, not my Father. It is a decision of our own making renewed every day to open to others and to broaden our horizon.

The rich man is tempted to skip straight to the last sentence of "Our Father": "free us from evil". He does not need to invoke for daily bread! Yet, referring to today has precious meaning not only for the rich, but also for the poor, who are often tempted to claim the rich man's barns filled with goods.

Yet the model proposed is not a society based on accumulation of wealth. Daily bread is the evangelical model! Learning to ask for everyday bread, claiming it in the plural, this kind of wisdom binds us together and makes us responsible, one for the other. We are rich in the eyes of God only when we learn to give the others our precious goods, only when we truly care that everyone has abundance of life. The bread we claim is meant not only to nourish everyone, but also to appease the hunger for justice of those who follow our God, crucified and resurrected.

* * *

A wise Rabbi was walking along a road when he saw a man planting a tree. The Rabbi asked: "How many years will it take before this tree will bear fruit?" The man answered: "Seventy years". Then the Rabbi asked: "You feel you are so strong and healthy that you expect to live so long to be able to eat its fruits?" The man answered: "I've found a world rich of fruits because my forefathers planted trees for me. I will do the same for my children".

Forgive us, Lord,
our obsession with ourselves.
We are not able to recognise our own limits.
We are so concentrated
on our present needs and on our own work
that we forget to be grateful
for the gifts You have given us
through the generations who have gone before us.
Forgive us, Lord,
for our closed horizon
preventing us from looking toward tomorrow,
preventing us from handing over to our children
a fertile and clean earth.
Forgive us, Lord,
for our greedy selfishness,
for our closed hands
grasping to hoard all we can
to squeeze our natural resources dry.
Open our hands, Lord,
to the joy of sharing.
Teach them the sower's generous gesture,
so that we may sow seeds without caring
who will benefit from the fruits of the harvest.
Amen.

Luca M. Negro

VI. Living as Christ's "cosmopolitans"

Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz

For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? (Mark. 8,36)

Again, one of those radical words of Jesus! The context makes it clear: Discipleship is the theme: "For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." At first glance, our text has nothing to do with creation spirituality. For the alternative to which it speaks is that between the "world" (in Greek "cosmos") and the disciples' "life", or more precisely, their "soul" (Greek: "psyche"). Moreover, it is between winning and losing. A dualism that leaves no room for anything in between.

The sharp distinction between *cosmos* and *psyche* smacks of gnosticism. The gnostics thought that the "soul" was the divine spark caught in the dark and ungodly spheres of the (individual) body and the (cosmic) world. Redemption meant that this divine and eternal essence had to be liberated from its earthly prison. The Redeemer was the One who had come down from the heavenly and eternal realm to rescue the divine sparks and, by ascending to heaven, to pave the way back up for the redeemed. This way up was one of strict discipleship. Everything was lost if and when the "soul" allowed itself to be carried away by the temptations of the *cosmos*. This helps to understand the strict alternative between the *cosmos* and the *psyche*, between "winning" and "losing".

Obviously, a gnostic interpretation of the words of Jesus does not make our search for creation spirituality any easier. As a matter of fact, there appears to be a definitive gap between the (immortal) *psyche* and the (mortal) *cosmos*. How, then, are we to go on?

Gnosticism is not the answer. On the contrary. We know today that our soul and the world around us are more deeply connected than we are used to admit. We are "earthlings" and, in this sense, born "cosmopolitans", inhabitants of the world. Our psychic dispositions exist in constant interdependence with our bodily and earthly conditions. Therefore, the better we understand this connectedness, the more we can be at peace with ourselves and the world around us.

Does this mean that we must do without Mark 8,36? Not at all.

The question is: How do we form and nurture the intimate relationship between *psyche* and *cosmos*? What shape to we give to it? To put it simply: we have the choice to allow this relationship to be shaped by the gospel of Jesus or by the "gospels" of all the "redeemers" around us. They promise us that the more you have, the happier you are. They tell us: The world is there to suit your needs. A good life is to belong to the winners, no matter what it costs. Those who do not make "it" are the "losers" and they have themselves to blame.

What these "apostles of success" do not tell us is that they are modelling the relationship between *cosmos* and *psyche* on greed and envy. They do not tell us that they create an unceasing longing for more and greater things. Nor do tell us that this greedy longing makes our souls empty. We "lose" them to the captivating "needs" that others are dictating. At the same time it is a safe way to lose the world as God wills it to exist.

So let us look at the way of Jesus! In all the things he said and did and suffered, including the hideous death on the cross, he lived out of the fullness of God (in Greek: *pleroma*). Call it God's grace, or mercy, or countless bounty, call it the abundance of creation as our earthly home, it was the energy by which Jesus lived (and goes on living). It was this *pleroma* that brought the lame to their feet and opened the eyes of the blind. This was the energy that roused Lazarus from his tomb. It was the love that manifested itself in Jesus' suffering and was glorified in his resurrection.

To be with Jesus and to follow him is to walk in the fullness of God. To walk in love for everything that surrounds us. This is our calling: live our lives as Christ's "cosmopolitans"!

Discipleship does not alienate us from creation. On the contrary, it fills us with awe and admiration for the wonders of God's world. If we let our soul be nurtured by God's loving kindness we are freed from greed and envy.

We find ourselves in a world of globalized greed and exploitation, affluence and misery, injustice and want. Hence our calling as "Christ's cosmopolitans" takes on world-wide significance. As we take joy in the miraculous ways that sustain the ecosystems of this planet we are compelled to exercise our responsibility for keeping our lifestyles well within their carrying capacities. Walking in the fullness of God involves a new kind of discipline, namely to make our footprints as lightly for the earth as possible. It means to stop being the proverbial bull in a china shop.

For long periods of time, Christians have understood words like Mark 8,36 as a call to turn away from the temptations and abominations of the flesh and a sinful world. As if it was possible to turn our backs to them! We are now called to understand this sentence as an invitation to bathe our souls, as it were, in the fullness of God and, with

this ardent joy, to turn back to our bodies and the world with unconditional and disciplined love. This does not mean that we deny the fact that the world is replete with abominations of many kinds of which the most hideous ones are economic and social in kind. But we are no longer afraid of them. Rather, we face up to them, we challenge them, we pray for their redemption.

* * *

Almighty God, Creator and Lifegiver,
we are part of your beautiful
but fragile creation.
We have the responsibility to protect,
to nurture and to respect it.
We have failed in our responsibility.
Therefore we cry:
Kyrie eleison . . .

The earth is our mother,
our origin, our nourishment.
Every seed in the depth of the earth
vibrates with your creating will.
When the earth is spoiled and poisoned
by greed and short-range interests,
we deny our origin,
we suppress your will.
Therefore we cry:
Kyrie eleison . . .

The earth is a water planet.
The seas are our amniotic fluid.
All life carries your creative water;
people, vegetation and animals.
When the water is polluted
it reacts against us and our future.
Therefore we cry:
Kyrie eleison . . .

The air is the breath of life,
the breathing-space of the earth.
Every breath is a reminder
of your creative power.
When the air is polluted
the lungs of the earth are damaged
and your strength is suppressed.
Therefore we cry:
Kyrie eleison . . .

Jesus Christ, who joins the Creator with creation,
has heard your groaning
and cleanses you from all guilt.
Arise and walk in faith and struggle
for the integrity of creation!
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Per Harling

VII. Our limited nature – a source of life

Eva Südbeck-Baur

For centuries the churches have paid little attention to God's creation. They had human beings and their well-being in mind, but animals and nature came far, far behind. It was the Green movement which brought environmental protection into the public consciousness, stood up for it, engaged in politics on behalf of it, and are still doing so. The churches have learned from the Greens.

The churches have had to dig deeper in their Scriptures and traditions and rediscover the forgotten texts on the creation. These were found especially in the Old Testament, to which the book of the Wisdom of Solomon also belongs. In the ancient Jewish holy Scriptures, Christians discovered that the love of creation, for humankind, animals and nature, is indivisible. All are bound together and cannot be played off against one another or arranged first in a hierarchy, because all are expressions of love for God, at least for us Christians.

The churches have also been able to learn from people who are outside the Christian framework of meaning. We could learn from these people because we recognised in their commitment to protecting the environment something of their unrestrained love of life, and we were touched by it.

Let us turn to a surprising passage in the book of Wisdom:

Our allotted time is the passing of a shadow, and there is no return from our death, because it is sealed up and no one turns back. Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist, and make use of the creation to the full as in youth. Let us take our fill of costly wines and perfumes, and let no flower of spring pass us by. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither. Let none of us fail to share in our revelry; everywhere let us leave signs of enjoyment, because this is our portion, and this our lot. Let us oppress the righteous poor man; let us not spare the widow or regard the grey hairs of the aged. But let our might be our law of right, for what is weak proves itself to be useless. (Wisdom 2:51-11)

Doesn't this text from the book of Wisdom sound familiar? Doesn't it remind you of an advertisement for shower gel, which is supposed to transport us to the rain forest, under a waterfall? The first sentences of this text from Wisdom have the basic tone of advertising today, in which of course everybody is always young, beautiful, healthy and wealthy.

Only in the second part does the text reveal the consequences behind all this, the exploitation of nature, and of the poor, the widow and the aged. We hear that it is our might and ability which will decide what is right. That may sound bad, but doesn't it also correspond to the way we talk, if one thinks of the hateful word "outdated", or of legal texts that talk about animals as goods to be traded. All that sounds terribly familiar.

This text is so up-to-the-minute that it is hard to believe it is over two thousand years old. It bears witness to a great hunger for life. And hunger for life is good, and there need be no objection to enjoyment. But a hunger for life which is not satisfied with "being more", but only with constantly "having more", a hunger for life which loses sight of our own limitations, weaknesses and vulnerability and makes oneself the focus and the only point to which everything is related, has within itself – even though it seems to affirm life – the potential for treating life with contempt.

And above all, such a hunger for life cannot be satisfied by more and always more. The feeling of having to have even more and never getting enough, cannot be overcome.

We see that the attitude of wanting to consume as much as possible in our short lives has always existed and exists today. It belongs to us, is part of being human, and we ourselves are also caught up in it. Then as now, we human beings are challenged, by the very transitory nature of our lives, to develop a loving relationship to the creation, to humankind, animals, nature and God.

As believers we must first of all "forgive" God for making us mortal, and not immortal like God's own self. The millennia-old wisdom of the Holy Scriptures can really help us here. Even unbelievers can succeed in making their mortality an integral part of their lives, so that their hunger for life is satisfied.

* * *

Since there will be a last time when I will feel a warm spring rain on my face,

a last time when I will smell the perfume of a flower,
a last time when I can embrace my lover,
that makes life and everything that lives
so infinitely precious.

Since there will be a last time,
let me live daily life with open senses,
clear thinking and a careful presence.

Since there will be a last time,
let me be aware that I am woven into the eternal becoming and being of life,
in which God holds everyone and everything in her/his hands.

Since there will be a last time,
I would like the beauty and preciousness of life which is given to me
to be preserved for those who will live after me.

My mortality, my being limited,
is a source of my capacity to love.
Our condition as limited beings
has within it a value which points to the future,
which is urgently needed by us
who live in economically rich countries.

VII. Unsere Begrenztheit als Quelle von Leben

Eva Südbeck-Baur

Über Jahrhunderte haben die Kirchen Gottes Schöpfung nur wenig Beachtung geschenkt. Sie hatten die Menschen und deren Wohl im Sinn, Tiere und Natur wurden weit, weit hinten angestellt. Es waren die Grünen, die den Umweltschutz ins öffentliche Bewusstsein holten, die für ihn eintraten, für ihn politisierten und es immer noch tun. Die Kirchen haben von ihnen gelernt.

Die Kirchen mussten in ihren Schriften und Traditionen tiefer graben und die vergessenen Texte zur Schöpfung wieder neu entdecken. Sie fanden sie vor allem im ersten Testament, zu dem auch das Buch der Weisheit gehört. In den alten jüdischen heiligen Schriften entdeckten sie, dass die Liebe zur Schöpfung, zu Mensch, Tier und Natur untrennbar miteinander verbunden sind. Sie können nicht gegeneinander ausgespielt oder in eine Hierarchie gebracht werden, denn sie sind Ausdruck der Liebe zu Gott, zumindest für uns Christinnen und Christen.

Die Kirchen konnten auch von Menschen lernen, die sich ausserhalb ihres Deutungssystems befanden, sie konnten von ihnen lernen, weil sie in ihrem Engagement für den Umweltschutz etwas von der unbändigen Liebe zum Leben wieder erkannten und sich von ihr berühren liessen.

Wenden wir uns einem überraschenden Abschnitt aus dem Buch der der Weisheit zu:

Unsere Zeit geht vorüber wie ein Schatten, unser Ende wiederholt sich nicht; es ist versiegelt, und keiner kommt zurück. Auf, lasst uns die Güter des Lebens geniessen und die Schöpfung auskosten, wie es der Jugend zusteht. Erlesener Wein und Salböl sollen uns reichlich fliessen, keine Blume des Frühlings darf uns entgehen. Bekränzen wir uns mit Rosen, ehe sie verwelken, keine Wiese bleibe unberührt von unserem ausgelassenen Treiben. Überall wollen wir Zeichen der Fröhlichkeit zurücklassen; das ist unser Anteil, das fällt uns zu. Lasst uns den Gerechten unterdrücken, der in Armut lebt, die Witwe nicht schonen und das graue Haar des betagten Greises nicht scheuen! Unsere Stärke soll bestimmen, was Gerechtigkeit ist; denn das Schwache erweist sich als unnütz. (Weisheit 2, 5-11)

Hört sich dieser Text aus dem Buch der Weisheit nicht vertraut an? Erinnert er Sie nicht an Werbung für Dusch-gel, das uns unter einen Wasserfall im Regenwald versetzen soll? In seinen ersten Sätzen entspricht der Text aus dem Buch der Weisheit dem Grundton heutiger Werbung an, in der ja immer alle, jung, schön, gesund und reich sind.

Erst im zweiten Teil entblösst er die dahinter stehenden Konsequenzen, die Ausbeutung der Natur, genauso wie der Armen, der Witwe und der Greise. Darüber was gerecht ist, hören wir, entscheiden unsere Stärke und Leistungsfähigkeit. Das hört sich schlimm an, aber entspricht es nicht auch unserer Redeweise, denken wir an das Unwort „Überalterung“ oder an die Gesetzestexte, die von „Fleischproduktion“ oder Tieren als „Ware“ reden. All das klingt schrecklich vertraut.

Dieser Text ist so aktuell, dass kaum zu glauben ist, dass er mehr als 2000 Jahre alt ist.

Er zeugt von grossem Lebenshunger. Und Lebenshunger ist gut, und auch gegen Geniessen ist nichts einzuwenden. Doch ein Lebenshunger, der mit ‚mehr sein‘, sondern mit ständigem ‚mehr haben‘ gestillt wird, ein Lebenshunger, der die eigene Begrenztheit, Schwäche, Verletzlichkeit aus dem Blick verliert und sich zum Mittelpunkt und einzigem Bezugspunkt macht, trägt, obwohl er lebensbejahend daherkommt, das Potential des Lebensverachtung in sich.

Und vor allem: Lebenshunger kann durch mehr und mehr nicht gesättigt werden, das Gefühl mehr haben zu müssen, zu kurz gekommen zu sein, lässt sich nie beseitigen.

Wir sehen, die Einstellung in unserem kurzen Leben möglichst viel zu konsumieren, gab es von jeher und gibt es heute. Sie gehört zu uns, ist Teil unseres Menschseins, und auch wir selbst sind darin verfangen. Damals wie heute sind wir Menschen herausgefordert aus unsrer Vergänglichkeit heraus eine zärtliche Beziehung zur Schöpfung, zu den Menschen, den Tieren, der Natur und zu Gott zu entwickeln.

Gläubige Menschen müssen Gott erst einmal verzeihen, dass sie oder er uns sterblich geschaffen hat und nicht wie Gott selbst unsterblich. Die jahrtausend-alte Weisheit der Heiligen Schriften kann in dieser Hinsicht wirkliche Hilfe bieten.

Auch Nichtgläubenden gelingt es ihre Sterblichkeit so in ihr Leben zu integrieren, dass ihr Lebenshunger gestillt wird.

* * *

Dass es ein letztes Mal gibt,
dass ein warmer Frühlingsregen auf mein Gesicht fällt,
ein letztes Mal, dass ich den Duft einer Blume riechen,
ein letztes Mal, dass meinen Geliebten umarmen kann,
das macht das Leben und alles Lebendige
so unendlich kostbar.

Dass es ein letztes Mal gibt,
lässt mich mit offenen Sinnen,
klarer Vernunft und achtsamer Präsenz
den Alltag leben.

Dass es ein letztes Mal gibt,
lässt mich wissen, dass ich eingeflochten bin
in das ewige Werden und Sein des Lebens,
in dem Gott alle und alles in seinen Händen birgt.

Da es ein letztes Mal gibt, möchte ich,
dass das, was mir an Schönheit und Kostbarkeit vom Leben geschenkt wird,
auch für Menschen, die nach mir leben erhalten bleibt.

Meine Sterblichkeit, meine Begrenztheit ist eine Quelle meiner Liebesfähigkeit.
In der Begrenztheit liegt ein zukunftsweisender Wert,
den wir in den wirtschaftlich reichen Ländern
dringend nötig haben.

VIII. Light shining towards the future

Peter Pavlovic

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. (Luke 12, 34-36)

The passage is Jesus' answer to the legitimate question of a person who has something in his/her possession, who has a managerial responsibility and wants to see his/her relationship to the material things that surround him/her in a responsible way.

The statement was formulated in the sequence of advice and recommendations given to the disciples. This sequence includes also the parable about the rich man and his worries about how to deal with property. The passage is a metaphorical culmination and the final word of a longer answer to that particular question.

The given situation is very close to all of us, people living in the 21st century. It has a particular flavour in its appeal to all of us living in Europe, a continent in which most of us have reached satisfactory living standards, to all of us for whom the question "how do we manage what we have" is a question of everyday life. In this sense, it is a question of fundamental importance.

In the centre of attention here is a discrepancy between what is momentarily pleasant and the reality of the overall perspective; a discrepancy between short-sightedness aiming at immediate profit and responsibility going beyond the limits of personal existence; a discrepancy between the knowledge we have and an easy escape in looking for consequent answers to the serious questions; a discrepancy between easygoing, as well as questioning, consumerism that still remains, at the bottom line, consumerism and the overall view that goes beyond a feeling of personal material sufficiency.

The message of the text is about the fundamental option we have in answering the question of our future.

No avoidance is possible. The text, although mild, speaks to us with the utmost urgency. We should not be misled by the tone.

The understanding of property must not be limited to the aspect of possession. Property bears with it a broader meaning, which includes also the necessity to protect and properly manage. Speaking about property management the text therefore does not concentrate on the issue of multiplication. The core of the message is in the question of purpose. The underlining tenor of the message speaks: the ultimate aim of everything you have is in the future. Everything you do now will have consequences in the days to come. Good or bad. What you produce now should be a light which gives a sense and meaning to the future days. The light you may produce in the present, your effort and your hopes, should be directed into the future. Your light should be the light shining on what is coming.

In that context and by knowing all that, be aware! It can happen that all you have will be, at the end of the day, of no use to you. This happens if you do not pay attention to the fact that all your possessions, all material things that surround you, and the whole world which is given to you in order to be managed by your skills, are not much more than piles of atoms and molecules. All these things have a particular purpose. All of them are called to be a source of light. Equally, as your attitude to them is another source of the same light. The light will appear only if both of them, material substance and your attitude, would act together.

What is of substantial importance here is that this light is not something that could appear automatically; nothing that would come from itself. Decisive to all that surrounds us is our personal attitude. Only this personal stance, this inner appeal and our relatedness decide about the nature of things we have in our possession and in our managerial scope. Only personal attitude can ignite the light and give sense to the material things which surround us.

All this is of fundamental significance in developing our relationship to the surrounding world we live in: nature, minerals, air, water, trees and plants, animals etc. that are given to humans for his/her benefit (Gen.1). All this is given to mankind, not only to enjoy it and make a happy life out of it, as hedonists try to explain and to convince us. "Use everything and do not care for what will come" is the slogan that gets so much attention in our post-modern time.

There is, however, also another danger, very close to us nowadays. Hectic deeds and frenzied activities, even those directed to achieve a good aim, will not in the end be a solution. Behind all of them we must not forget the inner

purpose. The aim should be to avoid both extremes: narrow-minded and limited focus on the multiplication of property and pursue of personal happiness, but also the 'return to nature' syndrome putting the centrality of the human being on a sidetrack. The human being is not to be seen in an isolated situation, but as an organism that can find truth about himself only as a part of the complex net. The substance of the human being is to be a person in relationship: relationship to the neighbours, but also relationship to all that we have and that surrounds us.

The biblical message and Christian conviction speak in a clear way: all this is about light that should shine from our present to the future, not only for future generations. The future also means us. It may well happen that unexpected and unforecast incidents will need to be faced already tomorrow. If we turn our attention to the question of environment, we already see negative consequences of a disrupted relationship between the human being and the material world surrounding him/her. Do we manage to take care of all that we have in our possession in such a way that light and warmth would be shining from all these material things? Do we manage to be not only kind but also discerning and keen-eyed? Do we manage not to ignore the signs of the time? These are the questions which in all our care for God's creation should not be missing.

* * *

L. Every part of this earth is sacred.
Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth.
This we know, the earth does not belong to us:

P. we belong to the earth.

L. This we know, all things are connected:

P. like the blood which unites one family.

L. This we know, we did not weave the web of life:

P. we are merely a thread in it.

L. This we know, whatever we do to the web

P. we do it to ourselves.

*from the prayers of the 2nd European Ecumenical Assembly, Graz 1997
adapted from a text of the Indian chief Seattle*